

Adapting public policies in response to an unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants: Colombia case study of migration from Venezuela

Background paper to the *World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies*

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Paula Rossiasco and Patricia de Narváez*

Abstract

This paper describes Colombia's response to migration from Venezuela from 2015 to 2023, outlining government actions to receive and integrate millions of migrants, refugees, and returnees to guarantee their rights and harness their long-term contributions to development. Colombia has become a global leader in its response to the unprecedented migration. It has set new standards for integration of large flows of people in conditions of forced displacement and heightened vulnerability, including by introducing some of the most progressive, innovative, and comprehensive solutions in the world. In particular, it has evolved to deal with influxes of newcomers who are in need of international protection due to their motives for migrating and their level of vulnerability. The paper reviews these efforts, which have ranged from emergency humanitarian response to long-term integration for growth. It concludes with an analysis of good practices of effective policies and approaches to migration from the Colombian experience that can be replicated in similar global contexts, and a call for the continuation of inclusive policies in the country and others experiencing similar challenges.

Keywords: refugees, migration, integration, public policy.

* Paula Rossiasco is a Senior Social Development Specialist at the World Bank, email: prossiasco@worldbank.org. Patricia de Narváez is a Social Development Consultant at the World Bank. email: pdenarvaezcano@worldbank.org. This paper serves as a background paper to the *World Development Report 2023, Migrants, Refugees, and Societies*. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this paper are entirely those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank and its affiliated organizations, or those of the Executive Directors of the World Bank or the governments they represent. The authors thank Ana Aguilera, Greta Granados, Paola Guerra, and Taimur Samad for their contributions to this paper. Venezuela refers to the República Bolivariana de Venezuela.

Context, scale, and timeline of cross-border movements from Venezuela to Colombia

Latin America is experiencing an unprecedented exodus of migrants and refugees from Venezuela, precipitated by the multifaceted humanitarian, economic, and social crisis in the country. This situation presents extraordinary humanitarian and developmental challenges—and potential opportunities—for migrant- and refugee-hosting countries. Second only after Ukraine, migration from Venezuelan is the largest active displacement crisis in the world.¹ As of February 2022, an estimated 7.1 million people have fled Venezuela—most of whom have left the country since 2015.² According to the United Nations' High Commissioner Office for Refugees (UNHCR), migrants from Venezuela are considered a refugee-like population and are in need of international protection.³ In Colombia, there has been a historic increase in the number of applications for recognition of refugee status filed in the last five years, going from 625 applications in 2017 to 15,954 at the end of 2021, which represents a percentage increase of 2,453 percent, and a cumulative total of 42,106 applications filed as of April 30, 2022. Nearly all (98.8 percent) of these applications have been filed by Venezuelan nationals. In total, between 2017 and 2022, Colombia has recognized only 1,289 people as refugees, of which 1,224 are of Venezuelan nationality (CONPES 2022b).

Colombia traditionally has been a country of origin for migrants and refugees due to decades of internal armed conflict and economic instability. Government data from 2012 reports approximately 4.7 million Colombians living abroad,⁴ of which UNHCR calculates 1 million were internationally forcibly displaced between 1980 and 2002 and approximately 517,000 are officially recognized as refugees.⁵ The three main countries of destination are the United States, Spain, and Venezuela. Additionally, there are around 8 million internally displaced persons in Colombia.

In the past seven years, Colombia has become the world's largest recipient of Venezuelans, and the second largest host of a refugee-like population, outnumbered only by Türkiye. As of October 2022, there were an estimated 2.9 million Venezuelan migrants in Colombia (of which 51 percent are women) (Migración Colombia 2023). This amounts to 40 percent of all Venezuelan migrants in Latin America. Colombia has the longest land border with Venezuela, and between 2015 and 2022, the migrant population in Colombia grew 16 times. In 2015 (before the Venezuelan exodus), there were 147,774 long-term immigrants of all nationalities in Colombia (0.3 percent of the total population).⁶ Today, migrants from Venezuela in Colombia represent 5 percent of the total population. Further, the impacts of the crisis are geographically concentrated—approximately 7 departments in Colombia (of a total of 32, plus Bogotá) host 70 percent of all migrants from Venezuela (CONPES 2022b).

The long-term economic benefits of the Venezuelan migration to Colombia have the potential to outweigh its short-term costs. The impact of Venezuelan migration on government spending is estimated to average between 0.4 percent and 0.5 percent of GDP on an annual basis.⁷ Notwithstanding the negative short-term costs, it is estimated that migration could increase the average annual rate of growth between 0.7 and 0.9 percentage points in the medium to long term, mostly through the impact on the labor force (World Bank Group 2018). Economic benefits result from an upswing of investment and consumption associated with migration. Venezuelan migrants are on average younger than the Colombian population, bringing demographic benefits. Additional productivity gains due to higher education levels among Venezuelan migrants,⁸ particularly as they are integrated into the formal job market, may eventually translate into macroeconomic gains.

