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Doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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ON THE INSIDE PAGE!!!

Amadea Bata-Balog:

COLOMBIAN RETURN MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE VENEZUELAN CRISIS

Doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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……..

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DECLARATION

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALBA	*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* Alliance for the Peoples of Our America
CCP	*Carné de Permiso Temporal de Permanencia* Temporary Residence Permit Card
CELAC	*Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños* Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
CELADE	*Centro Latinoamericano y Caribeño de Demografía* Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre
CEPAL	*Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Carribe* Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DANE	*Departamento Administrarivo Nacional de Estadística* National Administrative Department of Statistics
DAS	*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* Administrative Department of Security
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
ELN	*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* National Liberation Army
ENMIR	*Encuesta Nacional Migraciones Internacionales y Remesas* National Survey on International Migrations and Remittances
EPL	*Ejercito Popular de Liberación* People's Liberation Army
EU	European Union
FARC-EP	*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo* Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEIH	*La Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares* The Large Integrated Household Survey
IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
INE	*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (Chile)* National Institute of Statistics
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IDP	Internally Deported People
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IZA	Institute of Labour Economics
KNOMAD	Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development
LAC	Latin-America and the Caribbean
LMICs	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
MERCOSUR	*Mercado Común del Sur* Southern Common Market
MPI	Migration Policy Institute
MUD	Mesa de la Unidad Democrática Round Table of Democratic Unity

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NELM	New Economics of Labour Migration
OAS	Organization of American States
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PEP	*Permiso Especial de Permanencia* Special Residence Permit
PEP-FF	*Permiso Especial de Permanencia para el Fomento a la Formalización* Special Stay Permit for the Promotion of Formalization
PIP-TT	*Permiso de Ingreso y Permanensia de Tránsito Temporal* Temporary Transit Permit
PPT	*Estatuto Temporal de Protección* Temporary Protected Status
PSUV	Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela Venezuelan United Socialist Party
RAMV	*Registro Único de Migrantes Venezolanos* Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants
RMRP	(Venezuela's) Refugee and Migrant Response Plan
RUR	*Registro Único de Retornados* Single Registry of Returnees
RUV	*Registro Único de Víctimas* Single Registry of Victims
R4V	The Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants
SARS-CoV-2	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciencies
TMF	*Tarjeta de Movilidad Fronteriza* Border Mobility Card
UAEMC	*Unidad Administrativa Especial Migración Colombia* Special Administrative Unit Of Migration Colombia
UN	United Nations
UNASUR	*Unión de Naciones Suramericanas* Union of South American Nations
UNHCR	United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees
UP	*Unión Patriótica* Patriotic Front
US	United States
VRD	Visa de Responsabilidad Democrática Democratic Responsibility Visa
WHO	World Health Organization
WOLA	Washington Office on Latin America
WTO	World Trade Organization

1. CHAPTER: INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE RESEARCH TOPIC AND ITS RELEVANCE

International migration refers to the process of individuals crossing national borders with the intention of establishing residence in a new country. Nevertheless, relocating to a new destination does not necessarily signify the endpoint of migration history. Based on international experience, emigrants recurrently – sooner or later – return to their homeland (King, 2000; Cassarino, 2004). However, the nature of such movements and encounters is contingent upon various factors and the specific circumstances influencing migrants' decision.

This dissertation focuses on the return migration of Colombian nationals from Venezuela, a direct consequence of the multifaceted crisis that has been unfolding since 2014 in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The Venezuelan crisis, one of the largest and most neglected migration crises in modern history, has led to the displacement of nearly 8 million people, with Colombia receiving the largest share of these migrants (according to UNHCR, 2025). This mass migration is driven by a combination of economic collapse, humanitarian crisis, and human rights violations.

However, within this large-scale migration, a significant and often overlooked group is the returning Colombian nationals who are also deeply affected by the crisis. Many of these individuals had previously emigrated to Venezuela during earlier decades of flourishing economic opportunities in Venezuela and internal conflict in Colombia, meanwhile as conditions have deteriorated, a growing share of these Colombian nationals now face renewed pressure to revisit their migration decisions (Pinilla-Rubiano, 2023). These Colombian returnees are not typical migrants; many have spent years, even decades, living in Venezuela and have established deep roots in the country. Their return to Colombia is often forced and unplanned, driven by the same dire circumstances that have led millions of Venezuelans to flee their homes. The returnees face a unique set of challenges, including reintegrating into a society that may have changed significantly since they left, finding employment, accessing social services, and dealing with the psychological trauma of displacement. However, a huge number of Colombians are still residing in Venezuela, a population that might *wish* to return under changing structural conditions but often lacks the capability to do so. Measuring migration potential assists in understanding their plans and circumstances.

Understanding how aspirations and capabilities evolve in crisis contexts is critical not only for migration theory but also for public administration, which must anticipate and manage potential return flows. As return migration is shaped by individual motivations, structural constraints, and state-led reintegration policies, the topic sits at the intersection of sociology, political science, and public policy. The analysis therefore provides timely, multi-dimensional insights and contributes to a better comprehension of the research topic, which has been framed under the impression that the Colombian-Venezuelan migration nexus is of great concern and there is a growing likelihood of continued volatility and renewed return movements in the coming years.

Justification of the research relevance begins with acknowledging the significance of migration research. As is known, international migration is a popular field of research with a substantial body of academic work, however the topic of return migration remains relatively unexplored in scholarly research. Also, there is a considerable demand for turning our attention to the Latin American region since remigration remains significantly underexamined in the LAC context, where population movements are shaped by cyclical crises, shifting economic opportunities, and longstanding regional interdependence. The dissertation provides valuable contribution especially with regards to the work of the Hungarian academic community as valuable scholarship is available but relatively a narrow circle of researchers investigate the region itself or the migration trends being unfold there.

Indeed, international migration has long been a defining feature of Latin America, yet few population movements in the region have been as complex, prolonged, and multidimensional as those unfolding between Venezuela and Colombia. The mass exodus from Venezuela drew the attention of investigation to the region, yet from across the ocean, it is still a less-known episode, and there is obvious actuality of the inquiry. The topic is of great relevance, given that the situation is unchanged in Venezuela under the Maduro regime ("frozen crisis"), migration is expected to continue in the future, in fact, it is predicted to increase. Following the status of the Venezuelan crisis, it is evident that there is an acute shortage of food, medicine, and other basic goods affecting heavily the Venezuelan population, while the migration crisis has put increasing pressure on neighboring countries too. This massive influx of migrants has created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the region, putting a strain on the resources and democratic governability of host nations like Colombia (Mijares – Silva, 2018). The policy responses of some Latin American countries – to be highlighted in the dissertation – and their experiences with mass

immigration can be truly instructive to other governments facing similar challenges even in Europe. Although the volumes and/or the context might differ, it may help to formulate public policies and establish common good practices and encourage international cooperation.

While the influx of Venezuelan nationals has been the primary focus of much of the research and humanitarian response, there is a significant, yet understudied, population of Colombian returnees, whose experiences, plans and circumstances largely remain unknown. The Colombian society is not only dealing with a large influx of Venezuelan refugees but also with the reintegration of its own returning citizens, who often face similar challenges to their Venezuelan counterparts (Saa et.al., 2020). Understanding the return potential of the aforementioned population is crucial for developing effective policies in the field of public administration.

The relevance of the research topic and the inquiry of this dissertation lie in its integrated examination of four interconnected dimensions: the changing migration trends between the two countries, the underlying motivations to return, the actual return-migration potential among Colombians currently residing in Venezuela, and the role of Colombian public policy in shaping these processes. By addressing a critical and understudied aspect of the Venezuelan migration crisis, this dissertation intends to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced not only by Venezuelan migrants, but also the Colombian returnees and those who wish to return. The topic is of particular importance to public administration, as it highlights how states respond to large-scale population movements, how institutional frameworks support (or fail to support) returnees, and how evidence-based policymaking can improve reintegration outcomes. In light of ongoing instability in Venezuela and the increasing likelihood of future return flows, this dissertation addresses a timely and insufficiently explored issue with significant social, economic, and administrative implications for Colombia.

1.1.1 THE RESEARCH GAP AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

	Research Objective	Research questions	Hypotheses	Methodology
I. TRENDS				
	Presenting two country profiles: • Colombia: outlines current trends, circumstances and conditions for migration and remigration in Colombia. • Venezuela: outlines the political, economic and humanitarian crisis that intensifies both the Venezuelan refugee crisis and remigration of Colombian nationals.	RQ_1 How have migration processes shifted in the context of the Venezuelan crisis?	H_1 The number of returnees is increasing in proportion to the deterioration of economic and security indicators in Venezuela.	Secondary research Literature reviews and analysis of data sources
II. MOTIVATIONS TO RETURN				
	An assessment of the factors determining remigration to point out what may lie behind the changes in migration trends and motivation.	RQ_2 What are the main factors (causes, incentives, explanations and consequences) of remigration in Colombia?	H_2 Pull factors are essential in the remigration decision, but push factors are more powerful in the context of the crisis.	Secondary research Literature reviews and analysis of data sources
III. REMIGRATION POTENTIAL				
	Estimating the return aspirations and capabilities among Colombians in Venezuela, while identifying and analyzing the push and pull factors influencing the intention to return. The application of the Carling's "aspirations–capabilities" framework helps to interpret decisions regarding repatriation („intention–behavior gap").	RQ_3 How does remigration potential for Colombian nationals in Venezuela change in the context of the crisis? How do their aspirations and capabilities develop?	H_3 Colombians in Venezuela have increasing remigration potential (exhibiting high return aspirations) in the context of the crisis, however the intention to return overestimates the actual return (due to low return capabilities), thus a significant group of "frustrated returnees" exist.	Primary research Survey Carling's "aspirations–capabilities" model
IV. PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVES ON REMIGRATION				
	Analyzing the possibilities offered by the Colombian State for the return of its citizens.	RQ_4 What public policy initiatives address remigration in Colombia, and how well known, - and how motivating are they to those considering return?	H_4 The government initiatives to assist return are necessary but not sufficient conditions for mass remigration.	Revision of public policy initiatives Interviews Policy implications

1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND STRATEGY

Due to the complex nature of international migration, an **interdisciplinary approach** is often needed in order to better understand its causes, determining factors, as well as its consequences and impacts for future development and outcomes. International migration is a global phenomenon, and its role in the modern world is not limited to demographics anymore; it is a key issue for the economic, political and administrative agenda worldwide. Not to mention return migration, which being a sub-process of international migration, it may even be more complicated in its investigation. Consequently, explaining return trends and return potential, an interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional theoretical and methodological approach is needed.

Accordingly, this dissertation has an interdisciplinary approach, situated at the intersection of public administration, sociology, political science, and migration studies. Return migration –particularly in the context of the Venezuelan crisis – cannot be fully understood through a single disciplinary lens, as it involves institutional and policy responses (central to public administration), individual and household decision-making (sociology), cross-border mobility dynamics (migration studies), and broader political–economic conditions (political science). The advantage of this interdisciplinary approach is that it allows the analysis to integrate structural, institutional, and human-level perspectives, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. At the same time, being aware that the interdisciplinarity nature of the phenomenon does not mean that the research must include all existing aspects, limitations of the research always lie in such challenges as the need to balance diverse analytical traditions and maintain a coherent conceptual focus.

Within this broader landscape, the dissertation aspires to be a relevant contribution to migration studies that provides a comprehensive outlook on Colombian return migration within the context of the Venezuelan crises, as well as it addresses public administration, particularly on how state institutions, return policies, and administrative frameworks shape the capacities and opportunities of Colombian returnees.

Often a clear methodological course line is necessary to be adopted in academic research, however **mixed methods** have come to be recurrently used when having to examine a complex phenomenon such as return migration. Mixed methods take advantage of the potential strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods, and they complement each other in answering research questions. Understanding the intentions and capabilities

of Colombians living in Venezuela requires attention both to structural conditions – such as economic crises, policy frameworks, and demographic patterns – and to individual-level experiences, motivations, and constraints. For this reason, the study employs a mixed-methods design that integrates secondary analyses of international and national datasets with primary quantitative survey data and qualitative interviews. This combination allows for a more comprehensive, multi-dimensional interpretation, each methodological approach serving a distinct analytical purpose and contributes to the overall research aims in complementary ways.

Secondary Research	Literature Reviews	Descriptive and Analytical
Secondary Data Analysis	Data Sources	Contextual and Explanatory
Primary Quantitative Research	Survey Research	Descriptive and Exploratory
Primary Qualitative Research	Semi-structured Interview	Exploratory and Interpretive

When utilizing mixed method, the combination of macro and micro approximations is also suggested. In fact, while some research topics are best suited to be examined at one particular level of inquiry, – micro, mezzo or macro – other topics can be studied at each level. International and return migration is one of those topics that are often studied at both macro, micro and mezzo levels. According to Vargas-Silvas (2012) "it is indeed important to carry out micro-level studies of specific migratory experiences, but they should always be embedded in an understanding of macro-level structural factors that shape human mobility."

Following the above-mentioned strategies, and the combination of these methods, the dissertation employs a triangulated approach that strengthens the value of the findings. Secondary data provide macro-level context; the survey offers micro-level patterns; and interviews contribute interpretive depth. Together, these approaches enable a robust analysis of return-migration dynamics from both structural and individual perspectives. This interdisciplinary and mixed-methods approach produces a richer, more robust understanding than any single method or disciplinary lens could provide.

1.2.2 Applied Methodological Approaches

1.2.2.1 Literature Reviews

This dissertation employs an extensive literature review to address the theoretical part of the dissertation, which constitutes an important basis of the analysis. As a form of secondary research, an extensive bibliography is considered – written by influential and prominent theoretical works of distinguished scholars (e.g. Castles, Hein de Haas, Massey, Portes, King, Carling etc.) – that enables a systematic synthesis of existing scholarly

knowledge, empirical findings, and theoretical debates related to international migration, return migration, and the specific regional dynamics of Latin America (Sørensen, Cassarino, Orozco, Durand, López, Mejía etc.). Secondary research is particularly appropriate for this study because it allows for the integration of diverse sources that have examined the phenomenon from multiple disciplinary and geographical perspectives.

The literature review serves three principal purposes. First, it offers a comprehensive overview of the conceptual and theoretical foundations on migration decision-making, return migration, and transnational mobility. The examination of previous empirical research also helps identify gaps, inconsistencies, and unresolved questions that justify the present research focus. Second, the review contextualizes the case of Colombian return migration from Venezuela within broader regional and global frame of reference. It depicts a picture on both Colombian and Venezuelan country profile that mirrors the current circumstances of migration from one country to the other. Having a better understanding of the migration trends that characterize both countries is reached by analyzing academic journal articles, policy papers, institutional reports, news articles and government website information if necessary, in order to keep the analysis as up to date as possible. Thirdly, reviewing public policy initiatives, government papers and project assessments provides a critical assessment of the governmental policies that regards return migration in Colombia, as well as the unprecedented Venezuelan migration crisis.

Given the multilingual nature of the academic and policy discourse on Latin American migration, the review incorporates sources published in **English as well as Spanish, while also incorporates Hungarian academic literature.** This multilingual approach is essential for ensuring analytical completeness; from the one hand, Spanish sources (particularly policy reports, governmental documents, and local academic studies) that are not available in English, while on the other hand, Hungarian research that is often less known within the English-speaking academia. It is well known that engaging in academic literature across languages enables a more nuanced understanding of context-specific dynamics and prevents the analytical biases that may arise from relying exclusively on monolingual sources.

1.2.2.2 Data Sources

In addition to the scholarly literature, this dissertation relies extensively on secondary quantitative data produced by international organizations, global statistical agencies, as well as Colombian surveys and statistics. The use of such data is methodologically justified given the transnational character of migration processes and the need for reliable, comparable, and longitudinal indicators for better understanding international migration in a broader context, as well as focusing on Colombian returnees.

International databases – such as those maintained by the **United Nations World Population, the International Organization for Migration (IOM)**, the **World Bank**, **UNHCR**, **OECD International Migration Database, Migration Policy Institute (MPI),** – and relevant regional bodies as **Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPALSTAT) or the Colombian National Statistics Office (DANE)** – provide standardized measurements on migrant stocks, flows, forced displacement, demographic structures, and socioeconomic conditions. These datasets are indispensable for tracing broader migration trends, identifying structural factors shaping human mobility, and placing the case of Colombian return migration from Venezuela within wider regional and global migration context.

The use of these secondary sources serves multiple analytical functions in this dissertation. First, international datasets offer longitudinal perspectives that allow historical retrospect, enabling an assessment of how migration dynamics have evolved during centuries or within a specific period of time such as during the Venezuelan crisis. Also, these sources facilitate cross-national comparisons, which are essential for understanding how the Colombian–Venezuelan context aligns with, or diverges from, broader migration patterns observed elsewhere. And finally, the findings of these statistical sources and researches are both a fundamental base, groundwork and relevance point for primary research such as this dissertation with its survey and interview proposals.

While international datasets are of vital importance, the use of such statistics is accompanied by a critical awareness of their limitations, including issues of underreporting, methodological inconsistencies between countries, and the political sensitivities surrounding migration statistics. Such constraints however do not only apply to this dissertation, but it is a general issue, while it does not limit the value of the findings if data is treated systematically and with consciousness.

Principal statistical sources that constitute an important base of this dissertation regarding Colombian return migration and the Venezuelan migration crisis are the following national data survey projects:

R4V – Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (UNHCR–IOM): The R4V platform compiles harmonized regional data not only on Venezuelan displacement, but also on statistics of Colombian returnees, pendular mobility, and humanitarian needs. Its datasets enable the situating of Colombia's return migration patterns within broader regional displacement dynamics generated by the Venezuelan crisis.

DANE – Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (Colombian National Statistics Office): DANE provides far-reaching official demographic and socioeconomic data on Colombia, including population estimates, census information, mobility indicators, and labor market statistics. For this research, DANE's migration-related datasets are essential for contextualizing the scale, composition, and geographic distribution of Colombian returnees.

GEIH – Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares (Large Integrated Household Survey): The GEIH, conducted by DANE, is Colombia's principal household survey capturing detailed information on employment, income, education, household composition, and living conditions structured into four files: people, households, housing and migration. Although not exclusively focused on migration, its micro-level socioeconomic indicators are crucial for assessing the structural conditions faced by returnees. GEIH data therefore serve as an important baseline for examining reintegration trajectories and socioeconomic disparities among Colombians returning from Venezuela. The statistical database has been opened for public only since 2020 February, thus it provides definitely new information for analysis. (The access of the database from Hungary needs specific VPN (Virtual Private Network)).

Migración Colombia – Administrative Mobility Records: Colombia's migration authority, Migración Colombia maintains administrative data on cross-border movements, visa categories, and return operations. These records are particularly relevant for tracing the fluctuations in return flows from Venezuela and for understanding the temporal dynamics of repatriation during the crisis.

ENMIR – Encuesta Nacional de Migraciones Internacionales y Retornos: The ENMIR survey (formerly ENMIG) is one of the most comprehensive instruments for capturing the sociodemographic profiles, motivations, reintegration experiences, and labor market trajectories of Colombian return migrants. It is an important referential survey for contemporary studies on Colombian migration, and its thematic coverage offers direct empirical insights that align closely with the research questions of this dissertation. (The director of the research had run an international network of researchers (*colombiamigra*), where findings and new research has been shared within the closely related topics of Colombian return migration. These research and surveys also helped a lot in this dissertation.)

"Impulso a la Migración" Programme and Associated Monitoring Reports: Although primarily a public policy initiative, the programme produces valuable monitoring and evaluation reports on reintegration, economic inclusion, and service uptake among returned Colombians. Although the phenomenon of reintegration has not been in the focus of this dissertation, the documents of "Impulso a la Migración" do offer valuable insights into the circumstances of the migrated and returned population.

Law 1565 of 2012 and the Unique Registry of Returnees (RUR): Law 1565 of 2012 – also known as the Law on Return (Ley de Retorno) – established Colombia's formal legal framework for the recognition and support of return migrants, introducing institutional mechanisms for economic, social, and administrative reintegration. A key component of this framework is the Unique Registry of Returnees (Registro Único de Retornados, RUR), which compiles administrative data on eligible returnees, including their migration histories, socioeconomic profiles, and reintegration pathways. Although the database is not open for public for being part of governmental documentation, it constitutes a critical official source for understanding the scale, composition, and institutional engagement of Colombian returnees, particularly those returning from Venezuela during periods of crisis.

1.2.2.3 Survey Research

a) Purpose and Design of the Survey:

This dissertation includes a specifically designed survey to assess the return intentions, aspirations, and capabilities of Colombian nationals residing in Venezuela. The survey was developed to capture individual-level motivations and constraints associated with potential return migration in the context of prolonged social, economic, and political crisis of Venezuela. The survey was formulated on the basis of such contemporary theoretical frameworks in migration research as the Carling's aspiration–capability model and classical push–pull approaches, enabling an integrated analytical perspective on return migration dynamics.

The questionnaire is available online at the following link or QR code:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScU98Kngvil PL0ZzXZZhKSqVqXwjEidG2dz6BDgT16NSZS4_Q/viewform

b) Target Population and Sampling Strategy:

The target population consists of Colombian citizens and Colombian–Venezuelan dual nationals currently living in Venezuela. Since difficulties arise from the mobility constraints that characterize transnational and crisis-affected populations, and there is a lack an accessible, complete sampling frame, a non-probability, convenience sampling strategy was employed. This approach is widely used in migration studies where reaching dispersed or undocumented populations is challenging. The survey was available online, disseminated through Facebook, Whatsapp, and other social networks, and it was open to respondents at all ages, regardless of legal status or length of residence in Venezuela.

c) Theoretical Alignment

The design of the survey instrument is closely aligned with Carling's aspiration–capability model (Carling, 2002; Carling – Schewel, 2018) and also addresses the push and pull theory by identifying factors that capture macro- and meso-level contextual drivers. This research with such methodological approach grounded in the aforementioned theoretical basis is consistent with classic and contemporary migration theories.

The aspirations–capabilities framework was developed by Norwegian migration scholar Jørgen Carling, one of the most influential theoretical models for understanding migration decision-making and is often used for analyzing migration potential and the phenomenon of "stuck migration", which refers to when individuals wish to migrate but are unable to do so. Within this context, the model is especially relevant for studying Colombians living in Venezuela who might wish to return but face practical, financial, or legal constraints.

The theories are further explained in detail in the Theoretical chapter of the dissertation, which gives a better understanding for the methodological considerations. Indeed, its methodological relevance lies in the clear separation it draws between the theory's two main components; the *aspiration* to return and the *capability* to realize such a return. In order to feature this distinction, the questionnaire incorporates dedicated questions that measure both aspects. In addition to these core components, the survey includes a set of perceived push–pull factors – such as economic conditions, public security, and service quality – to capture contextual influences that shape both aspirations and capabilities.

By structuring the questionnaire around these conceptual dimensions also enables the classification of respondents into analytically meaningful migration states of four possible migration situation – elaborated in Carlings' model, but adaptive to return logics – such as potential returnees, frustrated returnees, voluntary stayers and passive stayers;

Aspiration	Capability	Type	Example
High	High	Potential returnees	A person both wants and is able to return.
High	Low	Frustrated returnees (Stuck migrants)	A person would like to return but cannot, due to legal, financial, or practical barriers.
Low	High	Voluntary stayers	A person could return but prefers to stay.
Low	Low	Passive stayer	Neither a wish nor an opportunity to return.

The model and the aforementioned categorization assist in bridging the gap between structural explanations (economic, political, institutional factors) and individual-level perspectives (motivations, preferences, agency), thus allowing researchers to analyze both why people want to migrate and why they are (or are not) able to do so. The framework is particularly suitable for exploring return migration, since both the aspiration to return and the capability to return can be measured separately, while also is a great estimate of migration potential.

d) Structure of the Questionnaire:

The survey includes six thematic blocks, each capturing a distinct dimension of the return-migration decision process:

Block	Focus	Questions	Purpose
A	Basic Information	6	Control variables for demographic and socioeconomic indicators
B	Migration background	3	Historical context to address the reasons for emigration, and transnational links, familial geography.
C	Return intention	3	Aspiration index that assesses the intentions and desire to return
		2	Return timing and assessment of the returnee population
D	Return ability	2 (subgroups)	Capability index that assesses the real ability to return (eg.: financial means, documentation, social support etc.)
		1	Capability conditional scenario evaluates policy support

E	Perceived Environment (push–pull factors)	4 (subgroups) + 1	Contextual perceptions that form a subjective evaluation of conditions in Venezuela and attractiveness of Colombia
F	Optional open questions on Public Policy Support	2	Qualitative insight into obstacles to return and support needs
Total		**~22 items**	**≈4 minutes average completion**

A) Basic Information: Includes sociodemographic and socioeconomic variables such as gender, age group, employment status, citizenship, duration of residence, and geographic location in Venezuela.

B) Migration Background and Ties: Captures the reasons for emigration from Colombia, levels of transnational contact, and the current geographic distribution of close family members. These items contextualize the respondent's migration history and relational embeddedness.

C) Return Intention (Aspiration): Assesses respondents' desire and likelihood of return through 0–10 Likert-type scales, complemented by questions regarding expected timing of return. These measures operationalize the "aspiration" dimension of the theoretical framework.

D) Capability to Return: Evaluates financial resources, documentation (e.g., passport, Colombian ID), social support networks, and awareness of return migration programs. Together, these items measure the respondent's perceived "capability" to actually accomplish their return.

E) Perceived Environment (Push–Pull Context): Includes scaled items that assess the severity of push factors in Venezuela (e.g., inflation, public security, healthcare, public services) and the perceived attractiveness of pull factors in Colombia (e.g., job opportunities, public security, political stability, public services). These variables link individual perceptions to structural conditions.

6. Optional Open Questions: Allow respondents to describe, in their own words, the main obstacles preventing return and the types of support that would facilitate return. These qualitative responses help contextualize and enrich the quantitative findings.

e) Conceptualization of the Survey

The conceptual structure of the survey is essential because it translates abstract theoretical constructs into clear, measurable variables, ensuring that the survey accurately captures the phenomena it is designed to study. In order to ensure terminological consistency, such concepts as 'return migration' should also be clarified regarding the survey, however the theoretical part of the dissertation offers a thorough examination of the concept as well as its nature.

Return Migration:	The process by which migrants move back to their country of origin after a period abroad. Whitin the context of this survey it is conceptualized as both potential and actual behavior shaped by individuals' intentions, perceived opportunities, and constraints. This definition allows the survey to capture not only whether respondents plan to return, but also the multidimensional factors influencing their likelihood and ability to do so.

To analyze the return intentions of Colombians living in Venezuela, the study follows Carling's aspirations–capabilities model (Carling, 2002; Carling – Schewel, 2018) adapted specifically to the context of return migration. Consequently, the following concepts should be specified, since these conceptual dimensions will structure the operational framework:

Return Aspiration:	the degree to which an individual *wants* to return to Colombia at the present moment.
Return Capability:	the degree to which an individual is *able* to return, considering legal, financial, informational, physical, and family-related constraints.
Contextual Environment:	perceptions of the severity of the Venezuelan crisis (push factors) and the attractiveness of conditions in Colombia (pull factors).
Social Networks and Information:	the presence of relatives in Colombia, access to accurate information, and familiarity with return pathways and administrative procedures.
Legal Status and Documentation:	possession and validity of citizenship documents, passports, dual nationality, residence rights, and potential entry restrictions.
Costs and Risks:	financial cost of the journey, risks during transit, and expected resettlement costs.
Constraints and Responsibilities:	childcare responsibilities, children's schooling, partner's employment situation, and other obligations that may inhibit return.

f) Operationalization of the Survey

Operationalization is crucial in the survey methodology because it transforms theoretical concepts – such as return aspiration, capability, or push–pull perceptions – into concrete, measurable indicators that can be captured through structured questions. By defining precisely how each concept is measured, operationalization ensures consistency and enables the construction of indices that will allow empirical analysis and the interpretation of the findings. This process ultimately makes abstract ideas analytically usable and comparable across respondents. Measurement strategy includes the operationalization of the two main core components of Carling's model (Aspiration and Capability) as well as further explanatory variables that supplement the analysis for a better understanding of return migration potential.

Return Aspiration: (*Aspiration_index* (0–10))

A composite measure capturing the desire or intention to return, based on:

A1.	At this moment, how much are you thinking about returning to Colombia? (0–10)
A2.	"If there were no obstacles, how likely would you be to return within the next 6 months?" (0–10)

Return Capability: (*Capability_index* (0–2))

A composite index capturing practical ability to return:

C1.	*Financial buffer:*	Does the household have sufficient savings or support to cover travel and the first two months after return? (0-1-2)
C2.	*Documentation:*	validity and completeness of Colombian passport, national ID, birth certificates, etc. (0-1-2)
C3.	*Knowledge and information:*	familiarity with administrative steps, reintegration programs, and employment possibilities in Colombia (0-1-2)
C4.	*Network support:*	presence of close relatives in Colombia who could provide housing or employment assistance (0-1-2)

Contextual Indicators: serving as explanatory variables in the analysis.

V1	Perceived severity of crisis in Venezuela (inflation, shortages, public services, security; Likert items rescaled to 0–10)
V2	Perceived attractiveness of Colombia (employment, public safety, services; Likert items 0-10)
V3	Perceived satisfaction in Venezuela and in Colombia in case of return (1-2-3-4)
V4	Perceived costs, risks and obstacles (open question)

Four-Cell Categorization (Carling Model):

Based on the combined aspiration and capability scores, individuals can be grouped into four analytically meaningful migration states:

Category	Definition
1. Likely returnee	*Aspiration_R* ≥ *6* and *Capability_R* ≥ *1*
2. Frustrated returnee	*Aspiration_R* ≥ *6* and *Capability_R* < *1*
3. Voluntary stayer	*Aspiration_R* < 5 and *Capability_R* ≥ *1*
4. Passive stayer	*Aspiration_R* < *5* and *Capability_R* < *1*

To maintain theoretical consistency and avoid sample-dependent median splits, aspiration and capability were dichotomized using fixed, conceptually grounded thresholds (aspiration ≥6 on the 0–10 scale; capability index >1 on the 0–2 scale).

f) Bilingual Development and Translation

The questionnaire was drafted in English and then translated into Spanish, with particular attention given to terms commonly used by Latin American communities. Both language versions were reviewed to ensure consistency in meaning, structure, and survey flow and both are attached to the Appendix.

g) Mode of Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

The survey was administered online to maximize accessibility across Venezuelan states. The questionnaire was optimized for mobile devices and designed for rapid completion, with an estimated duration of 3-4 minutes, however the option for offline completion could not be realized, which might be a constraint of internet connectivity and technology access in Venezuela. The platform of Google Forms was used, in which anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized to reduce social desirability bias, especially given the politically sensitive environment. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no personal identifying information was collected within the survey. The option for preferring not to answer was always ensured throughout the questionnaire, respecting all questions.

h) Limitations

The empirical analysis relies on a small (N=30), non-probability, self-selected online sample, which limits statistical representativeness and precludes population-level

generalization. The findings are therefore interpreted as exploratory and theory-informed insights into aspiration–capability configurations rather than representative estimates of the Colombian population in Venezuela. Although modest in size, the sample provides analytically meaningful insight into return-related attitudes within a hard-to-reach population. The relatively small number of respondents reflects the practical constraints of surveying a geographically dispersed and institutionally under-documented population, who also lives under constrained political environment. Concerns about privacy, surveillance, or potential repercussions discouraged participation in survey-based research.

Also, possible selection biases related to internet access and digital literacy must also be acknowledged. Furthermore, while return intentions offer valuable insights, they may not always translate into actual behavior (even despite the findings based on the model). Nevertheless, such intentions are widely recognized as key indicators for understanding migration decision-making processes.

i) Method of Data Processing and Analytical Use

The quantitative data collected through the survey will be processed by SPSS. The dataset will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques; to provide a descriptive profile of respondents, and by examining the relationships between variables, draw conclusions about the factors that shape return-migration potential. Frequencies, cross-tabulations, and measures of central tendency will be used to describe the characteristics of the sample and the distribution of key variables. Composite indices for return aspiration and return capability will be constructed from 0–10 scaled items, allowing for the categorization of respondents according to Carling's fourfold typology. To explore relationships between aspiration, capability, and contextual factors, bivariate analyses and, where sample size permits, multivariate regression models will be applied. Open-ended responses will undergo thematic coding to contextualize quantitative findings for a better understanding of return migration phenomenon. These analytical procedures ensure that the empirical findings remain consistent with the theoretical framework and allow for a nuanced interpretation of return-migration potential.

1.2.2.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

Complementing the survey-based research on the migration potential of Colombian nationals in Venezuela, this study also employs semi-structured expert interviews as a qualitative research method to contextualize return migration dynamics between Venezuela and Colombia. The idea of this research was not only reaching out for the target population (i.e. Colombians in Venezuela), but also to grasp the understandings of those who have a wider picture on the processes, circumstances and governance of Colombian

remigration. The interviewees in this research, thus, are experts with professional, institutional, or analytical insight into the Colombia–Venezuela migration corridor. The selected participants include migration researchers, policy analysts, representatives of international and civil society organizations, and government officials with direct knowledge of migration governance and return-related public policies.

The primary objective of these interviews is not to reconstruct individual migration trajectories, but rather to capture expert interpretations, institutional perspectives, and contextual knowledge regarding the conditions shaping Colombian return migration from Venezuela. This approach allows the research to move beyond individual-level narratives and instead focus on structural factors, policy frameworks, and regional dynamics that influence return intentions, capabilities, and reintegration outcomes.

The format of the interviews was designed to grant analytical comparability and flexibility. This means that the interview design allows us to compare responses across participants (because everyone is guided by the same thematic blocks), while still giving interviewees the freedom to elaborate on issues most relevant to their specific expertise. In order to reach this operationalization and practical objective a predefined set of thematic blocks guided each interview, while the structure allowed interviewees to emphasize issues most relevant to their expertise. Given the heterogeneous profiles of the participants, not all interviewees were expected to address every thematic area in equal depth. Through this method, the diversity of professional perspectives is appreciated as it contributes to a more nuanced and empirically grounded understanding of the regional context.

The interview guide was organized into thematic blocks designed to construct the broader context of Colombian return migration from Venezuela:

(1)	Professional background and scope of expertise;
(2)	The Venezuelan crisis and its implications for Colombian migrants;
(3)	The historical and regional context of return migration;
(4)	Motivations for return and perceptions of return potential;
(5)	Public policies and institutional framework for (re)migration;

This block-based structure also reflects the complex and multidimensional characteristics of return migration, which is shaped by the interaction of individual aspirations, structural constraints, and policy environments. (Find the full questionnaire in the Appendix both in English and Spanish.) By drawing on expert knowledge across different institutional and disciplinary positions, the interviews contribute to a contextualized interpretation of return migration potential, complementing quantitative analyses and migrant-focused data sources. Overall, the expert interviews serve as a critical tool for grounding the

empirical analysis in the regional realities of migration governance and crisis-driven mobility in the Colombia–Venezuela context.

A total of ten expert interviews were conducted during the period of the research in different times, locations and languages (English, Spanish and Hungarian), which also represents the effort to provide a deep, timely insight into the topic trying to overcome geographical and language constraints. Online, as well as offline interviews were taken both in Hungary and in Colombia during a research-trip in early 2026 to Bogota and Medellin. (A visit to Venezuela was not feasible unfortunately for obvious reasons.)

Participants included actors from public administration, such as representatives of Hungarian and Colombian diplomatic missions (namely from *the Colombian Embassy in Budapest, Ambassador Ignacio Ruiz; Sandra Lucía Mikan Venegas, Minister Plenipotentiary*), as well as established migration scholars with recognized expertise in the region (*such as William Mejía, former associate of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and International Labor Organization (ILO), also Professor at the Technological University of Pereira, Human Mobility Research Group; Dra. Luz Dary Botero Pinzón, Professor at Faculty of International and Business of Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (UPB); America Celeste Guevara Parra from the Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga (UNAB), Department of Socio-Humanistic Studies*). In addition, the sample comprised Colombian professionals from both civil engineering–related fields – with direct insight into infrastructure, territorial planning, and development challenges (*Dra. María de los Ángeles Guevara*) – as well as political sciences that regard specifically regional processes of international relations, geopolitics and relevant contexts of migration research (*namely Lady Gavira Ochoa - Professor, Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (UPB)*. Further interviews asked for anonymity, but all interview subjects were intentionally assigned with regards to their diversity in institutional and disciplinary perspectives in order to capture a broad, context-sensitive understanding of return migration dynamics and policy environments.

1.3 CONCLUSIONS AND THESIS OUTLINE

…To be finalized at the very end …

2. CHAPTER: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 THE COMPLEXITY OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Setting the context for the Colombian-related migration phenomenon, this chapter provides concentrated essential knowledge and key data on global migration patterns, incorporating recent statistical and scholarly findings and emphasizing the most important characteristics relevant to understanding contemporary international migration. Indeed, it is vital to understand international migration as a global phenomenon, as well as to define the concept and address its measurements. Defining international migration is as complex as defining international remigration – just as it will be discussed later; it is far from straightforward (Castels et. al., 2014; Massey et al. 1993; King, 2023; de Haas – Czaika, 2014; etc.). At its core, it refers to the movement of people across internationally recognized state borders with the intention of residing temporarily or permanently in a country other than their country of birth or citizenship. However, different institutions and disciplines adopt varying definitions, this is why researchers have a tough assignment in navigating between definitions and measurements when addressing international migration related investigations. For instance, the United Nations (UN) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) often classify an international migrant as any person who has changed their country of usual residence for a period of at least 12 months. Yet, this definition primarily serves statistical purposes and may exclude groups whose movements do not neatly fit temporal or administrative criteria; such as seasonal workers, circular migrants, refugees, or individuals with irregular status. All these give rise to measurement difficulties that further complicate migration understanding. It is mostly the inconsistent definitions across countries, data limitations and underreporting that undermine commonality, but it is also the dynamic and fluid nature of migration. Also, not to mention that data collection is often influenced by national interests, administrative capacities, or political sensitivities surrounding migration, especially regarding asylum seekers and irregular entrants. International migration statistics consequently remain subject to significant measurement error (Loginov, 2020). Clearly, defining and measuring international migration remains an evolving task that reflects the intersection of demographic, political, and epistemological challenges. Recognizing these limitations is essential for producing valid, context-sensitive analyses and for informing evidence-based migration policy (Haas et.al., 2019).

International migration constitutes one of the defining dynamics of the contemporary globalized world. Accordingly, understanding its definition, measurement and grasping the causes and driving forces behind this phenomenon has become a key focus of scientific inquiry. Several comprehensive overviews have been produced in the international literature on the theoretical strands of international migration each provide extensive reviews of the migration theories and research findings of their respective eras (Massey et al. 1993; Bauer and Zimmermann, 1995; Hagen-Zanker, 2008; Stahl 1995; Golovics, 2019, etc.), thus this chapter does not intend to include a thorough summery of these works and literature overview.

Yet, what can surely be clarified based on the review of the literature is that first and foremost, migration is a highly diverse phenomenon in itself, approached in an equally multifaceted manner by various disciplines, but most importantly branches of social sciences. Golovics (2019) highlights that this diversity, however, also reveals that different theoretical approaches intentionally focus on different aspects of migration, and therefore their explanatory power varies when considering the phenomenon as a whole. It is suggested therefore that migration should be understood and analyzed as a complex phenomenon. Grasping this complexity is indeed crucial, as migration has become a central element of social, economic, and political processes worldwide. It influences electoral dynamics, shapes public discourse, and informs policy agendas, while its repercussions – both beneficial and challenging – extend across origin and destination countries alike. These include transformations in labor markets, questions of social cohesion, and broader implications for political stability.

Between 1990 and 2024 the international migrant population almost doubled illustrating the accelerating pace of human mobility over the past decades (UN, 2024). However, numerical growth alone cannot adequately capture the multidimensional nature of international migration. Contemporary migration encompasses a wide spectrum of phenomena – ranging from labor migration and family reunification to forced displacement, asylum seeking, and return migration – each shaped by distinct drivers, contexts, and individual trajectories. Recognizing the complexity of the phenomenon, international migration scholarship has matured substantially over the past three decades. Contemporary understanding acknowledges that migration responds to multiple, intersecting drivers spanning economic opportunity, environmental stress, political persecution, and social networks (Tsegay, 2023). New research directions are coming forth, such as scholars increasingly examine migration as dynamic livelihood strategy rather than permanent relocation, thus noticing the importance and relevance of return migration or circular patterns. Future research must continue integrating insights from diverse disciplines, while improving

data infrastructure to address persistent measurement challenges, as well as addressing those migration trends that receive less attention.

Taking everything into account, this introductory chapter seeks to situate international migration within its broader global context, outlining its key trends and implications, before narrowing the focus to the Latin American region.

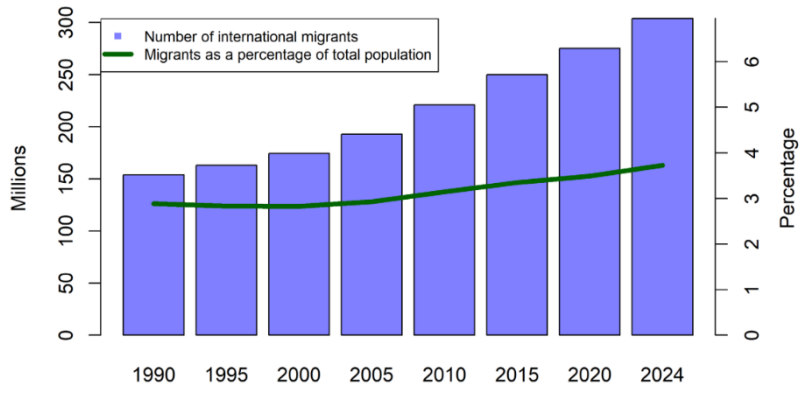
2.1.1 Outlook on International Migration Processes

Human mobility is as old as humanity, but over the centuries it has brought changing patterns, different drivers, and geographical differences. Indeed, global migration has transformed into ways that reflect shifting demographic trends, economic differentials, geopolitical realignments, environmental stressors, and evolving migration governance structures. This subchapter provides an overview of the most essential global migration trends, highlighting major patterns that underpin international mobility today.

2.1.1.1 The Scale and Growth of International Migration

According to the latest United Nations data, in 2024, an estimated 304 million individuals were living outside their birth countries, accounting for approximately 4% of the global population (UN, 2025). This marks a substantial increase since 1990, when there were an estimated 154 million international migrants globally. Although this growth is notable in absolute terms, scholars caution against interpreting it as evidence of an unprecedented surge in mobility. As Czaika and de Haas (2014) argue, when considered proportionally, the share of migrants relative to the global population has grown only moderately, suggesting that long-term migration rates remain relatively stable. It is also relevant to note that the vast majority of people – approximately 96% of the global population – remain within their countries of birth, thus making migration a phenomenon affecting a distinct minority even as its absolute scale increases (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of international migrants worldwide and as a share of global population, 1990-2024.



Source: United Nations, 2025.

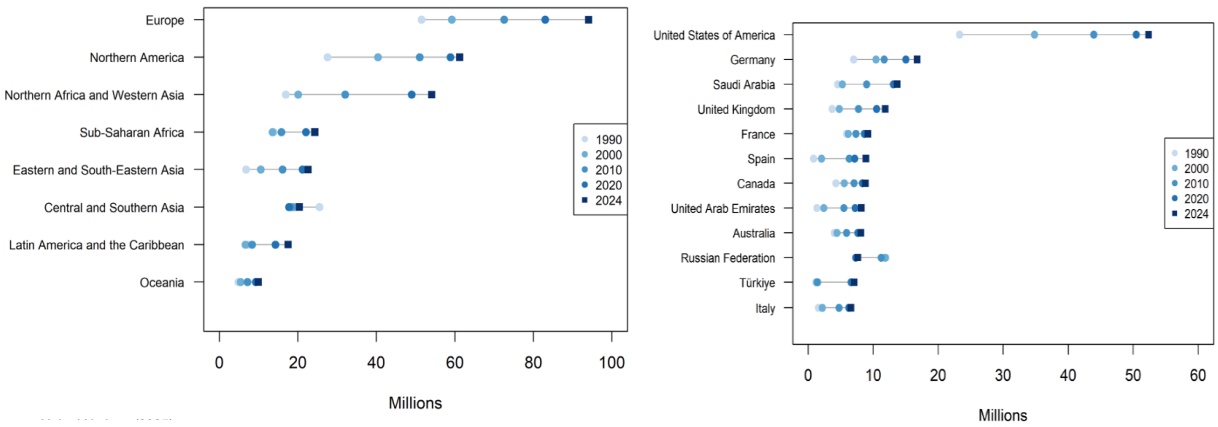
Nevertheless, the absolute rise in the global migrant stock has relevant effects on both sending and receiving countries, as well as having important policy implications. It is closely linked to structural global inequalities and demographic asymmetries, including ageing populations and high youth cohorts. These demographic dynamics continue to influence both demand for migrant labor in receiving countries and the supply of potential migrants in origin countries (Skeldon, 2018).

2.1.1.2 Changing Geographies of Migration

Perhaps the most significant shifts in global migration patterns over the past decades is the increasing diversification of both origin and destination countries. Historically, international migration followed a few dominant routes; primarily from Europe to the Americas during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and later from former colonies to European metropolitan centers after the Second World War (Massey, 1993). Thus traditionally, Western Europe and North America dominated as primary destinations, however their share of international migrants has declined in relative importance, which reflects a fundamental rebalancing of global migration geography. Today, migration is fundamentally multi-polar (Castles – de Haas – Miller, 2014).

Dramatic growth has occurred in northern Africa and western Asia, which hosted 54 million migrants by 2024 (UN, 2025). Several oil-rich Persian Gulf states have emerged as major destinations, particularly for labor migrants from South and Southeast Asia. This diversification reflects not only the economic ascent of new destination countries, but also the consolidation of regional migration systems that increasingly operate independently from traditional flows directed toward Western states. However, in the last three decades it was still Europe experiencing the largest increase in the number of international migrants among the regions shown in Figure 2. (43 million international migrants were estimated between 1990 and 2024 (UN, 2024). Northern America added 34 million international migrants between 1990 and 2024; however, the pace of growth in that region has indeed slowed over time. But it was the United States of America that hosted more international migrants than any other country in 2024, with 52.4 million. Germany was the second leading destination for international migrants, hosting 16.8 million in 2024, followed by Saudi Arabia (13.7 million), the United Kingdom (11.8 million), France (9.2 million), Spain (8.9 million), Canada (8.8 million), the United Arab Emirates (8.2 million), Australia (8.1 million), the Russian Federation (7.6 million), Türkiye (7.1 million) and Italy (6.6 million) (UN, 2025).

Figure 2: Number of international migrants by region of destination/ in the leading destination countries, 1990-2024



Source: United Nations, 2025.

The growing prominence of South-South migration (movement between developing countries) was detected in the last decades when it comes to the changing geographics to migration trends. South–South migration accounts for nearly 40% of all international migration, challenging earlier assumptions that migration predominantly flows from the Global South to the Global North (UN, 2025). Much of this mobility occurs between neighboring countries or within regional economic communities such as ECOWAS (West Africa), MERCOSUR (South America), and ASEAN (Southeast Asia). Asia-Pacific region experiences particularly extensive intra-regional mobility, with Southern Asia accounting for the largest migration inflows and outflows, whilst circulation within Eastern, Southern, and South-Eastern Asia represents the highest proportion of intra-regional return migration (Raymer, 2022).

Notwithstanding, South–North migration remains an important trend, mostly driven by economic disparities, labor market demands, and family reunification. Major destination regions, as mentioned before include North America and Western Europe, where remittances associated with these flows constitute a critical economic resource for many countries of origin, with global remittances reaching USD 647 billion in 2022 (World Bank, 2023). Estimates of the international migrant stock in 2024 by region of origin and destination indicate that the largest inter-regional corridor was from Latin America and the Caribbean to Northern America (27 million people originating from LAC were residing in Northern America) (UN, 2025).

Migration between high-income countries (North–North) is also substantial and often linked to skilled mobility, intra-company transfers, and academic mobility. Meanwhile, North–South migration – often related to retirement migration, lifestyle migration, or

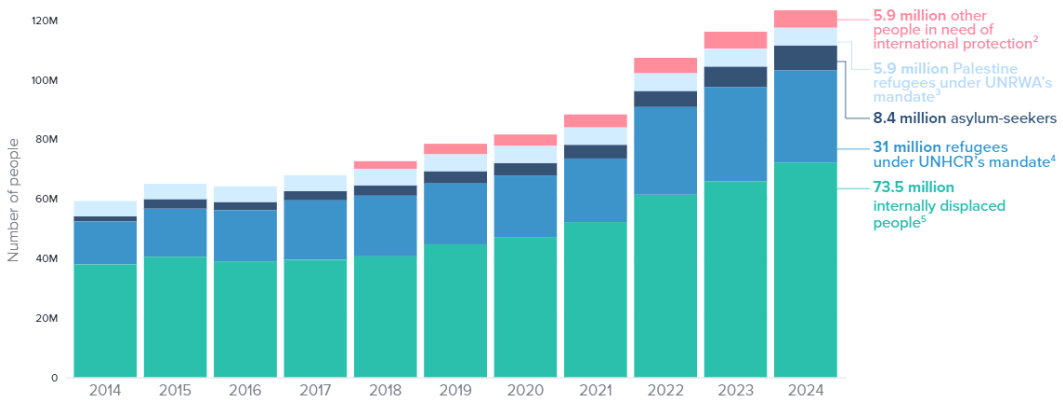
return mobility – remains smaller in scale but is becoming increasingly visible in certain regions, including Latin America and Southeast Asia (King, 2023).

2.1.1.3 Forced Migration and Displacement

The world is currently experiencing historically high levels of forced displacement. According to the data of UNHCR from 2025, over 123 million people were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order – more than at any time since the organization's founding (Figure 3). Over the last decade, the number of forcibly displaced people has almost doubled, and the number of refugees as a share of all international migrants has also increased significantly (UNHCR, 2024). Importantly, this represents not merely an increase in absolute numbers but also shifts in geographic concentration. Major displacement crises include those in Syria, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Ukraine, and the Horn of Africa. Their concentration in specific regions – particularly in low and middle-income countries bordering conflict zones – creates exceptional challenges for receiving communities and international responses. As conflicts in some of the largest displacement situations escalates (e.g. Sudan, Myanmar, Haiti, Gaza, Lebanon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, Central Sahel etc.), with regards to solution for displacement, concerns arise about the inherent protection risks to forcibly displaced people and the longer-term sustainability of these solutions.

Here comes the relevance of the Venezuelan displacement that has emerged as one of the largest population outflows in recent global history, with more than 7.9 million Venezuelans displaced regionally and globally. This crisis has significantly reshaped migration systems across Latin America and has placed unprecedented pressure on host countries such as Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Brazil.

Figure 3: Forcible displaced People Worldwide, 2014-2024.



Source: UNHCR, 2024.

Refugee returns – as well as IDP returns – recorded in 2024 reached their highest levels in more than two decades. For most refugees, returning home remains the preferred solution to their displacement situation. Nonetheless, it remains essential that returns occur voluntarily and under conditions of safety and dignity. As underscored in the fourth objective of the Global Compact on Refugees, the sustainability of return – particularly when undertaken on a large scale – depends fundamentally on improving conditions in the countries of origin to support their reintegration (lasting peace, or at least a cessation of fighting, is paramount) (UNHCR, 2025). Otherwise, people that do return from within the country or from abroad may have no choice but to leave again.

Also, the past years saw the highest refugee resettlement in the last decades; in 2024 more than 188,800 refugees were able to start the process of rebuilding their lives in safety in a third country. It is essential for migrants and refugees to access to third country's protection as well as provided opportunities for them to rebuild their lives. Equitable responsibility-sharing with major refugee-hosting countries must also be on the agenda when helping to ease the pressure on only a single country and administration. In addition, allowing refugees to work or study in another country can be mutually beneficial; refugees are protected and empowered, while receiving states gain access to their untapped potential (UNHCR, 2024).

The legalization and regularization – meaning the formal granting of refugee status, complementary protection, or a secure long/short-term residency permit – is arguably the most important enabling factor for achieving durable solutions to displacement (Crawley – Skleparis, 2018; Blosh, 2000). Regularization improves protection, socio-economic outcomes, integration and is a precondition for stability (Bakker, 2014; Clayton, 2005). However, achieving transparent regularization and high levels of resettlement is challenging as commitments by governments towards resettlement and refugee quotas have reduced lately, meanwhile UNHCR projects 2.9 million refugees in need of resettlement in 2025, more than double the amount in 2021 (UNHCR, 2024).

Environmental displacement is also becoming increasingly serious. Climate- and weather-related disasters occurred in recent years in different parts of the world, including in Pakistan, the Philippines, China, India, Bangladesh, Brazil and Colombia. While estimates vary, climate-related hazards – such as floods, droughts, sea level rise, and extreme weather events – are expected to push millions of people into internal and cross-border mobility in the coming decades (IOM 2022). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change anticipates that climate stressors will interact with other structural factors, influencing migration aspirations and capabilities (IPCC, 2022).

In fact, the most vital mission for reducing the number of forcibly displaced people globally is devoting effort to solve the root causes of forced displacement – conflict, disregard for the basic tenets of International Humanitarian Law, other forms of violence and persecution. However, while doing so, the humanitarian system is at breaking point. While the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide has continued to rise over recent years, the resources available to meet their protection and assistance needs have not grown at a consistent pace. Humanitarian organizations are facing challenges in their budgets, thus they are in need for funding so that they can provide different protection services, food assistance and basic shelter support for displaced people.

2.1.1.4 Labor Migration and Global Labor Markets

Labor migration constitutes one of the dominant forms of international mobility. In 2019, migrant workers accounted for approximately 169 million people, or 59% of the total global migrant population (ILO 2021). However, the composition of migration flows has simultaneously expanded to encompass multiple migration categories beyond the traditional labor migration. Mixed migration – encompassing voluntary labor migration, forced displacement, asylum seeking, and family reunion simultaneously – now characterizes many major corridors, reflecting how individuals often have multiple, intersecting motivations for movement (Dick – Schraven, 2018).

When it comes to labor migration, earlier periods witnessed predominantly manual labor migration, while contemporary flows include substantial proportions of tertiary-educated individuals, called high-skill migration. Nonetheless, the mix of immigrants to wealthy countries has remained "rather balanced between college and non-college educated" with growth primarily driven by emigration from non-wealthy countries (Peri, 2016).

Indeed, migration for employment is structured around global and regional labor markets characterized by segmentation, precariousness, and both high- and low-skilled pathways. High-skilled workers increasingly participate in globalized labor markets through specialized visa pathways, bilateral mobility schemes, and intra-company transfers. These flows are most commonly concentrated in sectors such as information technology, health, engineering, and academia. One of the fundamental consensus findings of migration economics is that high-skill migration is fundamentally linked to economic growth and innovation in the destination country, while it creates complexities for the source country (Skeldon, 2018; Peri, 2016; Czaika – de Haas, 2014). Brain drain and brain gain are two opposing effects of high-skill migration. Brain drain refers to the source country losing its educated, highly qualified professionals, which can lead to a human capital deficit and a decline in innovation within the home economy. Conversely, brain gain is the

phenomenon where the possibility of migration increases the number of skilled workers in the source country. Advanced economies actively compete for high-skilled migrants by tailoring their immigration policies. For instance, countries such as Canada, Australia, and Germany have created employer-driven programs to recruit skilled migrants. Meanwhile, modern research increasingly emphasizes the phenomenon of brain circulation, which suggests that remittances sent back by migrants and the knowledge, experience, and networks brought home by the diaspora can offset, and potentially even surpass, the negative effects of brain drain in the long term (Docquier – Rapoport, 2012).

As for low-skilled and temporary labor migration, these movements include workers who have limited formal education or specialized experience, often entering a destination country under a time-limited visa (if not illegally) to fill jobs that local workers are often unwilling or unavailable to do. Indeed, this form of migration is a global economic lubricant, filling essential roles in sectors like agriculture, hospitality, construction, and domestic services in high-income countries (Massey et.al, 1998). For destination countries, it provides a flexible labor supply that can respond quickly to economic cycles (Piore, 1979). However, migrants in these categories are highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, as they often face limited labor rights, restricted mobility, dependency on employers, precarious working conditions and low wages (Castles, 2006).

2.1.1.5 Demographics of Migration

Not only international migration patterns are diverse, but international migrants themselves too. Indeed, migrant populations have become increasingly diverse in terms of age, gender, skills, and family arrangements, underscoring the multifaceted drivers of mobility. The demographic profile of international migrants is shaped by changes in global labor markets, population structures, gender norms, and regional political dynamics. Understanding these demographic patterns is essential for interpreting contemporary mobility trends, as migration both reflects and reshapes the population compositions of origin and destination countries.

A central and historical demographic feature of global migration is its strong concentration in the working-age population. In 2020, an estimated 74% of all international migrants were between the ages of 20 and 64 (UN DESA 2020). While this pattern persists, especially in specific labor corridors (e.g., South Asia to the Gulf States), the overall age profile is diversifying. Many destination countries in the OECD now receive significant numbers of migrants through family reunification and educational pathways, leading to an increase in the proportion of children and older adults (OECD, 2021). A relatively new phenomenon is international students' enrollments. Globally there are around 6.9 million

international students, a figure that has more than tripled during the last two decades (UNESCO, 2025).

Concerning the gender dynamics of migration, currently there is a larger number of male than female international migrants worldwide (51,9% male and 48,1 female); in all age groups, male migrants outnumber females, except among elderlies (IOM, 2024). However, compared to earlier period, female migration has been increasing over time, which the literature calls the feminization of migration (Sassen, 2000). Male and female proportion varies significantly by regions, migration corridors, as well as labor sectors. Particularly in North America and Europe, women are either the majority or near equal to men in the migrant stock, often due to family migration and increased independent economic migration (IOM, 2022). Meanwhile, women dominate in sectors such as the care economy (nursing, elder care, domestic work) and manufacturing, often migrating independently as primary income earners for their families. As for the former market (care economy), it increasingly relies on migrant women from Asia, Latin America, and Africa, however women distinct vulnerabilities must be considered when forming migration policies and programs.

Skill composition is another critical demographic dimension as was already mentioned with regards to high-skill and low-skill labor migration. But indeed, international migration comprises highly heterogeneous flows in this regard. Often, rights, opportunities, and integration prospects vary widely across skill levels, thus migrants with varying skills experience migration differently in the same destination country.

Finally, an essential ascertainment is that the demographic patterns of labor migration differ substantially from forced migration. UNHCR reports that 40% of the world's displaced population are children under the age of 18, a proportion far higher than in voluntary migration streams (UNHCR 2023). Displacement tends to affect younger populations due to conflict-induced mortality among working-age adults, family separation, and heightened vulnerability of children to humanitarian crises. These demographic characteristics have profound implications for education, health, and long-term integration prospects in host countries, while also reshaping age structures in countries of origin experiencing protracted conflict or state fragility.

Taken together, these demographic dimensions of the internation migrant population illustrate that international migration is embedded in global transformations. Indeed, demographic divergences between regions generate migration flows; as Europe and North American countries experience aging populations and declining working-age cohorts, labor demand arises in these countries. By contrast, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and parts of Southeast Asia experience rapid population growth with limited domestic

employment opportunities, which generates migration pressure. All in all, the age, gender, and skill profiles of migrants both respond to and reinforce socio-economic and demographic change, making migration a key component of global population dynamics.

2.1.1.6 Migration Governance and Policy Trends

Migration governance has become increasingly compound policy domain, shaped by shifting geopolitical dynamics, heterogeneous national interests, and the rise of complex mobility patterns. It involves multiple levels of authority; while states remain the primary actors responsible for regulating entry, stay, and rights of migrants, the governance of international migration has progressively broadened to encompass regional organizations, international institutions, subnational authorities, and non-state actors. This diversification has contributed to what scholars describe as a *pluralized governance architecture*, in which responsibilities are distributed across overlapping legal frameworks and political arenas (Hollifield – Martin – Orrenius, 2014).

As a consequence, contemporary migration governance reflects a deep structural tension between states' desire to assert sovereign control and the functional necessity of managing mobility in a globalized economy in a cooperative and coherent manner. Scholars describe the latter as a global 'governance paradox' (Hollifield et al., 2014). This tension has been further exacerbated by the politicization of migration, as governments face growing electoral pressures and public anxieties that push them toward more restrictive, symbolic, and often fragmented policy responses (de Haas, Natter – Vezzoli, 2018).

A central trend within migration governance is the growing emphasis on enforcement and border externalization. High-income destination states – most prominently in Europe, North America, and Australia – have strengthened border enforcement in order to prevent irregular arrivals, as well as introduced stricter visa regimes. Also, many destination countries externalize, ie. outsource border and migration controls and often try to shift responsibility for asylum processing to third countries.

In parallel, an opposite trend has emerged for regularization and the rise of integrated policies among migrant receiving countries, recognizing the need to address irregularity and offer pathways to legal residence. Such initiatives are aimed at enhancing regular pathways, protecting migrants' rights, and facilitating integration. Several states have implemented regularization programs or expanded temporary and long-term residence options in recognition of the socio-economic contributions of migrants and the limitations of restrictive entry regimes. For example, Spain's long-standing regularizations to create more predictable and rights-based frameworks for migrants, or for instance Colombia or Peru, where the protection mechanisms for Venezuelan nationals are notable.

The adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) in 2018 marked a milestone in multilateral cooperation, emphasizing shared responsibility, human rights protections, and enhanced data collection. Even though it is non-binding, it has influenced policy debates, especially in regions where migration management requires cross-border coordination. In the meantime, regional governance mechanisms have also gained prominence. Such regional organizations as MERCOSUR or ASEAN have created frameworks for regional migration governance. Indeed, regional migration dynamics often shape migration outcomes more directly than global instruments, especially where historical, economic, and familial ties facilitate sustained cross-border mobility (Panizzon – Zürcher – Fornalé, 2016). At the same time, there is plenty of room to grow in terms of migration governance and its effectiveness, since challenges concerning implementation, divergent political priorities, and limited enforcement capacities are persistent and there oftentimes is an asymmetry between formal commitments and practical realities.

2.1.2 GLOBALIZATION OF MIGRATION

2.1.2.1 The Far-reaching Concept of Globalization

In order to see the tight link between globalization and migration – that without doubt brings the process of remigration with it as well – this subchapter explains the far-reaching concept of globalization and the one of globalization of migration, transnationalism and diaspora.

Globalization is a phenomenon that certainly preoccupies our contemporary, interconnected world. Probably, it is one of the "most important concepts for understanding the passage of human society into the third millennium" (James – Steger, 2014). It is a complex concept that has grabbed academic curiosity from a variety of perspectives and come to be a popular term to be used, even described as a "cliché of our time" – yet it still lacks full analytical clarity and a unified theory (Held et al., 1999). It is referred to as a process, a condition, a system, a force and an age, "a megatrend of our times" (Dokos, 2017), whose impacts – though uneven – are felt globally.

However, is globalization such a new phenomenon? Many scholars place the origins of globalization to long before the European Age of Discovery and the exploration of the New World, while others believe that globalization is a far more contemporary occurrence, just as the concept itself (James – Steger, 2014). There is a distinction between **historical** and **'ultramodernist' globalization** (Lloyd, 2000). Historically, the first wave of globalization started, when the capitalist world economy got going, which was characterized by the access to raw materials, industrial production, and the increasing circulation of capital, goods and labor. This process was interrupted during the **de-globalization**

period between the two world wars marked by economic depression and political instability. Globalization undoubtedly began to define the late 20th century, and gained its discursive prominence in the early 21st century with the development of its multidimensional concepts: economic, political and cultural globalization, the environmental and digital aspects of globalization. These facets of globalization are directly or indirectly connected to each other.

On the one hand, **economic** globalization is apparently determinative when analyzing the phenomenon. The emergence of a market-based global economy – marked by intensified flows of capital, goods, services and the reorganization of the international division of labor – has resulted in, we are facing economic integration and interdependence of national, regional, and local economies across the world that is encouraging free trade agreements and multinational corporations. Meanwhile, also **political** integration has been underway that refer to the growth of the worldwide political system – both in size and complexity – with new actors appearing on the political scene, such as 'transnational state apparatus', non-governmental, supranational institutions and legal systems (e.g.: EU, UN etc.) that regulate the political organizations under them, upholding global governance suggesting the limits to national politics (Held et.al., 1999; Sassen, 1996).

Developments in **science and technology**, improvements in the efficiency of long-distance transportation, advances in telecommunication, knowledge and information are essential drivers of globalization that have a huge impact on the territorial, national or regional organization of economies, societies and political systems (Melegh, 2004). As we are entering a new, digital-driven phase of globalization ("Globalization 4.0"), the world is more connected than ever (Manyika et al., 2016).

It is important that globalization cannot be conceptualized in only economic or political terms. The world is also being redrawn in the field of **culture and social relations**. The transmission of ideas, meanings, and values around the world can also be related to globalization, which extends and intensifies social relations both in scope and intensity. In this sense, globalization can perhaps best be described as the "widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life" (Held et al., 1999: 2). Giddens (1990) also captures globalization through the intensification of worldwide social relations, which link distant localities, thus occurrences many miles away can affect our daily lives. With the emergence of the global *lingua franca*, – English –, now more than 1 billion people speak the same language, facilitating shared cultural consumption and communication across borders (Srinivas, 2019).

Although there is a general understanding that globalization has led to a substantial reduction of global disparities in wealth and well-being between the Global North and the

Global South, there is evidence that not everyone has benefited from globalization ("the losers" of globalization) (Dokos, 2017). The processes linked to globalization have led our world to risks and to the midst of considerable uncertainty (CEPAL, 2002). Giddens gives voice to his worries on our global society with crucial changes and blurred contour, living in a world full of 'manufactured risks' of truly global in scope. Beck (1992) also argues that contemporary "globalized" risks are no longer natural hazards, but socially produced side-effects of modern industrial and technological development. "The debate now is about the consequences of globalization, not about the reality of globalization" (Giddens, 1999).

2.1.2.2 The Tight Link between Globalization and Migration

After outlining globalization, it becomes necessary to examine its interactive relationship with migration. Migration can be understood as one of the core dimensions of globalization, closely linked to its economic, political and social transformations. The literature on globalization and migration is extensive and predominantly apply macro-level approaches linking migration to systemic economic, political and social transformations (Melegh, 2004). Complementary approaches on globalization and migration nexus include transnational, network and migration policy analyses focusing on the regulation and governance of migratory flows (Hansen, 2002; Castles – Davidson, 2000; Sassen, 1996). What is common in this literature is that international migration is inextricably linked with globalization as they genuinely overlap and are interconnected, in fact, reinforce each other. Globalization processes facilitate – often generate – population movements, while migration deepens cross-border socio-economic and political relations (Dokos, 2017). In other words, as countries develop and become integrated in global economic, political, and social systems, their migratory interconnectedness is expected to increase, too (Czaika – de Haas, 2014). The upcoming few paragraphs intend to describe how globalization dimensions and international migration correlate.

Modern-day globalization has been driven by political and ideological shifts toward an imagined "universalization of Western liberal democracy" (Fukuyama, 1992) across the globe. Since the 1980s, market liberalization, privatization and deregulation have reduced barriers to trade and capital flows (Czaika – de Haas, 2014). And here we connect to economic globalization: a rapid increase in cross-border flows of different nature, starting with finance and trade, including ideas, ideologies, and knowledge about democratic and economic governance, cultural and media products, as well as people (Castles – Miller, 2009). Here we can refer to migration systems theory, according to which countries and regions that are connected by different types of linkages and exchange – for instance

trade, investment, communication – are also likely to develop migration linkages (Massey et al., 1998).

However, globalization is asymmetrical. While capital and goods circulate relatively freely, labor mobility remains politically restricted (Castells, 1999). Policy restrictions towards migration exist for the reason that migration represents a serious political challenge to nation-states, since migration strikes at the heart of issues that concern sovereignty, including national identity, economic competitiveness, and security (Koser, 2018). Sassen (1996) argues that strict migration control is structurally difficult to sustain in a global market economy, where persistent labor demand often conflicts with restrictive political frameworks.

Technological change has significantly stimulated migration. Advances in transportation and communication technologies made it possible to travel and communicate over increasingly long distances, and also lowered resource constraints on mobility by reducing their costs (Castells, 1996; Dokos, 2017). This has strengthened migrant networks and transnational ties (Faist, 2000). Also, demographic and social and cultural transformations further intersect with globalization-driven mobility (Castles, 2010). With demographic pressures, less developed, over-populated areas get loose of their citizens, who aim at more developed countries with demand for labor. As literacy and education levels have increased, parallel to the distance-shrinking technologies improving access to "global" information – via television, mobile phones, and Internet, – people's capabilities, aspirations to migrate and the awareness of opportunities have increased (de Haas, 2009). As a consequence, people base their moves on increasingly informed decisions, which is accompanied by the perception that such moves necessitate limited risks and costs (CEPAL, 2002).

The aforementioned dynamics underpin what scholars describe as the "globalization of (labor) migration" (Castles – Miller, 2009; Salt, 1992). This is a tendency that is characterized by "more and more countries to be crucially affected by migratory movements at the same time" (Ibid: 10). Czaika and de Haas (2014) defines this concept similarly, as "functionally related processes of emigration dispersion and immigration diversification". Contemporary mobility thus reflects a broader migration transition marked by increasing diversification and complexity (Solimano, 2004).

