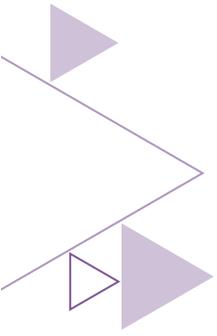


# Migration from Venezuela: opportunities for Latin America and the Caribbean

Regional socio-economic  
integration strategy







# **Migration from Venezuela: opportunities for Latin America and the Caribbean**

Regional socio-economic  
integration strategy

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This document was authored by Adriana Hidalgo and Francesco Carella from ILO, and David Khoudour from UNDP.

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February 2021

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is mandated to promote decent work for all people regardless of their nationality. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) works with people at all levels of society to help create nations that can cope with crises, and lead and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life of each and every person. Both organizations joined forces to develop this Regional strategy for socio-economic integration.

The Regional strategy was enriched by the contributions of the agencies that are part of the Integration Sector of the Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V<sup>1</sup>) in an effort to build coherent and complementary proposals for efforts directed at the migrant population from Venezuela, including refugees, asylum seekers and returnees, as well as host communities in the region. The strategy also contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the Quito Declaration on Human Mobility and Venezuelan Citizens in the Region, of September 2018.

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1 The Regional Platform for Interagency Coordination was formed at the request of the Secretary General of the United Nations on April 12, 2018 to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in order to direct and coordinate the response of the system's agencies to Venezuelan refugees and migrants, and to complement and strengthen the countries' national and regional actions. This response includes meeting the need for protection, assistance and integration of this population in the host countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. At present, it is made up of international cooperation agencies, non-governmental organizations, donor agencies and financial institutions. The Regional Platform is replicated at the national level through local coordination mechanisms established with the governments.



# Executive Summary

## Context

Since 2015, more than 5.4 million people have had to leave their country as a result of the economic, social and political crisis facing Venezuela. Around 85% went to another country in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). This figure, which does not include hundreds of thousands of returnees, makes this the most serious migration crisis in the history of the region.

Often, destination countries view refugees and migrants as a burden that affects the provision of public services and the national and local fiscal balance. However, international experience shows that migrants, including refugees, also contribute to the development of host countries (OECD-ILO, 2018).

Turning migration into a factor for sustainable development requires that public authorities at both the local and national levels promote the socioeconomic integration of the refugee and migrant population.

## Why a Regional Strategy for socio-economic integration?

While humanitarian aid seeks to meet the basic needs of the refugee and migrant population, in particular food, health and housing, a regional economic integration strategy aims to make its recipients the promoters of their own subsistence by promoting their sustainable inclusion in host communities and their contribution to local economies.

## Who is it for?

The Regional Strategy is aimed at the main host countries for the refugee and migrant population from Venezuela; in particular, to government institutions that have some degree of competence in the socioeconomic integration of this population, and to employers' and workers' organizations, with the aim of promoting social dialogue around this area.

The countries participating in the Quito Process identified socioeconomic integration as one of the priority axes of their work agenda. In addition, the Regional Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (RMRP, 2020), designed within the framework of the Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), includes socioeconomic and cultural integration among its four axes for priority action.

## Objectives of the Regional Strategy

The Regional Strategy is oriented towards the formulation of concrete responses to meet three objectives:

1. To reduce the levels of socioeconomic vulnerability of refugees and other migrants from Venezuela.
2. To maximize the contribution of this population to the economies of the recipient countries.
3. To promote social cohesion through initiatives that also benefit the host communities.

## Priority axes of the Regional Strategy

The Regional Strategy is part of a medium and long-term framework because it recognizes that the majority of refugees and migrants from Venezuela will settle for several years and that the only viable option for them to contribute to the sustainable development of their host countries is to promote socioeconomic integration and coexistence with their citizens. It is based on international standards on labour and human rights.

To this end, the Strategy is articulated around seven priority axes:

- i. Regularization and profiling of the population from Venezuela:** proposes making more flexible and expediting the processes of regularization and profiling of the migrant and returned population and carrying out studies on their demographic and socioeconomic profile.
- ii. Professional training and recognition of qualifications and competencies:** seeks to promote professional training and recognition of qualifications in the region in order to promote labour inclusion.
- iii. Employment promotion:** plans to promote access and efficiency of labour intermediation programs and platforms, boost the employability of refugees and migrants, and adopt measures for their transition into the formal economy.
- iv. Entrepreneurship and business development:** includes the integration of migrants and refugees into sustainable entrepreneurship programs and value chains, as well as promoting self-employment.
- v. Financial inclusion:** proposes facilitating access to financial services in host countries, promoting

financial education and adapting banking services to the needs of the migrant and refugee population.

**vi. Access to social protection,** proposes the preparation of a roadmap to promote a regional social protection floor and a campaign to disseminate information on access to social security.

**vii. Social cohesion:** foresees the design of institutional strengthening programs and awareness campaigns to combat discrimination and xenophobia.

## Strengthening regional cooperation mechanisms in matters of the socio-economic integration of refugees and migrants into their host communities

Until now, the Latin American and Caribbean governments' response to the Venezuelan migration crisis has been directed more towards national action than regional action, although the Quito Process pursues the latter. For this reason, it is essential that the countries of the region manage to strengthen cooperation mechanisms and adopt and implement truly regional policies, particularly in matters of socio-economic integration for the refugee and migrant population that comes from Venezuela, as well as for host communities.

For the successful implementation of the seven axes outlined above, it is key that the countries of the region manage to strengthen their cooperation mechanisms and adopt regional policies. The Regional Strategy suggests how to develop and implement such regional initiatives, focusing on the areas of:

**i. Human mobility and regularization:** better cooperation in the management of migratory flows at the regional level and the adoption of concerted regularization mechanisms to facilitate intra-regional human mobility and socioeconomic integration.

**ii. Mutual recognition of degrees and competencies:** when a person, whatever their nationality or immigration status, validates a technical or academic degree in one of the countries of the region or certifies their labour competencies, this recognition will be valid in the other countries of the region.

**iii. Labour intermediation:** regional cooperation on labour intermediation implies that both databases of job vacancies in each country and those of the job-seeking population, including refugees and migrants, are shared.

**iv. Social protection:** the extension of subregional agreements and promotion of coordination between national social security laws to guarantee the access of migrant workers and their families to national social protection systems and reinforce the system of portability of rights.

This type of initiative will contribute to a better response to the protection and inclusion needs of refugees and migrants from Venezuela at the regional level in a context aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis. It will also contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Quito Process.

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# Abbreviations Table

<b>LAC</b>	Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>ACN</b>	Andean Community of Nations
<b>CARICOM</b>	Caribbean Community
<b>DTM</b>	Displacement Tracking Matrix
<b>OECS</b>	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
<b>OISS</b>	Organización Iberoamericana de Seguridad Social (Iberoamerican Social Security Organization)
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>PEP</b>	Special Residency Permit (Permiso Especial de Permanencia)
<b>PEPFF</b>	Permiso Especial de Permanencia para el Fomento de la Formalización (Special Stay Permits for the Promotion of Formalization)
<b>PTP</b>	Permiso Temporal de Permanencia (Temporary Residence Permit)
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
<b>RPL</b>	Reconocimiento de aprendizajes previos (Recognition of prior learning)
<b>RAMV</b>	Registro Administrativo de Migrantes Venezolanos (Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants)
<b>RMRP</b>	Plan Regional de Respuesta para las Personas Refugiadas y Migrantes de Venezuela (Regional Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela)
<b>SICA</b>	Sistema de Integración Centroamericano (Central American Integration System)

# Foreword

The Latin American and Caribbean region today faces some of the most acute crises in its history. In order to face the **health crisis** and contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, most governments in the region have adopted measures for physical distancing and the restriction of mobility. These have resulted in a **protection crisis** for the most vulnerable populations, particularly those in situations of migration and forced displacement, as well as a **socioeconomic crisis** that has affected people employed in the most vulnerable sectors of the economy, especially women.

These human development crises were added to the **migration crisis** that has plagued the region for half a decade as a result of the economic, social and political situation in Venezuela. With more than five million Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the world, around 85% of which are in Latin America and the Caribbean, the region has to face new challenges

in terms of the mobility of people, access to basic and protection services, inclusion in labour markets and social cohesion.

Beyond the humanitarian response aimed at the population from Venezuela and the host communities, it is essential that the main recipient countries in the region consider options to promote socioeconomic integration and social cohesion. The document *Migration from Venezuela: opportunities for Latin America and the Caribbean - Regional strategy for socioeconomic integration* seeks to respond to the increasingly pressing challenge posed by the issue of migration from Venezuela, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prepared jointly by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), within the dual

framework of the Quito Process and the Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), this document was enriched with inputs from employers 'and workers' organizations, as well as from the bodies that make up the R4V Integration Sector. The document Migration from Venezuela: opportunities for Latin America and the Caribbean - Regional strategy for socio-economic integration is structured around seven priority axes: (i) regularization and profiling of the population from Venezuela; (ii) professional training and recognition of degrees and skills; (iii) job promotion; (iv) entrepreneurship and business development; (v) financial inclusion; (vi) access to social protection; and (vii) social cohesion.

Since these efforts need to be part of a logic of cooperation, the Regional Strategy proposes the adoption of concerted mechanisms to facilitate regional mobility and regularization of the population

in an irregular situation to promote the mutual recognition of degrees and skills, develop initiatives that improve labour intermediation at the regional level, guarantee the access of refugees and migrants to social protection systems and reinforce the portability of acquired rights.

The unprecedented challenges faced by our region require a coordinated response to build more peaceful, just and inclusive societies, with decent work, that take into account not only the needs and vulnerabilities of refugees and migrants, but also their contributions to the sustainable development of the region. With this objective, our two organizations are ready to support regional bodies as well as national and local authorities in Latin America and the Caribbean in the implementation of the measures developed within the framework of this *Regional Strategy*.



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*Development Programme*

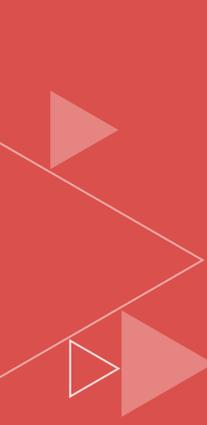
# Acknowledgments

This Regional Strategy is the result of a collaboration between the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the different agencies that make up the Coordination Platform for Migrants and Refugees from Venezuela (R4V) and the member countries of the Quito Process.

The document was drafted by Adriana Hidalgo and Francesco Carella from the ILO and David Khoudour from UNDP, under the direction of Vinícius Carvalho Pinheiro, ILO Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, José Cruz-Osorio, Director the UNDP Regional Centre for Latin America and the Caribbean, and Jairo Acuña-Alfaro, Leader of the Governance Team of the same Regional Centre.

The document also benefited from the valuable contributions of the members of the R4V Platform, led by the UNHCR and IOM, and especially those partners that make up the Integration Sector. Likewise, the support of the member countries of the Quito Process was of great importance, in particular the *pro t mpore* Presidencies of Colombia, Peru and Chile, as well as the representatives of the organizations of workers and employers of the region, who contributed significantly to the development of this document.

Finally, it is important to highlight the collaboration and contributions of the participants of the different spaces where this Regional Strategy was socialised, among which the Technical Seminar with the Integration Sector of the R4V Platform held on May 19, 2020, stands out, along with the Workshop on Socio-economic Integration and follow-up to the Recommendations of the Meeting of Ministers of Labour of the Quito Process, held on August 20, 2020.



# 1

## Description

The current Venezuelan migration crisis is the worst ever seen in the history of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Since 2015, more than 5.4 million Venezuelans have had to leave their country as a result of the economic, social and political crisis facing Venezuela. This figure, which does not include hundreds of thousands of returnees, makes it the second largest migration crisis in the modern world, after the Syrian crisis.

About 85% of Venezuelan refugees and migrants moved to another country in the LAC region. Colombia is the country that is receiving the highest numbers of people. As of August 5, 2020, this country welcomed 1.8 million Venezuelans (35.8% of the entire Venezuelan population in a situation of mobility), as well as an estimated number of at least 500,000 Colombian returnees from Venezuela. They are followed by Peru (830 thousand people), Chile (455 thousand) and Ecuador (363 thousand). Brazil (265 thousand) is the sixth largest recipient country for the Venezuelan population, just after the United States (351 thousand) and before Argentina (179 thousand) (R4V, 2020).

For their part, Aruba (16%), Curaçao (10.1%), Colombia (3.6%), Panama (2.9%) and Guyana (2.8%) are the main recipient countries as a percentage of the host population. This implies that these countries are the ones with the greatest pressure in terms of humanitarian assistance, provision of public services, access to jobs and citizen coexistence. In other countries in the region, such as Brazil, Mexico and Paraguay, the Venezuelan population represents only 0.1% of the total. Their absorption capacities are higher, while the costs associated with the integration of the Venezuelan population are lower than those of host countries with a higher concentration of Venezuelan population.

In the region, many destination countries tend to view refugees and migrants from Venezuela as a burden that affects the provision of public services and the national and local fiscal balance, not to mention the challenges in terms of cohesion and peaceful coexistence. However, international experience shows that immigrants, including refugees, also contribute to the development of their host countries (OECD-ILO, 2018). On the one hand, they represent a source of human capital that makes it possible to respond to the labour shortage in some sectors of the economy. They also invest and consume, which

contributes to feeding aggregate demand and thus GDP growth. On the other hand, by paying taxes, directly and indirectly, the refugee and migrant population contributes to improving the fiscal balance of their host countries.

An example of the positive effects on the local economy was evidenced in a study on the impact on society and the economy of the arrival of Venezuelans to Roraima, Brazil. This municipality registered growth and economic diversification during the period of highest influx<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, the tax receipts generated in 2018 by all Venezuelans is comparable to the additional expenses required for their acceptance, with both figures in the range of R \$ 100 million.

Turning migration into a factor for sustainable development requires that public authorities, both at the local and national levels, promote the socioeconomic integration of the refugee and migrant population. This is precisely the purpose of this *Regional Strategy*. The health, economic and social crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic makes it an even more necessary tool.

---

2 "A economia de Roraima e o fluxo venezuelano". Fundação Getúlio Vargas - Diretoria de Análise de Políticas Públicas (FGV-DAPP), ACNUR, Observatório das Migrações Internacionais (OBMigra), Universidade Federal de Roraima (UFRR) y ACNUR.



