

**XENOPHOBIC  
MANIFESTATIONS AGAINST  
VENEZUELAN  
MIGRANTS**



**IN BRAZIL  
IN 2018**

A GROUP OF PROTESTERS,  
IN THE PACARAIMA  
MUNICIPALITY, IN THE  
STATE OF RORAIMA,  
FORCED SOME 1,200  
PEOPLE OF VENEZUELAN  
NATIONALITY TO CROSS  
THE BORDER BACK TO  
VENEZUELA



*©Xenophobic manifestations against  
Venezuelan migrants*

**Care**

Argus. International Observatory  
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**Cover photo:**

Venezuelan walkers on the Cúcuta-Pamplona road

**Author:** Cinty Catoni | 2019 [Flickr].

Our views seek to investigate the social, economic, political and cultural phenomena surrounding human migration in different areas of the planet, in order to defend and promote the universality of human rights.

We observe the migratory processes taking care of their structural causes, the vulnerable populations, the various actors involved and the possible strategies of alarm, complaint, follow-up and resolution of cases.

The evocation of the myth of ARGOS –that of multiple eyes– inspires us to observe, with a plurality of perspectives, the migratory phenomena and the possible recommendations that guarantee free human mobility under conditions of equality and non-discrimination.

We focus on action research with the aim of accompanying and defending migrant populations whose human rights may be being violated. Our purpose is to generate inputs for the concretion of defense actions, as well as tools that can be useful to social, academic, civil and multilateral organizations.

Between 2017 and 2019, the phenomenon of massive migrations of Venezuelan people to its neighbor countries, particularly those of the Andean region, and Brazil to a lesser extent, have been observed. Given this considerable cross-border movement of human groups, it is important to mention that for many years Venezuela has historically been a receiving rather than sending country of migrants, as noted by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in various reports. Unlike other countries in the region, at least since the middle of the 20th century, Venezuela has experienced a massive immigration process of people from Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean. Two moments stand out: the first, with a European majority, between 1950 and 1960; and the second, of a South-South nature, between 1960 and 1990.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, the Andean countries have not historically been recipients of migrants, so the presence of Venezuelans is a novelty for their populations and for the economies of these countries, due to their low capacity to absorb foreign labor. In this sense, what has happened is that the vast majority of Venezuelan migrants have had to join the informal economy, with all that this entails in terms of lack of labor and social protection, pigeonholing and stigmatization of the migrant population, which has led in some countries to an outbreak of xenophobic manifestations by sectors of society and government authorities themselves against this population.

The term xenophobia refers to hatred, suspicion, hostility and rejection of foreigners; it is an ideology that consists of rejecting cultural identities different from one's own. The

1 ECLAC (2020), "Regional, local and individual dimensions of Venezuelan migration: the case of the border with Roraima (Brazil)", in *Notas de Población* No.110. Available at: [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45807/1/S2000236\\_07\\_MOTA.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45807/1/S2000236_07_MOTA.pdf)

Durban Declaration and Program of Action, the international community's plan to take action to combat racism, signed by consensus at the 2001 United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, establishes that States have the primary responsibility for combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, as well as to develop national and comprehensive plans of action for any manifestation of such violence and to adopt policies and programs to combat hate speech in the media, including on digital platforms.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this mandate, the authorities of the main host countries of Venezuelan migrants have been, on several occasions, the main promoters of xenophobia against this population in a situation of human mobility. Emblematic cases are the statements of the mayor of Bogotá, Claudia López, those of the Ecuadorian president, Lenín Moreno, or those of the president of Colombia, Iván Duque, who announced that he would exclude Venezuelans who are in an irregular situation in that country from the process of mass vaccination against the COVID-19.

One of the most serious incidents was recorded in Brazil in 2018, when a group of protesters, in the Pacaraima municipality, in the state of Roraima, forced some 1,200 people of Venezuelan nationality to cross the border back to Venezuela, in addition to destroying the camp where they were staying and burning their belongings<sup>3</sup>. This incident was especially symptomatic of the tense situation in some places due to the presence of migrants.

2 "The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action at a glance". Available at: [https://www.un.org/es/durbanreview2009/pdf/ddpa\\_at\\_a\\_glance\\_en.pdf](https://www.un.org/es/durbanreview2009/pdf/ddpa_at_a_glance_en.pdf)

3 BBC (2018), "Attack on Venezuelans in Brazil: riots in Pacaraima against immigrant camp". Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-45240028>

In January 2019, there was the murder, in the middle of a public street, of a woman at the hands of her partner, presumably of Venezuelan nationality, an event that shocked that nation, partly due to the inaction of the police who had the opportunity to prevent the death. In addition to the fact that the events themselves were regrettable, President Lenín Moreno reacted in an unfortunate way. He pointed out that the borders had to be reviewed, and added: “we have opened the doors to them [alluding to Venezuelan immigrants], but we will not sacrifice anyone’s security”. In addition, he ordered the formation of brigades to control the legal situation of Venezuelan immigrants in streets, workplaces and border crossings<sup>4</sup>. Thus, Venezuelan migrants ended up being associated with violent crimes, which is a clear case of promoting xenophobia.