2.1.2.3 Transnationalism and Diaspora

Transnationalism and globalization – both ubiquitous terms that are related but shall not be interchanged – that have gained prominence in migration studies since the 1990s (Dahinden, 2010; Faist, 2010; Portes, 1998; Castells, 1999, etc.). The evolution of a

global economy has contributed to the formation of economic, cultural, and ideological links between countries that are also meant to serve as bridges for international migration. Transnationalism is part of the globalization process that is present in economics, politics and in the social field too. In migration studies, transnationalism refers to the multiple ties and interactions that connect individuals and groups across national borders. The emergence of transnational communities – immigrant populations maintaining multi-stranded social relations with their societies of origin – exemplifies the interconnectedness of globalization and migration (Castells, 1999). Societies today experience a transition from territorially-based national identities to one of a trans-territorial nature (CEPAL, 2002). These communities extend political borders and are 'neither here nor there' but in both places simultaneously' (Portes, 1998). Having strong social networks, it connects them to two or more societies simultaneously thus they become multi-local (Schiller et al., 1992: 1-2; Klingenberg et al., 2020). They are considered as important social agents, and a fundamental matter is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies (Basch, Schiller, Blancszanton, 1994: 6). In fact, the phenomenon of transnational communities and activities, the stretched social fields crossing geographic, cultural, and political borders, challenge the traditional centrality of nation-state boundaries.

Nonetheless, transnationalism remains conceptually complex due to its multidimensional character (Tedeschi – Vorobeva – Jauhiainen, 2020). Among the many scholars dealing with the phenomenon, Vertovec (2009) highlights different theoretical premises in which the concept can be analyzed. He defines transnationalism through social networks, the multiple identities and sense of belonging, cultural reproduction, avenue of capital, cross-border public participation and political organizations, and through the (re)construction of 'place' or locality. These cross-border practices can have transformative structural implications.

According to Schiller et al, (1992b) and Portes (1997) transmigrants are geographically extended social units, developing and maintaining multiple relations and supportive links, such as familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political ones. Culturally, they circulate practices and symbols that contribute to the diversification of host societies. While transnational migrants are known for heterogeneity of their members, **diaspora** are rather homogenous groups. The two concepts are referred to as "two awkward dance partners" by Faist (2010) who made a great contribution to the conceptual understanding of the two terms arguing that they are concepts that often overlap but should be treated with consideration on the specific regard as they differ in emphasis. While diaspora is an old concept, transnationalism is relatively new, and broader in scope.

The extent to which the two are related can be realized from the perception that contemporary diasporas are "the exemplary communities of the transnational moment" (Tölölyan, 1991: 5). As discussed though, while transnationalism refers to processes that transcend international borders, the term 'diaspora' is used to introduce a religious, ethnic and national community or group. Also, "transnational communities encompass diasporas, but not all transnational communities are diasporas" (Faist, 2010: 21). Another variation in emphasis between the use of the diaspora and transnationalism approaches lies in the time dimension. With regards to human mobility, diaspora is referred to as a multigenerational pattern, a formation that reaches across generations, meanwhile the transnational idea concerns recent migrant flows. Both, however, rely on migrant networks that reduce risks, circulate information and shape migration dynamics. Also, both concepts intersect with debates on integration. It is suggested that generally diaspora members do not fully integrate socially – i.e., politically, economically, culturally – into the country of settlement as their bounded group maintain distance vis-à-vis other groups or the majority society. Indeed, migrants or diaspora members are 'natural' agents of intercultural exchange, and either through their 'thin' and 'thick' diaspora membership (Gamlen, 2008) preserve their heritages (Soltész, 2020). Thus, full assimilation would mean the end of diaspora (Faist, 2010). In the case of transnational migrants, their integration into the origin and host country at the same time is rather inherent. Recent scholarship increasingly questions whether cultural distinctiveness and social integration are mutually exclusive. The resilient bonds that migrants sustain with the country of origin may encourages return, yet for transnational migrants return is often part of a broader circular or onward mobility pattern.

These migrants – both diaspora and transnational communities – have gained growing research and policy attention due to their political, economic and developmental roles in both origin and destination contexts. Within the broader migration–development nexus, these dynamics are particularly salient in Latin America, where globalization, transnationalism and diaspora formation intersect in distinct ways.

2.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF RETURN MIGRATION

2.2.1 INTRODUCTION TO RETURN MIGRATION AND ITS RESEARCH

In our contemporary world, globalization, global warming, political and economic circumstances as well as advances in transportation and communication fuel international mobility, certainly making its pattern more complex in nature, as well as geographically

more diverse. Due to its growing size and dynamics, as well as the interdisciplinarity of the phenomenon, international migration is a popular field of research, with quite abundant academic literature. However, the initial migration, i.e. emigration was mainly examined, and nowadays the political aspect of immigration has become more prominent, while the issue of return migration has remained a less explored area.

Return migration has been the subject of various scientific interpretations since the 1960s – the first comprehensive studies were made in the last decades of the 20th century (Cerase, 1974; King, 1986) – but it took a long time for it to become the actual focus of theoretical and empirical research. On the one hand, because of difficulties in measurability and comparability, and the lack of reliable quantitative data (Cassarino, 2004: 253), and on the other hand, because it is smaller in volume than emigration or immigration. In general, the process of remigration has received more attention in foreign scientific works (Carling – Mortensen – Wu, 2011), while in Hungary there is less research on the phenomenon or related to the topic, though it is not negligible.

Migration is an extremely compound social process; it is typically not a one-way movement, as emigration is followed by constant counterflows. Based on international experience, emigrants recurrently – sooner or later – return to their homeland. In connection with return moves, migration between the village and the city was originally studied, only then did attention turn to international remigration. This summary analysis deals with international, cross-border repatriation. The aim of this section is to provide an overview of the available foreign and domestic literature on the topic, seeking to introduce a comprehensive summary of the existing approaches concerning the concept and the truly complex phenomenon of cross-border repatriation. The analysis presents the challenges of defining and measuring return flows, and then the theoretical schemes and mechanisms that are applicable when researching the topic.

Who returns, when and why, and who stays in the new homeland? What makes the emigration and return more successful for some, and less for others? The study covers the relationship between migration and development, human capital, remittances, and the reintegration of citizens.

2.2.1.1 Definitions and Typologies of Return Migration

Return migration has been the subject of various interpretations since the 1960s, though admittedly it was under inquiry with less attention than initial migration, due to its scarce measurability and comparability (Cassarino, 2004: 253), and because it is less

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voluminous than emigration or immigration. When it comes to an analysis in the context of return migration, multiple profound questions arise – alongside seemingly 'simple' ones on who returns, when, and why – which can only be explained with an interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional theoretical and methodological approach. Migratory movements fitting under the generic denomination of return migration are of a very varied nature. Hence, there is a conceptual vagueness with which the many existing synonyms are used in this regard. Synonyms for the term return migration include reflux migration, return flow, homeward migration, counter-current, second-time migration, repatriation or "retromigration".

The term *return voluntary migration* is generally used when "migrants return to their country of origin, by their own will, after a significant period of time abroad" (Dustmann – Weiss, 2007: 238). When people move to a second destination, it is called *transit migration.* Often used as a synonym of return migration, but according to Bovenkerk (1974), *remigration* or *re-immigration* is when one migrates back to the same destination after a period of return to his/her origin country. *New emigration* is actually moving from the destination country to a new destination after returning from the origin country. It mostly occurs when one cannot find his/her calculations. Finally, it is *circular migration* when round-trip movements between two places include more than one return. It takes place mostly in the framework of labour migration systems. All the migration types established by Bovenkerk – except in the case of transit migration – comprise at least one return movement, reflecting to the fact that return migration is usually part of a more complex migration history and that return does not necessarily imply the endpoint of the migration story.

Figure 4. Classification of migration

Source: Own compilation based on Bovenkerk, 1974 and SOPEMI, 2008.

As for the aim of the study, the concept of return migration will be in the focus, which can be further elaborated. The decision of moving – just as for emigration as well as for return migration – can be made by *choice* or it can be *forced* (deportation, expulsion). However, regarding the typologies, what must be taken into account is how much they are related to the migration motives, the causes of leave and return, intentions, and success of the migration. According to Gmelch (1980: 137-138), two dimensions are concerned: *the length of time* migrants intend to remain abroad and their *reason(s) for returning*. In both purposes, differentiation is made with respect to the migrants' intentions – both the initial immigration and later on the emigration plans – whether they dedicated their moves

to be *temporary* or *permanent*. Intentions suggest outcomes for returnees in correspondence with the achievement of their objectives as a reason of migration, ergo those who intend temporary settlement are more likely to return as soon as their goals are fulfilled. Correspondingly, permanent thinkers can have two ends to return: forcing factors pulled them home although they were meant to stay with successful circumstances or, on the account of failing to accomplish their goals, they choose to go back.

Some would argue that there is hardly a specific definition of the returnee, but multiple conceptualizations exist based on a ***successful*** or ***unsuccessful*** return (Tovar – Victoria, 2013) that is assessed by the socio-economic integration of the migrants as well as their contribution to development – often verifiable long after their return. According to this approach, returned emigrants are referred to as "successes" or "failures" (Bovenkerk, 1974*;* Wiest, 1978). In order to explain whether return is a consequence of a positive or a negative selection process, Cerase (1974) developed four types of migration taking into account accomplishment or lack of accomplishment: (1) *return of failure*: unsuccessful migration experience with failed integration into the host society (this being the reason to return); (2) *return of conservativism*: when the migration motive was to secure an income to be consumed at home (typically successful); (3) *return of retirement*: when moving to the homeland after working years; (4) *return of innovation*: when after return the social and financial capital gained abroad is invested in the home country – its success depends on the follow-up.

Another typology must be highlighted, which is developed in the time perspective of emigration: *intergenerational migration or 'roots migration'.* The patterns acquired during the primary socialization, over childhood influence the willingness of possible future emigration, thus members of the second – less regularly third – generation, who grow up in a strong transnational social network and nurture a nostalgic relationship with the place of origin of their parents or grandparents, have significant potentials to return (Wessendorf, 2007: 1083). The likeliness of return is often higher for those who participate in ethnic organizations and social networks, consume ethnic media, and regularly travel to their parents' homeland. Important triggers in their decision are the inclination or the relation to those who intend to perpetuate the national heritage and identity, the transmission through generations (family, friends or a bigger diaspora community), hence it is more likely that returning descendants will have the necessary knowledge, so return and integration may proceed more smoothly in their case. Different motivations and key life events are important drivers for international movements, however, first- and second-generation migration patterns show altering results. Some research examining return intentions attributes a higher probability of first-generation return and a lower chance of a

second (Bettin et al., 2018), while others determine surprisingly similar return rates and intentions for the first and second generations (Caron, 2019). The nationalities of the parents also exert important influence. If one parent is immigrant and the other is native, the second generation tends to be characterized by onward migration intentions and is significantly less likely to consider "returning" to their sole immigrant parents' origin country. The latter, strictly speaking, is not even a return if the person has not previously lived in the country, yet their cases are examined in the context of return migration.

2.2.1.2 Challenging Measurement of Return Flows

Return migration indeed is a phenomenon hard to quantify. Only in brief will operationalization be mentioned here, though studies do reflect on various methodological approaches to the subject and specific research questions. Major problems in the analysis of remigration processes are the differences of definition among different data sets, and certainly the lack of reliable and comparable data and documentation (Koser, 2000; Hárs, 2020). On the one hand, it is because of the departure of migrants from the destination country is not efficiently recorded, and on the other hand, relevant shortcomings exist for the statistics of incoming country nationals to countries of origin. Country statistics, population surveys (especially longitudinal and ethno-surveys), panel and case studies can fill this knowledge gap in order to give an idea of the quantity of return flows between important source and destination countries. Often, in the absence of comprehensive data, the specifics of return migration are presented on the basis of smaller samples, however, their results cannot be generalized.

It is not always possible to have a complete grasp of the process of returning home. One reason for this is that while – at the macro level – economic-demographic indicators (e.g. gender, age, educational attainment of returnees) are relatively easy to be measured statistically, changes in the individual and the factors influencing the decision can only be measured empirically (e.g. by questionnaires or interview surveys) at the micro level, which in turn is limited. Still, quantitative research with its limitations are numerous, and also over the years, from a qualitative point of view, various empirical inquiries have been carried out to better illustrate the manifold factors that have made return migration a multifaceted and heterogeneous phenomenon. Lately, attention is paid to sociological and anthropological approaches that aim to understand the complexities of return migration from individual perspectives.

The conclusion here is that – as was mentioned before –, besides difficulties derived from data availability, an interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional discussion of theoretical and

methodological approach is needed for such a complex phenomenon to be adequately measured and analyzed.

2.2.2 MOTIVES TO RETURN AND THEORIES AT GLANCE

The drivers of return migration are a constellation of extremely complex, multifaceted factors and diverse personal circumstances. The heterogeneity of returnees is beyond doubt. Not only do they have different migration intentions, but they are affected in different ways by the course of emigration and experience abroad, having different migration histories and they face diversely with the event of return, as well as they have unequal willingness to future migration, thus and so remigration is selective. (Actually, it is double selective, since emigration and return are of both selective nature (Horváth, 2016). The results show that in addition to the reasons for return are diverse, they are often characterized by overlaps.

When it comes to theory-building purposes, in fact there is no general theory of migration. Theory-building efforts project new knowledge along with striking limitations (Massey et al., 1993: 432.; Arango, 2000: 283.). It is certain that for a comprehensive understanding of increasingly complex migration processes of a multifaceted nature, it is not enough to use the tools of a single discipline (Hautzinger et al., 2014: 6), but to take into account sociological, political, economic, legal, demographic, geographical, historical, psychological and public administration points of view as well. Likewise, this is true for the theory of return migration that is under examination without a general theory to be pleasing (Contant – Massey, 2002; Gmelch, 1980). Like social processes in general, the phenomenon of migration cannot be incorporated into a single theoretical framework that could provide a satisfactory explanation in all places and times. The fundamental difference is that traditional interpretations of migration perceive migration as a one-time movement (Cassarino, 2004; Illés – Kincses, 2009), meanwhile, it emerges as a recurring event in the concept of return migration. Thus, theories of migration and reflux migration are sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory, but this does not mean that they are not compatible. Nonetheless, depending on the exact research question, most of the migration theories that were originally created to throw light upon initial migration processes are applicable in explaining and classifying return flows and their outcomes, of course with the necessary adaptation to the logic of return migration. As in the general case of migration, the task of most of the studies on the phenomenon of returning has been to carry information on the various factors or social attributes that intervene in the process of returning to the native land, showing the empirical regularities or uniformities that are observed around the aforementioned return (Castillo, 1997: 33). In order to do so,

studies (eg.: Hare, 1999; Contant – Massey, 2002; De Bree et al., 2010) often refer to general theories of voluntary migration such as neoclassical economics, push and pull theory, the new economics of labour migration, structuralism, transnationalism and social network theory or sociopsychological theories among others. In order to get familiar with remigration movements, these basic theories on initial migration shall be understood. However, instead of introducing all theories one by one, addressing the return logics to the models will be shortly proposed.

The earliest consideration in explaining population movements – size and direction – was Ravenstein's ***migration laws*** (1885), which are applicable to return migration flows as well. Return migration can be understood in the context of each significant migration flow – with a time phase shift – creating a counterflow with a smaller magnitude than the initial outflow. The further developed assumption by Lee (1966) introduced the ***push and pull factors*** that regulate migration decision and direction. The decision to return is driven by a set of influencing negative, so-called "push" factors in the host country, and "pull" factors indicating the attraction or positive attributes of the motherland –, which indeed more commonly have a bearing on return migration decision (Gmelch, 1980: 140). Intervening obstacles and personal factors might be also inherent in the decision and motivation. The theory operates at both the micro and macro levels, and to this day – supplemented with critical remarks, – they regularly study the recurring waves within this classical framework.

As far as the ***neoclassical approach*** is concerned, international migration is caused by wage differentials between countries and markets, as well as by higher expected earnings in the host countries (Todaro, 1969: 140). Along these lines, emigration intension is permanent to raise and maximize wages in the place of destination, thus untimely return "is considered a 'failure' caused by miscalculation" that did not bring the expected advantages (Tezcan, 2018: 3). Those with failed migration experience do not have considerable assets acquired abroad, so they cannot invest or consume significantly after their homecoming, so it is not economically worthwhile for either the individual or the country to return.

Meanwhile, the ***new economics of labour migration*** (NELM) judges returnees differently because it interprets return as a pre-planned, conscious, "calculated strategy" for achieving goals (e.g., higher income, accumulation of savings). Migrants are not only aspire to achieve their goals and earn sufficient assets and knowledge, but also preoccupied to minimize their risks and to mitigate the possible consequences of failures (Stark – Bloom, 1985). In case goals are not reached or integration is unsuccessful, the projected return is then periodically postponed, again seeing that the decision to relocation is premediated and only happens with attainments. Unlike neoclassical theory, NELM offers

the idea that emigration and return migration decision is determined in the household, not being made at the individual level (Stark, 1991). In connection with the NELM perspective, one can refer to remittances, which – other than their development potential – are constituents of a strategy set out to diversify the household resources inasmuch as to minimize risks (Constant – Massey, 2002). Return then is foreseen to be a successful migration experience. Even though these theories are laid in the success-failure paradigm, the following thesis will show that they cannot fully explain the return migration phenomenon.

The ***structural approach*** to return migration introduces a new understanding by the realization that the return is very much related to social and institutional factors. Structural thinkers of return migration focus on the cruciality of the return decision and the reintegration of the migrants that are based on the financial and economic resources brought back to origin countries. As the original theory corresponds to the global imbalance of capital distribution and development, so does the return logics. Migration decision is presented in a more deterministic form, inasmuch as movements are outcomes of a broader structural process. However, again when it comes to the development nexus, a substantial relationship is concerned with the links between the returnee's expectations and the conditions at the home country, in particular the social and economic context (Cassarino, 2004: 257). (Perceived) positive change at home can contribute to return decisions, whereas the lack of change or negative alterations in comparison with the situation at the time of emigration may deter people from going back (Condon – Ogden, 1996: 45).

Attention has been paid to the ***transnational aspects*** of international (re)migration experiences and practices in order to explain persisting migratory and return flows. Transnationalism attaches importance to the connections that migrants establish between countries; exchanges and interactions across borders that can create powerful social and economic ties between migrants' host and origin countries. Return is apparently not the endpoint of the migration cycle, so transnational migrants are perceived as part and parcel of a circular system, benefiting from the economic and political situation both in the country of origin and destination (Portes, 1997). Therefore, resilient bonds with the previous and successful integration in the latter are not substitutes or opposites, but could complement each other (Van Houte et al., 2015: 692). According to transnationalists, returnees prepare their reintegration at home through retaining strong links, preserving their national identity (e.g. participation in an ethnic community, consuming domestic media), sending remittances and devoting periodical and regular visits to their home countries[1]. "Migrants

[1] Benedict Anderson's concept of long-distance nationalism can be related, according to which it happens when some members of the diaspora living in the host country engage in activities that can be linked to cultural, national, or political processes in their home country (Kovács, 2017).

have become increasingly important, not only as a source of remittances, investments, and political contributions, but also as potential "ambassadors" or lobbyists in defense of national interests abroad" (Nyberg-Sorensen et al., 2002: 18). Returnees with their new transnational identities can have a significant impact on their motherland, in a way that can cause remarkable transformation in the local economy, politics, and culture.

Coupled with migration systems and the analysis of migration as a social process, it is ***social network theory*** that – similarly to transnationalism – explains return as an outcome of strong social and cultural ties and suggests that, in the long run, these networks (relative-acquaintance, organized-institutional) will keep migration and remigration between the sending and the receiving country in place (Tilly, 2007; Boyle, 2009; Hautzinger et al., 2014). Returnees are more likely to decide to return if they have the right human and social capital back home, and return is more common where more people have returned. Return affects and is affected by social structures that increase the availability of resources and information. In the developmental context, this social capital of returnees – that is inherent in the structure of people's relationships (Portes, 1998) and assisted by the internet and improved communication capabilities – facilitates their effective initiatives and reintegration.

There can be a myriad of reasons for migrants to leave and to return home, which can be explained in different ways, and it is also clear that return migrants have quite different experiences abroad, which determines the process of their return. One of the major shortcomings of most remigration theories is that it pays less attention to the identity of migrants and does not anticipate identity changes abroad. However, it is a fact that during the time spent in the host country, impulses to migrants (e.g. foreign cultural environment, different work ethic, different worldviews) or changes in the life cycle (e.g. family formation) have a significant impact on (re)migration decision (Sussmann, 2010). This new ***socio-psychological model*** analyzes return from the perspective of identity change and examines the changes taking place in returnees, with a focus on personal stories related to migration. For example, some migrants may experience an increase in homesickness and attachment to their homeland – anticipating the potential for repatriation – while others may no longer be attracted by the idea of returning due to new knowledge, experience or a changed worldview (Lados, 2018: 29). In addition to the economic and social dimension, it is important to consider this psychological dimension in relation to the characteristics of return.

Overall, despite their sometimes contrasting interpretations, the above mentioned theories make it clear that there are numerous reasons for people moving abroad and returning home, and they can be explained in very different ways. Nonetheless, these theoretical

schemes do not represent a theoretical body proper, capable of systematically, coherently, and globally explaining such a collective phenomenon as return migration (Sinatti, 2014: 12-13).

2.2.3 Consequences and Outcomes of Return Migration

Return migration has considerable impact both on countries of origin, transit, and destination, as well as on the migrants themselves, transforming demography, impacting development, trade, and international relations, and sometimes putting a burden on health, security, and human rights too (Jeffery – Murrison, 2011). It would be a rather impossible venture to elaborate on each ground, and as it is not in the scope of the study, therefore, I will address only a few key discourses on return migration, such as the relationship between migration and development, remittances and the migration of highly skilled workers, and finally the issue of (re)integration.

2.2.3.1 The Relationship between Return and Development

The study of migration and developmental nexus is one of a difficult area to measure, but it is the subject of intense debate in modern sciences. The understanding the relation of return migration and development is also more general, as much more empirical work would be needed to test the theories published on the topic. Separate examination of the causes and effects of remigration is common, however not expedient, as the (developmental) factors influencing migration decisions also affect the development outcomes of sending countries and communities (de Haas, 2008). The ***"successes"*** or ***"failures"*** question on the positive or negative selection process with regard to return migration is a fundamental issue when analyzing the effects of counterflows on the sending societies. In case the return is the result of the migrants' socio-economic failure in the host country, their impacts on the origin country are expected to be less constructive, while if the migrants' experience is positive, returning with new skills, capital, and plans for investment, they are more likely to take part in the development of their nation.

According to Cassarino (2004: 271), in order "to strengthen the link between return migration and development at home, return should not simply be viewed as a voluntary act on the part of the migrant but, above all, as a proof of readiness". In this sense, return pertains to a process of resource mobilization (both material and intangible capital, skills and knowledge), and not only willingness, but actual preparation. Based on readiness, three types of returnees can be distinguished: *well-prepared, partially-prepared, and unprepared returnees* (Cassarino, 2004). The preparedness and readiness of returnees and their potentially constructive impact on the host country depend not only on experience abroad,

but also on whether significant institutional, economic and political changes have taken place at home. These conditions affect the capacity and usability of resources after return.

Nevertheless, exploring the variation of return migration outcomes, the migrant remittances and the impact of human capital is regularly under inquiry. The degree to which returnees can successfully integrate and / or appear as actors of change depends on the aforementioned migration experience, preparedness, and the applicability of the specific skills, knowledge, social, and financial capital that the emigrated returnee acquired abroad. Evidence shows growth and innovation trajectories with regard to the returnees' human capital investment are determined by structural factors, local power relations, traditions as well as values in home countries (Glorious, 2013; Cassarino, 2004).

2.2.3.2 Human Capital – Brain Drain-Brain Gain Nexus

In relation to human capital and scientific and technological resources, the phenomenon of ***"brain return"*** in the context of ***"brain drain – brain gain"*** discourse arises as a developmental factor especially for less developed countries of origin. The emigration or seduction of (skilled) labor to more developed countries usually has a negative impact on sending countries, as it may cause labor shortages or structural problems. However, on the one hand, emigration results in depopulation in the short run and in some cases can hinder further economic development, on the other hand, it may even pay off for sending countries in the medium to long term (Lados, 2018: 5). Monetary remittances, for instance, are considered to be a positive and profitable consequence, but beyond that – perhaps with even more important potential in the long run – social remittances[2] are also essential investments. The return of the formerly emigrated individuals – with knowledge, skills, and social networks – may reverse the brain drain into significant brain gain for the origin country (Mayr – Peri, 2008). This is also the conclusion of those researches that raise the question of whether it is more worthwhile for countries to 'extract' skilled human capital for themselves by investing and subsidizing school and research activities, or to 'import' or call back those non-nationally, foreign produced human capital.

When a migrant fills a job below his or her education in the host country due to opportunity, lack of jobs or over-qualification, we are talking about ***"brain waste".*** In this case, the knowledge acquired abroad will not be so useful and profitable, so the contribution to domestic development is likely to remain low. The literature also distinguishes between "***brain exchange"*** processes in which there is no net loss or gain in human capital because migrated talents are replaced by foreign immigrants. In order to avoid brain drain, "***brain***

[2] Social remittances are ideas, practices, identities transferred from the host country to the mother country and the total of the so-called social capital.

escape"[3] and brain waste, states are implementing various measures to recall migrants or to contribute to "brain exchange" processes. In addition to income and job offers, this could include accreditation of foreign degrees or support for businesses, which can serve as a basis for successful integration.

2.2.3.3 Migrant Remittances

After discussing human capital as social remittances, here we focus on monetary remittances, which is a portion of a migrant's earnings transferred from the destination to the place of origin. Remittances sent from abroad – on a regular or less regular basis, – to those who have stayed at home, are mentioned in the international remigration literature in the context of utilitarian strategy on the one hand, and in the system of transnationality and networks on the other.

Remittances are considered to be a positive consequence of migration, which might balance up to a certain extent the negative effects of emigration and brain drain. They serve various purposes: provide financial help to family members at home and also "prepare the return of donors themselves by maintaining and reinforcing their economic and social capital in their origin countries" (Albertini et al., 2019: 1700). Thus, remittances are a significant and spectacular link between migrants and the society that sends them, one of the explanatory factors for return. According to remittance behavior (Grieco, 2004: 243-252), the level of remittances sent by migrants peak soon after arrival and although it continues to decline through time, remittances and the probability to return are correlated with each other.

International remittances are generally seen as a positive consequence, in contrast to the negative effects of emigration, especially in developing countries where remittances received from abroad are an important part of total national income. The economic development dimension of migrants' remittances is well known, given that it is almost the only quantifiable feature of the migration experience (Nyberg-Sorensen, 2004), however, there is no consensus on the extent to which these transfers can offset the aforementioned loss of human capital through emigration.

2.2.3.4 Reintegration of Returned Emigrants

Last, but not least, it is the reception and **integration** of return migrants that can pose serious challenges to transit and origin countries. Reintegration into the home country is influenced by a number of factors, including the returnee's gender, status, work, previous contact with the return country, personal migration experience, language, and reinte-

[3] When the resources, income and standard of living of the highly skilled in a given country lag far behind that of their international rivals, they are virtually 'fleeing' the country.

gration programs. Social and cultural reintegration and economic incorporation of returnees are considered as key to migrants' economic and social success in home countries (Poros, 2011).

Those with the right skills, knowledge, social and financial resources will be more successfully integrated, as was mentioned before, the preparedness for return and the mobilization of resources in terms of the reintegration successes also matter (Cassarino, 2004). There is also a strong correlation between changes in individuals' identities and their reintegration (Hegedűs – Lados, 2017). The time factor is important too, which means the time spent away during emigration on the one hand, and the time spent in the motherland after returning on the other, since integration successes can only be assessed only after a substantial time after return. The extent and direction of change in the abandoned country also influences the decision and integration of returnees. If the changes are radical in the mother country, the return is practically equivalent to moving to a new country (Lajtai, 2009).

Education, health, housing and the labor market are domains that have been consistently identified as critical at the local level to ensure the possibility of integration. However, this is not, incidentally, to say that other domains or contexts are not essential to be considered. Factors that might hinder or promote integration can be the existence of a sizeable co-ethnic community and the number and composition of those who arrive, contact with the country of origin, language, and integration programs. Applying a group-oriented immigrant strategy can facilitate reintegration by community members helping each other to settle. At the same time, there is a need for governmental policies that can foster the institutional and legal framework of reintegration by lifting migration boundaries and assisting migrants in accessing employment and public services. All the same, if countercurrents are poorly governed and the reintegration of returnees do not take place in the long run, remigration cannot benefit the country, either socially or economically, thus it can negatively impact on development.

2.3 MIGRATION POTENTIAL

2.3.1 UNDERSTANDING MIGRATION POTENTIAL

Migration potential represents a fundamental concept in contemporary migration studies, yet its widespread use in migration research and policy discourses, the concept has been used with varying meanings, unclear conceptualization and operationalization. A clear definition though, would lead to a better understanding of why people move, why they stay, and under what conditions migration aspirations translate into actual mobility. Understanding migration potential is crucial for several reasons. First, it allows researchers

and policymakers not only to react on migration flows but adopt predictive frameworks and measures that can anticipate future mobility patterns. It also provides analytical tools for examining how policy measures – in the case of this dissertation return policy measures – development, and climate change shape migration outcomes. Furthermore, addressing migration potential highlights the often-overlooked phenomenon of immobility, recognizing that millions of people worldwide aspire to migrate but remain "trapped" due to various constraints, insufficient capabilities (Carling, 2002; Hautte, et.al., 2025). In 2023, 16% of adults worldwide (over 900 million people) said they wish to leave their own country permanently, if possible (GALLUP, 2024). This proportion of the population outnumbers those who actually realize their migration aspirations (3.6% of the global population are international migrants), which figure clearly points to the gap between aspirations and actual migration, as well as highlights the significance and relevance of immobility (Hautte, et.al., 2025). The desire to migrate remains at record high in 2024, and Latin America and the Caribbean is among the top regions with the highest proportion of its population (28%) wishing to move permanently to another country, meaning that every 3rd out of ten wish to leave their homeland (GALLUP, 2024). However, here we again reach another conceptual issue with regards to migration potential. The concept of migration potential is often referred to as migration intentions or plans adopted by such surveys as for instance, GALLUP.

Yet, to avoid conceptual ambiguity, clarification is essential, which clearly distinguishes between the notions of *migration intention* and *migration potential*. While migration intentions capture individuals expressed desire to migrate, they often overestimate future mobility, as a substantial share of intentions do not translate into actual migration (de Haas, 2010). De Haas explicitly criticizes intention-only approaches and emphasizes that migration is a process mediated by structural and institutional conditions. Nevertheless, migration potential, rather than measuring migration intention or actual migration flows, captures latent mobility. It refers to the likelihood that migration will actually take place under given structural and institutional conditions (Carling, 2002; de Haas, 2010). As such, it occupies an intermediate analytical space between observed behavior and abstract intention. Migration potential thus must encompass both the desire to migrate and the actual ability to realize this desire (Carling, 2002). This dual dimensionality – aspirations and capabilities – has become central to contemporary understandings of migration dynamics, hence building on this aspirations–capabilities framework, the study conceptualizes migration potential as the overlap between motivation and feasibility (i.e. aspiration and capability), thus the analysis can distinguish between effective and constrained forms of potential mobility. (This will be explained in the following chapter.)

Classic migration theories were already introduced, all including their components on migration potential, at least the perceived determinants that drive migration, such as push and pull theory or neoclassical economic theory, migration system theory etc. However, research on migration potential has shifted from rather such simple push–pull explanations to more complex approaches that account for both individual motivations and structural constraints. Along these lines was the aspirations–capabilities framework developed by Jørgen Carling, providing a direct theoretical foundation for reconceptualizing migration potential.

2.3.2 THE ASPIRATIONS–CAPABILITIES FRAMEWORK

2.3.2.1 Theoretical Foundation of the Model

The aspirations–capabilities framework is a relatively new approach in migration research, originally developed by Jørgen Carling (2002) and later refined by Carling and Schewel (2018). The framework argues that migration research should go beyond analyzing solely migration motivations or causes (Carling – Collins, 2018). It addresses migration decision-making explicitly distinguishing between individuals' desire to migrate and their ability to do so. As Carling phrased: „*The essence of what I have called the 'aspiration/ability model' is that migration first involves a wish to migrate, and second, the realization of this wish*." (Carling, 2002: 2). Thus, he clearly states that migration is not merely a matter of desire (aspiration), so a simple „*Would you like to move?"* question would not predict actual migration decision or act. *"The distinction between the desire to migrate and the ability to migrate is crucial for understanding contemporary migration processes"* (Carling, 2002: 7). At the core of the framework lies the assumption that migration does not occur simply because of unfavorable conditions or attractive opportunities, but rather when migration aspirations and migration capabilities meet.

Migration aspirations refer to an individual's subjective desire or intention to move, shaped by perceived living conditions, future expectations, social norms, and personal life goals. Migration ability, i.e. capabilities, by contrast, capture the extent to which individuals possess the material, legal, social, and informational resources required to translate intentions into actual mobility. Individuals who desire to migrate but lack the necessary resources or legal means represent *latent* or *constrained* migration potential, while those who possess both aspiration and capability constitute *effective* migration potential.

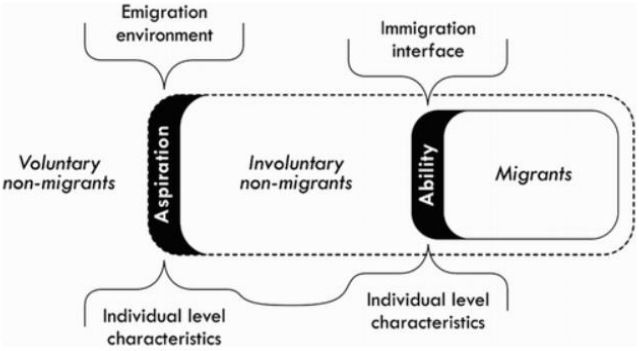
The framework recognizes the **intention–behavior gap** in migration processes (Carling – Collins, 2018; Carling – Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2021). The authors emphasize that migration aspirations or intentions cannot be equated with actual migration behavior, as a substantial share of individuals who express a desire or plan to migrate do not ultimately

do so. This gap can be explained because intentions are shaped by subjective perceptions and views of the future, whereas actual migration depends on structurally mediated access to resources, legal pathways, and opportunities. By this chain of thought, the authors caution against treating expressed intentions as predictive indicators of mobility.

Their theory was a critical turning point in migration studies especially as he was addressing not why people migrate, but why people do not migrate despite strong motivations to do so. Carling's central insight in his empirical research on Cape Verdean migration was "***involuntary immobility***", often described as "stuck migration". He assumed that many people remain immobile not by choice but due to structural constraints that prevent them from realizing their migration aspirations. Individuals may express a strong desire to migrate or return, yet remain unable to do so due to financial constraints, lack of documentation, family obligations, health conditions, or institutional barriers. While on the contrary, others may have the capacity to migrate but lack the motivation or perceived necessity to move.

Carling and Schewel (2018) together revisited the potential of the aspiration/ability model (Carling, 2002) for conceptual clarification, also addressing diverse aspects of the model's applicability and limitations. They clearly separate the dimensions of aspiration and ability/capability and show that migration does not occur simply because individuals have aspiration, neither if they have the capacity to move; many do not aspire to do so. Within this distinction, they highlight – besides *migrants* – two typologies further focusing on non-migration; i.e. "immobility"; *involuntary non-migrants*, who have aspirations to migrate but lack the ability, and *voluntary non-migrants*, who stay because of a belief that non-migration is preferable to migration (Carling – Schewel, 2018). Schewel in her work (2019) introduced another category regarding immobility – *acquiescent non-migrants* – referring to individuals (non-migrants) who remain in place not because they actively prefer to stay (voluntary non-migrants), nor because they have strong aspirations to migrate yet are blocked (involuntary non-migrants), but because they have adapted to their constraints and "adjusted" their aspirations downwards. By formalizing this category, she moved closer to an understanding of the behavior of those immobile individuals who neither aspire to migrate nor possess the capabilities to do so.

Figure 5: The aspiration/ability model



Source: Carling – Schewel, 2018.

Rather than describing migration decision on the basis of push and pull factors, focusing on non-migration, they identify three groups of factors that may be useful for analyzing immobility. **"Retain factors"** refer to conditions or advantages that make staying more attractive, such as social ties, place-specific economic benefits (e.g. language proficiency, local support schemes, fertile agricultural land), or simply the fact that an individual has lived in the same place for a long period of time, which tends to increase the likelihood of remaining as time goes by. While **"repel factors"** include social, economic, political, or cultural concerns that may reduce the attractiveness of leaving, for instance through the transmission of negative experiences by individuals who live abroad or have returned from abroad (Carling – Schewel, 2018: 949-950). Migration decision-making may also be influenced by **"internal constraints"**, which can likewise discourage departure, such as individuals' psychological conditions or, in the case of women, constraints arising from traditional family models (Kovách, 2022).

Carling and Schewel propose a two-step approach that suggests that migration should be analyzed in two analytically distinct stages: (1) whether a migration aspiration emerges; and (2) if so, whether the individual possesses the ability/capability to realize it. Already, the first step, migration aspiration matters, which may or may not result in actual mobility, however *"the absence of migration aspirations is a meaningful outcome that requires explanation."* (Carling – Schewel, 2018). This leads to one of Carling and Schewel's key theoretical claims that aspirations, desires to move are neither self-evident nor universal, and they are not simply the product of push–pull factors. Indeed, migration aspirations cannot be taken for granted. Contrary to earlier migration theories that implicitly assumed migration to be a universal or default response to unfavorable conditions, they emphasize that many individuals do not aspire to migrate at all, even when objective constraints or opportunities might suggest otherwise.

Another essential contribution of Jørgen Carling and Katharine Schewel (2018) is the introduction of Global Welfare Paradox (GWP), which is to explain why improvements in global well-being do not automatically lead to a decline in migration aspirations. The core of the paradox is that increases in global well-being do not necessarily reduce migration aspirations; on the contrary, they often raise them. At first glance, this appears contradictory, which is why the term "paradox" is used. It claims that growth in well-being increases aspirations (more information, higher expectations, "imagined futures"), as well as increases capabilities (greater resources and mobility opportunities). As a result, migration potential may increase even under improving conditions.

Before more thoroughly discussing the aspiration and capability dimensions of the model, regarding its theoretical formation, it was Hein de Haas (2021) who further elaborated and refined Carling's analytical framework, developing it into a dynamic and comprehensive theory of migration that integrates insights from multiple disciplinary perspectives. In order to achieve a more precise understanding of immobility, de Haas replaced Carling's concept of *ability* with the more dynamic notion of *capability* from the individual's perspective. This terminological shift was based on Amartya Sen's capability approach to human development. From a capabilities perspective, the key issue is not simply whether individuals are able to migrate, but whether they have the substantive freedom to choose migration or non-migration as meaningful life options they have reason to value (Sen, 1999; de Haas, 2021). For this thought, he introduces the concept of agency in order to avoid the automated structural explanation of migration (e.g. migration decision is determined in the case of specific structural conditions such as poverty, crisis etc.), and he wants to abstain from the interpretation of migration as an excessively free choice. Instead, he positions his idea in between, somehow balancing and forming a new theory.

Along these lines, he believes a new definition is also needed for mobility that involves the agency factor and does not stigmatize (voluntary) immobility, ie. the choice to stay. Thus, according to his definition, human mobility is the capability to choose where to live, rather than as physical movement alone. In his words human mobility is "people's capability to choose where to live, including the option to stay" (de Haas, 2021: 27). This reframing makes it possible not to consider immobility as a failure or a problem automatically, but to be interpreted as a potential expression of agency when individuals consciously choose to remain in place.

According to de Haas, large structural factors only provide a framework; actual migration depends on how individuals perceive these conditions and on what they are able and willing to do with the opportunities available to them. The matter of the fact is that different places have different possibilities, i.e. different opportunity structures, which is why de

Haas uses the term "geographical opportunity structures". This environment includes economic situation, political system, environmental factors, migration and return policies – along these macro conditions people consider migrating or staying. But their choices are influenced by perceived opportunity structures, rather than objective realities. It point out why structures alone do not explain migration, or that for example places (countries, cities, regions) can be perceived possible, accessible, and meaningful for some people – to enter or to stay–, while in others' perception the same places are not favorable. I.e. perceptions of opportunities matter as much as objective conditions. Geographical opportunity structures are cognitively constructed through available information, media representations, migrant narratives, and recruitment messaging (Ruhnke – Rischke, 2024). Incomplete or biased information can lead to mismatches between expected and actual migration outcomes, with significant implications for satisfaction and adjustment (Siviş, et al., 2024).

While Carling and Schewel explicitly acknowledge the social embeddedness of aspirations, de Haas (2021) extends this insight by emphasizing that aspirations and capabilities are not fixed attributes but change over time in response to life-course transitions, policy shifts, economic fluctuations, and environmental changes. Nor aspiration, nor capabilities are static; aspirations can evolve through experiences, information updates, and shifting reference frameworks; while capabilities similarly fluctuate, for instance educational attainment opens new doors, social networks develop, or economic shocks rapidly erode financial capabilities, while policy changes instantly transform legal capabilities. An unfortunate example was the COVID-19 pandemic, which dramatically illustrated how capabilities can contract suddenly, with closed borders and economic disruptions creating unprecedented involuntary immobility even among previously mobile populations. But other than actual constraints such as the COVID lockdowns, de Hass's dynamic perspective also highlights how migration and non-migration outcomes may shift according to individuals' *perceived* opportunities and constraints evolve.

2.3.2.2 Aspiration Dimension

Migration aspirations represent the desire, intention, and willingness to engage in spatial mobility, ranging from vague wishes to concrete plans for movement. Migration aspirations must be distinguished from both structural drivers and generalized desires that reflect diffuse or normative wishes, because aspirations are more concrete future orientations that take perceived opportunities and constraints into account (Carling – Collins, 2018). To better understand the aspiration dimension, the following interpretations must be highlighted. First, migration aspirations are not self-evident, but rather perceived realities. For instance, the mere presence of economic hardship, insecurity, or political

instability does not automatically generate a desire to migrate. Individuals may interpret similar structural conditions in fundamentally different ways. As a result, the absence of migration aspirations cannot be treated as a neutral or trivial outcome, but rather as a phenomenon that requires explanation before assessing migration capabilities (referring to the two-step approach).

Second, migration aspirations are not universal. The desire to migrate is unevenly distributed across populations and social groups. Age, gender, family situation, social position, and life stage all shape whether migration is perceived as desirable, necessary, or appropriate. For instance, young adults typically exhibit higher migration aspirations as they navigate education-to-work transitions and family formation (Chau, 2025). This again leads to the assumption that non-migration is not necessarily the result of constraint, but rather just reflects satisfaction with local life, varying priorities, or alternative life strategies in different life-courses.

Also, the model explains why individuals facing similar structural conditions may develop very different migration aspirations. Carling and Schewel (2018) argue that while structural conditions do influence aspiration, they are not merely the outcome of push–pull factors of economic (e.g. GDP growth, employment, unemployment etc.) and political determinants (e.g. political instability, governance failures, human rights violations, lack of political freedoms). Aspirations extend beyond these factors and are heavily shaped by broader social and cultural factors. Under this approach, along their analysis several interpretations and factors are introduced that influence migrants' desire and decision. Among these, they suggest that migration culture matters, which is understood as shared norms, values, and expectations regarding mobility within a community (Carling – Schewel, 2018: 948). Prevailing norms about mobility, gender roles, family obligations, and success definitions, for instance fundamentally shape whether and how migration is conceived as a viable or desirable option. In some contexts, migration has become culturally embedded as a life-course expectation, while in others, migration carries stigma or contradicts values emphasizing place attachment and community solidarity (Schewel, 2020). According to a study, socialization experiences during formative years for instance influence how individuals conceptualize mobility as a strategy for life advancement (Chau, 2025). Migration aspirations are also shaped by perceptions, ideas, expectation and visions on an imagined future (Carling – Schewel, 2018: 948), all shaping where and how individuals prefer to live. Social networks, information flows, reference groups, such as family members, peers, or migrant networks also weight in migration decision, because their experiences, narratives form aspirations in different ways (Carling – Schewel, 2018: 949). Social networks for instance play dual roles: migrant networks can stimulate aspirations by de-

monstrating migration's possibilities and benefits, while strong local social ties may reduce aspirations by providing satisfaction and belonging in origin communities (Sütő, 2025).

2.3.2.3 Capacity Dimension

While elaborating on migrants' aspirations as a first step, the framework clearly defines the capability dimension as well. Migration capabilities encompass the actual resources, freedoms, and opportunities that enable individuals to realize migration aspirations. Capabilities operate at multiple levels and take diverse forms. Material capabilities include financial resources for travel costs, visa fees and settlement expenses, Carling and Schewel however argue that it is not sufficient for individuals to possess resources; these resources must also be usable for migration. "*The ability to migrate should not be confused with access to resources alone, as migration is fundamentally shaped by political, legal and institutional constraints*" (Carling – Schewel, 2018: 949). These constrains by states and institutions can be legal statuses, documentations and administrative procedures. This institutional factor that shapes capabilities is an essential element is their framework, highlighting the importance of policy instruments regarding international migration. Visa regimes, border policies, and administrative procedures not only regulate migration but also structure migration capabilities. Carling and Schewel (2018) primarily realize that financial resources are neither necessary nor sufficient, but also explicitly distinguish between possessing resources and having the capability to migrate, emphasizing that migration abilities are relational and context-dependent. Another paradox within the framework – besides the Global Welfare Paradox (GWP) – is that since migration often requires substantial upfront investments, it paradoxically least accessible to those facing greatest economic hardship (Freihardt, 2025).

Carling and Schewel (2018) define migration capability as differentiated and unequal access to specific **migration channels**. Migration channels refer to the institutionalized and socially regulated pathways through which migration can occur, such as labor migration schemes, family reunification, humanitarian protection, student mobility, or irregular routes. Access to these channels is not evenly distributed, but structured by legal status, citizenship regimes, policy frameworks, and social stratification. For instance, two individuals with similar aspirations and comparable personal resources may face very different mobility outcomes because they are positioned differently within legal and institutional opportunity structures; thus access to different migration channels. This channel-based understanding of capability suggests that migration outcomes depend not only on whether individuals want to migrate (aspiration), but on whether they are granted access to particular channels through which migration is legally, socially, and institutionally possible.

Since migration capabilities are understood as multidimensional, human, social, legal, political and psychological factors determine who has access to which migration channels. These elements jointly shape individuals' real opportunities to migrate or to stay. While these dimensions are not formalized as specific typologies, they are consistently addressed in the work of Carling (2002), Carling and Schewel (2018), and de Haas (2021) as interacting factors. Human capital capabilities – including education, occupational skills, language proficiency, and health status – critically influence migration possibilities. Higher education significantly increases migration capabilities by enhancing access to legal pathways and improving labor market prospects, thereby making migration more feasible for highly educated individuals (Docquier – Rapoport, 2012; Czaika – de Haas, 2014). Social capabilities operate through networks providing information, assistance, and access to opportunities. Migrant networks lower migration costs and reduce uncertainty for new migrants by effectively increasing the capabilities of those with strong social connections (Massey, 1993; Portes, 1996; de Haas, 2010). However, – as elaborated in migrant network theories – the benefits of social networks heavily depend on gender and social position, influencing whether one can access powerful or useful connections. Thus, networks can enable migration and elevate capability, but they tend to reinforce existing inequalities rather than eliminate them (Curran – Rivero-Fuentes, 2003). For instance, family networks can both enable and constrain capabilities: while they may provide financial support and connections, they also generate obligations and care responsibilities that limit mobility (Ari, 2025).

Another element is legal and political capabilities that encompass formal rights and policy frameworks governing movement. Citizenship status, visa eligibility, passport strength, and bilateral agreements fundamentally shape who can legally migrate and where. Often, – as it will be introduced in the Chapter on Migration Governance –immigration policies in destination countries create hierarchies of access, privileging certain nationalities, skill levels, and entry categories while excluding others. Recent policy changes – such as the Ecuador–Venezuela visa policy shifts (2018–2019) constraining migration, or the Colombia's Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelans (TPSV, 2021) elevating capabilities – demonstrate how political capabilities can shift rapidly, transforming migration landscapes. Last, but not least, psychological capabilities – including self-efficacy, risk tolerance, adaptability, and linguistic confidence – also influence migration potential.

2.3.2.4 Methodological Innovations and Measurement Challenges

The operationalization and the measurement of aspirations and capabilities both present significant methodological challenges, just as in the case of migration potential, but the authors tried to provide the conceptual clarity necessary for empirically operationalizing

(Carling – Collins, 2018; de Haas, 2021). The matter of the fact is that it requires measuring latent propensities that may never manifest in actual movement. The aspirations–capabilities framework does not prescribe a single measurement instrument reflecting the framework's conceptual emphasis on context-specific and multidimensional migration decision-making. As de Haas suggests: "*migration aspirations and capabilities cannot be directly observed, but must be inferred from a range of proxy indicators*." Thus, rather than relying on a single composite index, the framework is operationalized through separate but interrelated sets of indicators capturing migration aspirations, migration capabilities, and observable (im)mobility outcomes; important analytically distinct dimensions which nonetheless cannot be inferred from one another.

Migration aspirations are measured directly through self-reported survey items capturing respondents' desires, intentions, and conditional preferences regarding migration or return. Following established practice in migration potential research, aspirations are treated as subjective orientations toward future mobility, rather than as predictors of actual behavior. And here lies an essential understanding of Carlings and de Hass' that their migration theory is not primarily designed to predict specific migration flows, but rather to explain patterns and mechanisms of migration and non-migration (de Haas, 2021). Carling and Schewel actually present a question-bank as a tool to capture migration aspirations for relevant researches (see in the Appendix Table A1).

Migration capabilities are not measured directly but inferred through a set of proxy indicators reflecting respondents' access to migration channels and their position within broader geographical opportunity structures. Capabilities are operationalized across multiple dimensions, such as human (e.g.: educational attainment; occupational skills; language proficiency, health), social (e.g.: presence of close family members abroad; size and strength of migrant networks; prior migration experience), political and legal (citizenship and residence status; possession of valid travel documents; access to legal (re)migration programs; awareness of relevant migration policies), and perceived (psychological) ones (e.g.: confidence in being able to migrate if desired; perceived knowledge of migration procedures; assessment of personal control over migration decisions). Also, observable outcomes are measured separately from aspirations and capabilities – with variables such as previous migration or return events; current residence status; duration of stay or immobility; instances of delayed or aborted migration –, in order to preserve the analytical logic of the framework. Indeed, the methodology is designed to uncover patterned mismatches between what people want, what they can do, and what ultimately occurs.

Mixed-methods approaches that combine surveys, interviews, or even ethnographic observation are particularly valuable for capturing the complexity of aspirations and capabilities (Zapata, 2025). Also, longitudinal researches that track changes in aspirations and capabilities over time provide insights into the dynamic nature of migration decision and actual migration outcome. Combining quantitative analysis of large survey datasets with qualitative case studies allows researchers to capture both broad trends and the underlying processes that shape them (Vlase, 2025)

Empirical applications have driven important methodological innovations in operationalizing the framework, such as for instance machine learning approaches. These employed approaches though do not explicitly apply the aspirations–capabilities framework but empirically resonate with its core insight by demonstrating that migration aspirations alone are weak predictors of actual mobility, while structurally mediated access to resources and legal channels plays a decisive role. Still, significant measurement challenges persist. With regards to aspirations, it remains difficult distinguishing from intentions, and from vague wishes or culturally expected responses. It is challenging to capture genuine plans in survey questions, even with granted anonymity. With regards to capabilities standardized measurement is also problematic. Legal capabilities, in particular, are complex and rapidly changing, with immigration policies frequently shifting in ways that suddenly transform migration landscapes (Karimi – Byelikova, 2025).

2.3.2.5 Applications Across Migration Contexts

The aspirations-capabilities framework has been applied across diverse migration contexts, because of its versatility, i.e. that it can be applied in different countries or regions; across different types of migration; and at different levels (individual, household, policy, etc.; and context-specific dynamics that assists in capturing the unique local factors that shape migration in various contexts.

Labor migration research utilizes the framework; one study for instance was conducted on Filipino cruise workers who were forced to return during COVID-19 and became temporarily involuntary immobile at their home country with high levels of aspiration to leave (Liao, 2024). With this example we also see that the framework has been applied to return migration dynamics. Furthermore, minority studies also exist that by analyzing the aspirations and capabilities, highlight the need for policy responses that are more nuanced and go beyond merely addressing material poverty among marginalized groups (Vlase, 2025).

Climate change has emerged as a relevant ground for the aspirations-capabilities framework, particularly influential in highlighting involuntary immobility dynamics, but also

recognizing that environmental stressors produce highly varied migration responses (Mayer, et.al., 2023). The framework helps explain why environmental change does not automatically produce displacement but rather shapes migration potential through affecting both aspirations and capabilities. Climate variability can worsen perceived conditions and future prospects, thereby increasing migration aspirations, while simultaneously eroding capabilities through destruction of assets, disruption of livelihoods, and deterioration of health (Freihardt, 2025). Research in Southern California after wildfire events found that post-disaster aspirations to stay and rebuild depended on place attachments and meanings associated with communities, challenging assumptions that environmental stressors uniformly increase migration aspirations (Tinoco, 2023).

Student migration research has applied the framework to understand educational mobility and immobility patterns and decisions to study home or abroad. Analysis of Chinese students in Japan revealed that while economic factors play significant roles, intrinsic dimensions like personal wellbeing and desire to live abroad also heavily influence aspirations (Nhi, 2025). A study on minority Hungarian higher education students found that the perception of financial stability and predictability doubles the likelihood of planning to stay at home (Sütő, 2025).

The framework's core distinction between aspirations and structurally mediated access to mobility has proven valuable in refugee studies seeking to move beyond simplistic voluntary–forced binaries and to capture heterogeneity in decision-making under constraint (Siviş, 2024). However, scientific debate concerns the framework's applicability to forced migration since the aspirations–capabilities framework was not designed to explain forced migration in the classical sense (such as flight from war or immediate threats to life). Carling, Schewel, and de Haas do not deny the existence of forced migration, but their model primarily applies to situations in which some degree of choice exists, even if that choice is severely constrained. According to de Haas (2021) migration also contains decision-making elements under conditions of constraint or pressure, hence focusing on agency and perceived opportunity structures, the framework helps to understand forms of (im)mobility that are shaped by constraints but are not purely voluntary or purely forced.

With the applicability of the model, the research of immobility gained recognition in migration research in the last years, yet limited attention has been paid to its consequences (Hautte, 2025). Its importance is relevant, because unmet migration aspirations can shape individuals' attitudes, behaviour, and overall well-being (Andersson – Siegel, 2015). For instance, those who strongly intend to leave may be less inclined to invest in local livelihoods or in skills and resources, such as education or local economic opportunities. Moreover, involuntary immobility may cause negative human development outcome

(psychological, physical) for individuals, households and even for entire communities. Also, the impact of involuntary immobility on individuals' well-being remains critically underexplored, signalling a need for further research on this relationship (Hautte, 2025).

2.3.2.6 Relevance of the Model to the Topic of the Dissertation

The model is particularly well suited to the study of return migration, where investigating the aspiration to return and the capability to return are both relevant according to de Haas (2018). In this study, migration potential is defined then as an outcome of the interaction between return aspirations, return capabilities, and contextual conditions in both the country of residence and the country of origin. By embedding migration potential within the aspirations–capabilities framework, the analysis moves beyond descriptive intention measures and offers a theoretically grounded assessment of who may return, under what conditions, and with what degree of likelihood.

When it comes to (im)mobility with relations to aspiration and capability, this framework is particularly relevant in contexts characterized by prolonged crisis and limited mobility options, such as the Venezuelan crisis. In such settings, high levels of migration aspiration may coexist with low levels of capability, resulting in a substantial population of individuals who are willing, but unable, to migrate or return. Their return intentions are shaped not only by deteriorating conditions in the host country, but also by perceived opportunities, risks, and support mechanisms in the country of origin. These groups are significant to be addressed in terms of migration potential because their mobility may be activated through changes in policy, economic conditions, or access to support mechanisms. Importantly, the framework enables the identification of individuals whose return intentions are contingent upon external support, thereby offering insights into the potential role of public policies and reintegration programs.

On the other hand, though, not all Colombians residing in Venezuela should not automatically be interpreted as constrained, "stuck", or their immobility considered to be an anomaly. Their non-migration may reflect voluntary non-migration (immobility) rooted in preferences, family strategies, or future expectations. By explicitly measuring aspirations before capabilities, the questionnaire of the dissertation – according to Carling and Schewel's „two step" logic, – avoids conflating unwillingness with inability. The analysis thus can distinguish between non-migrants: those who would like to return but are unable to do so, and those who would be able to return but do not wish to.

Based on this theoretical foundation, the survey instrument developed for this study operationalizes return migration as a two-dimensional process. It separately measures (1) return aspirations, capturing current intentions, perceived future life prospects, and

emotional orientation towards return, and (2) return capabilities, capturing access to financial resources, documentation, social networks, and institutional knowledge. In addition, the questionnaire includes contextual indicators reflecting perceived push factors in Venezuela and pull factors in Colombia, as well as conditional scenarios assessing responsiveness to potential policy support. This operationalization allows the empirical identification of distinct return profiles, including likely returnees, capability-constrained returnees, potential but passive individuals, and non-migrants. This categorization allows migration potential to be assessed not as a single aggregate figure, but as a structured distribution of mobility profiles, each with distinct implications for policy and reintegration planning.

2.4 CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Chapter 2 to be finalized at the very end, notes have been prepared…

3. CHAPTER: LATIN AMERICAN MIGRATION OUTLOOK

3.1 LATIN AMERICAN MIGRATION PROCESSES AND REGULATION OF MIGRATION

The migration landscape of Latin America has undergone profound changes in recent decades in terms of direction, intensity and composition of migratory flows. What is seen is that Latin America has transformed from being an immigrant receiving region to one that lets go of a huge emigration population, that tend to reside within the region.

From the early 16th century, Latin America had an 'open door' to European colonizers and for the African slaves they imported in order to secure labor force in the newly occupied lands for the access of raw material. The settlement was gradual with the devastation of the indigenous population, both as a consequence of European conquest and ravages, as well as the exposure to epidemics that their immune system was not prepared for. According to the estimations, over 1.86 million Spaniards settled in Latin America in the period between 1492 and 1824, yet the real dynamics of immigration started after independence (Macías, 1995).

The real dynamics of immigration though started after independence, during the stages of de-colonization, the age of mass migration took off. The period of 1830-50 was the adaptation to the world economy (Skidmore, 2005). Latin America was linked to international markets from quite the beginning, producing raw materials, foodstuffs and minerals. It was the contribution of the region to the European industrial revolution, thereupon some of the largest cities had already become significant markets for the industrialized products (Antón, 1998). As a consequence, from the 19th century Latin America received a large number of international migrants, some 29.5 million (Durand – Massey, 2010; Jancsó, 2021). Although, the most attractive destination on the continent was apparently the United States, while Latin America being only an additional landing place for many, the countries of the region had an "open door" for immigrants. Trying to encourage inflows and to facilitate the resettlement, various laws and regulations were created with measures that included granting citizenship, tax exemption or exemption from military service among others (Jancsó, 2018). The first immigration laws were the ones of Chile (1824) and Venezuela (1831), followed by the other countries in the middle of the century, elsewhere a few decades later. These policies were liberal in most of the countries, however they preferred 'white' immigration from northern and western Europe. Several countries from the New World, such as Argentina, Uruguay or Chile, were consciously and actively attracting migrants from Europe through their migration policy initiatives

with the aim of improving labor and race. These countries actually became the most prosperous by the late 19th century (Soltész, 2016). It was the creoles[4] becoming national elites, while finally slavery was abolished. An America of the "whites", "blacks" and "Indians" was present during this era (Anderle, 2010). It was mostly the Spaniard and Portuguese entering the New World with privileges, but wealthy British, French and people from the United States also entered Latin American countries, making way right to the top of the social hierarchy. Labor migrants were also started to embark from "peripheral Europe" (Italy, Southwest Germany, Poland, Austro-Hungarian Empire). European immigration directed principally five countries, Argentina (4 million), Brazil (2 million), Cuba (600 000), Uruguay (600 000), and Chile (200 000), while Latin America also welcomed arrives from the Middle East and the Far East between the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. Indeed, groups of different religions and nationalities not only from Europe but also from Asia and Africa made a significant impact on the society and culture of these areas (Jancsó, 2021). The region itself turned to be a place of diversity of people, with new mixtures of races and cultures (Durand – Massey, 2010).

In fact, the incentives of resettlement to Latin America have been changing over time. What is noted is that while earlier 'push factors' predominated these motives, – as for instance Spaniards without opportunities of social upward mobility in their homelands came to win social status as well as wealth (Skidmore, 2005) – with economic expansion and development, the region turned to be a place with prominent 'pull factors' (demand of skilled craftsmen or commercial opportunities) (Delgado Ribas, 1931).

As of the **period of the World Wars**, it was characterized by macroeconomic instability and political turbulence, depression and de-globalization (1913-1945). The war broke off the process of growing economic and market integration across the globe, consequently the climate for international migration has also changed drastically (Solimano, 2004). While before, there was an immigrant-friendly image of Latin America, where international migration was largely unrestricted and continuous, policies – especially in the US in the 1920s – have become more restrictive, enacting immigration quotas, in order to reduce immigration flows. After the First World War and during the Great Depression of 1929-1930, an opposite attitude of the 'proactive approach' emerged in the political behavior, one with anti-immigration sentiments, thus considerable efforts have been made to control the movement of people across state borders (Bertossi, 2008). In Latin America, after decades of unrestricted migration protocols, by the last third of the century, several conditions for immigration were laid down (being healthy, receptive, fertile) and even lists of undesirable persons appeared in the text of laws and regulations (criminals,

[4] White people of Spanish or Portuguese descent, already born in the Americas.

vagrants, fools, barbarians or unwelcomed groups as Asians or Gypsies) (Jancsó, 2018). The necessity for regulations and additional administrative barriers (e.g., raising settlement taxes) arose due to emigration of European masses after World War I. Indeed, as a result of the US's restrictive measures, immigration streams from Europe and Asia shifted to Brazil and Argentina, which both received some millions of immigrants within this period. Migration flows came to a halt with WW2.

A new period started after the Second World War with the reconstruction of the global economy, ensuring prosperity from the second half of the 1940s, which was hindered in the 1970s by such obstacles as the oil price shocks and the collapse of the Bretton Woods system. Meanwhile the LAC region was suffering from authoritarian regimes primarily from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s, (the timing varied across individual countries). In many states of the region, military or authoritarian regimes came to power which, within the Cold War context – often under the banner of anti-communism and the "national security doctrine" – suspended democratic institutions, restricted political freedoms, and committed systematic human rights violations. Notable examples include the regime of Augusto Pinochet in Chile (1973–1990); the military junta in Argentina (1976–1983); or the period of military rule in Brazil between 1964 and 1985.

Furthermore, the region was experiencing an economic downturn in the 1980s, came to be known as the 'lost decade', countries being unable to service their foreign debts. As a way out of the deep crisis, structural adjustment policies – basically known as Washington Consensus – were enacted as part of a policy package prescribed by international economic institutions, such as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO (Anderle, 2010). Through these veins, the region got increasingly depended and attached to newly emerging global organizations (WTO, GATT, NAFTA, MERCOSUR, etc.) and international markets that limited the economic role of the state, the control over resources, production, and services. Due to the weighty US dependency, anti-US climate started to grow in most of the countries in the region. (Later, along these lines presented itself the so-called 'pink-tide' from the end of the 1990s; See later in the 3rd Chapter). Although the region largely recovered from the economic setback, unfulfilled promises of globalization and the neoliberal agenda remained. The matter of the fact is that as a consequence of colonial heritage strengthened by prevailing interconnectedness, the development of the countries of the continent is strongly influenced by world economic trends, which results in short business cycles being interrupted by frequent and drastic recessions (Szente-Varga – Bács, 2019).

During this period in Latin America, migration was shaped by the combined effects of authoritarian repression and the regional debt crisis, i.e. political persecution and economic collapse jointly propelled both forced and economically driven mobility (Castles

– de Haas – Miller, 2014). Paradoxically, the regional economic crisis contributed to the downfall of several dictatorships, as economic collapse, IMF-backed structural adjustment programs, and rising social protest eroded the legitimacy of military regimes and facilitated democratic transitions in the 1980s (Mainwaring – Pérez-Liñán, 2013).

The **post-1950 period** shall be understood within the framework of the Cold War era and its implications on Latin America. Although the intensified period was uptight between the US and the Soviet Union, played in the European theater, Latin America's Cold War experience is not neglectable. The postwar period saw the onset of change in the direction of migratory currents, as Latin America transformed from being an immigrant receiving region to one that let go of a huge emigration population. It has become a region with undersized inflows from Europe coexisting with much more sizable outflows from various countries of the region. From this time on, three fundamental migration processes have been characterizing the region:

1) Transatlantic and transoceanic migration,
2) South-North migration, and
3) Intra-regional migration.

This shift of the region extensively shaped the global migratory system. On the one hand, the world wars had produced labor shortages in Europe and North America, which led to the recruitment of workers from selected third world nations, especially immigration flows from former colonies in the case of Europe (Durnand – Massey, 2010). On the other hand, due to the military juntas that emerged as a result of internal political and social crises, many from the region decided to leave their countries heading to the Northern part of the Americas (US and Canada).

Subsequently, **transatlantic migration –** involving countries of Europe – has also adjusted its profile. With regards to immigration from Europe, it has slowed down and drastically run low from the late 1950s and early 1960s after Europe recovered and once again started to grow, while the pre-eminent economies of Latin America failed to develop to its full potential and began to falter. In fact, even the more developed Latin American countries have ceased to be so attractive for Europeans, and their stocks have also dwindled due to its aging, assimilation, the lack of new waves and the return of former immigrants to Europe. In numbers it suggests that while their stock reached 4 million in 1970, it lessened to 2.5 million by 1990 (CEPAL, 2002). In fact, the flows have reversed. Meanwhile, Latin Americans heading to Europe was voluminous after the years of the Second World War, from the 1970s, the policy measures enacted by some European countries (Spain, Italy, Germany) took over by rather "closed door" policies. Nonetheless, Europe remained ready to the reception of political refugees and exiles from the Southern Cone

of Latin America during the period of dictatorships (Pellegrino, 2004). As of the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, Europe is still a preferred destination for Latin Americans, however emigration to Europe derives particularly from Ecuador, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Argentina and Peru. The biggest Latin American migration population resides in Spain with more than 3 million residents from the LAC countries, but immigration to Italy, Portugal – countries with strong historical and cultural ties to Latin America – or the UK, has also been popular during the last decades.

Transoceanic migration processes include not only European relations but refers to the rest of the world other than the Americas – especially Africa and Asia in general. Noting South-South migration, which is not a new phenomenon, however, has increased in recent decades as a consequence of restrictive policies in developing countries. Latin America has historically seen immigration from Asia, mainly from Japan, the People's Republic of China and later from the Republic of Korea. When the region transformed to be one of an out-migration nature, Brazil and Peru has sent out migrants to Japan in larger extents, which is interesting for being considered transgenerational returns of labor emigrants from Japan earlier in the mass migration period (Durnand – Massey, 2010). While immigrants from Asia settled only in a smaller set of countries, people entering from the Middle East spread widely throughout the region gaining remarkable influence on both politics and commerce (Jancsó, 2021). Subsequent inflows – from Lebanon, Syria and Palestine – followed the Second World War and continued throughout most of the 20th century. As of African ties, is well known that it can be traced back to slave trade, but ever since, flows have been modest, though lately increasing, migrants from the continent – Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, and the Democratic Republic of Congo – arriving as asylum seekers (IOM, 2017).

Although global integration was developing, and a new wave of globalization was underway, international labor markets remained constrained in Europe and the US too (Solimano, 2004). With regards to the North America, the US both recruited unskilled and low wage labor from Latin American countries to fulfill its labor needs – from Mexico and Puerto Rico for starters –, as well as it admitted refugees – such as from Cuba and the Dominican Republic – provoked by cold war situations and geopolitical consideration (Durand – Massey, 2010). South-North migration involves Canada too, but with less voluminous flows, primarily because its far distance. The movements were principally from the Caribbean and Central America to the US, but less from South America until the 1960s, when emigration began to emerge from countries such as Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. This trend with a huge immigrant population that accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s had laid the foundations of significant migratory colonies in the US being present until

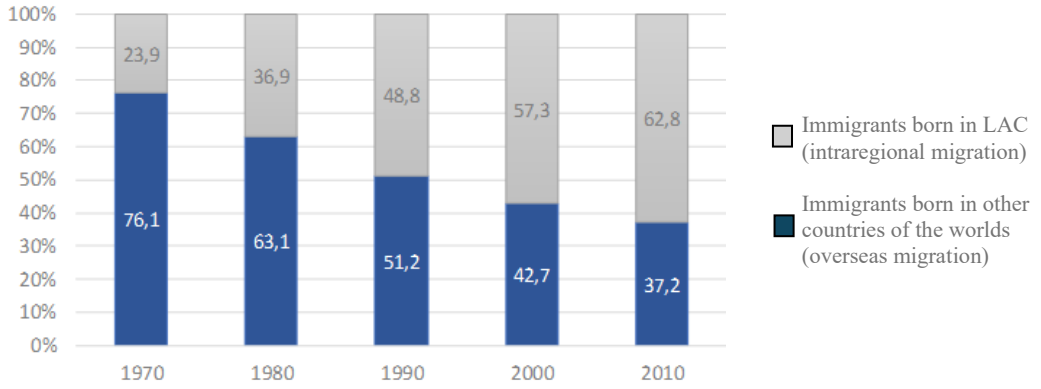
today (Altamirano, 1996; Solimano, 2004). This **South-North** – rather one-way – **migration corridor** is the most substantial one in modern Latin American migration history, however another patter has been gaining importance in the region especially due to a more restricted US immigration policies coming forth in the 21st century. Still, today, there is an enormous Latino population, nearly 60 million as of 2017, which account for approx. 18% of the total US population (Noe-Bustamante – Flores, 2019).

