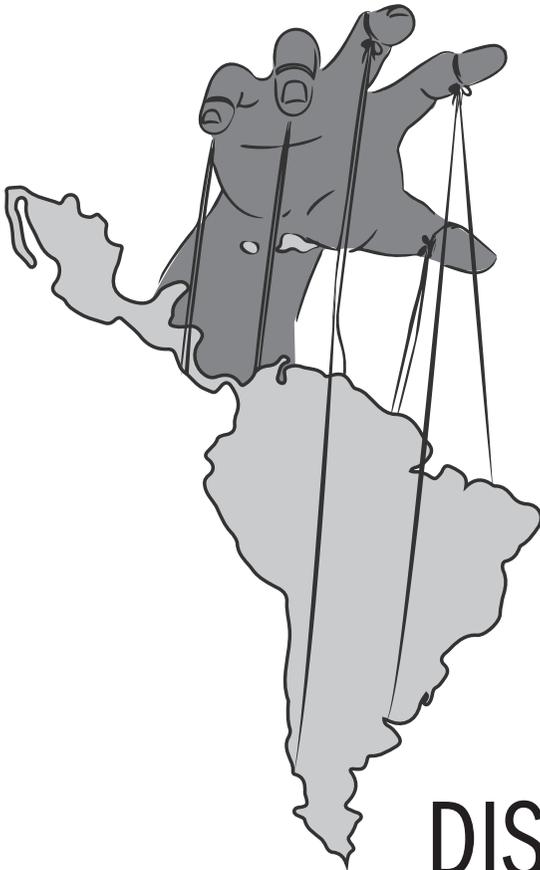


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The Venezuelan Exodus in Peru: A First Approximation

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ABSTRACT

Venezuela is facing one of the biggest economic collapses in modern history, forcing more than 10 percent of Venezuelans out of their country. The crisis is far from over and even more emigration is expected in the following years. Since 2016, Peru has received around 800,000 Venezuelans because of its positive socioeconomic conditions and friendly migration regime. Most Venezuelans have settled in Lima (77 percent), becoming, in only two years, six percent of the capital's population, and turning it into the city with the most Venezuelan migrants in the world. The current situation is posing unprecedented challenges for the Peruvian government and society, which have yet to find an official coordinated response.

1. THE CHALLENGE POSED BY THE VENEZUELAN EXODUS

Venezuela is facing one of the biggest economic collapses in modern history, forcing more than 10 percent of Venezuelans to migrate out of their country. Since 2013, Venezuela has lost 49 percent of its real GDP per capita due to a generalized economic and political crisis, and is hitting new hyperinflation records every month. Similar losses are comparable nowadays with war zones like Yemen or South Sudan.¹ In the last four years, the minimum wage measured in affordable calories fell by 87 percent, and is currently insufficient to feed a family of five.² According to a national survey, 87 percent of Venezuelans were poor in 2017 (up from 48 percent in 2014), and 64 percent reported losing body weight.³ With a collapsed public health system, Venezuela is experiencing

outbreaks of long-eliminated diseases such as measles, malaria, and tuberculosis.⁴ With 87.5 percent of households depending on subsidized food handouts,⁵ and the deterioration of the balance of payments and the government finances, it can only be expected that in the absence of regime change Venezuela heads further into a humanitarian catastrophe in the next months.

Venezuela's economic disaster is rooted in the decision of Maduro's authoritarian government to remain in power at all costs. Although the country has not entirely abolished democratic institutions, their meaning and impact have become void after a sequence of power grabs and electoral redesigns. All checks and balances on the executive branch have disappeared through permanent repression

of the opposition, and the suppression of freedom of the press as well as freedom of association.⁶ Beyond the threat of political repression, Venezuelans face some of the world's highest crime rates, with the country being considered the second-most-dangerous country in the world, only behind El Salvador.⁷ The combination of economic and political unrest has mobilized millions of Venezuelans to leave their homes and families to seek a better future, mostly in nearby countries of the region.