Colombia has become a global leader in its response to the unprecedented migration from Venezuela, setting new standards for integration, including the introduction of some of the most progressive, innovative, and comprehensive solutions in the world. Recognizing that properly managed migration is a development opportunity, Colombia has led the creation of exemplary open policies for the social and

economic integration of Venezuelan migrants since 2015. These have proceeded in three main areas. First, Colombia has established the legal and institutional basis for the protection and long-term social and economic integration of migrants in host areas, including the creation of the Presidential Border and Migration Management Office to coordinate the response, and the issuance of extraordinary transit and stay permits, and associated legal regulations, to regularize newcomers' migratory status and with that, access to markets and services. Second, Colombia is extending access to markets and services, including health, education, social protection, jobs, and housing, and developing special services for the protection of vulnerable populations, including family reunification, child protection, and human trafficking victims. Third, Colombia is supporting the formation of social capital and cohesion among Colombians and Venezuelans in the country, creating conditions for long-term integration.

Response: From humanitarian attention to long-term integration for growth

The government of Colombia's response can be characterized in three broad phases, starting with short-term humanitarian response to receive Colombian returnees and a wave of Venezuelan migrants (2015–17); moving to a more coordinated, medium-term response to allow migrants access to basic social services (2018–21); and finalizing in a long-term response centered on mass regularization, paired with social and economic integration (2021–present).

The first phase

The first phase started in 2015 after the expulsion and return of 22,000 Colombians from Venezuela. Efforts focused on increasing the institutional presence in the three main points of the border (La Guajira, Norte de Santander, and Arauca) through control units that integrate multiple government entities at the national and local level. Likewise, humanitarian care was prioritized by approving emergency care and childbirth care for migrants, building five shelters, and carrying out health days for pediatric care and vaccinations). To facilitate the return and reception of the returned population efforts were stepped up to implement Law 1565 of 2012, which established provisions and incentives for the return of Colombians residing abroad. Finally, monitoring of the migratory flow from Venezuela began. To respond more completely to the sudden and massive return of Colombians from Venezuela, the government of Colombia approved exceptional procedures to facilitate birth records and registration for persons born in Venezuela to Colombian parents, who are entitled to Colombian nationality under *jus sanguinis*.⁹

In 2017, as the numbers of Venezuelan migrants were rising, new measures were created to improve the management of the migrant population and access to basic services. The government developed two instruments to regularize the flow of migrants in border areas. First, with the aim of facilitating pendular migration, the government created the Tarjeta de Movilidad Fronteriza (TMF) or Border Mobility Card, which gave access to the national territory for a maximum of seven days and only within border areas. To better regulate border movements, the government also opened four additional migration points and crossing stations (bringing to seven the total number of open crossing stations between Colombia and Venezuela).

Some Venezuelans who seek to move to other countries in the region transit through Colombia. For this population, five humanitarian assistance routes were created for Venezuelan migrants who transit on foot through Colombian territory (*Ruta del Caminante*). The state, humanitarian organizations, and other actors offer different services along these routes, such as food and health care points, accommodation, orientation information, internet access and telephone calls, cash transfers, spaces for the protection of children and adolescents, and legal guidance.

Furthermore, in 2017, the government created the Special Permanence Permit (Permiso Especial de Permanencia, PEP), a special regularization scheme to grant temporary residence and access to social services and markets to Venezuelans residing in Colombia. This identification document authorizes a temporary stay in the country for up to two years and allows access to the entire institutional offering at the national, departmental, in matters of health, education, employment, and services for young children and adolescents. The PEP, initially conceived as due to the ongoing crisis in Venezuela, was periodically extended. As of January 2021, the program had been adapted to the needs of migrants and the context of migration 11 times (eight times for new issuances and three times to authorize renewals). The government granted access to emergency health care, education for migrant children, early childhood, and care for Between its inception and 2021, when the PEP transitioned to a more long-term regularization scheme, the status of 737,430 migrants from Venezuela was regularized.

The second phase

The second phase of the government of Colombia's response started in 2018 and was anchored and guided by the National Strategy for the Response to Migration from Venezuela (CONPES 3950). This strategy sets out a series of critical actions along two pillars (see CONPES 2018). First, it confirmed the principle of access to basic social services that guarantee the well-being of migrants and refugees while outlining institutional responsibilities and targets, including measures in health and education; measures for young children and adolescents; pathways and policies for populations with ethnic self-recognition such as indigenous peoples; Colombian returnees, and people fleeing security and social conflicts. Second, the CONPES confirmed the government of Colombia's commitment to improve institutional coordination and the mobilization of the institutions responsible for critical areas of service provision, as well as the creation of mechanisms for coordination of the country's response to migration from Venezuela. Specifically, the CONPES set the framework for the development and implementation of sectoral strategies to expand access to health care, education, early childhood care, childhood and adolescence services, labor, housing, and security services, as well as benefits for migrants from Venezuela and host communities. Since this Strategy was adopted, Colombia has made significant progress in meeting the needs of the migrant population, medium-term integration, and coordination among institutions.