The third migration pattern of Latin American international population moves – that actually started to dominate migration in the regional context – is **intra-regional migration**. Although, Latin American countries used to attract large scale immigration from a remarkably diverse array of countries – even beyond Europe, including Japan, India, China, or Lebanon – this geographical diversity seems to have changed by the 21st century, with more concentration on intra-regional resettlements (Czaika – de Haas, 2014). This process refers especially to movements between neighboring or bordering countries in the region, however not all sending and receiving countries share actual borders, see for instance flows from Colombia to Chile. But in fact, early flows were mainly between bordering countries from the 19th century due to expensive and less developed transportation and communication. Intra-regional migration evolved in response to the highly uneven distribution of the benefits offered by the international economy even within the region itself, thus the inequalities in levels of development, economic performances, differences in labor opportunities, as well as political persecution and obstruction led to significant migration (and refugee) flows between countries in the region (CEPAL, 2002; Solimano, 2004). The latter one includes the flows of the Venezuelan migration crisis, which has been one of the biggest challenges of LAC.

These flows have been also facilitated by the liberalization of migration requirements enabled by economic integration mechanisms in the region. Indeed, especially from end of the 20th century an exponential increase could have been detected in the number of **regional integrations** (Lehoczki, 2010; Rács, 2020). The idea of integration was already formulated by Simón Bolivar, the '*libertador*', however his vision was not fulfilled, as the colonial territories (semi-)peripherally connected to the world economy were structurally unfit to create a single political-economic space (Soltész, 2011). Although the region has been illustrating a definite pattern of integration with a variety of organizations, – such as the OAS, MERCOSUR, ALBA, UNASUR or CELAC among the rest – none of them actually have supranational power or have brought upon real transformation. It is because instead of a qualitative leap, there has been a quantitative spread, resulting an "oversupply of integrations", and the majority of them have been confronted with substantial political and institutional challenges since the latter half of the 2010s (Szente-Varga,

2020). However, A lot has been achieved in terms of trade, customs, tariffs, as well as migration policies with the creation of various bilateral and some multilateral trade network within the states of the region, however, recent integration plans are as much political as economic (O'Neil, 2009). As for migration facilitation though, within the framework of Mercosur, the Andean Community or UNASUR, among others, many can travel without visa or passports (Durand – Massey, 2010). While in 1970 the share of immigrant population in the region was overshadowed by mainly immigrants from overseas (76%), intraregional migrants exceeded the rest with 63% to 37% by 2010 (Figure 6).

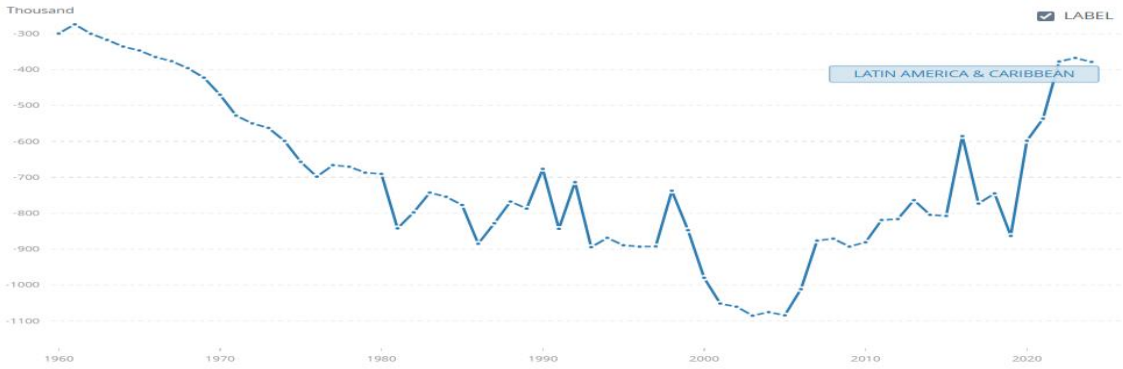
Figure 6: Constant growth of regional immigration (1970-2010) based on censuses



Source: Proyecto IMILA del CELADE

The total restyle of the contours of migratory processes in the region is corroborated by the rates of **net migration**. As several Latin American countries have experienced strong and durable decrease in immigration, while rapidly accumulating emigration, indeed, most LAC countries have witnessed reverse migration transitions, modifying their profile from being net immigration to net emigration kind. Statistics show that the migratory balance in Central America is negative by 6.8 million, in South America by 3 million and in the Caribbean by 1.2 million (IOM, 2020b).

Figure 7: Net migration – Latin America & Caribbean



Source: Word Bank, 2024.

3.2 NEW FACTORS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRATION IN THE REGION

3.2.1 DRIVERS OF MIGRATION

Following this review of the main trends of global and regional migration with a special focus on Latin America, a discussion follows that regards the determinants, new factors and characteristics of international migration in the region. The complexity of the wide range of factors involved in the decision of migration is evident, especially with the understanding of the history and circumstances of the region. Economic, political, social, cultural and geographical factors all influence migration within and outside the region, thus we see a very heterogenous population in move.

Contemporary international migration patterns of Latin America have been driven largely by the differences in GDP per capita income and real wage between the region and the rest of the world, as well as between countries within the region itself (Solimano, 2004). Consequential inequalities in levels of development and long-term disparities in the globalized world economy enhance the so-called pressures for migration (CEPAL, 2002). It is the expected higher wages and more and better labor opportunities that generally convince people to move especially ever since the globalization of labor migration. Migratory movements in the region, indeed, have the labor factor as their main component (Sicremi – Oea, 2015). Migration towards developed economies is evidenced in the framework of dual labor markets, that attracts both low skilled and high skilled migrants.

Other than economic reasons, the political situation in a receiving or destination country exercise a significant influence on people's migration decisions. Conflicts, insecurity, poor governance, lack of political freedom, corruption or human rights abuses all act as push factors (Bata-Balog – Thomázy, 2020). The region does not lack political conflicts and oppression, nor does it stand out for its good governance, having a look at the high corruption in countries of Latin America. 85% of the population in the region affirm that corruption in the government is a serious problem in their country, which contributes to the weakening of citizens' trust in their government (Transparency International, 2019). The long-lasting Colombian conflict with the guerillas is well known as a cause of huge outward migration – especially to the neighboring countries as refugees and asylum seekers –, as well as the Venezuelan situation, getting considerably worse since 2014 – push people to a desperate massive exile. As of 2020, more than 5 million Venezuelans have fled the country struggling economic and political crises, out of which approx. 4 million have moved to other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Chaves-González – Echeverría-Estrada, 2020). These courses are the ones mostly responsible for the

expansion in the number of migrants without official papers and human trafficking across frontiers.

According to the network theory of migration and transnationalism, the choice of country of destination and the probability of migrating is often influenced by the existence of social networks consisting of family and friends, who have already settled in the host country (Massey et al., 1993; Solimano, 2004; Borjas, 2001). These relatives-acquaintances' interpersonal or organized-institutional ties are considered to reduce costs and risks in movements and can increase expected returns. These networks are in fact very much alive in the context of migratory movements in the region, thus a high proportion of the moves occur within this framework. Resettlements are encouraged by cultural similarities in the region. Speaking the same language – in this case mostly the Spanish – often facilitate integration in the host country.

Spatial and geographic determinants have always played a crucial role in migration decision, however, as a consequence of globalization, distances can be crossed more easily involving lower costs of travel. Still, unskilled and poor migrants are affected by these factors as obstacles of migration, mainly this is why they often choose to reside in bordering countries. Also, LAC countries are exposed to the global risks of climate change and natural disasters, as for example the case of the earthquake in Haiti (2010) that set off thousands of people towards different directions in the Americas.

Although prime destination countries have emerged in the region – like Brazil, Chile or Argentina for instance – some have become areas of transit due to their geographical position – like Colombia or Mexico (CEPAL, 2002). The matter of the fact is that globalization is driving sizable streams in a way that migration potential has seriously increased in Latin America. According to a survey from 2015 (IOM) measuring global migration potential, 13% of the global adult population lives in Latin America, who wants to migrate abroad. Some 4.4 million from South America have plans to leave their country and 1.7 million are preparing to do so. These figures show future scenarios, that probably migration will continue to be a determinate course beyond and within the region.

3.2.2 Special Attributes of migration in the Region

Migration has long been a defining feature of the LAC region, shaping its demographic structures, labor markets, political transformations, and transnational social fields, yet there are some special attributes that characterize the region in particular. Understanding migration, migration determinants and migration decision in Latin America requires examining several interconnected attributes that shape mobility patterns and their consequences for origin and destination countries alike. Among these, in this dissertation, a

few dimensions will be very shortly introduced such as the nexus between brain gain and brain drain, the feminization of migration flows, the vital role of remittances, the rising significance of return migration and some additional structural features that especially define the regional migration landscape.

One of the most debated dimensions of migration in LAC concerns the outflow of skilled professionals – often described as "brain drain." Countries such as Mexico, Colombia, and several Caribbean states have historically experienced significant emigration of highly educated individuals to the US, Canada, and Europe. Small island Caribbean states in particular have recorded some of the highest tertiary-educated emigration rates globally (Docquier – Rapoport, 2012). However, as contemporary research increasingly conceptualizes this process as a dynamic brain drain–brain gain or "brain circulation" nexus, it is seen in the LAC region that migrants maintain transnational ties through remittances, investment, knowledge transfer, and diaspora networks (Soltész, 2016). Programs such as Colombia's Red Caldas (to be elaborated in the 5th Chapter) or broader diaspora engagement initiatives in some countries of the region reflect attempts to convert potential losses into developmental gains. Return migration, temporary mobility, and virtual knowledge exchange complicate the simplistic loss narrative, suggesting instead a cyclical pattern of skill mobility embedded in transnational social fields (Czaika – de Haas, 2014). This transformation from brain drain to brain circulation represents a critical shift in how the region conceptualizes migration of its skilled workforce.

Another defining feature of migration in LAC is the sustained feminization of migration flows. According to UN DESA (2020), women constitute approximately 51.4% of the international migrant stock in Latin America and the Caribbean, indicating a slight female majority. However, the feminization of migration in the region is not only a demographic phenomenon but also reflects structural shifts; women increasingly migrate independently rather than as dependents, particularly in sectors such as domestic work, caregiving, healthcare, and service industries (Castles – de Haas – Miller, 2014; Bata-Balog – Thomázy, 2020). This pattern is especially visible in migration from Central America and the Caribbean to North America and Europe, as well as within South America (UN DESA, 2020).

The feminization of migration is closely linked to global care chains, whereby women from lower-income LAC countries provide domestic and care services in wealthier destinations, while leaving their own dependents in the care of other family members (Shahd, 2024). In the LAC context, this dynamic has been extensively documented among Caribbean and Central American women migrating to the US, as well as South American women moving to Spain and Italy during the 2000s (Parreñas, 2001). This restructuring

has profound implications for family dynamics, child-rearing, and gender roles in both origin and destination societies. At the same time, migration journeys expose women to high vulnerabilities. Migrant women face labor market disadvantages compared both to migrant men and to local women. In addition, they experience other forms of discrimination related to ethnic origin, their status as foreign women, and economic vulnerability, among others. Furthermore, highly skilled migrant women often have fewer opportunities to obtain employment matching their qualifications, while low-skilled women tend to work in informal, irregular, or less visible sectors compared to migrant men (ILO, 2018; O'Neil et.al., 2016). Migrant women are at greater risk of exploitation and abuse, particularly under hazard in transit corridors through Mexico toward the United States (Freedman, 2016). Thus, while feminization reflects agency and economic participation, it also underscores structural inequalities shaping migration experiences in the region.

With respect to the topic of the dissertation, return migration must be highlighted, which is another critical but heterogeneous feature of LAC mobility patterns. Whitin the region, return migration has been strongly shaped by economic crises and shifts in immigration enforcement policies in destination countries, particularly the United States and Spain (Durand, 2004). Mexico, for example, has experienced substantial return flows following the 2008 global financial crisis and intensified U.S. deportation policies (Montoya-Ortiz et al., 2018). Similarly, El Salvador has recorded high levels of forced return linked to deportation regimes (Orozco – Yansura, 2015). In the South American context, Colombia has also witnessed significant return dynamics, including both voluntary and crisis-induced return movements associated with regional instability (Mejía, 2012), most notably in the Venezuelan displacement context.

Return migration has different challenges, as reintegration frequently involves economic insecurity, underemployment or skill mismatch, and insufficient institutional assistance. Policies such as Colombia's Law 1565 of 2012 reflect attempts to structure return and reintegration, yet implementation gaps frequently limit their effectiveness. All in all, – to be later more elaborated within the Colombian context, – these diverse patterns illustrate that return migration in LAC is shaped by a combination of structural economic factors, migration governance regimes, and transnational household strategies rather than purely individual decision-making.

Several broader characteristics further distinguish migration in LAC. As mentioned earlier, its intraregional nature in terms of migration flows; countries such as Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia have become key destinations within South America, reflecting shifting economic poles and regional integration processes. While also, the region increasingly experiences mixed flows combining economic migrants, asylum seekers,

refugees, and victims of trafficking. The Venezuelan displacement crisis represents one of the largest contemporary displacement situations globally, affecting neighboring countries and reshaping regional governance mechanisms (to be introduced later within this chapter). Irregularity and transit dynamics also determines migration trajectories in the region. Central America and Mexico for instance function as both origin and transit zones, creating complex humanitarian and security challenges. Migrants often navigate dangerous routes, face organized crime networks, and confront increasingly restrictive border controls, especially along the US–Mexico corridor. Also, remittances constitute a central economic dimension of migration in LAC (to be further elaborated in the very next subchapter). Indeed, the region is one of the largest remittance-receiving areas globally, with countries such as Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic relying heavily on these inflows. The region's dependence on remittance inflows underscores both the economic importance of migration and the vulnerability of households to fluctuations in migrant employment and income. What follows is a brief examination of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America, with particular attention to its effects on migration dynamics and the evolution of remittance flows.

3.2.3 COVID-19 PANDEMICS

The appearance of the novel COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), in December 2019, has shaken the whole world to an extreme extent. Since attempts to contain the virus (and conceal it) in the starting point of the Chinese city of Wuhan, failed, it has rapidly spread across the globe like a domino, causing a serious health and economic crisis globally. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020, and a pandemic on March 11, 2020. It proved to be a highly transmissible virus characterized by emerging novel variants, rapidly demonstrating a broad spectrum of health impacts.

A greater variety of control measures have been enacted, until the world population had to wait for the invention of the vaccination against the virus. The COVID-19 vaccines have been approved and widely distributed in various countries since December 2020, while preventive measure have remained, including for instance social distancing, wearing masks, contact tracing or quarantine efforts, as well as other restrictions, such as travel restrictions, lockdowns, business restrictions and closures etc. Governments and administrations have faced difficult decisions implementing serious and further restrictions, and though such efforts were crucial and essential to control the spread of the virus and save people’s lives yet could not bring the end of the pandemics.

As of February 3, 2023, there have been almost 676 million global cases, while around 648 million people had recovered from the disease. However, there has been almost 6.77 million deaths around the world, the United States, India, and Brazil being among the countries hardest hit by the pandemic (STATISTA, 2023a). Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemics continues, impacting countries around the world and developing further waves of infection. The number of new coronavirus cases worldwide continues to fluctuate – according to Statista (2023b).

The health crisis has brought about a diverse global economic recession, while in some countries even political confrontations were apparent (e.g. Latin American public protests against the governments). The pandemic affected the well-being and everyday life of people, though experiences of the pandemic have varied widely depending on age, gender and ethnicity, as well as on the type of job people do and on their level of pay and skills (OECD, 2021). The crisis also intensified existing social, economic and environmental challenges.

Although a few years might not be enough to have a full understanding of all that took place due to the coronavirus pandemic, a wide range of literature in different fields have been dealing with the issue examining its effects and consequences. It is widely recognized that revisiting and critically assessing the crisis is essential in order to draw lessons and enhance preparedness for future contingencies. Indeed, since the pandemic cannot be avoided in this decade concerning most of the topics of social studies, in this subchapter, a short introduction is made about the effects of the pandemic on migration in general, then the situation in Latin America with regards to the health crisis, then a study is presented on migrant remittances and development in relation to COVID-19 circumstances.

3.2.3.1 Effects of the Pandemics on Migration

Ever since the end of the world wars, through the globalization of migration, the last century has been characterized by increasingly extensive and complex global population movements. Yet this diverse international mobility has been brought to an almost complete standstill by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon the health and economic crises, along with the measures introduced by governments to 'flatten the curve' of infections, the pandemic has in fact been greatly impacting mobility and migration. Thus, the question arises whether it has brought about the end of the "age of migration" (Gamlen, 2020)?

Facing the most severe pandemic so far in the 21st century, policymakers were forced to previously uncharted territory, implementing drastic measures in order to limit the spread of the virus. Although the main focus has been on responding to the global health crisis (such as virus testing, disease treatment, and vaccination development primarily),

preventive measures had to be taken that involved the control of freedom of movement of people all around the world. Not only could people not leave their homes in cases of a curfew only to have a peaceful walk in the park, but restraints have massively impacted human mobility globally. Both internal and international travel restrictions were put into effect by the vast majority of governments around the world. A wide range of restrictions were introduced from early 2020, such as "stay-at-home" measures, workplace and school closures, restrictions on gatherings, other than the strict travel restrictions within and across borders. Besides internal movement restrictions, almost all 185 countries had issued international travel restrictions by December 2020 (IOM, 2022). These countries imposed a ban on all regions or total border closures. Measured included prohibiting all entry of foreign citizens, or banning citizens of specific countries, or even completely closing borders to stop departure and entry of all people, including their own citizens. Another effort was taken in the form of quarantine procedure, which obliged passengers to be quarantined in isolation for a minimum period of time (typically 10 to 14 days) immediately upon arrival (IOM, 2022). International travel restrictions were taken even more seriously than internal movement control, however enacted total border closures in the early weeks and months of the pandemic eased over time and by July 2021, most countries had dropped such controls, while even one year after the pandemic started off, a third of all countries still had internal travel restrictions in place (IOM, 2022). As a consequence, labor migration has been temporarily suspended in many countries, while, in others, migration processing and assistance to asylum seekers has been genuinely slowed down (Hennebry – Kc, 2020).

Without going into details on such a current and extremely multidimensional topic as the long-term effects of the pandemic on migration, an IOM study (Gamlen, 2020) raises various questions regarding the issue. Will countries need even more or less labor migration? Will anti-immigrant sentiment grow in the shadow of the pandemic? Will migration restrictions further proliferate even after the peak of the pandemic? Will international student migration recover? Or finally, will demographic and mobility transitions change course? Indeed, patterns of human mobility have shifted, and there has been a transformation of migration and mobility globally (Martin – Bergmann, 2020). Not only economic, social or political factors have been the ones determining the moves, but also health factors have played a crucial part in migrants' decisions.

Lessons to be learned and good practices have been apparent to follow in many areas. Only to mention a few evidence and results from the last years, on the one hand, deeper international cooperation is suggested on pandemic prevention and control measures in the field of migration administration (Guofu, 2020). Such international cooperation is

needed when travel restrictions are implied, otherwise migrants' rights can be seriously weakened to seek asylum, as well as their right to return and/or family reunification can also be diminished. Hence, the return to the home countries for instance has been quite difficult, at some points even impossible for international migrants due to wide-ranging suspensions, reductions in international flights and further restrictions, or often the lack of consistency of international restriction measures. This has impacted a huge migrant population, especially countries that have large numbers of citizens abroad.

The COVID-19 crisis has had a disproportionate impact on immigrants, particularly during the first months of the pandemic. Migrants are in a very vulnerable situation in case of such a crisis. An IZA study (Cassidy, 2022) revealed that the labor market disruptions due to the pandemic and lockdowns impacted immigrant workers more severely than native-born workers in most of the countries. The reason on the one hand is because immigrant workers were more likely to be employed in jobs that are not as easy to perform remotely, or they even have been employed informally (in many cases in Latin America), or some administrations even suspended previously issued visas, residence permits and permanent residence permits, making it impossible for immigrants to continue working in the country. For instance, evidence from Latin America shows that the unemployment rates of Venezuelans in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru were higher than the unemployment rates among the populations of the destination countries (Chaves-González – Amaral – Mora, 2021).

Besides IZA, further studies (Migration Data Portal 2022; OECD, 2022) have also found that migrant population is exposed to higher risks of contracting the virus, seeing that the incidence rates among migrants and forcibly displaced persons appear to be consistently higher than among non-migrant groups (Hintermeier et. al., 2020; Hayward et. al., 2020). Those immigrants are especially vulnerable and face serious trouble during the pandemic who travel or live in inadequate and unsafe conditions, are homeless or reside in overcrowded shelters, informal settlements, camp situations or slums.

However, the labor market recovery for immigrants took place by degrees – even was rapid in some countries (e.g. US) and generally by the end of 2020, the employment gaps between immigrant and native-born workers, both for men and women, had returned to pre-pandemic levels in the US, Canada, Australia, and most EU countries (Cassidy, 2022).

Be that as it may, although migrants – particularly in lower paid jobs and in irregular situations – suffered the effects of early COVID-19 crisis, they have also played an important role in the response to the pandemic by working in critical sectors (Migration Data Portal, 2022). IOM notes as an illustration, that "among the 20 countries with the highest number of COVID-19 cases as of 8 March 2022, available international data for 2015/16

show that at least 7 countries – the US, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands – depended on foreign-born workers in the critical sector of healthcare services" (Migration Data Portal, 2022). In the latter sector, 33% of doctors and 22% of nurses in the UK in 2015 and 2016 were foreign-born (OECD, 2019). Such critical and most effected sectors filled with a high share of immigrant workers have been for instance sales, agriculture, forestry and fishery (Migration Data Portal, 2022).

The prolonged COVID-19 pandemic has worsened migrants' social, economic and political inclusion, while the crisis has also exacerbated pre-existing social and economic disparities especially among migrant population. Xenophobia, stigmatization, discrimination and anti-foreign sentiment have surged since the onset of the pandemic, thus research shows (Marchi, et al. 2022) that refugees and other migrants have been unjustly discriminated for spreading the disease. Not only that they have increased obstacles accessing health care, often for such attitude towards them – ranging from physical and verbal abuses to social exclusion and discriminatory quarantine practices – they often have suffered a negative impact on mental health too. Evidence show that undocumented migrants often avoid hospitals – even vaccination – for fear of identification and deportation, thus they are more likely to spread the virus or develop advanced cases.

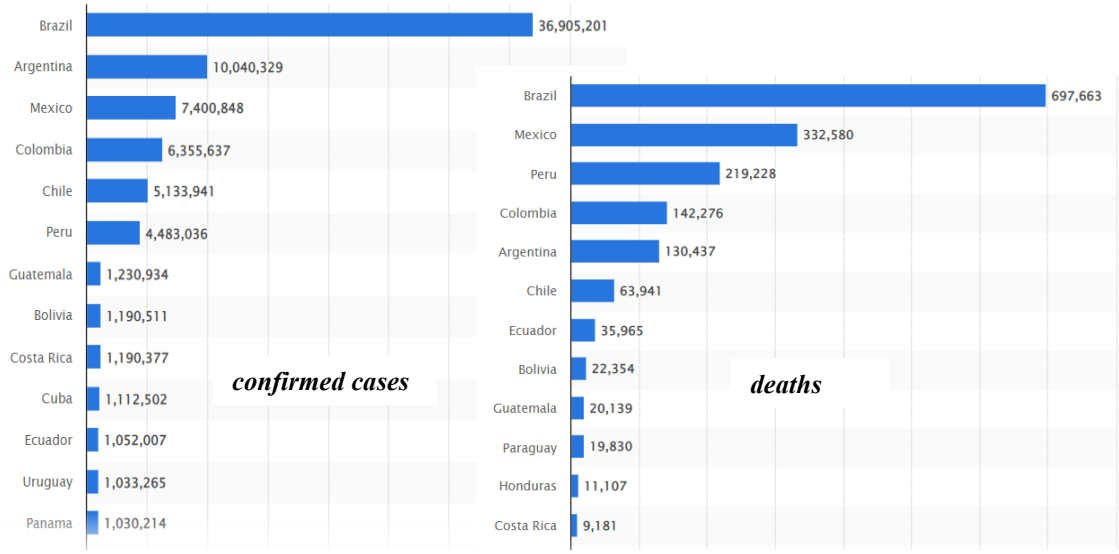
When it comes to migration and COVID-19, without doubt an extremely complex issue is implied. Examining Latin America, where regional migration outlook has transformed during the last decades, and most recently experts refer to different *migration crises*, such as the one from Venezuela or Central America, even terms such as "*migration in crisis contexts*" arose to explain the drivers of these migratory flows and try to understand how mobility dynamics are configured in these instances and contexts, also investigating the political-institutional responses implemented by various countries in the region (Zapata – Espinosa – Gandini, 2022). However, with the advent of the pandemic, the notion of "*crisis within the crisis*" has revealed itself (Ibid; Gandini – Selee, 2020) to understand the context of (im)mobility in the midst of the health emergency. After all, the COVID-19 crisis was added to another pre-existing one: the context of the migration governance crisis in the LAC region that arose after the emergence of a diversity of flows, in some cases massive and sudden, for which the responses of the states have been quite ad hoc.

3.2.3.2 COVID-19 Hit Latin America Hard

The worldwide spread of the coronavirus pandemic did not spare any region on the globe, nor did it bypass Latin America, what is more it has become a hotspot of the severe pandemic, with around 45 million registered infections at the peak of the health crisis, which accounts for almost one-third of all COVID-19-related deaths worldwide (Drexler –

Hoffmann, 2021). As it was cited before, it has not only been a "crisis within the crisis" in the context of migration, but it also exacerbated weak social protection, fragmented health systems and profound inequalities – such being critical in some countries of the region. "Socioeconomic vulnerability is highly correlated with the severity of COVID-19 infection and mortality" (ECLAC – PAHO, 2021). Indeed, Latin America has been one of the most strongly affected regions by the pandemic and its consequences. Within the region, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru is ranking among the nations with the largest number of cases and deaths resulting from the disease (see Figure 8 below).

Figure 8: **Number of confirmed cases/deaths of COVID-19 in LAC as of February 9, 2023.**



Source: Statista, 2023.

Brazil, on the top of both of the lists, was the first case of COVID-19 in Latin America was confirmed, on February 26, 2020. It is the most populated country in the region, home to the largest number of cases and deaths. As for the latter, Brazil ranks second in the world after the US, while Mexico and Peru rank fifth and sixth (Worldmeter, 2023). The virus was as fatal in Peru as it had the world's highest registered rate of deaths per capita (Drexler – Hoffmann, 2021). Also, Colombia is in the top four country in the region to be hit hard by the pandemics in terms of numbers of administered cases and unfortunate death cases. Despite available data, due to limited testing and challenges in attribution of the cases of death, the true numbers can be even higher.

Effective management of a pandemic required restrictive and preventive measures. Such were also taken in different pace and guidance in the region. Finally, as infection rates started to decrease and vaccination has been authorized, much of Latin America could breathe a sigh of relief in the midst of the crisis, however access to vaccines has been

unequal in the region. Vaccine diplomacy has changed within the region, in a way that initially, LAC countries depended on vaccine shipments from China, India, Russia, as well as Cuba, while most recently, the US and the multilateral COVAX initiative – that has presented huge delays in the beginning – have become the largest providers (Ibid.). More than 90% of Chile's population has been vaccinated as of July 15, 2022, followed by Cuba (89%), Uruguay (84%) and Argentina (83%) (Harrison – Horwitz – Zissis, 2022). Vaccine campaigns were implemented in different ways by governments in the region, while vaccine hesitancy was especially apparent in Brazil, for instance.

Analyzing the effects of the crisis within the regional context, evidence includes the followings; besides that the health effects of the pandemic in LAC countries has been among the world's worst, it also heavily affected the regional economy, demonstrating a record contraction in economic activity (CEPAL, 2022). Also, poverty and extreme poverty have risen strongly, as well as social inequality has grown (Ibid.). COVID-19 has represented a massive health, social and economic shock, also clearly highlighting not only the weaknesses of the region's health and social protection systems (Soltész, 2020), but also the fragility and the need to transform the development model of the region (UNSDG, 2020). Such chronic difficulties have become apparent and turned into an acute crisis demanding urgent attention. Governments faced hardships grappling with how to implement emergency measures while preserving the democratic fabric, safeguarding human rights and sustaining the gains of peace, meanwhile trust in public institutions has been already historically low and political instability is excessive in the region. Since the pandemic hit a region characterized by a critical economic and political constellation and widespread dissatisfaction (Soltész, 2020), masses of angry protesters took to the streets in several countries in the region such as in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador or Peru.

Is the worst over? Hopefully yes, however recovery is slow and policy measures are needed for reconstruction and development in order to rectify the societal and economic damage the pandemic has wreaked regionally.

3.2.3.3 Effects of the Pandemics on Remittances and Development

In fact, this global pandemic has been a disaster, hitting Latin America hard; 69 million infections and more than 1.6 million deaths have been documented (Reuters Covid Tracer, 2022). Real numbers are even higher. The vaccination has been a priority in Latin American countries, at the same time, monetary remittances from abroad turned out to be an "alternative serum" for the region. Surprising and reassuring data show that

[*] This chapter is based on a paper previously published as:
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remittances in the region have been extremely resilient under COVID-19 so far, helping millions of families to cope with the hardships during the fight against the pandemic.

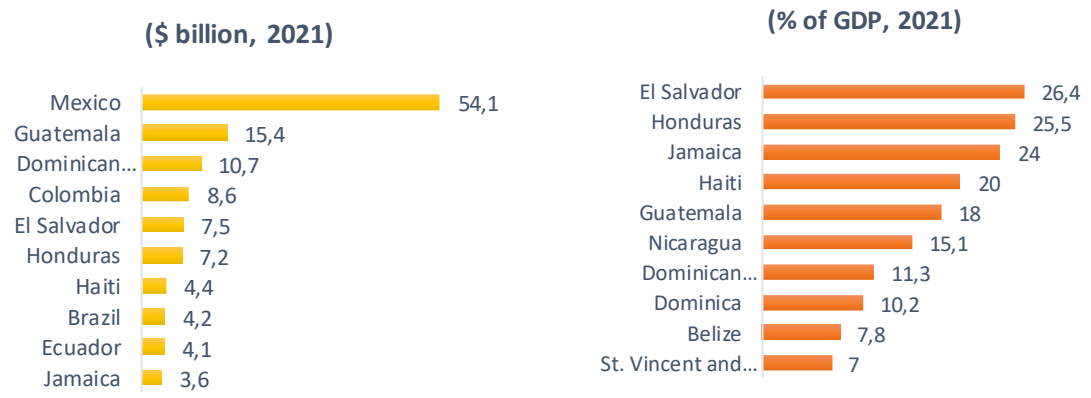
Seeing the biggest declines in April 2020, the World Bank forecasted a 20% drop in remittances for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) by the end of 2020, and a 19.3% contraction in Latin America, the sharpest decline in recent history that would have been about four times the decline in remittances experienced during the 2008-2009 global economic crisis (KNOMAD, 2020). The pessimism was though justifiable, as it was foreseeable that the epidemic would reduce employment and/or the wages of migrant workers as a result of the pressure on the labor markets of the host countries. However, despite forecasts, remittance flows quickly recovered, at least in some regions.

In this subchapter it is argued that migrant remittances have been a crucial tool for economic and human security in Latin America during COVID-19. Also, the aim is to find explanations for the resilience and increasing volume of cross-border remittances with regard to the LAC region, largely exceeding earlier estimates. Primary and secondary statistical sources were used especially focusing on the period between 2019 and 2022.

Remittances in the LAC Region Before and During the Pandemic

Latin American migrants support the development of their homeland in three main ways, namely through business and social networks, the dissemination of knowledge and technology, and monetary remittances. This study focuses on the latter, and its development during COVID-19. Remittances sent from abroad – on a regular or occasional basis – to those who have remained at home, are mentioned in the (re)migration literature in the context of utilitarian strategy on the one hand, and in the system of transnationality and networks on the other (Bata-Balog, 2022). International remittances are thus an important and spectacular link between migrants and the society that sends them. They are considered to be a positive consequence of migration, in contrast to the negative effects of emigration, – such as labor shortages, brain drain or structural problems, – especially influential in developing countries where these remittances account for a significant share of total national income (Nyberg-Sorensen, 2004). Great examples of this are the LAC countries, where remittances have risen steadily over the past decade and genuinely represent a salient component of their GDP (26.4% of GDP in El Salvador; 26.2% in Honduras; 23.6% in Jamaica) (KNOMAD, 2022).

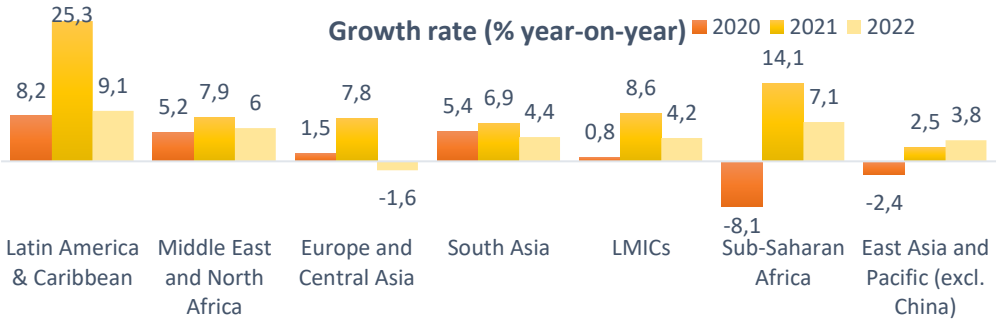
Figure 9: Top Remittance Recipients in the LAC region, 2021.



Source: KNOMAD, 2022.

As a result of the pandemic, the total value of officially recorded international remittances in the world average fell moderately by 2.4% in 2020, despite dramatic forecasts, while remittances from low- and middle-income countries were "only" 1.6 % lower than the 2019 values. (KNOMAD, 2021a) According to KNOMAD (2022), out of the six LMIC regions (Figure 10), Latin America and the Caribbean were clearly with the most fruitful in terms of remittance growth after closing the first year of the crisis with an 8.2% increase, with incoming remittances reaching $104 billion at the end of 2020.

Figure 10: Remittance Flows by LMIC Region, 2020-22.



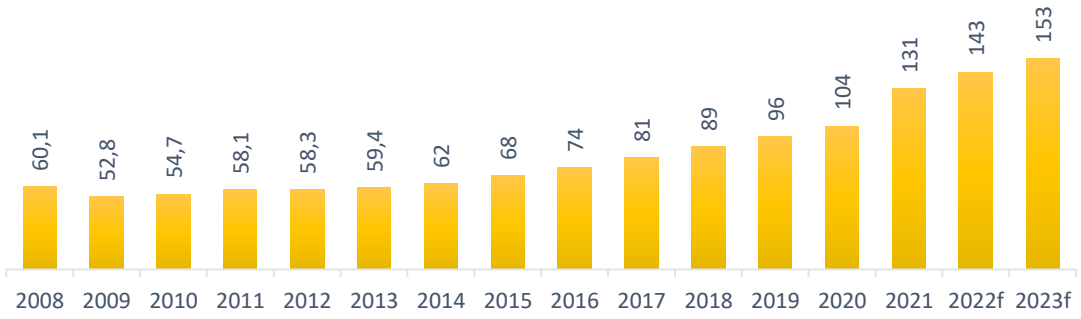
Source: KNOMAD, 2022.

Although the COVID-19 shock initially led to an expected decline, remittances rapidly bounced back and many Latin American countries have reported that their monthly remittance flows not only have recovered since April 2020 but are even higher than they were before the pandemic. By 2021, we see that remittances further catch-up, and we can witness a 37% increase in Guatemala, 34% in the Dominican Republic, 33% in Honduras, 31% in Salvador, 26% in Colombia, 25% in Mexico and 24% in Jamaica compared to the previous year. We could continue the list with South American countries regaining their strengths in terms of remittances, like Brazil or Ecuador, while there are some negative

examples as Panama or Paraguay, where remittance inflows could not catch-up so quickly. Nevertheless, on the top of the list there is Mexico, which is the second largest recipient of remittances in the world with nearly $54.1 billion – only outstripped by India, followed by China, – certainly leading the way in Latin America with huge amount of migrant remittances (KNOMAD, 2022).

Even before the release of last year's official year-end statistics, it was clear that the data for 2021 would reflect a further increase in remittances, and there were clear signs of another boom by 2022 as well. Revenues from remittances in the region indeed reached $131 billion in 2021, an increase of 25.3% by the end of the year – again even exceeding the projected values (KNOMAD, 2021b). Looking at the latest data of May 2022, – which already takes into account the effects and escalating risks of the Russian invasion of Ukraine – remittances to the LAC region are forecasted to propel by a strong 9.1% pace in 2022 and 7.7% in 2023 (KNOMAD, 2022). However, downside risks dominate due to the war and its consequences on economic development, austerity measures, inflation pressures and uncertain advancements in immigration policy in the United States, and further geopolitical risks.

Figure 11: Migrant Remittance Flows to Latin America (2008-2023) billion $



Source: 2008-2014: CEMLA: Las Remesas a Latinoamérica y el Caribe y los efectos de la pandemia del COVID-19. (2020); 2015-2023: KNOMAD (2022); (Note: f=forecast)

Interpretation of Remittance Developments

Migrants are particularly vulnerable to the economic and health effects of the pandemic, as they generally have limited access to the host country's state aid, social security system and often have occupations that suffer significant job losses during a crisis. In many cases, we see that the savings of immigrants are insufficient to protect their income during the current pandemic.

Thus, the question arises, how is it possible for migrants from certain countries to send home not less, but sometimes even more of their savings during the COVID-19? The fact that remittances to Latin American countries were in a surplus was a pleasant surprise.

How can this trend provoking early forecasts be explained? Some key factors help to reveal what happened.

First of all, more than 75% of remittances to the region come from the United States (Jewers – Orozco, 2020), (and for some countries more than 90%) (KNOMAD, 2022) as the US is the number one destination for those leaving the LAC region. Although the employment rate of foreign-born workers in the States decreased by more than one-fifth in April 2020 compared to before the outbreak of the pandemic, the situation has steadily improved ever since. Immigrants tend to change jobs rather than stay out of work in the long run, so shifts to the necessary sectors during the epidemic have reduced the impact of the employment crisis. All this, as well as various aids, incentives and benefits provided by the government have improved economic conditions compared to the forecasts and allowed remittances to quickly recover. Meanwhile Spain's, the second largest host country for Latin American communities, economic situation had a negative impact on remittance flows to Bolivia (-16%), Paraguay (-12.4%) and Peru (-11.7%) in 2020 (Banco Mundial, 2021). Similarly, in the case of some countries, remittances within the region have significantly shrunk due to the virus and restrictive measures that were particularly strict in the region. For example, remittances from Ecuador to Colombia, Mexico and Peru fell by 20% due to restrictive measures (KNOMAD, 2021a). At the same time, with the emergence of new migratory routes, we are witnessing an increase in remittances within the region. The number one example is remittances sent from Colombia to Venezuela or money transferred to Mexico for Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and Haitians on their way to the United States. Since transit migrants tend to stay in transit countries for a longer period, they need additional financial assistance from their families (either from their home country or those already living in the country of destination) to cover the cost of living and travel, and the payment of human traffickers. Therefore, we see that the inevitability and favorable development of remittances during the epidemic is felt primarily by the Central American and the Caribbean region, and secondarily by South American countries. In the South, the importance of these resources seems to be somewhat smaller compared to their own GDP (e.g. Argentina 0,2%; Brazil 0,3% or Colombia 2,7% in 2021) (KNOMAD, 2021), yet are an extremely important additional source of income to fight poverty.

Part of the explanation is that remittances are in fact 'counter-cyclical' in times of crisis. During periods of crisis (let it be a financial crisis or natural disaster), migrants try to send a large share of their income back to their home countries. This altruistic behavior was also observed during the 2008 economic crisis, and this is reflected in the personal narratives of many Latin American migrants who say, quote; "I will not stop helping my

mother in any way, even if my income is declining", as they note "we struggle here, but it is even worse at home" (The New York Times, 2020). Although newcomers and those living in insecure situations often have unbalanced working conditions, diasporas living in key migration corridors are better prepared to sustain the level of remittances destined for people living in their country of origin in times of crisis.

Pandemic-related travel and movement restrictions and the closure of shops made it difficult to access physical remittance providers, such as returning cash. However, the proliferation of digital transfers, such as the use of digital money, and the shift from informal to formal channels have greatly contributed to avoiding a decline in trends. A Mexican case study, for example, found that in the municipalities close to the border, which previously received remittances through informal channels, the number of registered remittances and open bank accounts has risen to a record level since the beginning of the pandemic (Dinarte et al., 2022). Both national and international banks have developed a variety of policies to help member states and migrants in sending remittances; reducing the costs, simplifying the process by implementing favorable transfer regulations.

While new migration flows and the number of refugees has declined, the crisis led to an increase in remigration. Initially, many migrants were stranded in their host countries due to lockdown measures and travel bans, however as these were slowly lifted, a steady increase is perceptible in the number of migrants that returned to their country of origin. Some also transferred their last savings home before making the trip, while the large increase in remittances may also be explained by the savings sent home of migrants who died in coronavirus infection (The Economist, 2020).

Another understanding of the size and evolution of remittances is related to the individualistic and collectivist nature of societies. Individualistic societies emphasize individual goals and individual well-being, while a collectivist, solidarity-based nation focuses on the goals of the group, in which the individual easily sacrifices his or her own interest. Personal, long-term relationships are becoming increasingly important, and migration networks, transnational and diaspora relationships are extremely strong. Latin American countries are characterized by such collectivism, while developed Western nations have rather individualistic identities. This also explains why during the pandemic the resources of Latin communities have been enriched, while the remittances to western developed countries have usually subsided. Similarly, to other European countries, remittances in Hungary fell significantly from 2019 to 2020 (-25%) (EUROSTAT, 2021), ever since continued to drop according to the National Bank of Hungary (MNB).

The strengthening of oil prices helped the recovery of remittances and the economic recovery of the oil producing countries in the region, such as Brazil and Mexico. The

resilience of remittances to the crisis is also shown by the fact that (except for China) the remittances targeted at low- and middle-income countries have been the double of foreign direct investment (FDI) figures and three times the value of development aid (ODA) (KNPMAD, 2021a). It is visible that there has been an increase in the dependence on remittances in the Latin American region, mainly due to the deterioration of GDP and high rates of inflation. All in all, this could make these economies vulnerable to sudden changes in remittance revenues – as noted earlier, can culminate economic security concerns. Nonetheless, the economic development potential of migrants' remittances is well known, given that this is practically the only quantifiable feature of migration (Nyberg-Sorensen, 2004). However, the extent to which these transfers can offset the effects of the COVID-19 crisis in different countries is still questionable. Certainly, the outbreak of the coronavirus once again highlighted the importance of remittances, which continue to be a basic source of income for a significant share of the Latin American population and a vital mechanism to alleviate the negative effects of the severe pandemic.

In conclusion, remittances to the LAC region have been responsive in a positive direction. Although the epidemic yet has not ceased to exist by the middle of 2022, we see the tightening and lifting restrictions on mobility in sending and receiving countries that affect the recovery of post-COVID economies, the size and direction of legal and irregular migration flows, and thus the development of migrant remittances as well. Indeed, LAC emigrants have maintained strong connections with their home countries, sending home sizable remittances before, during, as well as after the global pandemic. Remittances to Latin America are expected to further increase in 2022 and 2023, however, downside risks are also present due to the impact of the war between Russia and Ukraine, geopolitical uncertainties, improvements depending on economic developments, the inflation pressures in western societies and dilemmas regarding immigration policies (especially concerning the US) (KNOMAD, 2022). Further growth will require greater progress in accessing bank accounts for the immigrant population (which is essential for the use of digital channels) and there will be a high demand to reduce the cost of remittances. The 2030 target is to reduce the costs by almost half, since transferring money across international borders is persistently high, although it is lower in the LAC region than the global average (KNOMAD, 2022).

Despite the importance of intraregional migration, LAC countries are not large senders of remittances compared to the remittances they receive (Beaton et al., 2017) – yet these transfers are also decisive in their amount and effects. More importantly, the data and its analysis have mirrored the importance of the conditions of the US economy for remittances to the region. However, the increase in remittances in 2020-22 also well reflects

the collectivist nature of the Latin American population, the effort and commitment of migrants (altruists) to maintain support for their relatives left in their countries of origin, especially in critical times such as a crisis caused by a pandemic. Those who remain at home need revenue in particular to finance their medical services during the pandemic, especially considering that the underdevelopment and overcrowding of public health care in the region often requires the use of private institutions. By its nature, remittances function as a channel to reduce poverty and inequality (Beaton et al., 2017), in case there was a decline in remittances, the living conditions of those in the Latin American region would continue to deteriorate, which would encourage further emigration. Both result in security threats either for individuals themselves or at the regional level as well. Especially during the COVID, when the vulnerable population experienced great uncertainties, remittances turned out to be an essential form of social insurance and a kind of livelihood diversification (Thomson, 2014). Money transferred home has been a vital economic lifeline, helping millions of families in Latin America more resilient to shocks – like the economic and social effects of the pandemic – providing remittance recipients support to mitigate risks.

Although remittances have the potential to reduce livelihood security risks of the recipients – and while also display visible development effects on the recipient economy –, it is vital to realize that the responsibility for the citizens' social security and development lies with states and not with migrants (Thomson, 2014). Nevertheless, the leaders of the countries representing the world's major economies, – including the main destination countries of LAC migrants, – have committed themselves "to take steps to support the full inclusion of migrants […] in our pandemic response and recovery efforts […] regardless of their migration status" (G-20, 2021). In the framework of the G20 Rome Summit they reaffirmed to "strongly encourage the continued facilitation of the flow of remittances and the reduction of average remittance transfer costs" (G-20, 2021).

3.3 THE VENEZUELAN MIGRATION CRISIS

"Never in our history in Latin America have we faced such movement of people out of a country that was one of the richest in the region and a country that is not at war," said Eduardo Stein, special representative of the UNHCR, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (The Guardian, 2021). His words outline the seriousness of the phenomenon that the Latin American region has been facing, experiencing an unprecedented

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Venezuelan exodus since 2014, as a result of a severe political and economic crisis under Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro. More than 6 million have fled their homes in search of more secure conditions and livelihood, most of them (84%) residing within the region (RMRP, 2022). The Venezuelan exodus has put increasing pressure on Latin America's system of free mobility, and governments reacted in different ways to the influx. The countries most affected include Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Chile, in this chapter thus the aforementioned four countries' policy responses will be presented, seeking to answer questions such as: how affected countries approach the problem and challenges of mass Venezuelan immigration, and what public policies are implemented by the local governments to address the phenomenon.

The topic is of great relevance, given that the situation has been unchanged in Venezuela under the Maduro regime ("frozen crisis"), migration is expected to continue in the future, in fact, it is predicted to reach 8.4 million by 2025 (Alvarez et.al., 2022). The policy responses of some Latin American countries to be highlighted in this research and their experiences with mass immigration can be truly instructive to other governments in the region, as well as to those facing similar challenges in Europe. Although the volumes and/or the context may be different, it may help to formulate public policies and establish common good practices and encourage international cooperation.

3.3.1 THE CAUSES OF THE VENEZUELAN ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

From the 60's to the early 21st century the republic was one of the most democratic and politically stable state in Latin America, and it developed into the richest country in the region, the destination of thousands of immigrants. Its economy benefited from a thriving petroleum industry that capitalized on the world's largest known oil reserves. In addition to the increase in oil production and export volumes, the state's international role also increased when it became a founding member of the International Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960. The country was in an oil euphoria, when its oil production reached an all-time high in 1970, producing 3.8 million barrels per day (BPD) (Energy Institute, n.d.). Even through former Venezuelan Oil Minister and OPEC co-founder Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonzo, as a "prophet" warned that "Ten years from now, 20 years from now, you will see, oil will bring us ruin," (Useem, 2003) the government was not aware, blindly believing in the black gold.

However, only a few decades later we are facing a country struggling with a massive political, economic and social crisis, with pervasive problems, such as hyperinflation, chronic shortages of food and medicine, closure of businesses, high unemployment,

deterioration of productivity, authoritarianism, human rights violations, all resulting many to leave their homes in search of better opportunities and safe life circumstances. Being aware of the contemporary Venezuelan situation, the question arises, how such a catastrophe on a historic scale could arise? To unfold the complexity of the current crisis a short history outline is needed.

The uncertain and dangerous stance of Venezuela in the world has become evident from the second decade of the 21st century as a result of poor governance and mismanagement of oil revenues of the controversial rule of revolutionary leader Hugo Chávez, and his successor, Nicolás Maduro's increasing authoritarianism, combined with a significant decline in the fortunes of Venezuela's petroleum industry and the inclusive dependence on oil prices. After Chávez was elected, – perhaps the most controversial 'populist' and pink tide figure in contemporary Latin America (Zúquete, 2008) – he focused on enacting social reforms, including the so-called Bolivarian missions, as part of the Bolivarian Revolution, all financed from oil revenues. It obviously made him very popular after such governments that were forced to take very unpopular measures (starting with Carlos Andrés Pérez) such as radically curtailing welfare spendings in return for IMF loans. Chávez intervened significantly in the economy, and though he understood that the transformation and diversification of the economy was needed, with the reduction of oil dependence, he failed to meet his promise.

Chávez's social support was founded in his welfare policy successes, funded by petrodollars, that had valuable results; such as improvements in areas like poverty, literacy, income equality and quality of life. Social spending doubled from 11.3% of GDP in 1998 to 22.8% of GDP in 2011 (Johnston – Kozameh, 2013). Poverty and unemployment have decreased. In 1999, 14,5% were unemployed and 23.4% of the population were recorded as being in extreme poverty. The latter fell to 8.5% in 2011, while unemployment also dropped to 7.6% in 2009 according to official government figures (The Guardian Data, 2016). However, the government continuously overspent on social fields and was careless not allocating enough money for any future economic turmoil. Another pillar of the problem was that in the wake of remarkable results, bureaucracy has proliferated. The profits of the oil industry have also been lost to corruption and overambitious foreign policy, and at the same time political clientelism has been built with excessive leadership.

Chávez's main program, the so called "bolivarianism" was longing for national and economic independence, the guarantee of political sovereignty, and the creation of a direct participatory democracy based on the will of the people, coupled with anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-neoliberal rhetoric (Hegedűs, 2019). In order to reach independence and sovereignty, he often used his oil supremacy, and – in the name of Bolívar, through

the idea of uniting the region – he also promoted regional integrations (such as ALBA and CELAC) wishing to decrease dependence on the US and European governments. Meanwhile, he was also looking for global partners – Russia, China, Iran – with whom he intended to strengthen himself primarily against the United States. The aforementioned ties are the ones being tested today for the survival of Chávez's 21st century socialism.

After Chávez's unexpected death in 2013, ending his nearly one-and-a-half-decade presidency, Nicolás Maduro followed in his position, however with much less charisma. The new government inherited a country that had already lived its golden age, and by the means of the system contradictions coming into the surface, it had become more and more apparent what Chávez had left for the country. While in 2012, the price of crude oil per barrel was at an all-time high of $109.45, after the worldwide oil price collapse in 2013, from 2014 it began to fall, only stopped at $40.68 in 2016 before slightly recovering (Statista, 2022).[6] This trend made it clear that black gold alone will not solve Venezuela's problems anymore. The degree of oil dependency has been steadily rising and by 2019 Venezuela's oil revenues accounted for about 99% of export earnings (OPEC, 2021). The whole system was depending on – a fundamentally uncontrollable factor, – the world market price of crude oil that had drastically dropped in the beginning of Maduro's presidency. This trend has launched an economic chain reaction that led to the current economic and humanitarian crises. While the declining economy undermined Maduro's social support, his political legitimacy has been also challenged.

The continuous irrational economic policies and the inability of the government to deal with the so called "Dutch disease" – not only of Chávez and Maduro, but all the irresponsibility leading governments since 1958 – has questioned the sustainability of Venezuela's economic and political system in its entirety. After all, the question has not been whether the system will collapse, but that is when it will do.

3.3.2 The Current State of the Political and Economic Crises

3.3.2.1 Domestic Political Developments in Venezuela (as of 2025)

It has already been ten years since the death of Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez, yet chavismo still holds its position, finding new ways to ensure its survival. Although Nicolás Maduro, head of the Venezuelan United Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* – PSUV) had won the 2018 presidential elections (by 67,8%), the fairness of the elections was highly questionable for fraud, thus several countries moved to

[6] Also, no substantial developments have taken place in the oil industry, thus infrastructure and technology had become increasingly obsolete. The amount of oil extracted has also decreased significantly.

[*] This chapter is based on several articles previously published in the Geopolitical Series of MCC Press: Bata-Balog A. (2022; 2023; 2024; 2025): Venezuela.

recognize Juan Guaidó as interim president (US, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, France etc.) from the beginning of 2019. However, with the December 2020 parliamentary elections, where the coalition of the left and its allied forces won more than two-thirds of the seats in the National Assembly according to the official results, the government gave another reason for sharp criticism from the international community; the EU, the US and the OAS also rejected the result of the vote. At the same time, the president of the Assembly, Guaidó, has lost his constitutional authority in the absence of a mandate, – as he boycotted the vote – thus his previously accepted legitimacy has become controversial, creating a presidential crisis in Venezuela.

Following previously failed negotiations, in 2021, the government and the opposition held two rounds of talks in Mexico, mediated by Norway. The opposition sought to improve election conditions and wanted to guarantee the release of political prisoners, as well as the influx of humanitarian aid and COVID-19 vaccines, while Maduro's allies called for the lifting of sanctions brought in by former US President Donald Trump that have hit Venezuela's economy hard since 2019. In fact, Washington made the lifting of the imposed sanctions conditional on the announcement of free presidential elections as soon as possible and the resignation of Maduro. The South American administration, although was initially surprisingly open to the Caracas-Washington dialogue after Biden's election, rejected the demands and declared, in accordance with the "constitutional process," that only regional and local elections would be held in 2021.

The vote took place on November 21, 2021, after three years of boycotts by the opposition. Although the opposition initially refused to participate, its candidates, within the coalition of the Round Table of Democratic Unity (MUD), ran in the competition. The results came as no surprise: based on the official count, out of 23 counties in the country, the Socialists won twenty, and only three governors were elected from candidates running for anti-Maduro parties. With this victory, the PSUV ensured even bigger success than in 2017, further consolidating the power of Maduro, the "son of Chávez". However, the willingness to vote was low – only 41% of those eligible to vote went to the polls – which indicates the declining social support of the Chavismo. (It is an interesting turn that the President of Cuba congratulated his close ally on the victory even before the official results were announced (BBC, 2021)). An election delegation of 136 observers from the EU – while acknowledging the balance of the electoral council's administration, – concluded that the elections were marked by a lack of judicial independence and the rule of law, arbitrary voter exclusions and the use of public funds for campaign purposes (Lozano, 2021).

Maduro's dictatorial control was continuing. 2022 started with the government's letter of intent, the declaration of the so-called *Mano de Hierro* (Iron Fist) action that aimed at eliminating corruption and carrying out anti-drug operations (Ocando, 2022). The Chávist Maduro – who is regarded by the international community as an illegitimate leader since the 2018 elections – announced the campaign as part of his efforts to cleanse his government's political image by the time of the 2024 presidential elections. However, in order to strengthen his power, he just made it more explicit that he defines who can and who cannot take part in the corruption systems that intertwine the whole economy and politics; in addition, instead of the elimination of drug networks, the objective was simply their supervision. Consequently, the clientelist system continued, where Maduro kept the branches of power under check, had the army that was interested in the survival of the system on his side, and still enjoyed the support of the PSUV.

The 2024 elections could have provided a consensual solution to the legitimacy crisis of Venezuela, although there was no information on the date and other details even a year before elections, what is more, discussions on the key electoral reforms did not start in time – or rather at all. Representatives of the government and the opposition met again after more than a year on November 26 in Mexico City, where they signed the "social agreement", which seeks to establish a UN-administered humanitarian fund. The latter can receive approximately 3 billion USD, and its use might be scheduled for the time of the elections that can boost the government's popularity both economically and socially.

In the meantime, by the end of 2022, the opposition presented one of the most controversial episodes of its history when they dismissed Juan Guaidó as acting president and his interim government in the National Assembly on December 30 (Efe, 2022). Since 2019, Guaidó was the public face of the Venezuelan opposition, who placed himself in the interim presidential position by referring to the constitution. Out of the four big opposition groups, three backed the proposal supporting Guaidó, which also created a five-member committee to manage the external wealth of the country. The opposition forces could have reconsidered only the removal of Guaidó instead of the complete dissolution of the interim government (*Voluntad Popular*), but in their statement, they stressed the necessity of the dissolution in order to achieve unity before the elections.

However, in Maduro's authoritarian system, a hesitant and uneven political dialogue has indeed begun between the government and the opposition regarding the timetable for the 2024 free elections, which resulted in reaching an agreement in Barbados. The agreement includes twelve points, among them ensuring candidates' access to public and private media, lifting restrictions imposed on opposition politicians, allowing election observation missions from the EU, and the release of "wrongfully detained" Americans.

Also, in the framework of the agreement, the government and the opposition agreed to update the electoral registers both inside and outside the country so that the millions of Venezuelans who have emigrated can exercise their right to vote. The Venezuelan opposition hoped that the diaspora may become a political force, however unfortunately it may encounter obstacles, as Venezuela's strained diplomatic relations with several other countries create difficulties, limiting the number of Venezuelan embassies around the world. (Another difficulty is that Venezuelans must have a permanent legal residence in their host country in order to vote, which for many remains an unresolved problem.)

On October 22 the opposition parties – after they withdrew their support from Guaidó, – held their first primary election in eleven years in order to select the unified candidate who would have the best chance of running against Maduro in the upcoming presidential election. The opposition politicians organized the candidate-selection vote without state assistance, rejecting the support of the electoral authorities in organizing the ballot. The process was organized by civil society and the paper-ballot vote was conducted in polling stations set up in homes, parks, and the headquarters of opposition parties. According to the official results – considered "decisive" after more than 90% of the votes had been counted – María Corina Machado, an engineer and former legislator, received 92.4% of the vote. At the same time, however, the electoral chamber of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice suspended the primary process, accepting a lawsuit – submitted by a rival opposition deputy – which challenged the results of the vote by citing alleged irregularities in the internal procedure. Another problem also emerged regarding the prestige of the primaries. Machado had been banned in June from holding public office for fifteen years, which theoretically prevents her from submitting her candidacy. The disqualification of the deputy forms part of Maduro's efforts to undermine opposition unity. According to the election commission, approximately 2.3 million Venezuelans participated in the primary election (Puerta Riera, 2023) – suggesting that a high turnout may be expected in the 2024 presidential elections – however, the published data remain questionable due to the lack of transparency.

Thus, on January 10, 2025, Nicolás Maduro once again assumed the presidential office despite widespread domestic protests. The Venezuelan society and the international community once again considered the elections irregular and undemocratic, thus US, the EU and several Latin American countries recognized the opposition candidate, Edmundo González, as the winner of the Venezuelan presidential election. According to information provided by the National Electoral Council (CNE), Maduro received more than 51% of the votes, however, to this day the council has not made public the district-level tally sheets, neither has it provided the possibility for an independent verification of the

vote count. Based on the electoral records (*actas de votación*) collected by the opposition, 67% of the votes were cast for González, a Venezuelan diplomat, writer and expert in international relations, who ran as the candidate of the Democratic Unity Platform (*Plataforma Unitaria Democrática, PUD*).

Although there is broad agreement that the opposition candidate received a majority mandate and that "it is entirely clear that the government stole the election" (Soltész, 2024) Maduro assumed his third term in January and soon initiated criminal proceedings against González, who was forced to flee to Spain. The opposition is therefore once again led by Machado, who, despite having obtained extraordinary support (92%) in the opposition primaries, was prevented from running in the presidential election due to measures taken by Maduro. As political tensions heated, a wave of nationwide protests unfolded in Venezuela during 2025, to which the government responded with repressive measures, in several cases involving brutal police action, arrests and intimidation. Political persecution has consolidated a system of control that, according to the U.S. think tank WOLA, reaches the threshold of state terrorism (Dib, 2025).

Maduro continued his attempts to further centralize power, including the proposed constitutional amendment and the economic state of emergency decree. In February 2025, the president submitted his proposal for a constitutional amendment ("*Proyecto de reforma constitucional*") to the National Assembly, which would modify several provisions of the 1999 Constitution. The reform aims to institutionalize "communal/popular power" (*poder comunal*) and to restructure state institutions. Although the proposal officially emphasizes democratic participation and the strengthening of local communities, critics argue that the amendments primarily serve to consolidate the regime while weakening traditional parliamentary and municipal oversight mechanisms, as well as the system of checks and balances.

In April 2025, Maduro declared a state of economic emergency. The decree aimed to grant extraordinary powers to the state in order to manage the crisis caused by the decline in oil revenues. The measure envisaged tax exemptions, administrative facilitation, as well as import-substitution and investment-promotion policies. According to opposition critics, however, the measure primarily served political purposes and contained few implementable economic strategies.

In this domestic political and economic context, the regional and parliamentary elections held on 25 May 2025, as well as the local elections scheduled for 27 July, resulted in an overwhelming victory for the PSUV and its allied coalition, the Great Patriotic Pole (*Gran Polo Patriótico, GPP*). The ruling coalition won 253 of the 277 seats in the National

Assembly and 23 of the 24 provincial governorships, leaving the opposition almost completely excluded from decision-making.

3.3.2.2 Socio-Economic Conditions in Venezuela

What certainly characterizes the country of nearly 29 million people by 2025 is a predictable political instability, which is undoubtedly a serious obstacle to economic growth. Both 2023 and 2024 revolve/ved around the preparation of elections and the easing of Washington's sanctions as a result of increasing pressure due to the strategic importance of oil. Following the punitive measures imposed in 2019, the oil-based economy of the country – which had collapsed to its knees – has recovered somewhat as a result of the lifting of the embargoes; however, it has still not followed the expected growth trajectory during the year. According to the IMF, the increased oil production (850,000 barrels per day by November) may generate GDP growth of 4.5% in 2024, following 4% growth in 2023, but was projected a 4% decline for 2025 and a -5.5% for 2026.[7] These forecasts are largely attributed to the decrease in oil production caused by re-established US sanctions in 2025, as crude oil accounted for 25% of GDP in 2025 (OVF, 2025). Nevertheless, even small recovery is surprising turn compared to the previous eight years, when Venezuela's gross domestic product dropped by more than 75% according to the estimations – this represents the largest decline in the past 50 years for a country not involved in war (Telesur, 2022). Regarding oil production, according to OPEC, Venezuela produced only 527,000 barrels of oil per day in September 2021, corresponding to an 82.9% decrease in oil production capacity compared to 2013 levels, when Venezuela had the capacity to produce nearly 3 million barrels of oil per day (Ramirez, 2021). In order for emissions to increase, new wells and infrastructure upgrades are needed.

The state oil company PDVSA – being totally unable to sustain production – went through a major corruption scandal in 2023 (Voz de América, 2023). More than 50 officials and businessmen were arrested in an anti-corruption operation targeting the oil company and other related government bodies, which investigated missing oil payments and cryptocurrency transactions. Oil shipments worth billions of dollars left the country under the table, that is, without official payment, and it is estimated that PDVSA accumulated more than 21 billion USD in unpaid invoices. The sanctions introduced during the Trump administration had forced Venezuela to export its oil through illegal intermediary networks and with price discounts. Countries disregarding the sanctions – China, Russia, Iran, and India – became Venezuela's main buyers, thereby helping the regime survive. At the same time, the Venezuelan economy did not grow to the expected extent, which Maduro attributed to corruption related to oil revenues. The scandal led, among other consequences, to the resignation of the powerful and influential oil minister, Tareck El Aissami. Holding

officials accountable for corruption is not common in the country; however, Maduro is suspected of using the campaign to sideline political rivals, consolidate his power, and maintain control over the industry that almost exclusively provides the export revenues of a country struggling with severe economic difficulties.

The Maduro government's relaxations of the currency regulation have led to de facto dollarization, and the stronger acceleration of inflation since September 2022 can bring about the danger of hyperinflation – again – for the Venezuelan economy (DW, 2023). Due to fearsome hyperinflation, a total of 14 zeros has been cut from the national currency over the past 13 years (Bata-Balog, 2021). By 2022, the IMF is announcing a further 2,000% rise in consumer prices, which is certainly unsustainable with a minimum wage of USD 1.87 a month (OVF, 2021). Nevertheless, by 2023, Venezuela has somehow managed to emerge from the spiral of hyperinflation, its inflation rate is no longer the highest in Latin America since Argentina has recently set new inflation records. In 2023, price growth fell below 190% according to data from the Venezuelan Central Bank, whereas in 2018 it had exceeded 130,000%, thus these circumstances remained extremely damaging both to the population's consumption capacity and to the functioning of businesses.

As Venezuela is suffering from deep economic decline, social discontent is tangible, since power outages, shortages of food and medicine, high unemployment, low wages, and persistent difficulties in access to education and healthcare are all common. Even though formal employment has been able to increase in recent years, the ratio of those working in the informal sectors is still extremely high (48%) (AlertaVenezuela, 2025). Meanwhile, the unemployment rate rose from 56% 2020 to 58% in 2021 and is expected to further surge to 60% in 2022, according to a Washington-based organization (IMF, 2022). Since March 2022, both the minimum wage and state pensions have been frozen at 130 bolivars, which was close to 30 USD at the time, but calculated at the official exchange rate today it barely reaches 4 USD (Kolster, 2023). Venezuelans need 112 times their minimum wage in order to access the basic food basket containing essential goods, as the price of one liter of milk ranges between 3 and 4 USD (UNICEF, 2023). Although the government has been trying to supplement low incomes with bonuses, it is rather the remittances sent home by diasporas that help survival, but neither can they provide secure protection for those who remain in the country. 25% of families expect remittances every month, averaging around 150 USD (Zambrano, 2023). Meanwhile, the de facto dollarization of the economy continues to persist. More than 70% of merchants set their prices in dollars, and although dollarization has helped stabilize the Venezuelan economy, the government is seeking ways to abandon the use of the dollar as a commercial currency, since it does not wish to lose the ability to regulate the currency and manage the exchange rate.

Also, the budget deficit is significant, and the government debt-to-GDP ratio was already well above 300% in 2021 (Statista, 2021). More than two-thirds of Venezuela's foreign exchange reserves are in the form of gold, which is not only difficult to sell but also to access due to various sanctions. The British Supreme Court has blocked Maduro's access to 1.95 billion USD (GBP 1.4 billion) in gold held in the Bank of England (BoE), which accounts for about 15% of Venezuela's foreign exchange reserves. The United Kingdom feared that Maduro would not use its foreign exchange reserves to fight the epidemic, as he claimed, but to pay off its foreign allies for supporting its regime. For similar reasons, the IMF also withdrew 5 USD billion in special drawing rights and aid from Venezuela to support emerging and low-income countries in tackling rising debt and COVID-19.

On the meantime, 94% of households in Venezuela are malnourished, and after reporting losing on average 11 kilograms in body weight (Sequera, 2018), the population that are living in extreme poverty – three out of four Venezuelans (77%) – have reduced their food consumption by a further 7% compared to 2020 (ENCOVI, 2021). According to the national survey of ENCOVI, poverty in Venezuela shrank from 65.2% in 2021 to 50.5% in 2022 (became moderated for the first time in seven years), yet the income inequalities had escalated. Venezuela struggles with the largest inequalities in the continent, the poorest 10% live on only 8 USD a month. Approximately 400,000 people belong to the elite, 4.5 million represent the middle class, and there are 21 million who are poor. 10% of Venezuelans retain 40% of the national income (Singer, 2021).

According to the government's narrative U.S. sanctions are responsible for poverty and virtually all of the country's troubles. Even though the embargo does worsen the economic situation, the problem – as it was elaborated in the previous chapter – is much more the result of a flawed economic policy of domestic origin and primarily based on oil dependence. Besides the embargo, the COVID-19 pandemic also deteriorated opportunities. Venezuela's vaccination campaign was behind most countries in the region. The government was (supposedly) using every possible source to fund vaccinations, let it be frozen funds, gold or even oil. Vaccines from its allies Sputnik V (Russia), Sinopharm (China) and Abdala (Cuba) began arriving in the country in February 2021, followed by several shipments via the World Health Organization (WHO) COVAX mechanism (with several months of delay). Official figures turn out to be contradictory, although on the last day of December of 2021, President Maduro announced a 90% level of immunity. Economic growth in the future will depend heavily on the epidemic, but challenges to treat COVID-19 include a weak health care system, an exodus of skilled health personnel, and an unreliable power and water supply (Soltész, 2020).

