

Pies para que te tengo

Testimonies of Venezuelan refugees and migrants

RED CLAMOR NOVEMBER 2020



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To each and every one of the
people who told
their stories...
their journeys...
their little snippets of life.
For the smiles and tears
they shared, for the
thanks they gave...
for their bravery,
their strength and courage*.

• The names and details of the people who appear in the stories of this report have been modified to preserve their identity and confidentiality.

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Preface

“And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt”.
(Dt. 10,19)

Dear sister, dear brother, who have this book in your hands, may the passages of these testimonies reach your heart, because this book aims at moving the hearts of all men and women of good will. There are many people who, belonging to any Church or religion, or even without being part of a faith group, are sensitive to human pain and are able to reach out to refugees and migrants. Here we are presented with the testimonies of some of the many Venezuelan refugees and migrants at the present time, but their words can move us on behalf of people in this situation in any region of the world. We believers know that altruistic hearts are moved by the same Spirit that seeks to move believers.

And if this book falls into the hands of the authorities of any destination country for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, you will be able to find motivation to favor the right policies to open the arms of your nation to those who contribute with their culture and their work to make your country prosper. Also, it can motivate them to a healthy international policy, supported by the necessary dialogue between the authorities of each nation, since we all need each other, “*because we are all in the same boat*”*. On the other hand, it is urgent for politics to give a new direction to the economy so that we can have a true comprehensive development, an economy at the service of all people and not just the few.

This book, in the hands of educators and all those most involved in the promotion of culture, in contact with the testimonies of these people, can encourage them to work for an education that promotes the culture of openness to healthy intercultural coexistence. The globalized world in which we live must learn to break down the walls that separate us and to create bridges of convergence in order to enrich one another.

This book must reach the hands of all people, so that we are fully convinced that the Venezuelan refugees and migrants are our sisters and brothers, and that millions of them are experiencing an unstoppable exodus, as never seen before in any time or place. This book should motivate even more those who are already committed to the service of refugees and migrants, but it should also sensitize all the baptized, because this pastoral care should be a synodal service of a Church that understands that the dimension of this tragedy requires the commitment of all believers in a pastoral care organized along transversal lines. Let us keep in mind that each refugee and migrant is another incarnate Christ who awaits our fraternal hand (cf. Mt. 25, 35. 43).

We are all disturbed by numbers that ultimately tell us little or nothing about forced displacement. Let us be close to our brother in need like the Good Samaritan in the Gospel (cf. Lk. 10:25-37) and let us approach the hearts of the people who offer us their testimonies here, so that we may know a little more and reach out to the Christ who lives in them.

The Holy Family of Nazareth, who had to flee by emigrating to Egypt, bless and protect on their way all refugee and migrant families, and all families separated by forced displacement.

Gustavo Rodríguez Vega
Archbishop of Yucatan
President of the CLAMOR Network

* Pope Francis' message of March 27, 2020.

A logbook for the journey

Between August and December 2019, the Clamor Network (Red Clamor) carried out the research "**Pies para que te tengo**"¹ (*Feet, don't fail me now*). The research had access to more than 200 testimonies from Venezuelan refugees and migrants in different Latin American countries². Four countries were visited: Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Peru, and 11 cities were visited: Maicao, Riohacha, Ciénaga, Barranquilla, Cali and Cucuta in Colombia; Quito and Tulcan in Ecuador; Panama City in Panama; and Lima and Tumbes in Peru. The research also collected testimonies from Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Argentina, Chile, the Dominican Republic and Mexico.

The information provided by the interviews was crossed with reports from the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), from national and international organizations that work with refugee and migrant populations, and from different agencies and/or programs of the United Nations, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), among others.

The research aimed to garner and give voice to refugees and migrants, to make visible their feelings, the situations they have had to face and how they have dealt with them. The report deals with the opportunities, challenges and risks faced by Venezuelan refugees and migrants during the transit route and in the different host cities.

Transversal analysis demonstrates the situations and/or violence experienced by refugees and migrants since their departure from Venezuela. Among them are the deepening of the *Conditions of Vulnerability*, which in some cases already existed from their places of origin. This situation affects girls, boys and adolescents, pregnant women, people with disabilities, older adults, people belonging to indigenous peoples and afro-descendants, and people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, among others, exposing them to greater risks and situations of violence, abuse, discrimination, and xenophobia. The cases of Family Reunification, some of the mothers who have decided to travel alone and leave their children in Venezuela, forced by economic necessity, to seek a solution for feeding their families or for security reasons.

1. Expression used by Venezuelan people to indicate that they are ready to leave and to undertake without delay a path. Phrase used during the shared testimonies.
2. 122 women, 57 men, 23 LGBTI+ people.



Unfortunately, *xenophobia* is present throughout the process of human mobility of Venezuelan refugees and migrants throughout Latin America. Both on the different transit routes, as well as in the host cities and countries, Venezuelan refugees and migrants have been stigmatized, which has manifested itself in various forms: physical and psychological violence, hate speech and intentional, covert and structural discrimination.

The journey begins in the section called **Causes for Departure**, which recounts the different reasons that, according to the people interviewed, gave rise to their departure from Venezuela: Political Violence, Generalized Violence -or other security reasons-, and precariousness and difficulty of access to services and human rights, such as: Health, Food and Education.

We continue the journey through **the Transit Routes**. The challenges, risks, and hazards that all Venezuelan refugees and migrants had and/or have had to face during their displacement through Latin America, especially South America. This is how many people naturalized discrimination and xenophobia against them. The discrimination and violence that took place during the different journeys and countries in the form of extortion, robbery, gender violence, human trafficking and sexual violence.

After arriving at **Ciudades de Acogida** (Host Cities), the next stop in the report is the recovery of the voices in that encounter for the "new", that which is expected but not known, that which was imagined versus that which was found: "*We did not know what we were facing, what awaited us*".

The surprise, loaded with challenges, but also with opportunities. Opportunities such as support networks, organizations, church and communities; meeting spaces such as: dining halls, shelters, Support Spaces and safe spaces for children, among others; some opportunities for social and labor inclusion and opportunities in access to health. In this section we also find the challenges faced by Venezuelan refugees and migrants. Gender-based violence, stigmatization for being a Venezuelan woman; sexual exploitation in the context of mobility suffered by women, girls and LGBTI+ people; violence against children, robbery attempts, trafficking and "renting" of children; and precarious living conditions that hinder the full exercise of economic, social and cultural rights as their basic subsistence needs.

As outlined in the challenges section *that are evident* upon arrival in the host cities or during transit, refugees and Venezuelan migrants have encountered obstacles in their social integration, the creation and strengthening of support networks, but above all they have faced vulnerability in labor inclusion. In almost all of Latin America, Venezuelan refugees and migrants have entered the informal market, selling on the street, working as independent people and in other cases with formal contracts but with conditions that are different from those of the nationals of each country. Some of these people are homeless as a result of the vulnerability of labor inclusion and low income.

In this regard, as noted in the section on *Dignified Work*, the BBVA Report on the Economic Integration of Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in Peru notes that 89% of the people who work in a dependent manner do not have contracts, 76% work in small companies, which tend to be informal, and 97% do not have health insurance provided by their employer (BBVA, 2019).

This situation is not exclusive to Peru. As mentioned above, this situation is similar and impacts Venezuelan refugees and migrants in various ways throughout Latin America.

Not having a formal, fair and regular source of income directly affects their access to decent housing, often forcing them to live in overcrowded or precarious conditions, their ability to feed themselves and their families with basic food items, and their access to health and education for their children.

Between February and March of 2020, the SARS-CoV-2 virus that has affected a large part of the planet arrived in Latin America. Among the measures taken by the States of the region is the confinement or imposition of mandatory quarantine, which has impacted the general population, but particularly and differently for refugees and migrants, given their already precarious conditions of employment, housing, food and access to health.