# 2

## **Objectives of the Regional Strategy for socio-economic integration**

The *Regional Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela* (RMRP, 2020) includes socio-economic and cultural integration among the priority lines of action of the Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V). It also highlights the fact that "effective socio-economic and cultural integration is favourable not only for refugees and migrants from Venezuela, but also for host communities."

Likewise, within the framework of the Meeting of Ministries of Labour in support of the Quito Process, in Bogotá, Colombia (November 13, 2019), the representatives of different Ministries of Labour of Latin America and international cooperation organizations insisted on the need to “promote socio-economic integration with an emphasis on access to the labour market for refugees, migrants and returnees from Venezuela in Latin America and the Caribbean through collaborative work with the different international cooperation organizations and agencies within the decent work framework.” They also recommended “cooperating with the design of an income generation strategy for refugees, migrants and returnees from Venezuela, linked to migration policies, which contributes to the formalization of work and progressive access to a social protection floor.”

The *Regional Strategy for Socio-economic Integration* constitutes a concrete response to this dual concern of the Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela and of the Ministries of Labour of the member countries of the Quito Process. Not only is it part of a humanitarian logic of reducing the levels of socioeconomic vulnerability of refugees and other migrants who come from Venezuela, but it also seeks to maximize the contribution of this population to the economies of the recipient countries and promote social cohesion through initiatives that also benefit the host communities.

## 2.1 Why a Regional Strategy for socio-economic integration?

While humanitarian aid seeks to satisfy the basic needs of the refugee and migrant population, in particular food, health and housing, an economic integration strategy aims to support the recipients in becoming actors of their own subsistence. In this sense, it is a recognition that “there is a growing need to strengthen the link between humanitarian assistance and development in the global response and to place employment in a strategic place between both components” (ILO, p. 12, 2016). It also responds to the need to develop or strengthen labour market institutions and programs that support local integration, resettlement, voluntary repatriation and reintegration, as reaffirmed in the ILO’s *Guiding Principles: Access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market*.

Refugees and migrants from Venezuela face a series of obstacles that hinder their integration into the region’s labour markets or prevent them from creating their own businesses. The lack of a regular status represents one of the biggest obstacles to getting a formal job or starting a business. However, those in a regular situation also have difficulties accessing decent jobs and obtaining recognition of their academic degrees and professional skills. Accessing opportunities to develop skills and competencies that allow them to be more competitive in the labour market represents an additional obstacle. The population from Venezuela, including returnees, also faces discrimination problems and a high risk of labour exploitation. This situation is even more acute in the case of vulnerable populations, such as women, ethnic minorities and disabled people, among others.

In this sense, the Regional Strategy describes the main ways to promote socioeconomic integration with special consideration for women, who face more precarious labour insertion conditions and greater risks of violence and sexual and labour harassment for gender reasons, among other realities.

The health, socioeconomic and care crisis generated by COVID-19, as well as the physical distancing measures that have been taken throughout the region, aggravated the migratory crisis and increased the risks of rejection towards people from Venezuela. Within the host communities, many people already experienced situations of poverty, hunger and exclusion. For this reason, promoting socioeconomic integration implies thinking about sustainable development strategies that consider the community as a whole, and that can and should benefit everyone. A strategy that is exclusively oriented towards the refugee and migrant population could contribute to increasing the frustration of the local population and represent a factor for rejection, especially in the current context of COVID-19.

From this perspective, the Regional Strategy for socioeconomic integration is structured around seven axes:

1. Regularization and profiling of the population from Venezuela
2. Professional training and recognition of qualifications and skills
3. Job promotion
4. Entrepreneurship and business development
5. Financial inclusion
6. Access to social protection
7. Social cohesion

Each country will be able to position itself in relation to this Regional Strategy based on its specific needs and progress on the seven aforementioned axes, but always within a framework of respect for human rights and international labour standards, in particular the fundamental principles and rights at work<sup>3</sup>. The participation of the social partners (employers' and workers' organizations) in a tripartite social dialogue with the Government is very important to define the specific adaptations to guide this Strategy in each national context.

## 2.2 Applicability and relevance of a Regional Strategy

When targeting diverse countries, a Regional Strategy poses the challenge of applicability, adaptability and relevance. Among the challenges, these factors should be recognized above all:

- The global socio-economic context derived from the effects of the pandemic caused by COVID-19 and the quarantine and social distancing measures adopted by each country.
- The different institutional capacities of each country.
- That the countries are at different stages of development to respond to the needs and demands of the target population of this Regional Strategy.

Faced with these divergences, an added value of the regional proposal is to seek that the countries give each other feedback through the exchange of good practices and lessons learned. Membership in regional mechanisms facilitates a more articulated response (see **Box 1**).

---

3 International Labour Organization. ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. See: <https://www.ilo.org/declaration/lang-es/index.htm>

Regional collaboration within the Quito Process, as well as the support of the different actors of the Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants

from Venezuela (R4V), also constitutes an added value for the successful implementation of the Regional Strategy for socio-economic integration.

**Table 1.** Multilateral mechanisms in the region

### **Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR)**

- Multilateral Agreement on Social Security (1997).
- Agreement on Residence for Nationals of MERCOSUR Member States and Agreement on Residence for Nationals of MERCOSUR Member States, Bolivia and Chile.
- Plan to Facilitate the Free Movement of Mercosur Workers (2013)

### **Andean Community of Nations (ACN): Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru**

- Andean Instrument for Labour Migration (2003) - Participants: Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.
- Andean Instrument for Labour Migration (Decision 545).
- Resolution 957: Regulation of the Andean Instrument for Safety and Health at Work.

### **Pacific Alliance**

Its creation, via the Declaration of Lima (2011), established the purpose of progressively advancing towards “the free movement of goods, services, capital and people,” to prioritize “the movement of business people and facilitate migratory transit including migratory cooperation and consular police.”

### **Caribbean Community (CARICOM)**

- Members: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Monserrat, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.
- Agreement on Social Security (2006).

### **Central American Integration System (SICA)**

The Central American Social Integration Treaty (Treaty of San Salvador, 1995) aims to achieve Central American social integration through the coordination, harmonization and convergence of national social policies, for which purpose the Social Integration Subsystem was created and the Central American Social Integration Secretariat (SISCA) was established.

### **Ibero-American Social Security Organization (OISS)**

- Ibero-American Multilateral Agreement on Social Security.

## 2.3 Who is the Regional Strategy for and what is expected after its implementation?

The Regional Strategy is directed at the governments of the main host countries for refugee and migrant populations that come from Venezuela, especially government institutions that have some degree of competence in their socio-economic integration. It draws on the Colombian experience, where the Venezuelan Border Management of the Presidency of the Republic, with the support of UNDP, designed an income generation strategy for the migrant population from Venezuela and the host communities (UNDP / Presidency of the Republic of Colombia, 2019).

Following the implementation of the Strategy, the population from Venezuela, as well as members of the host communities, especially those affected by the health, socioeconomic and care crisis induced by COVID-19 are expected to:

- Benefit from a regular immigration status that allows them, among other things, to have access to public or reasonably priced health services, education, care and financial services, as well as to develop new skills and manage the recognition of their degrees and skills, insert themselves into the labour markets of the host countries and create their own businesses.
- Have access to salaried jobs or under the modality of self-employment in the formal sector of the economy, with full exercise of their labour rights and in observance of health and safety regulations at work, as well as those referring to the minimum age of admission to employment.

- Benefit from a social protection floor against a state of need or social vulnerability that requires the intervention of the different non-contributory programs, to guarantee access to a basic level of social protection. This floor will allow, as a minimum, that they have access throughout their life cycle to essential health care and basic income security that, in turn, will enable them to have effective access to goods and services defined as necessary at the national level<sup>4</sup>.

## 2.4 The norms and principles that support and guide the Regional Strategy

The recommendations included in this document are part of the global agenda on migration, particularly labour, forced displacement and sustainable development. They are based on the guiding principles defined in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (UN, 2018a), the Global Compact on Refugees (UN, 2018b) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015). The Regional Strategy follows the guiding principles of human rights and a gender perspective and adopts a pan-governmental and pan-social approach.

Likewise, there is a migration governance framework at the international level that is made up of binding and non-binding normative instruments, guiding technical instruments for the definition of national policies, and others that meet universal aspirations. These are included in the basis of this Regional Strategy, but it is also hoped that the countries that have not ratified them - where appropriate - move towards this process and that, in all cases, their content is disclosed and implemented.

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4 This guarantee of access to a minimum level of social protection must be articulated within the framework of a broader strategy of extension of coverage through an integrated policy approach and access to higher levels of social protection in line with Convention No. 102 of the ILO on the minimum standard of social security.

Those that are most closely related to the dimensions addressed by this strategy are listed below, recognizing that the list can be much longer:

#### **a. Technical and declarative instruments**

- ILO multilateral framework for labour migration. Non-binding principles and guidelines for a rights-based approach to labour migration (2007).
- High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (2013). General Assembly of the United Nations.
- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015). General Assembly of the United Nations.
- The “Guiding principles on the access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market” (2016).
- General principles and guidelines for fair recruitment and Definition of recruitment fees and related expenses (2016 and 2018).
- Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018).
- Global Compact on Refugees (2018).
- Declaration of Panama. 19th American Regional Meeting of the ILO (2018).
- ILO Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work (2019). International Labour Conference, One Hundred and Eighth Session to mark the Centenary of the ILO.
- Resolution on the ILO Centennial Declaration on the Future of Work (adopted on June 21, 2019).

#### **b. Normative instruments of the United Nations System**

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979). General Assembly of the United Nations.
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, adopted by

the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 45/158, of December 18, 1990.

- Convention on the Status of Refugees, adopted on July 28, 1951 by the Plenipotentiary Conference on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons, convened by the General Assembly of the United Nations.
- Protocol on the Status of Refugees, signed on January 31, 1967 at the United Nations General Assembly.

#### **c. Normative instruments of the Interamerican System for Human Rights**

- Convention on Political Asylum (1933).
- Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women or “Convention of Belem do Pará” (1994).
- Convention on Diplomatic Asylum (1954).
- Convention on Territorial Asylum (1954).
- Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights or “Protocol of San Salvador” (1988).
- Inter-American Convention Against all Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance (2013).

#### **d. Normative instruments of the ILO**

The fundamental ILO conventions are listed, so named because they are a prerequisite for the development of subsequent governance conventions and considered a priority due to their relevance to the operation of the international labour standards system. Other conventions and recommendations that address the components of this strategy (employment, social protection, rights of migrant workers and development of human resources, among others) are also considered.

### **d.1 Core conventions**

- Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and its Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930.
- Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87).
- Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98).
- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100).
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105).
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).
- Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138).
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

### **d.2 (Priority) governance conventions of the ILO**

- Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81); Protocol of 1995 relating to the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947.
- Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122).
- Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129).
- Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144).

### **d.3 Other applicable ILO conventions and recommendations**

#### **Conventions**

- Preservation of Migrants' Pension Rights Convention, 1935 (No. 48).
- Employment Service Convention, 1948 (No. 88).
- Migrant Workers Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97).
- Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102).
- Plantations Convention, 1958 (No. 110) and its Protocol of 1982 relating to the Plantations Convention, 1958.

- Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118).
- Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1944 (No. 121).
- Invalidity, Old-Age and Survivors' Benefits Convention, 1967 (No. 128).
- Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Convention, 1969 (No. 130).
- Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142).
- Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143).
- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156).
- Preservation of Social Security Rights Convention, 1982 (No. 157).
- Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment Convention, 1988 (No. 168).
- Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181).
- Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).
- Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).
- Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

#### **Recommendations**

- Livelihoods Security Recommendation, 1944 (No. 67).
- Medical Care Recommendation, 1944 (No. 69).
- Migrant Workers Recommendation (Revised), 1949 (No. 86).
- Migrant Workers Recommendation, 1975 (No. 151).
- Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).
- Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204).
- Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205).
- Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206).

The Regional Strategy is established within this regulatory framework and is based on the following principles:

- All of the actions implemented include both the refugee and migrant population, including returnees, as well as the host communities, unless for some reason their application is specified only for one or the other.
  - It is recognized that refugees enjoy a different protection status under international law.
  - Respect for human rights in general and labour rights in particular are guaranteed for all working people in a situation of mobility.
  - Tripartite social dialogue is promoted in the debate on and definition of the governance frameworks for labour migration.
  - The actions for implementing the Strategy include the promotion of decent work, both in the urban and rural sectors.
  - The exercise of freedom of association and collective bargaining is recognized and guaranteed.
  - It is based on and promotes equal opportunities and treatment in employment, as well as respect for diversity.
- The right of minors to live free from child labour and hazardous work.
  - The right of people to live free from forced labour.
  - The promotion of a national social protection floor, which guarantees income security throughout the entire life cycle and effective access to essential health services, accompanies measures to promote socio-economic integration because this constitutes one of the elements required for decent work.
  - It is formulated from a gender and intersectional perspective that considers the relevance of the service offer according to the life cycle and the business cycle, which guides actions and strategies, and recognizes the different experiences faced by women in terms of barriers to socioeconomic inclusion and, in particular, those related to care needs and responsibilities for families, which usually falls on migrant women.



# 3

## **Socio-labour profiling of the population from Venezuela**

Socio-economic integration is essential for the population from Venezuela, who need stable sources of income to sustain themselves in their new location and send remittances to their families. However, despite the fact that the majority of Venezuelans and returnees are of a productive age and have a high educational profile, they face many challenges when entering the labour market under decent working conditions.

### 3.1 Age and educational profile

According to various studies, the majority of refugees and migrants from Venezuela are young, between 18 and 35 years old, with the group between 26 and 35 years old being the largest, followed by the group of people between 18 and 25 years old. Salgado *et al.* (2017) point out that in Chile, the population of Venezuelans is young and in full productive capacity because they belong to the age range of between 20 and 35 years old and, to a lesser extent, in the range of 36 to 50 years, with an average of 29.2 years. Similarly, Simoes, Cavalcanti, Moreira and Camargo (2018) point out that in Brazil, Venezuelan immigrants are mostly young (72% are between 20 and 39 years old). Ramírez *et al.* (2019), and further establish that in Ecuador, 55% of the Venezuelan population is in the age range between 18 and 35 years.