In February 2018, the government of Colombia created the Presidential Border and Migration Management Office (Gerencia de Frontera) as a temporary institutional solution responsible for coordinating the national response to the extraordinary migration crisis. At the same time, the Presidency of the Republic hired an advisor, initially through international cooperation resources, to coordinate the response to migration from Venezuela in all sectors of the government. The Administrative Department of the Presidency of the Republic made this position official in February 2019, through the creation of an advisory-level position attached to the Office of the Chief of Cabinet, which acts as a coordinating body of the entities of the central government and local governments. Under the leadership of this advisor, consultants were hired by different international cooperation organizations, which have formed what is informally called the Management for the Border and Migration from Venezuela Office. This Office was created to: (1) promote, articulate, and monitor the measures of the national government in all relevant sectors to comprehensively respond to the migratory phenomenon throughout Colombia; (2) be a permanent channel of dialogue and coordination with the local and regional authorities of the country, seeking greater effectiveness and efficiency of all efforts so that all actions have the necessary impact to serve the migrant population and the host communities; (3) support the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in strengthening ties with other countries involved in the response to the migratory phenomenon, as well as with international institutions, donors, and cooperation organizations whose work complements the efforts of the Colombian state in area of migration from Venezuela; (4) promote actions that strengthen the processes of integration of the migrant population and reduce xenophobia in civil society and the Colombian private sector.

In 2018, the national government also created Local Migratory Roundtables as a strategy to coordinate with local authorities in departments with a high presence and impact of migrants from Venezuela. These working groups were created under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate for Development and Border Integration, the Presidential Border and Migration Management Office, and the National Unit for Disaster Risk Management. The working groups coordinate the response in the territory and evaluate strategies and measures to structure a scheme of care for this population. They have taken on special importance as they have become the mechanism through which the three levels of government (national, departmental, and municipal) meet to find solutions and generate actions to assist those who have arrived. In the border departments, this organizing space is called the Border Unified Command Post (PMU), and the National Unit for Disaster Risk Management (UNGRD) is in charge. As of July 2022, 26 territorial entities, including departments and municipalities, have created mechanisms for local coordination of actions towards the reception and of the Venezuelan migrant population (CONPES 2022b).

The government also took steps to guarantee nationality rights to children born in Colombia to Venezuelan parents. Most of these children could not obtain nationality because their parents were in an irregular migration status and did not comply with the residence requirement demanded by the Constitution for children of foreigners born in Colombia. Furthermore, despite the children having the right to Venezuelan nationality due to *jus sanguinis*, in accordance with Venezuelan legislation, parents faced insurmountable obstacles to register their children as Venezuelans at the consular offices in Colombia. Among other difficult demands, they were required to hold a valid Venezuelan passport and have legal status in Colombia, which most of them did not have. This situation was aggravated at the beginning of 2019, when the Venezuelan consular offices in Colombia were closed. This led the Colombian government to conclude that these children were not recognized as nationals of any state and, therefore, were at risk of statelessness. On August 5, 2019, Resolution 8470 of 2019 authorized the National Registry of Civil Status to automatically grant Colombian nationality at birth to all children who had a Venezuelan parent and were born in Colombia as of August 19, 2015, until the obstacles that prevent them from guaranteeing their right to nationality cease. An estimated 78,303 minors had benefited from these provisions as of May 2022.

To guarantee the right to health care, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection reaffirmed the right to free emergency care for all migrants independent of their migration status. This includes services to migrant children and pregnant and lactating women, as well as measures to combat malnutrition, communicable diseases, and gender-based violence. The government of Colombia also strengthened the management of public health in the most affected territories, especially at the border. To guarantee emergency care to all migrants, national resources were authorized through Decree 866 of 2017. These resources complement those of territorial health care agencies.

In Colombia, the migrant population can also access comprehensive health services through insurance under the contributory or subsidized regime of the General System of Social Security in Health (SGSSS). To acquire insurance from the SGSSS, a person must be duly identified and regularized, according to the criteria and considerations of Resolution 3015 of 2017. That Resolution specifies that the PEP can be used as a valid identification document to register.

Migrants' lack of insurance hinders their access to comprehensive health service, and their emergency care is more expensive for hospitals and the government. To reduce this gap, the Ministry of Health issued Decree 064 of 2020, Under this Decree, those who are not affiliated when they request health services or when they are identified by the territorial agency are immediately affiliated. Every newborn is affiliated even if their parents are not, and the regular migrant population is determined to be a priority affiliation population, targeted through territorial censuses. Under this arrangement, as of February 2022, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection had provided more than 17.9 million services to more than 2.1 million Venezuelan migrants, focused on care for pregnant and breastfeeding women, early childhood, malnutrition, communicable diseases, and gender-based violence (GBV). Additionally, as of April 2022,

652,540 regularized Venezuelan migrants were affiliated with the SGSSS, according to data from the Ministry of Health. This represents about two-thirds (67 percent) of the total population of regularized Venezuelan migrants, according to figures from Migration Colombia as of August 2021 (CONPES 2022b).