A study conducted by the Universidad del Pacifico del Peru as part of the "Historias que Inspiran" campaign shows that by July 15, 43% of Venezuelan refugees and migrants had lost their jobs; 49% were at risk of eviction, 5% did not have the economic resources to buy basic necessities and 10% had suffered hunger during the quarantine (Feline Freier, *Los refugiados y el COVID-19*, 2020).

The study also points out that some of the reasons why Venezuelan refugees and migrants are in a greater condition of vulnerability are: 1. the greater informality they face in comparison with the nationals of each country; 2. the absence of family networks and close contacts to psychologically deal with the crisis; and 3. their migratory status, which in many cases has not been resolved by the appropriate authorities in each country. (Feline Freier, *Los refugiados y el COVID-19*, 2020).

COVID-19 and confinement or quarantine measures have not only had a significant economic cost, but also a direct impact on the mental and emotional health of refugee and migrant individuals, families and children.

Feeling alone, having no one to turn to, has impacted negatively; their unregulated stay directly impacts the fear of going to hospitals, medical centers or clinics to receive medical attention in case of need; the fear, anguish or stress in case of needing medical assistance deepens the depression and anxiety faced by many Venezuelan women migrating in Latin America. In April 2020, 41% of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, who participated in a study by the Universidad del Pacifico del Peru, showed signs of anxiety and 29%, depression (Feline Freier, 2020.)

During these months of the pandemic, some refugees and migrants who participated in this research were contacted and explained that the effect of the pandemic has been profound. The loss of the source of income, of basic food, evictions, the lack of income to cover public services and the debts that continue to accumulate, are some of the difficulties they face in the host countries.

Very few of the people contacted stated that they are trying to return to their country. It is clear that there, many have their own homes that they left, behind when they left, and they have a family network to rely on.

Because of the pandemic here in Lima, Peru, [the situation] has been very complex because we've had a hard time with the quarantine issue. As a father, I had to make the decision to leave Lima because there are no jobs, and I made the decision to walk from Lima to the border of Ecuador by mule. (...) On the way we met parents with their babies from months to 2- and 3-years old walking, too. (Interview via WhatsApp, June 2020)

Despite the harsh situation, many refugees and migrants from Venezuela, assisted by organizations that are part of the Clamor Network and other actors, claim that they cannot and/or do not want to return to their country of origin. Even some people who do return face discrimination.

The trauma, experiences, and risks to which they have been exposed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic are evident in their stories. According to their own testimonies, it is important that their voices are known and heard.

The starting point

By November 2020, more than 5 million Venezuelans had left their country for different countries around the world. More than 80% of Venezuela's refugee and migrant population is concentrated in Latin America. Colombia has received nearly 1.8 million people, followed by Peru with more than 1 million, Chile with 455,494 and Ecuador with 417,199, among others. These figures are official government figures and include people who have regularized their status in one of the national systems, have applied for refugee status, or are currently refugees. States do not necessarily include in their figures people without a regular migration status³ (R4V, 2020).

Based on this, it can be stated that the number of people who have crossed the borders may be much higher than the official government figures. This, too, is supported by various sources (R4V, 2020).

The research was carried out between August and December 2019. During those months we had the opportunity to visit, listen and share with more than 200 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in different Latin American countries. Most of the people interviewed at the time of the interview were adults. Four countries were visited: Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Peru. Eleven cities were visited: Maicao, Riohacha, Ciénaga, Barranquilla, Cali and Cúcuta in Colombia; Quito and Tulcán in Ecuador; Panama City in Panama; and Lima and

Tumbes in Peru. There was also communication with Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Argentina, Chile, the Dominican Republic and Mexico.

During the research, some countries in the region had imposed as a requirement for Venezuelan nationals, the visa to enter their territory. This was the case of Ecuador (August 26, 2019). As a result, 80% of the refugees and migrants in transit interviewed in Tulcan had crossed the border through irregular crossing points.



The Pastoral Social kitchen continued to receive the same average number of people daily, about 200 including children. The organizations stated that the numbers of refugees and migrants in transit had not decreased significantly since the application for the visa.

This report is based primarily on the testimonies and stories collected during the months of field work. Individual and focus group interviews were conducted with refugees and migrants from Venezuela, as well as interviews with key informants in the different host countries.

The information was cross-checked with reports from the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), national and international organizations that work with refugee and migrant populations, and different United Nations agencies and/or programs, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), among others.

³ Last updated October 5, 2020, R4V.info "This figure represents the sum of Venezuelan migrants, refugees and asylum seekers reported by host governments. It does not necessarily imply individual identification, nor registration of each individual, and includes a degree of estimation, according to the statistical data processing methodology used by each government. Since many government sources do not take into account Venezuelans without regular immigration status, the total number is likely to be higher. R4V.info: <https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform>

The research stressed that the people interviewed in this exercise have been forced to live and face each situation differently and have dealt with it in the best possible way according to their circumstances.

The contradictory feelings...

Personally, for me crossing the border was psychologically tough. I remember I was crossing the bridge in Cucuta, and I was looking back and wanting to go back. I was looking at my flag disappearing in the distance and there was a knot in my throat. (Focus Group, 2019)

To leave or not to leave: "I never wanted to leave my country, because I never considered Colombia as a destination for me, I didn't like it, but here I am" (Focus Group, 2019). Yes, here, there, and beyond are millions of Venezuelan refugees and migrants walking or settling, seeking protection and a chance at life, leaving behind their families, joy, smiles, and also pain and nostalgia.

I was very scared. When you go out, you go through mourning, because we left all our comforts, my family. I had never been apart from my mother, from my family, even though I lived apart, I had many emotions, I wanted to be reunited with my husband, but I was leaving everything (Focus Group, 2019)

Deciding to leave your own country is never easy. Many of the people who shared their testimony said that they "packed their lives into a suitcase"⁴, carrying it with hopes and also with pain, not knowing for sure where they were going, much less what they would find, on the way or in the city where they arrived to stay. "It is not easy to leave your country without knowing what will be waiting for you (...) because we have come to venture, to see what we could achieve, and it has not been at all easy". (Focus Group, 2019)

I traveled with many illusions, because of my profession I thought I would be able to work and help my family. All those illusions, with time, collapsed. I left with a suitcase full of illusions and I arrived with a bag full of disappointment. (Account 07, 2019)

"If you knew what you were going to face, maybe you wouldn't have left," some people have said, but then looking at the horizon they say they would not return to their country of origin despite the challenges they face with the processes of regularization and integration in their new destination. "There we didn't have anything to eat, here at least we have three meals a day, with 5 dollars we can buy something to eat".

"As I told you, I had never left my homeland. The problem was that I had not faced what was really a migration. After I had gone all that way and arrived here, I said, 'I'll come back'. I think it would be only under extreme circumstances, but I would not expose my children to that again." (Focus Group, 2019)

Not wanting to leave, but being forced to do so because there is no other option to save your life.

That night the town was attacked by National Guard tanks, there was a small confrontation on the bridge, with tear gas, shooting without knowing where, many children were affected by the gas. At dawn, they called me and I told myself that I had to leave the municipality with my family. We left as if we were criminals, we picked up as much as we could and even left the house open, because we were nervous. (Account 64, 2019)

Thank you will never be enough...

In the midst of stories, they convey that they "can't take it anymore", that they are about to give up, that they are exhausted from not having opportunities for decent work⁵, from living on the streets, from being robbed, extorted, cheated, raped and sexually harassed, of suffering discrimination because of their diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, limited access to health or education, of being stigmatized and suffering from discrimination and xenophobia. What we have learned and what Venezuelans continue to teach us, is STRENGTH. This strength is revealed by the processes of forced displacement or migration. That driving force for life that the Venezuelan people have had and demonstrated in more than two years of mass exodus.

It is difficult to see ourselves in the mirror, to see ourselves as others see us. To realize our strengths or weaknesses. Some of the Venezuelan people have not found it easy to see themselves in that mirror and recognize themselves. Some Venezuelan people apologize...