In Peru, one of the countries that has received the most migrants of Venezuelan origin in recent years, there have been numerous xenophobic statements by municipal authorities, as well as abuses by police officers in some districts of Lima. One of the most relevant xenophobic expressions were the statements made by Congresswoman Esther Saavedra, who requested President Vizcarra to close the border with military force, and to expel the entire Venezuelan population, both “good” and “bad” people, in order to prevent Peru from becoming the migratory playground of the region. He alluded that a million Venezuelans, including workers and criminals, were taking jobs away from Peruvians<sup>5</sup>.

4 La Vanguardia (2019), “Indignation in Ecuador with the murder of a pregnant woman”. Available at: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20190121/454221784604/asesinato-ecuador-mujer-embarazada-diana.html>

5 El Nacional (2019), “Peruvian congresswoman calls for the exit of Venezuelans: ‘They come to take our jobs away’”. Available at: <https://www.>

Recent manifestations of xenophobia and discrimination against the Venezuelan population in that country are alarming, as is the case of the xenophobic march that a group of people held on February 20 against Venezuelan immigrants and refugees, transmitted live through digital platforms and justified by the murder of a Peruvian in Colombia, allegedly at the hands of a Venezuelan citizen of Venezuelan nationality. Likewise, the headquarters of the Venezuelan embassy was attacked with rocks and blunt objects, breaking windows and causing material damage to its facilities (fire of the signage, among others)<sup>6</sup>.

The situation is similar in Chile, where Venezuelan people have denounced being subjected to xenophobic violence, discriminatory policies and severe restrictions to access formal jobs, public health systems and public aid due to their irregular migratory status. It is worth highlighting an episode that took place during the month of June 2020, when the government of Sebastián Piñera announced, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of a “Humanitarian Plan of Orderly Return” so that migrant populations established in Chile could return to their countries of origin.

The condition to be eligible for this program would be the signing of an affidavit in which these people would renounce their residence in the country, any request for refuge, and in which they would assume the commitment not to return to Chile for a period of 9 years. In view of this, different pro-migrant organizations denounced the xenophobic nature of such program, being a direct attack against the freedom

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elnacional.com/mundo/congresista-peruana-pide-la-salida-de-venezolanos-vienen-a-quitar-trabajo

6 Somos Tu Voz (2021), “Xenophobic March in Peru attacked the Venezuelan Embassy with stones”. Available at: <https://www.somostuvoz.net/destacado/marcha-xenofoba-en-peru-ataco-con-piedras-embajada-de-venezuela>

of movement of people and against the right to migrate to other places, and harming, mainly, millions of workers in the world who move from one country to another to look for better job opportunities<sup>7</sup>. After receiving harsh criticism, on June 12 the program was suspended by the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During the wave of protests that took place in various countries in the region in 2019, Venezuelan migrants were frequently accused of causing situations of disturbance of public order. In this regard, it is noteworthy that 59 Venezuelan nationals were arrested and expelled from Colombia, accused of generating violence during the protests and participating in looting in the city of Bogota. A similar event occurred with 17 Venezuelans in Ecuador, who were accused of being involved in protests and allegedly possessing information about the transfers of President Moreno, all within the framework of the protests against the increase in fuel prices in that country. Something similar happened in Bolivia with the expulsion of nine Venezuelans for alleged links with former president Morales. Finally, another nine Venezuelans were expelled from Chile in the context of the protests against the increase in subway fares in the city of Santiago.

Within these contexts, discursive constructions begin to be created that will be reproduced through different governmental and non-governmental actors, and fundamentally through the media, which will delineate a type of subject marked by labeling and stigmatization. This framework of discursive constructions around the immigrant, various

7 La Izquierda Diario (2020), “Xenophobic ‘Humanitarian Plan’ of Piñera for the return of stranded migrants”. Available at: <http://www.laizquierda-diario.com/Xenofobo-Plan-humanitario-de-Pinera-para-retorno-de-migrantes-varados>



specialists in the region have denounced these actions with xenophobic practices.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the social demonstrations against immigration, it is worrying when it is the authorities who promote xenophobia, without considering that their management must abide by national and international legislation on human rights of migrants, and that their decisions must have some basis in reality. Thus, for example, the notion that Venezuelan migration is related to crime in Colombia is unprovable in light of the available data, as has already been made known to public opinion.

On the other hand, using the anti-immigration discourse to try to obtain votes is reprehensible from a democratic point of view, and irresponsible because of the potential consequences that this could entail both for the migrant population and for their own nationals, since it weakens democratic institutions, as history shows.

It is important to mention that Ecuador, Colombia, Peru and Chile have ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families of 1990, as well as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1966, which is why they are internationally obliged to protect against all forms of discrimination and xenophobia against migrant populations.

In this regard, on February 19, the Ombudsman's Offices of Colombia, Ecuador and Peru issued a joint communication requesting to facilitate the mobility of Venezuelan migrants, adopt measures for regularization and avoid their social and economic exclusion, as well as the homologation of such

8 BBC (2019), "How Venezuelans are becoming the scapegoat for the protests in South America". Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-50559187>

policies. Likewise, they consider that due to the persistent closing of borders as a consequence of the pandemic, the risks of irregular migration fall on people of Venezuelan origin, just as there is an increase in expressions of intolerance, xenophobia and aporophobia that stigmatize and criminalize the migrant population.<sup>9</sup>

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9 El Comercio (2021), “Ombudsman’s Offices of Colombia, Ecuador and Peru request to facilitate Venezuelan migration”. Available at: <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/defensorias-pueblo-colombia-ecuador-venezolanos.html>

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