3.3.2.3 Geopolitical Context and Foreign Policy

As for Venezuela's 21st century foreign relations, they have been characterized by cooperation with states traditionally in conflict with the United States; Cuba, Iran and Turkey, and Venezuela's two largest creditors, Russia and China. These actors have an interest in the survival of the current government – at least for the time being – so their goal is to at least keep the suffering country breathing (Pál, 2018). The latter two have not backed out from the socialist leader as a result of the Washington sanctions aimed at overthrowing Maduro's system of government, which also penalized third countries that supported the regenerating regime. Russia is Maduro's most important geopolitical ally. Linked along common anti-imperialist interests, The Maduro government has signed several strategic partnership agreements with Moscow and Beijing, promising cooperation in the energy, defense, and financial sectors, for instance a new 10-year program of cooperation with Russia, called "Agenda 2021-2031", or the "Treaty on Strategic Partnership and Cooperation" (*Tratado de Asociación Estratégica y Cooperación*) ratified in September 2025, which expanded defense-industry cooperation and joint military exercises. China is much more pragmatic, mainly interested in Latin American trade in raw materials – Venezuela's most important trading partner – who has recently been more cautious about investment and financing projects. Ever since the beginning, Cuba was a supporter of building a corrupt system of relations that ensured the concentration of power. In exchange for oil, it provided services in the fields of health and education, as well as military and intelligence services. Just like Iran, which is taking part in rebuilding Venezuela's deteriorating oil infrastructure. In July 2025, Tehran and Caracas renewed their oil-barter agreement, under which Iran receives Venezuelan crude oil in exchange for gasoline shipments and refinery technology.

However, on the other side of the world, Russia – Venezuela's greatest ally – attacked Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and consequently, various sanctions policies had been added to the agendas of the United States and the European states: besides the measures against the Russian economic and financial sectors, sanctions were introduced against its oil and natural gas exports. Washington's perception rooted in the Cold War was reinforced, whereby Russia's Latin American allies can mean a serious security threat in the case of the escalation of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict – risking even an impending Third World War. Thus, at the beginning of March 2022, the highest-level summit of the past years took place between the two countries, where the American officials were persuading Venezuela to distance itself from Moscow. Another reason of the rapprochement was that the decision makers of the White House marked Venezuela as the potential substitute source for the Russian oil, but the idea of the improvement of

relations with the South American country in exchange for oil appeared even in the Europe. Soon, the US started negotiations with Venezuela on the easing of the punitive sanctions that had been introduced in 2019 with the aim to overthrow the current regime. The talks turned to be successful as the Italian Eni and the Spanish Repsol oil companies obtained a special consent from the American Department of State to import, and at the end of the year, the PDVSA, the Venezuelan national oil company and the American Chevron energy corporation agreed on restarting the operations in Venezuela (El Damanhoury, 2022). In January 2023, shipping began according to the conditions set by the US.

At the same time, however, Maduro has no intention to cease existing connections with states hostile towards the US such as Russia, Iran or China that so far provided support to the regime to survive. Putin counts on Maduro's advocacy since the Russian presence in Venezuela is part of the discourse causing tensions with the West. This was well reflected by Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov's Latin American tour that included Cuba, Nicaragua, and a meeting with Maduro. During the latter, they discussed the strong military cooperation between their two countries and later negotiated with Sergey Lavrov Russian foreign minister about the possibility to access Venezuelan reserves stored in Russian banks and frozen by the US. Initially, the Venezuelan president ensured the Kreml about his complete support, stressed the responsibility of the US and NATO in the escalated situation on the Ukrainian border, what is more, he even offered military assistance. In the light of the American opportunities, however – similarly to other Latin American states – the Venezuelan leader started to keep distance from the Ukrainian war; for instance, he did not vote against the UN resolution condemning the Russian aggression and called on the two parties to initiate dialogue and find a peaceful, diplomatic solution. In any case, it is evident how Venezuela is trying to take advantage of its opportunities on both sides during the Ukrainian conflict (Bata-Balog, 2022b). With the start of the new year of 2023, Maduro, keeping his allies by his side, proposed the establishment of a new, regional, Latin American/Caribbean economic bloc with relations to China and Russia (Devonshire-Ellis, 2023) and in the course of the summer, he signed a 20-year cooperation plan with Iran (Reuters, 2022).

Despite this ideological loyalty, however, a forced marriage between Caracas and Washington was nevertheless concluded within the nexus of oil vs. democracy in 2023. Indeed, Washington's willingness to promote democratization toward the South American country waned with the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the sanctioning of Russia. Indeed, the Biden administration designated Venezuela as one possible substitute to take over the crude oil previously supplied by Russia. Thus, the "maximum" economic pressure aimed at removing the regime has – for the time being – been sacrificed

in exchange for stabilizing oil prices that had soared as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war. On October 18, the United States (temporarily) eased the sectoral sanctions against Venezuela that had been in force since 2019, after the Caracas regime and the opposition signed the Barbados agreement.

As a result, Venezuela's oil production jumped significantly in June after Chevron, thanks to a US license, began importing Venezuelan oil (Parraga – Guanipa, 2023). The activity of the energy sector continued to increase as news of the opening prompted previously banned multinational companies to line up in order to gain access to Venezuela's vast oil and gas reserves. Following the agreement with Chevron and later with the Spanish Repsol, one of the most significant deals in 2023 was the reactivation of operations by the French company Maurel & Prom (Vaz, 2024). The easing of sanctions allowed these companies, which already had joint ventures with the Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA, to expand production and exports. Hungary also did not remain idle in rebuilding its cooperation with Venezuela in exchange for crude oil and LNG, that is, liquefied natural gas. Taking advantage of the international opening toward Venezuela, at the beginning of November Péter Szijjártó visited Caracas together with representatives of MOL and the MVM Group, where discussions were initiated on the possibilities of imports (Hungarian Government, 2023).

However, as a result of the electoral fraud, The European Union renewed and expanded targeted sanctions against officials of Maduro's regime, as well as newly elected U.S. President Donald J. Trump reinstated the sectoral sanctions policy aimed at destabilizing Venezuela. Suspending the concessions in January 2025, Trump rejected the extension of the exemptions granted to Chevron and several European companies (e.g., Repsol, Eni, Maurel & Prom), which had previously allowed these firms to continue oil and gas production in Venezuela without violating sanctions. Then, with a presidential measure adopted on 24 March 2025, he ordered the application of an additional 25% tariff against countries purchasing Venezuelan oil. However, the anticipated collapse did not occur, because the shortfall was quickly compensated by Asian demand, as China and India absorbed a significant share of the volumes previously contracted by European companies, often at discounted prices.

In July, though, Chevron received a new license, which allowed a limited amount of oil to flow once again toward the United States. The license emerged as part of a prisoner exchange agreement, although the step was (once again) interpreted primarily as a pragmatic energy-market decision, focusing on American consumers and the stabilization of fuel prices.

In Trump's 2025 rhetoric, the anti-drug discourse served as a key framing device; by referring to the transnational criminal organizations Tren de Aragua and the Cartel de los Soles, Venezuelan migration was constructed as a security and public-order risk, thereby legitimizing the tightening of immigration control and the acceleration of targeted deportations. According to Washington, the *Cartel de los Soles* ("Cartel of the Suns") is led by Maduro and his inner circle – primarily high-ranking military officers. It is considered responsible for the way corruption, criminality, and drug trafficking embedded within the structures of the Venezuelan state destabilize the region and pose a threat to the United States. In February 2025, the US Department of State officially designated the Tren de Aragua gang as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, citing its "violent" and "extensive criminal activities" and warning that its expansion threatens public security in the United States and other Western countries (Department of State, 2025).

The growing migration pressure, the start of deportations, and the transfer of political prisoners were discussed on February 1, 2025, by President Maduro and the White House's presidential envoy for special missions, Richard Grenell. They agreed on the repatriation of undocumented Venezuelan migrants deported from the US – including alleged members of Tren de Aragua – as well as the release of six Americans detained in Venezuela. On February 10, approx. 190 Venezuelan nationals returned home, followed by another flight arriving in Caracas on February 20, with 177 Venezuelan migrants, who had previously been held in a migration facility established at Guantánamo Bay.

Deportation of Venezuelan nationals directly to Venezuela was already initiated by Washington in 2023. Efforts aimed at reducing migration at the United States' southern border are not new; however, the step represents a significant political shift (Alvarez, 2023). The United States had previously considered Venezuela unsafe for the return of migrants because of the conditions prevailing in the country, after experiencing record numbers of Venezuelan migrants crossing the US–Mexico border, Washington changed its position and resumed deportations. This policy shift may also imply the de facto recognition of the Maduro regime, since the resumption of deportation flights required direct coordination between the US and Venezuelan authorities.

During a July 2025 prisoner-exchange agreement, Maduro released ten additional American detainees, while nearly 200 Venezuelan nationals returned from a prison in El Salvador after being deported from the United States under a presidential order invoking the Alien Enemies Act of 1798. According to the procedure based on this wartime law – which served as the legal basis for the Trump administration's 2025 Venezuelan deportation program – individuals identified as members of Tren de Aragua were classified as enemy aliens and therefore could be deported without full legal proceedings. The decree

triggered intense legal and media debates throughout the year, and although internal security screening was tightened, the targeted deportations continued.

By September 2025, relations between Caracas and Washington had become even more strained after the U.S. government deployed military forces to the Caribbean in order to intensify the fight against drug cartels. On September 2 and again on September 15, the United States military launched attacks against two Venezuelan vessels. At least eleven people were killed in the first strike and three in the second. Vladimir Padrino López, Venezuela's minister of defense, accused Washington of attempting to legitimize its military operations in the region under the pretext of counter-narcotics efforts, which he argued should undoubtedly be considered attempts to overthrow the regime. In response to the American interventions, Maduro declared that the country was on "maximum alert," strengthened national defenses along border and coastal areas, and ordered the mobilization of approximately 4.5 million civilian volunteers. By the end of 2025, the US maintained several warships near the Venezuelan coastline and roughly 4,000 US Marines in the region, while F-35 fighter jets and MQ-9 Reaper drones are stationed in Puerto Rico.

States in the region have expressed concern about the intensified American military presence and view it as a potential risk to the preservation of regional peace. The CELAC convened an extraordinary meeting, where Venezuelan foreign minister Yván Gil warned that the U.S. campaign against drug trafficking represents a "false narrative." He denied the existence of the *Cartel de los Soles* and rejected accusations that the Venezuelan government is involved in narcotics trafficking networks (PSUV, 2025). Several Latin American governments also emphasized that a Syria-like intervention in the region must be avoided at all costs.

Although Latin America is famous for its oversupply of **regional integrations**, it is also clear that the international community remains divided on how to respond to the Venezuelan crisis and the scenarios it sees for resolving it. For instance, we suspect the deficiency of the Lima Group – formed in 2017 to guarantee the peaceful resolution of the Venezuelan crisis with the signing of 12 Latin American nations, – with Argentina announcing its departure in March 2021, undermining the regional bloc's policy of isolating Venezuela, saying it "led to nothing" (Reuters, 2021). Meanwhile, Maduro's anti-imperialist rhetoric that constantly blames external interference is, in fact, working, and in the case of sanctions, it is not entirely unfounded, as economic pressure is indeed a kind of intervention tool (Városi, 2021).

The underlying motive of the Venezuelan politics has been nothing else than the legitimization and strengthening of the regime both domestically and internationally. In the

past, – as mentioned above – Venezuela was the main driving force of the regional organizations, but during the crisis that peaked under Maduro it has become isolated.

Over the past years, Venezuela has likely benefited from the leftward turn that has unfolded in Latin America. The new **"pink tide"** presents an excellent opportunity for Maduro to end his international isolation and gain legitimacy as more and more left-wing presidents and governments come to power across the subcontinent. The term *pink tide* refers to waves of left-leaning governments that have periodically emerged in Latin America since the late 1990s, beginning with Hugo Chávez's rise to power in Venezuela and later including several other countries in the region (see Chapter 3.2.1). For Venezuela, probably the most significant – and also the least expected – turn came with the Colombian election results. After several decades of conservative administrations, Gustavo Petro, the former fighter of the M-19 guerrilla organization, was chosen as the first leftist president of the South American country in June. An important point of Petro's campaign was the normalization of the diplomatic and economic relations with the government in Caracas. Since 2015 tensions had emerged between the two countries, which soon turned into hostility due to two main reasons. On the one hand, Washington's most important ally in South America, Colombia did not accept Maduro's electoral victory in 2018, and on the other hand, the Uribista administration accused Maduro that he cooperated with the guerrilla groups that had been fighting against the Colombian government for years. Nevertheless, time has brought the political will to restore the – mutually beneficial – bilateral relations. Following the reopening of embassies, on September 26, 2022, the two countries announced the opening of a key border crossing point for trade purposes after seven years of isolation, which can enable the economic development of the neighboring areas and can lead to the establishment of security and peace (Alsema, 2022).

So, after Colombia elected Petro and Brazil witnessed the return of Lula da Silva to power, Venezuela's most important interregional diplomatic and economic relations became normalized. The right has therefore increasingly been pushed into the background, although during 2023 Argentina elected a right-wing libertarian politician as president in the person of Javier Milei, while in Paraguay the candidate of the well-known conservative Colorado Party also won the elections.

However, with the leftward shift, the desire to revive regional integration initiatives has also increased again, with Lula in particular striving for greater integration within the region. In May, the leaders of twelve South American countries gathered in Brazil, during which the Brazilian president attempted to revive the regional bloc previously known as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), which had earlier been created together with the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and Argentine president Néstor

Kirchner in 2008, taking advantage of the first "pink tide" to promote regional cooperation. Maduro not only received an invitation to the summit, but was also warmly welcomed by Lula, who, while welcoming the renewed cooperation, assured Maduro that the Brazilian leadership supports Venezuela's accession to BRICS. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has officially declared its intention to join the BRICS group, which brings together Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, and which decided on the admission of new members at its summit held in the second half of August. Although Venezuela was not among the selected countries on this occasion, Maduro was hoping that his country may become a member state in 2024 and thus actively participate in the global struggle against the US-led system of economic hegemony.

After an eight-year hiatus, the summit of the EU and CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) was held again in Brussels on 17–18 July 2023, during the Spanish rotating presidency. The leaders of the Union and the Latin American states gathered primarily for the purpose of economic cooperation, but in the changing global geopolitical environment the meeting also had political motivations: the EU is seeking allies in connection with the war in Ukraine. The overseas heads of state arrived in the hope of a free trade agreement, as the CELAC countries aim to target the European market, while the EU seeks access to the critical raw materials of South American countries in order to reduce its dependence on China. However, the central topic of the meeting became the condemnation of Russian military aggression and support for Ukraine. The declaration prepared by the EU was rejected by the Latin American countries, which requested significant modifications. In the case of Venezuela this is not surprising, as it did not vote for the UN resolution condemning Russia either. The Latin American countries were so unwilling to focus on the Russian-Ukrainian war that they even rejected the participation of Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the event.

The inability of regional organizations to adopt a coherent and effective stance toward the Maduro regime not only exposed the limits of Latin American regional governance but also contributed to the persistence of the Venezuelan crisis, whose most visible consequence has been the unprecedented scale of outward migration from the country.

Nearly one third of Venezuela's population seeks refuge and livelihood abroad. The number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants has reached nearly 7.9 million (UNHCR, 2025) and after the elections a further 43% of surveyed Venezuelans reported considering leaving the country (Human Right Watch, 2024). The cross-border exodus is testing the entire Latin American region (see next chapter), as the majority (85%) have settled within the region. Host countries in the region (Colombia, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador) have attempted to regularize the status of Venezuelan migrants by issuing temporary

residence permits, while the Washington administration announced that from April it will not extend the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) granted to approximately 607,000 migrants from Venezuela (Amaya – Batalova, 2025).

Another matter of the Venezuelan foreign politics was unfolding by the end of 2024, when international press was filled with reports of the Venezuela–Guyana conflict, suggesting that war between the two countries was imminent. The question of the long-disputed territory resurfaced after Venezuelan voters overwhelmingly supported, in a referendum, the creation of a new state in the oil-rich Essequibo region, which borders Venezuela but is currently administered by neighboring Guyana. Guyana accused the government in Caracas of preparing the annexation of Essequibo through the December 3 referendum, describing the move as an "existential" threat. The referendum asked Venezuelans whether they supported establishing a Venezuelan state in the disputed Guayana Esequiba territory and granting Venezuelan citizenship to its inhabitants; the government claimed that more than 95% of voters supported the proposal.

Would Venezuela attack Guyana in order to seize the oil-rich territory? For several reasons this appears unlikely. The tensions surrounding the land – which constitutes roughly two-thirds of Guyana's national territory – are more plausibly interpreted as a domestic political maneuver. Analysts suggest that the referendum primarily served to divert public attention from Venezuela's internal political and economic problems (Vogel, 2023). Indeed, it was Maduro's "joker card" for the 2024 elections, because by escalating the dispute, he could have push tensions to the point where the declaration of martial law might lead to the suspension of the elections (Rincón, 2023). In any case, Maduro and Guyanese president Irfaan Ali agreed to refrain from escalating the conflict, signaling a willingness to avoid a direct military confrontation despite the rising tensions.

3.3.2.4 Trends, Future Scenarios and Conclusions

Venezuela's future simultaneously contains significant opportunities and serious risks. The country's vast oil reserves could theoretically provide a foundation for economic stabilization; however, the sustainability of production is constrained by technological backwardness, the lack of foreign investment, and the sanctions environment. Despite repeated promises by the governments of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro over the past twenty-five years to diversify Venezuela's economy, the country remains almost entirely dependent on oil, which accounts for around 90% of export revenues. As a result, the instability of global oil markets generates deep economic vulnerability, since national revenues remain exposed not only to market fluctuations but increasingly to political pressures as well.

Monitoring the situation of the South American country struggling with crisis on top of crisis, one could speculate about the fall of the 21st century socialism. Although the eventual fall of Venezuelan socialism is expected, it seems that neither the US nor the economic crisis nor the epidemic could force the country to its knees (Vogel, 2021). Instead of weakening Maduro, there is a risk that the combined strength of the latter obstacles had given his government more influence over the population by directing vital welfare programs (such as monthly food distribution). Furthermore, events of the past years can lead to a different conclusion about Venezuela that can emerge from the Russian–Ukrainian conflict with renewed strength and can win over the newly elected, leftist presidents in the region to its side.

Indeed, Venezuela's geopolitical significance in terms of great-power balances is likely to increase over the coming decades. As long as Russia and China perceive Venezuela as a geopolitically relevant foothold that can serve as a counterweight to the United States within the Western Hemisphere, they will continue to support the South American regime. However, the good-old socialist Venezuela will probably see tense and unpredictable relations with the US, where sanctions will remain an essential instruments of pressure, although they may be eased if developments in the oil market or shifts in U.S. political priorities require it. However, – as mentioned before – the illegal system seems to be well adapting to the new circumstances, the question arises as to whether the sanctions have been effective. In the face of further U.S. sanctions, the Venezuelan economy in short time could suffer such catastrophic damage that it will be terribly costly to repair – if at all future recovery is among the goals set. Also, while maintaining sanctions may be politically justified, they also impose an increasing humanitarian burden on ordinary citizens. As a consequence, the emigration rate of the country of 28 million will continue to rise, which could destabilize the region as a whole.

From the perspective of late 2025, several possible scenarios can be identified regarding Venezuela's political and economic trajectory, however the likelihood of any outcome remains largely unpredictable.

Democratic transition and gradual consolidation:

Due to the severe legitimacy crisis in Venezuela, the prospects for a short-term and peaceful democratic transition are extremely limited**,** as the political process has been moving in the opposite direction. Democratic institutions function largely only in a formal sense, and the elections held over the past year have repeatedly undermined the minimum guarantees of transparency, fairness, and legality. It is difficult to imagine a situation in which

the opposition and the government would reach an agreement on the transfer of power through genuine dialogue, whether under internal or external pressure.

The regime – relying on a combination of corrupt but loyal military elites, political patronage networks, foreign alliances, and targeted social benefits – has so far resisted both internal and external pressure. However, the scenario may change. While Biden paused maximum pressure politics, the Trump administration has made it clear that it is serious about the overthrow of the regime**.** Although the strength of Chavismo appears to be weakening, the criminalization and systematic marginalization of the opposition and social movements remain major obstacles to democratic change and to the fragmentation of the regime.

Nevertheless, hope may emerge if several conditions converge: if the opposition manages to achieve internal unity, if a significant part of the military and security forces were to rebel, and if international pressure remains consistent and coordinated. The deepening economic and humanitarian crisis also works against the regime and – though regrettably – may eventually force Maduro to make compromises.

Status quo – Long-term authoritarian stability:

A much more likely scenario is the "status quo" scenario, as the political balance of power is increasingly shifting toward authoritarian consolidation. The regime is internally stable, externally supported, while society remains largely demobilized. The leader of a country that has long been in crisis has so far demonstrated that, if sufficient natural resources, geopolitical partners, and internal control mechanisms are available, it is possible to survive for decades on the margins of the international order.

Although US economic pressure has paralyzed several of Venezuela's foreign trade channels, it has nevertheless failed to bring about the collapse of the regime. While Washington continues not to recognize Maduro's legitimacy, it may ultimately be forced to reckon with the persistence of the status quo. On the one hand, fluctuations in global commodity markets and concerns over energy security periodically compel pragmatic engagement; on the other hand, the widely advocated democratic solutions require diplomatic dialogue as a necessary condition.

The legacy of the Monroe Doctrine still evokes, in many Latin American societies, historical memories of great-power influence and violations of sovereignty. When the United States imposes political sanctions or increases its military presence in the region, this can generate strong nationalist reactions and societal resistance. The Maduro government has long used US pressure as a nation-building narrative, portraying the US as an external enemy that legitimizes power concentration and repression while simultaneously

providing an explanation for economic failures. In this sense, the maintenance – or even escalation – of the conflict may bring certain domestic political advantages to the regime.

The Monroe Doctrine historically framed Latin America as a sphere of US strategic interest, which has often been perceived in the region as a form of hegemonic influence over its "backyard," shaping long-standing sensitivities toward external intervention.

Military escalation or coup d'état:

Although the campaign promise of the second Trump administration was to reduce US involvement in international military interventions, the military buildup in the Caribbean was not expected – yet it nevertheless occurred. While official communication from the White House frames these actions as part of the war on drugs, many observers raise the question of whether preparations for a potential intervention may be underway. The assumption is not entirely implausible, as the scale of the deployed forces appears remarkably substantial and arguably excessive for counter-narcotics operations. A regime-change invasion, however, remains unlikely. An open military intervention in Venezuela would carry significant short- and medium-term risks – human, regional, and geopolitical – and therefore most experts argue that the current situation should not be interpreted as conventional military warfare but rather as a demonstration of deterrent power and political pressure.

The United States significantly increased its naval and air presence in the Caribbean during 2025 as part of operations officially targeting drug trafficking networks, deploying warships, aircraft, and thousands of military personnel near Venezuela. A direct military action would pose serious domestic political, budgetary, and electoral risks for the Trump administration, while also raising the possibility of military reactions from allied powers. Increased involvement by Russia and China would further expand the geopolitical dimension of the conflict and prolong instability. One can imagine a Venezuela without Maduro. Yet paradoxically, the greatest danger of the Venezuelan crisis may not be the persistence of authoritarian rule but rather the possibility of uncontrolled state collapse. The Maduro regime is held together not by social cohesion but by forced loyalty among competing elite groups**.** If this internal balance were to suddenly collapse – whether due to a failed intervention, a coup, or Maduro's death – the resulting political vacuum could quickly become a regional security threat, as a fragmented state dominated by armed groups could descend into chaos.

The prospects for meaningful political change remain limited, and it remains uncertain whether internal political pressure (from the opposition and civil society), together with the international community, will be able to induce changes that allow for more

viable and legitimate governance. The period leading up to the presidential elections – according to the current constitutional cycle, until 2031 – will be shaped by a combination of a legitimacy stalemate, persistent sovereignty challenges, and geopolitical maneuvering; however, the country's trajectory appears more like a historical dead end than a path toward recovery. But this is not the hope of the millions fleeing the country.

3.3.3 THE REFUGEE AND MIGRATION CRISIS

Venezuela used to host thousands of emigrants from the region and other parts of the world. However now, as the result of the political, economic and humanitarian crisis, massive migrant flows are leaving Venezuela; more than 6 million have fled their homes since 2015 in search of safer conditions and livelihoods. Reasons for their migration include violence, insecurity, lack of employment and opportunities, as well as food, medicine and other services. Out of these 6,041,690 million emigrants, 84%, almost 5 million Venezuelans stay within the region. The countries most affected include the neighboring Colombia (1.8 million) as primary destination, – which accepts 30% of refugees, – Peru (1.3 million), Ecuador (500,000), Chile (450,000) and Brazil (260,000) (R4V, 2025). Reports notes that, before the arrival of the pandemic, about 5,000 Venezuelans fled their country daily (OAS, 2020). It has become the largest external displacement crisis in the region's history. The OAS estimates that by 2022, the number of displaced people will reach 7 million, already exceeding the number of Syrian refugees. Nevertheless, the Venezuelan refugee crisis is the most underfunded in terms of international aid. The Syrian exodus ($20.8 billion) has received nearly fifteen times as much funding as the Venezuelan community ($1.4 billion) (Bahar – Dooley, 2021).

[*] This chapter is based on a paper previously published as:
Bata-Balog, A. (2022): Venezuelans on the move: Seeking for public policies that address the migration crisis. In.: Rucheva Tasev, H. (Ed.): *International Academic Institute Proceeding.*

Figure 12: Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region

Colombia	2.83 M
Peru	1.66 M
CARIBBEAN	
Dominican Republic	99.7 K
Trinidad and Tobago	29.5 K
Guyana	23.4 K
Aruba	11.5 K
Curaçao	6.9 K
Brazil	732.3 K
Chile	669.4 K
SOUTHERN CONE	
Argentina	174.8 K
Uruguay	25.0 K
Bolivia	8.5 K
Paraguay	3.9 K
Ecuador	440.5 K
CENTRAL AMERICA & MEXICO	
Mexico	106.0 K
Panama	57.8 K
Costa Rica	29.5 K
OTHERS IN LAC*	5.1 K

Source: *R4V, 2025*

Some Venezuelans cross the border temporary, to return with urgently needed food and medicines, while many families want to settle permanently either crossing to the neighboring Colombia or Brazil, or transiting to third countries such as Peru, Ecuador or as far as Chile. The majority of Venezuelan migrants arriving in these countries are families with children, pregnant women, elderly people and people with disabilities. Often obliged to take irregular routes to reach safety, they often walk hundreds of miles as "*caminantes*", and are likely to fall prey to smugglers, traffickers and irregular armed groups (UNHCR, 2022). In fact, they are in immediate need of documentation, protection, shelter, food and medicine.

Border closures due to the pandemic stalled migration for a while, but since the borders reopened, thousands of people have been leaving in hurry every day. However, many had to return after losing their jobs abroad in the wake of the pandemic. (For instance, 37% of Venezuelans in Colombia lost their jobs (López – Dempster, 2021). Shortages of fuel, electricity, and clean water have sparked riots and left many migrants with no choice but to flee again.

We have seen exemplary solidarity, hospitable spirit in receiving countries, however the influx has also caused tensions in host countries, especially that waves of demonstrations and social unrest has been evident throughout the continent since 2019.

3.3.4 POLICY RESPONSES TO VENEZUELAN MIGRATION FLOWS

First of all, there is a fundamental legal and policy dilemma; whether the Venezuelans leaving their country shall be considered as refugees? According to the 1951 Geneva Convention, refugees are those who must flee their country "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion". Along these lines, most of the Venezuelans do not fall within this definition as they make their decision to emigrate rather owing to the collapsing economy, the complete devaluation of the local currency, food and medicine shortages and catastrophic public security. However, the Cartagena Declaration (1984), Latin America's own regional asylum convention operates with a broader definition on refugees, under which the deprivation experienced by Venezuelans, the serious disruption of public order and the systemic violation of human rights are to be considered "valid reasons" which could, in principle, provide a legal basis for seeking international protection (Soltész, 2021). It is another question, however, of how politically desirable and feasible it is for host countries to grant refugee status to hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans. Many Venezuelans who would meet the criteria do not register for refugee procedures and instead opt for illegal or alternative legal forms of stay, which are easier and faster to obtain and allow access to work, education and social services – at least for the short term (UNHCR, 2022). Countries of LAC started to issue permanent residence permits to Venezuelan immigrants. The essence of these permits has been its temporality, meaning that governments consider the stay of Venezuelans only to be a temporary state, expecting them to return, and are interested in resolving the Venezuelan political situation as soon as possible.

Virtually every South American citizen was free to travel within the continent without a passport and visa – in possession of an ID card –, as well as the right of entry and residence was granted to Venezuelan citizens in all South American countries. However, the emerging Venezuelan exodus has put increasing pressure on this system of free mobility. As a result, since 2017, several LAC countries (such as Panama, Honduras, Guatemala, Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Mexico etc.) have stopped providing visa-free access to Venezuelans and reinstated visa requirements for those seeking to enter these countries. Also, as a consequence of the COVID-19, from March 2020, LAC countries have taken restrictive measures in order to freeze the spread of the virus (Soltész, 2020). Borders being closed, illegal migration increased, and Venezuelan migrants continued to use irregular routes for entering host countries in the region. Hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans have remained without any documentation or permission to stay regularly in nearby countries, thus lacking guaranteed access to basic rights. This makes

them particularly vulnerable to labor and sexual exploitation, trafficking, violence, discrimination and xenophobia.

As for international cooperation and assistance, the IOM migration agency and the UNHCR, UN refugee agency has a truly active role in solving the situation. The Regional Intern-Agency Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela – R4V was created for the coordination of funds and international aid, as well as the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP, 2022)[7] has been set up in order to strengthen protection of migrants' rights, improve access to services, and expand integration opportunities.

Receiving countries have had already almost five years to set up their policy responses in order to control and help immigration of Venezuelan nationals. In fact, Venezuelans have already spent multiple years in their host countries, thus their needs go beyond immediate life-saving interventions, and include access to asylum and regularization, longer-term protection, self-reliance and integration (RMRP, 2022). In the forefront of exceptional efforts and public policy initiatives stands Colombia.

3.3.4.1 The Four Most Effected Countries (Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Chile)

Colombia

Colombia stands out with its tight links of Venezuelan-Colombian migration relations. Historically, Colombia has been a country with high levels of emigration, with Venezuela being one of the main migratory destinations for its nationals. Economic migration – as a result of the oil boom – and refugee migration – owing to FARC and other guerilla groups – was also present during the second part of the 20th century from Colombia towards Venezuela. Colombia's contemporary migration profile includes not only being an origin country, but a destination, a return, a transit, and it takes part in circular migration as well. Around 2000 Venezuelans are crossing the borders on a daily basis, with the majority remaining in Colombia as the first safe country rather than continuing onward to other destinations (UN, 2021).

Currently, Colombia hosts more Venezuelans than any other country, more than 1.8 million migrants, out of which more than half (56%) has been undocumented, meaning that they have trouble accessing essential services and getting work. The Colombian government had to realize that Venezuelan migrants – whether through legal or illegal channels

[7] The RMRP 2022 brings together 192 appealing organizations – including 23 refugee- and migrant-led diaspora organizations – as well as UN agencies, international and national NGOs, members of the Red Cross movement, academia and faith-based organizations, working together with host governments, local communities, donors and refugees and migrants themselves.

– will keep coming and are likely to stay in the country,[8] therefore what they need to do is to prevent Venezuelans from falling into an irregular status and to facilitate their integration. Thus, the Colombian government made the decision to address the challenge with a proactive approach, acknowledging it as an opportunity for economic, social, and cultural growth for the country and act along its Constitution that states; "*Foreigners in Colombia shall enjoy the same civil rights as Colombians*" (Article 100). It has been addressing the migration crisis through resolute and human-centered government action, with bilateral solidarity, aiming to reduce informality (Muñoz Gómez, 2020). The government have created the Comprehensive Migration Response Policy Agenda, along which they highlight Regularization, Identification, Communication, Intergovernmental coordination, Financial support and Digital & IT support; and such pillars for Venezuelan right and responsibilities as access to health, education and to welfare & protection to vulnerable groups, economic integration and citizen security.

Having a look at the policy responses and main measures taken by the Colombian government, we see great creativity in their initiatives. First of all, the government drafted the so-called Return Law (2012), which benefited Colombians returning from Venezuela as a result of the recession. In May 2017, they announced to issue the Border Mobility Card **(***Tarjeta de Movilidad Fronteriza,* TMF), which is a transit document for those who live near the Venezuelan-Colombian border, for crossing the border for max 7 days, thus facilitating circular migration. The issuance of the Special Stay Permits (*Permiso Especial de Permanencia*, PEP) was happening in several rounds, over and over, expanding the range of the eligible. It granted renewable legal status for 90 days (max 2 years) to Venezuelans who had entered the country and the permission to work. The Temporary Transit Permit (*Permiso de Ingreso y Permanensia de Tránsito Temporal,* PIP-TT) is strictly a transit document to foreigners who need to transit through Colombia either to take a connection returning to their country of origin or going to a third country (max. 15 days). Furthermore, in January 2020, so-called Special Permanence Permits for the Promotion of Formalization were started to get issued (*Permiso Especial de Permanencia para el Fomento a la Formalización*, PEP-FF), which allows Venezuelans in an irregular situation with a formal job offer to regularize their status. Giving the opportunity for Venezuelans to apply for such cards and permits creates legal pathways for those who would otherwise cross the 2220 km long border illegally. In order to be able to take the appropriate public policy measures, further information was needed on the migrants in the country; the Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (RAMV) was a process –

[8] The borders between the two countries were officially closed between Feb. 2019 – Oct. 2021, unilaterally by Caracas, then from March 2020 till June 2021 because of the COVID-19.

realized in two months, between April 6 and June 8, 2018. Another humanitarian policy measure was that Colombia offered citizenship to 24,000 Venezuelan children born in Colombia, – as they were refused to be given Venezuelan nationality by the Maduro government – thus avoiding statelessness and making it easier for them to access education and health care (Estoy en la Frontera, 2019). The government was also trying to support their integration by the recognition of foreign certificates or by issuing Student Special Permits, as well as in June 2021, it declared the extended recognition (for ten years) of expired Venezuelan passports.

All these measures were necessary, however Colombia made a historic gesture on 8 February 2021, when President Ivan Duque announced that Colombia will grant protected status for the next 10 years (*Estatuto Temporal de Protección,* PPT) for Venezuelans who entered the country before 31 January 2021 both through official border posts and those who slipped across without registering. It will also be on offer until 1 July 2023 to Venezuelans entering the country through legal channels. It aims to legalize undocumented, irregular Venezuelan migrants, who register in the RUMV system (*Registro Único de Migrantes Venezolanos).* It is expected that the statute will support the regularization of around 1.7 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants living in Colombia, facilitating their access to healthcare and legal employment opportunities. It will also allow Venezuelan migrants in Colombia to transition from a temporary protection regime to an ordinary migration procedure, giving them ten years to acquire a resident visa. It is considered that through this initiative, with the implementation of the PPT, Colombia has given "a license to dream" to Venezuelan migrants (BBC, 2021a).

There has been an update of Colombian policy towards Venezuelan refugees, the so called "*Aún estás a tiempo*" – "You are still on time", which refers again to the regularization of Venezuelan refugees. Despite the far-reaching assistance that the Colombian government has provided to Venezuelans through the aforementioned PPT, the implementation process has presented major flaws. According to statements by the current director of Colombian Migration, Fernando García, during the RAMV registration process in 2021, the entity's website collapsed due to the great demand for the service (Robayo, 2023). A situation that, in addition to hindering the registration process of hundreds of thousands of migrants, led to the loss of information for nearly 600,000 people who are still waiting for a response from the State.

The "*Aún estás a tiempo*" strategy recently promoted by Migración Colombia shows, to a certain extent, the intention of the new government to give continuity to the RAMV registration and regularization and seeks the purpose of ordering and correcting the shortcomings and errors that have arisen in the processes (Robayo, 2023). The new program

was announced on February 28, 2023, through Facebook live and it consists of four strategies that will depend mainly on the response capacity of the migrant population (Canal Institucional, 2023). The first one is "*Valida*", which seeks to identify and locate people who have registered in the RAMV but have not received the PPT. However, the validation period was only ten days and expired on March 10, 2023, which may mean that a significant number of migrants have not been able to rearrange their status. The second strategy is "*Descarga*", enabled from January 1 to April 30, 2023. It allows those who started the regularization process but have had difficulties in downloading the PPT Processing Certificate issued by Colombian Migration. Although this certificate was created to facilitate access to services and rights and some entities have adopted it through administrative circulars, in reality it does not enjoy the necessary institutional recognition. Indeed, this has generated a wave of complaints and criticism on social networks from the migrant population. The third strategy is called "*Recoge*" and was available until April 12, 2023 for those who have not claimed the PPT that have been available for delivery for 90 days or more in one of the 12 regional offices of Colombia Migration. The measure was promoted taking into account that, as of January 31, there were 118,032 PPTs that were not taken. Those documents that yet stay after the deadline will be considered invalid, as the immigration authority will assume that the migrant has withdrawn from the process. Finally, "*Registrate*" is the fourth strategy available between April 1 and 30, 2023 for holders of a Special Stay Permits (*Permiso Especial de Permanencia*, PEP) and refugees who did not register in the RAMV before May 28, 2022.

The new strategy is an essential step forward in the realization of the regularization process of Venezuelans entering and residing within the national borders, however, the deadlines and the time limits set by the strategies were probably too short as the measures would require a more reasonable amount of time, greater than what has already been established by Colombian Migration. However, it is welcomed again, seeing that those responsible for migration management at the national and local levels are aware that the regularization of the migrant population in Colombia is necessary to counteract poverty and the levels of inequality and social exclusion in the country.

However, anti-migrant sentiments can also be experienced, as Venezuelans from time to time are blamed for lower wages, worsening working conditions, and rising crime – something that has been experienced in other receiving countries as well. As a result, Colombians' support for the welcoming policy has lessened (López Villamil – Dempster, 2021). Meanwhile, the current administration draws attention to the fact that the measures they take shall not be governmental policy, but a state policy. PPT is indeed a policy that shows shifting from temporary to permanent measures. However, criticism was formulated from

the side of the Colombian opposition, fearing that the status would give immigrants the right to vote, helping the current government in the 2022 general elections.

Peru

Peru, also with a complex migration profile, hosts over one million displaced Venezuelans, a substantial increase from 7,000 in January 2016. At the same time of being a receiving country, it is a transit state too, since on average 30% of Venezuelan migrants entering Peru are in-transit to Chile or to other countries in the region (RMPR 2022).

From Colombia, it is 32 days on foot to Peru, a destination for many Venezuelans crossing Colombia and/or Ecuador to reach the capital, Lima, – which is the main destination for Venezuelan migrants in Peru – where approximately 80% of the Venezuelans migrants and refugees have settled due to employment opportunities and government services (Action Against Hunger, 2019). At the peak of the wave, 90 000 Venezuelans immigrated to Peru in a single month (Vera – Jiménez, 2022).

In June 2018, Peru – as well as Chile and two months later Ecuador – started to request passports for Venezuelan entries, rather than ID cards. However, both exempted minors to enter, and Peru also exempted pregnant women and the elderly over 70 years old. As a result, entries decreased for a while, and even though a Peruvian judge found that it violates Venezuelans' freedom of movement (Gestión, 2018), the government, from June 2019, subsequently required passports to enter (later not necessarily valid). However, in order to avoid illegal entries, the asylum system offered an alternative option for those without passport; they could immediately apply to asylum, so that they could enter the country without passport (Selee et al., 2019). This is the reason for Peru receiving the highest asylum claims among the four selected countries.

In order to regularize Venezuelan migrant population in the country, Peru has issued the Temporary Stay Permit (*Permiso Temporal de Permanencia,* PTP), which provided one-year legal status and work authorization to Venezuelans who entered Peru through legal channels before April 2017. It was in effect from 2017 to 2020. The government has since expanded the groups eligible for this permit several times. In 2018 administrative measures allowed Venezuelans to get work permits while they were waiting for their applications to be accepted, however these permits were often not accepted by employers (MPI, 2019). After PPT, hoping that a new permit will have more scope and efficiency, the government provided another alternative regularization processes; the Temporary Residence Permit Card (*Carné de Permiso Temporal de Permanencia,* CPP) – besides the humanitarian residency permit, for asylum-seekers. The pre-registration process for renewed stay permits closed on 7 April 2021, until which deadline some 368,000

foreigners, mainly from Venezuela (98%), submitted their pre-registrations, including over 130,000 asylum-seekers (R4V, 2021).

Some organizations, however, have seriously questioned the commitment of the Peruvian government to support the Venezuelan migrants with their policy measures. For example, the Amnesty International (2020) was noting that Peru has been unwilling or unable to adequately protect the rights and dignity of Venezuelans, while the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) released a statement expressing concern about the increasing military presence along Peru's borders (R4V, 2021).

Ecuador

Ecuador, on the one hand is a country with 6.7% of its population living abroad, while on the other hand has been one of the largest recipients of refugees in Latin America even considering that it is the smallest state out of the four analyzed countries,. It welcomed Colombians displaced by a decades-long civil war, while most recently Venezuelans are also entering the country. 96% of Venezuelans state that their migratory route ends in Ecuador; while 2% continues to Peru, 1% to Chile, and less than 1% returns to Venezuela (IOM, 2021).

Originally, Ecuador has some of the most progressive human rights, migration, and asylum laws in the region, some provisions even exceed international standards for the protection of migrants and refugees (World Bank, 2020). However, new regulations were implemented in Ecuador, as migrant waves started to increase in such degree that on August 27, 2018, more than 13,000 Venezuelans crossed the border into the South American country in only 48 hours (World Bank, 2020). To curb the flows, visa requirements were introduced from August 26, 2019.

While declaring a national emergency in the area of human mobility, the government has started a regularization process in 2019 for Venezuelans who arrived before July of that year. The period to apply for the Humanitarian Visa (*Visa de Residencia Temporal de Excepción por Razones Humanitarias),* which facilitated access to social services for two years, ended on August 13, 2020, after which Venezuelan migrants already residing in Ecuador could no longer apply for a visa for humanitarian reasons. Further visa types and other categories of residence permits are available, however none of them was designed for the Venezuelan population without a valid passport not to mention that the costs exceed the budgets of many.[9] Similar to the Colombian RAMV census, the Ecuadorian government also created a registry system in order to put together an x-ray of the situation of

[9] The price depends on the type of visa (work, tourism, UNASUR, or study, among others), but the lowest value is $250 that has even increased to $450 lately.

Venezuelan migrants in Ecuador. Yet in 2022, out of the half million Venezuelans, around 62% are in an irregular situation, which makes them more vulnerable (El Universo, 2022). The spread of the pandemic and restrictive measures worsened migrants' situation. The government granted vaccination to all refugees and migrants regardless of their status, which resulted better access to health care in this regard, but access to the formal labor market has not improved as 89% of Venezuelan migrants work informally (Riofrío, 2021).

Although in mid-2021, the recently elected President, Guillermo Lasso announced a new regularization process that involves allowing Venezuelan citizens in Ecuador to legalize their migration status and work freely in the country, this step has not been made yet. Meanwhile Venezuelans residing in Ecuador without regularized status may be subject to a fine of USD 800 (the amount of two minimum wages) (Riofrío, 2021).

Chile

Chile, one of the wealthiest nations in South America with the highest proportion of foreigners (8-9% in 2022-2023), is (also) characterized by solidarity in relation to Venezuelans, since many Chileans fled to Venezuela during the Pinochet dictatorship. In 2020, the largest share of immigrants in Chile originated from Venezuela, with more than 30% being Venezuelans (INE, 2021). The illegal immigration of Haitians, another large group of foreigners in the country (12.5%), provoked restrictive policy reactions in Chile, which affected the welcoming of Venezuelans, too (Thomázy, 2020).

Chile, even though it is to be reached from Venezuela only by crossing at least two other countries, has been a destination of choice for many Venezuelans. Before 22 June 2019, Venezuelans could enter Chile as tourists without visa requirements, however under the new provisions all Venezuelan nationals are required to obtain a visa at consulates (Consular Tourist Visa) prior to their entry to the country, while their access to employment authorization and pathways to permanent residency was prohibited. Their alternative was to apply for a Democratic Responsibility Visa (*Visa de Responsabilidad Democrática* – VRD) that referred to the severe democratic crisis of Venezuela. It was valid for one year (extendable for extra 12 months) granting temporary residence permit; however the process needed a valid passport, a criminal history record, and it was too expensive for many (50 USD). For these reasons, this type of temporary residence visa tailored to Venezuelans did not meet previous expectations. Although many have applied, only 11% were accepted, due to the large percentage of rejection of applications and pending procedures (Thomázy, 2021). In November 2020, the authorities stopped issuing VRDs, then a year

later in September 2021, the Chilean consulate enabled the VRD request option again, although giving priority only to family reunification (parents, spouses and children).

Apart from VRD, there are other categories of temporary visas for foreign nationals – including Venezuelans, – (such as work visa, student visa, tourist visa etc.), but these also have a range of requirements, (such as having family ties to Chilean residents or having a professional degree) that many Venezuelans may not meet. At least, since May 2019, Venezuelan nationals are allowed to enter with expired passports or identification cards and are expected to regularize their status in Chile. However, the onerous application procedure of Chile's temporary residence visas has increased illegal forms of stays, rather than decreasing the phenomenon (Selee et al., 2019). Realizing this, the government has extended the validity date of expired Venezuelan passports, issued from 2013 onwards, until April 22, 2023.

In April 2021, Chilean President Sebastán Piñera signed a new migration law,[10] replacing the law dating from 1975. The new, unprecedented law urges deportations and makes it more difficult for migrants to adjust their status. Regularization is only possible to those who entered Chile through authorized checkpoints before March 18, 2020, when Chilean borders closed to curb the spread of coronavirus. Those who entered without authorization have a period of 180 days to leave the country, otherwise they could be arrested and deported en masse. Such deportation provisions are actually against international human rights laws in general, depriving foreign nationals the right to free movement, non-discrimination, as well as the right to request asylum. The government went on to declare that migration is not a human right, which was a big change compared to the policy of the previous government of Michelle Bachelet (Thomázy, 2021).

Chile has already started mass expulsions. Between January 2018 and January 2021, 1,401 Venezuelans were deported without examination of their status or their consent, while other sources indicate that the Chilean government intended to expel 1,800 persons by the end of 2021 and has already scheduled 15 flights to do so (R4V, 2021). As a response to these measures, UN migration agencies issued a statement expressing their concerns (OHCHR, 2021), while apparently Venezuelans themselves are even more concerned with their distressed situation, as much as during the pandemic, some of them were too anxious to approach health authorities for the vaccination as they worried to get expelled from the country – R4V partners reported (Acosta, 2021). The opening of all land border crossings since May 1, 2022, which might again increase illegal entrances to the rich South American country.

[10] Ley 21325; Ley De Migración y Extranjería por el Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública

3.3.4.2 Comparison of the Effected Countries

The mass exodus of Venezuelans has been unprecedented, turning the region's migration system upside down. By the beginning of the year, 2022, the R4V indicates some 1.8 million Venezuelans residing in Colombia, which is predicted to triple, reaching over 5.5 million very soon by the end of the year, out of which 4.8 million people are in need (RMRP, 2022). These figures alone are a good indication of the seriousness of the situation, but the Colombian case is "just" the tip of the iceberg. More than 6 million Venezuelans has left their country,. Predictions are also showing an immense increase in the case of Ecuador, where numbers might grow by one and a half times, while figures might show a 20-30% growth in Peru and Chile, hundreds of thousands of people in need (See Table 1).

Table 1: Venezuelan migrants' statistics on estimates and permits

	Venezuelan migrants and refugees (Jan. 22, 2022.)	Projections for 2022.	People in need	Residence permits & regular stay granted (until Jan. 10, 2022.)	Pending asylum claims (until Jun. 30, 2021.)	Recognized refugees from Venezuela (until Jun. 30, 2021.)
Colombia	1 842 390	5 510 000	4 830 000	730 000	30 200	778
Peru	1 286 464	1 570 000	1 700 000	362 800	531 600	3 200
Ecuador	508 935	807 000	873 000	202 500	4 000	442
Chile	448 138	562 000	481 000	636 700	2 700	18
Total	6 040 290	8 900 000	8 400 000	2 624 317	952 246	186 832

Source: Own compilation based on R4V and national policies

As flows were increasing, posing great challenges to governments, first Peru (June 15, 2019), then Chile in the same month and finally Ecuador in August responded by restricting inflows and started to request visa for Venezuelans to enter the country. All four countries require legal entry for Venezuelans, ie. all persons must enter or leave national territories through official migration control points, so that they are registered and regularized. However, due to such administrative entry requirements – the necessity of passports and different documents to apply for a visa, – irregular entries have been on the rise and will not decrease until such requirement continues to be in place (RMRP, 2022). It is because the access of Venezuelan documents have become difficult to obtain due to costs, bureaucratic slowdowns, and sometimes political retaliation from the Venezuelan administration towards receiving countries as well as emigrating nationals. The real purpose of such tightened policies is on the one hand to curb the extraordinary inflows of migrants, and on the other hand to criminalize the entry of Venezuelans and provide a legal basis for their deportation. Chile has started deportations, but the other countries have also launched repatriation programs that seek to encourage Venezuelans to leave by providing one-time cash assistance and airfare (Soltész, 2021). Since borders have been closed due

to the COVID pandemic, it also increased irregular entries, which made it again necessary to regularize migrants within the national territories. The objective of such registries, in Colombia and Ecuador for instance, was to design and establish the most comprehensive public policies for the care of Venezuelan citizens residing in the country. In fact, countries were creative in many ways in their migration policies.

Table 2: Entry requirements for Venezuelans

	Colombia	Peru	Ecuador	Chile
Requires legal entry	yes	yes	yes	yes
Requires passport	yes (expired up to 10 years)	yes (6-month validity)	yes (6-month validity)	yes
Requires visa	no	yes, since 15 June 2019	yes, since 25 August 2019	yes, since 22 June 2019

Source: Own compilation

The most asylum claims have been registered in Peru, where until June 30, 2021, some 3200 Venezuelans were recognized as refugees, while in Colombia (778) and Ecuador (442) much less was asylum an option for Venezuelans, even less it was in Chile (18). The aforementioned figures indicate the trend that – due to the underdeveloped asylum systems – instead of an asylum approach, the regulation of the entry and residence of Venezuelans has shifted towards the issuance of different special/temporary permits, while asylum has been largely inaccessible.

Peru was the first country in the region to issue a specific permit (PTP), then Colombia's PEP was similar, though the Peruvian permit lasted for a shorter period of time than the Colombian (one vs. two years), as well as it had a more limited access to public benefits, such as health care for instance, which was a huge challenge during the COVID-19 (MPI, 2019). In Chile, the so-called democratic responsibility visa was introduced, while in Ecuador, the category of exceptional humanitarian visa has been the one to regulate the residence and employment of Venezuelans.

The country that demonstrated its commitment to support the migrant population from Venezuela the most was Colombia, granting protected status for Venezuelans. With the PPT, the government hopes to create a domino effect so that other countries like Ecuador, Peru and Chile would follow suit. So did US President Joe Biden in March, fulfilling his campaign promise to grant temporary legal protection (TPS) to an estimated 320,000 Venezuelans, offering them work visa and 18 months of legal stay without deportation. In fact, migration patterns of the selected countries – Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Chile – have reflected the reactions of their governments' institutional responses.

The socioeconomic profile of Venezuelan migrants varied across receiving countries, as well as over time within the countries (Vera – Jiménez, 2022). The reports of the IOM

Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) point out that Venezuelans who migrate to the Andean countries are less educated than those who migrate to Central America and the Southern Cone of America. In accordance, it is also common that the first groups realize their trip by bus, boat, and/or foot, while the latter groups were able to make all or part of the trip by plane.

Venezuelan refugees on the move, as well as receiving countries are in a desperate need for help and international aid, especially since their situations in the context of COVID-19 has worsened. Fleeing from crisis to crisis, an unusual "double-flow" of migrants has been precedented, with thousands of Venezuelans returning home. For such moves, migration corridors and isolation centers were opened, but these flows – largely uncontrollable (Acosta, 2020) – just reinforce the desire of Venezuelans to meet with lenient, solidary and open-door migration policies in the receiving and transit countries.

3.3.4.3 Evaluation, Recommendations and Future Scenarios as Conclusion

This subchapter has given a comprehensive analysis of the policies towards the Venezuelan population on the move, highlighting the most essential measures of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Chile, although the policies taken by the receiving countries are not limited to the ones introduced. In fact, different policies are needed for such a diverse migration.

Governments of LAC in general showed notable solidarity, but migration has put significant pressures on institutions, service delivery systems, the labor market, and social dynamics in receiving areas. Research suggests that for ensuring long-term positive outcomes for migrant host countries, necessary measures include the regularization of the migrants' status, their labor integration, and their basic access to public services (Selee et al. 2019). Yet, not all countries have taken such proactive approach in dealing with the influx, but rather had a reactive plan, viewing migration as a challenge that needs to be solved and implemented strict entry requirements. This attitude could be explained by the fact that these countries – with their already limited resources and infrastructure, – are experiencing an economic turndown as a result of the pandemic, while anti-migrant sentiments have also been precedented in the host communities with increased sporadic xenophobia, often accusing Venezuelans of poverty and unemployment.

However, seeing that the migration crisis is likely continue, it is time for the region to start to look beyond the immediate humanitarian situation, and shift from temporary to permanent measures. It has become evident, that Venezuelan migrants will not be likely to return to Venezuela in the short term – until the Caracas situation is solved – thus policymakers need to create legal pathways for the migrants to facilitate their full integration.

The Colombian policy approach has been radically different from that of other countries in the region such as Ecuador, Peru and Chile, which have enacted barriers to migration. Meanwhile, the creation of temporary permits in all four countries has helped ensure that many Venezuelans have some sort of legal status. Yet some of these measures have significant shortcomings in terms of coverage, permanence, or the access of public services they allow. For instance, seeing the high unemployment and informality in all countries, the private sectors should be more involved in policy considerations, promoting the benefits of hiring Venezuelans and expanding financial service. Also, women should be explicitly targeted with policies to support childcare and family responsibilities, as 67.6% of those in need are women and children (RMPR, 2022). Another problem is that barriers to entry tend to empower migrants' smugglers and human traffickers. Such alternative means to enter the destination countries outside of legal channels is often the only choice of the already vulnerable population, who are willing to put their lives at risk.

Although managing migration flows is vital, sustainable solutions require addressing the underlying drivers of displacement, notably the political crisis in Caracas from which these challenges originate. Otherwise, if migration continues to such an extent, and the crisis is purely addressed, Venezuelan migration will put regional security and political stability at risk. Learning from past mistakes, there is a consensus that an urgent and complete change in economic policy is inevitable for oil power, however any economic reconstruction can only be dreamed of with the Maduro regime being replaced. The nature of change is difficult to predict; scenarios may include a peaceful transition, but the chances of a bloody guerrilla or civil war revolution is also increasingly (Nagy, 2019), although the political reality of international armed intervention is perhaps less likely to be reckoned with in the near future. In the short term, in all probability the "frozen crisis" will continue, in which, in the absence of democracy, Maduro deprives Venezuelans of the opportunity to shape their own future and forces many more to leave their homes.

3.4 LATIN AMERICAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

3.4.1 LATIN AMERICAN PINK TIDE

The Latin American left turn that has been unfolding through the past years. It raises the question whether we can witness a "new pink tide", with the coming to power of progressive, leftist presidents and governments in the subcontinent, similar to the first pink tide which took place basically in the first 10-15 years the 21st century.

[*] This chapter is based on an article previously published as:
Bata-Balog A. (2022): Balra át, Latin-Amerika?. *MCC Corvinák.*

The most recent and maybe most unexpected turn has a particular significance as Gustavo Petro, the former fighter of the M-19 guerrilla organization was elected as the first left-wing president of Colombia in June after a several-decade-long conservative governance in the South American country. (See the next chapter.) During 2021, even Peru and Chile as well as Honduras took a left turn: while among the two Andean states, Pedro Castillo was victorious in the first at the presidential election in June, in the latter, it was Gabriel Boric, the most left-wing president of Chile in the past 50 years, who won the elections in December, and additionally, in Honduras, Xiomara Castro leftist politician triumphed.

The reorganization of the current power relations goes back in fact, to the decisive victory of the Mexican president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2018, who became the first left-wing president of the country. The Mexican leader, who is often referred to as AMLO, using the initials of his name, was followed by the success of the moderate leftist Alberto Fernández in Argentina in 2019, and then in Bolivia, the population voted for the Movement Toward Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS), the Luis Arce-led party of Evo Morales (Morales having been removed in a coup a year earlier).

Brazil was the last standing bastion of the right-wing governments. The country with the strongest economy and largest population in South America held the second round of the presidential elections on October 30, 2022. The first round caused a huge disappointment to the left wing since a couple of days before the challenge on October 2, certain opinion polls pointed in the direction that the charismatic leader of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores)*, the defining center-left force in Brazilian politics, Lula da Silva will gain a 15% advantage over the incumbent Bolsonaro; what is more, many predicted Lula's victory in the first round (with results over 50%). In contrast, conservative Bolsonaro was lagging behind the former Brazilian head of state with a "mere" 5 percentage points (Lula received 48% and Bolsonaro 43% of the votes). Thus, Bolsonarism proved to be stronger than expected, consequently, the conservative Bolsonaro was hoping for the extension of his term in office as Brazilian voters returned to the ballot boxes on Sunday, October 30 – on a mandatory basis (voting is compulsory for all citizens aged between 18 and 70). Nevertheless, according to expectations, Lula was set to get the most votes from those minor candidates who were knocked out in the first round, and as the left won, Lula can fill the role of the charismatic leader in the regional leftist network – a role which was occupied by Hugo Chávez back in the days.

As regards the leftist wave affecting the region, we might feel the "déjá vu" since it seems that the so-called pink tide is returning, which started as an avalanche during the millennium. With Hugo Chávez's electoral victory, a characteristic shift to the left swept through the millennial Latin America, during which such leaders came to power as the

Argentinian Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, the Brazilian Lula da Silva, the Bolivian Evo Morales, the Chilean Michelle Bachelet or the Ecuadorian Rafael Correa. These progressive regimes condemned neoliberal policy, confrontedAmerican imperialism and rejected the Washington Consensus, and tried to ease the foreign dominance over the national economies. They promised to overcome the chronic poverty and inequality of the region and various saw the solution in the realization of 21st-century socialism. The governments of the "pink tide" achieved considerable results because they could exploit the explosion in the global price of the energy sources and raw materials at the time (the so-called "commodity boom"). Besides the favorable economic growth, dynamic integration efforts and cohesion could be observed, although over time the quantity of regional integrations came at the expense of quality.

The political forces that could previously represent a credible alternative for the voters sought to remain ambitious with the help of progressive social policy, yet they could not accomplish many of their undertakings before the advantageous business cycle was interrupted by a drastic decline meaning the end of the "commodity boom". As a consequence, they failed to successfully complete the declared paradigm shift, in many issues they became confronted by their own social base, and additionally, the corruption scandals that multiplied during their administration ultimately facilitated the activation of conservative forces.

As a direct reaction to the pink tide, a conservative turn followed, thus, by the mid-2010s, a kind of right-wing realignment could be observed. In the columns of *The New York Times* (May 23, 2016), the criticism of the left and the rise of the right were discussed under the title "The Left on the Run in Latin America". At the same time, examining the events of the last couple of years, we can note that the latter had little time to unfold as now we can witness a pink tide gaining new momentum. The ruling rightist governments had to face such serious challenges as the coronavirus pandemic, the ensuing economic crisis, the escalating climate change or the war in Ukraine.

In its despair, society is looking for an alternative once more, and as the current elections show, they see it in the socialist and social democratic administrations again. According to some observers, this new wave is the continuation of the pink tide of those leftist governments that got into power in the 2000s, what is more, this might be its more dominant variant.

When comparing the two defining, Latin American "pink tides", in fact, we can discover many similarities, but their characteristics hide numerous differences. On the one hand, we can see alterations among the countries that took part in the leftist hegemony of the 2000s as well as in their roles – primarily regarding Colombia's historical turn, or the

change of the "main characters" such as Mexico's importance, or Brazil's absence so far. In a certain sense, the Venezuelan regime is the uninterrupted continuation of the original South American pink tide, but under Nicolás Maduro's leadership, Chávez's Bolivarian revolution turned into a massive economic and humanitarian catastrophe. Venezuela currently has a much more controversial role in the area than in the past when the prospering country was regarded as the vanguard, the key figure of the region. This time, the Venezuelan crisis tests Latin America's new left wing. In parallel with or in contrast to the commitment to the leftist ideology, if socialist and social democratic governments do not act to resolve the underlying conflict in Venezuela, they are simply rewarding the authoritarian government for resisting demands for reform.

The return of left-wing governments to the region clearly indicates the regional rejection of US policy. Indeed, the longstanding hegemonic influence of the United States' since the Monroe Doctrine, has fostered persistent currents of skepticism and anti-Americanism within the region's political discourse (Soltész – Nagy, 2024). Joe Biden's latest Summit of the Americas, which ended in diplomatic failure, and the decreasing US influence in the Organization of American States (OAS) are obvious signs for it. The new generation of the regional political leaders concentrates more on environmental and gender issues, and while they are less interested in the common identity, cases of social justice receive more attention. It is important, however, not to generalize in relation to the policies of the countries and leaders joining the second pink tide – after all, the first pink tide was also diverse – since they essentially differ on some issues, be it democracy or minority rights.

The regional aspirations have lost their priority; the states increasingly follow economic policies related to China and to a lesser extent with Russia with rather general commercial relations, arms sales, energy deals, niche technology related to nuclear science, naval and air power displays and high-level political meetings (Szente-Varga, 2022). Engagement with China has intensified politically under the banner of South–South Cooperation (SSC) and the discourse of an emerging multipolar order, whereas economic relations are largely underpinned by China's resource demand and market-seeking strategies (Lehoczki, 2022). Indeed, the primary trading partner of many states in the region is not the US anymore but China (who, amidst the trade war with the US, gained new stimulus to further strengthen its positions in the region).

Taking into account the existing international environment and geopolitical events, the progressive governments that newly got into power may find themselves in a much more difficult position than their predecessors during the first pink tide. Since not even Latin America could put the coronavirus pandemic behind itself, the current events in the region are taking place in the "shadow" of the worsening international economic situation. Due

to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the food and energy prices have shot up and as such can potentially cause further economic upheaval, which can lead to political consequences. "And the worst is still ahead of us," – says a senior economist of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) referring to what Latin America can expect in 2023. The IMF and other economic institutions downgraded their GDP estimates for almost all countries in the region for 2023 because of inflation, which is expected to remain high, and the decline of the dollar, which batters the currencies of most emerging markets. The missing economic growth will generate further social discontent, and blaming the international economy will not help those leaders who cannot resolve the problems. Considering that nowadays the leading political mood in Latin America is – and likely will remain – anti-incumbent, the second pink tide is likely to be much shorter-lived than the first.

"There are those who just preach and there are those who act." Andrés Pastrana, former Colombian president, conservative politician, currently the president of the Centrist Democrat International, observes that the international left has an organized, unified action, moreover, in the light of the recent Colombian elections, he finds that the solidarity between the contemporary left-wing governments of Latin America is also strong. He believes that the advance of the left was made possible by the absence of an alliance between the right and the center. Whether the current wave of left-leaning governments will be able to convert electoral support into durable structural change remains uncertain, as outcomes will be shaped by domestic constraints and evolving geopolitical dynamics.

3.4.2 COLOMBIAN ELECTIONS (2022)

The South American country has concluded its closest and most unpredictable presidential elections. The second round of the Colombian elections on 19 June 2022 took place amid great tension, economic challenges, polarization and mistrust against the government. The campaign was filled with death threats and scandals and ended with the showdown of two such candidates who were competing from the two sides of the political spectrum, although both presented themselves as an alternative to the political status quo. A consensus on the necessity of change emerged; the question was whether this change will come from the right or the left. The result definitely marked a milestone for the Andean country since the elections were won by Gustavo Petro, an ex-guerrilla-turned-politician, who made history by becoming Colombia's first left-wing president. Together

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with the first Afro-Colombian vice president, Petro convinced the majority of Colombians that they represent the change the country needs.

The new president – who was sworn into office on August 7 – inherited a deeply divided nation, which relentlessly struggles with poverty, inequality, inflation as well as the legacy of a bloody war between left-wing guerrillas, cartels and the state, and is desperate for changes and reforms in the shadow of the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic. The hope of many for a better life and peace seemed to shatter under the administration of the previously ruling president, Iván Duque, but it is questionable whether the left turn can really benefit the country. Considering that the biggest winner of the parliamentary elections in March was the leftist Historic Pact (Pacto Histórico) coalition, it can be expected that the social democratic president will have a strong coalitional background in the Congress.

"It is the end of an era," stated Petro, who has replaced Colombia's conservative political establishment. The 2022 presidential elections differed from the previous ones in many respects. Four milestones mark the peculiarities of the 2022 elections, and although several conditions contributed to the Colombians' decision on that Sunday, four key factors can help to understand Petro's victory.

The constitution limits the tenure of the Colombian president to a single term,[11] therefore, the previously ruling president, Iván Duque could not be reelected. There would not have been much chance for the latter even in the absence of the law because the people wanted radical political change. This became very clear at the time of the first round on May 29, when the prospects of the country's dominant, conservative political class were ruined as the centralist, conservative candidates, such as Federico "Fico" Gutiérrez, the protégée of the ruling party, suffered defeat. Though in May, Petro confidently obtained the first place, since neither candidate had at least 50% of the votes, the two strongest competed again three weeks later.

The last-minute rise of Federico Hernández, the 77-year-old businessman known as the "Colombian Trump", was unexpected. The millionaire construction magnate – who is known as "el ingeniero" (the engineer) thanks to his architectural engineering degree – is not a typical presidential candidate in Colombia. The political outsider offered his business talent for the improvement of the Colombian economy using populist rhetoric. Hernández's – Bucaramanga's former mayor – plans remained rather obscure, however, one promise of his was clear: to overcome corruption that is characterizing the country. He

[11] Under the administration of Juan Manuel Santos, Colombia adopted Acto Legislativo 02 de 2015, a constitutional amendment that abolished presidential re-election and reinstated the "original" (1991 Constitution) single four-year term limit for the office of president.

called the political elite "robbers, thieves, scoundrels and criminals", what is more, once, in the middle of a heated debate, he slapped a municipal representative in front of cameras for allegedly accepting a bribe. Although before the round against Petro – fearing a potential left turn – the ruling party also assured him of their support, he could not overtake his challenger.

On Sunday, June 19, 2022, more than 22.6 million Colombian voters exercised their right to vote. Gustavo Petro obtained 50.49% of the votes in contrast to Hernández's 47.26%. Nonetheless, Petro defeated the right-wing aspirant only by a very narrow margin (3.1 percentage points). Though he could mobilize the majority, his drastic socio-economic reforms create fear in some sectors of the country. The economist presidential candidate – the former mayor of Bogota – fights for the elimination of social inequality, and parallelly, he proposed the transformation of the country's economic model. He would halt every new oil and natural gas development; thus, he ultimately aims to achieve carbon neutrality. American investors were worried about the statements of the presidential candidate, and the peso also considerably weakened at once since the oil is the key income source for the economy of the country. Former Finance Minister Juan Carlos Echeverry directly called the measure "economic suicide". In case of his victory, the ex-guerrilla politician promised that he would reduce the close Bogota–Washington relations: besides the renegotiation of the bilateral free trade agreement, he also intended to change the common regulation of drug trafficking. Colombia is the US' number one ally in the region as a strategic, security, anti-drug, political and trade partner, but Petro's election may be a cause for concern as it is uncertain whether the cooperation – which has lasted through several changes of administrations in both countries – will remain or decline.

4 milestones marking the election of Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez in Colombia:

Colombia's first left-wing president:	In Colombia's 200-year-long history, the political elite was practically represented by a few families and their descendants and following the establishment of the National Front (1958), the post of president was filled in turn by the two traditional parties: the liberal and the conservative. Their compromise forced out the other political actors, for instance the already strengthening leftist organizations. Although they encountered disagreements on certain issues, their governments defended the status quo, the capitalist economic model and the relations with the US. Politicians of the 20-21st centuries, who were already elected in a multiparty system, did the same. This dominance was so strong that no left-wing candidate could come to power with reformist proposals. In fact, those candidates who proved to be successful on the left side of the political spectrum and came close to power were threatened or even killed. In the course of the political history, five presidential candidates were assassinated (three of them were leftist or far-left, the other two liberal), and many more became victims to assassination attempts.