An analysis of the most recent reports of the IOM Displacement<sup>5</sup> Tracking Matrix (DTM) for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean corroborates these results. In Panama, 83% of the Venezuelan people surveyed are in the age range of 18 to 45 years, with a higher concentration in the ages of 26 to 35 years (DTM September 2019); in Trinidad and Tobago, the majority are between 25 and 29 years old, followed by the group of people between 30 and 34 years old (DTM September 2018).

The analysis of these same reports makes it possible to verify that Venezuelans with higher educational levels migrate to the Southern Cone of America, Panama, Mexico, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic, while those with technical and secondary educational profiles (mostly complete) tend to migrate to the Andean countries, Brazil and the Caribbean countries of Aruba, Curaçao, Trinidad and Tobago,

and Guyana. This is presumed to happen because those with a higher occupational qualification migrate to countries that are perceived to have better and greater job opportunities (Bravo and Úzua, 2018; Koechlin, Solórzano, Larco and Fernández-Maldonado, 2019). It also follows that, due to their socioeconomic profile, the first group corresponds to people with the ability to travel to more distant destinations since, according to the DTM analysed, those who migrate to the Southern Cone, Panama, Mexico, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic make all or part of the trip by plane while those who travel to neighbouring or closer countries make part of their trip by bus, boat<sup>6</sup> and / or on foot.

However, some differences between the first and second migratory waves can be identified. The first migrations corresponded mainly to people with postgraduate, university and higher technical studies, including professionals in careers such as Engineering, Social Sciences, Administrative Sciences, Education, Medicine and Law, among others (Mercer, 2019; Tincopa *et al.*, 2019; Salgado *et al.*, 2017). The most recent waves include younger people with less education and little work experience. In other words, recent migrations are of people who leave the country in conditions of greater vulnerability and with less work experience (Blouin, 2019).

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5 The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is IOM's global tool for capturing, processing and generating information on the movements of people in different countries. Specifically, they are surveys of people over 18 years old that are carried out at border points and destination cities. They provide information on the profile of people in human mobility, transit routes, living and working conditions, as well as the particular vulnerabilities and specific needs they face.

6 According to a report on the RV4 Platform, there were three shipwrecks that caused more than 80 deaths of Venezuelans who were taking the sea route to Caribbean countries (RV4 April-May 2019).

## 3.2 Distribution and differences by gender por género

Women represent about half of the people who come from Venezuela and, on average, have higher educational levels than their male counterparts; they also have work experience. It is estimated that more than 70% worked before migrating and of these, approximately 57% had a formal job, a similar proportion to their male counterparts, while 16% were unemployed (9% of men were) (IOM, 2018).

Despite this, they face significantly worse job placement conditions than men. Unemployment is generally double what they experienced before they migrated and at least double that of their male counterparts. These results are influenced by the combination of the sexual division of labour within households and in labour markets, and the violence experienced in transit and destination (Carcedo, Chaves Groh and Larraitz Lexartza, 2020).

Within households, the migratory experience tends to reinforce, reproduce and increase the differences in the distribution of care work and other unpaid tasks. Women who come from Venezuela take care of the family more intensively than before migrating and do so more than men. This difference tends to grow in the places of destination, where the difficulties of educating the little ones, the lack of care services and support networks, and the scarcity of resources that prevent hiring third parties for household tasks lead women to disproportionately assume reproductive responsibilities within families. To meet this demand, they also do not have the help of the extended family and, in particular, of older women; less than 10% of women are over 50 years old. For women heads of households, the pressure is even greater (Carcedo *et al.*, 2020).

In LAC countries, the sexual division of labour outside the home produces labour markets with strong segmentation and horizontal segregation by sex, which implies a high concentration of women in professions

and trades that require fewer qualifications (ECLAC, 2019). These markets favour the disqualification of women who come from Venezuela and reinforce precarious work in jobs that are usually located within the informal economy and, therefore, in working conditions with a lack of decent work. Among these are occupations related to cleaning, caring for other people, and street vending. In fact, women reach a labour market that is already segregated by sex, but they only manage to insert themselves into feminized and low-productivity occupations. They are not successful in entering occupations where women are the majority, but require high or medium-high qualifications, such as health and education. For many, this segmentation of the labour market implies giving up their professions and work experiences and reinforces their disproportionate participation in the care economy in two ways: inside and outside their homes, paid and unpaid.

The violence and harassment experienced by women and girls of all ages who come from Venezuela also impact their access to livelihoods and contribute to their exclusion from labour markets, which implies loss of employment, lack of incentive to search and consequent real access only to jobs with high levels of risk. Street sales, domestic work and sex work are some of the sectors in which migrant women find employment opportunities and, at the same time, risk situations, as well as exposure to violence and exploitation.

The reinforcement of the domesticity mandate reaches not only the loss of their professions, businesses or disconnection from the collective spaces in which they were reaffirmed, they also lose the possibility of acting and interacting on their own behalf in different settings and with different people. This drastic change, the lack of job opportunities and precarious living conditions, as well as an increase in reproductive workloads and the risks of sexual, sexist and xenophobic violence reinforce this enormous decline in their quality of life.

### 3.3 Main obstacles to labour insertion

In general, refugees and migrants from Venezuela, especially women, find more opportunities to be employed in the informal economy, with the limitations it implies in terms of access to labour rights. The reason is structural: between half and three-quarters of the jobs in Latin America and the Caribbean are in the informal economy, either because they are jobs without a formal contract and in precarious conditions or because they include low-productivity enterprises and, therefore, do not offer the possibility of affording coverage against various risks of the present and future (ILO, 2019).

In Peru, the study by Koechlin *et al.* (2019) points out that the insertion of Venezuelan people into employment "has been at the cost of reinforcing the predominant tendencies of the Peruvian occupational structure, that is, the generation of employment in the informal sector of the economy" (2019, pp. 50 -51). In its study on immigration of South Americans in Argentina, the ILO (2011, p. 123) indicates that these people are inserted in "(...) a labour market characterized by the high presence of precarious jobs for the population as a whole, where the migrant population takes the worst part (...)." The insertion of the migrant population into the labour market is determined, therefore, by its structure and, in this case, by informality, clearly to the detriment of compliance with labour rights. In Trinidad and Tobago, more than 90% of Venezuelans surveyed for

the DTM report indicated that they were working in the informal sector (DTM September 2018).

In relation to immigration regulation, the processes involved are long and expensive, and in some cases access to it is impossible. Not having a regular immigration status constitutes a limitation for access to decent work, as already outlined by various studies (Tincopa, 2019<sup>7</sup>; Acosta *et al.*, 2019<sup>8</sup>; DTM Panama 2019; Célleri, 2019<sup>9</sup>). In the Dominican Republic, the DTM report indicates that, "although the Venezuelan population finds activities that generate income, these are low. There is limited access to labour rights due to their irregular migration status" (DTM October-November 2018). In a study carried out with women in Peru, the results of which can be extrapolated to men, the following were identified as obstacles to labour insertion: (1) the difficulty of requesting appointments at the National Directorate of Migration, which leads women to resort to "processors" (people who can access the website at dawn to process an appointment); (2) the existence of few State offices for managing immigration documents, such that women have to stand in long lines to obtain them; and (3) high costs, such as for the Interpol File and the immigration card (Tincopa, 2019).

Having a document proving one's refugee status or a work permit is not a guarantee of access to the job market. There are some barriers that are related to the lack of information on the part of the private sector about this migratory category, since they do not know whether these documents are valid and are not sure of the existence of restrictions to

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7 The delays in obtaining an appointment to start the application for the residency procedure in Argentina are up to 12 months. On the other hand, in May 2018, the Argentine Executive increased the prices of all administrative immigration fees, including the fee to request an urgent appointment that increased five times from 2,000 to 10,000 Argentine pesos (from 47 to 234 euros) (Pacecca, 2018, in Acosta *et al.*, 2019).

8 In Panama, among the different challenges to regularizing or applying for refugee status, the DTM report indicates: (1) the expiration / theft / loss of passport (Venezuelan people are not accessing new documents either in the consulates or in Venezuela) although, on occasions, they receive consular certificates of passport extension for the immigration and labour regularization procedures; (2) the cost of immigration regularization and legal representation. Additional costs include the processing and sending of documents to Venezuela, payment to the responsible person in Panama and travel / stay in the capital for those who live in the interior of the country (DTM September 2019, p. 15).

9 In Ecuador, where neither documents nor extenuating circumstances are required, the main limiting factor to obtaining documentation is the cost. The visa application costs 50 USD; the UNASUR Visa costs 250 USD, and the temporary visa costs 400 USD (Ministry of Foreign Relations, 2019, in Célleri, 2010, p. 13).

hiring migrants, such as work permits for certain occupations.

Access to vocational training in the LAC region is usually conditioned on the possession of immigration documentation and, in general, a residence card and a basic level of education are required according to the policies of vocational training institutes. Sometimes, as previously mentioned, migrants and refugees do not carry their diplomas and, therefore, it is impossible to demonstrate the minimum required degree, which makes it impossible to access these alternatives to strengthen employability. In countries like Costa Rica, people between the ages of 15 and 17 can access the courses available at the Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje (INA), regardless of their immigration status. Access facilities for this type of training promote job placement under more favourable conditions, because they allow access to degrees that prove mastery of certain skills.

The validation of university degrees requires going through tedious processes (obtaining apostilles or finding documents that are not available in Venezuela), that are long and expensive. In many cases, the document that they do not carry or that they cannot obtain is the diploma itself: “despite the fact that 40% of the Venezuelan people surveyed have higher education, only half have been able to bring their diploma to Peru (50 %). Of this group, only half have validated their diploma (50%)” (Blouin, 2019, p. 58). A related problem is the inability to obtain documents in Venezuela when requested.

The costs also represent an obstacle because “the Venezuelan migrant must debate whether to assume the costs of validating professional degrees or whether to save that money for survival purposes or for sending remittances” (Blouin, 2019, p.59). This situation generates a low correspondence between their studies (university or technical-superior) and the type of work they perform.

Koechlin *et al.* (2019), in their study on labour insertion in Peru, asked what is the relationship between the training that the Venezuelan migrant brings and the occupation they perform: of 575 people who completed their university or technical degree studies, only 7,65% are working in their field of study (university students and technicians in their profession), while 92.35% are working in some other activity. Among those surveyed, inappropriateness affects both men and women in a similar proportion. It should be taken into account that, sometimes, countries limit the incorporation of workers to certain occupations or professions, so this inappropriateness is not always due to barriers related to the recognition of degrees.

### 3.4 Lack of decent work and job precariousness

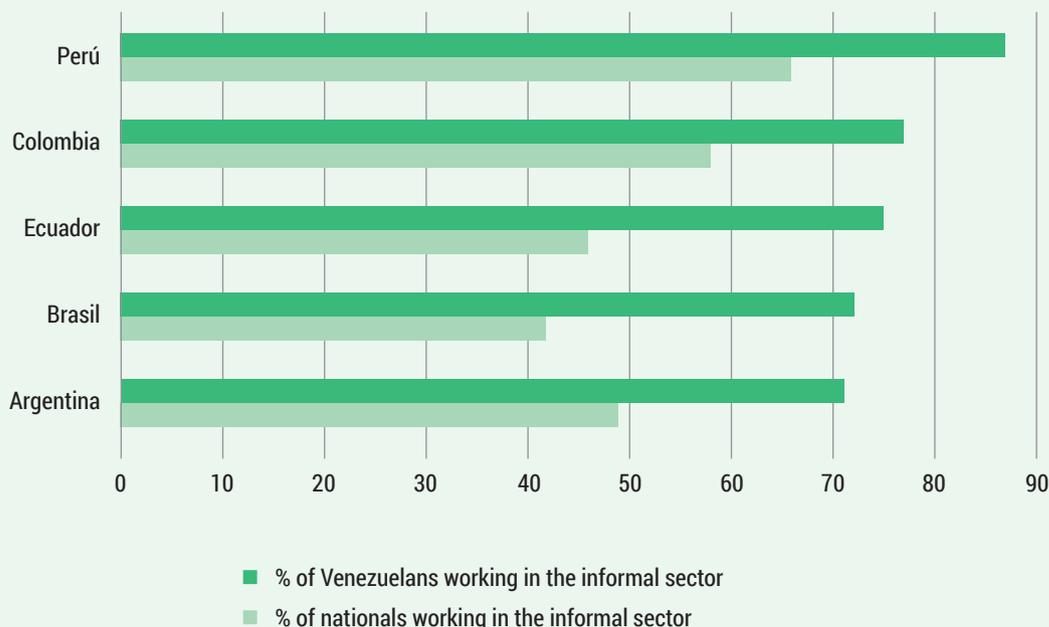
The majority of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, regardless of their educational level and work experience, are working in the informal sector. The most frequent occupations are: in shops, street vendors, customer service, restaurants and construction; a majority of women are relegated to paid care and domestic work. Informal working conditions do not meet the requirements of labour legislation. They are characterized, on the contrary, by the lack of a written employment contract, existence of longer or shorter working hours than desired, payment of minimum wage or less, non-payment of wages, lack of social protection (they do not have access to health or pension systems), disrespect for labour rights (bonus, vacation pay and overtime, among others) and early dismissals after passing the trial period.

**Figure 1** compares the percentages of informal work among nationals and people of Venezuelan origin in five South American countries: Argentina,

Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The percentage of Venezuelans working in the informal sector is systematically higher than that of nationals and

exceeds 70% in all five countries. On average, the gap between the two populations is around 24%.

**Graphic 1. Percentage of Venezuelans and nationals in the informal sector, 2018-19**



**Source:** World Bank (2020).

In Chile, Salgado *et al.* (2017) report that 45% of the Venezuelan people surveyed in their study entered the labour market as salespeople and that another 20% are working as waiters, which is equivalent to saying that 65% work in the service sector, under the modality of customer service. In Peru, Tincopa *et al.* (2019) point out that 29% of women who work do so in itinerant or informal jobs and 43% in jobs related to direct sales or customer service. Thus, "a very notable characteristic of the Venezuelan migrant population in all the countries of South America, including Ecuador, is their presence in the streets, squares, parks and markets, selling products such as

sweets, fast food, homemade sweets, juices, or the traditional Venezuelan arepa "(Ramírez *et al.*, 2019, p. 20).