The crisis in Venezuela is far from over and more emigration should be expected in the following years. According to a recent poll by Gallup, 40 percent of Venezuelans want to escape the country.⁸ Not only current economic conditions are harsh, but forecasts are far from optimistic. The IMF projects that real GDP will shrink 18 percent, and hyperinflation will soar to 10,000,000 percent by 2019.⁹ Increasing economic and political distress are likely to unleash new waves of migrants across the continent. A recent estimate predicts that the number of migrants could potentially reach 8.2 million in the coming years, based on Venezuela's foreign income (oil revenue and remittances), given the government's need to import food to assist a population in need.¹⁰ The International Organization for Migration (IOM) currently projects that the total number of migrants will increase by 40 percent during 2019.¹¹ These estimates are highly dependent on a variety of assumptions of migrant decisions and economic forecasts regarding Venezuela's future.

By the end of 2018, between 3.3 million and 5.5 million Venezuelans were living abroad, according to Facebook data.¹² The economic decline and political chaos precipitated the massive exit of Venezuelans—a great share of them traveling by foot since 2015. Conservative estimates by the IOM calculate the size of the Venezuelan exodus at 3.3 million people by the end of 2018, which will represent 10 percent of the country's total population. Nevertheless, social media data

can provide better real-time estimates on the magnitude and scope of the exodus. In recent years, products of search engine queries, email logins, and the use of social media have provided new pathways to understand demographic changes in societies, particularly those provoked by migration. In the case of social media, Facebook's advertising platforms,¹³ geo-located Twitter messages,¹⁴ and LinkedIn career histories¹⁵ have been used to understand different features of migration patterns. In the case of Venezuela, estimates of emigration have been produced using Facebook and Twitter data.¹⁶ Demographic data from Facebook users can be obtained through Facebook's advertising platform, "Facebook Ads Manager." This tool allows potential advertisers to select specific characteristics of their target audience. For this case, since 2015 Facebook has included the "Expat" group, constructed through a mix of self-reported information, logins, and user networks.¹⁷ To estimate the number of Venezuelan migrants, the 2011 Venezuelan Census projections for 2018 were used to estimate the size of the exodus, and the average differential in the Facebook penetration rate (that is, the number of users per population per age group and gender) was calibrated at 10 percentage points.¹⁸ Using Facebook data, we estimated the size of the global Venezuelan exodus at around 5.5 million (17 percent of the country's population).¹⁹ The majority of the diaspora resides in Colombia, the United States, and Peru (63 percent), with substantial communities also in Chile, Spain, Ecuador, Argentina, Mexico, Panama, and Brazil. The most inhabited city by Venezuelans outside of Venezuela is Lima, followed by Bogotá, Barranquilla, Buenos Aires, Quito, Medellín, and Panama City, in that order.

2. THE VENEZUELAN EXODUS IN PERU

Venezuelan migration to Peru had some antecedents in the pre-2015 period, but surged in 2016, only to escalate after 2017. Similar to other host countries, Peru had

Table 1 – The Venezuelan Exodus – Principal Host Countries

Country	Global	Peru	Colombia	US	Chile	Spain	Ecuador	Argentina	Brazil
<i>Venezuelan Expats (Facebook Users)</i>	4,225 K	636 K	1,541 K	440 K	313 K	267 K	256 K	148 K	85 K
<i>Venezuelan Expats (Facebook Estimates)</i>	5,593 K	752 K	2,085 K	674 K	382 K	376 K	318 K	170 K	108 K
<i>IOM Estimate (Dec. 2018)</i>	3,314 K (LAC)	698 K	1,529 K				278 K		
<i>Asylum Seekers (Dec. 2018)</i>	394 K	156 K	2 K	73 K	3 K	30 K	11 K	1 K	85 K
<i>GDP per capita (US\$ 2017)</i>	6,731	6,379	6,379	59,792	15,067	28,259	6,216	14,463	9,896
	US\$	US\$	US\$	US\$	US\$	US\$	US\$	US\$	US\$
<i>GDP Avg. Growth (2014-2017)</i>		3.3%	2.2%	2.2%	1.7%	3.3%	0.4%	1.2%	-2%
<i>Road Distance from Caracas (km.)</i>		4,509	1,416	2,201 (plane)	7,608	6,995 (plane)	2,510	8,536	1,491
<i>Migrants in 2017 (% of Population)</i>		0.3%	0.3%	14.6%	2.8%	13.4%	2.7%	5.4%	0.4%
<i>Migration Legal Stringency</i>		Low	Low	High	High	High	Medium	Low	Medium