	Thus, so far, the left wing had mostly been left out of the policy-making process in Colombia. The leftist wave (pink tide) at the beginning of the 2000s, which swept through Latin America after the Venezuelan Hugo Chávez got into power, also widely avoided the country. Now, however, we can witness a new left turn in the South American region. Petro's victory in Colombia made history, though his success reflects not only the particular, leftist political paradigm shift in the region but also the failure of the previous establishment. Public concerns about left-wing politics – seeing the disastrous example of Venezuela next door – and "Petrophobia" are still very strong.
The first ex-guerrilla president:	Domestic political instability has accompanied the history of the South American country. Civil war was going on among multiple actors including the large, leftist, insurgent organizations from the 1960s, guerrilla groups, right-wing paramilitary squads, organized crime groups and the national armed forces. The woeful legacy of the civil war also affects the current conditions of the country, and the tragic decades of the armed conflict still strongly influence the Colombians' memory. As a consequence, to this day, a significant part of the population associates the entire left-wing movement with these armed guerrilla groups (such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), or the 19th of April Movement (M-19)) as well as the related drug trafficking, blackmailing and kidnapping. For many years, the political discourse has been defined by the relationship with the country's irregular armed forces. Even minor, incidental support for some armed movements meant political suicide. Yet, Petro openly admits that he was a member of the M-19 rebel group, although he claims that he never took part in armed actions. (This is rather doubtful considering that in the mid-1980s, he was arrested by the army – for possession of weapons – during the siege of the Palace of Justice, the building that houses the Supreme Court of Colombia.) In spite of this, the population is so hungry for peace (especially in the affected rural areas) that this time, the majority of society voted not against the guerrillas but for an ex-guerrilla fighter. They are pinning their hopes on Petro, who promised to completely implement the peace agreement signed with the FARC rebels in 2016 – that Duque was reluctant to do – moreover, to initiate peace negotiations with the still active insurgents. Many agree that the historic peace deal with FARC – which most Colombians rejected in a referendum, but President Juan Manuel Santos still received the Nobel Peace Prize for it – did a lot to open the door to a viable left-wing – even an ex-guerrilla – candidate, thereby breaking decades of taboos. Petro will continue his fight, so that eventually the rebel groups will clash not with weapons but in the political arena. (As did the M-19, who made peace with the government in 1990, surrendered their weapons, and several of their members entered politics democratically.)
The first Afro-Colombian vice president:	The new vice president is Francia Márquez (born 1981), an Afro-Colombian, anti-racist, feminist activist. According to experts, Petro's election would hardly have been possible without Márquez's proposed position as vice president, as she managed to legitimize Petro's campaign in the collective struggle for equality. With her Afro-Colombian origins, Márquez not only represents ethnic diversity (based on the 2018 census, almost 12% of the Colombian population identify as black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal or Palenquera), but as a woman and single mother, who has worked as a miner and domestic servant to earn her daily income, she also embodies the struggle of many Colombians. The now lawyer, who wears brightly colored Afro-Colombian clothes and jewelry, has repeatedly spoken out against illegal mining that destroys indigenous lands, and for her environmental activist work, in 2018, she received the Goldman Environmental Prize known as the green Nobel Prize. She also put Colombia's Europeanized elitism in the spotlight, won several votes from those voting against the

	traditional political mainstream and from women, the LGBTQ+ population as well as ethnic minorities. The fact that at the 2022 elections even four Afro-descendant presidential/vice presidential candidacies were possible, among whom the nation could welcome its first Afro-Colombian vice president, definitely marks a turning point in a country plagued by social inequalities and historically ruled by conservative white elites who have swept racism under the carpet.
The president receiving the most votes and breaking the record of participation:	Petro could have said that "third time is the charm". It was the third time that he ran in the presidential elections, and after 2010 and 2018, he won both rounds of the elections in 2022. The voter turnout at the time of the second round (58.1%) exceeded the participation rate of the first round (54.9%). This is the highest rate since the 1998 presidential elections, when 63% of the voters cast a vote. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres also congratulated Colombians on their propensity to vote. In the first round, Petro could collect 8.5 million votes – at that time, votes were divided among six candidates – then after the very close campaign in the second round he was able to win more than 11.2 million votes. This result made him one of the presidents receiving the most votes in the country's history.

4 factors that explain Petro's victory:

Battered economic situation:	Colombia is a developing country with a strengthening economy, one of the leading states of the region, but despite the recent, positive economic forecasts (for example, a 5.8% GDP increase was projected for the country, the strongest growth among Latin America's largest economies), there is a significant gap between such estimations and the Colombians' perception and view of their living conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic has set back the country's efforts against poverty and inequality by at least a decade. According to the official data, 39% of Colombia's 51.6 million inhabitants lived on less than 89 dollars a month in 2021. Unemployment (11.1%) and the informality of the labor sector (55%) are still extremely high. Globally, Colombia belongs to the most unequal countries and is at second place in the region (after Brazil) (based on HDI by World Bank statistics). Citizens are worried about the increase of prices and inflation (8%). Due to worsening public safety, the still active irregular armed groups, criminal organizations and cartels, economic development faces constant obstacles.
The decline of trust in the political establishment and democratic institutions:	Although Colombia has one of the most democratic and stable political systems in Latin America, while the region has generally seen a positive change concerning satisfaction with democracy, Colombia is one of those few states where trust in democratic institutions has significantly deteriorated. (Systemic) corruption is a huge problem for the country, if not the biggest: 80% of Colombians believe that corruption is widespread in the public sector. The 2022 presidential elections took place in line with the growth of distrust toward the electoral system. Errors in the preliminary results of the Senate elections on March 13 have weakened the already fragile public trust in the electoral process, and the growing violence in the country casts a shadow over democratic processes.
The crisis of the traditional political class and the deficit of Ivan Duque's popularity:	The circumstances of the elections were primarily shaped by the voters' rejection of the driving forces of Colombian politics: the political elite that has been ruling for decades and within that the so-called Uribismo, the political force that plays a decisive role due to Álvaro Uribe – who was president between 2002 and 2010 – and that overshadowed even Duque's presidency. 85% of Colombians think that the situation in the country had worsened under the Duque administration. Duque's popularity dropped to the point that before the elections, 73% of the population no longer supported him. The series of violent, anti-government demonstrations that claimed

	human lives were telltale signs of the urgent need for change. Indeed, the pandemic did not help Duque's support either.
Social media played an important part in the campaign:	In the first months of the campaign, Petro's challenger, Rodolfo Hernández was often mentioned as TikTok's king because he collected more than 500,000 followers at lightning speed on the platform. He was not only the presidential candidate with the most followers, but he also had the most "likes". Social media played a huge role in giving Hernández visibility – especially among young voters. Later, Petro also paid more attention to his campaign conducted on social media platforms, but overall, the candidates still had relatively modest online spending compared to traditional media. It is likely that the newly elected president will continue to regularly use his social media platforms to engage with the public even though the campaign is over. The Colombians are now wondering whether Petro will be able to realize the indicated reforms and the promises made for a better life.

3.5 CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Chapter 3 to be finalized at the very end, notes have been prepared…

4. CHAPTER: CONTEMPORARY MIGRATION PROCESSES IN COLOMBIA

4.1 MIGRATION PANORAMA OF COLOMBIA

Colombia, like almost all the countries in the Americas, is a country that has a long history of migration, one with specific characteristics and complexities. 21st-century Colombia can be characterized as a rapidly urbanizing middle-income country – with a population of 53.4 million inhabitants in 2025, – where declining poverty coexists with persistently high inequality and structural social tensions (IOM, 2013). Demographic and socio-economic transformations constitute the broader structural context shaping contemporary Colombian migration dynamics.

Understanding its population movements gives a sketch of its character, its joys and its pains. Analyzing and reviewing migration processes, that is, how people move and why, will give us more arguments to think about what the identity of a territory is like, how and why changes in its population occur – and in a more policy-oriented sense – how migration can be assisted. Understanding Colombia's migration dynamics is therefore essential for comprehending contemporary Latin American demographic transformations and the challenges faced by the migrants themselves as well as the region as a whole.

Colombian migration has generated a substantial body of scholarship, though comprehensive analyses remain limited in Hungarian research (Anderle, 2010; Soltész, 2014; 2016; 2021; Jancsó, 2018; 2021; Thomázy, 2021). without attempting to provide a comprehensive account; – international researches examine labor migration, cross-border forced displacement, and refugee protection gaps within the region (Ibáñez, 2009; Rojas – Ceballos, 2006) as well as internal displacements (Bello, 2006; Duarte Castro et al., 2020). International migration trends – particularly toward Spain and the United States – have been analyzed alongside migration policy development and remittances (Echeverri, 2005; Orozco, 2006; Guarnizo, 2006; Mejía, 2006; Cárdenas – Mejía, 2006; Bernal Marquez et. al., 2000; León, 2010; Medina – Cardona, 2010), while an essential part of Colombian migration research focus on return migration from the 2010s in both governance and academic research primarily linked to Venezuela (López Villamil, 2020; Díez Jiménez et al., 2021; Palacio – Botero Montoya, 2023). The Venezuelan crisis has generated complex, crisis-driven migration dynamics, involving not only Venezuelan outflows but also the return of Colombian nationals, which form the basis of this dissertation, thus a separate subchapter will focus on these patterns.

4.1.1 COLOMBIA AS A MULTI-DIRECTIONAL MIGRATION SYSTEM

Colombia occupies a unique and multifaceted position within global migration patterns, by today characterized by the coexistence of emigration, immigration, transit and return (Palma, 2015). During the last fifty years – before the Venezuelan crisis – Colombia has emerged as a country of emigration, with one of the highest numbers of the South American region. Since the 1960s, persistent political instability, armed conflict, and economic recession have compelled substantial numbers of Colombians to emigrate, initially to neighboring countries such as Venezuela, subsequently to the United States, and more recently to European destinations, notably Spain. Simultaneously, Colombia has transformed from primarily being a country of emigration to becoming an increasingly significant destination for intraregional migration, especially refugees and migrants from Venezuela after the humanitarian crisis in the neighboring country that began in 2015. Beyond this dual character – as both a major source of international emigrants and a major receiver of regional refugees – Colombia also experiences transit and return movements. Indeed, as a result of high rates of emigration in previous periods and current outflows, a huge diaspora population developed (Díez Jiménez et. al., 2021), which generally keeps tight relations with their country of origin and in many cases discards the possibility of returning sooner or later.[12] Furthermore, Colombia has the world's most severe internal displacement due to its long-lasting internal armed conflict, which has ruined public security and has forced 6.7 million people to flee their homes (UNHCR, 2023).

Colombia's geography and regional embeddedness are also central in migration processes. Its geographical location on the subcontinent – forming an entrance to the North and South – have positioned the country simultaneously as (i) a destination and first refuge, (ii) a point of departure for extra-regional migration, and (iii) a key transit territory in inter-American mixed movements (IOM, 2024).

Colombia's contemporary migration panorama is defined by the simultaneity of:

- **Large immigration inflows**: Venezuela being the most consequential and regional immigration;
- **Ongoing emigration** toward North America, Europe, and increasingly diverse regional destinations;
- **Transit dynamics** linked to the inter-American route system (including episodic reverse movements);
- **Return and reintegration** challenges for Colombians coming back (voluntary or forced returns).

In migration theory terms, Colombia illustrates how emigration and immigration can coexist within the same national migration regime, with flows responding to shifting

[12] Interview with Luz Botero (2026)

opportunity structures, social networks, state capacity, violence, and regional political–economic cycles (Massey et al., 1993; Castles – de Haas – Miller, 2014; de Haas, 2010).

4.1.2 INWARD MOBILITY

The panorama of Colombian migration is more than complex for many reasons. Without going into the history of the colonization and the age mass migration after the independence, immigration to the country has been substantial and diverse. Indeed, historical migration processes have played a decisive role in shaping Colombia's contemporary ethnic configuration, which today constitutes of the majority self-identify as being mestizo (54%), 31% European Colombians, 3% native South Americans made up of the ancestors of indigenous peoples, and 11% African Colombian, Mulatto, Palenquero, or Raizal (WorldAtlas, 2019). (Some studies even estimate higher shares of Colombia's population being of African descent (Jancsó, 2021)). Colombia's ethnic composition thus reflects the historical interaction among Indigenous populations, Spanish colonizers, and enslaved Africans. The country is home to approximately 85 recognized ethnic groups, which clearly presents its considerable cultural diversity.

However, when observing immigration of the 20th century, the census results of the 1980s indicates that there was little quantitative importance of immigration before the recent massive arrival of Venezuelans, both in absolute terms and relative to the total population of the country. The peak was somewhat above 160.000 in the 1985's census (See Table 3) (Mejía, 2020). People barely knew any foreigners moving to Colombia, much less they experienced massive flows, nor did Migración Colombia or its predecessor the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (DAS) had such demanding tasks with immigration management as they have today.[13]

Table 3: Colombian residents born abroad according to census data (per 1000-inhabitants; 1843-2018)

Census	Total population	Born abroad	Born abroad per 1,000 inhabitants
1843	1.932.279	1.160	0,6
1851	2.240.054	1.527	0,7
1912	*2.867.357	*9.052	*3,2
1928	7.851.000	35.251	4,5
1938	8.701.816	56.418	6,5
1951	11.178.850	49.659	4,4
1964	17.484.508	74.053	4,2
1973	20.666.920	82.848	4,0
1985	27.867.326	163.351	5,9
1993	33.109.840	106.162	3,2
2005	41.468.384	107.617	2,6

** Men only*

Source: Mejía, 2020.

[13] Interview with William Mejía (2025) Luz Botero (2026)

In the migratory profile of Colombia prepared by Ramírez et al. (2014) for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2014), it is mentioned that close to 110,000 foreigners reside in Colombia, which is almost 200% more than in 1999, and more than 40,000 residence permits have been granted to non-nationals seeking to do business in the country. It includes immigrants from "historic" incoming communities, such as from neighboring countries, from Europe, even some from the Asia, the Middle East or from Africa. Yet a new wave of immigration began to arrive to the South American country from the second half of the 2000s.

Several have arrived for work, for studying, or as part of being victims of illegal trafficking networks, while also many in transit to other destinations; for instance, particularly those seeking to reach to Panama using the Colombian route as a strategy to finally target the United States that is undoubtedly the most indisputable pole of labor attraction in the region (Palma, 2015). Indeed, inward-transit movements include other South American nationals as well as other extra-regional migrants in transit or seeking protection. The inter-American route via the Darién[14] has produced changing patterns, consisting of back and forth movement from Central America back toward South America – sometimes via risky maritime routes – illustrating the volatility of regional mobility systems under shifting border controls and enforcement environments (IOM, 2024). Migrant networks are beneficials in these scenarios, when families, acquaintances or even local intermediaries provide help and services such as transportation and accommodation, specific to national groups (Palma, 2015), however high risks are often associated with such journeys, especially in case of informality. The new routs of Venezuelans transiting the country to the Southern parts of the continent, or again to the US through Central America has been significant and busy in the last years. The routes through Colombia are appealing for Venezuelans as they have been granted permission to enter and depart Colombia even with expired passports. An immense Venezuelan inflow, which definitely characterizes the main inward mobility to the country will be elaborated in the upcoming chapter separately.

Besides the rather unvoluntary refugee flows of Venezuelans, the interests in entering Colombia could be associated with the idea that it is going through a moment of economic expansion, which has laundered the image of the country in the international context. But the flow of information between immigrant nodes also influences the decisions. The labor market conditions for medium and highly qualified people could be one of such attraction or the differential treatment of foreigners (positive discrimination) in the country in case

[14] The Darién Route (also referred to as the Darién Gap migration route) is an extremely dangerous migration corridor that crosses the dense rainforest region between Colombia and Panama.

they are of European and North American origin (preferred white migration from the Western Civilization).

Experiencing such inflows, Colombia does not have an institutional tradition around incoming migrations; on the contrary, a large part of the regulations has revolved around the emigration of Colombian citizens. In 2018, Migration Colombia registered the entry of 4,151,565 foreigners according to authorized activity, while it has been much lower in 2023 (1,058,594) still due to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemics (UAEMC, 2023).

4.1.3 OUTWARD MOBILITY

On the other hand, emigration potential of Colombian nationals has been increasing. From 1980-2000, emigration from Colombia was one of the largest in volume in Latin America. Colombian outward migration is characterized by three major waves. **The first significant wave** of Colombian migration occurred between the 1960s and the early 1970s, with the United States serving as the primary destination, motivated by the opportunities offered by the United States Immigration Act of 1965 (Cabrera – Rodríguez – Blanco, 2019). These waves are often portrayed as the foundational moment of the contemporary Colombian diaspora (Palma, 2015). Previous movements were already developing around the 1860s towards the US (Mejía, 2019), however this period marked the onset of a more structured and sustained pattern of emigration, with approximately 609,467 Colombians residing abroad between 1963 and 1973 (Bernal Marquez et. al., 2000). This wave also helped embed the notion of the "American Dream" within the Colombian migratory imaginary, establishing it as a powerful motivational reference for future migrants (Palma, 2015).

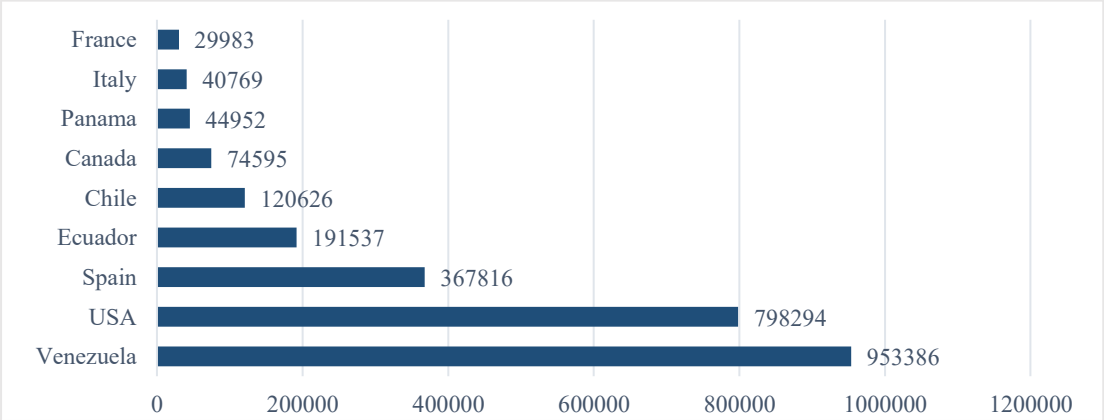
The second wave of Colombian emigration episode targeted Venezuelan – in addition to further expanding the Colombian population in the United States. While also Ecuador became a country of destination besides Venezuela following the oil boom that emerged after the 1973 oil crisis. This migratory expansion was largely driven by labor shortages – most notably in agriculture – in border zones, resulting from the outmigration of local rural populations toward urban centers (Mejía, 2012). During this period, the number of Colombians residing abroad increased from 820,615 in 1978 to 2,494,925 in 1993 (Bernal Marquez et. al., 2000). Despite this growth, migration flows stagnated due to the economic recession in Venezuela and Ecuador during the 1980s, as well as the gradual tightening of US immigration policies throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

In the 1990s and early 2000, the difficulties in Colombia, such as the fight against drugs and guerrilla and paramilitary violence, all undermined popular confidence in the country's future prospects. The civilian population, trapped in the middle of the conflict, was

forced to flee from rural to urban areas and, in many cases, to leave the country. Indeed, this **third wave** of outflows was broadly shaped by contextual factors such as the failure of the Peace Talks between the Colombian government and the FARC in 2000, the 1999 economic crisis, and the gradual rise of economic integration processes such as the European Union and Mercosur (Bernal Marquez et. al., 2000). Colombian emigration grew and did not stop, despite the notable improvement experienced since the beginning of the 2000s in terms of security and economic growth in the country, or the tightening immigration policies of North America and Europe. Since 2000, the perceived nexus between drug trafficking and irregular migration in the US, together with the events of September 11, 2001, has further hardened the United States' policy stance on immigration, evident until today. As a result, migration destinations diversified, leading to an expansion of flows toward Europe – particularly Spain – as well as toward non-traditional destinations in Latin America, as well as new destinations such as Japan, Australia, South Africa, Israel, South Korea, and the United Arab Emirates, among others (Echeverri, 2005). During the 2000s, the number of Colombians living abroad continued to rise steadily, ultimately attaining record figures with 3,378,345 Colombians recorded to be residing overseas in 2005 (DANE, 2005) and an estimated 4.7 million by 2012 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). This third wave registered the highest emigration levels in Colombia's history (IOM, 2013).

As for the most preferred destinations by Colombians, the list has been steady in the last two decades. The highest rates of the outflows went to bordering Venezuela ever since the beginning of the 1960s, choosing the oil-rich neighbor that offered a chance at work and peace. However, figures have drastically changed since the Venezuelan crises escalated and the vast majority of Venezuelan emigrants are now hosted in Colombia, accounting for some 2.8 million in 2025 (R4V). (See Colombian-Venezuelan migration nexus in the following subchapter). In absolute terms, the United States has been a principal destination of migrants from Colombia. The number of those entering/trying to enter illegally is very high; the arrest of Colombians trying to enter the States through the US southern border with Mexico has again broken records and is already at its highest point in history (Maseri, 2022). Emigration to Spain, the ex-colonial power has emerged from the beginning of the 21st century, however, the global crises of 2008 hit the Iberian country drastically, thus immigration decreased. Besides Spain, Italy and France are preferred from the European OECD countries. With respect to intraregional patterns, besides Venezuela, Ecuador, Chile, and Panama need to be mentioned – Chile exceeding Panama in the number of Colombian immigrants by 2019.

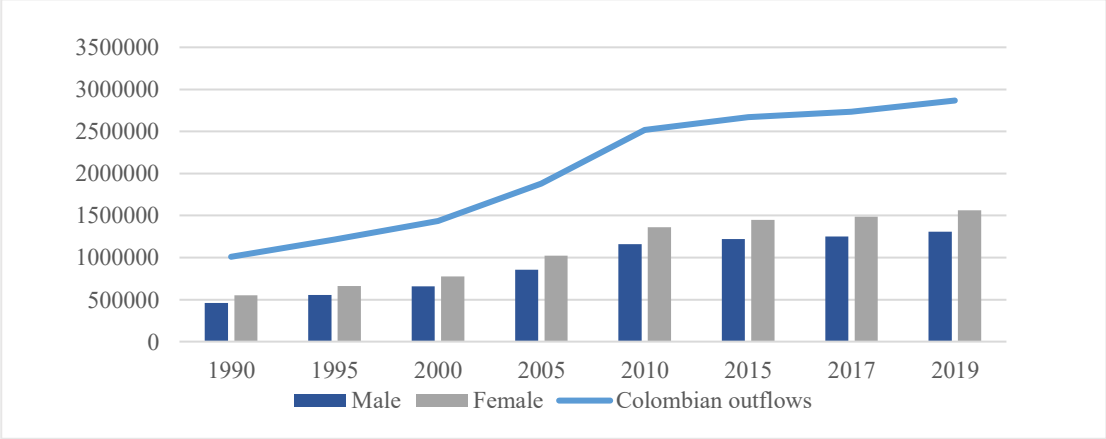
Figure 13: Destination countries of Colombian outflows, 2019



Source: UN Statistics, Population Division, International Migration, own compilation

The number of emigrants from Colombia has multiplied in the last few decades and have been steadily growing according to the UN Statistics (see Figure 14), however many more are planning to leave the country. An important element to highlight is the feminization of migration (Baeza, 2019). Concerning the gender balance, Colombian emigration is dominated by women.

Figure 14: Emigration rates of Colombia (Male/Female composition)



Source: UN Statistics, Population Division, International Migration, own compilation

Estimates according to Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia reveal that the number of Colombian nationals abroad has reached close to 4.7 million by 2025. They propose that of these 4.7 million migrants, 34.6% are in the United States, 23.1% in Spain, 20% in Venezuela, 3.1% in Ecuador and 2% in Canada. Those of the remaining percentage have chosen other, less frequent destinations, such as Mexico, Panama and Australia. This is an important number when examining diaspora related matters.

The net migration of Colombia has been negative for most of its contemporary history. Yet figures of different institutions vary in their statistics. The CIA World Factbook

shows a huge drop in the number of people leaving the country after 2009 as a consequence of the recession that directly affected Colombia (-0,68 migrant/1 000 population). Some sizable volume of emigration went to Chile for instance (Bata-Balog – Thomázy, 2020). After 2010 rates produced a slight recovery. On the other hand, UN Statistics and projections indicate a huge Venezuelan influx in the country, with net migration turning positive for the first time in long history (rates reach +4.16 in 2018). The combination of returnees, transit migrants and new immigrants explains the contraction of the gap between net entries and exits from the country that make up the overall net migration rate. However, when looking at regular channels (so mainly excluding the Venezuelan influx), in 2022, Colombia broke its record for net emigration, with over 547,000 nationals leaving the country. It was a 70% increase compared to the average annual levels before 2020 and it was estimated that over 1,000 Colombians were departing the country each day with the intention of settling abroad (MMC, 2025).

The involuntary dimension and the internal conflict caused migration in Colombia is definitely one to be mentioned in terms of outward migration dynamics, thus a separate chapter will be dealing with it (See: Conflict and Forced Mobility). Structural factors such as internal displacement, armed conflict, socio-economic inequality, and irregular migration routes increase vulnerability to trafficking networks. Indeed, recent transformations in regional mobility patterns have led to a growing reliance on irregular transit corridors. Between 2021 and 2024, the number of Colombians migrating to Central and North America by crossing irregularly the Darién Gap increased by over 10,000% (MMC, 2025). These processes highlight how insecurity, economic volatility, and perceived opportunity abroad can translate into high-risk mobility.

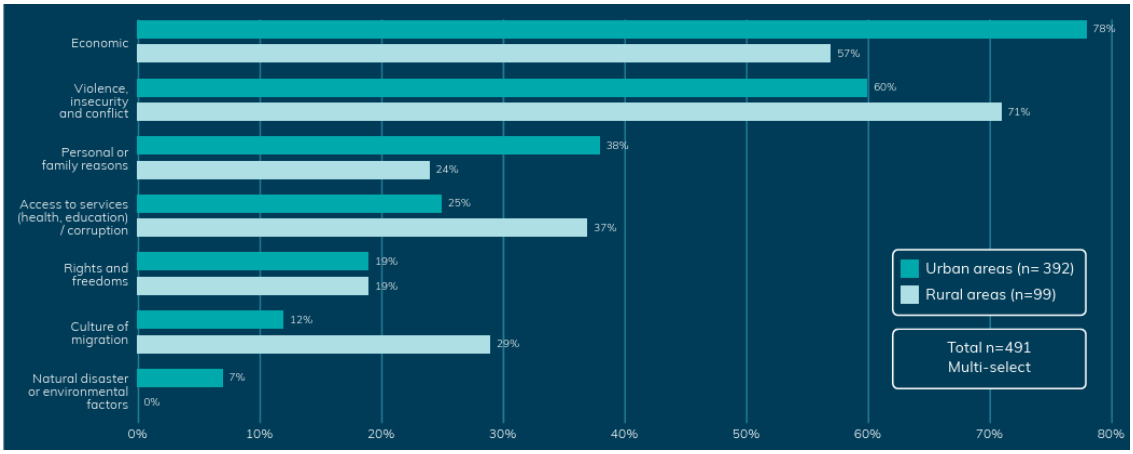
4.1.3.1 Determinants of Colombian Emigration

Colombian emigration is shaped by a multifaceted set of drivers, – structural and individual-level factors. Understanding these motives requires situating migration decisions within broader socio-economic inequalities, labor market dynamics, and evolving regional mobility regimes. Colombian emigration has long been shaped by a combination of economic restructuring, labor demand abroad, social networks, and the multi-decade armed conflict (Castles et al., 2014). Classical push–pull explanations are often insufficient on their own to analyze the complex nature of Colombian migration decision, but migration systems theory highlights how migrant networks lower costs and risks, making flows self-reinforcing over time (Massey et al., 1993). For Colombia, this is evident in the consolidation of diaspora communities in North America and Europe, as well as in neighboring South American destinations during specific historical periods.

In a survey by ENMIR, marriage, family reunification (6,8%), studies (4,3%) and adventure (2,2%) were listed among the reasons for emigration, where economic and labor migration motives were overrepresented (86%) as the main determinant of emigration of Colombian nationals in the late 2000s. While the economic nature of these flows is undoubtable, the proposed result for security motives (only 1%) should be taken with reservation and seen, rather, as a minimum level, since data provided by the UNHCR on the current existence of Colombians abroad "in a situation similar to that of refugees" is much higher, counting 374,000 nationals, that means that the true proportion of Colombians emigrated for security reasons would rather be at least 10% or more (Mejía, 2009). Indeed, the population of forced migration is fundamentally distinct from voluntary economic migration, as it is driven by violence, threats, and armed conflict rather than individual choice or economic calculation. The displacement occurs on an individual and family basis rather than through organized refugee camps, thus is inherently difficult to monitor, register, and quantify with accuracy (Ibez, 2009).

A more recent survey (MMC, 2025) revealed further distribution among the main motives for leaving Venezuela; Colombian migration is heavily influenced by the combined impact of economic factors and violence (Figure 15). The most usual reasons is related to economic nature, which also refers to the demand for relatively unskilled labor and higher remuneration for skilled workers in developed countries and the effect of globalization on a workforce seeking higher pay in developed countries. Likewise, family reunification is an important reason for moving abroad, and the lack of access to services and corruption were also frequently reported as a determining factor in migration decision.

Figure 15: Reasons for leaving Colombia



Source: MMC, 2025.

4.1.3.2 The Colombian Diaspora and Transnational Networks

As a result of high emigration rates throughout the last centuries, a huge diaspora population has been formed in the receiving countries. According to data from the United Nations Global Migration Database and official national registers, the Colombian diaspora has experienced continuous growth with notable increases particularly since the 1990s. Around 4.7 million Colombians are residing abroad as of today; 34.6% in the United States, 23.1% in Spain, 20% in Venezuela, 3.1% in Ecuador and 2% in Canada (Cancellería, 2025). After highlighting the three most important diaspora populations, rather a few general characteristics are presented in a few words as transnationalism, remittances and brain drain.

The Colombian diaspora in the United States constitutes one of the largest and most established South American communities in the country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (2022), approximately 1.3 million individuals of Colombian origin reside in the United States, with significant concentrations in Florida (particularly the Miami metropolitan area), as well as in New York and New Jersey. (Pew Research Center, 2023) highlights the community's marked socio-economic heterogeneity, encompassing both highly skilled, middle-class migrants and individuals who migrated for labor or protection-related reasons, contributing to its internal differentiation and "plurifragmentation" (Guarnizo, 2006). Most of the immigrants were settling during the 1980-90's, after many have obtain legal permanent residence with a reason of family reunification and a significant share claimed asylum and entered as refugees (MPI, 2015; Chaves-González – Batalova, 2023).The Colombian diaspora in the United States encompasses both first-generation migrants and a growing U.S.-born second generation, reflecting a process of demographic consolidation and intergenerational transition (Pew Research Center, 2023). While the first generation remains closely connected to Colombia through transnational networks, remittances, and political engagement, the second generation increasingly embodies patterns of social integration and upward mobility within the US context. Together, these cohorts illustrate the transformation of Colombian migration from a predominantly recent labor- and crisis-driven movement into a more established diasporic community with multi-layered identities and socio-economic trajectories (Collier – Gamarra, 2001).

The biggest Colombian diaspora in Europe exists in Spain. The consolidation of the Colombian communities in Spain was facilitated by linguistic and cultural proximity, labor demand in domestic and care sectors, and Spain's regularization programs in the early 2000s (León, 2010). While the 2008 financial crisis broke immigration flows to Spain and led to return migration and onward mobility, Colombians remain one of the largest

Latin American communities in Spain, characterized by distinct demographic features, including an overrepresentation of working-age individuals and, increasingly, higher levels of educational attainment among recent migrants (Garha – Valls, 2025).

Colombian diaspora in Venezuela emerged particularly during the oil boom decades of the 1970s and 1980s, when labor demand and economic prosperity attracted large numbers of workers across the shared border (Mejía, 2012). **By the early 2010s, an estimated 700,000 to over 1 million Colombian-born individuals resided in Venezuela**, forming one of the largest Colombian diaspora communities worldwide (IOM, 2013). This migration was facilitated by geographic proximity, historical ties, and the development of cross-border migration systems, while a bilateral migration reversal has been seen (See following chapter) due to the Venezuelan crisis. Also as a result of the crisis, large flows of returns have been developing.

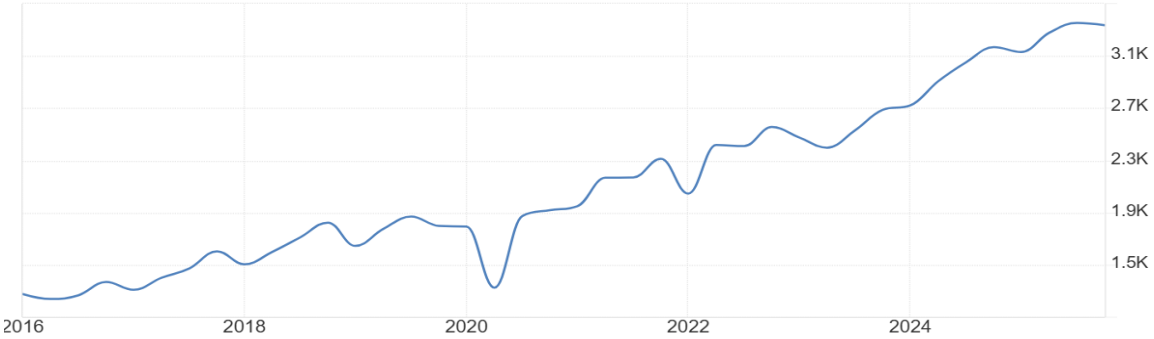
Emigration of Colombian nationals in overall includes a significant number of skilled professionals (IOM, 2013). This process implies to the brain drain phenomenon, which characterized Colombian migration processes as health professionals and engineers are particularly affected (Soltész, 2013). A recent study (Peña Alfaro – Torrez Díaz, 2024) focuses on the emigration of healthcare professionals, including doctors and nurses, and its survey among Colombian nursing students reveals that 84% consider emigration as part of their professional plans, with preferred destinations including Canada (64%), Spain (58%), Germany (45%), and the United States (44%). This does not only represent a significant brain drain in the healthcare sector but has implications for Colombia's public health infrastructure and the development of human capital in medical services.

However, a key characteristic of Colombian emigration is the formation of a large and globally dispersed diaspora that maintains strong transnational ties with the country of origin. Drawing migration and development scholarships as transnationalism and migration network theory, studies have shown that the Colombian diaspora (especially skilled migration) possesses substantial human and social capital and actively contributes to Colombia's economic development through entrepreneurship, investment, and knowledge transfer (Massey et al., 1993; Soltész, 2013). Research demonstrates that Colombians gain new attitudes and economic resources as a result of their experiences in receiving countries, which they transmit through social remittances and return migration, creating political and social changes in Colombia (F. Jiménez, 2018). Moreover, Colombian diaspora networks are often family-based and socially dense (MPI, 2015) and family and social ties remain strong across borders, thus maintained regular contact with relatives and communities in their country of origin facilitate economic and social exchanges across

borders, as well as future migration (Cárdenas – Mejía 2006; Guarnizo, 2006; Chaves-González – Batalova, 2023).

Indeed, Colombia's diaspora is sustained through dense transnational practices, which includes circular visits, transnational parenting, hometown associations, digital connectivity, as well as remitting. Not just social remittances, but financial remittances are vital being a central material linkage between diaspora and origin. Colombia's central bank (Banco de la República) documents that remittances in Colombia averaged 1220.50 USD Million from 1996 until 2025, reaching an all time high of 3354.00 USD Million in the third quarter of 2025. In 2024, remittances equaled to 2.3% of GDP, and for the first time in history, between January and July, 2025, they equaled the value of the country's oil exports (Sánchez, 2025). Remittance inflows to Colombia are highly concentrated geographically, with approximately 54% originating from the United States and 14% from Spain, followed by smaller shares from Chile, the United Kingdom, Canada, and other countries (Banco de la República, 2024). It is important to highlight that Venezuela does not appear as a major source of remittances to Colombia, on the contrary; Venezuela receives more remittance from Colombia than the other way around.

Figure 16: Remittance development of Colombia (2016-2024)



Source: Banco de la Republica, Colombia, 2025.

As it was highlighted in a previous chapter on LAC remittances (Chapter 3.2.3.3), in the case of Colombia, it is also true that remittances are part of a household risk-management strategy by diversify income sources. In Colombia, this dynamic is particularly relevant given widespread labor informality and regional inequalities, which encourage households to use migration as a strategy to improve economic security. Indeed, remittances received by Colombians provide greater opportunities to "balances the pockets of families"; cover basic expenses, pay for education and contribute to the well-being of Colombian households (Medina Grass, 2024). Evidence on Colombian households demonstrates that international remittances positively affect household expenditure composition and demand for education, while also indicating important effects on consumption, investment in health expenditure (Medina – Cardona, 2010). However, research implies that

remittances are mostly used for consumption rather than productive investment, and they are not solving poverty and economic vulnerability, ont he contrary may create dependency patterns and can reinforce regional inequalities within countries (Cárdenas – Mejía, 2006; Soltész, 2013).

Although contemporary diasporas are considered within the migration-development context, participation in emigration have not always been appreciated by civil society in Colombia because of widely held perceptions that 'living abroad' equaled 'living in comfort'. At times, sectors of the political opposition criticized those who 'abandoned' the country in difficult times and later wanted to participate (Orozco, 2020). As a consequence, members of the diaspora often have the feeling of guilt living better lives at the receiving countries (even if sending remittances).[15]

4.2 THE COLOMBIAN-VENEZUELAN MIGRATION NEXUS

The relationship between Colombia and Venezuela represents one of Latin America's most dynamic migration corridors, characterized by a profound historical reversal that fundamentally restructured demographic and economic connections between the two nations. This chapter demonstrates how bilateral migration dynamics are shaped by temporal factors and structural conditions. Indeed, the two countries share special relations that have been shaping their migration panorama. Colombia and Venezuela – as neighboring countries – have been significant migration destinations for one another. Mobility between them dates back to their shared colonial past, the attempt to form a single nation, and their consolidation as independent states during the nineteenth century. These movements have persisted over time and continue to this day. Having said that, in the followings, the Colombian-Venezuelan migration nexus is addressed; first the Colombian migration flows to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, then Venezuelan migration crisis will be highlighted that targeted the Republic of Colombia. The aim is to briefly unfold the transformation of Venezuela from the main destination of Colombian migrants into the country of origin of the largest immigration wave Colombia has received.

While former chapter on the Venezuelan migration crisis has been included in this dissertation (See Chapter 3.3.3), it was more focused on policy measure and policy responses, while the upcoming section of the thesis will concentrate on the bilateral dynamics of migration and the characteristics of migrants in both countries.

[15] Interview by Prof. Luz Botero.

4.2.1 COLOMBIAN EMIGRATION TO VENEZUELA

Given the current crisis in Venezuela and the massive flows of migrants escaping the country, it is hard to imagine that Venezuela used to be the main destination country for international migrants in Latin America (Mejía, 2022). Naturally, it was the oil revenues that played a central role in this immigration history of Venezuela. Due to the country's oil reserves and the commence of oil exportation, the Venezuelan government could invest in public works and agricultural and industrial projects. The petroleum-driven expansion generated employment opportunities across multiple economic sectors, from skilled positions in the petroleum industry itself to construction, commerce, and service sectors that expanded dramatically in response to rising incomes among Venezuelan populations. This provoked an increased demand for workers with varying qualifications and made Venezuela an attractive country for migrants. Great immigration flows began during the post-war period. While Colombian nationals were the most dominant migration population in Venezuela (one-third) before the Second World War, significant numbers of Europeans began to arrive after WWII, mainly Spanish, Italians, and Portuguese, among others, including migrants and refugees from Eastern Europe (Mikly Bernal, 2022). The new immigration flows remained high until the countries of origin began their postwar economic recoveries, then significant return flows begin for instance to Italy and elsewhere (Mejía, 2022). Indeed, European immigration was much more emphasized and encouraged by migration policies and governmental efforts than regional migration. Historically, the aim was „whitening" and Europeanizing the Venezuelan population. Racist and eugenic ideology was behind the immigration policies of Venezuela (Wright, 1990). Between 1945 and 1952 137.000 Europeans immigrated to Venezuela, mostly Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, in addition to Eastern Europeans (Kirk – Huyck, 1954).

Meanwhile, Colombians have continued to make up the biggest part of immigrant population, a trend that continued for most of the century. To understand the predominance of Colombians in the immigrant population, we must consider such factors as the immense border areas and the historical and cultural ties the two nations share. Venezuela and Colombia are divided by a land border of about 2,200 kilometers along densely populated portions of western Venezuela and eastern Colombia (the Venezuelan states of Táchira and Zulia and Colombian departments of North of Santander and Guajira). These border areas are essential in the Colombian-Venezuelan migration nexus because traditional border flows exist, while migration stocks are high on both sides of the border; a great number of Venezuelans are found in Colombia, while a number of Colombians are residing in Venezuela. These areas share strong economic, social, cultural, and even family ties; thus the communities have created strong cross-border regional networks. The aforementioned

conditions have established ongoing opportunities for circular mobility and transnational community formation that has always been relevant, while its magnitude alter and evolve depending on the two countries political and economic conditions (Mejía – Castro, 2023).

In the second half of the twentieth century, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced a period of profound economic and social instability, which resulted in a significant slowdown in the flow of European immigrants to Venezuela. During this phase, military dictatorships emerged in several countries – particularly within the Southern Cone – prompting notable shifts in both the composition of migratory flows and the overall stock of migrants in the region. As a consequence, Venezuelan immigration began to have a large regional component, and "problems of undocumented immigrants" arose, mostly with regards to Colombians (Pellegrino, 1986).

With the decrease of European immigration, as well as the increase in return flows to Europe, Colombian immigrants' share of the total immigrant population started to rise again. The sudden increase in international oil prices in the 1970s beneficiated Venezuela and again led to a significant increase in migration, which now rather has been characterized by regional migration compositions. There was notable surge in the number of Colombian and other Latin American immigrants; by 1977, Venezuela – with a population of around 13 million – was hosting approximately 1.2 million foreign workers (Jancsó, 2021). The migration boom resulted in the implementation of the V Plan of the Nation between 1976 and 1978, i.e. Venezuela's Fifth National Development Plan under President Carlos Andrés Pérez, which had as its central objective the approval of the entry of skilled labor to that country, managing to employ about 900,000 workers in the labor market. The initiative, by the 80s, led Colombians to represent 77% of all immigrants in Venezuela (Cabrera et. al., 2019) as the total number of immigrants approached 1.1 million in the 1981 census, the highest of the century (Mejía, 2022). This proportion vastly exceeded Venezuelan representation in Colombia (Mejía – Castro, 2023).

Migrants from the region were attracted for economic reasons, as labor migration intensified between Latin American countries, while also many were fleeing in search for refuge from the ruling military dictatorships in the 1970s and part of the 1980s. As for arrivals from the Southern Cone, migrants to Venezuela originated particularly from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay and Bolivia (Jancsó, 2021).

Also, Colombians migrated to Venezuela for both reasons. Labor migration was not only significant as there was a high demand for workers in Venezuela – particularly in agriculture, commerce, and services – but also due to the wage differential between the two countries. While real wages declined in Colombia, in Venezuela they grew at an annual rate of 4.5% between 1972 and 1979. However, because the majority of Colombian

migrants lacked legal status, they were often compelled to accept wages lower than those received by citizens. In the 1980s, most of Colombian immigrants (68%) had low-skilled jobs (entry level occupations, plant and machine operators, assemblers, and trade-related workers), often performing the least prestigious jobs (Mejía – Castro, 2023).

During the 1970s and 1980s, while pull factors were evident in Venezuela, significant push factors operated in Colombia with regards to migration decision, including elevated unemployment rates produced by accelerating industrialization processes. As Colombia underwent economic transformation through industrial development, traditional agricultural sectors contracted, displacing rural populations toward urban centers. However, urban labor markets could not absorb this displaced population entirely, creating pools of underemployed and unemployed workers. Venezuela offered an attractive alternative for the displaced Colombian workers, particularly those without access to education or skills enabling them to compete in increasingly industrialized Colombian labor markets. The combination of declining Colombian opportunities and expanding Venezuelan prospects created a powerful directional bias in migration flows, establishing a pattern that would persist through most of the twentieth century (Diaz, 1987).

Table 4. Number and percentage of Colombians residing in (1981–1990–2001–2011)

Census 1981		Census 1990		Census 2001		Census 2011
No. of Colombians in Venezuela	% of Colombians relative to total foreigners	No. of Colombians in Venezuela	% of Colombians relative to total foreigners	No. of Colombians in Venezuela	% of Colombians relative to total foreigners	No. of Colombians in Venezuela
508,166	47.3%	529,924	51.8%	608,691	60%	684,040

Source: IOM, 2013

On the other hand, expulsion factor of Colombia also motivated migration to Venezuela. Toward the end of the twentieth century, a considerable number of Colombians migrated to Venezuela seeking refuge, largely as a consequence of the internal armed conflict in Colombia (Álvarez de Flores, 2004). Indeed, the armed conflict produced massive displacement populations primarily within the country itself (IDPs). Due to multiple combatant groups, such as guerrilla organizations, paramilitary forces, and government security forces, several rural areas became uninhabitable for civilian populations. However, those facing violence-based displacement sought refuge not only within the borders, but (often after being internally displaced) fled across the national border of Venezuela, which offered escape from immediate physical danger, distance from Colombian combatant groups, and opportunities to reconstruct lives in relative safety (Carreño Malaver, 2014). The characterization of Colombian displacement to Venezuela as motivated by fear, insecurity, and protection needs, rather than primarily by economic opportunity-

seeking, distinguishes this migration component from earlier petroleum-boom-driven labor migration. Colombian asylum seekers and refugees displaced by violence had faced more challenging circumstances than economic labor migrants. They possessed fewer resources, limited ability to plan extended stays, and more pressing immediate security needs. The Venezuelan government, responding to humanitarian obligations and regional solidarity principles, initially accommodated Colombian refugee populations, providing asylum without necessarily formalized legal status until 2003 (Carreño Malaver, 2014). By 2009, Venezuelan authorities acknowledged approximately 200,000 Colombian refugees and persons in refugee-like situations residing within Venezuela, representing a substantial humanitarian commitment despite Venezuela's limited resources (Mejía – Castro, 2023). These flows peaked in the 90s and increased especially in bordering areas. As a consequence, along the border, the movement of Colombians and Venezuelans from one side to the other became an integral part of daily life and the local economy. Many people live on one side but work or study on the other, and/or they have family members on both sides.

The earlier migration wave of economic labor migration of Colombian nationals to the oil-rich country during its economic boom helps explain why Venezuela has repeatedly served as a place of refuge for Colombians: new arrivals have often been able to depend on the support networks provided by relatives already settled in the country. Colombian refugee waves persisted into the early years of the twenty-first century and later formed the base of return migration of Colombian nationals from Venezuela.

However, the reception of Colombian refugees became progressively more complicated as political relations between Colombia and Venezuela deteriorated. The presence of Colombian armed groups within Venezuelan territory, including incursions by Colombian paramilitaries and concerns about Colombian guerrilla groups utilizing Venezuelan sanctuary, generated Venezuelan security concerns. Accusations and documented evidence regarding Colombian illegal armed groups maintaining bases in Venezuelan territory produced climate of distrust and stigmatization directed toward Colombian populations generally within Venezuela. The Colombian diaspora became subject to collective suspicion and resentment, as Venezuelan authorities and populations increasingly viewed Colombians as security threat rather than humanitarian refugees (Álvarez, 2019). This stigmatization, while unjust toward the overwhelming majority of Colombian migrants who participated in no armed activities, nonetheless shaped policy responses and social relations. Venezuelan policy responses to Colombian populations became progressively more restrictive, particularly from the final years of Chávez and then Maduro's leadership. Restrictions on Colombian entry increased, documentation requirements became more

stringent, and deportations of undocumented Colombians increased (Carreño Malaver, 2014). These restrictive measures functioned practically to discourage Colombian immigration and to encourage Colombian return or onward migration.

4.2.2 BILATERAL MIGRATION REVERSAL – VENEZUELAN EMIGRATION TO COLOMBIA

However, during the 2010s, Venezuela's historical role as a migration magnet underwent a profound reversal. Instead of receiving migrants, the country began generating unprecedented levels of emigration and asylum-seeking, surpassing the total number of immigrants it had attracted throughout the 20th century. Colombia, which rather used to be a migrant sending country, emerged as the principal destination, receiving a substantial share of Venezuelan nationals, as well as Venezuelan-based Colombians who returned after prolonged periods of residence abroad. In this sense, the migratory relationship between the two countries appears cyclical, illustrating how broader political, social, and economic shifts reshape mobility patterns over time – a reminder that the trajectory of migration often mirrors the turning wheel of history (Mejía, 2022).

As the Colombian-Venezuelan migration nexus has transformed caused by the political and humanitarian crisis in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, migration and displacement has reached quantitatively unprecedented levels as the fleeing Venezuelan population aimed at neighboring countries. Colombia became one of the main recipients of Venezuelan migrants, due to its proximity and close social, commercial and cultural relationship. According to national and international data, in 2014, there were only 23,573 Venezuelans living in Colombia, a number that was not significant in comparison to the local population (around 47 million people) (Bitar, 2022). However, from 2013 and 2014, new waves of migration from Venezuela to Colombia developed, the year 2016 marking a breaking point in growth, with an increase of 138% compared to 2015, at which time the influx of migrant workers began to be massive, rapid, and involuntary (Bustos, 2024).

Initially, starting from the beginning of the century, the waves were subtle, marked by growing numbers of Venezuelan emigrants, but the direction and character of migration flows remained relatively stable. However, as Venezuela's political and economic situation deteriorated dramatically, the magnitude and composition of Venezuelan emigration shifted fundamentally. The economic and political deterioration afflicting Venezuela during this period was so multifaceted and comprehensive in its effects that collectively created conditions pushing populations out of the country at unprecedented rates.

The most dramatic manifestation of Venezuelan migration to Colombia occurred between 2016 and 2019, when the Venezuelan-born population residing in Colombia underwent

exponential expansion. According to data from Migration Colombia, Venezuelan migration remained relatively low until 2016, when it reached a total of 53,747 people, however in 2017, the number of Venezuelan migrants began to increase dramatically in Colombia, 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 the COVID-19 crisis emerged (Bitar, 2022). This growth rate had no historical precedent in the bilateral relationship, expanding with such velocity that it essentially caught both nations unprepared for managing the flow. The data provided by the *Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares* (GEIH), Colombia's primary household survey conducted by the *Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística* (DANE), documents this expansion through measurements of the stock of Venezuelan-born persons residing in Colombia during this period. The growth was not gradual or incremental but rather explosive; between 2016 and 2019, in merely three years' time, the Venezuelan-born population in Colombia multiplied approximately tenfold, growing from a baseline of perhaps 200,000-300,000 persons to more than 2 million by the end of 2019 (Mejía – Castro, 2023).[16]

In the beginning of the pandemic, the figures dropped a little, (1,747,327 in June 2020 and remained below 2 million for some time) then started to grow again rapidly during 2021. 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. By February 2022, there were 2,477,588 Venezuelan migrants in Colombia (Bitar, 2022).

To contextualize this growth's magnitude appropriately, it is essential to examine the proportional transformation of Venezuelan representation within Colombian population. In 2015, Venezuelan-born persons represented approximately 0.3% of Colombia's total population, a proportion that, while noticeable, remained manageable within the context of normal demographic and migration processes. By 2019, merely four years later, this proportion had expanded to approximately 4% of Colombia's total population, representing a thirteenfold increase in proportional representation. Indeed, no comparable precedent existed for such rapid demographic transformation in Colombia's migration history. For comparative context, consider that during the peak of Colombian emigration to Venezuela in the 1970s and 1980s, Colombians never exceeded 3.5% of Venezuela's population despite Venezuela's much smaller population size at that time. The Venezuelan expansion in Colombia thus represents a demographic transformation of historically unprecedented proportions within the bilateral context (Mejía – Castro, 2023).

[16] Migration Colombia's figures are lower than DANE estimates based on data from the ENMIR, according to which there were already more than 2 million Venezuelans in Colombia by February 2020.

Table 5: Key Push and Pull Factors in Venezuelan-Colombian migration

Period	Origin	Primary Push Factors	Destination	Primary Pull Factors	Migration Type
1970s–1980s	Colombia (skilled migrants and investors)	Agricultural sector contraction; industrial displacement; high unemployment	Venezuela (nationwide)	Petroleum boom labor demand; currency strength and investment opportunities	Economic labor migration
1990s–2000s	Colombia (conflict-affected areas, low- and middle-income population)	Armed conflict; paramilitary violence; forced displacement; security threats	Venezuela (frontier regions)	Educational migration; brain drain preservation of status	Economic labor emigration
Mid-2010s	Venezuela (broad classes, also investors)	Economic collapse; hyperinflation; medical/food crisis	Colombia (border regions, major cities)	Employment; formal and informal markets; diaspora networks	Diversified mass immigration
Late 2010s	Venezuela (all social classes, both Venezuelans and Colombians)	Political repression; humanitarian crisis; state collapse	Colombia (nationwide)	Humanitarian protection; access to services; family reunification; regularization programs, geographic proximity	Forced migration, refugees; Colombian remigration
2020–2021 pandemic	Both nations	Border closures; pandemic restrictions	Temporary return flows	Health safety; Family support	Temporary reverse and circular migration
2021–present Post Pandemic Period	Venezuela (continued outflows)	Continued economic collapse; Lack of employment opportunities; Structural instability	Colombia (also internal mobility within Colombia)	Legalization (ETPV 2021) Labour market recovery Diaspora networks	Structural forced migration

Source: Own compilation

As mentioned earlier, the diplomatic relations between the two South American countries have not been without conflicts since Maduro's coming to power. Besides the closure of embassies, border closures due to conflictive relations were disturbing migration flows between the two countries. Maduro closed borders with Colombia in August 2015, justifying the process by referring, among other things, to the presence of Colombian paramilitary groups in the area, insecurity, and the increase in fuel and food smuggling (Castellanos, 2015). Then in 2019, tensions flared up again when the Colombian government, with the help of the US, was trying to deliver truckloads of aid to Venezuela as part of a greater effort to help Venezuelans, which was considered by Maduro as an act of interference and backing of the opposition groups in times of crisis (Lozano – Santander, 2019). During the COVID-19, borders were again officially closed between the states in the region (Torrado, 2020). Indeed, COVID and closed borders reduced migration flows into Colombia to a minimum but increased return flows to Venezuela, resulting in a decline in the stock of Venezuelans in Colombia. However, with the easing of sanitary control measures and the first signs of economic reactivation, immigration has begun to

recover – despite ongoing border closures – and flows and accumulated totals appear likely to return to pre-pandemic levels (Mejía – Castro, 2023).

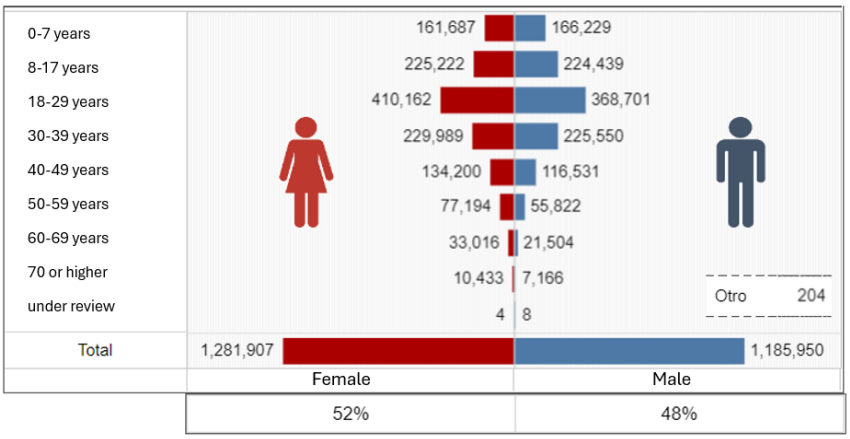
After political ties strengthened under Colombia's new president, Gustavo Petro, the 2,200 km long shared borders fully reopened since the 1st of January 2023, allowing passage of cargo and passenger transport (Cambio, 2022). Ever since, Venezuelans have been crossing the stretch on foot, not only for migration reasons, but people exit and return carrying bags of merchandise. Colombian vendors and low-cost stores are available at the border, selling groceries, water, medicine and products that even if are available in Venezuela, they are at exorbitant prices so that the vast majority of people cannot afford them (WOLA, 2023).

According to Migración Colombia almost 2.5 million Venezuelans reside in Colombia who have registered in the RUMV by June 2023. As flows of Venezuelans have been expanding, individuals and households have developed migration strategies supported by the consolidation of networks in destination cities and configured in migratory chains (chain migration) (DANE, 2021). The latest survey by the Colombian government on Venezuelan immigrants made by the National Statistical Office of Colombia revealed that among the groups of immigrants from Venezuela who arrived in Colombia were also returnees, Colombians who had migrated to the OPEC country in previous decades. This specific population will be addressed later in this dissertation (See Chapter 4.4).

While the first migratory waves of Venezuelans were made up of the economically better positioned citizens, recently migrants are often in a worse financial situation (Cabrera, et. al., 2019). Working-age populations – those between approximately ages 18 and 65 – constituted the majority of Venezuelan migration flows, indicating that migration was not broadly dispersed across all age groups but rather concentrated among those most capable of contributing productively to host economy labor markets. This working-age concentration reflects both supply-side factors (working-age individuals possess greater mobility and fewer age-related constraints on labor market participation) and demand-side factors (Colombian employers preferentially recruit working-age populations for available employment). However, due to the substantial family component of Venezuelan migration, in recent years a huge number of children and adolescents are also accompanying their parents. The significant presence of minors, as well as the kinship ties within households, suggests that this immigration flow has a strong family component, likely stimulated by family reunification processes, which in turn reinforce settlement (Mejía – Castro, 2023). Within this context, according to the RUMV, the number of women has also risen inasmuch as the feminization of this migration trend could be detected recently (RUMV, 2023). While for previous years, other statistics – such as the National Survey of Living

Conditions, which collects household information in Venezuela – show the predominance of men, representing 51% in 2017, and 54% in 2019–2020. This inclusion of women in migration flows means that Venezuelan migration encompasses both productive labor force participation and reproductive labor (household maintenance, childcare, elder care) that female migrants themselves perform within Venezuelan households and also make available to Colombian employers through their labor force participation.

Figure 17: Population pyramid of Venezuelans in Colombia registered in the RUMV by 2023



Source: RUMV, 2023.

Venezuelan emigration populations primarily included not merely subsistence-level populations fleeing destitution but also consisted of educated populations with credentials, skills, and cultural capital accumulated through educational investment. Indeed, Venezuela's educational system, despite degradation during the crisis period, had historically produced populations with relatively elevated educational attainment compared to regional averages, particularly among middle and upper-class populations who constituted the initial waves of emigration. Educational credentials are essential in settlement and integration processes as skills, technical qualifications, professional credentials, and cultural knowledge facilitate navigation of international migration processes and employment seeking in destination locations (Iredale, 2001; Carling – Schewel, 2018). Within this context, the first waves of emigration represented the brain drain phenomenon – the loss of educated, skilled populations from origin societies with subsequent employment of those populations in destination economies. This brain drain dimension, while improving individual migrants' circumstances and contributing productively to Colombian labor markets, represents substantial costs for Venezuela, which loses valuable human capital, which would be desperately needed for national reconstruction. However, these Venezuelan educational credentials often received incomplete recognition within Colombian labor markets, obliging educated Venezuelan migrants to accept occupational positions substantially below credential levels, (Mejía – Castro, 2023) a process termed

occupational downward mobility or overqualification in labor market research literature (Bauer – Zimmermann, 1999).

While during early 2000s flows the most educated Venezuelans were among the first to emigrate, as Venezuelan crisis deepened and became generalized across social classes, it broadened migration participation to encompass progressively larger proportions lower-income and less-educated populations. By the late 2010s, Venezuelan migration included individuals ranging from university-educated professionals through secondary school-educated workers to primary school-educated agricultural and informal sector workers. Indeed, as economic collapse extended beyond middle and upper classes into working classes and rural populations, migration became a mass phenomenon encompassing an entire social spectrum (Mejía – Castro, 2023). Working-class Venezuelans, agricultural populations, and informal sector workers who possessed minimal resources or credentials nonetheless emigrated to Colombia, often through irregular channels or with assistance from diaspora community members who sponsored or facilitated their movements. The transformation from selective to mass migration reflected the reality that as the crisis deepened and living conditions deteriorated, even subsistence-level households encountered circumstances so severe that the risks associated with irregular migration and precarious settlement in Colombia became preferable to remaining in Venezuela.

Due to their economic circumstances, the Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia are highly vulnerable. A large proportion of this population resides with irregular status (around 1,500,000 people in 2021), which implies that they do not have access to state services and assistance Bitar, 2022). The number of migrants with unsatisfied basic needs was estimated at 1,640,000 in 2021 (RMRP, 2021), or approximately three-quarters of the total migrant population. Indeed, the migrant population experiences much higher poverty levels than the local population. (In 2021, 63.4% of the migrant population lived in monetary poverty, compared to 39.3% of the Colombian population (Bitar, 2022)).

The geographic distribution of Venezuelan populations across Colombian territory revealed distinctive patterns reflecting both labor market opportunities and the dynamics of chain migration through established social networks. Rather than dispersing evenly across Colombian territory, Venezuelan migrants concentrated overwhelmingly in specific urban centers and regions. These reflect both economic opportunities, as well as the location of established Venezuelan diaspora communities who facilitate continued migration through networks of kinship, friendship, and community connection. Indeed, established communities can facilitate continued migration for those who could arrive in cities where compatriots already maintained residence, provided information about employ-

ment and housing, offered initial shelter or support during transition periods, and assist social integration and community formation (Massey, 1998).

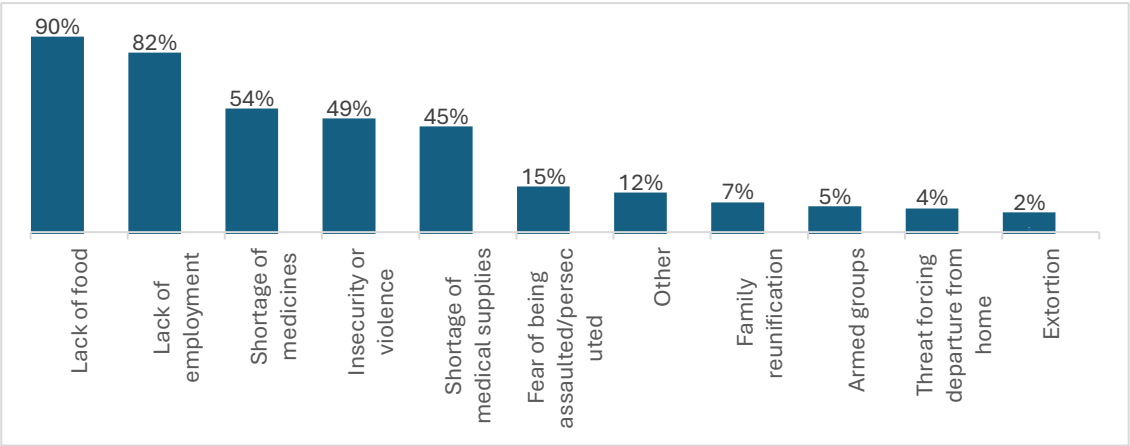
The immigrant population concentrated most heavily in Colombia's three largest interior cities – Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali – which together accounted for 44.6% of the Venezuelan-born population residing in Colombia (Mejía – Castro, 2023). In fact, these three cities represent Colombia's primary economic and employment centers; Bogotá serving as the capital and principal financial and administrative center, Medellín functioning as an industrial hub and secondary economic center, and Cali serving as a major commercial center for western Colombia. The concentration of Venezuelan populations in these cities reflected rational economic calculation, since these centers can offer the greatest employment opportunities, highest wages, and most developed labor markets. Additionally, these cities housed proportionally larger middle-class and professional populations capable of employing Venezuelan migrants as household workers, caregivers, and professional services providers in ways that were less common in smaller cities or rural areas with lower-income populations less able to pay for such services.

Apart from the aforementioned interior city concentration, border regions have also received significant number of migrants. Frontier regions including Amazonas, Arauca, and particularly Norte de Santander (which includes the border city of Cúcuta) developed significant Venezuelan populations (Pineda – Ávila, 2019). Among these areas, circular migration between the two countries has been significant, and it enables individuals to maintain economic and family ties to the homeland while obtaining employment in Colombia. The Venezuelan – as well as Colombian – populations in frontier regions are often engaged in cross-border informal trade and commerce, including illegal activities on both sides of the border (Álvarez, 2019).

Based on a survey by the UNHCR (2017) profiling Venezuelan migrants, a high proportion of people wish to remain in Colombia. Those who do not wish to settle in the country explain that this is only a transit territory to countries such as Panama, the United States, Chile, Argentina and Ecuador. The housing situation of Venezuelan migrants is characterized by overcrowded homes, their accommodations are shared with other family groups, especially at the border territories. This raise concerns in terms of the protection of children and adolescents as well as the prevention of gender-based violence. Another problem is the education of children as there is a very low percentage of schooling. The fact that migrants from Venezuela have a high feeling of guilt for accessing consumer items that they know are scarce at home is a sad indicator how deep the humanitarian crisis is in Venezuela and what a burden these people carry.

The main reasons for leaving Venezuela include lack of work, food shortages and lack of medical supplies (Figure 18). Consequently, these migrants do not wish to return to these circumstances, not to mention that many feel a deep fear of returning due to the situation of generalized violence and insecurity that they perceive in the country. They also wish to send remittances to those who stayed home in Venezuela (Pineda – Ávila, 2019). However, the population leaving Venezuela often hide their actual reasons also because of fear from authorities and the central power, as one or more members of the household are still in Venezuela. Among the many reasons that are revealed for crossing the border, there are women who traveled to Colombia to give birth to their children in order to access medical care as well as Colombian nationality. Also, within mixed families, there is a large number of people in the process of being nationalized Colombian, in order to regularize their immigration status and access all the services provided by the Colombian state (UNHCR, 2017). Indeed, at least 40% have dual nationality and another 30% are Colombians returning (Pineda – Ávila, 2019). Although the Colombian society is considered to be welcoming and sympathetic in general towards the Venezuelan incoming migrants in the spirit of reciprocity, Venezuelans reveal that there are some acts of discrimination in Colombian territory, based on their nationality (UNHCR, 2017).

Table 18: Main reasons for leaving Venezuela



Source: UNHCR, 2017.

In conclusion, the intense migratory dynamics that have historically occurred between Colombia and Venezuela have presented a significant investment in the direction of cross-border flows in recent years. As the two countries are connected by historical, cultural and social ties, often referred to as "*pueblos hermanos*" (brother towns) and they share the so called "*solidaridad latinoamericana*" (latinamerican solidarity), they used to treat migration between their nations within this context. However, the crisis in Venezuela have transformed this narrative in a way that not only bilateral migration reversed, but relations also deteriorated. Undoubtedly, the most impacted country by the effects of the

political, economic and social crisis in Venezuela is Colombia, where different measures have been implemented to manage the massive income of Venezuelans, as well as Colombian returnees.

4.3 CONFLICT AND FORCED MOBILITY

4.3.1 THE FARC ORGANIZATION

The origins of the FARC go back to the period of civil conflict in Colombia between 1948 and 1953 – known as "La Violencia" – which began with the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, candidate of the Liberal Party, followed by the revolts framed in the Bogotazo. Such heated environment appeared on the grounds of poverty and weak state institutions, and political contrasting, as from the middle of the 19th century, Colombian society and political actors were divided into two camps that had radically different ideas about the future of the country. The liberal and the conservative camp found themselves in a long-lasting wave of violence. In some areas of the country, activists of the Communist Party of Colombia have joined the liberal groups. In addition to the fact that the appearance of the Communist Party brought an ideological color to the wave of political violence, many members of the guerilla groups formed with its help later appeared in the ranks of the FARC.

At the end of 1958, the conservative and liberal political elite finally put an end to the wave of political violence that had been going on for ten years, through the formation of the National Front resulting from the fusion of the two parties. The new political force though tried to remedy the land-owning relations, which were considered the source of the conflict, the reforms mostly benefited the land-owning elite, as a result of which the situation of the peasantry did not improve significantly. Consequently, disputes over land tenure remained on the agenda, and violence continued in rural areas.

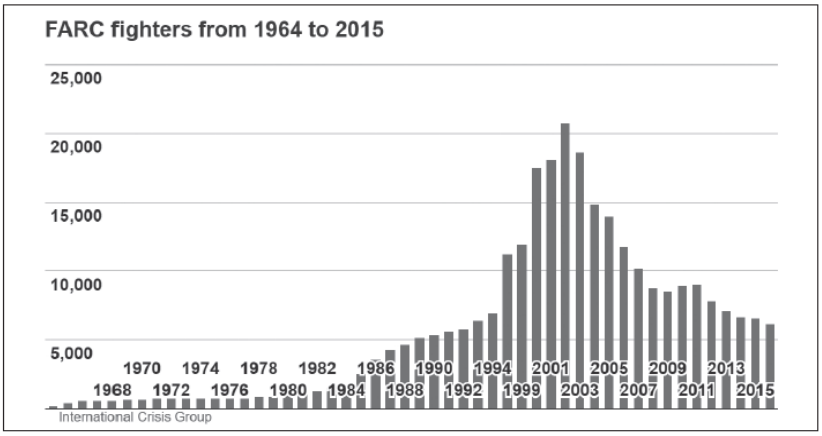
The highly complex multi-actor armed conflict motivated by different political interests entered upon the 1960s, then worsened with the rise of the drug trade from the 1980s (Hegedűs, 2017). Within this context, the two most important guerrillas in Colombia were created in 1964: the FARC and the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN). Two other insurgent organizations were active during the armed conflict, the 19th of April Movement (*Movimiento 19 de Abril - M -19*), and the People's Liberation Army (*Ejercito Popular de Liberacion - EPL*). These guerilla organizations could break grounds and strenghten due to Colombia's central weakness, the inability of the government to exercise power over its national territory (DeShazo – Forman – McLean, 2009).

The FARC began to organize itself in 1966 under the leadership of experienced guerrilla Manuel Marulanda Vélez, as the military wing of the Communist Party of Colombia and advocated an armed struggle to change the rigid political and agricultural structures. FARC became a revolutionary movement dedicated to guerrilla warfare with Marxist-communist ideological background, and in 1982 the group modified its name to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP).