Really, I apologize for invading your space. We are invading a space, which was not something that we wanted. No. It really was our turn because we had no other choice. It's not because we want to, but it's because we had no other choice. (Focus Group, 2019)

This situation, this process of displacement of the Venezuelan population, has brought challenges for everyone. For the refugees and migrants, for the States, for the host cities and communities, for the people of each town, municipality and city, for the social organizations, for the church organizations and for the international organizations. "This massive migration took us by surprise, and we had to organize ourselves from the daily learning" shared one of the organizations that is part of the Clamor Network, while we were going to an interview.

Perhaps that is why we have all had a hard time seeing ourselves in the mirror and discovering that it has all been a learning process with successes, challenges and lessons learned.

They, the refugees and migrants are grateful:

To organizations. I don't think I could name them because there are many (...) they are the ones who have listened to us the most, the ones who have supported us the most. I don't know (...) but we really thank them for being there. For making our life here a little bit easier. Because suddenly, they have helped us, they have given us support at some point (...) And well, thank you will never be enough. (Focus Group, 2019)

We, who in one way or another welcome them, accompany them, listen to them or simply look at them, should also be thankful... their example of temperance and strength makes us respond to them: The gratitude is mutual.

⁴ "God has a purpose with each of us Venezuelans who decide to emigrate. Because we put a country in a suitcase. A country in a bag" (Focus Group, 2019)

⁵ <http://www.oit.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang-es/index.htm>

Transversal analysis

Vulnerability conditions

Venezuelan refugees and migrants, as will be detailed below, have suffered a decline in their living conditions in their places of origin. These conditions have had a direct impact on their quality of life and their rights to access food, health, and education, among many others. In many cases, their personal and family security has also been affected.

This worsening of the conditions of vulnerability during the process of displacement and mass exodus that affects women in a distinct way exposes them to greater risks and situations of violence, abuse, discrimination and xenophobia, since in many cases it is the women who leave and take care of their children and the elderly in their families.

I am Venezuelan. One day, I decided to get up, because I have a 15-year-old son, a 13-year-old daughter and a 78-year-old mother in my care because my father died three years ago. I am a single, pregnant mother, and I decided one day to get up and come to Ecuador.

When I left Venezuela, I didn't have the money for the ticket, we came asking for a ride to San Antonio del Táchira. In San Antonio I crossed the borders, arrived in Cucuta and from there we walked through all the jungles of Colombia, along all its roads, until we reached Ipiales.

Along the way we found, thank God, people who gave us some food, a sandwich or something, and that was what the children ate. I kept going. We bathed in the rivers because the heat was so strong. So much walking. So, we arrived at a shelter that we found on the way, but I preferred to sleep outside and not inside, because we had been told that it was dangerous there.

So, I slept outside with my children, as I did during the whole trip, we slept on the roads. I would lay out a sheet for them and there I would sleep.(...) My children would say to me, "Mom, are you sure of what we're doing. And I would say, 'yes son, we're going to get to Ecuador and we're going to do well there'. I didn't know if that would be the case, but I had to be strong. And so, we continued (...) little by little we advanced, it took us 21 days to get to Rumichaca.

When we arrived at Ipiales I realized that Rumichaca was right there. It was a huge joy, because it's hard to walk around pregnant. I was pouring the amniotic fluid along the way and at risk of giving birth because I was already seven months pregnant. My mother is diabetic and hypertensive, she had already had three heart attacks and was getting very tired. She almost went back.

When I arrived in Rumichaca, I knelt down and thanked God for being there. Our feet were entirely shattered. There I sat my mother and my two children and began to ask for money throughout the park, to bring them bread and purple mombin.” (Account 30, 2019)

Children: family reunification cases

Whether out of economic necessity, seeking a way to feed their children, or for security reasons, some mothers have decided to travel alone and leave their children in Venezuela while they make their way to their new host cities. Working as a mother in another city is not easy.



"Who can you leave your children with while you work?" "That's why we thought that, in the face of the unknown, the best thing to do was to leave our children with their grandmothers", shared two cousins who decided to leave together from Venezuela.

"It was not and has not been an easy decision," said one of them. In a different case, they said they left their children with their grandmothers because they thought that they could work and send money, so their children would be better off.

Of course, traveling without their sons and daughters has exposed them to various risks.

"In Lima, we started to work, and we sent 100 or 150 soles (45 USD) to Venezuela, but it was not enough. The children (who were still in Venezuela) started to lose weight. My sister's mother called us and told us that they were going to expel them from the shelter where we lived before we left, because they were accusing us of abandoning the country and treason to our homeland.

That we had to bring the children with us or they were going to take them away.” (Account 66, 2019)

But family reunification in the context of human mobility is not easy. Particularly in the case of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, where families are dispersed across different countries and cities; where women and families have had to cross different countries and face long journeys.

In the yearning for reunification with their children, women work long hours and, in some cases, do not eat, in order to save enough to send for their children. In others, they contact international or humanitarian organizations seeking help, and in many cases the women undertake return trips seeking reunification.

It was with that call that everything began. I started crying and I said, 'today is the day, even if we have to walk, we are leaving'. We decided to return from Lima, we bought the tickets to Huaquillas.

Looking for Mom

I managed to scrape together a hundred dollars and sent it to my eldest son. I sent them to Maicao, on January 24th, because my son told me that he wanted to come, that he couldn't stand not seeing me anymore. Otherwise, he was going to kill himself and his brothers. So, I gave him the money to come. With that money, they left on January 24th and arrived in Cartagena. And there he told me, 'Mommy, should I keep walking?' I said no. Stay there until I can get more money. Stay at the terminal in Cartagena.

We communicated on Facebook. I went to the Scalabrinian Mission and they lent me a phone, I contacted my brother and he told me that they were still in Cartagena, my 17-year-old son with his two brothers.

After that, all three were missing for three days. And here I was (in Quito, Ecuador) mortified, I didn't know what to do, whether to go to Colombia or stay here.

Then, I saw a video on Facebook with the three children who came looking for their mother. I contacted the man on Facebook, he gave me a number to call and told me that my children were fine, that I shouldn't worry. He told me that he found them walking on a highway in Cartagena, the three children. That the youngest one, the four-year-old, looked very bad, his feet were destroyed. He had to buy him some flip-flops and cure him. He also gave them food.

He told me, 'I am not a bad person' and he put my eldest son on the phone. When I heard him, he said, 'Mommy, we're okay'. He said he had to come to Ecuador because they wanted to see me. And that the eight-year-old didn't want to eat, he just wanted to hug me.

The man of the trailer truck is from Medellin. He left them in Pasto, paid their ticket to get to Ipiales. There I went to find them, to Ipiales, they arrived at midnight. I remember it was raining in Rumichaca. I got desperate because I couldn't find them, I started screaming and they sent me to immigration. There, a friend called me from here in Ecuador and told me that they wrote to me on Facebook. I had left it open, because I didn't have a phone. My children were in a children's home in Ipiales and they were fine. It was midnight, but I wanted to walk there. I needed to see my children. But the policeman wouldn't let me. At 5 a.m. I ran away and left. I started asking around Ipiales where a children's home was, a man in a cab took me there. The home opened at 7 a.m., and I stayed outside waiting.

I cannot explain what happened when I saw my children. It was like we were born again. I brought them from there. Again, the Norwegian Council was very supportive. They arranged for us to sleep in a hotel in Tulcan and gave me 80 dollars to get here. (Account 38, 2019)



Our goal was to get to Cúcuta and there they would take us to the children. But we were told that if we left Ecuador, we could not get a stamp in six months, so we did not go there and stayed in Tulcan. When we left Peru, they were giving the aid, the mothers with children or pregnant women could enter, they gave them the visa or asylum. Everything got complicated, they were no longer letting people pass freely (...) They stamped us in July in Ecuador, before establishing the visas. We would have to process the visa in Peru, but what would happen to the children?
(Account 66, 2019)

Despite the many obstacles they have to face for the reunion, they succeed. The process of family reunification involves a wide range of actors, international organizations, humanitarian organizations, religious organizations, the organizations of the Catholic Church, various NGOs and the national authorities of each country with the admirable lead of the mothers, of course.