Koechlin *et al.* (2019) note that a visible characteristic of the labour insertion process consists of "the precarious working conditions in which a significant percentage of immigrants find themselves. (...) The precarious factors are reflected in the working hours, salaries, formality and informality of employment, job rotation "(p. 36). The study shows that, for Lima, Arequipa and Piura, 82% of the Venezuelan people surveyed reported working longer than the established legal workday, which is equivalent to 48

hours per week<sup>10</sup> and 46% reported having an income below the minimum wage. When introducing the gender variable, the study finds that more Venezuelan women receive an income below the minimum compared to their male peers (58% reported by women versus 37% reported by men).

For Chile, Salgado *et al.* (2017) point out that although 49% of the people surveyed had a written contract, “some 43.1% of those who have a contract, do not contribute to the pension fund. This situation has a certain correlation to when they were asked if they were contributing to the health system (...), 17.4% of those who have some type of employment contract do not contribute to the health system” (p.108). Céleri (2019), in the study on Ecuador, found that 51% of the people surveyed with a job have a dependency relationship, but 70% indicate that they have not signed a contract. According to the author, a possible explanation for this situation is that they enter jobs under the condition of a “probationary period,” which according to current legislation in Ecuador is three months, a period in which employers can make dismissals without the obligations that they would have under a fixed contract and with the payment of social security.

This situation is also evident in the DTM reports. In Brazil, 80% of the people who reported being employed receive less than the minimum wage and 72% did not sign any employment contract (DTM April 2019). In Paraguay, 20% of the people who reported employment earn less than the minimum wage (DTM October 2018). In Trinidad and Tobago, 47% of Venezuelan people who work reported earning less than the minimum wage and 23% reported being in violation of their labour rights for not being paid or being paid less than the agreed salary (DTM September 2018).

Women also face the worst working conditions in the informal sector; more often they lack a contract, earn less than the minimum and less than their male counterparts (wage gap), and work fewer hours than desired. They also face particular risk situations at work or when searching for work: sexual harassment, abuse and rape. They are, therefore, subject to dual employment discrimination due to their status as women and refugees or migrants.

Pressure is evident in the labour market due to informal, low productivity and precarious jobs. There is an oversupply of labour for this type of work, which results, on the one hand, in an increase in job insecurity, which affects both nationals and refugees and migrants and, on the other, an increase in xenophobia and discrimination.

### 3.5 Impact on employment and work due to the measures adopted to stop the spread of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a veritable health, socioeconomic and care crisis. The quarantines and other physical distancing measures adopted to prevent the spread of the virus, although necessary, generated an economic recession at the global level that resulted in a decrease or paralysis of productive activities, especially in sectors such as hotels, construction, restaurants, travel and tourism; a strong increase in unemployment and a reduction in working hours and income (UN, 2020). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects that real GDP will suffer a drop of 3% in the world in 2020 and a drop of 5.2% in LAC (IMF, 2020). The UNDP (2020a) anticipates that the Human Development Index (HDI) could reverse for the first time in three decades.

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<sup>10</sup> When cross-analyzing the variables of working hours and remuneration, the study found no relationship between greater number of hours worked and higher remuneration.

Recent ILO estimates show a decrease in the number of working hours of around 10.7% compared to the last quarter of 2019, which is equivalent to some 305 million full-time jobs in the world (based on a 48-hour workweek) and a reduction of 13% in the Americas (ILO, 2020a). These same estimates show that many young people under 30 years of age, who make up around 70% of international migratory flows at the international level (ILO, 2017b), were affected by the closure of work centres and borders. The productive sectors that are most affected are precisely those with the greatest presence of young workers (ILO, 2020a).

In the world, almost 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy were affected by isolation measures or by working in the most affected sectors, and their income was reduced by 60% during the first month of the crisis (ILO, 2020). According to the Inter-American Development Bank (2020), the level of informality could reach 62% in Latin America and the Caribbean, a percentage that currently stands at 54%, according to the ILO.

In 2020, the poverty rate could increase to 4.4% and the extreme poverty rate to 2.6% compared to 2019, reaching 34.7% of the Latin American population - which is equivalent to 214.7 million people -; for its part, extreme poverty would reach 13% - which is equivalent to 83.4 million people (ECLAC, 2020d, cited by ECLAC and ILO, 2020).

People who work in the informal economy and who are therefore not covered by the countries' social protection systems are the ones who are most affected by the economic and labour crisis. Refugees and migrants, who also suffer the consequences of xenophobia and discrimination, constitute a particularly vulnerable population because most of them work in activities related to commerce and services, including itinerant sales, domestic work,

care for children and the elderly, construction and recycling, all informally (UNDP, 2020b). As expected, these activities will be among the most affected when the restrictive measures adopted due to the health crisis are totally or partially lifted. The economic reactivation process will also depend on the conditions in which the companies find themselves in order to operate again. Many had to close, lay off staff or slow down their production, so they did not receive or perhaps do not receive support from governments (tax benefits, extensions to pay debts, subsidies to keep jobs, reduction of social costs, etc.) and will have serious difficulties in resuming their activities.

Since there is not yet a vaccine, the population will have to live with the SARS-COV-2 virus and that will imply an adaptation of the operating rules of many of the services in which the migrant population is or was employed, and this will be reflected in the quantity and quality of jobs. Health and safety regulations at work are especially relevant in this case, and also require adaptation to prevent the spread of the virus.

A rapid needs assessment in the context of COVID-19, carried out in Colombia (May 2020) by GIFMM<sup>11</sup>, indicates that, since preventive measures were implemented, 20% of households report receiving income from paid work when before, this number was up to 98%, which shows a decrease of 78%. In addition, 48% of the people surveyed said they did not have any source of income, which implies a significant increase compared to the 4% who reported no income before the isolation measures. Also noteworthy is the increase in the percentage of households that are using their savings (before, they were used by 2% and now, by 13%).

Those who work in activities such as, for example, the distribution of food - with a strong presence of Venezuelan workers - did not suffer restrictions on

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11 "Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows," Colombia, which is part of the Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, R4V.

mobility because they are “essential services,” so they can continue to function despite the social distancing measures. However, they were exposed to the risk of contagion because they lacked, in all cases, the necessary protective elements and were not covered by social protection, in addition to encountering difficulties in joining workers’ organizations and establishing dialogues with the employment sector.

School closures and, in many cases, distance learning can put a strain on families; in particular, for women, who dedicate three times as much time to unpaid care and domestic work as men. Furthermore, gender inequalities are accentuated in households with lower incomes, in which the demand for care is higher, given that they have a higher number of dependents per household (ECLAC, 2020a).

Finally, the massive arrival of the population from Venezuela made it difficult to design a response to the demand for housing. This additional vulnerability factor was increased by the context of the COVID-19 epidemic. In fact, the excluded neighbourhoods, which have an overrepresentation of the refugee and migrant population, are particularly affected, given that the shelters, short-stay hotels or shared apartments are highly overcrowded spaces with poor infrastructure, which represents a vehicle for the spread of the virus and an increased risk of exclusion.

### 3.6 Social protection in the regional context

Social protection, which includes social security, is a human right that is defined as a set of policies and programs designed to reduce and prevent poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout the life cycle. The provisions of Convention No. 102 of the ILO on the minimum standard of social security (1961) establishes nine main areas of protection: family and child benefits; maternity and unemployment benefits; benefits in case of accidents at work and occupational diseases; sickness, old-age, disability

and survivors benefits, and health protection. The provision of all these benefits is made through a combination of contributory schemes based on traditional social insurance and non-contributory benefits financed by taxes (ILO, 2017a).

Beyond recent advances in the consolidation of comprehensive social protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean, significant coverage gaps persist in geographical terms (with marked differences between urban and rural areas) and especially with respect to some groups considered difficult to cover, as in the case of migrant workers and their families. The countries developed their social protection systems on the basis of different starting lines and various institutional schemes and, therefore, the results achieved are quite heterogeneous in terms of coverage and quality of benefits. Currently, more than five out of ten workers do not contribute regularly to social security and, therefore, lack any type of coverage.

Colombia promoted, through the Special Residency Permit (PEP), the regularization of the Venezuelan population, to facilitate their access to formal employment. Thus, the immigration authorities regularized more than 660,000 Venezuelans in less than three years. However, coverage rates for Venezuelans in a regular situation within the social protection system remain relatively low. As of April 30, 2020, the number of PEP holders registered in the Single Database of Affiliates (BDUA) of the General System of Social Security in Health was 216,285, that is, only 32.7% of Venezuelans are PEP holders (UNDP / Presidency of the Republic of Colombia, 2019).

In addition to traditional problems such as high informality, there are other elements that exert pressure on the performance of social security systems, such as accelerated technological change and disruptions in the organization of production and work; the aging of the population and the increase in dependency rates; the incidence of natural disasters and, also, the phenomenon of labour migration (ILO, 2018).

A global mapping conducted by UNHCR in 2018 found that most national social security systems are not accessible to non-nationals. In the few countries where access is given to refugees, it is partial or limited due to restrictive legal frameworks or barriers to implementation<sup>12</sup>. Over the years, an understanding has been achieved on the part of both the authorities and the general population that these programs do not depend on the discretion of the government in power, but rather are rights that must be guaranteed by the States (ECLAC, 2017). Non-contributory social protection policies were implemented through the appropriate institutions using available public funds and with a commitment to implement them from a human rights perspective. In addition, these policies have an international, constitutional and legal framework which recognizes the right to social security of all people without distinction.

All these factors mean that the region has a favourable framework for promoting the inclusion of refugees and migrants in national social protection systems<sup>13</sup>.

Due to the serious situation in the LAC region resulting from the effects of the pandemic, governments applied different measures to extend social protection to the populations in which COVID-19 caused the greatest damage. At the beginning of the pandemic, the use and adaptation of existing cash transfer programs was the most frequent response. Due to the prolongation of the health crisis and the limited coverage of social protection instruments, which were not enough to cover vulnerable populations such as informal workers and vulnerable households, new instruments such as vouchers

and transfer programs were created. However, the migrant population was not always included in these responses (Rubio, Escaroz, Machado, Palomo and Sato, 2020).

COVID-19 response measures such as isolation highlighted the global care crisis and, in particular, global care chains<sup>14</sup>. Within the framework of social protection, care must be understood as a basic right of citizenship that the community assumes and guarantees in order to maximize individual and social well-being, with direct supervision of the State in the provision of care services and the regulation of the responsibilities assumed by other institutions.

Unpaid care and domestic work increased as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, from caring for patients at home and the elderly, school closures and mandatory quarantines. Women and girls are the primary caregivers in the home and have greater domestic and family care responsibilities. Worldwide, they do two and a half times more unpaid care and domestic work than men.

Migrant women, especially those who are involved in domestic care, face a greater possibility of exposure when they maintain their economic activity and when they are unable to do so, as a consequence of travel and mobility restrictions, they experience harsh socioeconomic consequences derived from income losses. Unequal power relations and discriminatory social norms can pose additional risks for migrants in contexts where discrimination and xenophobia limit their access to a source of employment, livelihoods or services<sup>15</sup>.

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12 Phelps, Laura: Mapping opportunities for linking humanitarian cash-based interventions with national social safety nets for displaced populations, UNHCR, March 2018.

13 "The incorporation of refugees in national non-contributory social protection programs (social assistance) in the Americas, how to move forward?" UNHCR July 2018.

14 [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_633165/lang--es/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_633165/lang--es/index.htm)

15 United Nations Development Programme (2020). Technical Note: the economic impacts of covid-19 and gender inequalities recommendations and guidelines for public policies. Retrieved from: [http://americalatinagenera.org/newsite//images/cdr-documents/2020/04/PNUD\\_GENERO\\_COVID19\\_\\_ESP\\_FINAL\\_ok\\_5.pdf](http://americalatinagenera.org/newsite//images/cdr-documents/2020/04/PNUD_GENERO_COVID19__ESP_FINAL_ok_5.pdf)



# 4

## Priority axes of the regional strategy for socioeconomic integration

The *Regional strategy for socio-economic integration* aims to respond to the needs of this population not only with humanitarian actions, but also with measures aimed at their socio-economic integration. In this sense, the Strategy is part of a medium- and long-term framework and recognizes that the majority of refugees and migrants from Venezuela will settle for many years, which is why the only viable option for them to contribute to the Sustainable development of their host countries is to promote socio-economic integration and citizen coexistence. With this objective, the Regional Strategy focuses on seven axes: (i) Regularization and profiling of the population from Venezuela; (ii) Professional training and recognition of degrees and skills; (iii) Promotion of employment; (iv) Entrepreneurship and business development; (v) Financial inclusion; (vi) Access to social protection, (vii) Social cohesion.

## 4.1 Regularization and profiling of the population from Venezuela

The regularization of migration and the recognition of refugee status are central elements of the integration of refugees and migrants into their host countries. Having the necessary documentation is essential for them to have access to services and the formal job market. However, in many Latin American and Caribbean countries, a large proportion of the Venezuelan population is in a situation of irregular stay. For some people, this is because they used irregular channels to cross borders or because they do not have official documentation, which is difficult to acquire in Venezuela; for others, it is because they encountered legal or practical barriers to accessing refugee status determination procedures, and the rest, because the host countries increased restrictions on regularization. Faced with this, public authorities in the region should adopt more flexible and expeditious regularization mechanisms, as well as improve their asylum systems to favour the integration of migrants and refugees and increase their contribution to the economies and societies of the countries receiving them.

On the other hand, as a complement to the regularization processes, it is important to have detailed data on the socio-labour profiles of the Venezuelan population, as well as the returnees, to better understand who they are and what their areas of training and experience are, and thus seek a better insertion into the labour markets of the host countries. On the other hand, to favour the matching process between demand and labour supply, information is also needed about the characteristics of the labour demand.