As of the 1960s, the organization began a slow expansion, which was also indicated by its increasing ambitions (Budai, 2017). While previously FARC members considered regime change and social justice being their main goal, thus protecting the interests of the peasantry, later they intended to liberate the entire Colombian society, promising not only protection, but also education and medical care, as well as calling Colombians to a popular uprising (Tomán, 2013).

The 1980s also saw the rise of paramilitary groups and drug gangs, which would add to the already existing conflict between guerrillas and the state. Crimes such as murder, kidnapping, extortion, and attacks against productive infrastructure became commonplace. With the development of the drug trade, the power of organized criminal groups increased enormously in the 1990s, and then right-wing paramilitary groups and left-wing guerrilla organizations entered into close cooperation with drug cartels, making the conflict more complex and the government weaker. The FARC entered the drug business in the 90s, which resulted in the organization's rapid growth, from 4,000 members to approximately 18,000 guerrillas by the end of the decade (Hegedűs, 2017). The FARC tried to recruit and absorb all the groups and members of the peasantry that wanted to join the armed struggle against the government.

Figure 19: Developments in FARC membership



Source: Budai, 2017.

The organization's ideological foundations and political goals were laid down by the Marxist-communist ideologue Jacobo Arenas, Colombian guerilla leader, an influential

figure in both political and operations side of FARC. The fight against imperialism and globalism was the main objective of the guerillas, therefore they steadily opposed the activities of the United States and multinational companies in the country. Moreover, any country that intended to interfere in Colombia's internal affairs was considered an enemy. They were dedicated to eliminate economic and social inequalities in as much as they considered both legal and illegal means legitimate to do so. At first, the FARC attacked military units and raided the farms of large landowners (Rabasa – Chalk, 2001). The aim of these attacks was to loot military equipment, take hostages, secure food supplies and obtain information. It concentrated its activities on the rural agricultural areas of the country, yet kept the border areas of the country under its control, and was also able to extend its authority to the central parts of the country in the southern districts.

From the 1980s, the economic situation of the country was unfavorable (debt crisis, failed economic reforms etc.) thus the guerilla groups and drug cartels were able to strengthten during this period. Peacemaking was a serious desire of the government. While the guerilla organization continued its operations, it took a serious step towards successful advocacy on the political level in 1985, as it formed a political party called the Patriotic Front (*Unión Patriótica* – UP) with the support of the Communist Party and the Colombian left. However, the FARC was not successful on the political scene, while the enlarged organization and their increased ambitions required a larger volume of financial resources. Its main sources of income were proceeds from illegal mining, participation in the drug trade, taxation of various forms of economic activity, as well as extortion and kidnapping targeting politicians and the heads of major commercial companies.

By the end of the 1990s, thanks to increased revenues and membership, as well as successful attacks against Colombian forces, – while peacemaking attempts failed, - the guerrilla organization was at full strength in 1998-1999. It was no coincidence that the United States classified the FARC as a terrorist organization in 1997. The FARC had gained unprecedented strength, increased its terrorist activities, while the Colombian state was desperate and came close to collapse (Budai, 2017). According to a public opinion poll published in the summer of 1999, the majority of Colombian society believed that the FARC might even take power in the future (DeShazo – Forman – McLean, 2009).

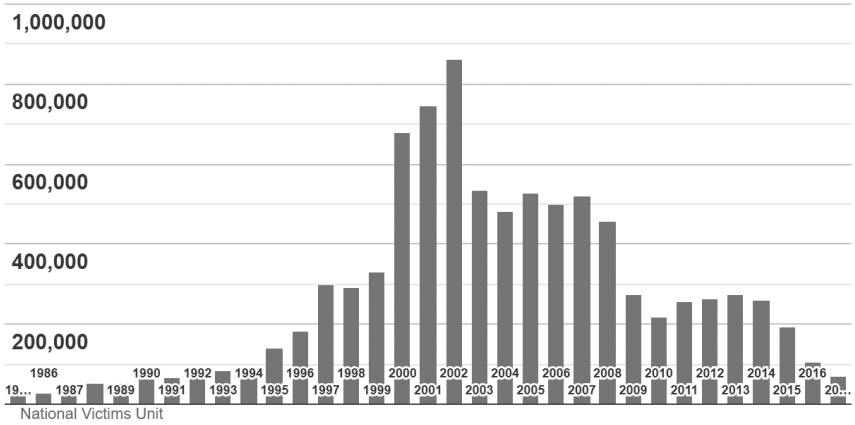
Andrés Pastrana's (1998-2002) efforts to peacemaking were unsuccessful, as the guerillas were rather in control and had stronger negotiation positions. However, Pastrana reenforced the relations with the United States in as much as Colombia received assistance through the so called Plan Colombia; a substantial foreign aid, military aid, and diplomatic initiative aimed at combating Colombian drug cartels and left-wing insurgent

groups. Pastrana also started the modernization of the armed forces, which later was more efficient in fighting the guerillas.

His successor, Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010) was the one who declared a determined fight against the guerillas and drug cartels. His administration conducted a counterinsurgency campaign. He took seriously his security initiatives and the ambition to straighten legitimate state authority. His agenda was popular and welcomed since the society has lost faith in the possibility of ending the fight with the organization peacefully (Beittel, 2015), so there was a consensus that more forceful actions were necessary to be taken. During the eight-year-long presidency of Uribe the government achieved success in the fight against the left-wing guerrillas; huge areas were liberated from the control of the insurgents, several decisive attacks were made on the FARC, several leaders were captured and hostages were released. As a result of these efforts, the guerillas were pushed to the outskirts of the country, although they continued their operations. The Uribe administration – all with its failures and accomplishments – could improve the overall security environment of Colombia, including the rolled back the power of the guerillas as well as demobilization of the paramilitaries at the same time.

In fact, the FARC weakened from the beginning of the millennium due to the fight against paramilitary groups and government countermeasures, including the resumption of peace talks, the strengthening of the country's security sector, and cooperation with the United States. The attacks of the paramilitaries reduced the number of members of the organization, and represented serious competition in the drug trade, which caused the FARC to lose significant income. It was the civilian population though that suffered the most from the increasingly intense conflict, which seriously affected the social support of the organization.

Figure 20: Conflict victims since 1985

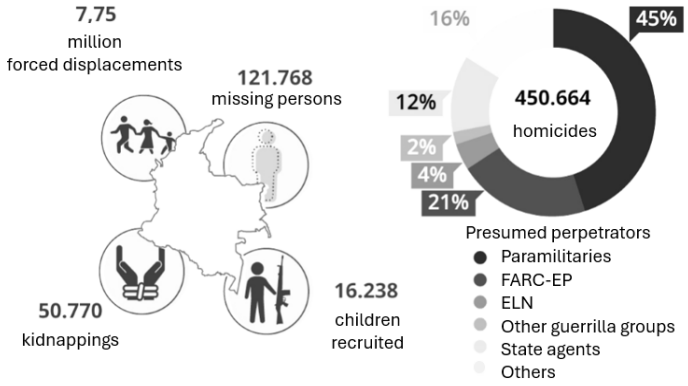


Source: Budai, 2017.

However, these victims were increasingly committed by paramilitary groups or persons connected to the state apparatus, not necessarily by the members of the FARC. On the other hand though, the FARC could not take advantage of the opportunities to assert its will through political means, so it withdrew from the political process to concentrate on a military victory, again resorting to more and more aggressive means, which again negatively affected the civilian population especially on their territories.

According to the latest research (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022), between 1985 and 2018, at least 450,664 homicides were registered in Colombia as a result of the internal armed conflict. However, taking into account that many have not been reported, this figure is estimated to be almost twice as high, at around 800,000 victims. As stated earlier, the paramilitaries were the main perpetrators of these murders, responsible for approximately 45% of the cases, while guerrilla groups and state agents accounted for 27% and 12%, respectively. Likewise, the report indicates that at least 121,768 people were disappeared during this period, some 55,770 were kidnapped and up to 7.7 million were victims of forced displacement (See figure below).

Figure 21: Number of victims of the conflict between 1985 and 2018



Source: Naranjo, 2022.

4.3.2 THE PEACE AGREEMENT AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

The path to the peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia was full of challenges and extremely complex factors and emotions. The country's political leadership tried to bring the various Colombian guerilla groups to the negotiating table ever since the 1970s in order to (re)establish the status quo of the state and secure the citizens. The M-19 movement was the first to start negotiations with the Colombian government, then in 1990 its members demobilized and successfully entered political life. The EPL reached an agreement with the Colombian government in 1991, but the disarmament was

partial, as some of the former guerrillas – in cooperation with the FARC and ELN groups – continued the drug trade.

It was President Belisario Betancur who managed to achieve a considerable progress in settling the path of the peace; he established a peace commission with the aim of legalizing FARC's political activities and transforming the guerrilla organization into a political party. However, the peace process between the government and the FARC was dominated by mutual distrust and recrimination, for which both sides provided reasons (Budai, 2017). Thus, the FARC did enter the political scene through the Unión Patriótica, for the FARC deemed it impracticable to resolve the conflict through political means. So, it again resorted to violent means to enforce its interests.

Pastrana, Uribe and then Juan Manuel Santos were also dedicated to making peace, though with different ideas on the negotiations and the implementation. The peacemaking was so complicated and complex to be made because the peace had to include several issues and very sensitive matters, such as the land issue and the development of rural areas, the participation of FARC members in political life, their reintegration into society, issues related to drug trafficking, the investigation of human rights violations and compensation to be paid to victims, as well as the disarmament of members of the organization and the practical implementation of the desired peace accord.

After another failed attempt to agree to peace in 2002, during the government of President Andrés Pastrana, which led to the formation of the Detente Zone, in 2012 the Colombian authorities and the FARC met again to try to put an end to the conflict. Elected President Juan Manuel Sandos announced on August 12, 2012, that they would begin peace talks with the FARC guerrillas, promising to continue Uribe's politics. Finally, peace talks between the government and the FARC leadership led by Rodrigo Londoño, alias "Timochenko" began in October 2012 in Norway and lasted for four long years, with Cuba, Norway, Venezuela and Chile participating in the negotiations as guarantors.

Negotiations with the FARC had a long history, going through ups and downs, – as is frequently the case – including moments of real crisis and the challenges in discussing the aforementioned pressing issues over and over again though the four years of dialogues (Segura – Mechoulan, 2017). However finally an agreement was reached in 2016 – after at least four attempts of peace talks had failed since 1982.

The society was divided on the question of the peace. Santos had promised that the Colombians would have the last word, so he submitted the pact with the guerrillas to a referendum, however, the result of the referendum was different from what he wanted. The

voters opted for the peace treaty "Not to be approved"[17] by the slightest difference, less than one percentage point. The main reason behind the result was that the citizens felt that the agreement has given "quasi-impunity" to the guerillas as they are not to be sentenced to prison terms – even if admittedly guilty – they are only restricted in their freedom of movement and right of residence. Uribe was against the agreement as he did not support its current form and wanted to hold the guerillas responsible and was ready to include stronger punishment in the accord. Thus, the society has been polarized ever since on the issue of the peace.

Even though the referendum failed, after incorporating proposals from the voters against the accord, – without much of a "national dialogue" – a new version of the agreement was born with slight modifications, and the Final Agreement was signed between the National Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) in Cartagena, 27 September 2016.

The six main topics of the peace negotiations that began in 2012 were the followings, which were also included in the final agreement itself:

• Solving the land issue and developing rural areas;	*1. Towards a New Colombian Countryside: Comprehensive Rural Re-form*
• The participation of FARC members in political life;	*2. Political Participation: A democratic opportunity to build peace*
• Disarming the members of the organization the reintegration of the organization's members into society;	*3. End of the Conflict*
• Solving the drug issue;	*4. Solution to the Illicit Drugs Problem*
• Investigating human rights violations and paying reparations to victims;	*5. Agreement regarding the Victims of the Conflict: "Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparations and Non-Recurrence", including the Special Jurisdiction for Peace; and Commitment to Human Rights*
• Implementing the provisions of the peace agreement.	*6. Implementation, verification and public endorsement*

The peace negotiations and the historic peace deal have attracted international attention and it was welcomed by the international community. However, all have been interested to see its implementation – according to the measures included in the provisions of the Agreement. According to the Peace Accords Matrix at Notre Dame University's Kroc Institute, it is "the most varied and complex implementation agenda of all the peace agreements signed since 1989" (Santaeulalia, 2021).

[17] ¿Apoya el acuerdo final para terminación del conflicto y construcción de una paz estable y duradera? (Do you support the final agreement to end the conflict and build a stable and lasting peace?) (El Tiempo, 2016)

The FARC demobilized in 2017: 6,804 fighters turned in 8,994 weapons, about 2,250 support militia members registered themselves, and more than 4,000 were released from prison. The reintegration of ex-fighters into society has been set as a goal. The worst human rights violators are supposed to be put on trial, compelled to admit to their crimes and make reparations to victims, and instead of imprisonment, sentenced to several years of "restricted liberty."

Challenges of the implementation have been evident ever since signing the peace treaty, however fulfilling the accord has gone more poorly than anticipated and the cycles of violence have so far been impossible to break. Instead, in historically conflicting territories, violence is on the rise again. The problem is that new armed groups are quickly filling the vacuums of authority that the government still cannot handle on its own.

In a report of WOLA by Isacson (2021), an analysis by a leading research and advocacy organization in the Americas, notable facts were highlighted about the implementation of the peace after five years of its signing, such as;

(i)	The implementation budget is falling behind its 15-year target;
(ii)	The crucial territorial development programs are running behind and the state is still absent, while criminal and armed-group violence is increasing;
(iii)	The accord created space for political participation, however, despite some important steps forward, the continued pace of attacks and killings and occasional government displays of indifference show how much remains to be done;
(iv)	Special congressional districts for victims are a major, but fragile, advance;
(v)	Demobilization was largely successful;
(vi)	Reintegration is flawed but progressing;
(vii)	Social leaders and human rights defenders remain unprotected;
(viii)	Voluntary crop substitution has nearly ground to a halt;
(ix)	Transitional justice has made progress;
(x)	The vision laid out in the Ethnic Chapter remains far from realization and also the inclusion of women and LGBTI people is not adequate;
(xi)	Key laws needed for accord implementation remain unpassed.

The report concludes by noting that "a strong accord needs stronger implementation", ie. the Colombian government should demonstrate stronger will and efforts in the implementation process. Especially considering recent security declines and economic adversity brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become even more urgent to fulfill the accord's promise of consolidating the central power and bringing the state to abandoned areas (Isacson, 2021).

The implementation of the peace agreement has been monitored and verified by international actors with technical, humanitarian and financial resources to promote peacebuilding and reconciliation. However, the whole dialogue was guided by a central premise, i.e.

it would be a process “for Colombians, by Colombians” (Segura – Mechoulan, 2017). Nonetheless, US support has been significant, and it continues to be essential. Since the evolution of the dialogue process between the government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC it is of vital interest to South American states as it is linked with significant shares of subregional balance (Calderón, 2014).

As for Colombia, it is not without limitations to quantify the cost (economic, social, political) of the prolonged armed conflict (Álvarez – Rettberg, 2008), but what is for sure is that the peace deal was a historic step and an essential leap forward in order to put an end to the longest armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere. The implementation of the peace agreement is indeed crucial for Colombia's future economic development as well as for its political stability (MNB, 2016). In the post-agreement era, implementation continues to be extensive and urgent. Solving the challenges in coherence between the accord and the implementation of national policies is of great importance (Amaya-Panche, 2021), all for the sake of the safety and wellbeing of the Colombian citizens. Indeed, the new government vowed to implement the 2016 peace accord and prioritize a “total peace” policy that would seek an accord with the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas and the negotiated disarmament of other armed groups, including criminal gangs.

4.3.3 COLOMBIAN REFUGEES OF THE ARMED CONFLICT

In the 1990s, the conflict with the guerillas and the paramilitaries grew rapidly in both intensity and geographical scope. The effects of the conflict have not stayed within the national territories, but by the mid-90s the conflict began to affect neighboring countries too. The armed conflict in Colombia resulted in one of the largest displacement crises in the Western Hemisphere and constitutes the seventh largest refugee population in the world. The matter of the fact is that despite the signing of the Peace Agreement of 2016 with the FARC-EP, the harsh humanitarian consequences of the violence still prevail; both the violations of humanitarian norms and the absence of the State especially in remote areas of Colombia. Also, due to the reorganization of armed groups that continue to commit serious abuses against civilians, – including killings, child recruitment, and rape –, the violence has even increased in some territories of the country; for instance, the situation significantly deteriorated on the Pacific coast and in large eastern and southern areas of the country (ICRC, 2018). The civilian population is not safe, and their wellbeing is oftentimes a long way to be secured. For these reasons, many are deciding or even forced to leave their homes.

In Colombia, there are 6.7 million displaced people as a result of the conflict (UNHCR, 2023). Colombia is the country with the most IDPs (Internally Displaced People), followed by Syria (6.2 million) and Congo (4.4 million). For the victims of their citizens, the Colombian government provides support to conflict-induced IDPs through different programs, run by the "*Unidad para la atención y reparación integral a las víctimas*", which offers relocation, healthcare, finance and educational support to IDPs across the whole country. The most affected Colombian towns are Bajo Calima and the rural area of Buenaventura in the department of Valle del Cauca; the Litoral San Juan, Lloró, Alto Baudo and Domingodó in the department of Chocó; Timbiquí in Cauca; and Santa Bárbara de Iscuandé and the community of El Pital (rural area of Tumaco) in Nariño (IHD, 2023).

Even though 88% of the total number of victims are victims of internal displacement, an unprecedented flow of Colombian refugees began fleeing the country, seeking protection in neighboring countries. According to the official figures provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2017) state that in late 2017, there were 224,106 Colombian registered refugees, asylum-seekers and undocumented displacees considered to be in 'refugee-like' situations throughout the Americas, the vast majority of them in Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama. In 2021, 31,281 people from Colombia fled and requested asylum in other countries. This corresponds to approximately 0.061% of all inhabitants (UNHCR, 2021). Ecuador is undoubtedly the country with the most Colombian refugees. According to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility (RREE), there are some 54,750 Colombian refugees (IHD, 2023). However, the former UNHCR Representative in Colombia notes that in these three countries alone, the overall figure could be as high as 1 million (Ruprecht, 2019). Apart from the neighboring countries, not surprisingly their main destinations are the USA, Canada, and Europe.

In fact, the number of Colombians living abroad with refugee status is very high. Of the 395,949 Colombians requesting refugee status in another country, 113,605 have obtained it. This number also indicates that many countries deny granting them refugee status. Colombia's neighbors, indeed, afford only limited or nonexistent international protection status to Colombian refugees, which, – according to a study (Ruprecht, 2019) – can be seen as a fundamental infringement of the provisions of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1969 American Convention on Human Rights and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees – all enacted to the protection of refugees and asylum seekers.

Colombian refugees have only a few options; they can return home voluntarily when conditions permit, remain permanently in the country of first asylum if that country allows,

or resettle in a third country. Since there are some host countries that are in the practice of returning Colombians without allowing them to seek asylum, lacking legal status, indeed many return. Discrimination, xenophobia, and lack of job prospects are also factors that 'encourage' Colombian refugees to return to their homes, even if it is still so dangerous that some of them are killed (ICRC, 2018).

Along their routes, migrants are exposed to multiple risks, such as extortion, labour or sexual exploitation, abuse and physical and psychological threats. Colombian children are particularly vulnerable to targeting and recruitment by Colombian armed groups (USCCB, n.d.). Often their livelihoods are in danger in the receiving countries. Regardless of their legal status, access to the labor market, health care, and education are often limited. There is also a lack of humanitarian assistance, leaving many Colombians without any means of providing for their basic needs (USCCB, n.d.).

Other than ending the armed conflict in Colombia, the government needs to provide assistance for their victims abroad, as well as those who decide to return. Within the framework of the Victims and Land Restitution Law (Law 1448 of 2011), victims of the internal armed conflict have the right to comprehensive reparation, regardless of whether they reside in Colombia or abroad. It is a legal instrument through which – judicial, administrative and social – measures are issued in favor of Colombians who consider themselves victims of the conflict. Currently, 25,752 compatriot victims abroad have registered in the administrative system created for victims (Single Registry of Victims (*Registro Único de Víctimas, RUV*)). They are mainly concentrated in Ecuador, Venezuela, Canada, Spain, the United States, Panama, Costa Rica, Sweden, Chile and France (Cancilleria, 2023).

For those who remain abroad and are recognized as victims of the conflict, the following assistance is provided: 1) administrative compensation; comprehensive reparation delivered by the Colombian state as economic compensation for the victimizing acts suffered; 2) measure of satisfaction: exemption from compulsory military service; 3) psychological accompaniment: actions focused on emotional recovery at individual and group level; 4) land restitution: the process must be carried out directly with the Unit of Land Restitution through the Consulates (RUV(a), n.d.). Colombian nationals who decide to return their motherland can also access to state assistance (See: Public Policy Chapter on Return Migration).

Indeed, the Colombian government is trying to assist its citizens, while it also has to assist refugees from Venezuela. Consequently, the public services of the country dealing with refugee related issues is certainly overloaded.

4.4 COLOMBIAN RETURN MIGRATION

The analysis of the return flows has acquired notable importance respecting the exponential growth of this migratory movement in recent years along with immigration (Jiménez et. al., 2022). Studies on the issue could take as a starting point the issuance of the Return Law of 2012, which allows to broaden the analysis of the magnitude of the phenomenon and the actions undertaken for this population (See later in Chapter 5.2.1.3). To begin with, in 2014 Díez Jiménez, published an article that compiled the main studies on international remigration to Colombia, and he noted the absence of works that address in depth the phenomenon of Colombian return migration.

One of the few extensive analyses on the issue was carried out after the 2008 crisis, which was a demographic study of socioeconomic characterization based on a household survey of ENMIR (*Encuesta Nacional sobre Migraciones Internacionales y Remesas*) that inquired about the returnees of Colombian nationals (as well as about their initial migration histories). The other essential and pioneer work on the issue was published as a book that concerned the Andean Region (Mejía – Castro, 2012) emphasizing the need to see the reintegration of returnees beyond economic aspects and consider psychosocial and cultural aspects of return, too. Before these macro studies, some scientific work has been carried out – that tried to characterize the population from the micro level, often through qualitative methodologies –, particularly on the return of migrants from Spain. Multiplicity of empirical studies have been carried out from sociology, political science, demography and psychology. Focuses have been on labor market participation upon return (Mejía, 2013; Prieto-Rosas, 2017), on the effects of the economic crisis and on the strategies used by immigrants and/or returnees. The return of the victims of the armed conflict has been under fewer studies though it is a relevant inquiry in order to understand the entire return panorama of Colombian nationals.

Jiménez et. al. (2022) in their literature review on Colombian return migration concluded that there is a lack of studies on return migration in areas such as family, multidimensional reintegration, transnationalism, and political participation. When focusing on the return flows from Venezuela to Colombia, it is apparent that academic interest in this topic has only acquired considerable importance since the exponential growth of the migratory flow in recent years. So did the policy interests. However, Jiménez and his colleagues also found that **there is only a small number of studies that address current return from Venezuela, which makes it difficult to design policies to regulate and assist these flows.**

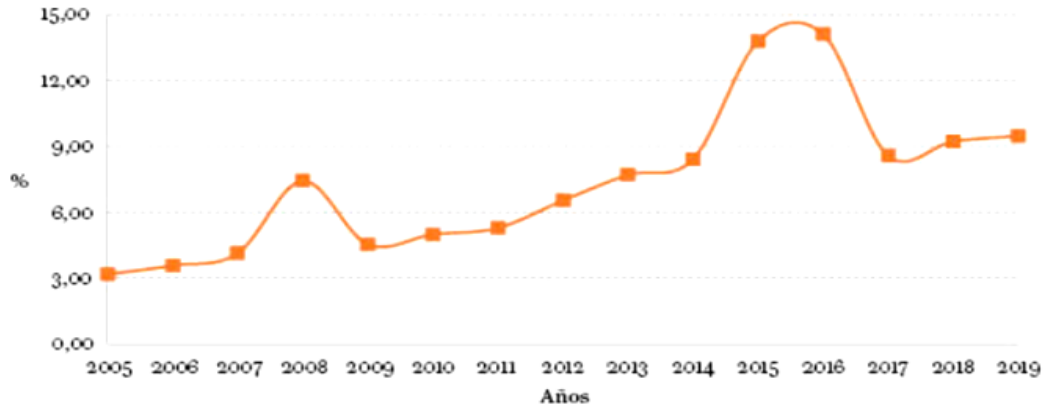
4.4.1 PATTERNS AND DYNAMICS OF COLOMBIAN RETURN

Return migration in the case of Colombia represents a complex process that reflects not only economic conditions in origin and destination countries but also patterns of conflict resolution, family reunification, and important transnational networks (Jímenez et. al., 2022). The examination of return migration is crucial for understanding how Colombian diaspora communities maintain connections to their homeland and how their repatriation happens or fail to happen.

Colombian return migration exhibits heterogeneous characteristics and patterns depending on the receiving countries they return from. While some returnees move directly from primary destination countries such as the United States and Spain, others engage in circular migration patterns, maintaining ongoing connections between Colombia and their countries of residence, often such as in the case of intraregional migration patters (Azose – Raftery, 2018).

With the international financial crisis that began in 2008, stricter policies of western countries on immigration, and with the country's economic growth, as well as the peace negotiations with the guerilla groups, conditions have been improving for the return of many nationals who had settled abroad (Palma, 2015). The rise in return flows was especially impacted by the Venezuelan crisis emerging especially after 2015. Considering the evolution of return migration in Colombia, during the period 2005-2019, a constant increase can be detected since 2005, a boom in 2008 as a result of the financial crisis, and it was 2016 that of greater number of returns of Colombians were coming mainly from Venezuela.

Figure 22: The evolution of Colombian return migration (2005-2019)



Source: Jiménez et. al., 2022.

The importance of returnees on Colombia is also well established based on the ENMIR household survey mentioned before,[18] in which data on households with emigrants and returnees indicates the two themes in the same order of magnitude; 6% of the households have emigrants and 5.5% returnees (Mejía, 2009) (Table 6). It suggests that not only emigration is relevant for Colombian households, but the return population is also as much significant as emigration population.

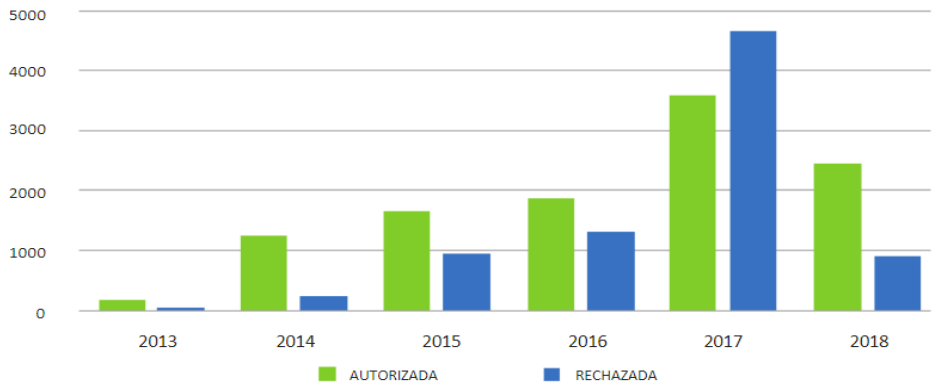
Table 6: Colombia, percentage of households with emigrants and returnees and average of them in the same households (October 2008 – February 2009)

Households with emigrants		Households with returnees	
% of households	Emigrants/households	% of households	Returnees/households
6.0	1.16	5.5	1.21

Source: Mejía, et. al., 2009.

Difficulties appear in measuring return to the extent that many Colombians return spontaneously and do not appear in surveys or are not registered in the system. The Single Registry of Returnees (RUR) created in the framework of the Return Law of 2012 provides a tool that allows to have an overview of the return despite the fact that not all of the returnees are registered (especially in the first years of the initiative) (See later in Chapter 5.2.1). Data by the RUR also underline that, in effect, return migration has been increasing and, by 2018, 11,048 authorized Colombians had returned and 19,153 in total (Figure 23).

Figure 23: The number of applications registered in the RUR



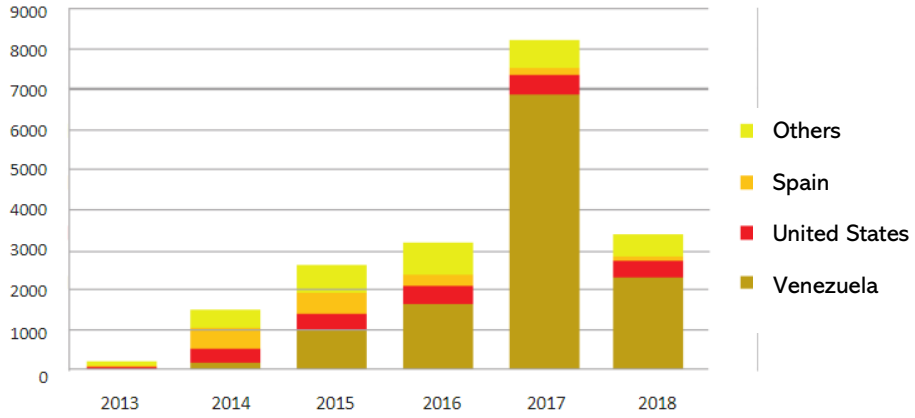
López Villamil, 2020.

In the case of Colombia, the pattern of Colombian emigration forms the foundation for understanding the country's return migration; Venezuela, Spain and the United States, are the three main countries of destination for Colombian migration, and these countries

[18] ENMIR was carried out in the urban areas of 18 municipalities in the country selected for having a significant number of households with people abroad

are also the origin of most returnees. Between 2005-2008, returnees were arriving predominantly from these countries: US 32.4%, Venezuela 27.3%, Spain 16.4%, the rest from Ecuador 12.5%, Panama 4.4% and other European countries or countries from the region (7%) (Mejía, et. al., 2009). However, as early as 2008 – when the ENMIR survey was conducted – an increase in returns from both Venezuela and Spain was already observable (Mejía et al., 2009). Since then, returnees from Venezuela have unequivocally become the primary country-of-origin group among return migrants to Colombia, according to RUR statistics.

Figure 24: Returnees by country of origin according to the RUR



Source: López Villamil, 2020.

Conclusions of the ENMIR survey suggest that depending on the country of destination and the period of time considered, 20% to 50% of long-term migrants leave the receiving country within five years of arrival, to return to their place of origin or move to a third country (secondary emigration) (Mejía, et. al, 2009). It found that there are noticeable return flows around retirement age. It is also underlined in the interwies conducted for this dissertation,[19] as well as the dissertation survey has also shown simmilar cases.

4.4.2 Motives to Return

Return migration in Colombia has occurred at varying rates for differenct reasons. As for macro-factors, return has primarily been depending on economic and political conditions in both Colombia and destination countries. As for instance, the period following the U.S. financial crisis of 2008-2009 witnessed increased return migration, as unemployment in the US affected Colombian workers disproportionately. Similarly, economic downturns in Spain during the same period contributed to return flows from that country. More recently, the global COVID-19 pandemic also increased return migration as employment opportunities contracted and travel restrictions affected migration dynamics.

[19] Interview with Luz Botero.

Macroeconomic conditions in destination countries are linked to shifting return patterns, such as in the case of the United States and Spain, where is was revealed that unemployment rates directly influence household decisions to return (Arango – de la Mata – Obando, 2015). The relationship between economic conditions and return is not linear, however; cultural factors, family networks, health status, and accumulated time in the destination country all shape individuals' decisions to return or remain abroad.

According to the analysis of ENMIR, it is believed that returns are generally spontaneous, and that short and long-term migration are remarkably dynamic. Most of the returns are motivated by individual determinants, which is why it is more difficult to encourage them by offering incentives (Mejía, et. al, 2009). On the other hand, the survey does measure motivations for migrants decision. Results show that economic and labour reasons for Colombian returnees of their initial migration motives were predominate, followed by motives of marriage and family reunification. Considering that studying and the desire to learn and venture are purposes that are achieved within a specified time, they suppose a greater propensity to return, their importance among the reasons of emigration whitin those already returned seems logical (Mejía, et al., 2009).

Table 7: Motives of returnees for moving abroad / for returning with the intention of staying

Economic, labor	69.6%
Marriage, family reunification	7.1%
Studies	6.2%
Adventure	15.5%
Security and other	1.5%

Family	53.5%
Economic, labor	21.5%
Adaptation	13.3%
Health	3.2%
Deportation	2.1%
Absence or expiration of documents	1.6%
Discrimination and xenophobia	0.1%
Other	4.7%

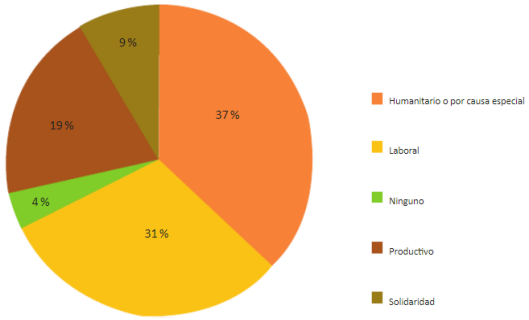
Source: Mejía, et. al., (2009) based on ENMIR.

For these returnees labor and economic motives do not appear as the main reasons for remigration (22%), although they have definitely an important role, while family reasons are more decisive (54%) (Table 7). According to Mejía, et al. (2009) situations of maladjustment, discrimination or xenophobia do not weight as much in the statistics as it actually appears in the imaginaries and social representations associated with migration.

While return migration typicly from Spain, the US or even at first from Venezuela was primary of economic nature, after the deepening of the Maduro-led crisis and the rise in forced migration from Venezuela to Colombia, the reasons have changed. The RUR statistics and their typologies of returnees clearly reflects a changing trend in remigration motivations. The highest number of registered returnees from 2013 to 2018 is of a humanitarian type or for a special cause, (37%), followed by labor return with 31%,

productive[20] and of solidarity return of Colombian victim of the internal armed conflict with 9% (Figure 25) (López Villamil, 2020).

Figure 25: Returnees by type (motive) of return according to RUR, 2013-2018



Source: López Villamil, 2020.

Also, the return patterns and motivations of Colombians displaced by the internal armed conflict (solidarity return category in the RUR system) differs in important ways from economically motivated migration flows. For refugees and conflict-affected emigrants, return has historically been closely tied to security guarantees, territorial restitution, and institutional trust (Ibáñez – Velásquez, 2009). While – as introduced in the previous chapter – the 2016 peace process with the FARC-EP marked a critical turning point in rural reforms, victim reparation, and land restitution mechanisms, thereby creating a more favorable – though uneven – context for return assisted by policy instruments (See Chapter 5), empirical assessments suggest that implementation gaps, persistent localized violence, limited economic opportunities, and insecurity in certain regions continue to constrain large-scale or permanent return (Echavarria et al., 2024). At the same time, according to official victim-policy institutions return and relocation processes are underway, indicating an ongoing policy architecture aimed at facilitating (often gradual and localized) return or resettlement rather than a single, nationwide "post-conflict return wave" (Unidad para las Víctimas, n.d.). However, persistent armed-group presence and renewed displacements continue to constrain return prospects and the sustainability of reintegration in many affected territories (Bocanegra, 2024).

4.4.3 Return Migration in the Context of Competing Strategies

Return is neither an automatic nor the primary trajectory for Colombian migrants abroad. Return migration is often implicitly framed in the literature either as the endpoint of a migration cycle, or as the expected outcome of crisis or adverse conditions in destination countries, however Colombian migration pattern prove otherwise. After for instance the

[20] Return to co-finance productive projects linked to the development plan of the department and / or municipality of the resettlement, with own resources or subsidies (See Chapter 5.2)

2008 economic crises, an immense return flows would have been expected. Although the crisis did trigger large-scale returns, many Colombian migrants were able to remain in host countries. They have either regularized their legal status or adapted to the new conditions created by the crisis, due to fear of returning to a country that offers limited opportunities for reintegration. Migrants often relied on social networks and household-level survival strategies rather than repatriation (Mejía – Castro, 2012; Mejía, 2011). Others migrated onward to countries offering better conditions (re-emigration). Alternatively, some migrants have returned to Colombia but, finding no favorable conditions for satisfactory reintegration, have subsequently migrated to other South or Central American countries (bounce-back migration) (Bedoya, 2014). Indeed, research shows that Colombian migrants employe diverse migration strategies based on their available social resources. Either staying and surviving, or rather than returning to Colombia, many have re-emigrated for instance from Spain to third countries (UK, Germany, France, US, Venezuela) (Sierra-Paycha, 2016).

As an alternative to return, Colombian migrants often opt for onward migration within transnational circuits, or prolonged settlement in destination countries. Indeed, as was introduced in this chapter before, Colombian settlements in major destination countries – such as the US and Spain – has produced relatively stable diasporic communities characterized by labour market incorporation, family reunification, and long-term residence (Cárdenas – Mejía, 2006; OECD, 2015). In this sense, the absence of return migration should be interpreted as a result of competing strategies, social embeddedness, and differentiated access to mobility options available within established Colombian diasporic networks (de Haas, 2010).

4.4.4 Reintegration Challenges and Social Networks

Return migrants face multiple challenges when reintegrating into Colombian society. Job placement is one of the main challenges from a returnees (Cassarino, 2004; OECD, 2015). Empirical evidence from Colombia indicates that migrants and returnees experience higher unemployment rates compared to the non-migrant population and, even when employed, more likely to encounter lower job quality, lower wages and greater levels of informality (Mejía – Castro, 2012; Ardila Vargas et al., 2024). Data derived from the GEIH and Migration Pulse surveys also show that returnees and migrant groups tend to work more but earn lower wages, exhibit significantly lower rates of formal contracts and pension contributions than the Colombian population in avarage. These numbers reflect persistent informality and precarious employment conditions, and these labour market constraints limit income stability, while also restrict access to social protection systems,

including health insurance and pension schemes, thereby affecting long-term socio-economic inclusion (World Bank, 2018; OECD, 2015). Labour market integration therefore is extremely essential for sustainable return outcomes in Colombia.

Table 8. Labor market indicators for different migrant groups

Indicator	Colombian population	Returnees	Migrants with PEP or PPT (Venezuelans)	Other migrants
Average hours worked per week	45	51	52.4	51.2
Monthly salary	$1,110,730	$869,619	$1,061,460	$839,047
Hourly income	$23,140.22	$18,117.07	$21,229.19	$17,480.15
Written contract (%)	68%	23%	23%	18%
Verbal contract (%)	32%	77%	77%	82%
Makes contribution to pension funds (%)	39%	19%	25%	5%
Wants to change jobs (%)	23%	37%	44%	38%

Note: Calculations are based on the GEIH (January–February 2022) for the Colombian non-migrant population, and Round 3 of the MP survey for the migrant population.

Source: Ardila Vargas et al., 2024.

Beyond employment difficulties, returnees confront psychological and social obstacles including loss of their previous local social networks, readjustment to Colombian cultural norms, and difficulty transferring foreign credentials within the Colombian labor market. Social capital and existing social networks in Colombia are significant; return migrants rely more on social networks than non-migrants to find jobs upon returning to their home country. Return migrants demonstrate varying patterns of labor market integration. Some return migrants successfully utilize networks to find employment, however jobs obtained through networks may be of lower quality than positions secured through other means, suggesting that social capital carries both advantages and limitations for reintegration (Le Barbenchon, 2025).

Another reintegration challange for returnees is the attitude demonstrated towards them. A research (Sholten, 2025) found that nonmigrants are concerned about both the economic and political competition of returnees. They hold conditional attitudes toward return migration; while on the one hand they welcome returnees who bring financial capital and employment opportunities, on the other hand they oppose returnees when competing for scarce jobs during high unemployment. Furthermore, nonmigrants fear return migrants acting as “norm entrepreneurs” who could influence local politics and social norms.

Migration status also influence reintegaration, however it is always challanging to document irregularity. When the migrants themselves or their relatives are asked about their migratory status, the possibility of not recieving answers is high, especially with

respect to those who are in irregular status, mainly due to fear about the consequences. It was no exception in the case of the ENMIR survey, where only 18.6% of returnees reported that they traveled without the mandatory documentation. Real numbers must be higher. This result thus constitutes a minimum level regarding irregularity.

4.5 RETURN MIGRATION FROM VENEZUELA TO COLOMBIA

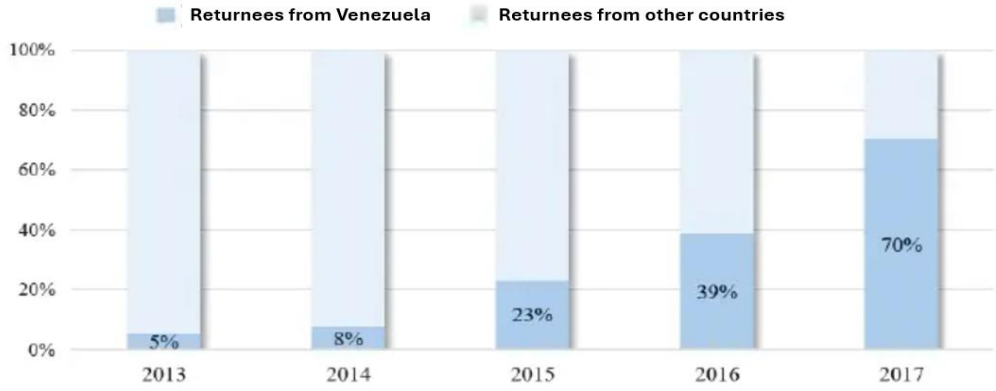
A turning point for Colombian return migration from Venezuela – one of the main destinations of Colombian emigration – was definitely the institutional, economic, and political system collapse of Venezuela, when conditions became untenable for both Venezuelan nationals and resident foreigners, including Colombians. Since 2013, greater migratory flow of Colombians has been observed in terms of its magnitude, volume, and distribution, altering the historical direction of mobility. Due to the critical situation in the neighboring country, the transition from a voluntary and often spontaneous return and of a small population, becomes a forced return of a magnitude that requires greater attention.

4.5.1 SCALE AND DYNAMICS OF RETURN FROM VENEZUELA

Colombians leaving Venezuela has been existing alongside Venezuelan refugees and migrants seeking to cross into Colombia, representing a distinctive though less-documented migrant population. The precise number of Colombians returning from Venezuela is difficult to quantify due to data limitations and the informal nature of many border crossings. Colombian return has taken place throughout the entire period of the large Venezuelan exodus, but a milestone was marked in August 2015, when Maduro announced the closure of the border between the two countries and more than **22,000 Colombians were expelled**; the deportation of 2,232 Colombians and the "accelerated voluntary" return of more than 20,000 Colombians (Díez Jiménez et. al., 2021). That episode was surrounded by dramatic circumstances, such as the homes of "illegal" Colombians were marked for demolition (DW, 2015).

As a consequence of such processes, return from Venezuela became the dominant component of international return migration in Colombia. By 2017, 70% of all returnees to Colombia were originated from Venezuela, which has been only 5-8% before the culmination of the crisis under Maduro (Figure 26) (Cabrera, et. al, 2019).

Figure 26: Returnees from Venezuela vs. Returnees from other countries



Source: Cabrera, et. al., 2019.

According to the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, GEIH and RUR-based statistics analyzed by López Villamil (2020) and Mejía (2023), more than 400,000 Colombians were estimated to have returned from Venezuela in the mid-2010s, although only a small fraction formally registered in the *Registro Único de Retornados*. This discrepancy highlights the limits of administrative capture and suggests substantial informal or unregistered return. Also, these numbers do not seem high enough compared to the size of the Colombian diaspora in Venezuela, which was estimated to reach almost 1 million Colombian-born individuals resided in Venezuela in the beginning of the 2010s (IOM, 2013). Indeed, professional and policy discourse on Colombian return from Venezuela expected "mass return" (for example, as after 2008) in reality, however, migrants frequently opt for alternative strategies – such as re-emigration or maintaining their status abroad – meaning that the narrative of large-scale return has, in many cases, proven to be overstated (López Villamil, 2020). Díez et al. (2021) for instance document future migration intentions among returnees, including the possibility of onward migration, while due to historically and structurally embedded Colombian–Venezuelan migration system, cross-border circulation also remains to be a possibility for Colombians in Venezuela (López Villamil, 2019).

Also, what should not be forgotten is the fact that the migrant population from Venezuela also includes victims of the Colombian internal armed conflict. Indeed, the number of victims among all returnees is more than significant. It should be noted that Venezuela is the second country with the highest concentration of Colombians registered in the Single Registry of Victims (RUV), a program for Colombian citizens who consider themselves victims. Around fifth of them submitted their declaration in Venezuela, which corresponds to 3,770 people (DNP, 2018). From 2012 to 2018, 362 victims included in the RUV returned from Venezuela, which corresponds to 39% of all the returns of victims registered in this period (DNP, 2018).

4.5.2 DETERMINANTS OF RETURN FROM VENEZUELA

Empirical evidence suggests that Colombian return migration from Venezuela is primarily crisis-driven and multi-causal rather than classical economic and labor migration or a simple "homecoming" decision. Survey evidence from Colombia's Caribbean region suggests that people returned not only as part of family survival strategies, but also because Venezuela's economic and humanitarian crisis led to unemployment, falling incomes, and limited access to essential goods and services. (Díez, Cabrera – Márquez, 2021). Complementing this, recent IOM monitoring reports identify family reunification as the most frequently cited reason for return (77%), followed by lack of employment (49%) and difficulties accessing food (21%), underscoring that return is caused by deteriorating livelihoods rather than long-term planned return processes. At the same time, institutional and qualitative accounts highlight that the 2015 border closure and subsequent expulsions produced forms of accelerated and, in some cases, forced return, blurring the boundary between "voluntary" return and crisis-induced displacement (López, 2019; López Villamil, 2020).

According to the UNHCR survey (2017) the main reasons for the move among Colombian returnees are the lack of food and employment, followed by insecurity and violence. The survey suggests that Venezuelan nationals have even bigger problems accessing food and employment than Colombians or Venezuelan Colombians. This could be detected also from the results from the border areas according to which 78% of Colombians claim if they returned to Venezuela, they would not be able to support their family with their income, while this percentage is even higher for Venezuelan nationals (92%) (UNHCR, 2017). It is no surprise that family reunification is between the reasons of Colombian returnees rather than for Venezuelans, as they probably return to their close or extended families who stayed in Colombia. However, family reunification will assumably be more and more relevant for Venezuelans who decide to follow their already emigrated family members, thus they can reunite in the receiving countries.

Table 9: Reasons for Leaving and Fears of Return – Border Region

What are the main reasons your family left Venezuela?

Reason	All	Col	Col-Ven	Ven
Lack of food	90%	82%	90%	91%
Lack of employment	82%	68%	80%	85%
Difficulty accessing medicines	54%	48%	58%	53%
Generalized insecurity / violence	49%	46%	50%	49%
Lack of medical supplies in health centers	45%	45%	47%	45%
Fear of being attacked or persecuted	15%	19%	18%	13%
Other	12%	16%	11%	12%
Family reunification	7%	12%	11%	4%
Direct threat to leave home	4%	5%	5%	3%
Armed groups	5%	4%	5%	5%
Extortion	2%	2%	2%	2%

If you returned to Venezuela tomorrow, what would happen?

Reason	All	Col	Col-Ven	Ven
My family would be at risk due to violence	93%	88%	94%	94%
I could not support my family with my income/work	89%	78%	89%	92%
My family would be in danger due to insecurity	45%	44%	46%	45%
We would be persecuted or attacked by others	10%	11%	12%	10%
Fear of armed groups	6%	6%	6%	6%
There is a direct threat against me or a family member	3%	3%	4%	3%
Other	3%	6%	3%	3%
Risk of extortion	3%	3%	3%	2%

Source, UNHCR, 2017

Also, national statistical operations such as DANE's *Encuesta Pulso de la Migración* provide additional evidence base to quantify return-related drivers among Venezuelan-origin populations, including Colombian returnees, and can be used to triangulate patterns across time and space. But indeed, many of these returns were motivated by the same crisis conditions affecting Venezuelans – the economic and political deterioration that had originally pushed Colombians to Venezuela now prompted their return, as the Venezuelan location that had offered opportunities for decades ceased to be an advantageous place to maintain residence and employment (Mejía, 2023).

4.5.3 Characteristics and Profile of Colombian Returnees from Venezuela

The Venezuelan crisis produced heterogeneous return profiles. A significant share of returnees had resided in Venezuela for decades, many had built families, economic investments, and in some cases had acquired Venezuelan nationality (López, 2019). Colombian returnees from Venezuela were often accompanied by Venezuelan partners, children, and other relatives, some of whom are eligible for Colombian nationality (Hernandez – Campos-Delgado, 2023). The majority of the returnees are socially embedded settlers, thus their return therefore often causes loss of accumulated assets, disruption of binational family structures, and reintegration challenges in Colombia after prolonged absence. Concerning their economic status, some had accumulated property and savings during their years in Venezuela and brought these resources back to Colombia, potentially enabling investment or economic activity. While others, particularly those living in the lowest-income neighborhoods of Venezuelan cities, had few resources and faced extreme poverty conditions, similar to Venezuelan migrants themselves. Many returnees occupied informal employment sectors in Venezuela, which limited their accumulated capital upon return (Riaño – Aliaga Sáez, 2024).

The 2015 deportations were sudden, unplanned returnees, falling out of the category of "voluntary" returnees, were much more forced resettlements. These individuals frequently arrived without belongings, savings, or documentation, thus representing a vulnerable population in motion (López Villamil, 2019). However, after the main waves of

the second half of the 2010s, based on empirical research and data, it can be understood that those Colombians remaining in Venezuela after 2014-2015 were increasingly those with established employment, family connections, or economic investments that anchored them to Venezuelan residence despite deteriorating conditions. This selection dynamic produces smaller subsequent return flows as the pool of motivated returnees diminishes over time. This assumption is supported by empirical evidence from the Caribbean region of Colombia, (Díaz Jiménez et al., 2021) which shows that a significant proportion of returnees display relatively low levels of formal education and limited accumulated economic capital, indicating that earlier return flows were disproportionately composed of more vulnerable migrants. In contrast, Colombians who remained in Venezuela during the later stages of the crisis often possessed stronger labor market attachment, family networks, or economic investments, factors that likely delayed or reduced their propensity to return. Also, drawing on qualitative research with Colombian migrant entrepreneurs returning from Venezuela, Riaño (2022) highlights how decisions to remain or return were closely linked to the degree of economic and social embeddedness in Venezuela. Indeed, many returnees reported exhausting savings, losing businesses, or facing the collapse of local markets before deciding to return, while those with more stable enterprises, diversified income sources, or stronger family networks were able to remain in Venezuela for longer – despite deteriorating macroeconomic conditions. These pattern underscores the uneven and stratified nature of return dynamics within the Colombian diaspora in Venezuela and also suggests that decisions to remain or return are closely tied to the strength of economic, social, and transnational networks (Massey et al., 1993; Cassarino, 2004).

4.5.4 Reintegration Challenges and Social Networks

Importantly, Colombian returnees from Venezuela often had stronger connections to contemporary Colombian society compared to those returning from the United States or Spain. However, their extended absence for those who moved decades ago, had children born in Venezuela, even with strong social connections can create family-level reintegration challenges. Indeed, some returnees had spent extended periods in Venezuela – in some cases decades – establishing families, property, and social networks within Venezuelan society. Upon return to Colombia, many returnees found themselves in the paradoxical position of returning to a homeland they had left years or decades earlier, often to communities or regions altered by conflict, displacement, and economic change.

In general, Colombian returnees from Venezuela maintain complex transnational networks before and after their return. Many of them had families in Colombia, and many

have family members remain in Venezuela after return or had kinship connections extending across the border region. These transnational networks become especially important for returnees who lack extensive connections to contemporary Colombian society. While in border regions particularly, Colombians and Venezuelans often maintain fluid cross-border networks for economic exchange, family visiting, and mutual assistance.

The collapse of Venezuelan institutions and economic systems paradoxically strengthened some transnational networks, as family members in both countries developed strategies for survival that depended on cross-border resource flows and information exchange. Returnees' networks in Venezuela may provide information about opportunities for return, while their networks in Colombia enable initial housing, employment assistance, and social integration. However, the prolonged nature of the Venezuelan crisis means that both networks may be weakened by sustained separation and the deteriorating conditions affecting network members remaining in Venezuela.

Colombian returnees from Venezuela face labor market integration challenges similar to returnees from other countries, but with particular intensification given the crises-driven and forced nature of their migration. Empirical evidence from the department of Atlántico indicates that Colombian returnees from Venezuela experience high levels of labor informality, contractual instability, and limited social security integration (Díez et al., 2021). Similarly, broader national-level evidence suggests structural labor market disadvantages among return migrants (López Villamil, 2020). Upon return, many returnees lack formal qualifications recognized in the Colombian labor market or have credentials from Venezuelan institutions whose validity is questionable. (The hardship of process of validating academic degrees has been mentioned by several Venezuelans in Colombia during the research trip of this dissertation.) However, labor market insertion is frequently mediated by informality and social capital rather than institutional credential validation. Also, others possess years of work experience in Venezuela that does not translate easily into Colombian employment sectors, thus returnees frequently experience occupational downgrading upon return. Colombian returnees are competing with Venezuelan migrants and native Colombian workers for formal and informal employment.

4.5.5 Territorial Patterns and Border Dynamics

The spatial distribution of these Colombian returnees within Colombian territory diverged notably from that of incoming Venezuelan migrants, reflecting distinct network structures and motivational patterns. According to the 2018 National Population Census, approx. 22.7% of Colombian returnees from Venezuela resided in rural or dispersed rural areas, contrasting sharply with the predominantly urban settlement pattern of Venezuelan

migrants in Colombia (DANE, 2019). This rural settlement pattern likely reflects the agricultural and extractive origins of much Colombian emigration to Venezuela, with returnees reconnecting to the rural communities from which they had migrated decades earlier. It also draws attention to the enduring importance of rural areas as both sources and destinations of international migration. By highlighting this pattern, Colombian–Venezuelan return migration challenges the urban bias that has long shaped migration research (López Villamil, 2020). Also, Colombian returnees distributed themselves much more heavily in cities proximate to the frontier.

Return migration is an inherent feature of migration processes and displays particular characteristics in border regions with Venezuela (Price, 2024). Also, Colombian returnees concentrates heavily in border regions, particularly the Venezuelan border states corresponding to Colombian departments of Norte de Santander, Guainía, Arauca, and La Guajira. The city of Cúcuta for instance in Norte de Santander became a major hub for Venezuelan migrants and Colombian returnees, where long histories of cross-border exchange have been intensified by recent crisis-driven migration as the primary land border crossing point between the two nations (Cabrera, et. al., 2019). Cities including Cúcuta, Barranquilla, Santa Marta, Bucaramanga, Cartagena, Riohacha, and Valledupar together accounted for almost 28% of the Colombian returnee population (López Villamil, 2020). These border regions are characterized by a floating population that lives or works on either side of the border, living transnational lives by sactualy simultaneously living in both countries (Riaño – Aliaga Sáez, 2024). This represents another form of migration with distinct characteristics, reflecting the open-ended, dynamic nature of return. However, beyond these immediate border areas, return flows distributed across Colombia, with some returnees traveling to major urban centers where they had family connections or where economic opportunities existed.

For Colombian returnees from Venezuela, settlement in border regions is increasingly dangerous, as these territories are marked by the presence of guerrilla factions, paramilitary structures, and other illegal armed actors competing for territorial control. According to a study based on interviews, the context of violence in Norte de Santander means that most of the returnees have experienced human rights abuse and forced displacement (Riaño – Aliaga Sáez, 2024). They have been vulnerable in two ways; as it was mentioned before, many of these returnees were originally fleeing Colombia as a result of the armed conflict and violence, now they face the same violent and poor circumstances as they had to return from the crisis-led Venezuela.

4.6 CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Chapter 4 to be finalized at the very end, notes have been prepared…

5. CHAPTER: PUBLIC POLICIES IN SUPPORT OF (RE-)MIGRATION

5.1 GLOBAL MIGRATION POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND RETURN MIGRATION INITIATIVES

This chapter places return migration initiatives within the broader framework of global migration governance, understood as an increasingly significant field of public administration and public policy. Migration governance encompasses the institutional, legal, and policy arrangements through which states and international actors seek to regulate human mobility, balance competing policy objectives, and respond to complex migration dynamics that cut across national borders. Within this framework, migration policies are commonly structured around interrelated domains, including the migration–refugee nexus, immigration policies, emigration and diaspora engagement policies, integration policies, and return and remigration policies. The academic literature emphasizes that these policy areas are analytically distinct yet deeply interconnected, as they often target overlapping populations and are shaped by shared institutional and normative logics. The following chapter provides a concise overview of the theoretical, structural, functional, and institutional characteristics of these major migration policy domains based on academic literature, without aiming to deliver a comprehensive public policy analysis. Instead, it highlights how return policies have gained increasing prominence within global migration governance.

The chapter then turns to the Colombian case, offering a brief overview of Colombia's migration policy trajectory before focusing more specifically on its return migration framework. Particular attention is devoted to key policy instruments and initiatives, including Red Caldas, the Victims and Land Restitution Law (Law 1448 of 2011), the Return Law (Law 1565 of 2012), and the Colombia Nos Une program, which together constitute the core pillars of Colombia's approach to return, reintegration, and diaspora engagement.

All together, these initiatives illustrate Colombia's gradual shift toward a more structured and policy-driven engagement with return migration, shaped by internal displacement, long-standing emigration patterns, and more recent regional mobility dynamics. Building on this analytical overview, the final chapter of the dissertation offers a set of evaluative reflections and policy-oriented considerations, identifying key gaps, tensions, and opportunities for further development within Colombia's return migration and reintegration framework.

5.1.1 MIGRATION GOVERNANCE AND INTENATIONAL MIGRATION POLICIES

Migration policies constitute a central component of contemporary state governance, reflecting how states regulate human mobility across borders and within territories. Broadly defined, migration policy encompasses the legal, administrative, and institutional frameworks through which states seek to manage emigration, immigration, transit, and return, while balancing economic interests, security considerations, humanitarian obligations, and human rights norms (de Haas, Natter & Vezzoli, 2018). As Boswell (2007) says that migration policy is a complex legal and institutional system, and according to Hollfield (2004), it is a classic formulation of how liberal states navigate between market forces, law, and sovereignty. Over recent decades, migration policies have become increasingly multiplex and politicized, shaped by globalization, demographic change, conflict, and widening global inequalities. Indeed, migration policies are not merely tightening but are becoming more complex and politically sensitive (de Haas, 2021), and this heightened politicization and securitization of migration is often analyzed in contemporary academic literature (Guiraudon & Lahav, 2000). It is due to the nature of international migration, as it significantly influences international relations insofar as it affects relations between states, which are shaped by response to the phenomenon. In this sense, migration can become a trigger for conflict or, under certain conditions, for cooperation. Likewise, states may influence migration through the policies they adopt; however, these policies are themselves conditioned by interstate relations and by the approaches taken by other states toward migration (Weiner, 1985).

Also, along these lines, several scholars contend that analyzing migration necessitates a broad understanding of international relations that extends beyond a strictly state-centered framework. Within this literature, the relationship between international relations and migration has been conceptualized through a range of approaches, including Wallerstein's world-systems theory, perspectives that foreground the role of the state, and analytical frameworks informed by interdependence theory (Mitchell, 1989). In parallel, a growing body of scholarship rooted in transnationalism has emerged, frequently emphasizing the political dimensions of migration (Canales and Zlolniski, 2001; Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller, 2002), as well as the formulation of migration policies and their implications within the global political and economic order (López Salas, 2005). Particular attention has also been paid to migrants' rights and political representation in both countries of origin and destination, and to how these issues intersect with migration policy frameworks (Calderón Chelius, 2006).

Migration policies do not simply regulate mobility; they actively construct migrants as policy subjects by naming, categorizing, and positioning them within specific regimes of rights, control, and inclusion. It means, that people do not become "policy subjects" of migration policies automatically just by existing, but it is the primary holder of the power of nomination, the state produces and legitimizes categories of subjects that determine who is considered deserving of public intervention and in what form (Foucault, (1991). Thus, people become *relevant* to the state only when the state recognizes, names, and categorizes them through policy. In other words, by Gil Araujo (2010), migration policy constitutes a power practice through which visibility, voice, and the right to speak are differentially allocated. The classifications are shaped by prevailing political dynamics, social tensions, and institutional priorities, and they define the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within the public sphere. Consequently, migration policies do not merely respond to pre-existing social realities but actively construct migrants as particular types of subjects, thereby shaping their rights, obligations, and opportunities. As Czaika and de Haas (2013) argue, migration policies do not simply "restrict" or "regulate" migration; rather, they selectively shape its forms, directions, and consequences.

The fact is that although migration governance is embedded in international relations and global governance, every public policy embodies a specific vision of society and an underlying intention to transform it according to the governing group's own perspective and social model. This social model is the product of a historical construction in which not only strictly political elements—and thus power struggles—converge, but also long-standing cultural dimensions (Novick, 2012). This also represents the multidimensional nature of the phenomena, while also calls for attention to the complexity of global migration policies.

From an analytical standpoint, contemporary migration policy research emphasizes the importance of agency–structure interactions. Frameworks such as the aspirations–capabilities approach – that is one of the bases of the theoretical approach of this dissertation – conceptualize migration and return not simply as responses to policy incentives, but as outcomes shaped by migrants' aspirations and their capacity to act within structural constraints (Carling – Schewel, 2018). This perspective highlights why similar policy instruments can produce divergent outcomes across groups and contexts. Overall, migration policies should be understood not as static legal texts, but as dynamic governance systems embedded in broader political, economic, and social structures. Their effectiveness depends not only on formal design, but also on implementation capacity, institutional coordination, and the lived realities of migrants.

While historically, migration policies were primarily oriented toward border control and admission regulation, focusing on who may enter, reside, or work within a state's territory, classic migration regimes emphasized sovereignty and national security, with limited attention to migrants' rights or long-term integration (Castles – Miller, 2009). However, as mentioned before, from the late twentieth century onward, migration has increasingly been conceptualized as a structural and enduring phenomenon rather than a temporary or exceptional one. This shift has given rise to the concept of migration governance, which extends beyond border enforcement to include labor-market regulation, integration policies, diaspora engagement, and return migration frameworks. Governance approaches recognize that migration today constitutes a complex issue that is addressed across multiple arenas: it appears in discussions, declarations, and action plans of regional integration blocs, within governmental institutions – whether binding or non-binding for states – as well as in civil society organizations, local authorities, employers, and migrants themselves—across different levels of decision-making (Betts, 2011). At the regional level, migration policies are often shaped by free-movement agreements, regional labor markets, and shared protection mechanisms, as seen in the European Union, ECOWAS, or in the South American case, MERCOSUR and the Andean Community. These arrangements illustrate the growing importance of multi-level governance in migration management (Geddes – Scholten, 2016) which is an essential characteristic of global governance especially since the early 2000s. Still, at the global level, migration policy remains largely within the domain of national sovereignty, yet it is increasingly influenced by international norms and soft-law instruments. Organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) play a key role in shaping policy discourse, technical standards, and best practices. In 2016, the **IOM** became a related organization of the UN, which was a milestone of migration governance being institutionalized for the first time within the UN architecture, strengthening coordination, data production, and policy diffusion across states and regions.

In the same year, the New York Declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly, which was a critical turning point in global migration governance because it formally launched two distinct yet coordinated international policy processes, one addressing refugees and the other migrants. This dual-track approach reflected a growing consensus among UN Member States that, while refugee protection and migration governance are interconnected, they require separate normative frameworks, legal logics, and institutional responses.

First, the Declaration initiated the process that led to the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). This process was firmly anchored in the existing international refugee protection regime, particularly the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and was led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Rather than creating new legal obligations or changing the core legal definition of refugee status, the objective of the GCR was to enhance predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing among states hosting large refugee populations (UNHCR, 2018). The GCR emphasized four key areas: easing pressure on host countries, enhancing refugee self-reliance, expanding access to third-country solutions, and supporting conditions for safe and voluntary return.

Second, as a contemporary policy milestone, in December 2018, the New York Declaration launched a separate, state-led process to elaborate a comprehensive framework for international migration, culminating in the **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM).** It was the first-ever intergovernmentally negotiated UN agreement on a common approach to managing international migration, because prior to this process, international migration lacked an overarching global governance framework comparable to the refugee regime, resulting in fragmented and predominantly national policy responses (Betts, 2011). The GCM negotiation process, led by UN Member States with substantial involvement from the IOM addressed all dimensions of migration, including regular and irregular migration, transit, destination, and return. The resulting Compact articulates 23 objectives covering areas such as migration data, protection of migrants' rights, regular migration pathways, international cooperation, and return and reintegration (United Nations, 2018). As for return perspectives relevant for this dissertation, Objective 21 of the GCM specifically commits member states to „cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration," establishing a normative framework that emphasizes human rights protections, dignity, and the need for comprehensive reintegration support (United Nations, 2018; GCM, 2018).

The GCM operates on several guiding principles that differentiate it from previous migration governance approaches. First, it adopts an individual level focus, ie. a people-centered approach that places individuals at the core of migration policy, recognizing that decisions to migrate and return are deeply personal and influenced by complex socioeconomic, political, and social factors (Guild & Wieland, 2020). Second, the compact emphasizes international cooperation, acknowledging that no state can effectively address migration alone due to the inherently transnational nature of migration flows (Kerwin; Hare, and Fuentes, 2025). Third, it grounds migration governance in human rights frameworks and fundamental freedoms, committing states to respect, protect, and fulfill the

rights of all migrants regardless of their migratory status. While also, the GCM recognizes the principle of state sovereignty, at the same time emphasizing shared responsibility and cooperative frameworks for managing migration in all its dimensions (Guild – Wieland, 2020).

This Compact represents a form of low-intensity normative action through *soft law*, by means of which states seek to adopt common "rules" for "human mobility in the twenty-first century" while simultaneously preserving their sovereignty (Fajardo del Castillo, 2020). Indeed, the negotiation process of the agreement was not without difficulties and disagreements due to the normative expectations it generates and the power struggle for sovereignty in terms of policy making among diverse states with varying migration interests and capacities. This voluntary nature has generated both opportunities and challenges. Even despite its adoption, many questions remain regarding the political and legal scope of the text, since it is non-legally binding, a cooperative framework that operates through consensus and collective commitment rather than coercive mechanisms. The effectiveness of soft-law instruments was criticized already before GCM, thus no surprise that concerns about ensuring implementation and accountability of GCM arose, because domestic policy priorities and political pressures often endanger the results of such initiatives (Pécoud, 2021). President Donald Trump was also one of the critics who does not appreciate the efforts made to create GMC. On the 7th of January, he signed an executive order withdrawing the United States from the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), formally pulling the country out the UN's Global Compact for Migration. The US argues that GFMD promotes mass migration and undermines national sovereignty by advancing the concept of an international „right" to migrate. Principal Deputy Spokesperson Tommy Pigott claims that such organizations have fueled an endless flow of mass migration, while under Trump administration "the era of mass migration is over" (Fox News, 2026).

Since 2016, The Migration Governance Indicators (MGI) have been measuring and assisting governments with their migration policies and strategies. MGI are a policy assessment framework developed by the International Organization for Migration to measure how well a country's migration policies align with internationally recognized principles of good migration governance (IOM, 2022). They are not a ranking of "good" or "bad" countries, but a diagnostic tool designed to support – upon request by states - evidence-based policy dialogue and reform to identify good practices and areas with potential for further development. The framework is explicitly aligned with the principles of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, making it one of the main operational tools for monitoring GCM-related policy capacity at the national level.

While the important relationship between international migration and development has long been recognized, the integration of international migration into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs, 2015) represents an important step forward. The matter of the fact is that when supported by appropriate policies, migration can contribute to inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development (UN, 2017). Within the agenda, migration is not treated as a sector-specific issue, nor as a problem to be managed exclusively through border control, but as a cross-cutting structural component of sustainable development, linked to economic growth, inequality, labor markets, and human rights (UN, 2015).

Among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined, migration is referenced explicitly most notably for instance in (UN, 2015):

- Target 10.7, which calls on states to *"facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies"*;
- Target 8.8, which emphasizes the protection of labor rights and safe working environments for all workers, including migrant workers;
- Target 10.c, which aims to reduce the transaction costs of migrant remittances.

Although the 2030 Agenda is non-binding, it has substantial normative and policy significance. By integrating migration targets into a universally endorsed development framework, the SDGs have contributed to the mainstreaming of migration across policy sectors, including employment, education, health, and inequality reduction (Betts, 2011; UN DESA, 2019). The Agenda was created in 2015 and has encouraged states to align national migration strategies with broader development planning and reporting mechanisms as it provided an important normative foundation for subsequent global initiatives, particularly the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM).

5.1.2 Refuge-Migrant Nexus in Migration Governance

When it comes to defining refugees and migrants in a conceptual framework, it is not always without difficulty, especially when forming policies. The scholarly literature treats refugee policy and immigration policy as closely interconnected yet analytically distinct policy domains for several reasons. Most authors start from the assumption that refugee policy constitutes a specialized subsystem of immigration policy, operating within the same institutional and political space—namely border control, entry, residence, and integration—while being grounded in different legal and normative foundations. Immigration policy is discretionary and sovereignty-driven, determining who may enter and under what conditions, whereas refugee policy is constrained by international law and is

protection-based, centered on principles such as non-refoulement and the right to seek asylum. This distinction is classically conceptualized by James Hollifield as the tension between rights and sovereignty (Hollifield, 2004), an ever-lasting dilemma on the migration agenda for states and governments even in the 2020s.