Sources: IMF, WB, IOM, UNHCR, Facebook, Google Maps

received Venezuelan migrants as early as 2002, although mostly members of the upper-middle class who fled the Chavista government.²⁰ Flows intensified in 2013, when the Venezuelan economy started rapidly deteriorating, although the number of Venezuelan residents in Peru never exceeded 7,000.²¹ The year 2016 saw Venezuelan net legal migration flows rise to 10,247, while in 2017 it added up to 106,771. By early 2018, net migration flows rose to 40,000, while legal migration surpassed 700,000. Social network estimates, as well as interviews and on-the-ground experience on the Ecuador-Peru border, give reason to believe that the actual number of migrants might be higher than what administrative records show, due to the presence of illegal migration.

Although Peru does not have recent experience as a host country for migrants, its socioeconomic conditions and migration regime have led the country to become the second-largest host for Venezuelans. Although Peru's culture has been shaped not only by its colonial past, but also by European, Chinese, and Japanese migration during the late nineteenth century,²² migration stagnated in the beginning of the 20th century. By 2017, migrants only constituted 0.3 percent of the Peruvian population, while the number of emigrants amounted to between 1.5 and 3 million, or

between 4.4 percent and 8.5 percent of the country's population.²³ With no recent experience accommodating migrants, Peru reacted early to the Venezuelan crisis by creating the Temporary Permanence Permit (PTP) in March 2017, which gave Venezuelan migrants legal residence for up to one year and allowed them to work in the formal sector. The PTP was awarded not only to migrants who had a passport, but also to those who had a birth certificate or a national ID. When migrants had no legal identification, they were able to solicit refugee status. In addition, although PTP is no longer valid for newcomers, there are *de facto* no restrictions for any Venezuelan entering Peruvian territory. Moreover, not only Peru's legislation facilitated migration, but also its recent growth trajectory. In the last 15 years, Peru almost doubled its GDP per capita and lowered poverty by 37 percentage points (from 59 percent to 27 percent).²⁴ This has presented opportunities for migrants, who could also benefit from the country's exceptionally large informal sector. As interviews with recent migrants confirmed, Venezuelans in Peru perceived a less tight labor market than in Colombia, where migrants had long surpassed one million.

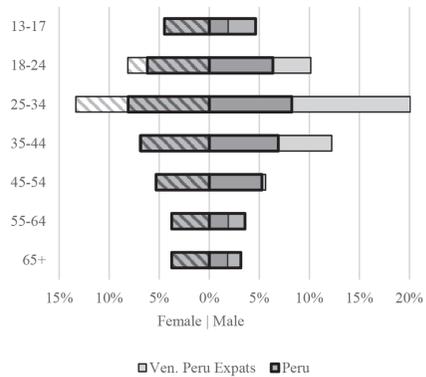
Venezuelan migration in Peru consists of more males, and is on average younger, than both the Venezuelan and Peruvian

populations. As Facebook data shows, and is also confirmed by administrative data from the Peruvian migration department (SNM) and IOM surveys, more than half of the Venezuelan migrants in Peru are young adults between the ages of 18 and 34.²⁵ This represents a larger share for this age group both relative to the age distribution of Venezuelan residents (that is, Venezuelans in Venezuela), and of Peruvian citizens. Senior citizens (older than 65 years) are the smallest demographic group within migrants, and are underrepresented in comparison to Venezuela’s population. The share of male migrants is also substantially larger than the male share of Venezuelan and Peruvian residents. According to an IOM survey, at least half of migrants are married, although 73 percent traveled without children, which is consistent with the relatively low share of minors among migrants. As interviews reveal, some Venezuelans initially migrate without their children (sometimes without their spouse/partner), waiting for them to migrate once the first parent has found stable employment and is adequately settled.