In response to the increase in the demand for educational services, the National Ministry of Education maintained its commitment to guarantee universal access to education for Venezuelan children. Thus, migrant children have the right to study, regardless of their immigration status. As a result, more than 496,000 migrants of Venezuelan origin were enrolled by the end of 2021.¹⁰

One of the challenges of integrating children and adolescents into the education system was documentation barriers. To eliminate this obstacle, the Ministry of Education, in conjunction with Migración Colombia, issued Joint Circular No. 16 of 2018, which established instructions for the care of children and adolescents from Venezuela in Colombian educational establishments. The documentation requirements became more flexible so more young people could access education more easily. They could enroll using a system of equivalences and validations of their education level, even when they lack a valid identification document. Up to that point, Venezuelan students without a valid passport or foreign identity card could not take the Colombian high school exit exams, which are necessary to enroll in tertiary education, and validate their academic baccalaureate, which is equivalent to a high school diploma. To remedy this obstacle, Resolution 284 of 2018 was issued to accept the PEP as a valid document for students to take the state exams. Resolution 624 of 2019 and Resolution 675 of 2019 allowed Venezuelan students to use the Secretary of Education Established Number (NES) they registered with to take state exams and present any identification document with name and photo to validate their identity.

The Ministry of Education has not only helped the population in Colombian territory but has also sought to guarantee school access for the approximately 8,000 students who engage in pendular migration in the border area. With this population in mind, it designed the humanitarian school corridor. Since 2015, more than 4,000 students who lived in the border municipalities of Venezuela have attended educational institutions in border municipalities in Colombia on a daily basis. The Ministry of Education has led the necessary regulatory, technical, political, and financial processes so the humanitarian corridor can operate effectively, using resources from the General System of Participations (SGP-MEN).

Extending family welfare services to migrant households was also made a priority. The Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF) provides migrant families with early childhood programs, childhood and adolescence support programs, nutrition programs, and services to protect and restore children's rights. It granted access to these services regardless of the migratory situation of children, parents, or other household members. The Institute encountered various challenges to care for Venezuelan migrants, including the need to eliminate obstacles to the care of migrant and refugee children and adolescents, mainly in services aimed at early childhood and protection, due to legal, institutional, and administrative barriers. A Migrant Childhood Strategy was implemented in 2019, with the aim of facilitating the transit of migrant children and their families from emergency care to inclusion in ICBF services. This was done by: (1) improving identification and referrals; (2) integrating pathways to access services and services; and (3) strengthening territorial capacities and management of alliances. The Institute has made significant efforts to strengthen its institutional response by increasing the coverage of services and designing projects aimed at this population. In its prevention programs, the ICBF went from serving 66,565 migrants in 2018 to 111,077 in 2021, an increase of 67 percent. In 2021, of the total number of children served, 100,256 (90 percent) were under 18 and 90,276 were under 5. The number of admissions to protection programs to assist children when their rights are violated or threatened or are at risk, more than tripled from 1,068 in 2018 to 3,609 in 2021 (CONPES 2022b).

In 2019, the government of Colombia launched the "Income Generation Strategy for the migrant population from Venezuela and the host population." This Strategy, which was created in close cooperation with public

and private institutions, initially sought to identify the obstacles that hinder the process of socioeconomic integration of migrants from Venezuela and to establish routes for their mitigation. The strategy sought to prioritize three processes. The first is an employability route. It aims to promote the formalization of work by making the regularization schemes, mechanisms for validating qualifications, and certifying competences more flexible. It also seeks to increase training offerings, improve the labor intermediation system and step up efforts to stop forced labor. The second was an entrepreneurship route, to simplify procedures necessary to start a business, improve training and support for entrepreneurs, increase funding for business projects, and strengthen already consolidated companies. The third was a route to financial inclusion that simplifies the processes of opening bank accounts and offers financial education to those needing it. This exercise culminated in the identification of 45 obstacles and 82 mitigation actions.

In 2019, Venezuelan migrants were included in the Great Integrated Household Survey (GEIH). This national survey included a question on migrant background to better understand the socioeconomic situation of migrants in the country. The annual statistical survey has also provided a view of the changing situation of Venezuelan migrants in the past three years, a comparison between Venezuelans who have migrated in the previous year and in the previous five years, and a comparison with socioeconomic characteristics of the local population.

Other specific tools were built to improve the follow-up and monitoring of information on migration. These include the Colombian Observatory of Migration from Venezuela of the DNP (OMV) and the National Observatory of Migration and Health of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (ONMS); measurements, such as the Migrant Integration Index; and systems, such as the Information System for Migration Information/Sistema de Información de Estadísticas de Migración (SIEM). These tools allow the public to access migration data in an aggregated manner and generate analysis and reports to assist the creation and monitoring of programs and strategies to attend to and integrate the migrant population.

The government of Colombia also made efforts to create and coordinate communication campaigns to promote the social inclusion of Venezuelan migrants. Colombian society in general has been supportive of and receptive to migration from Venezuela, partly due to the family, social, and cultural ties between the two countries, and partly to the emigration history of many Colombians. However, as migratory flows have increased, the migrants arriving have more vulnerabilities and greater needs, and the exodus extends over time, Colombians' acceptance of Venezuelans has decreased, and feelings of rejection and discrimination have grown. A 2018 study by the Ideas for Peace Foundation showed that the perception of Venezuelan migration and social conversation on the subject has varied according to migration dynamics. While between 2007 and 2010 the perception of Venezuelan migration was positive due to the economic impact of the arrival of highly trained professionals, this perception started to turn in 2016 due to the high flows of vulnerable people. This change in the sociodemographic profile of migrants led to a negative perception that associated them with negative economic and public health impacts and increased crime and violence. As of 2018, public perception changed again to view migrants in the role of victim due to the risks of human trafficking, exploitation, and discrimination. Since 2018 and with the persistence of the migratory phenomenon, Colombian's acceptance of long-term integration has been limited. This constitutes an important barrier both to access to services and markets, and to the integration of populations in host communities. Since mid-2019, the trend of approval of the government's reception measures has been reversed, after unfavorable perception toward the migrant population spread. Despite this, feelings of discrimination against the national population and xenophobia have not intensified. In fact, discriminatory and xenophobic attacks against the migrant population have elicited reactions of social sanction against the perpetrators and solidarity for migrants. The government, with support of the World Bank, created a comprehensive public communication strategy for the social integration of Venezuelan migrants based on a qualitative study of perceptions of Venezuelans among the local population. The strategy, implemented starting in 2021, included a migration narrative to be used by government and allied partners, social media