Within the field of global migration governance, as mentioned above, it was the New York Declaration (2016) and the Global Compacts (2018) that deliberately established two separate yet coordinated frameworks for these respective policy areas, thereby constituting an important milestone. Institutional overlap though had already been highlighted by Castles, de Haas, and Miller (2014), who argue that immigration policy regulates economic, family-related, and other admission channels, while refugee policy governs the humanitarian channel of entry. Nevertheless, in practice, the two domains are increasingly intertwined.

A political governance approach also raises concern on how refugee policy has increasingly been subordinated to broader immigration control objectives, particularly in destination states facing political pressure to restrict migration. Rather than functioning exclusively as a protection-oriented regime, asylum systems are often integrated into border management, deterrence, and selection strategies, thereby blurring the distinction between humanitarian protection and migration control (Gibney, 2004; Boswell, 2007).

In the migration literature, the refugee–migrant nexus refers to the analytical insight that, although refugees and migrants are defined through distinct legal categories, their movements, experiences, and policy treatment increasingly overlap in practice. Scholars emphasize that mixed migration flows, shared migration routes, and common reception, integration, and return frameworks blur the boundary between forced and voluntary migration, particularly in policy implementation and governance (Boswell, 2007). As a result, refugee and immigration policies are often jointly administered within the same institutional and political systems, making their interaction central to contemporary migration governance debates (Long, 2013; Betts, 2011).

The Venezuelan displacement in Latin America constitutes a clear empirical manifestation of the refugee–migration nexus, whereby forced displacement is governed predominantly through migration policy instruments rather than asylum regimes. In this dissertation, the regional country responses of the Venezuelan migration crisis have already been discussed in Chapter 3.3, however, here we again must mention them because they reflect a broader regional pattern of mixed legal categorization and governance pragmatism in which states seek to balance humanitarian considerations with administrative feasibility and political constraints. Although the drivers of Venezuelan outflows—economic collapse, food and medical insecurity, political repression, and generalized violence—clearly

exceed classic labor migration dynamics, most receiving states in the region have avoided large-scale recognition of Venezuelans as refugees, opting instead for migration-based, temporary, and administrative protection mechanisms (Freier & Parent, 2019; Acosta & Freier, 2015). As a result, Venezuelans are often classified as "*migrants in need of protection"* rather than as refugees, producing a hybrid governance approach that sits squarely within the refugee–migration nexus (Cantor, Freier, & Gauci, 2021). This approach is rather "convenient" for receiving states as it allows them to extend protection without triggering the full legal obligations associated with refugee status, while still responding to large-scale displacement. However, it also creates uneven protection outcomes, as access to rights depends on migratory status rather than on protection needs.

A perfect example of this is Colombia, where protection has been institutionalized through large-scale regularization and temporary protection frameworks (e.g. Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants (ETPV)), administered through migration institutions rather than the refugee regime. At the regional level, the Venezuelan case highlights how the refugee–migration nexus reshapes governance in contexts of mass displacement outside the Global North. While this approach has enabled rapid and large-scale inclusion, the literature cautions that it may also normalize temporary protection, leaving displaced populations in prolonged legal precarity and limiting durable solutions such as permanent residence or citizenship (Freier & Parent, 2019).

5.1.3 IMMIGRATION (ADMISSION AND ENTRY) POLICIES

In the academic literature on migration, immigration governance refers to the set of policies, institutions, and regulatory instruments through which states control the admission, residence, and status of non-nationals within their territory; i.e. regulates who is allowed to enter and remain in a country. There is a "receiving-country bias of migration research" (de Haas, 2011, p. 13), which refers to the fact that in both academic and policy-oriented discussions, immigration policies are afforded a markedly more prominent role, whereas emigration and return migration tend to receive substantially less systematic attention. Tóth (2010) even claimed that 'migration policies' as an object of research has been synonymous with research on 'immigration policy'.

Another characteristic of immigration governance is that it is the most sovereignty-sensitive and politicized domain of migration policy, as it directly concerns border control, national membership, and access to rights (Hein de Haas & Mark J. Miller, 1993; Hollifield, 2004). Also, scholars emphasize that immigration governance is shaped by a persistent tension between state control and individual rights. While states seek to regulate entry and residence through restrictive immigration policies according to economic,

security, and political priorities, in the same time, they are constrained by international legal norms, labor market demands, and human rights obligations often limiting the state's ability to enforce their desired controls. Hollifield (2004) conceptualizes this as the "liberal paradox," which explains why policy outcomes often diverge from political intentions. According to him, immigration governance thus is a constant balancing act between state authority and rights-based constraints, which was also explained within the migration-refugee nexus.

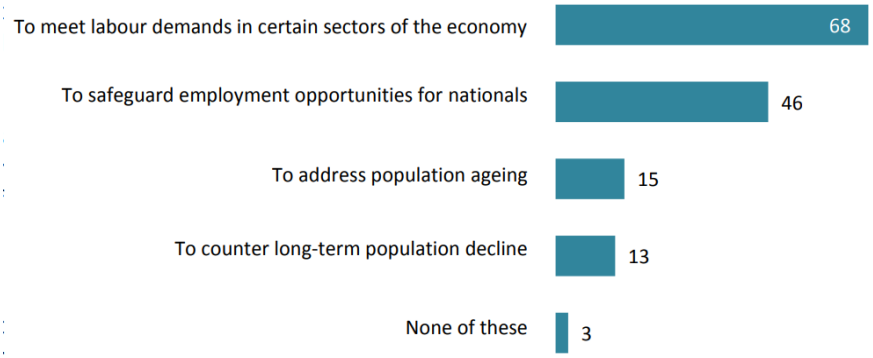
The core policy instruments of immigration governance include admission and selection tools, such as visa regimes, admission criteria; such as quotas, points-based systems, and labor recruitment schemes, which determine who may enter and under what conditions. Border and enforcement instruments cover asylum and refugee determination systems, the control of the borders, carrier sanctions, detention, and removal procedures, regulating unauthorized entry and stay. Once admitted, status-management instruments define migrants' rights and obligations through residence permits, work authorizations, family reunification rules, and pathways to permanent residence or citizenship (Castles et al., 2014; de Haas, Natter, & Vezzoli, 2018).

As highlighted, immigration policies have a sovereign nature, while they are also embedded within multi-level frameworks involving international organizations, regional free-movement regimes, and soft-law coordination mechanisms when it comes to their constitutionality. In our contemporary world immigration governance is not confined to national borders but extends outward through externalization practices, cooperation with transit states, and regional agreements, reinforcing its transnational and multi-actor character (Betts, 2011). These policy frameworks result in complex tensions between national interests and international cooperation.

In the academic literature - also referred to it with regards to migration governance - immigration policies are commonly understood as being shaped by a combination of economic, demographic, and political rationales, particularly labor-market needs, skills shortages, and longer-term demographic challenges. At the same time, when forming policy goals and strategies, contemporary immigration agendas increasingly reflect the migration–development nexus, framing immigration not only as a control issue but also as a potential driver of economic growth, human capital formation, and development outcomes (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014; Hollifield, 2004; de Haas, 2012). Without a detailed introduction to policy practices, some patterns are presented with regards to current immigration policy rationales. Primarily, meeting labor demands is the top rationale for countries' immigration policies; globally, 68% of Governments identify meeting labor market demands as the underlying reason for their current immigration policy (UN,

2017). A large share (46%) of Governments also view immigration policy as a tool to safeguard employment opportunities for their nationals, while demographic drivers are the third most widely cited rationale, with 15% of Governments pursuing their current immigration policy to address population ageing and 13% to counter long-term population decline (See Figure 27). Also, there has been a large increase in the number of countries with policies to attract highly skilled workers; and more than half of all countries have a policy to promote the integration of migrants.

Figure 27: Rationale for current immigration policy, 2015 (percentage of governments)



Source: UN, 2016.

5.1.4 Emigration and Diaspora Policies

Emigration policies refer to the set of legal, institutional, and programmatic measures through which states engage with the outward movement of their own citizens. However, they do not stop only regulating departure, but contemporary policies realized the importance of managing relationships with nationals residing abroad. Within these lines, diaspora policies constitute a central component of contemporary emigration policies, blurring the boundary between mobility governance and citizenship governance. Indeed, emigration policy no longer ends at the moment of departure; instead, it increasingly extends into the long-term governance of citizens abroad. Thus, emigration policies are primarily concerned with transnational ties, and the political, economic, and social implications of emigration for countries of origin (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014) especially since late twentieth century, as large-scale emigration, remittance flows, and diaspora communities became structurally embedded in national economies and societies (de Haas, 2012). Thus, there has been a shift on the perception of migration; no longer considered a loss to be prevented, but framed positively, linking migration to development and transnational engagement, a phenomenon to be managed, leveraged, and governed (Gamlen, 2014; Castles et al., 2014).

Since the migration–development nexus has characterized emigration policy importance, emigrants are embedded into national development strategies (de Haas, 2012;

Frankenhaeuser et.al., 2013). They are frequently framed as development actors through remittances, transnational entrepreneurship, and skills transfer. In order to mobilize the developmental, political, and symbolic potential of their emigrant populations, states increasingly pursue strategies aimed at fostering loyalty, political support, and economic engagement among members of the diaspora. In exchange, they extend selected rights, institutional recognition, and symbolic forms of inclusion that reaffirm emigrants' continued membership in the national community.

The shift where emigrants and diaspora being reimagined as assets rather than losses, and in which states actively seek to maintain governance ties with citizens beyond their territorial borders creating institutions and policies directed at their diasporas (Gamlen, 2006) has constructed the term of what Alan Gamlen famously conceptualized the **"emigration state"**. While in fact, diasporas generally come into being without the help and support of any government, as well as transnational practices are also likely to appear spontaneously (Soltész, 2016), the state can actively facilitate diaspora experience and transnational mechanisms. 'Emigration states' according to Gamlen apply diaspora engagement policies. His threefold typology of diaspora policies describes a state–diaspora "relational logic", in which he defines three higher-level types of diaspora engagement policy: (1) capacity building policies, aimed at discursively producing a state-centric 'transnational national society', and developing a set of corresponding state institutions; (2) extending rights to the diaspora, thus playing a role that befits a legitimate sovereign, and (3) extracting obligations from the diaspora, based on the premise that emigrants owe loyalty to this legitimate sovereign (Gamlen, 2006). Gamlen conceptualizes diaspora policies as a sequential strategy through which states first construct and institutionalize a transnational national community, then legitimate it by extending selected rights, and finally activate it by eliciting obligations such as loyalty, political support, or economic contributions. The central insight of this typology is that diaspora engagement is not merely symbolic, but a form of transnational governance based on reciprocal claims between states and emigrants.

In the migration governance literature, emigration policy instruments are commonly structured into analytically distinct but interrelated categories reflecting how states engage with citizens abroad (Levitt & de la Dehesa, 2003; Gamlen et al., 2019; Ragazzi, 2014; among others). Institutional and administrative instruments are often highlighted, including consular services, documentation, and the creation of specialized diaspora or emigrant affairs bodies, which formalize and facilitate state–diaspora relations and enable governance beyond territorial borders. Also, legal and political instruments are essential tools that encompass external voting rights, dual or multiple citizenship, and recognition

of overseas residence. Economic instruments aim to facilitate remittances, diaspora investment, and entrepreneurial engagement. The aforementioned instruments are often prioritized since they link emigration policy to national development strategies and the migration–development nexus (de Haas, 2012). Similarly, human capital and knowledge-transfer instruments exist, where skills networks and scientific diaspora programs are created. Albeit concerns over brain drain, models of brain circulation and transnational capacity building have gained prominence in emigration and diaspora policies (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). Further symbolic and discursive instruments facilitate policies, including cultural programs, nation-branding, and narratives of belonging. These all play a crucial role in shaping diaspora identity and sustaining emigrants' affective ties to the state (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014). Taken together, these instruments illustrate that emigration policies constitute a multidimensional governance toolkit through which states seek to maintain authority, mobilize resources, and structure transnational engagement with their populations abroad.

However, scholars caution that emigration policies often privilege economically valuable migrants, reproducing inequalities within diasporas and between migrants and non-migrants (Gamlen, 2014; Castles et al., 2014). On the other hand, it is understood that, given the circumstances of everyday life, the country of destination can do much more for a migrant than the country of origin (Soltész, 2016). Thus, in case migrants are not considering prompt return or transit, migrants are more likely to get engaged in political and social actions in the receiving country than in the origin-country, while they are also often highly motivated in obtaining citizenship in the country of destination, which leads the way to integration processes.

5.1.5 Integration policies within Migration Policy Frameworks

Integration is a cardinal question of migration discussion, a widely discussed and debated issue in academic literature, however its total complexity is not included in this chapter (Portes – Böröcz, 1989; Portes – Zhou, 1993; Eriksen, 2007; Castles et al., 2014; Penninx – Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016; Kováts, 2013; etc.). On the other hand, it is essential within the framework of migration policy frameworks, thus in the followings its place is defined within migration policy frameworks. Indeed, integration policies constitute a distinct yet deeply interconnected sub-domain within the broader architecture of migration policies (Hollifield, 2004; Boswell, 2007). As discussed earlier, while migration policies in the narrow sense focus primarily on the regulation of mobility – entry, admission, residence, legal status, and return – integration policies address the post-arrival phase, aimed at

facilitating migrants' effective participation in the economic, social, and civic spheres of the receiving society, primarily through labor-market access, education and language training, housing, health care, and anti-discrimination measures. As such, integration policies operate at the intersection of migration governance and domestic social policy (Castles – de Haas – Miller, 2014).

When it comes to functional differentiation, the migration policy literature commonly distinguishes between control-oriented policies (border management, visa regimes, asylum determination) and integration-oriented policies (labor market access, education, housing, health care, and civic participation). However, scholars emphasize that this distinction is primarily analytical rather than empirical. In practice, integration outcomes are strongly conditioned by migration control decisions, particularly legal status, security of residence, and access to rights (Hollifield, 2004; de Haas – Natter, – Vezzoli, 2018). This structural interdependence has led to the characterization of integration policies as the "internal dimension" of migration policy. Legal frameworks for admission and residence establish the boundaries within which integration can occur, it means though that effectively it enables or constrains migrants' capacity to participate in host societies (Boswell, 2007). Integration outcomes thus are often subject to migration policies.

Integration policies are underpinned by dual logic and are formulated both as a normative and instrumental policy objective. Normatively, they are grounded in principles such as equality, social cohesion, and rights-based inclusion, reflecting liberal democratic commitments to non-discrimination and social participation. While on the other hand, instrumentally, integration is often framed as a means of maximizing migrants' economic contributions, reducing welfare dependency, and mitigating social conflict (Geddes – Scholten, 2016; Penninx – Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). This duality has important implications for policy design. Integration measures frequently become conditional, linking access to rights or long-term residence to language acquisition, labor market participation, or demonstrations of cultural conformity. As several authors argue, such conditionality blurs the boundary between integration policy and migration control, transforming integration into a mechanism of selection and discipline rather than inclusion (Guiraudon – Lahav, 2000).

A defining feature of integration policy is its strong territorial dimension. While as was stated previously migration control remains largely centralized at the national level, the practical implementation of integration policies is often devolved to regional and local authorities. Indeed, it is more practical in terms of implementation, since education systems, housing markets, health services, and local labor markets play a decisive role in shaping integration trajectories, making local governance capacities a critical determinant

of policy effectiveness (Geddes – Scholten, 2016). Through this multi-level governance structure different integration outcomes can be reached even within the same national legal framework. Consequently, integration policies cannot be understood solely through formal legislation but must be analyzed in relation to institutional capacity, local political priorities, and socio-economic contexts, which critically shape their implementation and outcomes (Penninx – Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). Castles, de Haas and Miller's work (2014) is a classical reference highlighting that migration and integration policies are embedded in broader socio-economic structures, and integration outcomes are regularly a matter of labor markets, welfare states, and patterns of inequality.

No surprise that integration occupies a central yet highly contested position in contemporary migration policy debates when it comes to broader systems of migration governance. One argument claims that integration outcomes are evidence of the limits of immigration itself, rather than reflections of policy design or structural conditions. For instance, perceived shortcomings or "failures" of migrant integration – often framed in terms of social cohesion, labor market segmentation, or cultural incompatibility – are frequently mobilized in political discourse to justify more restrictive admission policies, tighter border controls, and increasingly selective migration regimes (Castles, 2010; Geddes – Scholten, 2016).

From another perspective, a substantial body of research demonstrates that integration difficulties are not externalities of migration but are often produced by migration control policies themselves. Restrictive migration policies can undermine integration processes if these prioritize deterrence and temporariness over stability and inclusion. Precarious legal statuses, limited access to rights, and prolonged uncertainty regarding residence or protection status constrain migrants' ability to invest in language acquisition, education, labor-market participation, and long-term settlement strategies (Hollifield, 2004; de Haas – Natter – Vezzoli, 2018).

This tension has generated a growing consensus in academic literature that integration should not be conceptualized as a secondary outcome of migration, occurring only after admission decisions have been made. Instead, scholars increasingly argue that integration constitutes a core and constitutive element of migration policy, embedded in legal frameworks, rights regimes, and governance structures from the moment of arrival—or even earlier (Penninx – Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). This proposal indeed shall be incorporated into policy practices and implementation procedures.

The analytical approach – as mentioned above – reappears again, meaning that migration and integration policies are analytically inseparable. Ie. the conditions under which migrants enter and reside fundamentally shape their subsequent life chances and social

trajectories. Drawing on the aspirations–capabilities framework, which is a central theoretical base of the dissertation, migration governance does not merely regulate movement but actively structures migrants' capacity to act, participate, and plan for the future within host societies (Carling – Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2021). Integration policies, therefore, are not simply reactive tools responding to migration flows; they are proactive instruments that shape how migration results in social inclusion, economic participation, or marginalization.

Successful integration policies are generally characterized by a long-term, multi-dimensional and rights-based approach. However, they range from multicultural and inclusion-oriented models to more assimilationist or conditional frameworks, depending on national contexts and governance traditions (Penninx – Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016; Castles et al., 2014). It means that the effectiveness of integration policies depends on how „integration" is defined (conceptualized) and measured (operationalized). It is because migration policies differ in how they interpret membership, diversity, and responsibility for integration.

Overviewing the spectrum on how governments apply integration policies and how their strategies differ, not only the definition of integration matters, but also what integration is not (Gordon, 1964; Portes – Zhou, 1993). Though it would be relevant to introduce conceptual debates on such terms as multiculturalism, assimilation or acculturation, since it is out of the focus of the dissertation, only a general introduction is made to how governments form and measure integration policies.

Noting the complexity of integration, in the academic literature, it is operationalized through a multidimensional and multi-level framework that measures migrants' participation across structural, social, civic, and cultural domains, while explicitly accounting for legal status, access to rights, and institutional opportunity structures; "reaching a certain legal status (citizenship or permanent residence permit), labor market status (stable job) and the acquisition of cultural and social skills for being able to interact with members of the host society (at least medium-level language proficiency, knowledge and respect of the basic traditions and customs of the country of destination)" (Soltész, 2016). All these conditions substantially shape integration outcomes (Penninx – Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016).

However, when it comes to integration policies, some receiving countries prefer multicultural and inclusion-oriented models, which recognize cultural diversity as a permanent feature of society and emphasize equal rights, institutional accommodation, and mutual adaptation between migrants and host societies. In these frameworks, integration is understood as a two-way process, in which the state removes structural barriers for migrants'

participation while also protecting cultural and social pluralism (Castles et al., 2014; Penninx – Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). Such multicultural societies do not force assimilation, but are characterized by the recognition of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity as a permanent and legitimate feature of the social order. Meanwhile other countries rather implement assimilationist or conditional integration models, which place stronger emphasis on migrants' individual responsibility to adapt to dominant societal norms, values, and practices. In these approaches, migrants' access to rights, long-term residence, or citizenship is often conditional upon demonstrated integration outcomes, such as language proficiency, civic knowledge, or labor-market participation. Integration is thus framed less as a collective societal process and more as a selective mechanism of inclusion, closely linked to immigration control and social cohesion concerns (Geddes – Scholten, 2016).

States form their policies along the aforementioned poles, however contemporary practice regularly shows hybrid integration regimes, which combines rights-based inclusion with conditionality and performance requirements. The literature argues that such diversity reflects the differences of national understandings on citizenship, welfare systems, and state–society relations, besides being purely contrasting technical policy considerations. Consequently, integration policies function not only as social policy tools but also as normative frameworks defining who belongs, under what conditions, and on what terms (Castles et al., 2014).

Beyond the host society, though, the effect of integration policies extends even further; experiences of inclusion or marginalization significantly influence migrants' future aspirations and capabilities, including decisions about onward migration or return (Carling – Schewel, 2018; Cassarino, 2004). In this sense, integration policies are closely intertwined with return migration policies, as both operate on the same populations and are embedded in overlapping institutional and normative frameworks (Penninx – Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). The following section therefore turns to return migration policies, examining how states seek to regulate, encourage, or manage migrants' decisions to return and reintegrate.

5.1.6 Return Migration Policies

Unlike earlier perspectives that viewed migration as a permanent, one-directional movement, contemporary understanding recognizes migration as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon encompassing temporary, circular, and return movements (Kerwin – Hare – Fuentes, 2025). This approach has appeared in policy perspectives as well, thus return migration has emerged as a critical component of contemporary international migration

governance, gaining significant prominence within multilateral policy frameworks over the past two decades. Comprehensive policy frameworks and initiatives started to surface all around the world, designed to facilitate safe, orderly, and regular migration patterns, with particular emphasis on ensuring dignified returns and sustainable reintegration (Kerwin – Hare – Fuentes, 2025). Indeed, the phenomenon of migrants returning to their countries of origin represents not merely a reversal of initial migration flows but rather a complex process involving economic, social, and political dimensions that demand sophisticated policy responses. Some might even say that it is a completely new migration decision.[21]

The conceptualization of return migration has undergone significant transformation, shifting from early interpretations that framed return primarily as a final stage of failed migration toward more dynamic understandings that emphasize circularity, preparedness, transnational ties, and the role of structural and institutional contexts in shaping return outcomes (Cassarino, 2004; King, 2000; de Haas, 2012). However, contemporary scholars and policymakers increasingly acknowledge that return migration encompasses diverse manifestations: voluntary returns driven by personal achievement or nostalgic longing for homeland, assisted returns through government programs and international cooperation, and forced returns through deportation when migrants have not met legal criteria for residence (IOM, 2019). Indeed, since return migrants are very different from each other (in background, resources, reasons for return, legal status, etc.), their diversity – just as international migrants themselves – demands differentiated policy approaches that recognize the agency, vulnerabilities, and potential contributions of returnees, while also respecting state sovereignty and international legal obligations.

As highlighted before with regards to global migration governance, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) was a huge milestone, which became the most comprehensive international framework governing also return migration. Objective 21 for instance specifically addresses the imperative to "cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration" (GCM, 2018) Key principles underlying the GCM's return and reintegration framework include ensuring that returning migrants are engaged in policy decisions, maintaining international cooperation between origin, transit, and destination countries, guaranteeing due process and individual assessment for all nationals seeking return, and upholding the prohibition of collective expulsion and the principle of non-refoulement (GCM, 2018). Additionally, states are encouraged to create conditions promoting personal safety, economic

[21] Mejía, interview, 2025.

empowerment, inclusion, and social cohesion in communities to promote sustainable re-integration.

When it comes to return – just in terms of emigration and immigration contexts – the remigration and development nexus appears in policy debates. Significant research demonstrates that return migrants can serve as agents of sustainable development, as they may transfer financial capital, knowledge, and innovative practices to their countries of origin (Cassarino, 2004; Docquier – Rapoport, 2012; de Haas, 2012; King, 2018). Voluntary, economically successful returnees often come back with savings, income, or business profits that they earned while abroad and this "remittance" represents a relevant source of funding for local sustainable development projects, (eg. education, healthcare, and environmental protection measures). Indeed, return migrants can act as development agents, with their human, social, and financial capital that has the potential to contribute substantially to sustainable socioeconomic development (de Haas, 2012; King, 2018). Empirical studies show positive correlations between migration experience and poverty reduction at the household level, with migrant and return-migrant households displaying higher income levels and better access to basic services than non-migrant households (Adams, 2011; de Haas, 2010). However, it is important to remember that this potential requires supportive policy frameworks and adequate reintegration assistance (Kutor – Ofori – Arku, 2025).

Despite policy commitments, significant challenges persist in implementing safe and dignified return practices. Vulnerability and protection concerns especially arise in case of forced returns. Indeed, research on forced return migration reveals for instance substantial health consequences, as returning migrants frequently encounter systemic barriers including limited healthcare access, economic instability, and social exclusion, all contributing to widening health disparities (Izquierdo-Condoy, et.al., 2025). Forced return also raises risks for returnees' marginalization both socially and economically. In order to address these challenges, governments and international organizations must adopt coordinated, equity-focused migration policies that integrate public health, legal, and social support systems.

Even though countries try to manage and coordinate return, adopting bilateral negotiations and arrangements (between the country of origin and destination cooperation on deportations, assisted return programs, or reintegration support), these processes are often without transparency (Taran, 2000). Indeed, authorities often lack structured readmission frameworks, resulting in inadequate protections with minimal monitoring (Cassarino, 2014).

Another challenge for return migration lies in its gender dimension. Women migrant workers often encounter restrictive policies and reintegration programs that do not adequately safeguard their rights or well-being upon return. Other than gender, research further reveals that state-managed return migration schemes can marginalize other vulnerable groups too when policies are poorly designed, leading to weak reintegration outcomes for those whose needs are not reflected in available data or program planning (Taran, 2000). Despite substantial evidence that return migration affects social groups differently – particularly along lines of gender, class, and legal status –, gender-sensitive and intersectional policy frameworks remain insufficiently developed in many national contexts (King – Lulle, 2016; IOM, 2019).

Globally, many governments report having policies or programs to encourage the return of their citizens living abroad; e.g. in 2019, 33% of governments reported having policies to raise levels of return of citizens living abroad, while only 1% adopted policies that wish to lower such flows (UN, 2019). However, empirical evidence suggests that returns tend to occur when economic conditions in home countries are attractive and new opportunities exist, while efforts by countries of origin to attract back their nationals living abroad (with public policies and incentives) often have limited impact (OECD, 2008).

As discussed earlier, return migration can only be considered sustainable and successful when it is accompanied by effective reintegration processes (Cassarino, 2004; Koser, 2000). Reintegration, not the same process as return itself, encompasses the complex processes through which returnees adapt to social, economic, cultural, and psychological conditions in their countries of origin. The effectiveness, the quality and the sustainability of reintegration is crucial, as it directly shapes returnees' capacity to secure livelihoods, rebuild social networks, and regain a sense of belonging in their communities of origin. It requires creating "conditions that will encourage personal safety, economic empowerment, inclusion and social cohesion in communities", recognizing that successful return involves far more than the logistics of physical transport (IOM, 2017). Indeed, in the absence of adequate reintegration support, returnees may face vulnerability, social exclusion, and instability, such circumstances thus may increase the likelihood of repeated or onward migration (Cassarino, 2004; Kuschminder, 2017).

5.2 MIGRATION POLICY OF COLOMBIA

Due to the violent and conflicted nature of the second half of the twentieth century's Colombia, migration governance was for a long time primarily structured around national security and public order considerations. The internal armed conflict, the state's fear

related to guerrilla movements and drug trafficking, and also the perception that cross-border mobility constituted a potential security risk, all resulted in migration management to be less a matter of social policy or development issue, but rather one of control, law enforcement, and sovereignty, and was therefore concentrated within the authority of security institutions (Ciurlo, 2015). Through this logic was nominated the *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* (DAS) as the responsible institution, which simultaneously performed intelligence, internal security, and migration control functions. This security-focused approach reflected Colombia's internal conflicts and geopolitical priorities, however proved to be inadequate for addressing the multidimensional realities of Colombian migration in the contemporary context. However, Colombia's migration policy evolved significantly during the twenty-first century, transitioning from this the "securitization" of migration governance to a more comprehensive approach addressing both diaspora engagement and migration governance (Carvajal, 2017). Following the dismantling of the DAS, migration management was rather reframed along civilian, technocratic, and rights-based lines.

The National Development Plan[22] for 2002–2006 established that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Cancellería*) should take the lead in promoting migration policy and coordinating it with various forward-looking policy initiatives. The latter became the coordinating axis of the **Comprehensive Migration Policy (*Política Integral Migratoria, PIM*)**, which was approved on August 24, 2009, set out in **CONPES 3603 (2009)**.[23] It encompassed the multiple dimensions of the migration phenomenon, consistently framed within the migration–development nexus—a recurring theme in Colombian state policymaking in this field (Bedoya, 2014). These milestones in Colombia's migration related policy agenda set further guidelines for migration management in border areas, promoted bilateral labor migration, encouraged return of Colombians abroad, and improved services for immigrants. The PIM provides a comprehensive framework outlining policy areas and actions that were subsequently formalized through specific laws and decrees at the national, departmental, and municipal levels. It is grounded in five core principles, all reflecting fundamental changes in migration governance: (1) coherence and reciprocity in relations with other countries; (2) a comprehensive and long-term policy orientation; (3) alignment with foreign policy objectives; (4) full respect for individual rights, recognizing migrants as legal subjects under national and international law; (5) and targeted

[22] In Colombia, National Development Plans are adopted for four-year periods corresponding to presidential terms, and since the early 2010s they have increasingly incorporated migration-related objectives, reflecting a gradual shift from security-oriented governance toward development, rights-based, and humanitarian approaches.

[23] POLÍTICA INTEGRAL MIGRATORIA 2009 (Agosto 24): Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social República de Colombia Departamento Nacional de Planeación.

assistance prioritizing foreigners and Colombians abroad in situations of heightened vulnerability (CONPES 3603 Document; Ciurlo, 2015). It announces that: "this document summarizes the guidelines, strategies, and programs of the National Government aimed at promoting the development of Colombians living abroad and foreigners residing in the country. The policy addresses the various dimensions of development for the migrant population, as well as the institutional reforms necessary for its proper implementation. Finally, it describes the products, activities, associated budget, and recommendations that will be implemented to fulfill the proposed policy guidelines" (PIM, 2009).

Another key turning point in Colombia's migration policy architecture occurred when adopting the Law 1465 of 2011 and Law 1565 of 2012 institutionalized state responsibilities toward Colombians abroad and return migrants, while programs such as Colombia Nos Une strengthened ties with the diaspora and promoted return and reintegration. These developments were embedded in the later coming, successive National Development Plans, which explicitly incorporated migration into national planning and emphasized inter-institutional coordination.

Significant institutional reform occurred also in 2011, when the national migration system was formally created by law, *Migración Colombia* emerging as the leading migration management agency responsible for controlling and overseeing population flows into and out of the country. Before *Migración Colombia*, responsibility for policy design and implementation was assigned to different public institutions and agencies that were largely uncoordinated and fragmented. This biased and limited approach to migration processes resulted in fragmented policies, a lack of coherence in adopted measures, and an emphasis on emergency-driven responses (Ciurlo, 2015). The institutional reorganization reflected efforts to build more comprehensive migration governance.

More recently, Colombia's migration policy has been profoundly shaped by the large-scale arrival of Venezuelan migrants – as introduced previously in this dissertation –, positioning the country as a central actor in regional migration governance. Policy responses such as the Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants (ETPV) reflect a pragmatic and humanitarian approach that combines regularization, access to services, and long-term integration objectives. At the same time, with regards to migration governance during the Venezuelan exodus, persistent challenges still remained related to institutional capacity, uneven local implementation, and the coexistence of humanitarian, development, and control logics within migration governance.

We must bear in mind that migratory phenomenon in the contemporary Colombian context is embedded within broader regional and international scenarios that influence its dynamics (such as the Venezuelan crisis) and migration governance. Indeed, Colombia's

migration policy framework has increasingly evolved in close interaction with international migration governance norms and instruments, having international, regional and subregional dimensions of its migration management (e.g. bilateral agreements, integrations, global commitments such as GCMs, etc.), which all serve as tools to improve migrants' guarantees and living conditions. Overall, Colombia's experience illustrates a shift from securitized migration management toward a hybrid governance model, shaped by regional displacement dynamics and evolving international norms, (Bitar, 2022). while also prioritizing policies related to return migration.

5.2.1 COLOMBIAN INITIATIVES IN SUPPORT OF RETURN MIGRATION

Colombia's approach to return migration has gradually evolved from *diaspora engagement* initiatives toward a more explicit *return-and-reintegration* policy architecture. Indeed, Colombia has developed a comprehensive framework for managing return migration of its citizens abroad, combining legislative measures, institutional programs, and international cooperation. However, according to the ENMIR survey (Mejía et al., 2009), explicit policies by recipient and origin countries to encourage or attract return have yet few results. Even today – at a time when Colombia has become a key transit country for Venezuelan nationals and remains engaged in implementing the peace agreement – emigration dynamics and diaspora-related issues continue to receive insufficient attention. Mejía argues that the Government must put more and more emphasis on its public policies related to the support of return migration of Colombian nationals especially considering that return flows have been increasing.[24] He also argues that if the political, economic and social situation in the country of origin is stable and attractive, a certain number of returns will occur spontaneously; otherwise, assistance and financial support from the receiving country is rarely enough to convince many migrants to return (Mejía et. al., 2009). However, this observation was made before aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, before the Venezuelan crisis, as well as before the Peace Deal with the FARC, which might result the increase of returns of victims from abroad. Certainly, incentives for migrants with long stays in the receiving countries are much more difficult to emerge effectual, especially if they have brought their families and their children were born and educated in the receiving country (Mejía et. al., 2009).

For many years, Colombian migration, the rights of emigrants, and the challenges they face did not occupy a central place on the national agenda. However, in the early 1990s,

[*] This chapter was based on the following paper:
Bata-Balog, Amadea (2021): Las redes de migrantes transnacionales y la diáspora: una visión colombiana. *IBEROAMERICANA QUINQUEECCLESIENSIS,* 19, 32-51.

[24] Mejía interview, 2025.

following a prolonged period of violence linked to guerrilla activity and drug cartels, the country adopted a new constitution under President Gaviria in 1991. This occurred within a broader climate of "enthusiasm for national reconstruction." Public policies –motivated by concern over the negative consequences of emigration and, in particular, the loss of skilled professionals – had, until the late 1980s, focused on programs designed to encourage expatriate intellectuals to return to Colombia. In general, these initiatives were largely unsuccessful, as national institutions struggled to provide returning scholars with working conditions comparable to those they had enjoyed abroad. Against this backdrop, a new and more forward-looking initiative emerged: the Red Caldas program, launched in 1991. Red Caldas was unfortunately not long lived, but it was followed by the rather well-known Colombia Nos Une program and institutional infrastructure supporting returnees.

Before introducing the aforementioned programs, a major milestone for return governance was indeed CONPES 3603 (2009) – mentioned before - setting out the Comprehensive Migration Policy (PIM) because it explicitly framed the state's responsibilities toward Colombians abroad and return-related interventions (institutional coordination, information services, and linkages with sectoral programs). More recently, *Ley 2136* (2021) consolidated the PIM in statutory form, defining principles, lineaments and governance arrangements for migration management, explicitly encompassing Colombians abroad and Colombian returnees among the populations addressed by the national policy framework. In practice, return policy coordination is organized through inter-institutional arrangements that connect the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Cancillería), migration authorities, and sectoral entities (tax/customs, labor, social protection, etc.), aiming to move beyond ad hoc responses and toward a more coherent reintegration pathway.

Not to forget about taking into consideration the victims of the armed conflict of Colombia, the government introduced the Victims and Land Restitution Law in 2011, which created a framework for compensation and assistance for the victims displaced abroad or for those who have already returned to the national territory. However, we could say that the most important policy initiative from the side of the Colombian Government towards return management and assistance has been the Law 1565 of 2012, also known as the Return Law (*Ley de Retorno*), developed and corroborated under the umbrella of 'Colombia nos Une', and its 'Return Plan' to foster and assist return migration of the Colombian diaspora.

With regards to such remigration policy initiatives and the goal of attracting migrants back to the origin country, the effectiveness of these efforts has been always questioned (Mejía et.al, 2009). However, a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, back in 2013 noted that, as a matter of policy, the Colombian government neither

promotes nor discourages the migration of its nationals, viewing it as a fundamental right. Instead, it seeks merely to accompany migrants during departure, residence abroad, and return, should they choose to do so (Bedoya, 2014). By acknowledging this, their intention is also questioned whether at the time have they been effectively work on luring emigrants home. Some researchers also criticize public policies and the legal framework for return as inadequate, for instance describing the types of return established in Law 1565 of 2012 as inoperative, since its application hinders the process of reintegration of migrants (López Villamil, 2020), as well as they claim that the legal categories make invisible the problems of the most vulnerable returnees (Aliaga Sáez, et al., 2019). Despite these critiques, the Return Law is the most relevant measure enacted for Colombian returnees.

This chapter examines the principal return migration initiatives and related institutional mechanisms designed to facilitate and support the reintegration of Colombians returning from abroad.

5.2.1.1 Red Caldas

The first return and diaspora engagement program was the so-called Red Caldas. Well, it was not a "return program" in the narrow sense, but it is historically important for Colombia's diaspora strategy and the *return of knowledge/capacity* debate. It usefully broadens the analysis beyond return initiatives, and humanitarian and economic reintegration and highlights a parallel policy logic: leveraging transnational human capital (with or without physical return). Red Caldas was launched in early 1991 by COLCIENCIAS, the national agency responsible for managing and financing research. As stated at the time: "The director of COLCIENCIAS, Álvaro Mendoza Arango, informed a few days ago that the Red Caldas website was already functioning at redcaldas.org" (El Tiempo, 1999). The program sought to enable the participation of "expatriate brains" in Colombia's scientific and cultural development without requiring their physical return. Instead of offering financial incentives for repatriation, Red Caldas focused on establishing institutional and relational mechanisms that would allow highly skilled Colombians abroad to collaborate from their countries of residence. It worked as a network of Colombian researchers abroad, aiming to connect the scientific diaspora with the national science and innovation system; i.e. an organized scientific diaspora (Echeverría-King et.al., 2022). This was facilitated through the use of emerging communication technologies – specifically the Internet – which had not yet become part of everyday life then. Notably, Colombia became the first Latin American country to organize its highly skilled diaspora into an online scientific network (Soltész, 2016).

Using a set of email lists, the program evolved into a virtual platform for generating collaborative project ideas. Most successful cooperation took place in universities, and the knowledge exchanged proved highly beneficial for Colombian academic institutions. Regarding project financing, the government provided co-funding, which required diaspora researchers to secure matching financial support. However, severe public spending cuts in the late 1990s significantly limited COLCIENCIAS' capacity to support Colombian research groups, and the impact was felt immediately by the program's main nodes – located predominantly in European and North American cities where most Colombian scholars were based. As a result, participation gradually declined once the program could no longer offer material support. Finally, although Red Caldas was formally dissolved in 2001, its trajectory demonstrated the real potential for productive collaboration within a transnational scientific network (Chapparo et. al., 2006). The Red Caldas experience is frequently discussed as an emblematic case of early "brain networking" in Latin America, including its eventual weakening/discontinuation in the early 2000s – often attributed to institutional fragilities and sustainability challenges typical of diaspora knowledge networks (Echeverría-King et.al., 2022).

5.2.1.2 Victims and Land Restitution Law (Law 1448 of 2011)

The Central Government, besides their efforts to end the armed conflict, also needs to provide assistance for their victims abroad. Within the framework of the Victims and Land Restitution Law (Law 1448 of 2011), victims of the internal armed conflict have the right to comprehensive reparation, regardless of whether they reside in Colombia or abroad, also helping their return. It is a legal instrument through which – judicial, administrative and social – measures are issued in favor of Colombians who consider themselves victims of the conflict. Those who suffered homicide, enforced disappearance, kidnapping, threats, injuries that produce permanent disability, torture or inhuman and degrading treatment, crimes against freedom and sexual integrity, forced recruitment, forced displacement, dispossession or forced abandonment of land, all are recognized by the law. Victims shall register themselves in the system of the Single Registry of Victims (*Registro Único de Víctimas, RUV*) managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Colombian consulates. Currently, 25,752 compatriot victims abroad are included in the RUV, which are mainly concentrated in Ecuador, Venezuela, Canada, Spain, the United States, Panama, Costa Rica, Sweden, Chile and France (Cancilleria, 2023).

For Colombian nationals who decide to return to Colombia, they must register in the RUV and preferable notify the authorities 30 days before their return. They also can access state assistance, though the measures that are available at the time of their arrival will depend on the existing offer in each territory. However, they can 1) request for food security

support to temporarily cover basic needs; 2) apply for economic support for the transfer to the final place of return or relocation within the national territory; 3) as well as their inclusion in support schemes will be sought for socio-economic stabilization and access to the institutional offer of entities in the territory of final settlement (RUV(b), n.d.).

The National System of Comprehensive Care and Reparation for Victims is responsible for offering plans, programs, and projects aimed at comprehensive care and reparation for victims of the armed conflict domiciled abroad and intend to return to Colombia or have already returned. On the one hand, the Colombian government is trying to assist their citizens, however, still needs to afford more attention and put more effort in its mission. While on the other hand, it also must assist refugees from Venezuela, accordingly the public service of the country is indeed overloaded with refugee issues.

5.2.1.3 Law 1565 of 2012 (Ley de Retorno)

The centerpiece of Colombia's return policy is Ley 1565 de 2012 ("*Ley de Retorno*") [25], so-called Return Law, which provisions are issued and incentives are set for the return of Colombians residing abroad. It mandates integral accompaniment for Colombians who voluntarily return. A salient design feature is that beneficiaries may generally access the law's incentives only once, which positions the program as a single-window reintegration boost rather than a long-term support scheme.

The law sets key eligibility criteria, including the followings:

- Being an adult;
- Proof of being abroad for at least 3 years;
- Register and express to the competent authority the interest of returning to the country under Law 1565 of 2012.;
- Not have current or former convictions abroad or in Colombia;
- Not having more than 12 months residing in Colombia after having returned.

Operational guidance linked to Ley 1565 commonly distinguishes return modalities in Article 3 (productive, solidarity/humanitarian-oriented categories), which structure the kind of support and validation pathways available to returnees. These classifications reflect the diverse circumstances and motivations of Colombian returnees. The first category, "*Retorno Solidario*" (Solidarity Return), targets Colombians who are victims of the internal armed conflict and persons living in extreme poverty conditions. This category receives specialized support articulated with the Unit for Victims (*Unidad para las Víctimas*) according to provisions established in Law 1448 of 2011. The second category, "*Retorno Humanitario o por Causas Especiales*" (Humanitarian or Special Circumstance

[25] LEY 1565 DE 2012 (Julio 31): Por medio de la cual se dictan disposiciones y se fijan incentivos para el retorno de los colombianos residentes en el extranjero

Return), applies to Colombians who return due to situations of force majeure or special circumstances that place at risk their physical, social, economic, or personal integrity, or that of their family members, including situations involving the abandonment or death of relatives abroad. The third category, "*Retorno Laboral*" (Labor Return), targets Colombians who return seeking employment. Under this classification, the government provides orientation and training to improve labor competencies, thereby facilitating labor market reintegration. The final category, "*Retorno Productivo*" (Productive Return), focuses on Colombians who return with entrepreneurship projects or productive initiatives. This category allows for access to funding sources and represents the government's effort to leverage returnee skills and capital for economic development. Notably, under the Return Law, individuals may apply to a single type of return per application; however, within the two-year period of recognized returnee status, they may transition to other return categories if such a change serves their socioeconomic stabilization objectives.

1) Solidarity return *(Retorno solidario):*
• Return of victims of the internal armed conflict, and those who obtain the classification as solemn poor;
• Single Registry of Victims *(Registro Único de Víctimas);*
• Unit for Comprehensive Attention and Reparation of Victims.
2) Humanitarian or special cause return *(Retorno humanitario o por causa especial):*
• Return due to situation of vis major or special causes;
• National System of Humanitarian Attention to the Return.
3) Labor return *(Retorno laboral):*
• Return to use skills, knowledge and work experiences acquired abroad;
• Ministry of Labor: Employment service, which works through the portal: *http://redempleo.gov.co/*
4) Productive return *(Retorno productivo):*
• Return to co-finance productive projects linked to the development plan of the department and / or municipality of the resettlement, with own resources or subsidies;
• Helps entrepreneurship in productive projects;
• Possible sources of financing to which returnees can apply according to their profile;
• Through the National Learning Service (SENA) returnees can access to the Enterpreneur Fund.

Under the Return Law, specific operational entry points facilitate the implementation. Most importantly it is the ***Registro Único de Retorno*** **(RUR)**, i.e. Unique Registry of Return, that functions as a central administrative gateway: registration is required to be recognized as a returnee under Ley 1565 and to initiate access to applicable benefits and routes. This registry thus plays a dual role: service access (enabling) and state measurement (counting/characterizing returnees).

The *Comisión Intersectorial para el Retorno* (CIR), i.e. The Intersectoral Commission for Return is the formal coordination body responsible for articulating an integral

response to the returnee population, including reviewing requests, determining eligibility/type of return, and coordinating proposals and plans for return accompaniment. From a policy-design perspective, the CIR reflects Colombia's attempt to avoid treating return as only a consular or migration-control issue; instead, it is positioned as a cross-sectoral reintegration process that requires labor, social, fiscal and local-territorial coordination.

How to register through the website:

- Valid citizenship card has to be attached;
- The stay abroad should be certified with documents;
- The compliance with the requirements shall be verified and the type of return chosen;
- Notification will arrive, if approved, the certificate of approval as a beneficiary will give access to incentives and support according to the type of return.

Referral and Opportunities Centers for Return (CRORE) were established under Article 9 of Law 1565 of 2012 with the mandate to receive, orient, and refer Colombian returnees and mixed family units, in coordination with local and departmental authorities. Staffed by advisors from the *Colombia Nos Une* internal working group within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, these centers provide structured guidance on the available service pathways offered by territorial entities, including support related to entrepreneurship, employment, education, administrative procedures, and access to health and social services. In accordance with current regulations, CROREs do not administer or disburse financial resources; rather, they function exclusively as orientation and referral mechanisms within the return migration policy framework (Appendix Table A2).

Under Law 1565 of 2012, the *Comisión Intersectorial para el Retorno* (CIR) was founded, which is a legally established intersectoral coordination body responsible for overseeing and articulating Colombia's return migration policy. It is composed of approximately 16 government entities, which meets monthly to analyze and approve Return Law applications. This multi-sector approach recognizes that successful reintegration of returnees requires coordination across education, labor, health, housing, and social protection sectors.

5.2.1.4 Colombia Nos Une

Colombia Nos Une (CNU) ("Colombia Unites Us") program, operated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, serves as the primary institutional mechanism for managing diaspora engagement and return migration support. It was launched before the Victims and Land Restitution Law or the Return Law mentioned above, however, already in 2003, it was imagined to be an umbrella program, that encompasses different initiatives with regards to diaspora engagement and return migration support through different administrative bodies. Indeed, in 2003-2004, as part of the development of Colombia's Comprehensive

Migration Policy under President Álvaro Uribe, the *Colombia Nos Une* program was founded, and even today it serves as the principal information, orientation, and referral platform for Colombians abroad and those returning. This program represents the Colombian government's recognition of its diaspora as a vital component of the nation and aims to generate initiatives that promote networking and collaborative activities among Colombians inside and outside the country. After Red Caldas, it expanded its focus beyond highly skilled migrants to include middle-class Colombians, who had become an increasingly significant share of emigrants since the 1980s (Soltész, 2016). As noted on its website:[26] "Colombia Nos Une, a program working for the benefit of more than 4, 7 million Colombians abroad."

The activities of Colombia Nos Une have focused on five key areas: Community Plan, Return Plan, Orderly and Regulated Migration, Service Improvement, and Reintegration of Recognized Colombians Abroad. The umbrella program is quite multifaceted. Colombia Nos Une operates as the technical secretariat for implementing the Return Law and manages the institutional infrastructure supporting returnees. In return policy, CNU typically operationalizes guidance on legal procedures, routes users to the RUR, and connects returnees to reintegration-oriented opportunities. Furthermore, the program's scope encompasses multiple dimensions of support for the diaspora. It helps Colombians abroad open bank accounts in Colombia, facilitates the recognition and validation of academic qualifications obtained abroad, and provides guidance on optimizing the use of remittances. Additionally, Colombia Nos Une operates housing assistance programs – most notably "*Mi Casa con Remesas*" – created in partnership with the National Bank of Colombia and the Inter-American Development Bank, enabling emigrants interested in purchasing property in Colombia to access necessary financial support. The program has established strategic partnerships with entities such as BANCOLDEX (Colombian Foreign Trade Bank) to offer credit lines to diaspora entrepreneurs, and it works with local universities to provide business management training and other non-financial support to potential entrepreneurs. Beyond these specific programs, CNU coordinates the provision of information on social security, housing acquisition, educational services, and employment opportunities for Colombians living abroad (Orozco, 2023).

Back in its beginnings, a dedicated portal – *redescolombia.org* – was created to offer practical information to Colombians abroad and support them throughout the migration process. In 2007, the virtual platform composed of four thematic subprograms (science, commerce, culture, and community) was launched. Although this diversification aimed

[26] Accessible at: http://www.colombianosune.com/noticia/colombia-nos-une%2C-un-programa-que-trabaja-en-beneficio-de-los-m%C3%A1s-de-4-millones-de-colombian

to target different migrant profiles, the portals – especially those directed at highly skilled migrants – proved less popular than anticipated. On one hand, the rapid expansion of the Internet and social media offered users alternative information channels (Soltész, 2016); on the other, by 2012 most content on the platforms was being generated by government officials rather than diaspora members, reducing engagement (Escobar, 2012). Later, the Portal RedEsColombia was designed by Colombia Nos Une again to increase interaction among diaspora members and promote development initiatives. The government considers this website to be among its most successful initiatives for maintaining diaspora engagement, while the program also launched and actively maintained Facebook[27] and Instagram[28] pages in an effort to remain visible and relevant in the social media environment as well.

The highest concentration of program participants is found in the principal destination countries for Colombian migrants – most notably the United States and Spain – followed by Venezuela and Ecuador. While the exact and current number of participants is difficult to ascertain, in 2012 the program reportedly assisted more than 320,000 Colombians abroad, and since February 2014 its official webpage has registered more than 2 million visits (Colombianosune.com, 2013), however latest data are not available, but the webpage still operates, though more updates would raise its standards. All in all, rather than delivering material assistance directly, Colombia Nos Une operates as a coordination and articulation hub, linking return migrants with existing institutional resources in areas such as employment, entrepreneurship, social protection, and skills recognition. Its role is therefore best understood as enabling return through institutional navigation and state visibility, rather than as a stand-alone reintegration program.

5.3 EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When it comes to the evaluation of migration governance practices, the academic literature widely agrees that migration policies are inherently difficult to evaluate, as their outcomes are shaped by complex interactions between legal frameworks, institutional capacity, political priorities, and migrants' own agency. The aim in this chapter is not to produce an independent evaluation of the effectiveness or adequacy of the policies under consideration, but it may provide a few observations and formulates policy-relevant considerations by situating the examined measures within the broader body of existing scholarly interpretations and debates.

[27] Accessible at: https://www.facebook.com/ColombiaNosUneMRE
[28] Accessible at: https://www.instagram.com/colombianosune/?hl=hu

The policy formations and their applications are indeed essential for the sake of safe and orderly migration, however critical scholarship highlights recurring challenges, including fragmented governance structures, limited coordination across policy domains, and a persistent gap between formal policy objectives and implementation outcomes. de Haas and Czaika's (2011) so-called "three policy gaps" framework for instance draws attention to the frequent discrepancies between declared policy objectives and actual outcomes. The first is the discourse gap, which refers to the divergence between political rhetoric and the concrete policies that are adopted. The second is the implementation gap, defined as the distance between formal policy documents and their practical execution. And the third issue is the efficacy gap, which captures the difference between the intended effects of a policy on migration flows and the changes that materialize in practice. According to this conception, political discourse matters not because it constitutes policy objectives in itself, but because it provides a reference frame against which policy claims can be assessed. For instance, statements advocating "zero immigration" in destination countries or "diaspora-driven development" in countries of origin could be taken as benchmarks, rather than actual or practical policy goals (Soltész, 2016). Further studies (Acosta - Freier, 2015) also suggest that governmental immigration discourses are often more restrictive than immigration policies. Thus, it is one matter what and how the government promises, and another what policies actually do, and it is no different in case of return migration policies.

Moreover, as it was touched upon in this chapter, migration policies often reflect competing logics – such as control, humanitarian protection, and development – which can lead to internally inconsistent policy designs and uneven impacts across different migrant groups (Castles – de Haas – Miller, 2014; Geddes – Scholten, 2016; de Haas, 2012). Undoubtedly, it is challenging to design, to adopt and to implement policies in migration governance, however it is defining its effectiveness or the lack thereof is also a complex process. Huddleston and Niessen (2011, p.11) for instance states state that "public policies (…) can be benchmarked provided that they are broken down into policy objectives, inputs, process, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact." In fact, besides evaluating the policy effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and technical efficiency also need to be assessed (Ibid.).

Unlike immigration policy evaluation that regard admission and entry policies, emigration and diaspora policies meanwhile are probably even more difficult to assess since they operate across different timescales at different levels within home states (Gamlen, 2006). Moreover, many of these measures are shaped by the policies and decisions of destination countries and therefore fall largely outside the sovereign control of countries of origin,

thus asystematic evaluation of their effectiveness is close to the impossible (Soltész, 2016).

With regards to integration and remigration policies, since the literature increasingly conceptualizes these two as interlinked processes rather than sequential or opposing outcomes, thus their assessment is also relational. In case then, when integration is not effective or well managed, return may not be considered effective either. In this sense, integration policies not only affect settlement trajectories but also influence the sustainability and developmental potential of return (Carling & Schewel, 2018; Cassarino, 2004; Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). Criticism on integration policies points out that they often suffer from implementation gaps, selective conditionality, and an overemphasis on individual adaptation, which may reproduce structural inequalities and shift responsibility away from institutions and host societies (Joppke, 2007; Geddes & Scholten, 2016). Also, return migration governance is frequently criticized for weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, with limited systematic evidence on long-term reintegration outcomes and development impacts. This lack of robust evaluation constrains learning, accountability, and policy improvement, reinforcing the gap between normative policy goals and empirical outcomes (Cassarino, 2014; IOM, 2019).

When it comes to the migration governance framework of Colombia, we must see a significant development in its recognition of emigration, return, and diaspora engagement as central components of national migration policy. Indeed, the responsibility of guaranteeing the well-being of its citizens belongs to the State, for which it is necessary for the government to think about migrations in their complexity and in the quantitative changes of emigration and return flows (Mejía et al., 2009). As Mejía suggested (Interview, 2025) with regards to return policies, it is not enough to appreciate those trends that include the return of those who are economically active, and contributes to the development of the economy, integrated into the local community, but the government must collect detailed information and data that is able to determine the vulnerable population that should also be the object of specific programs within inclusive and truly fair public policies. Besides the importance of adequate data and information on returnees, some studies (López, 2020) refer to the insufficient government response that would requires the participation of migrants in the policy formulation process to be able to talk about migratory governance. The criticism is also based on the lack of a proper public policy in Colombia due to the lack of inter-institutional coordination, financial resources and political will.

Within a more specific domain of migration governance context, evaluations of Colombia's return and reintegration policies point to both notable innovations and enduring limitations. Such initiatives and instruments as the Ley de Retorno (Law 1565 of 2012), the

Victims and Land Restitution Law (Law 1448 of 2011), and programs coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including Colombia Nos Une reflect a growing state commitment to addressing return migration beyond ad hoc responses.

However, the literature notes challenges related to uneven territorial capacity, limited systematic monitoring of reintegration outcomes, and fragmentation across national and local levels, which affect the sustainability of return processes. (Bedoya, 2014; Orozco, 2023; Ciurlo, 2015). Scholars also emphasize that reintegration support remains largely focused on short-term assistance, with weaker links to long-term local development strategies and labor market integration, particularly outside major urban centers. Soltész (2016) suggests that while Colombia has built a fairly complete and well-structured policy system to deal with the return of its diaspora, it is still unclear how effective these policies really are, especially in helping returnees find jobs, reintegrate economically, and avoid onward migration. Colombia's remigration policies aim to ensure that return is voluntary, informed, orderly, and respectful of human rights by adopting a combination of legal incentives, institutional support mechanisms, and sectoral coordination. This shows that the government understands that return migration is complex and cannot be managed with a single measure, but requires economic support, social inclusion, and legal protection, however according to Bedoya (2014) the quality of the government's support on on such matters may be questioned, given that most of the migrants interviewed call for greater state presence and involvement. His article concludes that the observed shortcomings in public policy and return migration in Colombia are because of, among other reasons, the fact that migrants are not a priority in the political agenda, the government's institutional framework is weak and the decentralization of resources has been insufficient to achieve their ends (Bedoya, 2014).

All in all, the experience of the Colombian remigration initiatives highlights the need for further efforts in developing return migration policies that are conceptually coherent and that are capable of linking policy design to empirically observable outcomes; i.e. policy and practice approach. Building on this dissertation, further research could explore how aspirations and capabilities evolve before and after return, and how migration governance frameworks shape not only return outcomes but longer-term mobility trajectories.

5.4 CONCLUSION

Summary of Chapter 5 to be finalized at the very end, notes have been prepared…

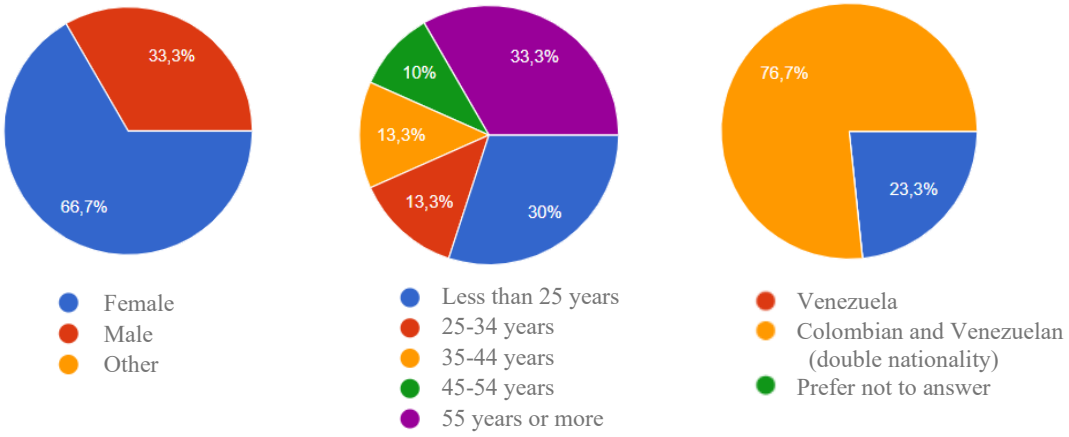
6. CHAPTER: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF RETURN ASPIRATIONS AND CAPABILITIES AMONG COLOMBIANS IN VENEZUELA

This chapter presents the empirical analysis of return aspirations and their structural, subjective, and policy-related determinants among Colombians residing in Venezuela. The analysis is based on a non-probability online sample (N = 30) and the statistical analysis of the survey was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics; no weighting was applied and all valid cases were retained. Given the politically sensitive Venezuelan environment, respondents were challenged. Limited institutional trust and perceived risks associated with expressing opinions in the Venezuelan politically sensitive environment was detected; concerns were phrased as follows: *"I believe it is impossible to fill out the questionnaire given the situation; there are risks, and probably it should not be circulated".* Due to evident limitations in representativity the analysis offers theory-informed exploratory insights rather than representative conclusions. The analytical strategy therefore focuses on descriptive analysis and relational patterns aligned with the aspiration–capability framework, rather than on population-level generalization.

6.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENT

This paragraph summarizes the main socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Among the respondents, more women (66,7%%). are represented than men (33,3%%), and importantly the majority of them are Colombo-Venezuelans, with double nationalities. Indeed, none of the respondents were only Venezuelan citizens, while 23% were only Colombians. Dual citizenship constitutes not merely a legal status but as an influencing factor in both the decision to stay or to return. Dual nationality may operate in two courses within the aspirations–capabilities framework. Colombian citizenship may function as a capability-enhancing factor by reducing legal and administrative barriers and enhances access to labor markets and public services in the country of return (Bauböck, 2010; Faist, 2000). On the other hand, Venezuelan citizenship may reflect long-term socio-political incorporation in the country of residence, hence structural and symbolical integration can decrease return migration intentions (Carling – Schewel, 2018). In this sense, dual nationality may simultaneously strengthen return capabilities while potentially moderating return aspirations.

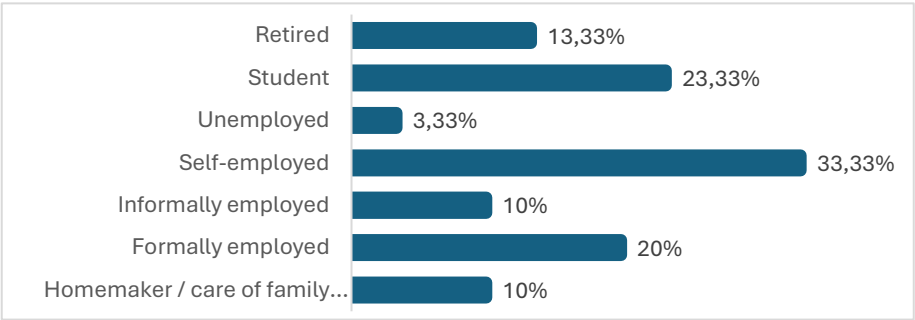
Figure 28: Gender, age and citizenship distribution of respondents (Q1-3)



Source: Own compilation

The sample (N=30) is heterogeneous in terms of age (Figure 28) and labor-market status (Figure 29), reflecting diverse livelihood situations among Colombians residing in Venezuela. Most of the respondent (33%) are self-employed (33%) and students (23% – mostly below the age of 25). The formally employed population also represent themselves, as well as the retired individuals, representing the older population in the survey. Although the proportion of respondents reporting informal employment appears moderate in the sample, self-reported measures of informality are widely acknowledged to underestimate actual participation in the informal sector, particularly in Latin-America, in contexts characterized by economic precarity and regulatory ambiguity (Portes – Haller, 2005). Within this thought, "self-employed" often is characterized with informality in the Latin-American context. Unemployment is almost irrelevant in the sense that most probably without employment (if not informally employed that is not admitted) there is no way of surviving during the crises. It might suggest that those without employment have already left Venezuela in search of job opportunities either in Colombia or in other countries of the region.

Figure 29: Employment status of respondents (Q6)



**Percentages exceed 100% as respondents could select up to two categories.*

Source: Own compilation based on SPSS statistics

The sample is not representative in terms geographical distribution, however it aligns with historical and demographic data that indicate Colombian-Venezuelan communities being

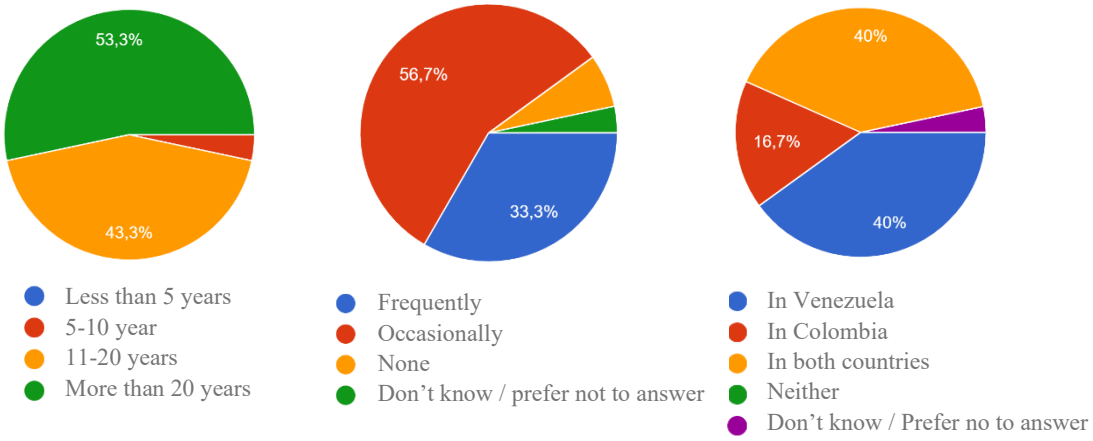
most concentrated in Venezuelan states bordering Colombia. Táchira has long been cited as a major locus of cross-border settlement[29], which was also the number one state where responses were coming from (35%).

6.2 MIGRATION BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENTS

Examining the migration background of Colombians in Venezuela is essential as it provides the depth of migration embeddedness, which may be directly linked to both aspirations and capabilities. The questionnaire contained four questions (Q5, Q7, Q8, Q9) that were meant to explore migration history and social ties in both Venezuela and Colombia. The migration background profile suggests a heterogeneous settlement history, however based on the distribution of years spent in Venezuela, a relatively long-term settlement pattern is clearly evident within the sample. Indeed, no one has arrived in less then 5 years, and only one respondent moved to Venezuela in the las 5-10 years, meaning that immigration has stopped during the years if the crisis in Venezuela. The majority of the Colombians (53%) have been living in Venezuela for more than 20 years, which means either an aging diaspora that most probably migrated during the first and second wave of emigration from Colombia, while also a population of youth that "has never lived in Colombia" (an interpretation based on the responses for Q9) but was born in Venezuela as a second generational diaspora. Also, a substantial share of respondents has lived in Venezuela for more than a decade (43%), indicating that they arrived before the crisis has started in Venezuela. From a theoretical perspective, prolonged residence is often associated with deeper structural integration and stronger local embedding (de Haas, 2010; Carling – Schewel, 2018). At the same time, long-term exposure to economic and institutional deterioration in the host country would suggest return considerations.

[29] Táchira state, located along the Colombia–Venezuela border and connected to Colombia via key crossing points such as the Simón Bolívar International Bridge, has long served as a central locus of cross-border settlement and migratory interaction between the two countries. The extensive terrestrial frontier in this region has historically facilitated sustained population movement and diasporic networks, making Táchira one of the most dynamic frontier areas in the Colombian–Venezuelan migration corridor.

Figure 30: Length of residence in Venezuela / Contact regularity with family and friends in Colombia / Location of closest family members (Q5, Q8, Q9)



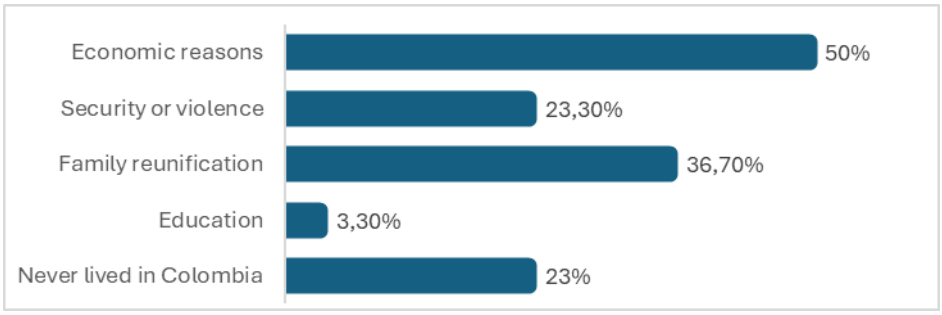
Source: Own compilation

Contact with Colombia remains frequent for many respondents (33%), though 57% has reported occasional contacting with family and friends. This figure corresponds with the location of close family members that shows a high share of the respondent having their closest families (only) in Venezuela (40%) indicating that oftentimes whole households have moved and resided in Venezuela. On the other hand, a few (17%) still have their closest ones left in the origin country, yet another high share, 40% has families in both countries. This bi-local family configuration – based on Q8, Q9 – clearly reflects the transnational character of Colombian–Venezuelan mobility. Family location functions as a gravitational factor in return decision-making (de Haas – Miller, 2014). When close relatives reside in Colombia, return may be emotionally and socially facilitated with regular occasions of family reunifications. Conversely, when the nuclear family is settled in Venezuela, return may involve higher social and relational costs. Indeed, both scenarios were mentioned in the open questions, where one respondent highlighted that she wouldn't consider leaving due to her father is located in Venezuela and doesn't want to return; while also it was said that the respondent desires to reunite with her family left in Colombia.

The primary motivations for leaving Colombia were predominantly economic (50%), although security-related (23%) and family reunification motives (37%) were also present. This reflects the historically mixed character of Colombian emigration flows, where economic rationality and conflict-related displacement often overlap (Castles, de Haas – Miller, 2014). The last category – „never lived in Colombia" – represents those Colombians residents of Venezuela who have no migration history on their own but were born is Venezuela (or elsewhere). Strictly speaking, in their case, it would not even be a return if the person has not previously lived in the country, yet their cases are examined in the context of return migration. Their high percentage in the sample might resemble the fact that often

there is higher probability of first-generation return and a lower chance of a second (Bettin et al., 2018).

Figure 31: Original reasons for leaving Colombia (Q7)



**Percentages exceed 100% as respondents could select up to two categories.*

Source: Own compilation

6.3 ASPIRATION, CAPABILITY WITHIN CARLING'S CATEGORIZATION

6.3.1 ASPIRATION DIMENSION

6.3.1.1 Aspiration Profile of the Respondents

Return aspirations were measured through two question items in the questionnaire trying to catch current return intentions and return intention without (perceived) obstacles:

- Q10: At this moment, how much are you thinking about returning to Colombia?
- Q11: If there were no obstacles, how likely is it that you would return to Colombia within the next 12 months?