### ► Current situation / obstacles

- An important part of the Venezuelan population is in an irregular situation in many countries of the region.
- In many countries, the Venezuelan population, particularly the most vulnerable, has limited access to the information available on the different options for regularization.
- The regularization mechanisms that were implemented in most of the countries of the region are relatively rigid and prevent addressing the permanent flow of people from Venezuela.
- The high costs of visas and the long periods needed to respond to the procedures represent another obstacle to regularization.
- Despite the fact that many Venezuelan nationals could qualify as refugees, few are ever recognized as such by the authorities of the host countries.
- Some of those who returned do not have the necessary documentation to prove their nationality and are in an irregular situation.
- Efforts to characterize the refugee and migrant population remain very limited.
- There is a scarcity of data on the population from Venezuela disaggregated by sex, diversity, age, ethnic origin, and disability status, among others.
- Detailed and systematic data is lacking on the educational and socioeconomic characteristics of the population from Venezuela and their ability to enter the labour markets.
- When they exist, a systematization of the data about the characteristics of the labour demand is required.
- There is a lack of knowledge on the part of the private sector regarding the validity of the regular stay documents and about the processes for hiring refugees and migrants.

## ► Proposal

In order to address the massive arrival of refugees and migrants from Venezuela and facilitate their process of socio-economic integration, it is necessary for the governments of the recipient countries to implement processes of regularization of the Venezuelan population in an irregular situation, recognition of their refugee status through the persons who qualify and requested protection, and profiling of the returned population (including persons born in Venezuela who are the sons and daughters of Latin American refugees and migrants).

Such regularization and profiling processes, which are based on a registry of the population from Venezuela, as Colombia did in recent years through its Special Stay Permits (PEP), are the most effective in allowing refugees and other migrants to successfully enter formal labour markets and contribute to the economic growth of their host countries (Clemens, Huang, and Graham, 2018). In this sense, one of the rounds of PEP in Colombia covered people who had entered the country irregularly as long as they had registered with the government between April and June of 2018, which allowed for the regularization of large numbers of Venezuelans. Argentina and Uruguay, for their part, grant MERCOSUR residence visas to people from Venezuela, despite the fact that this country was suspended from this body. In the first case, they obtain a temporary two-year visa. In the second, a permanent resident visa. Upon entering, Brazil grants temporary residence to any Venezuelan person as long as they have some type of identity document, which allows them to arrange for permanent residence three months before the previous one expires, although they must prove that they have a legal source of income. Peru, through the Temporary Permit of Permanence (PTP), allowed people to move to a migratory category of long-term

residence after one year, but at present, the program is closed (Selee and Bolter, 2020).

Some examples of migrant registries are: Colombia, with the Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (RAMV), which collected information on the size and profile of this population, specifically those who were in an irregular situation, as it was carried out during the round of PEP for people in irregular condition; and Ecuador, started in September 2019, which provides information on an approximate number of migrants from Venezuela, their characteristics, migratory situation, socioeconomic position, and work and educational profiles (Selee and Bolter, 2020).

Another important example of regularization was the decision of the Brazilian government to recognize the refugee status of Venezuelans through group-based determinations, such as the *prima facie* approach. Under this approach, asylum applications that meet the necessary criteria are processed through an expedited procedure, without the need for an interview<sup>16</sup>.

It is necessary to make procedures more flexible and to extend the criteria for recognizing refugee status, so that the Venezuelan population benefits from greater protection and the processes of socioeconomic integration in the host country are accelerated. Several countries in the region extended the definition of “refugees” in their national legislation based on the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees - as is the case of Brazil (UNHCR, 2019) -, while others increased their capacities to process applications for asylum or developed simplified or accelerated processes.

It is also important to carry out profiling processes for the migrant population from Venezuela, which include refugees, asylum seekers and returnees,

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<sup>16</sup> This measure follows the decision, adopted in June 2019 by CONARE, to recognize that the situation in Venezuela constitutes a serious and widespread violation of human rights, as described in the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees of 1984.

through coordinated surveys among the different entities in charge of providing care in different areas and those that participate in the process of socioeconomic integration, in particular the Ministries of Labour, Education, Health and Social Protection, as well as the departments of statistics. The profiling processes must consider that, many times, the reasons for leaving Venezuela are associated with the criteria for recognition of the refugee's condition, such as persecution, situations of violence or serious disturbances of public order that threaten the life, as well as the security or freedom of these people.

## ► Strategic lines

### 1. Adoption of flexible regularization mechanisms

- ◆ Adopt different migratory categories or create ad hoc temporary alternatives (for example, special residence permits or humanitarian visas), to enable access to services and insertion into formal labour markets.
- ◆ Strengthen national asylum capacities, including improving refugee status recognition processes to reduce response times and make conditions more flexible, so that a greater number of asylum seekers can access the refugee qualification and, therefore, obtain recognition of their legal status.
- ◆ Improve the information and guidance mechanisms for the regularization processes of Venezuelans, aimed at employers, and both employers' and workers' organizations.
- ◆ Reduce the costs of visas and residence permits, when they have a cost, or apply special rates for vulnerable populations.
- ◆ Create regularization mechanisms for people in an irregular situation who obtain a formal employment contract.

- ◆ In the context of COVID-19, adopt more flexible regularization mechanisms to guarantee greater protection, which simplifies the incorporation of migrants and refugees into the labour market in a context where the need for foreign labour was more than evident.

### 2. Streamline the profiling processes of the returned population from Venezuela

- ◆ Information and orientation mechanisms so that people who return to Venezuela after several years or even decades know their rights and the current processes for the recognition of their nationality in their country of origin.
- ◆ Facilitate profiling processes so that returnees and, in particular, those belonging to the "second generation" can request recognition of nationality in their country of origin (or that of their parents).

### 3. Profiling of the demographic and socioeconomic profile of the population from Venezuela

- ◆ Collect existing information to avoid duplication of efforts / studies and waste of resources.
- ◆ Carry out studies that assess the living conditions of the population from Venezuela such as: the composition of the household; access to health, education and childcare services; level of education and professional skills; work and business experience, as well as vocational profile; current economic activity and working conditions; cases of vulnerability, discrimination and labour exploitation; the situation of migrant women and the specific obstacles they face; ethnic minorities: indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.

## 4.2 Professional training and recognition of degrees and skills

Investing in vocational training is a key aspect of the process of socio-economic integration since it reduces the gap between the demand and supply of skills. While it is true that a part of the population from Venezuela is educated and has skills that can be useful for the economies of the countries of the region, another part requires technical or complementary training, including socio-emotional skills, to better meet the needs of labour markets in the host countries and thus facilitate their job placement. In this sense, it is important to involve employers' and workers' organizations in the design of vocational training programs so that they consider the needs of companies.

Another essential stage in the labour inclusion process is the validation of technical and academic qualifications, so that studies completed outside the destination country are recognized. This validation process, although not a legal requirement in all sectors, opens up more formal employment options. But in practice, there are many obstacles that make it difficult or prevent most professionals from validating their qualifications, so they find themselves in a precarious employment situation despite their academic level.

For their part, in many countries, people without degrees but with professional experience have the option of requesting recognition of this experience through skills certification mechanisms. Recognition of previous learning acquired throughout working life can facilitate the process of insertion into the job market for the Venezuelan refugee and migrant population, as well as for returnees.

### ► Current situation / obstacles

- The channels of communication and coordination between public employment services, companies and vocational and technical training institutes need to be streamlined and strengthened so that the training offered is relevant and meets the needs of the job market.
- The incorporation of women continues to be widespread in areas or occupations traditionally assigned by gender. Affirmative measures are required for the promotion of gender equality.
- Most of the people from Venezuela are inserted in occupations that are not related to the studies they have completed.
- The underutilization and waste of their job skills represents a loss not only for the refugee and migrant population, but also for the national economy that is deprived of skills and capacities that it might need.
- In many cases, qualified persons, whether Venezuelan or returnees, do not carry their diplomas acquired abroad.
- They face difficult requirements to fulfil, such as the apostille of certificates and technical and academic degrees in Venezuela or, in certain cases, their translation.
- They must assume high costs and long procedures to validate degrees that account for the studies obtained and thus certify their skills, acquired formally or informally, which means that they must be underemployed and self-employed in the informal sector.
- Women are the ones with the highest levels of imbalance, since they have the highest levels of education (as a group), but also the highest levels of underemployment.
- In many countries, refugees and migrants in an irregular situation are unable to validate their qualifications or certify their skills.

## ► Proposal

The definition of the training curricula must be aligned with the requirements of the companies, market studies and information collected by the public employment services and duly accredited private employment agencies. Due to the impact of the pandemic, the new dynamics developed around work promoted the construction and operation of digital platforms to promote the sale of goods and services, and thus enable communication between very diverse actors from different geographical locations. At this time, training institutes have an opportunity to capture these possibilities and transform them into new careers or enrich / adapt existing ones, including those in health-related areas.

The wastage of the competencies of migrant workers is caused by difficulties in the recognition of prior learning (RPL), which, in turn, is due to difficult-to-meet requirements established by the responsible institutions. They have to do with costs, misinformation, duration and immigration documentation, among others, which are related to legal or regulatory provisions that would need to be reviewed to enable more inclusive access. The RPL also finds limitations because some countries may not recognize certain competencies, a barrier that could be reversed at a regional level, working on frameworks that homogenize the qualification.

In other cases, the limitation originates from the lack of studies that determine which skills the market needs to have strengthened or developed, and the consequent training offer, which must also be reviewed and updated. The participation of representatives of workers and employers is a conducive channel for identifying the necessary and

available skills, which opens the possibility of working on the gaps (OECD / UNHCR, 2018).

Some countries facilitate the process of validation of degrees by making the procedure free, as is the case of Argentina, Ecuador and Uruguay. Argentina, in February of 2018, began to recognize the degrees as if there was a reciprocity agreement between the two countries, even though it does not exist, which eliminated the apostille requirement and accelerated their management by decentralizing the validation at different public universities in each of its provinces. Uruguay had a centralized system in a university in the country and, with the increase in immigration, it decentralized the procedure in different university faculties, which reduced waiting time (Selee and Belter, 2020).

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to recruit refugees and migrants to meet the demand for local labour, particularly in the health and care sectors. In this sense, some countries accelerated and simplified the procedures for validating the qualifications of health professionals in order to increase the number of personnel assigned to care for infected people. Peru ordered the hiring of refugees and migrants who were medical professionals to reinforce health care in the face of the COVID-19 emergency. To do this, it created the Special COVID-SERVICER Service, made up of medical professionals, to exclusively attend to the health emergency and in which both Peruvian health professionals, refugees and migrants<sup>17</sup> can participate. In Argentina, by means of Official Decree 260 of Thursday, March 12, 2020, authorized "exceptionally and temporarily the hiring and exercise of professionals and health technicians graduated abroad, whose degree is not revalidated or enabled in the Republic of Argentina"<sup>18</sup>. "These measures

17 Emergency Decree No. 037-202. El Peruano (Sunday, April 12, 2020): <https://www.mef.gob.pe/es/normatividad-sp-9867/por-instrumento/decretos-de-urgencia/22200-decreto-de-urgencia-n-037-2020-1/file>

18 Official Decree 260 (Thursday, March 12, 2020). Official Gazette of the Republic of Argentina No. 34.324: <https://www.boletinoficial.gob.ar/suplementos/2020031201NS.pdf>

could have continuity and, at the same time, are an example of good practices that may be replicated in the future in light of the needs of the labour market in other areas or occupations.

## ► Strategic lines

### 1. Vocational training

- ◆ Review of admission requirements for the refugee and migrant population at training institutions for work.
- ◆ Development of training courses in the sectors of the economy and branches of economic activity with the greatest demand in the market, in consultation with employers' and workers' organizations.
- ◆ Promotion of careers in information and communication technologies, as well as in the provision of cleaning and disinfection services in health establishments, management of elements of risk to biosafety in occupational spaces, risk and health management systems and security against COVID-19, among others.
- ◆ Strengthening the link between vocational training and public employment services, as well as with workers' and employers' organizations, so that there are feedback channels about the occupations in greatest demand, capturing the needs of companies and referring the seekers of employment to vocational training institutes.
- ◆ Construction, in association with organizations and bodies that are working in this area, of a regional occupational framework to facilitate labour mobility.
- ◆ Promotion and facilitation of women's access to technical and professional training on equal terms with men and in non-traditional areas.

- ◆ Consolidation, through social dialogue, of the link and congruence between employment, qualifications and migration policies, which generates an exchange of information between the educational system and the labour market, in order to develop training procedures in relevant fields and anticipate the needs.
- ◆ Construction, through tripartite dialogue, of training modalities that include training in the workplace.

### 2. Validation of degrees granted in Venezuela

- ◆ Adopt a flexible process for the validation of degrees obtained abroad and reduce costs, especially in the context of COVID-19.
- ◆ Creation of a fund to subsidize the process of validating the degrees of the most vulnerable people.

Design of alternative mechanisms to the apostille, to be able to recognize the degrees granted abroad.

### 3. Competency certification

- ◆ Increase in financial and human resources at the disposal of the competency certification bodies, to streamline the certification processes.
- ◆ Mapping of public employment services and the degree of attention to the refugee and migrant population, as well as referral to training or recognition of prior learning (RPL).
- ◆ Review and simplification of procedures and requirements for RPL, as well as associated costs, especially in the current context of COVID-19, which demonstrates the need to incorporate more of the Venezuelan population into the job market.

- ◆ Prospective employment studies for professional updating or reconversion.
- ◆ Holding meetings with representatives of employers and workers, analysis with employment platform firms and review of successful insertion practices, as well as aspects to improve.

### 4.3 Promotion of employment

Economies in the region are characterized by high levels of informality, unemployment and job vulnerability. The migrant population, particularly the female population, is particularly exposed to this vulnerability. The lack of economic opportunities causes many people from Venezuela to look for options in the informal sector, but also, in some cases, to resort to illegal activities that can contribute to increased citizen insecurity in the host communities. In this sense, the best humanitarian aid that public authorities can provide is to facilitate the access of the refugee and migrant population to labour markets.

The Colombian Special Residency Permit for the Promotion of Formalization (PEPFF) allows the regularization of Venezuelans who are in an irregular situation, provided they have received an offer of formal employment. In Brazil, Costa Rica and Peru, those seeking asylum are granted a temporary work permit, so they can remain in regular immigration status while their case is resolved (Selee and Belter, 2020).