campaigns, public dialogues with diverse actors, cultural and gastronomical events, and outreach through influencers and celebrities, among other actions.

Several measures were also taken to include Venezuelans in Colombia in the COVID-19 response. In March 2020, at the outbreak of the pandemic, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection issued guidelines to prevent, detect, and manage COVID-19 cases in the migrant population in Colombia. Eventually, both regular and irregular Venezuelan migrants were included in the country's vaccination scheme.

The third phase

In March 2021, the third phase of the government of Colombia's response, focusing on long-term integration of Venezuelans in Colombia, began. A major component was the creation of Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelan Migrants (Estatuto de Protección Temporal para Migrantes Venezolanos, ETPV). This process was approved in 2021 and will be implemented through 2023. The TPS accelerates registration and regularization of migrants and allows migrants to transition from an emergency and transitory migratory regime to a legal pathway toward regularization and long-term integration. By granting a permit of stay and work for up to 10 years, the TPS supports long-term integration of migrants, grants and expands access to basic services, and eases labor market pressures. This measure covers both the conversion of migrants who had PEP status and the estimated 1 million migrants in Colombia with no regular status. An estimated 2.4 million Venezuelans are either in the process of obtaining their TPS or have already received it. Venezuelans who have been regularized through a PEP or TPS for more than five years are automatically eligible for a resident visa in Colombia, therefore enabling them to transition into the ordinary migration regime.

The TPS process is staged in such a way as to adapt to the vulnerabilities of Venezuelans in Colombia, while still serving the objectives of protecting national security and informing policy making. To access the TPS, Venezuelans who had entered Colombia irregularly before January 31, 2021, had to present summary evidence of their residence in Colombia and had until May 28, 2022, to register in the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (RUMV). Those who entered through a Migratory Control Point can access the TPS until November 24, 2023. Those who have entered after May 29, 2022, will have up to two years to benefit from the measure. The deadline is until May 30, 2031, for children in the Administrative Process for the Restoration of Rights (PARD), adolescents and young people linked to the Criminal Responsibility System for Adolescents (SRPA), and children in initial education services or enrolled in the educational system. Similarly, the TPS provides that during the duration of the PPT, migrants must transit to the ordinary visa regime. Several adaptations have been made to ensure that vulnerable migrants can produce proof for different requirements to register in the TPS.

Under the TPS, Venezuelan migrants are eligible for national subsidies and services in the same conditions and at the same levels as Colombians (not more, not less), equalizing opportunities for medium- and long-term integration. Migrants with TPS can access the health social security system. More than 814,000 Venezuelans were registered as of July 2022. More than 620,000 Venezuelans have also been registered in the identification system for potential beneficiaries of social programs (SISBEN), and more than 42,000 are receiving cash transfers established during the COVID-19 pandemic to support the most vulnerable populations. Additionally, more than 458,000 Venezuelan children are registered in schools. Regularization has also allowed more than 401,000 Venezuelans to access financial services (CONPES 2022b).

To make the TPS operational, the government of Colombia created the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (Registro Único de Migrantes Venezolanos, RUMV) to facilitate identification; ascertainment of socioeconomic characteristics; registration in the health and social protection systems; and targeting of migrants eligible for education, health, climate-resilient housing, emergency shelter and response in the event of disasters due to natural hazards, and social protection programs in Colombia. The RUMV makes

it possible to update and fill in missing information about the migrant population. This register contains a comprehensive characterization survey, which is applied to each person who wants to benefit from the TPS, which will facilitate comprehensive public policy decision-making, given the relevance of the information collected and its ability to be applied across sectors.

To make sure the TPS translates into effective access to rights and services, the government created a tripartite committee. This committee was composed of the Presidential Border and Migration Management Office, Migración Colombia, and the Presidential Delivery Unit. Its objectives were to identify, coordinate, and monitor the legal and regulatory changes necessary for the TPS to be a valid and recognized identification card in different sectors. The committee identified key actions needed to recognize the TPS in different government and nongovernment entities, such as financial institutions. It also coordinated service fairs to be held in the same places where the TPS identification cards were handed out so migrants could have immediate information about and register for services such as health insurance, the public employment system, and social protection. Furthermore, it established targets for each key sector for the number of migrants that should be integrated into their service delivery.