The day the children arrived was Thursday. At the border they didn't stamp entries because they entered with the census code. We had not told anyone that the children were coming, because they always changed the date. We were waiting for them in Rumichaca, looking for them, we were desperate. We were in the tents of the Red Cross, feeling defeated because we didn't see them. Suddenly I saw the lady from UNICEF coming and the guy from the Ombudsman's Office.

They said they had been looking for us even under the rocks (...) We began to cry of joy (...) With papers in hand, we went to the bridge.

Suddenly everyone was coming (...) It was already dark; you could only see a group of people on the Rumichaca Bridge. All the children were crying, from the youngest to the oldest, we hadn't seen each other for a year. That was a unique experience, not even childbirth can compare to this.... A unique kind of happiness (Account 66, 2019)

Xenophobia

In 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance took up in his annual thematic report the concept of xenophobia as "attitudes, prejudices and behaviors that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity" (OHCHR, 2016). Xenophobia is one of the strongest and most important forms of discrimination, which has been prohibited in various international instruments for the protection of human rights⁶. In simple words, "Xenophobia is the rejection of foreigners" (UNHCR, 2018).

The fear of the other person that we perceive as different, as an outsider and as a threat, is one of the causes of xenophobia, which is accentuated in contexts of human mobility, in which xenophobia can be manifested through prejudices expressed by speech or violence (OHCHR, 2016).

Unfortunately, the process of human mobility of Venezuelan people has not been free of xenophobic discrimination. Both on the different transit routes and in the host cities and countries, Venezuelan refugees and migrants have been victims of xenophobia, which has manifested itself in various forms: physical violence, hate speech and intentional, covert and structural discrimination.

The conditions of vulnerability of Venezuelan LGBTI+ and women refugees and migrants become more profound during the process of human mobility.

Women, including trans women, suffer particularly from xenophobic discrimination linked to gender-based violence as a result of the deepening of unequal power relations with men. This discrimination manifests itself in a particular way in the "sexualization of their bodies" and in sexual violence.

There were moments that you would never want to remember. They took advantage of our situation. On one occasion, in a place in Colombia where it was too cold, we asked a "gandolero" to take us out of there (...) I had to kneel down to get out of that place because the cold was going to kill me. And the man did give us a ride, but he took advantage of the situation, he made me do things that can't be spoken about. (Account 42, 2019)

The report will highlight the different attitudes and xenophobic manifestations during the process of human mobility of Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

Myths that support xenophobia

"The arrival of Venezuelan people has caused social, political and especially economic problems in our region", is one of the phrases heard in the different cities and countries visited. "It is the Venezuelan people who are causing insecurity or taking away our jobs," many say.

In conversations with local people in Ecuador, a cab driver seeing Venezuelan people standing next to a traffic light (one of them was wearing a jacket with the Venezuelan flag) said: "You know what? My family is in a bad mood with me; they don't talk to me because I gave my other cab to a Venezuelan to drive. They ask me why I gave it to them, if the Venezuelans are taking our jobs and stealing from us (...) But I was a migrant in Spain, and I know that is not true. We migrants move the economy," he explained. "Look, I give that Venezuelan a job, he brings me the earnings of the day, I am Ecuadorian. He has to go buy food from an Ecuadorian person; if he buys fruits or vegetables, we are going to have to produce more. The room that he pays for, I'm sure it belongs to an Ecuadorian person. And that's how the economy moves". "What about security?" I asked him, and he replied, "Miss, there are bad guys everywhere and of every nationality. Can we say they're only Venezuelans? No, we are making a mistake".

This situation, which is not simple, is supported by official figures in some countries. In Colombia at least, with regard to the high levels of unemployment, the director of the National Department of Statistics (DANE) said: "The possibility of saying that the Venezuelan migrant population is structurally affecting the level of the unemployment rate is quite unlikely at this time" (GIFMM, Inter-Agency Mixed Migration Flows Group, 2019). In Peru, a study by BBVA concluded that "Considering the greater availability of labor and human capital generated by Venezuelan immigrants, we estimate that Peru's potential GDP has taken a modest leap, for the first time, between 2017 and 2019. Likewise, the demand for goods and services from Venezuelan immigrants has had a positive impact on the observed GDP (BBVA, 2019). A recent study by the World Bank in Peru indicates that if the country takes actions such as regularizing the situation of the Venezuelan population, the GDP could grow in the coming years (World Bank, 2019).

⁶ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination are among them.

Part one:

Causes for departure



“Venezuela is not a country that has emigrated, it has been a country of immigrants. We were used to receive people, not to leave the country”.

Those are the words with which many of the people begin their stories. Some mention that Venezuelans have not been historically refugees and migrants, "the situation in the country has led us to that.

The causes of the exodus have not changed; on the contrary, they have worsened, said several of the people interviewed, one of them living in Panamá:

Before 2016, the people who left the country were those with economic resources, who had businesses and higher livelihoods, who had the possibility of establishing themselves economically in other countries, now, the people who are leaving are those who lost their jobs or who, despite being employed, cannot afford to buy food or pay for medicine for their sick relatives.(Panamá, 2019).

Since 2018, the number of people who have left Venezuela has been increasing. Concern about food and health of children, the elderly, and persons with chronic illnesses is added to the political violence and security concerns in a context of generalized violence in the country (OHCHR, 20199).

Political violence

Thinking differently, dissenting, arguing, protesting, marching, accompanying students during protests, have become one more reason to be forced to leave behind what people love so much: family and country.

"I left my country because I had political problems. I was in a graduate program at the university and went out with all the students to protest," explained the official from one of Venezuela's universities, who has been out of her country for more than a

year now. "I left because I was accused of treason," she added.

As a result of her activism with the university students, she suffered reprisals, was detained and ill-treated during her arrest. She also received threats against her son. In Venezuela, she was detained for approximately one month.

The day I left, I told my mother, "I'm either leaving or staying". She told me, "you're leaving because they're going to kill you. They already told us. So, you're leaving". I left with nothing for Colombia, I was pregnant. And from Colombia I came here. Walking because I didn't have any money. (Account 38, 2019)

Participating in politics, joining an opposition political party or having been a civil servant from a different political side is also a risk factor resulting in a quick, unplanned departure from Venezuela.

7 The names and details of the people who shared their stories have been modified to ensure their safety.

Pedro⁷ was a member of a political party in Venezuela. He worked in his municipality. Belonging to an opposition party led to harassment, raids on his home, detention and threats against his family.

(...) I returned to my municipality. I went to the town hall, to my job. A few days later they sent me a message saying that they were in the municipality and that they were going to my house. My family was in the house, the children were asleep, I said "I'm not going to run away", it was not fair that this was happening. They came and said they had a warrant to search my house. They came in, armed (...) They checked the house and at least they respected my children, who were in their room sleeping, only peeking in to verify that they were minors.

(...) I was summoned to another municipality. I moved, they acted differently there. They put handcuffs on me in the room (...) They interrogated me and said they had evidence (...) In the search they found nothing, they just wanted an excuse. But they couldn't do anything, they warned me not to move from my home, to be in the municipality because in the next few days they were going to call me again.

I returned to my municipality, that day was very stressful, we had never gone through anything like that. I continued to work (...) On the street I felt a very intense pressure, not only towards myself but also towards my family. My youngest son, who was in preschool, was constantly being harassed by his teacher and even by the director, he was targeted. It was something very grotesque, and I saw that the situation was not going to change for Venezuela at that time and we were going to be the ones who would suffer the most. An acquaintance called me and told me that the best thing was for me to leave, because they had me on file and that the next time, they would probably not let me go. So, I thought the best thing was to leave the country. (Account 64, 2019).