#### ► Current situation / obstacles

- Most of the region's labour markets maintain high informality rates and have difficulties absorbing the demand for labour.
- The condition of irregular stay due to the lack of identity or immigration documents restricts the possibilities of getting into a decent job and forces them to work informally.
- A large part of this population reports income below the minimum wage and working hours greater than 48 hours a week.
- Their unionisation rate - in the studies where it was investigated - is very low. There is great ignorance about the right to organize and fear of exercising it.
- This population often lacks a written contract.
- Migrant women:
  - Are more affected by unemployment and underemployment than men, and they receive lower wages, mostly below the minimum.
  - Work fewer hours due to the need to care for their children, and because of the lack or difficulty in accessing these services.
  - Are more exposed and more affected by situations of violence and sexual and workplace harassment.
  - Are mainly offered customer service jobs that, deep down, have a sexual connotation of attractiveness or "hook" to convince potential clients or consumers (ILO and IOM, 2019), so there is a bias in the job offer. However, these prejudices and perceptions also expose them to situations of sexual exploitation and human trafficking and limit their access to "traditional" jobs such as caring for children and the elderly or housework. They are more likely to be victims of human trafficking and migrant smuggling.
- The labour insertion of refugees and migrants occurs, above all, in the informal sector of the economy. Many times, they work as street vendors and shop assistants.

## ► Proposal

Generating the necessary capacities in the Ministries of Labour is the first step in designing proposals that promote employment, particularly the Public Employment Service and Labour Inspection.

The demand for these services underwent a notable increase in most of the countries and generated its necessary modernization through technological tools that facilitate labour intermediation, such as, for example, applications and databases that collect information on occupational and professional profiles. Some of these services may establish restrictions on the access of refugees and migrants, mainly linked to the required documentation. They must be identified, and reform measures must be taken that may imply modifications in administrative regulations or specific laws. Alliances with the private sector and workers' organizations are key to knowing the requirements of companies and the availability of labour. The promotion of employment in rural areas should be incorporated in order not to restrict job opportunities to the most populated cities and to supply the workforce that is sometimes needed in rural areas. Migration can even represent an opportunity and should be included in the design of strategies aimed at revitalizing rural areas. Having a young population that is available to work and often has higher qualifications and skills than nationals can fill labour shortages not only in agricultural activities, but also in activities that require more skills and that, usually, due to their geographic location do not attract national professionals.

The promotion of women's employment should also be incorporated in order to overcome the prevailing bias towards offering women customer service jobs or sales that expose them to situations of violence and harassment. It is necessary to promote equity in employment because Venezuelan women have higher educational levels than Venezuelan men, but they are more affected by unemployment and

underemployment, and they are the ones who receive a higher percentage of wages below the minimum or lower wages in comparison with their male peers. At the same time, it is important to coordinate actions with the pertinent state agencies to address the limitations they have in access to work due to the lack of care services and even access to the educational system for their children. Also, it must be ensured that pregnant or lactating women have equal access to the world of work.

As for Labour Inspection, the vulnerable position in which many refugees, migrants and returnees find themselves promotes the precariousness of their working conditions and the non-observance of their rights. A sensitized and trained inspection team which has the technical and technological tools necessary to identify work centres with a high concentration of this population is key to recording and monitoring the correction of infractions and thus protecting their rights. The Labour Inspectorate must receive training on ILO Convention 190 on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work, in order to contribute to the prevention and elimination of this type of violence; It must also be empowered and act if necessary, both in the formal and informal sectors, whether due to violence committed by employers, co-workers, clients or suppliers, with special regard to violence and gender-based harassment.

## ► Strategic lines

### 1. Promotion of access to the different programs and services available for guidance and job placement

- ♦ Review of the requirements for access by refugees and migrants, in particular those referring to the required immigration documentation.
- ♦ Establishment at the local level of alliances with the private sector, workers' organizations

and local governments, to adapt both the demand and the supply of employment.

- ♦ Carrying out studies to characterize the supply and demand of labour, data collection and processing (qualifications, educational level, sector where they manage to insert themselves, number of refugees and migrants who request services and recruitment of job offers, among others).
- ♦ Preparation of studies of manpower needs and skills for the future, with programs for adapting skills to projections of future demands, framed in the future of work and attentive to the economic reality generated by COVID-19.
- ♦ Consideration of the particular conditions in which labour insertion or reintegration takes place in the face of the risk of contagion of COVID-19, which demands additional measures for health and safety at work, particularly in domestic services and paid care for people.
- ♦ Creation of a regional network of public employment services to facilitate mobility among refugee and migrant workers.
- ♦ Design of specific employability routes for job seekers from Venezuela in the Public Employment Services.
- ♦ Sensitisation of the personnel who provide services related to situations of gender violence, which constitutes an obstacle for the effective labour insertion of women and access to training services.

## **2. Promotion of employment in rural areas: so that job placement opportunities are not restricted to the most populated cities and the shortage of labour that is sometimes experienced in rural areas can be addressed.**

- ♦ Carrying out studies of the supply and demand for labour in rural sectors.
- ♦ Strengthening / design of temporary / seasonal employment programs that respect national and international regulations, as well as the agreements signed between countries.
- ♦ Strengthening strategies that reinforce urban and rural links, especially with regard to food systems (production, transport and marketing).
- ♦ Increase in public programs aimed at the rapid recovery of livelihoods in rural territories. Food production activities are essential to guarantee the food security of host communities, but they can also be a fundamental element of local economic stimulation (food markets and related activities). These programs should be oriented towards the host and migrant communities.
- ♦ Promotion of public programs that promote the creation of "green jobs."
- ♦ Generation / strengthening of dialogue regarding rural development policies with government institutions, workers' and employers' organizations and local social organizations.
- ♦ Improved regulation of agricultural worker recruitment activities to ensure fair hiring.
- ♦ Increase in the creation of non-agricultural jobs in rural areas.

- ◆ Incorporation of health and safety measures in agricultural and livestock work to protect working people in particular from COVID-19.

### 3. Strengthening of labour administration

- ◆ Carrying out improvements to the computer platforms of the public employment systems.
- ◆ Training and development of reference protocols to other institutions and programs.
- ◆ Awareness of civil servants about vulnerabilities and rights violations that increase the risk to refugees and migrants, including returnees.
- ◆ Development of protocols that allow the exchange of vacancies between the various host countries.
- ◆ Strengthening the capacities of the Labour Inspectorate through training and the design of protocols for the care of the refugee and migrant population.
- ◆ Training for the Labour Inspection on Convention 190 and its Recommendation 206, to act in the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work. In turn, to provide the Inspection with the necessary powers to act in the event of violence and harassment, including the issuance of orders that require the interruption of work activity in the case of danger to the life, health or safety of the workers.
- ◆ Supervision of compliance with health and safety regulations at work by the Labour Inspection, to guarantee the implementation of protective measures against COVID-19 in all work centres, with special attention to domestic work that, due to its characteristics, requires different strategies.

### 4. Promoting employability

- ◆ Dissemination of existing services and programs through employers' and workers' organizations, as well as the requirements for hiring refugees and migrants.
- ◆ Creation or reinforcement of the courses offered for the development of socio-emotional skills for life and leadership, especially for women, as well as their promotion through guidance and job placement services.
- ◆ Promotion and referral to available professional training programs (also virtual), including those related to the area of soft skills.
- ◆ Emphatic promotion of diverse jobs for women, with the aim of combating the bias that only offers women jobs in customer service and sales, thus increasing the equality of conditions with their male counterparts.
- ◆ Dissemination of information on the labour rights of women and men and for the former, on mechanisms of protection and complaint in situations of sexual and labour harassment, as well as those involving rights related to maternity and breastfeeding.
- ◆ Strengthen the capacities of trade union organizations to organize workers and defend their rights.
- ◆ Coordination with the institutions responsible for facilitating women's access to care services, to promote their insertion into the labour market.

## 5. Adoption of measures for the transition from the informal to the formal economy, based on the guidelines of the Recommendation on the transition from the informal to the formal economy, 2015 (No. 204):

- ◆ Productivity: creation or strengthening of business, financial and technological development services; development of sectors and value chains.
- ◆ Standards: disclosure, training, simplification of procedures and social dialogue.
- ◆ Incentives: for accessing the formal sector and social protection.
- ◆ Establish simplified or progressive tax regimes, depending on the level of consolidation of the business, such as grace periods during the first years of operation.
- ◆ Strengthen the capacities of trade union organizations to include specific clauses in collective bargaining in order to extend labour protection to these workers.
- ◆ Supervision: promotion of a culture of compliance, institutional strengthening and formalization agreements.

## 4.4 Entrepreneurship and business development

The creation of businesses represents an alternative for the Venezuelan and returnee population that has productive projects or difficulties of insertion into the formal labour market. At present, only a minority of refugees and migrants arrive with a small amount of capital that could be used to start this type of undertaking. But, to scale these initiatives and expand business options between this population and the host communities, it is essential to develop initiatives that allow for the promotion of potential

entrepreneurs or business projects through training and support, as well as financing through alliances between the public and private sectors.

### ► Current situation / obstacles

- Establishing a formal business involves numerous regulatory and administrative requirements that are complex for most entrepreneurs in general and can represent additional obstacles for refugees and migrants.
- Little availability of programs and services for business advice or for the promotion and development of enterprises for the refugee and migrant population.
- Restrictions on access to these programs and services due to their condition of irregular stay.
- Barriers to access financial services and loans to start or strengthen enterprises related to documentation: credit history, possession of assets, unrecognized identity documents, ignorance of refugees and migrants as potential clients.
- Women have more difficulties accessing credit because, in many cases, they do not have collateral, something that is complicated by their status as migrants.
- Most of the Venezuelan people are inserted into informal jobs or create informal enterprises. Many of them do not qualify as micro-enterprises, but as subsistence businesses.
- The micro-enterprise segment is characterized by a high rate of failure (in the first five years of existence, 45% in Peru and 53% in Ecuador) due to environmental factors, lack of market information, low productivity and innovation, low business management capacity and lack of access to financial services (IDB, 2018). For refugees and migrants, who face additional challenges, these rates are likely to be even higher.

- Most of the enterprises created by the population from Venezuela are born out of immediate need (in the absence of adequate employment options) to support the family and not because a concrete opportunity has presented itself.
- It is also common for mothers without care options or access to school for their children to engage in productive ventures in order to balance their care responsibilities with the need to generate income. Many times, refugee and migrant women are forced to take their children to work, which takes place on the street and in the sales sector, for fear that they will suffer abuse or violence at the hands of unknown persons with whom they live in difficult, often overcrowded conditions.
- All the above factors mean that the majority of Venezuelan refugees and migrants' ventures are low in productivity and innovation, informal, with little long-term perspective, and operating in already saturated markets.
- In conclusion, it is important to develop sustainable companies that create employment under decent working conditions and are a dynamic factor in local economies. In turn, this type of work is important for women (even with their greater care responsibilities) and their profile, specific needs and interests must be considered in order to provide real opportunities.

## ► Proposal

The potential to develop sustainable businesses is rarely fully realized. Among the obstacles to business development are external factors over which companies have no control, as well as internal factors related to the skills and knowledge of entrepreneurs. In the specific context of refugees, migrants and returnees, the situation is aggravated by a lack of

knowledge of the market in the host countries, their policies and regulations, existing programs in public and private entities to support entrepreneurship and due to lack of access to a social and business network (UNCTAD / IOM / UNHCR, 2018).

It seeks to promote a people-based approach to sustainable companies, which recognizes that, in the world of work, the social, economic and environmental spheres interact inseparably. This approach is promoted by the ILO in accordance with the Conclusions regarding the promotion of sustainable enterprises<sup>19</sup> emanating from the International Labour Conference of June 2007.

The private sector, through business associations and Chambers of Commerce, can contribute to this process by providing technical and financial support to business projects initiated by refugees and migrants, as well as vulnerable people from the host communities.

## ► Strategic lines

### 1. Creating a suitable environment for sustainable companies and effective integration in value chains

- ♦ Macro assessment of the environment conducive to sustainable entrepreneurship and recommendations for public policies to support entrepreneurship.
- ♦ Profiling and analysis of the subsectors / value chains with high potential for entrepreneurship, both for refugees and migrants from Venezuela, as well as for the host community, with special consideration for women who, due to their care responsibilities, would benefit from a formal job without a fixed schedule.

19 The Conclusions can be accessed at this address: [https://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS\\_114235/lang--es/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS_114235/lang--es/index.htm)

- ◆ Implementation of the Approach for Inclusive Market Systems (ESMI), which promotes the development of value chains for access to employment and entrepreneurship in small and medium-sized companies in order to develop holistic livelihood strategies based on the market.
- ◆ Profiling and implementation of pilot projects to promote the integration of refugees and migrants in new and innovative ventures, and thus avoid displacement.
- ◆ Establishment of alliances with constituents (for example, chambers of commerce in different areas).
- ◆ Improvement and / or expansion of business development services that include: technical assistance and support with procedures and registration (company creation, invoicing, tax registration, permits or licenses); taxation; access to credit and marketing.
- ◆ Program to promote the quality of the service of the Business Development services operators, which use the Start and Improve your Business (IMESUN), Gender and Entrepreneurship Together (GET Ahead) and Our Coop methodologies.
- ◆ Adaptation of training programs to the reality of the pandemic, which requires, among other things, the design of digital platforms and greater flexibility in training times.

## 2. Strengthening and preparing refugees and migrants from Venezuela for their economic integration through entrepreneurship

- ◆ Analysis of the skills, experience and particular knowledge of the population from Venezuela, with special attention to women.

- ◆ Training in managerial capacity of individual or collective ventures, with the IMESUN, GET Ahead and OUR COOP methodologies.
- ◆ Awareness of refugees and migrants about market opportunities, support programs and financial and non-financial services.

## 4.5 Financial inclusion

A major obstacle to the socioeconomic integration of the population from Venezuela is the lack of access to the financial system. In most of the countries of the region, it is very difficult to open a bank account and, even more so, to benefit from credit. This lack of financial inclusion also represents an obstacle to accessing formal jobs or creating businesses. For this reason, it is important that public authorities in host countries work hand in hand with financial institutions to enable access to these services.

### ► Current situation / obstacles

- The Venezuelan population in a regular situation has very low rates of financial inclusion compared to host communities.
- Most of the people from Venezuela do not have any type of financial service or product with financial institutions in their host countries.
- There are legal barriers and banking regulations that limit the possibilities for opening and / or contracting financial products and services by the refugee and migrant population.
- Other obstacles to the financial inclusion of this population lie in the lack of knowledge of current regulations on the part of bank branch personnel, as well as in the perception that this population presents a high-risk factor.