In 2021 the Integral Migratory Law was approved. The law establishes the principles, definitions, general guidelines, and interinstitutional arrangements for the coordination of migration policy, including policy related to migrants from Venezuela, in accordance with the provisions of Colombia's Constitution and the international instruments on human rights ratified by the state. This represents a joint effort to provide the country with a public policy instrument necessary for the management of migration. In its fifth chapter on the socioeconomic and productive integration of the migrant population, the law contemplates the promotion of employment, local economic development, entrepreneurship, and financial inclusion.

The government of Colombia also led the creation of the Centros Intégrate, one-stop-shops to provide services in key host areas in an integrated and coordinated manner. These centers, currently open in Bucaramanga, Cucuta, and Medellín, and soon to open in Barranquilla, Bogotá, Cali, Cartagena, Riohacha, and Santa Marta, offer registry and regularization services; evaluations and design of a comprehensive care plan based on the family needs; and follow-up to ensure access to health, education, employment, justice, and social protection services in the same conditions as nationals. The centers represent the efforts of local authorities to provide integrated services to Venezuelan migrants and work toward their long-term inclusion. Advisors located inside the Integration Centers provide access to services, or external referrals can be arranged when the needs or the procedure exceed the Center's capacities. State-provided services are prioritized, without prejudice to complementary services or humanitarian care offered by NGOs and international cooperation allies in the prioritized territories. Local management of the Centers will be strengthened through a technological tool that allows the care and services provided to be traced and that improves local capacities to manage information.

To better monitor and evaluate integration efforts in different cities, municipalities, and departments of Colombia, the National Planning Department created the Multidimensional Index of Socioeconomic Integration of Venezuelan Migrants (IMI) (CONPES 2022a). The Index measures integration process through three progressive and interdependent dimensions. The first is the coverage of basic needs, understood as migrants' ability to obtain a vital minimum standard of living in the host country. It covers fundamental living conditions, including access to basic health services; the possibility of living in decent housing with access to essential services; access to quality initial child care, and preschool, basic, and secondary education; the restoration of human rights for children; a monetary income that guarantees minimum survival, including daily nutrition and meals; and the possibility of accessing state social programs that make it possible to overcome conditions of vulnerability. The second dimension is economic integration, which strengthens the dimension of coverage of basic needs and prepares the ground for social integration. This includes subdimensions such as access to the labor market and perceptions of quality of life. The third dimension, social integration, normally occurs when the needs of survival and economic

stabilization have been met. Through social integration, migrants consider themselves to be part of the social fabric of the host country and consider the needs of the nation as their own. In this way, social integration contributes to the nation socially and culturally through citizen, civic, social, or communal participation, among others, and respects the regulations on security and coexistence. The Index currently covers 23 of Colombia's departments and 23 departmental capitals. It includes four components, which are divided into 11 subcomponents and 36 indicators, and will be updated every six months.

This third phase is anchored in a new Strategy for the Integration of the Venezuelan Migrant Population as a Development Driver for the Country (CONPES 4100) approved in July 2022 (CONPES 2022b). This strategy aims to adapt the institutional response supporting the social, economic, and cultural integration of Venezuelan migrants to harness their contribution to the development and prosperity of Colombia in the next ten years. CONPES 4100 establishes two overall objectives: (1) to create mechanisms to offer migrants integrated services and access to markets; and (2) to strengthen migration governance, including the promotion of evidence-based decision-making. These objectives are to be accomplished through seven specific strategies: (1) increase the offering and access to services of migrants and host communities; (2) strengthen the state's capacity to prevent and address migrants' specific vulnerabilities; (3) strengthen and adopt strategies to support the economic integration of Venezuelan migrants; (4) promote an environment that favors the social and economic integration of Venezuelan migrants; (5) strengthen the institutions responsible for providing services to and integration of migrants; (6) define a financing strategy to provide services and harness the migration benefits of development; (7) strengthen the creation, analysis, and exchange of information, monitoring, and evaluation.

The positive effects of regularization and integration measures have already begun to contribute toward migrant's and host communities' well-being and development. Studies have shown that per capita consumption of regularized migrants is between 31 percent and 60 percent higher than that of irregular migrants, and that once regularized, migrants' probability of working in the formal sector increases by 10 percent and regularization increases their income by up to 31 percent (Ibáñez et al. 2022). Additionally, studies have shown that mass regularization has only induced negligible effects on the formal employment of workers who are nationals (Bahar, Ibáñez, and Rozo 2020).

The economic contribution of migrants to Colombia has already been observed through their contribution to tax revenues and the country's GDP. Venezuelan households' contributions to the value added tax (VAT) have been estimated at Col\$500 billion (approximately US\$150 million) in 2019, representing an annual average of 0.03 percent of GDP (Melo-Becerra et al. 2020). Furthermore, Venezuelans' income tax for 2019 was calculated at Col\$129 billion (approximately US\$38.7 million), representing an annual average of 0.01 percent of GDP (Melo-Becerra et al. 2020). Advances in regularization and economic integration of Venezuelans have likely increased and will increase their contribution to tax revenues and GDP.

What has worked and what could be improved

Given the breadth and range of Colombia's response, examining what has worked can provide guidance for countries facing similar situations of internationally forced displacement.

What has worked?

The Colombian experience suggests that the following steps can be effective.