Generalized violence. Security concerns

Robberies, extortion or even murder attempts are some of the reasons why some people decide to leave Venezuela. Shortages of cash, food, medicine and power outages put the safety of neighborhoods and cities even more at risk and become a catalyst for leaving the country. That was the story of the Perez family, who were entrepreneurs.

We were doing pretty well as a family, at first. But the country's economy began to decline, and insecurity and extortion increased. They stole our computers and information from the companies. In 2009 we began to receive calls, strong threats. (...) They were monitoring us all the time; it was quite traumatic. We thought that they were going to shoot and kill us at any moment, we decided to leave the state. We fled because there was a truck behind us. We were on that property for a year and a half.

We went back to our state and started up the company again, but in 2015, we were extorted again. Then, a critical economic situation for the country arise, and we went to another property. We had animals, but we had to sell them to eat. Our children were getting sick because of the poor nutrition, so we decided to leave.

After we left Venezuela and they found out, they expropriated our house. We have the intention of recovering it and selling it, but our relatives have told us not to return, better to lose the house. Because if we go back, they can kill us. For political reasons and because of the insecurity. (Account 29, 2019)

The violence and risks for the members of the Police Force

In addition to the general security factors, there are risks involved in working in the Venezuelan Armed Forces. This is the case of a policewoman whose long working hours and the risks she took in providing her service were combined with the lack of economic liquidity to support and feed her children.

It was a police officer. For us, it was about the responsibility, and what we had to do. (...) Then there were times when, because of the situation in the country, you are already in command, and you can't get out. And my children were left adrift, what about the food and everything else? And we weren't allowed to go out. Because I thought that at least I had a job. If, while I am alive, they (the State) didn't look after my family, which is the place where I work for, what if I was killed? We went out into the street, every day we had death over our shoulder. We knew we were going out, but we didn't know if we were coming back. Then I didn't see the point, suddenly I was out, and my children were in need. So, in view of all the situations that started to occur, this forced me to leave. (Focus Group, 2019)

In other cases, the economic and alimentary instability, are coupled with the "order" to violate human rights, and the risks that disobeying those orders brings:

He worked as an officer of the Bolivarian National Police. There is a point where one is forced to give up that work, because one is asked to oppress people who go out on the streets to ask for their rights. I quit that job because the government is so cynical that they told us that we should attack those who protest. Police pay is also miserable, no matter what rank you hold. I left Venezuela in 2019 (Focus Group, 2019).

Silent violence. Economic, social and cultural rights.

The factor that stands out most among the causes of the departure by Venezuelans is the current inability of the Venezuelan State to guarantee the rights to food, health, and education (OHCHR, 2019).

The lack of purchasing power, the shortage of food and medicine and/or its high costs; the lack of real access to medical care, either in hospitals or in medical centers, as well as the lack of educational opportunities for children, adolescents and young people, the absence of teachers, and the lack of money to access school classrooms or to buy educational materials, add to the confluence of factors that force individuals and entire families to leave Venezuela.

I was head of security for a bank in Venezuela. I worked, I am a single mother, it was very difficult with money. I am a mother of three children. I lived alone, I rented, I didn't have enough for the rent, I couldn't afford three meals a day. Food was beginning to become scarce. I had three children and it wasn't easy anymore. (...) I was full of despair. And the two girls have a different father, now deceased, I was the one in charge of them. I had to sell the roof of my house. I sold my phone, my AC, my TV, I sold everything because I was determined to migrate. No matter where I was during the day or at night, I would do whatever it took, as long as my children did not continue to be malnourished. Because the youngest suffered from severe acute malnutrition. Even in the hospital where I arrived, they have her hospitalized. I sold everything. (Focus Group, 2019)

Health

The lack of access to medical treatment and the high cost of medicines is another cause for entire families or individuals to decide to leave Venezuela. This is particularly true for people with chronic diseases and those living with HIV. Another problem is that of sexual and reproductive health and the difficulty of accessing family planning methods and specialized care for pregnant and nursing women. In general, the shortage of medicines in hospitals, medical centers and pharmacies often forces the search for drugs in the underground market at high economic and security costs:

We made the decision to leave our country, mainly, to have the possibility of getting Mario's medicine. He is diabetic and it was very difficult for us to get his medicine there. The mother of a friend of ours (...) sent him the medicine from Spain (...) but there was a time when she could no longer do so, and we had to look for them in the 'black' market at excessive costs. Sometimes a single injection of insulin cost us to five times the minimum wage, more than what we were paid, and it was good for approximately 15 or 20 days, it was very expensive, and it was very difficult for us. There were months when we couldn't get the insulin, we would spend a month or so looking for insulin, without being able to inject it, that was disturbing him, it was deteriorating, at one point he even weighed 56 kilos, that was worrying. (Account 59, 2019)

Access to health and treatment

I am a physiotherapist, I am not practicing, but I am not losing hope. I left Venezuela with my husband and my son. I am a struggling mother.

When I found out I was pregnant, I took an HIV test and it came back positive (...) so did my husband. Not having my child was not an option, besides it is not legal to have an abortion, I could be put in jail. They told me I had to be in medical supervision. After two months I started taking the retroviral treatment. I was taking them the whole time, until I gave birth, my son came early and was born at seven months. I went into labor and my water broke, the child swallowed the liquid and became contaminated. Anyway, I had a C-section. There was no turning back, the baby was contaminated and that caused a lot of health problems.

Several doctors attended to him in the clinic, because of the problem of equine feet, he walks

on his toes, and, in addition, he was diagnosed with an inflammation in the adenoids, a problem that needs surgery. Everyone who has seen my son is a specialist, but he did not have the adenoid surgery and the inflammation worsened over time, the perforation in his ear is increasing, he has a secretion and granulomas. Also, he has a skin problem that also needs surgery.

In Venezuela we took him to several places, to the hospital with the Cuban doctors, to another hospital and they told me that they were going to operate on him, but they did not.

We left because we were really concerned about my son's health and ours. Because we had no way to take the treatments in our city. We want to improve our child's quality of life, and get the medical care and surgeries he needs. (Account 23, 2019). (Account 23, 2019)

Food

Many of the stories from parents and entire families describe how one of the main reasons for the decision to leave their cities is the lack of food to adequately feed their children. In many cases families are forced to eat once a day, prioritizing the food for the children while sacrificing the food for the adults.

We would go days without eating, and my brothers would go home and tell me 'sister, I'm hungry'. They were small, 6 and 7 years old, it was painful for me not to have anything to give them. The little we had, we chose to give it to them, because we could endure it. (Account 20, 2019).

People recounted how hyperinflation has a direct effect on the cost of basic foods, which is coupled with a shortage of these, long lines and conflict in the neighborhoods or areas where the state distributes the "CLAP" food boxes, which also do not cover basic nutritional needs. This situation is also described in the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet⁸. (OACDH, 2019)

This situation has a special negative effect on women, who in most cases are in charge of providing food for their families and who, according to the stories, had the task of "solving" the food situation for the whole family: looking for food in the stores or standing in long lines to get the boxes provided by the State.

I told my sister because we are the two sisters. I told her, "well sister, you stay here with the boys and I'm going to loot. We are going to give the boys something to eat". I don't know, I'll bring something, even if it's a package of flour or bread, to make food for the children. (Focus Group, 2019)

Education

Barriers in access to primary and secondary education for children and adolescents are evident, including lack of teachers, lack of school meals, lack of water and electricity services, insufficient educational materials, among others.⁹

One of the reasons why young people migrate is access to real education. Many of them were university or technology students in Venezuela. Many of them, despite having guaranteed access to education, lack of transportation, lack of food, and economic restrictions to acquire the necessary study materials led them to decide to leave their studies and go to other countries. "I was studying graphic design and working in a supermarket, I spent two years working. I couldn't continue working because of the situation and I couldn't continue to pay for my studies," said Juan, as he shared his story in one of the focus groups. (Focus Group, 2019)

⁸ A/HRC/41/18/SP, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Geneva, 2019.

⁹ The Venezuela Humanitarian Response Plan with Humanitarian Needs, July 2020.