## ► Proposal

Financial inclusion is an essential requirement for labour and business formalization. For this reason, it is important to work hand in hand with financial institutions, to sensitise the different banks and their branches about the rights of the migrant population in terms of access to the financial sector, adapt the offer of services to their needs and make the mechanisms for access to credit more flexible. On the other hand, promoting this type of inclusion implies investing in financial education programs aimed at the Venezuelan and returnee population.

Financial institutions have to see this population as presenting an opportunity to generate new businesses that can become a source of profits. Greater access to credit mechanisms is also a way for Venezuelans to consume and invest more in their host countries, thus stimulating GDP growth.

With government support, suitable interventions could be designed to pool public and private funding in order to partially transfer the risk to Development Finance Institutions and donors (co-investment, provision of technical assistance, financing of market studies, creation of collateral).

Likewise, the financial inclusion of the Venezuelan population can be facilitated by fostering cooperation between financial institutions in the region. This implies, for example, promoting alliances with banking institutions to develop mechanisms for shared credit history at the regional level. It could also be connected with credit bureaus to enable options for access to commercial banking resources or consider the possibility of creating regional guarantee funds so that the Venezuelan population can benefit from loans.

## ► Strategic lines

### 1. Facilitate the access of the Venezuelan population to financial services

- ♦ Elimination of regulatory and administrative barriers that prevent the Venezuelan population, particularly those in a regular situation, from accessing financial services in their host countries.
- ♦ Sensitisation of financial institutions on the rights of the Venezuelan population through the development of training programs on serving refugee and migrant clients, with a special focus on the situation of women.
- ♦ Dissemination of information bulletins that explain the rights of refugees and migrants and encourage the different actors in the sector to promote banking among those who are in a regular situation.
- ♦ Organization of awareness and training workshops in municipalities with a high concentration of population from Venezuela, so that bank branch personnel are familiar with immigration issues.

### 2. Promote financial education

- ♦ Formulation and implementation of an ambitious financial education plan aimed at Venezuelans and returnees with modules specifically designed for a population that is not familiar with the financial system of the host / return countries.
- ♦ In communities where it is necessary, include host communities in the financial education program.

- ◆ Holding financial education workshops in the main receiving cities, as well as in areas with a high migration density, in collaboration with the different centres for attention to migrants and the main associations of Venezuelans and returnees. This is particularly relevant in the current context of restricted mobility, during which greater access to digital platforms has been promoted.

### 3. Adapt the banking and credit offer to the needs of the refugee and migrant population from Venezuela

- ◆ Mapping of current financial and non-financial services for refugees and migrants, with special attention to the services provided to women, as well as an analysis of the quality of the services.
- ◆ Design of financial products adapted to the specificities of the population from Venezuela, especially in the current circumstances where, due to the economic crisis, they have been more vulnerable.
- ◆ Development of institutional, financial and technical sustainability plans for operators of financial and non-financial services.
- ◆ Creation of a guarantee fund to facilitate access to credit for this population and allow banks to recover a part of their losses in cases of non-repayment.
- ◆ Collaboration with key international financial institutions, as well as key donors interested in the self-reliance of refugees and migrants, to find blended financial solutions that could incentivize financial service providers to serve this population.

## 4.6 Access to social protection

People from Venezuela are characterized by high levels of vulnerability, difficulties in accessing social security and a predominantly informal job placement. This situation conspires against effective access to social protection, resulting in a low or limited level of coverage. In this context, people from Venezuela access jobs of poorer quality and low salaries, they lack social protection against the different social contingencies to which they are exposed, such as old age, disability, death, health and accidents from work, and they do not have safe work environments. On the other hand, those who achieve formal labour insertion have all of these coverages and, in addition, in some cases they can accrue the contribution periods in each of the national systems to which they have contributed, thanks to the application of bilateral agreements and multilateral social security services (ILO, 2018).

In the current COVID-19 crisis, in low- and middle-income countries, those who are most affected are those who work in the informal sector, as well as people with limited access to health services and social protection. They are the ones who are most at risk of falling into poverty and facing greater difficulties in the recovery phase (ILO, April 7, 2020). These same circumstances of lack of income and social protection are what lead many people to return to Venezuela.

### ► Current situation / obstacles

- There is ignorance about the rights to social protection of the refugee and migrant population, as well as about all the programs and services in social protection, both contributory and non-contributory. In general, the lack of information that contributes to effective access to social protection including social security predominates.

- There is poor coverage in terms of non-contributory social protection programs that must ensure a minimum level of protection, both for host communities and refugees and migrants.
- Difficulties persist in accessing a social protection floor that guarantees income security throughout the life cycle and access to essential health services for the refugee and migrant population, due to the lack of regular stay documents or other restrictive requirements.
- Mainly informal labour insertion, which prevents the materialization of labour rights and social security.
- The most recent migratory waves account for young, pregnant women, those with young children, and many breastfeeding women. It is essential to give them and their children access to health services and food supplements if necessary, among others.

## ► Proposal

Recommendation No. 202 of the ILO on national social protection floors is an important instrument for closing social protection gaps in countries and, in particular, those related to refugees and migrants. The Recommendation specifies guidelines to advance in the consolidation of a comprehensive social protection system, where a social protection floor plays an important role in guaranteeing both income security throughout the life cycle and essential health care. The ultimate objective of this international instrument is to guide the formulation of a proposal for the expansion of social security in coordination with the rest of the social, economic and employment policies, in order to help guarantee income security throughout the entire life cycle and access to essential health services.

The proposal is made up of a horizontal dimension that refers to the number of people covered and another,

vertical dimension, that refers to the social risks covered by the system and the level (quality) of both financial and in-kind benefits. The social protection floor guarantees a minimum level of security represented by effective access to income security throughout the life cycle (children and adolescents; active ages; and older adults) and essential health care. Then, it simulates a social protection ladder that can be climbed to the highest levels, in line with other international instruments, such as Convention No. 102 of the ILO on the minimum standard of social security and those considered third generation, which stipulate an even higher protection threshold. The options for implementing a social protection floor are multiple, and it is possible that contributory, non-contributory, universal, assistance and / or mixed regimes may coexist, as well as a combination of all the above.

The Recommendation establishes that when designing and putting the national social protection floors into practice, the Member States must promote productive economic activity and formal employment, including the adoption of labour market policies and tax incentives, policies to promote education, vocational training, productive skills and employability, as well as entrepreneurship and sustainable companies in a decent work framework, as proposed by this Regional Strategy, while guaranteeing coordination among all of them. All of this will help to consolidate a social protection floor and promote higher levels of social protection for all people, including the migrant population.

In rural areas, special attention must be paid to strengthening public non-contributory social protection programs such as, for example, conditional cash transfer programs that exist in all the countries of the region and are aimed at the poorest populations. These programs should expand their coverage both to vulnerable nationals who are not covered, as well as to refugees and migrants. It is important to complement them with productive inclusion plans that imply, in the case of rural areas

still highly dependent on agriculture, coordination with other programs aimed at strengthening access to natural and financial resources, technical assistance, and marketing routes.

To advance in the consolidation of a comprehensive social protection system that includes a social protection floor, the following roadmap is proposed, which is more necessary than ever in this context of a pandemic that has highlighted the importance of universal social protection.

## ► Strategic lines

### 1. Roadmap to guarantee access to social protection for refugee and migrant workers and their families, promoting a social protection floor:

- ◆ Preparation of reports with policy recommendations, which include an analysis of international regulations and national legislation, barriers to access, coverage gaps and challenges for connecting refugees and migrants with the national social protection system, whether contributory or non-contributory.
- ◆ Preparation of a proposal to implement a social protection floor which guarantees effective access to minimum income security and essential health care throughout the life cycle. This should review requirements, access barriers and measures that can be implemented in order to realise the right to social security.
- ◆ Preparation of a flexible affiliation proposal for national and foreign self-employed workers, as well as for domestic workers.
- ◆ Design of a micro insurance scheme for handling family contingencies both in the country of origin and destination.
- ◆ Inclusion of migrant children in existing care systems, which must be expanded and strengthened in order to address their specific needs.
- ◆ Preparation and integration into the comprehensive national social protection system, progressively, of a proposal for daily care and attention for children of migrant parents.
- ◆ Consideration of the particular situation of migrant women and provision of solutions to their particular needs, including access to maternity and medical services for their children, as well as conditional transfers for each minor.
- ◆ Safeguarding the financial and actuarial sustainability of the different proposals.
- ◆ Promotion of effective coordination of government institutions in general and social security in particular to guarantee good governance of labour migration in the area of social security.
- ◆ Promotion of the application or negotiation and signing of social security agreements between two or more countries, which allow the accrual of years of services and payment of the corresponding benefits. The creation of a single regional register of social security contributions may be envisaged.
- ◆ Review of current agreements to improve the following principles: equal treatment, access, conservation or transferability of social security benefits, wait times and pre-existence.

- ◆ Strengthening the capacity of trade union organizations to offer information and assistance services to these workers.
- ◆ Promotion of minimum wage policies that include migrant workers.
- ◆ Inclusion of refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the programs and measures adopted by governments to meet their most pressing needs while mobility restrictions are in effect.
- ◆ Design of a communication plan on the benefits of being protected against different social contingencies.

## 2. Roadmap to disseminate information on accessing social security and create a culture of social security:

- ◆ Design of an action plan to strengthen the social security culture among nationals and refugee and migrant communities, to promote their incorporation into a social protection floor.
- ◆ Creation of a national tripartite body to monitor the performance of the system and propose alternatives that ensure effective and timely access to social security for migrants.
- ◆ Implementation of community workshops with union and community organizations to socialise their rights and obligations under labour legislation, health and safety at work, as well as health and social welfare among the communities that are the object of the Regional Strategy.
- ◆ Promotion of the ratification and application of ILO conventions and recommendations on social protection for refugee and migrant workers.
- ◆ Design and dissemination of informational material on rights and obligations in matters of social protection, and the mechanisms for making them effective.

## 4.7 Social cohesion

The success of the *Regional strategy for socio-economic integration* will be based not only on concrete actions aimed at the refugee and migrant population, but also on social cohesion programs that allow better coexistence with citizens of host communities. In different areas of Latin America and the Caribbean, the rapid increase in both the Venezuelan and returned population creates a series of risks that could constitute a threat to social cohesion, even more so in the current context of the COVID-19 crisis.

The increasingly visible presence of refugees and migrants in the streets, job competition in some sectors of the economy and, especially, in the informal sector, as well as the increase - real or perceived - in insecurity represent some of the factors that can contribute to the increase in xenophobia in host countries, especially in municipalities where there is a strong concentration of people from Venezuela. As a result, Venezuelan refugees and migrants face discrimination problems in the labour markets that prevent their process of inclusion in decent work conditions and force them to disproportionately enter into precarious conditions and the informal sector (see Figure 1), where they are more at risk of being victims of labour exploitation.

For these reasons, it is important that the countries of the region address social cohesion as an integral part of their responses to socioeconomic integration.

## ► Current situation / obstacles

- Xenophobia has increased in almost all the countries of the region as the number of refugees and migrants from Venezuela has grown.
- Returnees, despite having the nationality of the countries to which they return, also suffer from issues of rejection and stigmatization.
- The high rates of unemployment, underemployment and informality in the region have contributed to reinforcing xenophobic sentiments, particularly among the most vulnerable population.
- The population from Venezuela faces growing problems of discrimination, particularly in terms of access to services and formal jobs.
- Women from Venezuela suffer from dual discrimination, first as refugees or migrants and second as women.
- The COVID-19 epidemic has contributed to the increase in xenophobic sentiments, as some communities see refugees and migrants as responsible for the spread of the virus.

## ► Proposal

To promote social cohesion, it is important to implement comprehensive programs that benefit both the refugee and migrant population from Venezuela, including returnees, and host communities. Thus, the different programs for vocational training, job promotion or financial support for entrepreneurship aimed at Venezuelans should also include a local component for the host population, especially the most vulnerable.

Reciprocally, given the conditions of vulnerability of a growing part of the refugee and migrant population, the differentiated programs to combat poverty aimed at vulnerable populations (disabled people,

Afro-descendants, indigenous people, women heads of households, victims of armed conflicts, among others) should have a specific component for refugees and migrants. In São Paulo, Brazil, the Trabalho Novo (New Work) program, which supports newcomers and offers them housing in municipal shelters, Portuguese and computer classes, as well as access to job offers, was initially designed for residents from the streets before being extended to the refugee and migrant population. This program allowed hundreds of Venezuelans to gain financial autonomy thanks to better integration in the labour market and the host society.

## ► Strategic lines

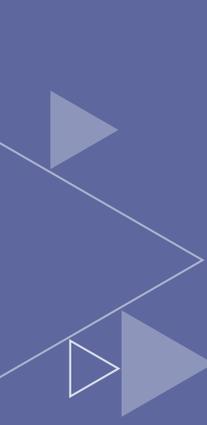
### 1. Design of institutional strengthening programs at the national and local level

- ♦ Work to raise awareness among public authorities so that they better understand the multiple reasons why Venezuelans and returnees leave their country, as well as the challenges and vulnerabilities they face, depending on their personal conditions and the environments in which they find themselves.
- ♦ Programs designed with the participation of governments, employers' and workers' organizations, to promote social dialogue.
- ♦ Investment in training so that the different State services can provide better services and more accurate information to refugees and migrants, taking into account issues of discrimination, xenophobia, citizen coexistence, socio-economic and cultural integration, among others.
- ♦ Strengthening institutional capacities to improve migration governance with a view towards reducing irregular migration, which tends to exacerbate xenophobic attitudes.

- ◆ Design of gender-sensitive policies that consider the different impacts of migration on host communities.
- ◆ Dissemination of information on the rights of refugees and migrants and the mechanisms for their enforcement, as well as on the channels for reporting situations of gender-based violence and workplace and sexual harassment.