Pursue long-term regularization with clear terms that strengthen prospects for integration. Granting regular migratory status under clear terms and procedures—whether through refugee status, regular migration pathways, or extraordinary regularization schemes—results in a smoother integration process

and better development outcomes. Regularization over a sufficiently long-time horizon provides stability and influences households' decisions on economic activities, investment, and savings, and improves development outcomes for hosts and migrants. Furthermore, Colombian regularization schemes have included rights to free movement and work, granting migrants the flexibility to establish themselves where conditions are more favorable and giving them the opportunity to be self-sufficient. Research on the impacts of regularization in Colombia has shown that it leads to higher wages (Ibañez et al. 2022) and employment rates (with a minimum impact on the employment of the local population, and only in selected high-migration border areas) (Bahar, Ibañez, and Rozo 2020), but higher rates of crimes reported against migrants, especially women (Ibañez, Rozo, and Bahar 2021, 42).

Utilize multisectoral approaches aimed at integration. Refugee-like situations affect multiple development dimensions including labor conditions, access to services, and social connectedness. Responses that address these multiple dimensions tend to be more effective for long-term integration. Inclusion, therefore, becomes a central element of the response, focusing on closing gaps between refugee-like populations and nationals across all dimensions affected by displacement. The government of Colombia's issuance of coordinated strategies for migrant reception and integration through CONPES 3950 and CONPES 4100 created a pathway across many sectors for government institutions to respond to migrants' needs and rights.

Adapt institutional, legal, and policy frameworks to respond to emerging volumes of flows and increased vulnerabilities. Because of the characteristics of the situations Venezuelans are fleeing, their high vulnerability, and limitations in activating existing migratory and refuge systems, most Venezuelans have fallen into a limbo in which they are neither economic migrants nor refugees. This has forced Colombia to adapt its frameworks to address the challenges emerging from influxes of people who are too vulnerable to be considered economic migrants yet not vulnerable enough to be considered refugees. To strengthen coordination across institutions to respond to migration, Colombia established (1) a presidential border and migration management office to lead the country's efforts toward short- and long-term integration policies; (2) a roundtable for coordination of effects by government institutions and international cooperation actors willing to support the government in the reception of migrants; and (3) migration roundtables at the local level that included the participation of local government, national government, NGOs, civil society, and other international cooperation actors to develop and support responses that adapt to specific local circumstances.

Expand access to services and benefits through national systems. Colombia has mainstreamed the integration of refugee-like populations into national public service and benefit systems, thus achieving more lasting results than integration measures that are time-bound and specifically targeted to migrants. These have also proven to be more cost efficient than migrant-specific systems and have helped reduce tensions among migrants and local populations due to perceived distortions across parallel systems. Providing emergency humanitarian assistance and simultaneously planning for the swift integration of refugees into national systems and into the economy ensures a shorter adjustment period for host communities and a faster harnessing of the development benefits of inclusion. Thus, Colombia has provided free emergency health care for all Venezuelan migrants, while registering them in the national social health security system to provide them more holistic and expansive health services. Similarly, Colombia has provided basic education to all migrants, independent of their migration status, through public and private schools, while also working toward the active inclusion of Venezuelans in higher education, certifying their competencies and working toward recognizing their studies in Venezuela.

Identify specific needs and vulnerabilities of migrants to adapt responses tailored to their circumstances. Migration heightens vulnerabilities for specific populations and through specific parts of the migration process that need to be recognized and addressed to protect migrants' rights. Migrants are more vulnerable to malnutrition and human trafficking—including sexual and labor exploitation, and minors are more likely to be unaccompanied, among other risks. Some of the actions the government of Colombia took to address

these specific vulnerabilities include the integration of a migration focus in the National Strategy for the Fight Against Human Trafficking; expanding the Colombia Institute for Family Welfare's (ICBF) nutritional programs for Venezuelan families, children, and pregnant and lactating mothers; and creating specific programs for the protection and restitution of the rights of unaccompanied minors, including family reunification.

Promote social cohesion by addressing xenophobia and discrimination. Although Venezuelan migrants and refugees represent an economic opportunity for host countries, the social stigmas to which they are exposed place them on the edge of society and prevent them from fully participating in political, economic, and social life. Similarly, biases, mental models, and stereotypes on the part of the host community—which often are differentiated by gender—pose a threat to building trust and social integration between the two groups. Although, in general, Colombian society has received Venezuelans with empathy and solidarity, rejection of migrants and of the governments' migration policies has been steadily growing. The government of Colombia, with the support of international cooperation actors, conducted an audience study and designed an integrated communications strategy that took into account the social and political context, institutional offerings, the role of nongovernment stakeholders, and key issues around the most prominent sectors of concern regarding migration. This led to the creation of communication strategies and campaigns in alliance with diverse organizations to promote integration and address discrimination and xenophobia.

What could be improved?

What does the Colombia experience suggest could be done differently to improve outcomes?

Thinking long term from the onset can increase efficiency and effectiveness. The parallel execution from the start of short-term measures to provide humanitarian aid, medium-term access to basic social services, and long-term policy adjustments toward regularization and socioeconomic integration responds more effectively to displaced persons' needs and to governments' limited capacity and resources than a piecemeal approach. A long-term view can also help mitigate the possible negative impacts for host communities and provide the steppingstone for migrants and refugees to contribute to the development of their host country.