Part two:
Transit
routes



Although during the research we identified cases in which people arrived by air to host cities, the vast majority arrived by land looking for the closest and safest border points.

For people arriving by land, Colombia is one of the obligatory stops, in most cases. The border crossings at Maicao (La Guajira) and Cúcuta (Norte de Santander) are two of the most used.

The visa requirements imposed by different countries, including Peru¹⁰, Ecuador¹¹ and Chile have not necessarily reduced the number of people crossing their borders and entering their countries. On the contrary, this generates an increase in transit through irregular passages; fees by processors and people who "facilitate" the crossing by "trochas", train tracks or rivers, and exposing refugees and migrants to greater risks of protection, making them even more vulnerable, especially children and adolescents, the elderly, those with illnesses, people with disabilities, women and LGBTI+ people who sometimes suffer gender violence.

We left in 2019, there were six adults and two girls in total. My brother, my sister-in-law who has a disability, my two older nieces, the husband of one of them, the two girls and me. We traveled by bus, through San Antonio (from Táchira) to Cúcuta (Colombia). We arrived in Cúcuta in August and were there for one day. We crossed with the Andean Charter, the girls and me. My passport was expired and not stamped. There we bought the bus tickets to Rumichaca. On the way the bus crashed four times, so when we arrived in Rumichaca the border was already closed. We never changed buses, it was an accident and it took hours to fix it, this happened over and over again.

¹⁰ <https://r4v.info/es/documents/download/72443>

¹¹ Statement by the Working Group on Venezuelan Human Mobility, Visa imposed by Ecuador on Venezuelan migrants and refugees goes against international human rights obligations, 26 August 2019.

Until we arrived in Rumichaca, we should have arrived on the 25th before they closed. Because from the 26th they have already started to ask for the temporary visa in Ecuador.

As we could not cross the border, some "advisors" took us to a place, a house, where some people arrived in a van, they told us that they would get us through for 30 dollars, in the end they got us through for 20. They took us in the van along the trail, it was a road that went through that mountain (...) They left us on the road. They told us to get off and how to continue down the road. And they took us down there, a little town. So, we took a bus to Quito. (Focus Group, 2019)

How xenophobia, discrimination and violence are normalized

The conditions in which refugees and migrants leave Venezuela cause them a great emotional burden. "The most traumatic part was leaving my family. I don't care what any city or country is like. Leaving my family, that affects me in every way," shared one of the participants of the Focus Group. (Focus Group, 2019)

In addition to the feeling of sadness and nostalgia, there are acts of violence and xenophobia that in many cases are normalized by statements such as "it's normal" or "we're fine, but..."

Lengthy raids in the Venezuelan *postas* or *alcabalas*, the economic extortion while passing through each one and/or the confiscation or theft of their belongings once they no longer have money, is perceived as something that "affects us" for deciding to leave the country. In many cases, people are prepared to face this, carrying cash or belongings that they know they must leave along the way until they reach the border.

"Like everyone else, on the way here, they took money from me. At the end of three *alcabalas* they took personal things from me, I had no problems the rest of the way," said a young Venezuelan nursing student (Focus Group, 2019). Many refugees and migrants say that the hardest part of the journey was leaving Venezuela.

We traveled together, my girlfriend and I, by bus from Caracas to San Cristobal. The trip was excellent, until we reached the border. I was carrying a tablet and my partner was carrying another one, one of those Canaima tablets that the government gives to high school students and college students and that it is forbidden to take out of Venezuela. The worst thing was that when we arrived at the border, they searched us and found the Canaima tablet and put it in a small room. I didn't know I couldn't take them.

She was horrified, because they made her undress and checked her completely, they wanted to record her. They threatened to destroy her passport if she didn't. And she obviously took off her clothes and they searched her. And in the end, they told her that she couldn't take the tablet, so she had to return. They did it with malice. So, I went back with her because I wasn't going to leave her behind. We threw away the cover and she put the tablet inside her sweater, and we went back in, and they didn't tell us anything. That was by the Venezuelan security side. (Account 47, 2019)

The payment to pass through the paths (*trochas*) or non-regular roads has been normalized. Rates between USD 10 and USD 20 in Colombia or Ecuador, Peru or Chile are assumed as something to be "compulsory". "We have to", nobody questions it, they see it as a natural obligation in their mobility process. On the borders between Venezuela and Colombia, the people that "help" them are identified as "*tramitadores*" (processors) who can be of either nationality and are the people that "collaborate" with them to cross the border either by the *trocha* or *la raya*, the regular border crossing.

In addition to all this, there are explicit xenophobic messages and behaviors present at border crossings and on the roads.

When we were passing that bridge, the people of Colombia were shouting at us, "get off, go through the road, leave the sidewalks free for the Colombians. Venezuelans get off. Walk on the road". They yelled at us as if we were a plague entering the country.

And I thought to myself, "well, this is where the learning begins". Listening to those comments... we have learned to treat each other as equals, and suddenly you receive those comments, it was something impactful. (Focus Group, 2019)

It was a long and tiring trip, without much problem, only when we arrived at Tulcan (Ecuador), a man who sold the bus tickets was hurrying us, they treated us badly, and he told us, "Venezuelans have to be treated like dogs". Then I answered, "if we are dogs, then it was a dog that freed your country, because Simon Bolivar was Venezuelan". (Account 01, 2019)

Colombia

The routes in Colombia are reported to be the most difficult for refugees and migrants. On the one hand, these routes are the first ones people encounter when leaving Venezuela; then the diverse and difficult Colombian topography that implies crossing the country from east to west or from north to south through three mountain ranges into the Andes. Whether you enter through Maicao, Cúcuta or Arauca, if one wishes to continue to other cities in the country or reach Ecuador, Peru, Chile or any other country in South America, one must cross mountain ranges, moors and valleys, where refugees and migrants face different climatic temperatures and difficult roads, many full of curves and difficult traffic conditions.

We went through many towns, we walked for 20 days as we were asking for work, but we couldn't get any. We went through Cúcuta, through Medellín, we slept in the mountains, we asked for money and food, which we had never done before. We crossed the Páramo de Berlín, Pamplona, Los Palomos, Chinchiná, and arrived here, in Cali. We had to cross the Páramo on foot. It was 8:30 at night when we crossed the moor. (Account 19, 2019)

Colombia's topography and climate are combined with the security situation. An unresolved armed conflict, guerrilla groups, paramilitary groups, armed groups operating outside the law and common criminals, links to illegal economies (such as illegal mining or illegal crops) and the high risk that children, adolescents and young people have of being recruited by these groups, are some of the difficulties that refugees and migrants face.

Trocha Maracaibo – Maicao: “extortion and armed people”

The route from Maracaibo to Maicao is one that thousands of Venezuelans have followed during their departure from Venezuela. Either by "la raya", as they call the regular official entry, or by "la trocha", the irregular roads. The Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows lists La Guajira as the third department in Colombia with the largest number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, with 161,106 people (GIFMM, 2020).

During their exodus from Venezuela along this route, Venezuelans report the presence of people armed with "sticks", "machetes" and in some cases firearms, who control the "mecates" (tollbooths) every few kilometers. These people control and stop the cars traveling these routes to extort money from the driver and, in some cases, from the passengers. "The journey was horrible, the people who we paid frightened us, they were armed, they pulled machetes on us and we had to pay a lot so they wouldn't hurt us," shared one of the interviewees. (Account 07, 2019)

On other occasions, when people don't have cash to pay the gunmen, they steal their goods or belongings:

My trip was a bit traumatic too because there were too many difficulties. There was a truck that they call "chirichera", you see many people traveling in, they brought many goods, they brought many things. And the "guajiros" who collect "mecate", if they are not paid, they want to steal from the people. There were many people who didn't have the money to pay, so they took goods and many things from them. (Focus Group, 2019)

Some women who have traveled the *trocha* recount that there have been cases of sexual violence. "They told me that they wouldn't take me with them in shorts and they gave me a blanket," said one woman in one of the focus groups, to which another woman replied, "If they like a woman, they make her get out of the car and keep her".