## **2. Carrying out awareness campaigns with host communities to fight discrimination and xenophobia:**

- ◆ Campaigns in the national and local media to better explain the issue of forced displacement and promote citizen coexistence, with an emphasis on the contribution migrants make to the development of the countries.
- ◆ Need to reduce xenophobic attitudes due to erroneous beliefs that associate the spread of the virus to people in a situation of mobility.
- ◆ Promotion of integration activities at the local and national level, such as intercultural and food fairs, among others.
- ◆ Organization of participatory meetings and workshops at the local level, to sensitise host communities and jointly develop solutions that facilitate the local integration of refugees and migrants.
- ◆ Training programs for teaching staff, to help them sensitise students on the migration issue and fight more effectively against xenophobia in schools.
- ◆ Sensitisation of employers' and workers' organizations, as well as the business community, to prevent abuse and discrimination problems in the workplace, and facilitate the labour insertion of refugees and migrants from Venezuela into local markets.



# 5

## **Strengthen regional cooperation mechanisms for socio-economic integration**

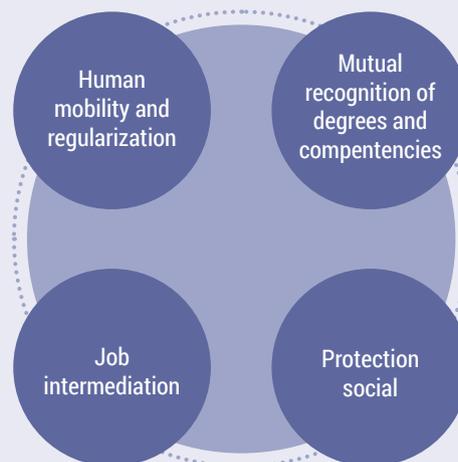
Until now, the response of Latin American and Caribbean governments to the Venezuelan migration crisis has been directed more towards national action than regional action, although the Quito Process pursues the latter. For this reason, it is essential that the countries of the region succeed in strengthening cooperation mechanisms and adopting and implementing truly regional policies, particularly in matters of socio-economic integration for the refugee and migrant population from Venezuela, as well as for host communities. In this sense, the outbreak of COVID-19 in the region and the negative impact that quarantines and other social distancing measures have had on economic activity and employment make regional cooperation even more necessary.

Regional cooperation on socio-economic integration should, first of all, share the best practices implemented by the different host countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Through a peer review process, it is possible to identify which of these practices should be replicated - with needed adaptations - in other countries. The regional cooperation framework could also aim for Latin American and Caribbean countries to implement regional initiatives for socioeconomic integration, in particular in the areas of (i) human

mobility and regularization, (ii) mutual recognition of degrees and skills, (iii) labour intermediation and (iv) social protection.

This type of initiative would allow for better management of the response to refugees and migrants from Venezuela at the regional level within a context aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis. It would also contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Quito Process.

**Graphic 2. Main areas of regional cooperation in socio-economic integration**



## 5.1 Expand spaces for collaboration in the areas of human mobility and regularization

Although the Venezuelan migratory crisis constitutes a phenomenon of a regional dimension with repercussions in most of the LAC countries, the cooperation mechanisms in the area of human mobility and the regularization of people in an

irregular situation have been relatively limited. In the early years of the crisis, the countries of the region facilitated the mobility of people from Venezuela, particularly through a broad interpretation of regional integration agreements, especially within the framework of ACN, Mercosur, and CARICOM. Thus, in the Quito Declaration on Human Mobility of Venezuelan citizens in the Region<sup>20</sup>, dated September 4, 2018, the representatives of the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and

20 <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/declaracion-de-quito-sobre-movilidad-humana-de-ciudadanos-venezolanos-en-la-region/>

Uruguay agreed, "in accordance with the national legislation of each country, to accept expired travel documents as identity documents of Venezuelan citizens for immigration purposes." In this way, Venezuelan people were authorized to enter most of the countries in the region without a visa, and in some cases, without a passport.

However, with the rapid and massive increase in the number of refugees and migrants, restrictions on mobility have multiplied (Selee and Bolter, 2020). A growing number of countries began to require new entry requirements, such as: a valid passport, despite the difficulties and high cost that this represents for the vast majority of the Venezuelan population; a visa, which many Venezuelan people cannot afford, and an apostilled criminal record certificate in Venezuela, which implies additional costs and terms.

The result of these increasingly restrictive measures is that mobility at the regional level was limited, complicating the living conditions of the population from Venezuela. This trend translated into a high number of Venezuelans in an irregular situation. According to data from the R4V Platform (2020), around half of Venezuelan refugees and migrants are in an irregular migratory situation. These restrictions also contributed to creating bottlenecks in some transit countries, particularly in Colombia, the country with the longest land border with Venezuela and at the same time, the most open to entry for the Venezuelan population. Many people in transit were stuck in the border areas when some of the countries in the region decided to change their entry rules. Municipalities located on the borders between Colombia and Ecuador, Ecuador and Peru, and Peru and Chile were particularly affected by these bottlenecks. In this sense, the policies adopted unilaterally by the different countries of the region, which were reinforced by the almost generalized closure of the borders during the COVID-19 crisis, had negative repercussions for both the refugee and migrant population, as well as for neighbouring countries.

For this reason, better cooperation in the management of migratory flows at the regional level and the adoption of concerted regularization mechanisms would make it possible to avoid these types of negative effects and facilitate the socio-economic integration of the population from Venezuela. This implies, for example, that the main host countries in the region adopt joint regularization programs to avoid massive movements to countries that decide to unilaterally make the options for regularization of the migrant population more flexible. In this sense, the biannual meetings of the Quito Process could be used for the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of each member country to assess the conditions of the population in an irregular migratory situation and adopt concerted regularization measures. An alternative could be the implementation of a regional regularization commission to examine the current situation in detail and propose specific recommendations that facilitate human mobility processes at the regional level, as well as regularization mechanisms.

On the other hand, the countries of the region could better harmonize, especially within the framework of the Quito Process, the procedures for asylum applications by defining common principles for the recognition of refugee status for Venezuelans. These could be based on the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, which proposes a broader definition of refugees than the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and the Protocol on the Status of Refugees (1967). In this way, the processes of access to refugee status would be streamlined, taking into account the specificities of the current situation in Venezuela.

## 5.2 Build a regional framework for the mutual recognition of degrees and skills

An essential stage in the process of socio-economic integration of refugees and migrants is the possibility of obtaining recognition, on the one hand, of technical and academic qualifications, and on the other, of the job skills that they were able to acquire throughout their schooling and professional life. In this sense, as noted above, it is essential that the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean relax both their mechanisms for the recognition of degrees awarded abroad and for the certification of skills (see Section 4.2). But this dual process could be reinforced if the countries of the region adopted a framework of mutual recognition of degrees and competencies.

Regarding the recognition of competencies, the representatives of the Ministries of Labour and international cooperation organizations, as well as employers' and workers' organizations - meeting on November 13, 2019 in Bogotá, Colombia, in support of the Quito Process - recommended support for "regional homologation initiatives for the certification of labour competencies," in collaboration with the "Inter-American Centre for the Development of Knowledge in Vocational Training (CINTERFOR) of the ILO and other entities involved in this area." In fact, since 2015 there has been a *competency certification network* that includes the entities responsible for this process in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay<sup>21</sup>.

Regarding the mutual recognition of technical and / or academic degrees, the main regional coordination initiative is the Organization of the Andrés Bello Agreement for Educational, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Integration<sup>22</sup>, which brings together

Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela. Despite the efforts towards educational integration among these countries, there are still no regional mechanisms for the recognition of degrees, which explains a large part of the difficulties faced by people with technical and / or academic degrees awarded in Venezuela.

In this context, a regional framework for the mutual recognition of qualifications and competencies would imply that, every time a person, whatever their nationality or immigration status, validates a technical or academic degree in one of the countries of the region or certifies their labour competencies, this recognition is valid in the other countries of the region. In this way, people who decide to migrate to another country do not have to go through all the procedures again and can contribute more effectively to the economies of the recipient countries. This regional framework of mutual recognition would benefit not only the population from Venezuela, but also any citizen of one of the member countries with the intention of migrating within the region. It is a mechanism that facilitates, at the same time, intra-regional mobility and socioeconomic integration.

This dual process of mutual recognition, which involves both the Ministries of Education (in particular in matters of recognition of qualifications) and of Labour (together with the national institutes of vocational training, especially for the certification of competencies), could be implemented within the framework of existing multilateral mechanisms in the region (see **Table 1**) and on the basis of the agreements that apply to this matter. In addition, it is possible to provide technical assistance for the development of a regional qualifications framework, which can be submitted to the consideration and validation of the member countries of the Quito

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21 [https://www.oitcinterfor.org/red\\_certificacion](https://www.oitcinterfor.org/red_certificacion)

22 <http://convenioandresbello.org/cab/>

Process. This framework would constitute a common understanding among the countries of the region of what is expected at each level of vocational training and, once it is validated by the participating States, it would facilitate the labour mobility of those who have been certified. This framework should cover, at least, levels 1 to 5 out of 8, with level 1 being the one with the lowest qualifications; levels 2 to 4: the different degrees of technical-professional training and levels 5 to 8: those of higher education. Level 8 corresponds to the doctorate.

### **5.3 Promote labour intermediation at the regional level**

People from Venezuela tend to be concentrated in border areas, particularly in the case of Colombia, and in large cities, where there are more options for accommodation and work, although many times they are in the informal economy and thus are synonymous with labour exploitation and socioeconomic vulnerability. They also choose destinations where they already have family or community networks that can provide support. But, in most cases, refugees and migrants do not have enough information about the job opportunities that exist in the host countries and, even if they do, they cannot always access the public employment services programs due to their immigration status or lack of information on these services. For this reason, it is important that employment services can identify the specific barriers faced by Venezuelans and returnees in order to improve their integration into employability routes and help them access decent jobs, taking into account the needs of the different countries.

It is possible that the skills that Venezuelans and returnees bring with them are not required in the host country or that the absorption capacity of the labour market is insufficient, but that they can be used in other countries of the region. For this

reason, a reinforcement of cooperation between the different public employment services in LAC can contribute significantly to a better labour inclusion of the population from Venezuela. In addition, it would allow better integration into the labour markets of the region and favour intra-regional labour mobility.

Among the recommendations to the representatives of the Ministries of Labour and international cooperation organizations, as well as to the employers and workers mentioned previously, is the promotion of “the initiative for the Integration of Public Employment Services of the Latin American Region and the Caribbean among the interested countries.” This initiative aims precisely at exchanging job vacancies, having more information on job opportunities, facilitating labour relations by taking advantage of the skills of workers, and creating an international mobility route in the region.” It also highlights the need to strengthen the operation and response of these services.

Regional cooperation on job placement implies that databases are shared on job vacancies in each country, as well as on the population seeking employment, including refugees and migrants. To better understand where job opportunities are, a common system for monitoring the situation of labour markets at the local level can be adopted in each country, based on indicators such as unemployment rates, the size of the informal economy and the business climate (Bahar, Dooley and Huang, 2018). In the same perspective, it is important that the providers of the different employment agencies, both public and private, work with business associations to identify the skills needed in each country and share them with other countries in the region. An initiative of this nature demands a certain homogeneity between the different computer platforms of the public employment services of the countries, at the same time that it requires regulations that allow them this socialization.

## 5.4 Adopt regional social protection mechanisms

Access to social protection is a key component of the process of socioeconomic integration of the refugee and migrant population (see Section 4.6). For this reason, regional cooperation should aim to strengthen regional social protection mechanisms. This implies that, through better coordination of national legislation, refugees and migrants benefit from a social protection floor that guarantees them, throughout their life cycle and whatever their level of qualification, effective access to minimum income security and health care, in accordance with the Social Protection Floors Recommendation of 2012 (No. 202) and the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention of 1952 (No. 102). On the other hand, the Venezuelan migratory crisis shows the importance not only of integrating this population into national social protection systems, but also of consolidating the portability of rights at the regional level.

In fact, the lack of an instrument for the coordination of social security legislation (bilateral, multilateral or Ibero-American agreement) that allows the accrual of services and payment of social security benefits translates into difficulties in preserving the rights in progress acquisition or allowing the portability of acquired rights. Even in the presence of agreements that coordinate social security legislation or allow portability, certain categories of workers do not have access to the different benefits, despite having a formal employment relationship (e.g., temporary migrant workers).

In this sense, one of the 23 objectives agreed to within the framework of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (UN, 2018a) is: *“Establish mechanisms for the portability of social security and the benefits acquired”*. The objective is for people who work in the formal sector to be able to add the contribution periods in the different social security systems of all the countries where they

have contributed and to access the corresponding benefits in the country where they are (ILO, 2018). When the beneficiaries complete the age and years of contribution requirements, each social security management entity will assume the contribution periods in each country and will pay a full benefit or pro rata for the years of contributions to its system, depending on whether it is a pension or other social benefits.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, most of the bilateral and multilateral coordination agreements for social security systems contemplate the transferability of the rights and benefits of the migrant population. Such is the case of the Multilateral Agreement on Social Security of Mercosur, the Andean Instrument for Social Security of the ACN, the Multilateral Ibero-American Agreement on Social Security of the OISS, the Agreement on Social Security of CARICOM and the Agreement on Social Security of the OECS (ILO, 2018).

However, these types of agreements only cover nationals of the countries that have signed the agreements and do not extend to migrants from other countries. Hence the need to promote the ratification of the Ibero-American Social Security Agreement so that more countries are included in this mechanism for portability of social security rights. Until now, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay have ratified this agreement, which is in force in all of them. Although Venezuela also ratified it, it has not yet deposited the instrument's ratification or developed the application protocols. This implies that, in the case of Venezuelans, there are no mechanisms for the portability of rights and benefits when they move from one country to another. Furthermore, portability is limited when people migrate from one sub-region to another (for example, from an ACN country to a Mercosur country).

For this reason, it is important to extend subregional agreements and promote coordination between national social security legislation, to guarantee access of migrant workers and their families to national social protection systems. It is essential that they be included in the strategies designed by the States to build social protection floors and ensure, among other things, access to health care and coverage against contingencies such as the one currently experienced with the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, it is necessary to review or sign agreements between the countries to strengthen the portability system, where the rights acquired in one of the countries of the region remain in force when people migrate to another country in the region.

The ratification and universal application of the Ibero-American Social Security Agreement can be a strategy for achieving this goal. This would facilitate intra-regional mobility without being detrimental to the social rights of the refugee and migrant population, even when these people are not citizens of one of the countries that are signatories of these agreements, as is the case today with the Venezuelan population. This implies harmonization work between the different social protection providers, including individually funded systems.

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