The mean value of current return intention (Q10) was 3.37 (0–10 scale), indicating generally low expressed return aspirations within the sample. However, when respondents were asked whether they would return if no obstacles existed (Q11), the mean increased to 5.53, suggesting a substantial latent return potential suppressed by structural constraints. This alteration measure in expressing aspirations was tested with a Wilcoxon signed-rank test, which confirmed that the increase from Q10 to Q11 is statistically significant ($Z = 4.418$, $p < .001$) (Appendix Table D3). This indicates that (perceived) structural barriers – economic, institutional, or informational – play a measurable role in constraining expressed return intentions. It is in line with the suggestion of the aspirations–capabilities framework (Carling, 2002; Carling – Schewel, 2018) according to which structural constraints operate as suppressors of expressed return intentions rather than reflecting a genuine absence of aspiration.

Thus, to operationalize return aspirations beyond a single-item measure, an **aspiration index** was constructed combining Q10 and Q11, thereby capturing both manifested and latent dimensions of return motivation. Using a theoretically grounded threshold

(aspiration ≥ 6 on the 0–10 scale), respondents were dichotomized into low and high aspiration groups, where the means (aspiration index) was 4,45 on a 0–10 scale (Appendix Table D1). This lower percentile, but rather moderate average suggests that, at the aggregate level, return motivation among respondents is neither negligible nor dominant. Based on previous intuitions, a much higher aspiration index was hypnotized, while the result reflects a rather modest, mid-range motivational profile, indicating the presence of conditional or constrained aspirations, as mentioned above.

Question no. 13 on the possible time of return also indicates low aspiration in the sense that 37% of the respondents indicated the option of having no plans to return. In case they do, they plan in 1-2 years (33%), not in the short term (in 3 months or in 6-12 months: 10%-10% and also 10% did not want to respond, which again points to concerns about privacy, surveillance, or potential repercussions) (Appendix Table D5).

Furthermore, question no. 14 (community-level return intention) represents an important complementary dimension, as it captures return aspirations not only at the individual level but also at the level of collective perception. In as much as migration aspirations are socially embedded and influenced by perceived collective tendencies and expectations within migrant communities (Carling – Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2010). Altogether, 60% of the respondents indicated that they know others intending to return (some people or a lot), while only 33% noted that they do not have any friends and families who plan to return (Appendix Table D6). These numbers would suggest high migration potential within the diaspora community, or at least the aforementioned latent migration aspirations that could be more visible within the communities themselves than in a survey. Investigating the socially normative influence and collective dynamics of migration decision on individual aspiration levels, results show[30] that a perceived return intentions of others have a moderate negative association with individual return aspirations (Spearman's $\rho = -.327$, $p = .089$). It suggests that respondents who believe that many others are planning to return tend to report higher personal return aspirations. Although the relationship does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, the direction of the association is theoretically consistent with diffusion and normative migration dynamics.

6.3.1.2 Analysis of Aspiration-related Relationships

In order to have a deeper understanding on how aspirations develop, the most important relationships were analyzed statistically to test theoretical assumptions. However, it must be noted that due to the sample size (N=30) statistical correlations have challenges in

[30] Spearman rank correlation analysis was conducted (Appendix Table D7).

terms of their results (the same applies to later correlation analysis too). (The calculations and outputs of SPSS are included in the Appendix for each analysis in this section).

- **Duration of residence in Venezuela and return aspirations**

Long-time residence in the host country often results in lowering aspirations to return (Carling, 2002). The sample of the dissertation also suggesting that longer settlement may be linked to slightly lower return intentions (correlation analysis[31] revealed a weak negative association between length of residence in Venezuela and current return aspirations ($\rho = –0.161$)), however, this relationship was statistically not significant ($p = .396$). But from the average data we can indeed suspect that this population with long-term settlement history has relatively low aspirations levels in terms of return.

- **Age cohorts and return aspiration**

Life-course and embeddedness theories suggest that age is structurally related to migration aspirations through social and economic embeddedness and evolving life circumstances (Elder, 1994; de Haas, 2010; Carling – Schewel, 2018). It is assumed that older individuals may display lower mobility intentions due to deeper social and economic anchoring, while younger individuals typically exhibit higher mobility potential due to lower levels of socio-economic and institutional embeddedness, longer future-oriented investment horizons, and greater labor-market flexibility. In the survey, a weak-moderate negative association was observed between age group and current return aspirations (Spearman's $\rho = –0.25$, $p = .158$), suggesting that older respondents tend to report slightly lower return intentions, while conversely, younger participants appear more inclined toward return. However, the relationship is not statistically significant, indicating that age alone does not substantially differentiate return aspirations in this sample.

- **Employment vulnerability and return aspirations**

Based on the idea that economic vulnerability increases return aspirations (Stark – Bloom, 1985; De Haas, 2010; Carling – Schewel, 2018), the aspiration of vulnerable population's was measured here. The analysis[32] however indicated no statistically significant difference in current return aspirations between economically vulnerable respondents (informal employment, unemployment, homemaking and self-employment[33]) and those in more stable labor-market positions ($U = 38.50$, $p = .368$). Although economic precarity is often theorized as a push factor in migration decision-making, the present sample does not provide statistical support for this relationship but rather suggests that patterns cannot be

[31] Spearman rank correlation analysis was applied (Appendix Table D9).
[32] Independent-samples Mann–Whitney U test was applied (Appendix Table D10).
[33] Self-employment was also added for two reasons: 1) it is often characterized by informality; 2) for statistical purposes to raise the sample size within the test analysis.

explained solely by economic compulsion but reflect a more complex aspirations–capabilities dynamic. In line with the framework, not all "push factors" automatically translate into migration aspirations.

- **Family location and return aspirations**

In line with transnational migration theory having families in both countries create cross-border family ties, with emotional, social, and normative attachments that shape migration aspirations; thus, when the closest relatives reside in the country of origin, the relational pull of these transnational social fields increases the likelihood of return intentions (Faist, 2000; Cassarino, 2004; Carling, 2002;). The analysis[34] revealed a statistically significant difference in current return aspirations across family-location categories ($H(2) = 6.857$, $p = .032$). Respondents whose closest family members reside in Colombia displayed the highest mean rank in return intentions, suggesting that social capital in the origin country and transnational family ties constitute a strong motivational factor in shaping return aspirations, whereas social capital in Venezuela has negative impacts on return migration.

6.3.2 CAPABILITY DIMENSION

6.3.2.1 Capability Profile

Carling's (2002) definition of capabilities highlights legal-administrative opportunities, economic resources, social capital, and access to information. Thus, return capability within the dissertation was measured primarily through four components (Q15):

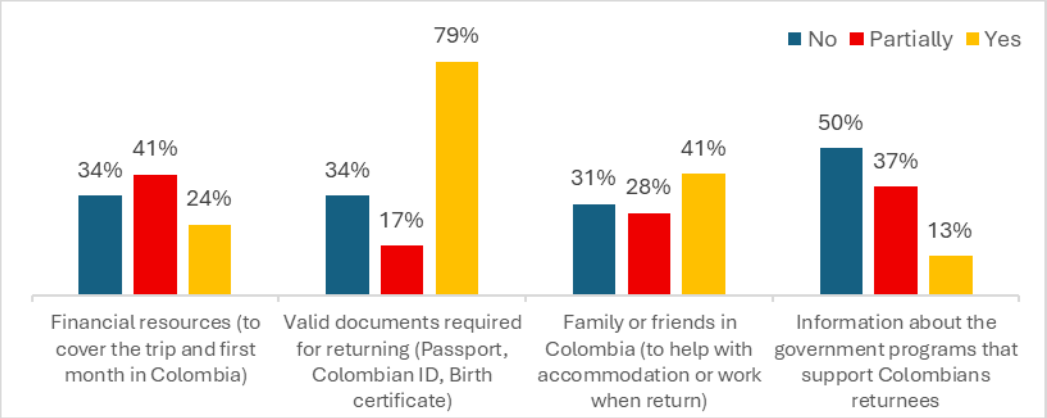
- financial resources (q15_fin),
- documentation status (q15_doc),
- social network support (q15_network),
- policy awareness (q15_prog).

Responses were recoded on a 0–2 scale (0 = no resource, 1 = partial access, 2 = full access; ("prefer not to respond" answers were treated as missing)), and after having a short overview on the characteristics this population obtain in terms of their resources, the above highlighted four component were aggregated into a composite **capability index** (range 0–2). This index reflects the extent to which individuals possess the practical resources required to translate return aspirations into feasible mobility outcomes. The mean capability score in the sample was **1.10**, suggesting a moderately favorable structural position for return (Appendix Table D2). Using a fixed threshold (capability ≥ 1), respondents were categorized into low and high capability groups, which was adapted to the four-cell categorization of the Carling framework in the followings. Descriptively, capability

[34] Kruskal–Wallis test was applied (Appendix Table D11).

levels were more evenly distributed than aspirations, suggesting that the lack of capability alone does not account for the current patterns of non-return, i.e. that Colombians still remain in Venezuela despite the crisis.

Figure 32: Capability profile of the respondents (Q15)



Source: Own compilation based on SPSS statistics

The capability profile of the sample reveals an asymmetric resource structure. Financial preparedness is rather limited in the sample, while it would be one of the most critical capability component, i.e. a classical structural constraint in returning (Carling, 2002; de Haas, 2014); over three-quarters lacking sufficient resources to cover initial reintegration costs (Figure 32). Most respondents however possess the necessary legal documentation for return (79.3%), which correlates to the fact that the majority has Colombian and dual citizenship that facilitates the necessary documentations. Social network support is present for a substantial share of respondents, yet not universal. Social capital though, particularly through family and friendship networks, may partially offset financial shortages (Carling, 2002). Most strikingly, awareness of governmental return support programs is low, with half of the respondents reporting no information at all. These findings suggest that while formal–legal barriers are minimal, economic and informational constraints remain significant structural limitations to effective return. Indeed, economic limitations were also named in the open question section, where several answers registered that the biggest obstacle that prevents them from returning to Colombia at this time is of economic nature (Q21), as well as it was translated that economic support would help the most to be able to return (Q22).

6.3.2.2 Analysis of Capability-related Relationships

- **Citizenship and return capabilities**

As mentioned earlier regarding the citizenship profile of respondent, the effect of citizenship on return capability is multidimensional, depending on how citizenship opportunities (or challenges) function both in the origin and the host country. Often, dual citizenship

combines the advantages, potentially maximizing mobility freedom and strategic choice between staying and returning (Faist, 2000; de Haas 2010). Therefore, to examine whether dual legal status is associated with perceived return-related capability, the analyses investigated the relationship between dual citizenship and Colombian citizenship (since there were no Venezuelan respondents) vs. the four-component capability index. The analysis[35] revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($p = .013$). However, contrary to initial expectations, the capability index was higher among respondents holding only Colombian citizenship compared to dual citizens.[36] The results suggest that formal legal status alone does not automatically translate into higher effective capability, but raises the question then, which capability components shaped the correlation to the other end.

To better understand the source of this difference, the four underlying capability components (financial resources, documentation/legal feasibility, social networks, and access to return programs) were examined separately through median comparisons. The observed difference in the composite capability index appears to be driven by the social network and program-access dimensions that showed higher median values among respondents of only Colombian nationality. Financial factors were not the ones to explain the differences observed in the index, however as for documentation feasibility, while median comparisons did not indicate differences in documentation capability, frequency distributions revealed that all Colombian-only respondents reported full documentation status, whereas dual citizens displayed more variation. This suggests that the Colombian-only group exhibits uniformly high levels of documentation.

Taking into account the aforementioned four component capabilities, now it is rather clear why Colombian nationals may reveal higher capabilities as they are in possession of valid documents required for returning (e.g., passport, Colombian ID, birth certificate), higher family or friend connections in Colombia who could help them with accommodation or work when return, as well as their information about the government programs supporting Colombians returnees is also higher. In this sense, capability emerges not merely as a function of legal eligibility but as a product of locally accumulated resources and relational infrastructure. From an aspirations–capabilities perspective (Carling, 2002; Carling – Schewel, 2018), these findings suggest that effective capability, in this context, appears to be shaped by cumulative social and contextual resources rather than by legal status alone.

[35] Mann–Whitney U test was applied (Appendix Table D12).
[36] The median capability index was 1.50 in the non-dual group and 0.75 among dual citizens.

- **Employment and financial capability**

According to Carling's theory, material resources, as a classical capacity endorsement, increase capabilities for migration. Employment in this sense can facilitate the accumulation of financial resources. To examine whether labor-market participation contributes specifically to material capability, the financial capability dimension (q15_fin) was selected from the aspiration index, which is the more relatable component. Employment categories were transformed into economically active (formally employed, informally employed self-employed) and non-active groups (unemployed, student, households, retired) due to small cell sizes. Economically active respondents reported significantly higher financial capability levels (mean rank = 12.14) compared to non-active respondents (mean rank = 6.80), U = 13.00, Z = -2.276, p = .023 (exact p = .033). The effect size was large ($r \approx .55$), indicating a substantial association between employment and financial capability. This finding confirms[37] that employment strongly increases material capability, which is essential in case of return. Though as determined before, overall capability differences appear to be rooted more strongly in embedded social resources than in labor-market participation.

6.3.3 THE FOUR-CELL CATEGORIZATION (CARLING FRAMEWORK)

To integrate return aspirations and capabilities within the Carling-framework (Carling, 2002; Carling – Schewel, 2018) the four-cell model was applied. The framework posits that migration – in our analysis; the return – outcomes are shaped by the interaction between the desire to (re)migrate and the ability to do so. Individuals may therefore be analytically grouped into four categories depending on whether they exhibit high or low aspiration and high or low capability.

In the calculations, fixed conceptual thresholds were employed to avoid sample-dependent categorization (aspiration ≥6; capability ≥1). The resulting four-cell distribution reveals a clear pattern (See Table 10)[38]. The largest group consists of passive stayers (41.4%), defined by both low aspiration and low capability. A further 31.0% are voluntary stayers, characterized by low aspiration but relatively stronger capability. Likely returnees – those combining high aspiration with high capability – represent 24.1% of the valid sample. In contrast, frustrated returnees –individuals who express strong return aspirations but lack the means to implement them – constitute only 3.4% of respondents.

[37] Mann–Whitney U test was conducted (Appendix Table D14).
[38] Also see Appendix Table D3.

Table 10: Four-Cell Categorization of the respondents

	Low capability	High capability	Total
Low aspiration	12 (41.4%) Passive stayer	9 (31.0%) Voluntary stayer	21
High aspiration	1 (3,4%) Frustrated returnee	7 (24,1%) Potential returnee	8
Total	13	16	Valid=29 (N=30)

Source: own compilation based on SPSS Statistics

While classical applications of the aspirations–capabilities framework often emphasize the structural gap between desire and ability as a key driver of involuntary immobility (Carling, 2002), the present findings suggest that such a structural aspiration–capability mismatch is marginal within this sample. Although it was initially expected – based on the aforementioned theoretical background – that within crisis situation, aspiration rises, while often capabilities fall, thus creating a number of "frustrated returnees". However, based on the results of the questionnaire there is only a limited size of "frustrated returnees", which indicates that constrained capability alone does not explain continued residence in Venezuela. Rather, return aspirations themselves appear generally modest. However, rather than indicating the absence of return potential, the findings suggest that the aspiration–capability configuration among Colombians in Venezuela has evolved over time. What may have characterized earlier waves of return migration – namely high aspiration coupled with limited means – appears less prominent in the current phase.

One plausible interpretation is temporal selectivity (Carling – Schewel 2018); individuals with stronger return intentions (and more or less sufficient resources) have already repatriated during earlier phases of the Venezuelan crisis, leaving behind a more structurally and socially embedded population. Indeed, the continued residence of the remaining population reflects not merely the absence of capability (which often they possess), or structural constraints but rather adaptive strategies within the crises context or shifting life-courses. They have already created strong family ties in Venezuela, and are less vulnerable to economic circumstances, thus their perception of life in Colombia is less desired or idealized – at least without perceived support structures. Return thus, is currently not the dominant strategic horizon among Colombians in Venezuela, who seems to have strong social and economic embeddedness in the host country. In this sense, the findings based on the four-cell model underline the existing difference between voluntary and involuntary immobility (Carling – Schewel, 2018), presenting the forms of rather voluntary immobility for Colombians residing in Venezuela.

6.4 THE ROLE OF PUSH–PULL PERCEPTIONS

In the aspiration–capability framework, push factors are understood not merely as objective structural constraints but as perceived pressures that shape migration aspirations through their impact on subjective wellbeing. While push factors generate dissatisfaction with current conditions, pull factors enhance the perceived attractiveness of alternative destinations and thereby reinforce migration aspirations (Lee, 1966; Carlin, 2002). The push and pull logics operate on the aspiration level, while it is the capabilities that in cases match with high aspiration, results in migration. The analysis already described aspiration- or capability-related proxy variables that act as push and pull factors in the decision to return, however Block E in the questionnaire (Q17–Q20) specifically focused on perceived environment with push and pull determinants.

6.4.1 PUSH FACTORS

Theoretical and empirical research both confirms that subjective wellbeing is a significant predictor of migration-related intentions (Carling, 2002; Carling – Schewel, 2018; Stark – Bloom, 1985; Bartram, 2013). The satisfaction level of wellbeing in the host country acts as decisive push factor, which often serves as a stronger predictor of migration intentions than specific structural constraints. Responses show a rather satisfactory wellbeing in Venezuela even within crises context (Figure 34). Still 37% are rather not satisfied with their wellbeings, which is still a high percentage, but the selectivity is evident in the population that still resides in Venezuela; those who were not satisfied at all, have already left the country.

A strong positive correlation[39] was found between dissatisfaction with personal wellbeing and return aspirations ($\rho = .712$, $p < .001$). The result confirms that individuals who feel less satisfied with their wellbeing in Venezuela exhibit significantly stronger return aspirations.

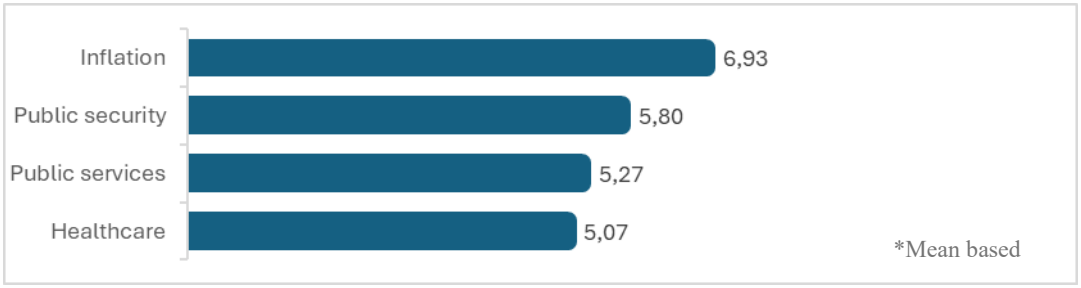
Figure 34: Satisfaction with wellbeing in Venezuela (Q18)

Source: Own compilation

[39] Spearman rank correlation analysis was applied (Appendix Table D17).

Moving to question no. 17, respondents evaluated the seriousness of selected structural conditions in Venezuela on a 0–10 scale. Among the examined factors, inflation and cost of living emerged as the most salient push element (M = 6.93), followed by public security (M = 5.8), public services (M = 5.27), and healthcare availability (M = 5.07). Overall, push perceptions appear moderate rather than extreme, which is interesting given the crises situation in Venezuela. The predominance of inflation suggests that economic instability constitutes the most prominent structural pressure, while security and service-related issues are perceived as serious but not overwhelmingly acute within this sample.

Figure 35: Perceived Severity of Structural Conditions in Venezuela (0–10 scale) (Q17)



Source: own compilation

Although healthcare shortages were perceived as significantly more severe among respondents aged 55 and above[40], no statistically significant differences were observed across age groups in the overall push index (H = 1.610, df = 2, p = .447)[41]. This suggests that there are no generational differences in term of average crises perception but are dimension-specific in the case of health care perception for instance. The latter can be explained by the assumption that older age cohorts rely on healthcare more than younger generations, thus they face existing challenges in health care system more severely.

The fact that the crises perception is not extreme, significant, but rather moderate within the population can explain why these individuals have not left the country yet, but raises the question of the relationship between crisis severity and perception of it. The factual data on crises severity is not the question here, it is the explanation of perception, which is not statistical, but needs interpretation. One explanation can be that among populations living in protracted crisis contexts is common for crisis conditions to become normalized over time (Festinger, 1957). Prolonged exposure to inflation or structural shortages may therefore not be subjectively perceived as highly severe (e.g., 9–10 on a Likert scale), reflecting processes of psychological and sociological adaptation. This is particularly relevant in the Venezuelan context, where crisis conditions are not a recent phenomenon. It also aligns with the voluntary stayers category and that their strategies rather focus on adaptation and embeddedness. This embeddedness effect (Massey et al., 1993), which

[40] Mann–Whitney U test with age groups divided into >55 and 55+ years old.
[41] Kruskal-Wallis test was applied (Appendix Table D16).

was previously observed, also plays an important role in their crisis perception. The respondents have relatively high capabilities, thus the crisis may be perceived as less existential. This, in turn, may reduce the extremity of subjective perceptions. But the selection effect here also must be highlighted (Czaika – de Haas, 2014); individuals most severely affected by the crisis may have already left, leaving behind a comparatively more embedded and resilient population. We have also seen that this population do not idealize Colombia (based on Q12) as they consider the costs of migration, therefore it reflects a form of relative rationality/comparability in migration-related decision-making which also affects crisis perception (Stark – Bloom, 1985, Carling, 2002).

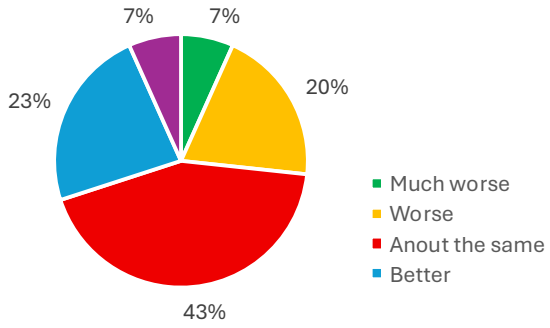
When examining the effects of the push factors on return aspiration, inflation and cost of living showed a moderate positive association with aspirations ($\rho = .337$, $p = .068$), approaching conventional levels of statistical significance.[42] While correlation for healthcare shortages, public security, and public services were positive but non-significant with aspiration. This suggests that return aspiration in the sample may be selectively responsive to material-economic pressures rather than to generalized crisis perceptions. The findings indicate a differentiated push dynamic, in which economic hardship plays a more prominent role than security or institutional concerns.

6.4.2 PULL FACTORS

A classical pull factor is the perception of wellbeing in the destination country. Question no. 12 was measuring the perception of Colombia among the diaspora population. Perceptions of life prospects in Colombia appear divided within the sample. While 30% of respondents consider life in Colombia to be better or much better than in Venezuela, a comparable share (26.7%) perceives it as worse, and the largest group (43.3%) evaluate it as roughly similar (Figure 36). Responses do not idealize life in Colombia or at least demonstrate rational calculations on possible return considering their financial and social capital available (capabilities); i.e. context-dependent comparative evaluations. It also predicts moderate pull factor determinants in the case of Colombia – to be introduced later in this chapter.

[42] Spearman rank correlation analysis was applied (Appendix Table D15).

Figure 36: Perception of life in Colombia in case of return (Q12)

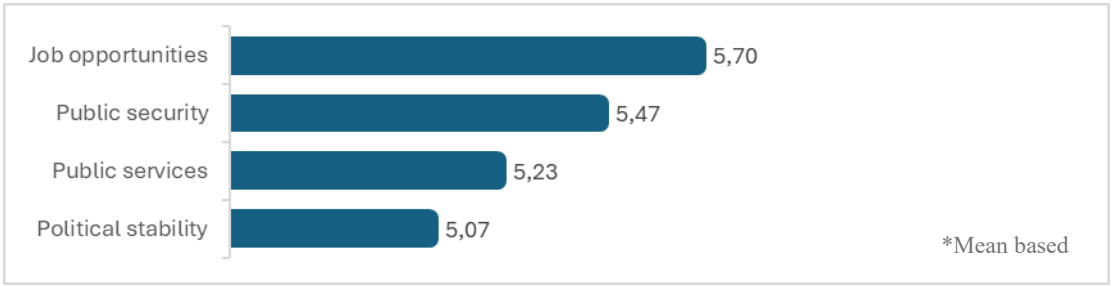


Source: Own compilations

The findings on the perception of the destination country and return aspiration relevance support theoretical perspectives emphasizing the role of subjective evaluations of future well-being in shaping migration aspirations (de Haas, 2010; Carling – Schewel, 2018). Migration decisions are often driven by perceived opportunity differentials and imagined life trajectories. Indeed, a statistically significant positive association was observed between perceived life prospects in Colombia (Q12) and current return aspirations (Q10) (Spearman's $\rho = 0.365$, $p = 0.047$)[43]. Respondents who believed that their life would be better in Colombia reported significantly higher levels of return aspiration.

Structural pull factors, opportunities were also measured in Q19, where perceived pull factors related to Colombia were evaluated at moderate levels (5-6) on a 0–10 scale across all dimensions, job opportunities being the highest one (Means: 5,7) (Figure 37). There were strong intercorrelations among the variables, which indicates that respondents tend to assess Colombia holistically rather than differentiating between specific structural domains such as employment, security, public services or political stability.

Figure 37: Perceived Opportunities in Colombia (0–10 scale) (Q19)



Source: own compilation

Colombia thus appears moderately attractive as a place to return, but none of the pull factors demonstrated a statistically significant[44] association with return aspirations. This suggests that the macro-structural pull determinants do not initiate return aspirations.

[43] Spearman rank correlation analysis was applied (Appendix Table D19).
[44] Spearman rank correlation analysis was applied (Appendix Table D18).

Indeed, as it was established above, this population do not idealize life in Colombia (only 23% said their lives would be better in Colombia), either because they are satisfied in Venezuela, or because Colombia as a destination is a viable alternative, but is not on the top of the list in case of leaving Venezuela. Colombia is not recognized as being radically better in the sense that no significant opportunity gap is perceived (Stark – Bloom, 1985). Again, this pattern aligns with a context of embedded settlement and adaptive strategies, where migrants become more socially and economically integrated in their country of residence meanwhile adapting even to crises situation, thus the pull of opportunities elsewhere becomes less influential in shaping migration intentions (Massey et al., 1993; Carling, 2002).

Combining the two measures of pull factors (Q12 and Q19), its interpretation point out that while specific structural pull factors (Q19: employment, security, public services, political stability) did not show a statistically significant relationship with return aspirations, the overall perception of life prospects in Colombia (Q12) was positively associated with aspiration levels. This implies that return intentions may be shaped more by holistic and affective evaluations of the country of origin, a nostalgic, identity-based attachment, rather than by isolated structural indicators, which would suggest a classical opportunity oriented or economic migration logics

6.4.3 The Combination of Push and Pull Factors

Based on Lee's theory (1966), migration occurs within the context of push and pull factors. Adapting the push and pull factors with Carling's framework on the sample interpretation, structural and subjective level measurement of push and pull factors were involved in aspiration-related analysis – See a classification of results below with highlighted implications:

	Structural Level	Subjective Level
Push (Venezuela)	Moderate crisis perception → weak effect on aspiration	Wellbeing dissatisfaction → strong aspiration activation
Pull (Colombia)	Moderate attractiveness → weak effect on aspiration	Positive life perception → strong aspiration activation

Push and Pull and Aspiration–Capability Implications:

- adaptive strategy, crises normalization
- social and economic embeddedness
- not crisis sensitive
- not structural opportunity driven but subjective/conditional push and pull dynamics
- dissatisfaction with Venezuela and expected wellbeing in Colombia activates aspirations

Although many respondents perceive their situation in Venezuela as difficult and are not generally satisfied with their wellbeing, while also a high share of the population would expect and imagine a better life in Colombia, overall, they do not appear to be motivated by strong host country-specific push factors or destination-specific pull factors. Indeed, while subjective dissatisfaction with current wellbeing and conditional expectations of better future wellbeing elevate aspirations, return intentions are less driven by structural push or pull factor determinants. That is, when even if push pressures exist are not matched by sufficiently compelling pull forces. Since capability levels are not critically low within the sample, the limited return aspiration cannot be attributed to constrained mobility resources, nor strong push or pull factors. This is a pattern – with a predominance of passive stayers – that often characterize population in contexts of social and economic embeddedness with adaptive strategies in long-lasting crises circumstances.

6.5 SYNTHESIS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Policies and programs that facilitate return play a potentially decisive role in facilitating actual mobility by lowering practical barriers, reducing uncertainty, and signaling institutional support. However, their effectiveness ultimately depends on whether potential returnees are aware of their existence and substance, as well as they are able to strengthen already existing return aspirations. The awareness of such policies constitute an important element of capabilities, which was already discussed before. Only 13% of the respondents indicated to have clear information on Colombian return programs, 37% had at least some information, while the majority (50%) had no knowledge of such programs.

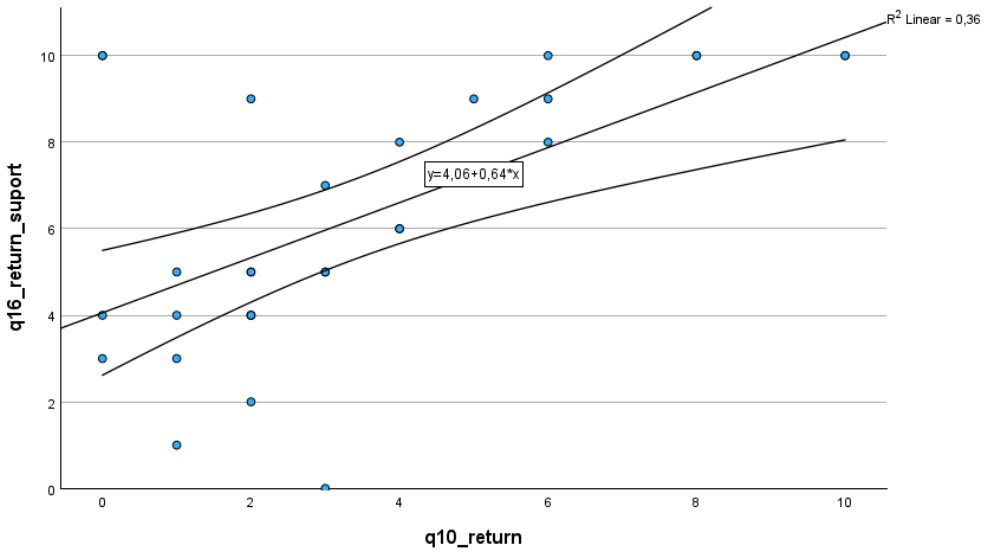
Another question is whether policy can activate aspirations where structural factors do not? Indeed, since the sample shows a rather medium level aspiration (not 0) and also presumes some latent qualities, policy boost effect can be significant. The first analysis on policy gain (policy_gain = Q16 – Q10) captured the extent to which return intentions would increase in the presence of policy support; the result presented Mean = 2.83, which means that on average, return intentions would increase by nearly three points if policy support were available (Appendix Table D20).

The other analysis[45] of policy sensitivity (Q16) reveals a strong and highly significant positive correlation with return aspirations ($\rho = .901$, $p < .001$). This suggests that governmental support mechanisms do not independently generate return intentions but rather reinforce pre-existing aspirations. Policy measures therefore function as catalysts rather than primary drivers of mobility. Consequently, policy support is likely to be most

[45] Spearman rank correlation analysis was applied (Appendix Table D21).

effective among individuals who already exhibit higher return aspirations, while they may have limited impact on passive stayers characterized by low motivational intensity.

Figure 38: Policy Sensitivity Gap (Scatter Plot of Q16 by Q10)



Source: Own compilation by SPSS Statistics

Overall, the results suggest limited current return aspiration among respondents with a relatively favorable structural capability. Most of this population is classified as passive stayers in Venezuela. Their return aspirations though are not fundamentally lacking; rather, they advance under policy support. It suggests that return potential is politically sensitive, that typifies a latent return potential.

7. CHAPTER: CONCLUSIONS

…The formulation of conclusions will be finalized later…

7.1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

7.2 POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.3 FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

7.4 CONCLUSIONS AND OVERVIEW

APPENDIX

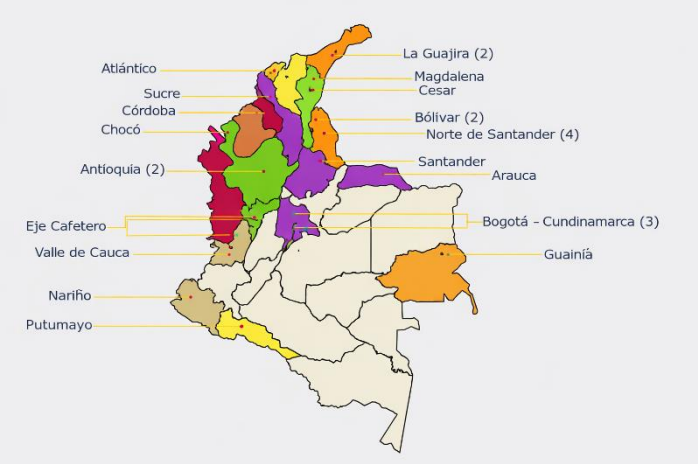
APPENDIX A: TABLES AND FIGURES

Table A1: A typology of survey questions on migration aspirations and related concepts

Theoretical concept	Selected survey questions
1. Aspiration, desire or preference to migrate	'Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?' (OECD 2015); 'Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to go abroad to live or work some time during the next five years, or would you prefer staying in [this country]?' (Carling 2013); 'Would you like to someday live in the United States?' (Becerra et al. 2010); 'Would you like to move from your current location to a different place at some point in the next 10 years?' (Young Lives 2013)
2. Intentions or plans to migrate	'Do you intend to migrate abroad?' (van Dalen, Groenewold, and Schoorl 2005); 'Are you planning to move to [preferred destination country] in the next 12 months, or not?' (Gallup 2008); 'Will you try to go to [preferred destination country] within the next five years?' (Carling 2013)
3. Preparations for emigration	'Have you done any preparation for this move (for example, applied for residency or visa, purchased the ticket, etc.)?' 'During the past five years, have you obtained a visa for going to Europe? Have you applied for one during the past five years?' (Ersanilli, Carling, and de Haas 2011)
4. Consideration of migration	'Have you and your family seriously considered moving to another country?' (Wood et al. 2010); 'Are you thinking about looking for work abroad after finishing your studies?' (Kureková 2014); 'Have you thought about moving in the future, outside the locality/community where you currently live?' (Creighton 2013)
5. Conditional willingness to migrate	'If someone were to give you the necessary papers for going to live or work in Europe, what would you do? Would you stay here or go to Europe?' (Carling 2013); 'If you could improve your work or living conditions, how willing or unwilling would you be to move outside your country?' (Drinkwater 2002)
6. Necessity of migration	'Do you think you will have to migrate to the United States?' (Becerra et al. 2010); 'I feel that I'm going to have to migrate to the U.S. when I graduate in order to find a job to support myself or my family' (Becerra 2012)
7. Likelihood of migration	'How likely do you think it is that you will live elsewhere in the future?' (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006); 'Do you expect to be living in this city in two years?' (Madhavan and Landau 2011); 'In the next 12 months, are you likely or unlikely to move away from the city or area where you live?' (Dustmann and Okatenko 2014)

Source: Carling – Schewel, 2018.

Figure A2: Referral Centers and Opportunities for Return (CROPEs) 2025



Source: Colombianosune, 2025

APPENDIX B: SURVEY - QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

English

Introduction

Hello! Thank you for taking the time to participate.
This anonymous survey (3–4 minutes) aims to understand the **intentions of Colombian nationals living in Venezuela to return to Colombia**.
Your participation is voluntary, and all answers will remain strictly confidential and used for academic research only.

Do you agree to participate?

☐ Yes, I agree
☐ No, I do not wish to participate *(end of survey)*

BLOCK A: BASIC INFORMATION

1. **Gender**

☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Other

2. **Age group**

☐ Under 25
☐ 25–34
☐ 35–44
☐ 45–54
☐ 55 or older

3. **Citizenship:**

☐ Colombian
☐ Colombian and Venezuelan (double citizenship)
☐ Venezuelan
☐ Other
☐ Prefer not to answer

4. **In which state of Venezuela do you currently live?**

☐ [Dropdown list of Venezuelan states]
☐ Other: _____

5. **How long have you lived in Venezuela?**

☐ Less than 5 years
☐ 5–10 years
☐ 11–20 years
☐ More than 20 years

6. **What best describes your main work situation?**

☐ Formally employed
☐ Informally employed
☐ Self-employed
☐ Unemployed
☐ Student
☐ Homemaker / care of family or children
☐ Other

BLOCK B: MIGRATION BACKGROUND AND TIES

7. **Why did you leave Colombia originally?** *(You may select up to two)*

☐ Economic reasons
☐ Security or violence
☐ Family reunification
☐ Education
☐ Prefer not to answer
☐ Other

8. **In the past 12 months, how often have you been in contact with family or friends in Colombia?**

☐ Frequently
☐ Occasionally
☐ Not at all
☐ Don't know / Prefer not to answer

9. **Where do your closest family members live currently?**

☐ In Venezuela
☐ In Colombia
☐ Both countries
☐ Neither
☐ Don't know / Prefer not to answer

BLOCK C: INTENTION TO RETURN (ASPIRATION)

For the following questions, please use a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "not at all" and 10 means "completely."

10. **At this moment, how much are you thinking about returning to Colombia?**

- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11. **If there were no obstacles, how likely is it that you would return to Colombia within the next 12 months?**

- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. Comparing your life in the next two years, living in Colombia would be…

☐ Much worse
☐ Worse
☐ About the same
☐ Better
☐ Much better
☐ Don't know / Prefer not to answer

13. If you decided to return, when would you most likely do so?

☐ Within 3 months
☐ In 6–12 months
☐ In 1–2 years
☐ I have no plans to return
☐ Don't know / Prefer not to answer

14. Are there others in your family/community/acquaintances who has been also planning to return to Colombia in the short or long term?

☐ Yes, there are quite a lot of people
☐ Yes, there are a few people
☐ No, I don't know any
☐ Don't know / Prefer not to answer

BLOCK D: CAPABILITY (SUPPORT TO RETURN)

15. Do you have…?

a) … enough financial resources to cover the trip and your first month back in Colombia?
b) … valid documents required for returning (e.g., passport, Colombian ID, birth certificate)?
c) … family or friends in Colombia who could help you with accommodation or work when you return?
d) … information about the government programs that support Colombians returnees (e.g., *Colombia Nos Une*)?

☐ Yes
☐ Partially
☐ No
☐ I don't know / prefer not to answer

16. If financial or administrative support were available, how likely would you be to return?

- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

BLOCK E: PERCEIVED ENVIRONMENT (PUSH–PULL CONTEXT)

(Use the same 0–10 scale, where 0 = not serious / not attractive, and 10 = very serious / very attractive.)

Conditions in Venezuela – "Push" factors

17. **How serious do you consider the following issues in Venezuela today?**
    - 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

    a) Inflation and cost of living
    b) Lack of medicines and healthcare
    c) Public security (violence, crime)
    d) Quality of public services (water, electricity, education)

18. **Are you satisfied with your wellbeing in Venezuela?**

    ☐ Absolutely
    ☐ Rather yes
    ☐ Rather not
    ☐ Absolutely not
    ☐ Don't know / Prefer not to answer

19. **How attractive do you think the following aspects are in Colombia?**
    - 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

    a) Job opportunities
    b) Public security
    c) Public services (education, health, transport)
    d) Political stability

20. **Do you feel like the Venezuelan crisis has been increasing the will in Colombian nationals to return?**

    ☐ Yes
    ☐ Maybe
    ☐ No
    ☐ Don't know / Prefer not to answer

BLOCK F: OPTIONAL OPEN QUESTIONS

21. **What is the biggest obstacle that prevents you from returning to Colombia at this time?**
    .....*(Short answer)*

22. **What kind of support would help you the most to be able to return (if you wish to return)?**
    .....*(Short answer)*

Closing Message

Thank you very much for your participation!
Your answers are anonymous and will be used only for research purposes.
If you would like to receive a summary of the study's findings later,
you may voluntarily leave an email address in a separate form (not linked to your responses).

ENCUESTA

Intenciones de Retorno de los Colombianos Residentes en Venezuela

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Español

Introducción

¡Hola! Mi nombre es Amadea y me gustaría pedirte que, por favor, dediques unos minutos para participar en esta encuesta, que forma parte de mi tesis doctoral.

Queremos entender un poco mejor cómo viven esta experiencia las y los colombianos que actualmente residen en Venezuela, y cuáles son sus planes o deseos respecto a su futuro entre Venezuela y Colombia.
Tu participación es muy valiosa y completamente anónima, todas tus respuestas serán tratadas **de manera confidencial**. La encuesta solo tomará unos **3–4 minutos**.
¡Muchísimas gracias por tu ayuda!

¿Aceptas participar?

☐ Sí, acepto
☐ No deseo participar (fin de la encuesta)

BLOQUE A: INFORMACIÓN BÁSICA

1. **Género**

   ☐ Femenino
   ☐ Masculino
   ☐ Otro

2. **Grupo de edad**

   ☐ Menos de 25 años
   ☐ 25–34 años
   ☐ 35–44 años
   ☐ 45–54 años
   ☐ 55 años o más

3. **Ciudadanía / Nacionalidad:**

   ☐ Colombiana
   ☐ Venezolana
   ☐ Colombiana y venezolana (doble ciudadanía)
   ☐ Prefiero no responder
   ☐ Otra

4. **¿En qué estado de Venezuela resides actualmente?**

   ☐ [Lista desplegable de estados venezolanos]
   ☐ Otro: _____

5. **¿Cuánto tiempo llevas viviendo en Venezuela?**

   ☐ Menos de 5 años
   ☐ 5–10 años
   ☐ 11–20 años
   ☐ Más de 20 años

6. **¿Cuál describe mejor tu situación laboral principal?**

☐ Empleo formal
☐ Empleo informal
☐ Trabajador independiente
☐ Desempleado/a
☐ Estudiante
☐ Se dedica al hogar / cuida de su familia o hijos
☐ Otro

BLOQUE B: ANTECEDENTES MIGRATORIOS Y VÍNCULOS

7. **¿Por qué saliste originalmente de Colombia?**
(Puedes seleccionar hasta dos opciones)

☐ Motivos económicos
☐ Seguridad o violencia
☐ Reunificación familiar
☐ Educación
☐ Prefiero no responder
☐ Otro

8. **En los últimos 12 meses, ¿con qué frecuencia has estado en contacto con familiares o amigos en Colombia?**

☐ Frecuentemente
☐ Ocasionalmente
☐ Nada
☐ No sé / prefiere no responder

9. **¿Dónde viven actualmente tus familiares más cercanos?**

☐ En Venezuela
☐ En Colombia
☐ En ambos países
☐ En ninguno
☐ No sé / prefiere no responder

BLOQUE C: INTENCIÓN DE RETORNO (ASPIRACIÓN)

*Para las siguientes preguntas, utiliza una escala del **0 al 10**,*
*donde **0 significa "nada"** y **10 "completamente"**.*

10. **En este momento, ¿qué tanto piensas en regresar a Colombia?**
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11. **Si no existieran obstáculos, ¿qué probabilidad habría de que regreses a Colombia en los próximos 12 meses?**
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. Comparando tu vida en los próximos dos años, vivir en Colombia sería...

☐ Mucho peor
☐ Peor
☐ Más o menos igual
☐ Mejor
☐ Mucho mejor
☐ No sé / prefiere no responder

13. Si decidieras regresar, ¿cuándo lo harías más probablemente?

☐ Dentro de 3 meses
☐ En 6–12 meses
☐ En 1–2 años
☐ No tengo planes de regresar
☐ No sé / prefiere no responder

14. ¿Hay otras personas en tu familia/comunidad/conocidos que también estén planeando regresar a Colombia a corto o largo plazo?

☐ Sí, bastantes personas
☐ Sí, algunas personas
☐ No conozco a nadie
☐ No sé/ prefiero no responder

BLOQUE D: CAPACIDAD (RECURSOS Y APOYO PARA EL RETORNO)

15. ¿Tienes...?

a) ... suficientes recursos económicos para cubrir el viaje y tu primer mes en Colombia?
b) ... documentos válidos para regresar (p. ej., pasaporte, cédula colombiana, registro civil de nacimiento)?
c) ... familiares o amigos en Colombia que puedan ayudarte con alojamiento o empleo al regresar?
d) ... informaciones sobre los programas gubernamentales que apoyan a los retornados colombianos (p. ej., Colombia Nos Une)?

☐ Sí
☐ Parcialmente
☐ No
☐ No sé / prefiere no responder

De nuevo, utiliza una escala del 0 al 10, donde 0 = nada y 10 = completamente.

16. Si existiera apoyo financiero o administrativo disponible, ¿qué tan probable sería que regresaras?
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

BLOQUE E: ENTORNO PERCIBIDO (FACTORES DE EMPUJE Y ATRACCIÓN)

(Usa la misma escala del 0 al 10, donde 0 = nada serio / nada atractivo y 10 = muy serio / muy atractivo.)

17. Condiciones en Venezuela – "Factores de empuje"

¿Qué tan graves consideras los siguientes problemas en Venezuela hoy?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

a) Inflación y costo de vida
b) Falta de medicinas y atención médica
c) Seguridad pública (violencia, delincuencia)
d) Calidad de los servicios públicos (agua, electricidad, educación)

18. ¿Estás satisfecho/a con tu bienestar en Venezuela?

☐ Totalmente
☐ Más bien sí
☐ Más bien no
☐ En absoluto
☐ No sé / Prefiere no responder

19. ¿Qué tan atractivos consideras los siguientes aspectos en Colombia?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

a) Oportunidades laborales
b) Seguridad pública
c) Servicios públicos (educación, salud, transporte)
d) Estabilidad política

20. ¿Consideras que la crisis venezolana ha incrementado el deseo de los colombianos de regresar?

☐ Sí
☐ Tal vez
☐ No
☐ No sé / Prefiere no responder

BLOQUE F: PREGUNTAS ABIERTAS OPCIONALES

21. ¿Cuál es el mayor obstáculo que te impide regresar a Colombia en este momento?

..... (Respuesta breve)

22. ¿Qué tipo de apoyo te ayudaría más para poder regresar (si deseas hacerlo)?

..... (Respuesta breve)

Mensaje de cierre

¡Muchas gracias por tu participación!
Tus respuestas son anónimas y se utilizarán únicamente con fines de investigación.
Si deseas recibir un resumen de los resultados del estudio más adelante,
puedes dejar voluntariamente una dirección de correo electrónico en un formulario separado (no vinculado a tus respuestas).

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTRODUCCIÓN

Esta guía contiene un conjunto de preguntas para entrevistas semiestructuradas con expertos y profesionales que tienen conocimiento del contexto colombo-venezolano, investigadores con experiencia en el campo de los estudios migratorios, así como actores gubernamentales familiarizados con las políticas públicas.
Por lo tanto, el cuestionario incluye principalmente secciones que establecen el contexto de la migración de retorno de colombianos; sin embargo, en general, el intercambio de sus experiencias y conocimientos nos acerca a comprender la realidad regional latinoamericana.
Las preguntas están organizadas en bloques temáticos y pueden adaptarse según la relevancia y el perfil de cada entrevistado.

---

1. ANTECEDENTES PROFESIONALES Y PERSPECTIVA GENERAL

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND AND GENERAL PERSPECTIVE

- **¿Por qué y de qué manera se siente involucrado con el tema de la migración (de retorno) colombiana en el contexto de la crisis venezolana? (conexiones personales y/o profesionales)**
  Why and how do you feel involved with the topic of Colombian (return) migration within the context of the Venezuelan crisis? (personal and/or professional connections)

- **¿Qué cree usted que es lo más malinterpretado por el público general (europeo) sobre la región?**
  What do you think is most misunderstood by the general (European) public about the region?

- **Si tuviera que describir las relaciones colombo-venezolanas en una o pocas frases, ¿cómo lo expresaría?**
  If you had to describe the Colombian-Venezuelan relations in one (or a few) sentence(s), how would you phrase it?

- **¿Cuál es su impresión sobre los procesos migratorios tanto colombianos como venezolanos?**
  What is your impression on both the Colombian and Venezuelan migration processes?

---

2. LA CRISIS Y LA MIGRACIÓN VENEZOLANAS

THE VENEZUELAN CRISIS AND VENEZUELAN MIGRATION

2.1. La crisis venezolana

The Venezuelan crisis

- **¿Cómo describiría las principales dimensiones de la crisis venezolana desde su perspectiva o experiencia?**
  How would you describe the main dimensions of the Venezuelan crisis from your perspective/expertise?

- **¿Cuáles son las realidades regionales como consecuencia de la crisis venezolana?**
  What are the regional realities as a consequence of the Venezuelan crisis?

- **¿Qué escenario considera más probable para Venezuela?**
  What scenario do you consider most likely for Venezuela?

2.2. Migración venezolana
Venezuelan migration

- **¿Cómo describiría el estado actual de la crisis de refugiados venezolanos a nivel regional?**
  How would you describe the current state of the Venezuelan refugee crisis at the regional level?

- **¿Cuáles son los principales factores que siguen impulsando a la población venezolana a huir actualmente?**
  What are the main factors that continue to drive the Venezuelan population to flee today?

- **¿Cuál es su observación sobre los migrantes venezolanos (su situación, desafíos, planes, actitud, etc.) en Colombia? Si pudiera ilustrar su situación con un ejemplo o historia, ¿cuál sería?**
  What is your observation on Venezuelan migrants (their situation, challenges, plans, attitude etc.) in Colombia? If you could illustrate their situation with one example or story, what would it be?

- **¿Prevé algún cambio en el futuro cercano respecto a los patrones de los flujos de refugiados venezolanos?**
  Do you expect any changes in the near future in the patterns of Venezuelan refugee flows?

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3. CONTEXTO HISTÓRICO Y REGIONAL DE LA MIGRACIÓN DE RETORNO COLOMBIANA

HISTORICAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT OF COLOMBIAN RETURN MIGRATION

- **¿Cuáles son los principales factores (causas, incentivos, explicaciones y consecuencias) de la remigración de ciudadanos colombianos?**
  What are the main factors (causes, incentives, explanations and consequences) of remigration of Colombian nationals?

- **¿Cómo describiría las principales olas de migración de retorno de Venezuela a Colombia en las últimas décadas?**
  How would you describe the main waves of return migration from Venezuela to Colombia over recent decades?

- **¿Qué hace que la migración entre Colombia y Venezuela sea particular dentro de América Latina?**
  What makes Colombia–Venezuela migration distinctive within Latin America?

- **¿Cómo es el abordaje de la sociedad colombiana hacia los retornados colombianos?**
  How is the Colombian society's approach toward Colombian returnees?

- **¿Cuáles son los principales desafíos que enfrentan los retornados en Colombia; y cómo caracterizaría el proceso de reintegración de los retornados?**
  What are the main challenges faced by returnees in Colombia; and how would you characterize the reintegration process of returnees?

---

4. COLOMBIANOS EN VENEZUELA: MOTIVACIONES PARA RETORNAR Y "POTENCIAL DE RETORNO"

COLOMBIANS IN VENEZUELA: MOTIVATIONS TO RETURN AND 'RETURN POTENTIAL'

4.1. Colombianos en Venezuela
Colombians in Venezuela

- **¿Qué sabe sobre los ciudadanos colombianos que residen en Venezuela?**
  What do you know about Colombian nationals residing in Venezuela?

- **¿Qué factores (económicos, de seguridad, acceso a servicios) influyen más en sus condiciones de vida actuales y cómo describiría las estrategias de sustento y supervivencia de las familias o comunidades colombianas en Venezuela?**
  Which factors (economic, security-related, access to services) most strongly shape their current living conditions and how would you describe the livelihood and survival strategies of Colombian families/communities in Venezuela?

- **¿Cómo ha cambiado su situación a la sombra de la crisis (en la última década)?**
  How has their situation changed in the shadow of the crisis (in the last decade)?

- **¿Cómo prevé la evolución de la situación de los colombianos en Venezuela en los próximos 5 años?**
  How do you foresee the situation of Colombians in Venezuela evolving in the next 5 years?

- **¿Hay algún aspecto importante que suele pasarse por alto al considerar a los colombianos en Venezuela?**
  Is there any important aspect that tends to be overlooked when considering Colombians in Venezuela?

4.2. Motivación para retornar y potencial de retorno
Motivation to return and return potential

- **Según su experiencia o percepción, ¿cuáles son las principales motivaciones para retornar a Colombia? (Por favor, nombre tanto factores de empuje como de atracción y considere cuáles son más determinantes en la decisión de moverse.)**
  In your experience/perception, what are the main motivations for returning to Colombia? (If you could, please name both push and pull factors, and consider which ones are more determinative in the decision to move?)

- **¿Qué factores influyen con mayor fuerza en la decisión de permanecer en Venezuela?**
  Which factors most strongly influence the decision to remain in Venezuela?

- **¿Predominan factores emocionales o racionales en estas decisiones?**
  Do emotional or rational factors dominate these decisions?

- **¿Qué significa "retornar" hoy para alguien que ha vivido 10, 15 o 20 años en Venezuela?**
  What does 'returning' mean today for someone who has lived 10, 15, or 20 years in Venezuela?

- **¿Cómo cambia el potencial de remigración de los ciudadanos colombianos en Venezuela en el contexto de la crisis?**
  How does remigration potential for Colombian nationals in Venezuela change in the context of the crisis?

- **¿Cómo evalúa los desarrollos futuros de los flujos de migración de retorno de los colombianos desde Venezuela? (disminución, estancamiento, aumento)**
  How do you assess the future developments of return migration flows of Colombian nationals from Venezuela? (decrease, stagnation, increase)

4.3. Capacidades y limitaciones (Marco de Carling)
Capabilities and constraints (Carling framework)

- **¿Qué limitaciones prácticas dificultan la migración de retorno? (documentación, recursos financieros, movilidad)**
  What practical constraints hinder return migration (documentation, financial resources, mobility)
- **¿Cómo afecta el contexto venezolano sus capacidades reales de movilidad?**
  How does the Venezuelan context affect their actual capabilities for mobility?
- **¿Qué papel desempeñan las redes familiares o comunitarias en las decisiones de retorno?**
  What role do family or community networks play in return decisions?
- **¿Perciben las personas que tienen margen de maniobra o capacidad de actuar?**
  Do people perceive themselves as having room to maneuver or act?

---

5. POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS Y MARCOS INSTITUCIONALES
PUBLIC POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

- **¿Cómo evalúa las políticas públicas colombianas dirigidas a apoyar a refugiados y migrantes venezolanos?**
  How do you evaluate Colombian public policies aimed at supporting Venezuelan refugees and migrants?
- **¿Qué políticas gubernamentales existen para apoyar e incentivar a los retornados, y cómo evalúa cada una y en general?**
  What government policies exist in supporting and incentivize returnees, and how do you evaluate each and overall?
- **¿Qué tan informados están los migrantes sobre las posibilidades de retorno o los programas de apoyo?**
  ¿Qué comentarios reportan los retornados sobre dichos programas?
  How informed are migrants about return possibilities or support programs; and What feedback does returnees report regarding support programs?
- **¿Qué obstáculos administrativos enfrentan comúnmente los potenciales retornados?**
  What administrative obstacles do potential returnees commonly face?
- **¿Cuáles considera como las áreas más urgentes para mejorar en materia de políticas públicas?**
  What would you identify as the most urgent areas for policy improvement?

APPENDIX D: SPSS OUTPUT

Table D1: Descriptive Statistics of the Aspiration Index (Scale 0-10)

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
asp_index	30	1,00	10,00	4,4500
Valid N (listwise)	30			

Construction of Composite Indices:

asp_index = MEAN(q10_return, q11_no_obs)

Table D2: Descriptive Statistics of the Capacity Index (Ordinal 0-1-2)

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
cap_index	29	,25	2,00	1,1034
Valid N (listwise)	29			

Construction of Composite Indices:

cap_index = MEAN(q15_fin, q15_doc, q15_net, q15_prog)

Table D3: Classification of Respondents According to the Aspiration–Capability Matrix

Aspiration and capability dichotomization (asp_high; cap_high) with fixed thresholds (aspiration ≥6; capability >1). Crosstabulation of these variables → four-cell categorization.

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Aspiration cathegory (0=low, 1=high) * Capaciróty cathegory (0=low, 1=high)	29	96,7%	1	3,3%	30	100,0%

Aspiration cathegory (0=low, 1=high) * Capaciróty cathegory (0=low, 1=high) Crosstabulation

			Capaciróty cathegory (0=low, 1=high)		
			,00	1,00	Total
Aspiration cathegory (0=low, 1=high)	,00	Count	12	9	21
		% within Aspiration cathegory (0=low, 1=high)	57,1%	42,9%	100,0%
		% within Capaciróty cathegory (0=low, 1=high)	92,3%	56,3%	72,4%
	1,00	Count	1	7	8
		% within Aspiration cathegory (0=low, 1=high)	12,5%	87,5%	100,0%
		% within Capaciróty cathegory (0=low, 1=high)	7,7%	43,8%	27,6%
Total		Count	13	16	29
		% within Aspiration cathegory (0=low, 1=high)	44,8%	55,2%	100,0%
		% within Capaciróty cathegory (0=low, 1=high)	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table D4: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Comparing Baseline and Conditional Return Aspirations

Nonparametric Tests

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.[a,b]	Decision
1	The median of differences between q10_return and q11_no_obs equals 0.	Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	<,001	Reject the null hypothesis.

a. The significance level is ,050.

b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test **q10_return, q11_no_obs**

Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Summary

Total N	30
Test Statistic	347,000
Standard Error	38,820
Standardized Test Statistic	4,418
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	<,001

Table D5: Frequency Distribution of Intended Timeframe for Return (Q13)

q13_when_to_return

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Dentro de 3 meses	3	10,0	10,0	10,0
	En 1–2 años	10	33,3	33,3	43,3
	En 6–12 meses	3	10,0	10,0	53,3
	No sé / prefiere no responder	3	10,0	10,0	63,3
	No tengo planes de regresar	11	36,7	36,7	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table D6: Frequency Distribution of Others Return Intentions (Q14)

q14_others_return

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No conozco a nadie	10	33,3	33,3	33,3
	No sé/ prefiero no responder	2	6,7	6,7	40,0
	Sí, algunas personas	12	40,0	40,0	80,0
	Sí, bastantes personas	6	20,0	20,0	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table D7: Correlation Matrix of Aspiration Index and Others Return Intentions

Nonparametric Correlations

			q14_others_return_num	asp_index
Spearman's rho	q14_others_return_num	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	-,327
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,089
		N	28	28
	asp_index	Correlation Coefficient	-,327	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,089	.
		N	28	30

Spearman's rho Correlations

Highly Positive: *(None)*

Positive: *(None)*

No Linear Correlation: *(None)*

Negative: *(q14_others_return_num <---> asp_index)*

Highly Negative: *(None)*

Table D8: Correlation Matrix of Duration of Residence and Aspiration Index

Nonparametric Correlations

			years_Ven_num	asp_index
Spearman's rho	years_Ven_num	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	-,161
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,396
		N	30	30
	asp_index	Correlation Coefficient	-,161	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,396	.
		N	30	30

Spearman's rho Correlations

Highly Positive: *(None)*

Positive: *(None)*

No Linear Correlation: *(None)*

Negative: *(years_Ven_num <---> asp_index)*

Highly Negative: *(None)*

Table D9: Correlation Matrix of Age Cohort and Aspiration Index

Nonparametric Correlations

			asp_index	age_group_num
Spearman's rho	asp_index	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	-,264
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,158
		N	30	30
	age_group_num	Correlation Coefficient	-,264	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,158	.
		N	30	30

Spearman's rho Correlations

Highly Positive: *(None)*

Positive: *(None)*

No Linear Correlation: *(None)*

Negative: *(asp_index <---> age_group_num)*

Highly Negative: *(None)*

Table D10: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on Employment Vulnerability

Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test

q10_return across employment_vulnerability

Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary

Total N	16
Mann-Whitney U	38,500
Wilcoxon W	93,500
Test Statistic	38,500
Standard Error	9,145
Standardized Test Statistic	,930
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,353
Exact Sig.(2-sided test)	,368

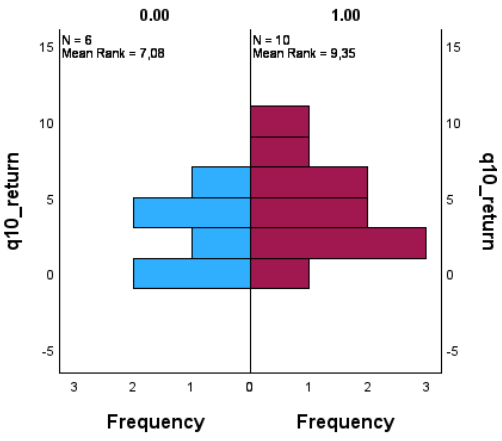

Table D11: Kruskal–Wallis Test of Return Aspiration by Family Location

NPar Tests

Kruskal-Wallis Test

Ranks

	family_loc_num	N	Mean Rank
q10_return	1,00	12	11,79
	2,00	5	23,50
	3,00	12	14,67
	Total	29	

Test Statistics[a,b]

	q10_return
Kruskal-Wallis H	6,857
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	,032

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: family_loc_num

Table D12: Correlation Matrix on Citizenship and Capacity Index

Nonparametric Tests

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.[a,b]	Decision
1	The distribution of cap_index is the same across categories of citizenship_num.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	,013[c]	Reject the null hypothesis.

a. The significance level is ,050.

b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

c. Exact significance is displayed for this test.

Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test

cap_index across citizenship_num

Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary

Total N	29
Mann-Whitney U	29,000
Wilcoxon W	282,000
Test Statistic	29,000
Standard Error	19,300
Standardized Test Statistic	-2,487
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,013
Exact Sig.(2-sided test)	,013

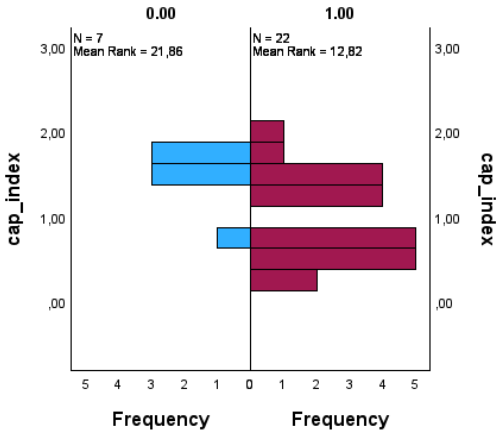

Table D13: Cross-Tabulation of Documentation Status (Q15) by Citizenship

Statistics

q15_doc_num			
,00	N	Valid	7
		Missing	0
1,00	N	Valid	22
		Missing	1

q15_doc_num

citizenship_num			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
,00	Valid	2,00	7	100,0	100,0	100,0
1,00	Valid	,00	1	4,3	4,5	4,5
		1,00	5	21,7	22,7	27,3
		2,00	16	69,6	72,7	100,0
		Total	22	95,7	100,0	
	Missing	System	1	4,3		
	Total		23	100,0		

Table D14: Mann–Whitney U Test of Financial Capability by Employment Status

NPar Tests

Mann-Whitney Test

Ranks

	employment_binary	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
q15_fin_num	,00	10	6,80	68,00
	1,00	7	12,14	85,00
	Total	17		

Test Statistics[a]

	q15_fin_num
Mann-Whitney U	13,000
Wilcoxon W	68,000
Z	-2,276
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,023
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	,033[b]

a. Grouping Variable: employment_binary

b. Not corrected for ties.

Table D15: Correlation Matrix of Push Factors and Aspiration Index

Nonparametric Correlations

			asp_index	q17_Ven_inf	q17_Ven_healtcare	q17_Ven_pub_sec	q17_Ven_pub_serv
Spearman's rho	asp_index	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,337	,117	,179	,138
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,068	,537	,345	,468
		N	30	30	30	30	30
	q17_Ven_inf	Correlation Coefficient	,337	1,000	,587***	,688***	,670***
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,068	.	<,001	<,001	<,001
		N	30	30	30	30	30
	q17_Ven_healtcare	Correlation Coefficient	,117	,587***	1,000	,731***	,643***
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,537	<,001	.	<,001	<,001
		N	30	30	30	30	30
	q17_Ven_pub_sec	Correlation Coefficient	,179	,688***	,731***	1,000	,824***
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,345	<,001	<,001	.	<,001
		N	30	30	30	30	30
	q17_Ven_pub_serv	Correlation Coefficient	,138	,670***	,643***	,824***	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,468	<,001	<,001	<,001	.
		N	30	30	30	30	30

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

Spearman's rho Correlations

Highly Positive: *(None)*

Positive: *(asp_index <---> q17_Ven_inf), (asp_index <---> q17_Ven_healtcare), (asp_index <---> q17_Ven_pub_sec), (asp_index <---> q17_Ven_pub_serv), (q17_Ven_inf <---> q17_Ven_healtcare), (q17_Ven_inf <---> q17_Ven_pub_sec), (q17_Ven_inf <---> q17_Ven_pub_serv), (q17_Ven_healtcare <---> q17_Ven_pub_sec), (q17_Ven_healtcare <---> q17_Ven_pub_serv), (q17_Ven_pub_sec <---> q17_Ven_pub_serv)*

No Linear Correlation: *(None)*

Negative: *(None)*

Highly Negative: *(None)*

Table D16: Kruskal–Wallis Test of Push Factors by Age Cohorts

NPar Tests

Kruskal-Wallis Test

Ranks

	age_group_num	N	Mean Rank
push_index	1,00	9	9,67
	2,00	4	10,25
	3,00	4	6,25
	Total	17	

Test Statistics[a,b]

	push_index
Kruskal-Wallis H	1,610
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	,447

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: age_group_num

Table D17: Correlation Matrix of Satisfaction Level with Venezuela and Aspiration Index

Nonparametric Correlations

			q12_Col_perc_num	q10_return
Spearman's rho	q12_Col_perc_num	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,365*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,047
		N	30	30
	q10_return	Correlation Coefficient	,365*	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,047	.
		N	30	30

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Spearman's rho Correlations

Highly Positive: (None)

Positive: (q12_Col_perc_num <---> q10_return)

No Linear Correlation: (None)

Negative: (None)

Highly Negative: (None)

Table D18: Correlation Matrix of Perception of life in Colombia and Aspiration Index

Nonparametric Correlations

			q12_Col_perc_num	q10_return
Spearman's rho	q12_Col_perc_num	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,365*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,047
		N	30	30
	q10_return	Correlation Coefficient	,365*	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,047	.
		N	30	30

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Spearman's rho Correlations

Highly Positive: (None)

Positive: (q12_Col_perc_num <---> q10_return)

No Linear Correlation: (None)

Negative: (None)

Highly Negative: (None)

Table D19: Correlation Matrix of Pull Factors and Aspiration Index

Nonparametric Correlations

			asp_index	q19_Col_job_opp	q19_Col_pub_sec	q19_Col_pub_serv	q19_Col_pol_stab
Spearman's rho	asp_index	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,249	,078	,175	,061
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,184	,681	,354	,750
		N	30	30	30	30	30
	q19_Col_job_opp	Correlation Coefficient	,249	1,000	,767***	,740***	,574***
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,184	.	<,001	<,001	<,001
		N	30	30	30	30	30
	q19_Col_pub_sec	Correlation Coefficient	,078	,767***	1,000	,772***	,708***
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,681	<,001	.	<,001	<,001
		N	30	30	30	30	30
	q19_Col_pub_serv	Correlation Coefficient	,175	,740***	,772***	1,000	,759***
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,354	<,001	<,001	.	<,001
		N	30	30	30	30	30
	q19_Col_pol_stab	Correlation Coefficient	,061	,574***	,708***	,759***	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,750	<,001	<,001	<,001	.
		N	30	30	30	30	30

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

Spearman's rho Correlations

Highly Positive: *(None)*

Positive: *(asp_index <---> q19_Col_job_opp), (asp_index <---> q19_Col_pub_sec), (asp_index <---> q19_Col_pub_serv), (asp_index <---> q19_Col_pol_stab), (q19_Col_job_opp <---> q19_Col_pub_sec), (q19_Col_job_opp <---> q19_Col_pub_serv), (q19_Col_job_opp <---> q19_Col_pol_stab), (q19_Col_pub_sec <---> q19_Col_pub_serv), (q19_Col_pub_sec <---> q19_Col_pol_stab), (q19_Col_pub_serv <---> q19_Col_pol_stab)*

No Linear Correlation: *(None)*

Negative: *(None)*

Highly Negative: *(None)*

Note: Curated Help is calculated based on actual cell values, not the formatted values.

Table D20: Descriptive Statistics on Policy Gain

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
policy_gain	30	-3,00	10,00	2,8333	2,64032
Valid N (listwise)	30				

Composite Variable:

policy_gain = q16_return_support - q10_return)

Table D21: Correlation Matrix of Baseline Aspiration Index and Intentions with Policy Support

Nonparametric Correlations

			asp_index	q16_return_support
Spearman's rho	asp_index	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,901***
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	<,001
		N	30	30
	q16_return_suport	Correlation Coefficient	,901***	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	.
		N	30	30

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

Spearman's rho Correlations

Highly Positive: *(asp_index <-*

Positi<---> *q16_return_suport)*

No Linear Correlation: *(None)*

Negative: *(None)*

Highly Negative: *(None)*

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Translations of publications:

- Economic Development in Indonesia from Independence until the Crises in the 90s. (2017): In. Go Hungary – Go Indonesia: Understanding Economic and Business Issues (2017): Eds.: Novák, T. (Book 1). OBIC, BBS, Budapest. 39-63. old. ISBN: 978-615-5607-26-4
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