From there we went through the 'trocha', all those people had weapons, it was really ugly. They wanted me to get down with the two girls because I was on the front. My husband was in the back with the oldest. They didn't get us down, because I told the man that I needed to get to Colombia because my baby could die. We begged them, my husband got on his knees. (Focus Group, 2019)

The road from Maracaibo to Maicao

I entered Maicao through the "trochas" with my brother and my two daughters. That was in 2018. On the "trochas" we had to pay the "mecates" (...) They took 500 bolivars for each of us, so it was 2,000, between my two girls, because they charged for them, my brother and me.

When we told them that we didn't have anything else, they hit my brother on the head. And they were going to shoot him. My six-year-old daughter jumped on top of my brother and daughter jumped on top of my brother and hugged him.

She told the man, "please, not my father, not my father". He helped me raise them. By chance, one of the men was from a region I knew. My sister lived there, I knew him, and he knew me. Then, I turned and asked the other guy to please help me and tell him to leave my brother alone (...) Otherwise my brother would have been killed. We didn't have any more, we needed 10 bolivars. We didn't have it. If you don't have it, they pull you down and hurt you. But that's why it wasn't easy at all going on the 'trocha'. (Focus Group, 2019)

Caminantes (walkers): “pies para que te tengo” (sic).

As already mentioned, many Venezuelan refugees and migrants make their journey with few economic resources. Some sell their belongings and undertake the journey with the little that they have. The costs of land tickets and the fees charged by “tramitadores” (processors) and people who “help” them with paperwork and border crossings are very high. That is why many resort to walking and crossing Colombia in search of a host city to settle in or reach another country.

Most Venezuelans start their journey from Cúcuta (North Santander), from there, they walk to Bogotá, Medellín, Cali or to the border with Ecuador. On their way they carry clothes, some belongings like pots, some food and a piece of their life in Venezuela. On the way they leave their belongings to free themselves from the burden. As they pass through some cities and towns, humanitarian organizations give them backpacks with food and hygiene and food kits. In Support Spaces¹², in different places, they receive information and orientation. Cases with specific needs are identified and referred, and comprehensive basic services are provided to meet their most urgent needs. Most of the time people make groups to avoid walking alone and to seek protection. Men who travel alone prefer to walk with women and children: “those who had the best chance of getting a ride are children and women. So, the mothers,” said one of the men.

I followed the migrant's route on foot, my goal was to continue to Bogotá. At the job I had in Cúcuta I collected some money for the trip, and I found out that the Red Cross in Patio Bonito, just outside of Cúcuta, was offering help so that people could continue their journey. I got there, to Patio Bonito and they gave me a food and medicine kit. I walked out of there and then took a bus to Pamplona, which is a cold area, and stayed in a shelter that night. In that shelter they gave us clothes and a meal, then one had to continue. (Account 15, 2019)

Many refugees and migrants walk during the day. At night they look for villages, town squares or shelters to spend the night. Some sleep on the roadside looking for safe places.

They all ask for rides (hitchhiking) from cargo trucks that take them from town to town or from city to city on different routes.

On their way, Colombian people come out to help, to encourage or to lend their hand to the *caminantes* (walkers). Some offer them food, others clothing, some set up improvised shelters where they adapt ranches with mattresses and spaces for men and for women. The kindness and generosity of the Colombians who help them is always recognized.

That truck gave us a ride to the middle of Ipiales, from then on, we started walking all four of us. About two hours later we saw a small town, some houses. We came across a police station. The police stopped us, bought us soda, cookies and bread. They helped us. They themselves stopped a truck, and we started crying. That truck took us to Rumichaca and we paid them by unloading the goods it was carrying. We arrived there at about 9 or 10 at night. (Account 47, 2019)

However, in some cases, truck drivers charge *caminantes* for rides.

The next day I went to the Red Cross and there they restocked me to continue the journey. There, a truck gave us a ride in exchange for three cans of tuna or sausages and took us to the next shelter. We arrived, but it was too crowded, and we had to stay on the side of the road. The cold was relentless and did not let us sleep. In the morning, another truck arrived and gave us a lift, in exchange for three more cans, and left us near the next Red Cross shelter, because there was an alcabala on the road. We had to walk for a while until we reached the snowy area, through the *Páramo de Berlín*. There they gave us another donation, and they kept asking for three cans to take us to the next shelter. There were many of us and the trucks were full of canned goods. (Account 15, 2019)

Many women walk out of Venezuela with their small children and face the long journey with them through Colombia and sometimes Ecuador. This journey with the children becomes particularly difficult, as it poses risks to the health and life of the child and in many cases of the mother.

Walking with a baby while pregnant

In January 2019, my baby had an accident, I had left him with his grandmother, on his father's side, and she let him out. He was run over by a truck and had fractures, he almost died. Then my mom sent me the tickets to come here. I walked to Colombia, with a suitcase and my little boy, I carried him for a while, and he walked for a while. I didn't know I was pregnant.

The journey was tough because it was raining all the way. The baby was covered so that he wouldn't get wet, he was one year and six months old. He was very delicate because he had a skull fracture and intestinal tract damage as a result of the accident in Venezuela. I brought him with me at risk because he could not travel. But when I saw that there was no medicine there, I took him. He walked for short periods of time, but I mostly carried him. I took the brunt, but many helped me. On the way they helped us a lot, they gave us something to drink, to eat and to wear.

I came with some friends, we were like 10 people, they helped me, because I felt tired, but I didn't know it was because of the pregnancy.

In Colombia we received food. We kept walking, walking, until we found help to travel. That's what we did. For a while we walked, and sometimes people gave us a lift. On the way I started throwing away clothes, the clothes that my son was no longer going to wear, because it was too much weight he was carrying. The baby had chronic diarrhea, but we received diapers because he was so young.

In Colombia they didn't want to let us through. I had my papers in order, but many of my friends didn't. They wanted to beat them up, and they didn't want to let them through. They insulted us so much. The verbal abuse hurt more than the physical abuse. But we got through regardless.

The baby arrived in Rumichaca with pneumonia and was treated there. I couldn't hospitalize him, because I didn't have the means. But they helped us a lot, they gave us a lot of medicine, food and beverages to hydrate us. And I had found 50,000 pesos that helped me get there. We walked for almost 17 days. (Account 51, 2019)

¹² The Support Spaces is an inter-agency initiative of the R4V Platform, implemented by the GIFMM in Colombia and other national coordination platforms in countries such as Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Brazil, Argentina and Bolivia. For more information visit <https://r4v.info/es/working-group/234?sv=39&geo=0>

Los Hinchas: xenophobic attacks on transit routes.

The first stories place them on the route between Bogotá and Cali, on the pass between Ibagué and Neiva. They are groups of people who attack the *caminantes* in their journey through the country. They are described as a group of people with soccer team shirts who get into trucks and start attacking the Venezuelan people in the back of the truck with sticks.

We were about to arrive in Ibagué, but we got a ride in a trailer again, it was getting dark. There the 'hinchas' got in and hurt us, beat us up and stole from us. The man in the trailer saw what was going on and pulled them down. He gave a lift to 30 more Venezuelans and kept going and going. He drove through a cold, cold moor until he reached Neiva. There we got off. (Account 66, 2019)

There were additional stories and testimonies about aggressions by the 'hinchas' on other routes in Colombia. Today, it seems that this is happening in different parts of the country.

On the moor, before we arrived in Medellín, we were walking, and someone yelled at us and told us to get on the truck. Inside, the 'hinchas' were hiding, but only one of them called to us. A lady told us not to get in, and when we saw that they had machetes, sticks, pipes, we left and hid. We continued walking and later others arrived and fortunately we didn't get on the truck either. I even cried out of fear, I had never been through this before. (Account 19, 2019)

During the interviews and Focus Group in Cali, Colombia, refugees and migrants shared several of their stories about the 'hinchas'. One story in particular drew attention: groups of the 'hinchas' were now in Cali, attacking refugees and migrants who spend the night around the transport terminal.