Most Venezuelan migrants in Peru have settled in Lima (77 percent), becoming in only two years six percent of the capital’s population, and turning it into the city with the most Venezuelan migrants in the world. Venezuelan migrants are not evenly distributed across Peru. While 29 percent of the country’s population lives in Lima Metropolitana, at least 76.6 percent of migrants inhabit the city, according to social media data, although in administrative records the share is as high as 86 percent.²⁶ Expats in Lima amount to 6.7 percent of the city’s population, making the capital the most Venezuelan city outside Venezuela. Additionally, there are medium-sized communities in Trujillo (representing 2.1 percent of the region’s population), Arequipa, and Chiclayo, and small communities in Callao, Piura, Chimbote, Cusco, Ica, Tacna, Tumbes, and Huancayo. Apart from Cusco, the majority of the diaspora has settled on the Pacific coastline, avoiding the highlands and

rainforest regions. Regions’ populations appear to be the key factor determining migration shares, as well as average wages and distance from Tumbes’ border, which partly explains why Trujillo has a substantially larger share of migrants than Arequipa.

Figure 1 – Peruvian Citizens and Venezuelan Expats in Peru Age and Gender Pyramid



Source: FB, INEI (own estimate)

Migrants have higher levels of education than both locals and Venezuelan residents. As Facebook data shows, Venezuelan expats in Peru have on average a higher level of educational attainment than both Peruvian citizens and Venezuelan residents, as well as Venezuelan expats in Colombia. Facebook data shows that 45 percent of Venezuelan expats in Peru have completed some type of tertiary or college degree, while administrative data yields 55 percent for the same category. There is no complete registry on the number of professionals that have arrived in Peru, although out of 394,000 administrative registries (a third of actual migrants), there appears to be at least 23,000 engineers, 21,000 professors, 22,000 technicians, and 9,000 nurses.²⁷

Venezuelan migrants appear to be generating challenges for Peru’s society in three key areas: labor markets, services provision, and public health. According to standard immigration economics literature, a sudden significant migrant shock expands the labor supply, generating lower

equilibrium wages in the short-run, while labor demand adjusts in the medium- to long-run for higher wages. Although in our research neither descriptive nor causal estimates show significant changes in unemployment or wages, interviews reveal that Venezuelans face labor mismatches because they are overqualified or work in different occupations than before, most of them in the informal sector (95 percent). There are also new challenges to services delivery, both in terms of providing the necessary assistance to avoid a humanitarian crisis, and to facilitate integration to education and health services, which risk being overrun by the increase in demand. Our research also shows that the marginal net fiscal impact of the migration is small and manageable, but sensitive to increases in migration rates and labor market behavior. Finally, Venezuela's crisis has generated a resurgence of diseases such as malaria and measles, long eradicated in the region, causing a public health emergency in recipient countries. It is worth mentioning that given the unequal geographical distribution of migration, these three key policy areas have heterogeneous effects across the Peruvian territory.

The Venezuelan diaspora is encountering increasing episodes of xenophobia and may be creating political backlash against the government. Within migrants surveyed in Tacna exiting Peru, 39 percent reported episodes of xenophobia and discrimination, 55 percent of them in public spaces and 41 percent in the workplace. These episodes were also reflected in our interviews with migrants in Lima. As early as July 2017 (when there were fewer than 200,000 Venezuelans in Peru), only 17 percent of Peruvians considered that migration had a positive impact, and 56 percent thought the country had "too many migrants."²⁸ In a more recent poll, 55 percent of Lima's citizens have expressed negative views over Venezuelan migration.²⁹ Forty-six percent of Limeños emphasized a negative impact in the labor market, while 28 percent saw Venezuelans as crowding out public services. Moreover, 94 percent consider that

the government should restrict Venezuelan migration to some degree. This increasing trend in public opinion, as well as the rise of anti-immigrant candidates in the recent municipal elections in Lima, has created a climate for political backlash against the government.³⁰

There is no definite forecast of how many Venezuelans will arrive in Peru in the near future, and estimates are highly sensitive to swings in international politics. In addition to the problems that arise when estimating future aggregate Venezuelan refugee flows, specifically predicting flows to Peru involves making assumptions about Peru and other host countries' migration policies that determine the relative cost of migration. As an example, Peru's announcement of the end of the PTP for migrants arriving after November 2018 produced a local peak in October. Moreover, Ecuador's tightening of the border in January 2019, after the killing of a woman and increasing episodes of xenophobia in Peru's northern neighbor, appear to be sending more migrants to the border in the start of 2019.³¹ As previously stated, the decision to migrate to a particular country depends on the benefits and costs of migration, and these may fluctuate as countries become more or less welcoming. As of 2018, on average, an increase in 100 migrants entering Colombia is significantly associated with 68 migrants entering Peru around three months later. It is not clear how local Colombian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian politics may affect this rate.