A regional response can be a gamechanger. Latin America and the Caribbean is experiencing human mobility situations of unprecedented characteristics and scale. The nature of migration and forced displacement is changing. These changes include a rising proportion of people in need of international protection, in addition to growing volumes of more traditional economic migration. Forced displacement is a development concern as much as a humanitarian concern, with significant implications in the short and long term at the regional, national, and subnational levels. As a region, it is necessary to understand these situations, identify best practices and lessons learned, and tailor an approach to mitigate risks and enhance development opportunities associated with human mobility. A regional approach is needed to ensure the best possible long-term development outcomes for local populations and migrant communities in Latin America and the Caribbean. As countries of origin, transit, and destination, nations in the region need to work together to devise a framework for collective action, strengthen regional engagement, and provide a holistic system to mainstream people in situations of human mobility across local, national, and regional programs.

National systems to collect data should be strengthened and data should be analyzed to lower the costs of monitoring and improve policy making. Comprehensive and timely data are fundamental for decision-making and for providing services to migrants and host communities. The challenges of optimizing the collection, analysis, and transfer of data have been present in Colombia since the onset of the Venezuelan exodus. Problem areas include (1) the quality and use of data; (2) collection of data on migrants in all relevant areas; (3) the vagility of data for different subpopulations and segregated by gender; and (4) interoperability of information systems. In addition to strengthening the tools of analysis and visualization

of information, government efforts need to focus on creating an interoperable system of data on migrant populations that collects, shares, and projects information on the institutional offering at the national and territorial level to which this population has access. The governance tools created for similar crises have shown the need to implement information systems to support the design, formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the corresponding public policies, highlighting the possibility of identifying, on an individual basis, how those policies are helping people overcome their vulnerabilities and thus meeting the goals of socioeconomic stabilization.

Efforts should be made to ensure that policies persist over time, regardless of changes in political contexts. The integration of migrants and refugees takes time and benefits can be maximized only if this policy is adopted by the state as a whole, not just a particular government administration. Changes in government administrations may endanger earlier investments in integration, affecting migrants and local communities alike. In the case of Colombia, risks include increasing the number of irregular migrants in the country and losing ground in progress made on access to services such as health, education, and social protection through the SISBEN registry, and on formal employment and income generation opportunities. While Colombia has adopted strong integration policies in these areas, they can be reversed because they have not been elevated to law, risking significant investments already made and the well-being of migrants and local populations alike.

Notes

¹ The Venezuelan migration to Colombia is comprised of Colombian returnees, Venezuelan migrants (regular and irregular, in transit, and daily/pendular) and refugees. As such, it is considered a mixed migration. Irregular migrants are considered those migrants who have entered through nonauthorized checkpoints or are beyond the limits of authorized human mobility as regulated by the Ministry of External Relations. Despite its mixed nature, this situation shares key elements with refugee crises in other parts of the world, including (1) the accelerated pace at which it is evolving; (2) the refugee-like conditions of migrants based on their level of vulnerability; and (3) related to these conditions, the lack of valid documentation for migrants to enter other countries, including passports. Accordingly, in UNHCR's 2018 assessment, "*an important proportion of the Venezuelans currently present in Colombia may be eligible for refugee status or equivalent protection under applicable international, regional, and national standards, including the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, and the aforementioned Cartagena Declaration*" (UNHCR Assessment Letter, October 19, 2018).

² Situation Response for Venezuelans (R4V), as of December 2022. <https://www.r4v.info/es/refugiadosymigrantes>.

³ UNHCR. Venezuela Situation. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/venezuela-emergency.html>.

⁴ <https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/sites/default/files/informe-ejecutivo-2013-vinculacion-colombianos-exterior.pdf>.

⁵ Comisión de la verdad.

⁶ Migración Colombia (2023); authors' estimations using data from the 2005 National Housing and Population Census and consular records by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Presidency of Colombia (2020).

⁷ See World Bank (2018); Reina, Mesa, and Ramírez (2018); Tribín-Urbe and others (2020). These estimates from 2018 and 2020 were calculated before the Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelan Migrants (TPS) measure was approved. The World Bank is currently updating its assessment of the fiscal impacts of migration in light of this new measure.

⁸ According to data collected in Colombia by the Observatory of the Venezuela Migration Project based on the Great Integrated Household Survey (GEIH), at the end of 2019 about two-thirds (65.9 percent) of Venezuelans living in the country had finished high school and very few (4.9 percent) do not have any degree. The remainder (29.2 percent) had a degree in higher education: 12.4 percent had a technical or technological degree; 14.9 percent had a professional degree; and 1.9 percent had a postgraduate degree. <https://migravenezuela.com/web/articulo/el-rastro-de-los-profesionales-venezolanos-en-linkedin/2505>.

⁹ *Jus sanguinis* is a principle of nationality law by which citizenship is determined or acquired by the nationality or ethnicity of one or both parents.

¹⁰ Departamento de Planeación Nacional. Observatorio Nacional de Migración desde Venezuela. <https://www.dnp.gov.co/DNPN/observatorio-de-migracion/Paginas/Educacion.aspx> (accessed September 2022).

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