The current situation is posing unprecedented challenges for Peruvian government and society, which have yet to find an official coordinated response. Peru, and more specifically the city of Lima, are experiencing an increase in foreign population that has no precedents in the country's history, although there might be an antecedent in the internal migration from the highlands in the mid-20th century. In addition to the societal challenge of assimilating a new population, the Peruvian government needs to

Table 2 – The Venezuelan Exodus – Principal Host Cities in Peru

Region	Ven. Expats	Population	% of Ven. Expats	% of Dept.	Road Distance to Tumbes	Ave. Wage (2017)	Unemployment (2017)
Lima Metropolitana	576,413	8,574,974	76.6%	6.7%	1,269 km.	1617	6.0%
La Libertad (Trujillo)	37,643	1,778,080	5.0%	2.1%	712 km.	967	3.3%
Arequipa	9,411	1,382,730	1.3%	0.7%	2,279 km.	1242	5.3%
Lambayeque (Chiclayo)	8,234	1,197,260	1.1%	0.7%	500 km.	910	3.8%
Callao	5,882	994,494	0.8%	0.6%	1,268 km.	1222	6.9%
Piura	5,882	1,856,809	0.8%	0.3%	288 km.	900	4.0%
Ancash (Chimbote)	4,705	1,083,519	0.6%	0.4%	844 km.	938	3.4%
Cusco	3,529	1,205,527	0.5%	0.3%	2,369 km.	1158	3.9%
Ica	3,529	850,765	0.5%	0.4%	1,572 km.	841	2.8%
Taena	3,529	329,332	0.5%	1.1%	2,512 km.	1254	4.4%
Tumbes	3,529	224,863	0.5%	1.5%	0 km.	1040	4.4%
Junin (Huancayo)	2,353	1,246,038	0.3%	0.2%	1,554 km.	996	4.4%
Unclassified	93,759		12.5%				
Total	752,866	29,381,884	100.0%	2.5%		12.61	4.4%

Sources: Facebook, INEI, Google Maps

guarantee the integration of migrants to ensure both their wellbeing and the welfare of Peruvian citizens. Without any built-in capability within the Peruvian bureaucracy to deal with a migration crisis of this scale, the Peruvian government needs to carefully understand the heterogeneous effects of the migration wave and act accordingly, keeping in mind both the increasingly conflictive politics at the national scale and outside pressures from regional powers (Colombia, Brazil) and international institutions (UN, OAS, IADB) that may affect the policy space.

NOTES

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¹⁷Spyratos et al., *Migration Data Using Social Media*.

¹⁸The former assumption was based on the observation that emigrants are more likely to adopt a Facebook account in the country of destination when the country has a higher penetration rate than in Venezuela (taking into consideration the Facebook penetration rate in South America is 20 percentage points higher than in Venezuela by the end of 2017).

¹⁹Our estimates also include Colombian returnees, as well as the early emigrants of the Chavista era. Moreover, though the methodology allows researchers to gather real-time information on migration beyond what administrative records can show—taking into consideration not only their scattered and late publication, and the lack of records on illegal migration—and provides insights on patterns of the Venezuelan migration, it also has some important shortcomings. First, there is no clarity on what is meant by “Expat” in Facebook’s Advertising API. If reported data is used to estimate Expat users, the number of Facebook users might not be revealing of who is an expat. Nevertheless, if Facebook logins and user networks are used to define “Expats,” Colombian and Peruvian returnees, as well as international students and workers, might bias our estimates. Second, Facebook data is rounded to the thousand level, which prevents estimates to capture geographical localities with

fewer than 1,500 inhabitants. Third, estimates are extremely sensitive to assumptions on Facebook penetration: changing the difference in the platform penetration rates between Venezuelan residents and the diaspora from 0 to 10 percentage points raises estimates on the size of the diaspora by almost a million residents.

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