They came to the terminal the day before yesterday and called the police. They were fewer and we were thankful because two kids were awake and the kids started shouting that the 'hinchas' were coming, because there are so many kids there and all of them woke up.

When the cops came and we told them about the 'hinchas' coming. They only looked at them and did nothing about it. They let them get on the bus because there were two buses filled with them coming. The cops escorted them. They didn't do anything to them. (Focus Group, 2019)

Gender-based violence on transit routes

From the testimonies received, it is possible to affirm that refugee and migrant women have the highest risk of suffering gender violence during their journey. Discrimination in this context is combined with xenophobia and sexualized stereotypes about Venezuelan women, exposing them, many times, to violence and sexual aggression. Sometimes, even, conditioning them to receive help during their transit from city to city.

It left walking in 2018. I was told to take a highway where trailers gave lifts. And there I spent two days waiting. All along the Barranquilla highway. Finally, a man gave me a lift to Cali. But the man had other intentions. When I arrived in Cali, he told me, "well, I brought you to Cali, you have to pay me". But how could I pay him if I didn't have any money? I told him I didn't have any money, and he said, "well, you know, you're very pretty, you have to pay me". So, I told him that I wasn't going to do it, that he would have to kill me first. He wanted to beat me up, but some Colombian police arrived, I told them what was happening, and they took him away. They left me there for two hours, gave me food and water. And they let the man go. I told them I needed to go on and continue walking. (Account 38, 2019)

Gay and transgender people are among the groups most at risk along the route. Sex in exchange for food, a lift or something to drink are some of the situations they face to continue their journey, as one trans woman shared during her interview (see account 42 above).

Human trafficking and sexual violence on the roads

As we will read later in the section on *sexual exploitation of refugee and migrant women*, some Venezuelan women are "recruited" for sexual purposes from their hometowns. Relatives, friends or other women offer them work in Colombia, in many cases without clearly explaining the destination. This situation is aggravated by the risks they face during the transit route.

I was also brought here by some friends, who invited me to work 'on whatever came up', at least that's what they told me.

We were in Camp Two, they were charging us fines too. We had to run from one place to the next. They told us that the guerrillas were going to kill us, that the 'paracos' were going to catch us. We had to ask for rides, but they wouldn't give us a ride for free. So, I came with two girls who had more experience than me, or perhaps they used me as a key. I was the one who 'whored' myself the most in the lifts we got, because they would grab me. (Focus Group, 2019)

Ecuador: "The Ibarra case pointed the way"

In January 2019, an act of violence brought mourning to the municipality of Ibarra, Imbabura, in northern Ecuador. This event marked the stories of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador in a very negative way. Expressions and acts of xenophobia began to affect some of the people who were in transit...

Once we were in Tulcan, the journey started getting worse, because we already knew Colombia a bit. We didn't know much about Ecuador and then it happened to us. In Tulcan we started to work, we felt the force of the merciless xenophobia of the Ecuadorians because it had already happened; the man who had killed a girl. Seeing people being taken out of shelters, seeing them run. (Focus Group, 2019)

Story "The dogs saved us"

(...) Then we started to go down, we walked a long way and under the sun. Until a truck stopped and took us to Otavalo, it left us at the entrance, in a place called 'El Catatumbo', there we ate thanks to other Venezuelans. That night we stayed in a town square.

We were tired. My brother-in-law and friend went to work. We stayed in the square. There was a lot of movement that day, but we didn't know what was happening. We fell asleep in the square and suddenly we saw some very mysterious men coming towards us. I woke up my sisters and we ran out, one of them saying "kill them, kill them". We ran and ran, barefoot. They said, "look for them, look for them". Some dogs came out and scared them off. We ended up in the house of some men who helped us. In the park they took things, almost everything. Except the wallet because we never let go of it.

In the afternoon, my brother-in-law and our friend arrived, and people explained to us what had happened: a Venezuelan killed an Ecuadorian woman, that was what was happening when they attacked us, stole our things and tried to rape and kill us. That's why we decided to go to Quito. (Account 66, 2019)

...or even once settled in Ecuador.

Then the news came on. I didn't even know what was happening, since I didn't have a TV (...) and I didn't even know. And he told me that a fellow countryman had killed a pregnant woman and I don't know what else. That we were all the same, that we all came from the same branch, and I don't know what else. He started to check if there was anything missing in the house. I had stayed there for four months. (Account 39, 2019)

From Peru to Chile... more violence

Changes in migratory conditions or requirements for entry visas in Ecuador, Peru and Chile have added to the list of complications that Venezuelan refugees and migrants have to face during their journey.

I was determined to travel to Chile because I have an uncle who has been here for three years, and he offered to welcome me into his home. I decided to come when it was still possible to enter without a visa, but just that week that I was going to travel, they established that whoever intended to live in Chile needed to have the democratic responsibility visa to enter. In July 2018, I started to apply for it at the Chilean Consulate in Puerto Ordaz, in Venezuela. I followed the procedures for about five or six months, and I fulfilled the requirements they asked for: an apostilled criminal record and a passport with 18 months of validity, and it was approved in 2019. It is a visa that grants permission to stay in the country to those who want to live in Chile. It is a residence permit for one year, with it you can get the RUT (Rol Único Tributario), you can renew it for one more year, or apply for the permanent residence. (Account 74, 2019)

Some professionals, encouraged by friends or work colleagues, motivated them to come to Chile, a country that at the time allowed the entrance of Venezuelan people and facilitated the homologation of degrees, thus expanding work opportunities.

I was only passing through Ecuador and Peru because my destination was always Chile. The Chilean government had issued a decree accepting the entry of Venezuelans with expired passports and identity cards.

In addition, there was a precedent, some professionals had validated their degrees in Chile. As a professional, this was my opportunity. I spoke to a colleague in Chile and she offered to receive me. (Account 02, 2019)

In their journey they crossed Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. In each country they faced different challenges. Some refugees and migrants were victims of abuse by national authorities.

When we arrived at the terminal in Lima, we had to ask for money on the street to buy tickets to Tacna, the border with Chile. It was 80 soles -almost 24 dollars-. We waited all night at the bus office, to leave for Tacna, on the 8 am bus. At about 6 am the Peruvian authorities arrived to do a search. We were still sleeping when they saw us and told us: "Venezuelans, your passports". Shouting, and saying "but quickly, quickly". We had them stored and it took us a while to get them out. The officer was upset and wanted to make a fuss. He began to say that we Venezuelans ignored them and did not listen to them. He wanted everything done quickly and began to shout to make us look bad. We didn't want to argue, or respond, or fight. We kept quiet to avoid making the situation worse. It was a bad moment that he put us through. The officer was very rude and humiliated us. We showed him the documentation and moved from there, because many Venezuelans have been victims of mistreatment by the Peruvian authorities. That is part of the xenophobia. (Account 02, 2019)

In other cases, the loss of their identity documents, lack of money and/or changes in regulations have made it difficult, but not impossible, for them to reach their destination.

After being in Peru for three months, my wife was told that she could not get a visa because my documentation and that of my daughters had not been completed. During the following week my documentation arrived, but not that of my daughters. I went again with my documentation and the date of entry to Peru. We did all the paperwork for nothing because we were denied the visa.

We decided to continue to Tacna, we stayed there for two more months because of the requirements they were asking for. They asked us for the criminal records of Peru, and they cost 30 dollars with a certificate of authenticity. We spent a lot of money for nothing. They rejected our papers because we had been in Peru for more than three months.

Since we did not have the visa, we asked for asylum in Chile, because I felt threatened in my country. But the PDI spoke to me very clearly and told me that those who have been in Peru for more than three months did not have the opportunity to obtain a visa to go to Chile. At that time, it was very clear to me that I could not enter through the authorized route. I had run out of options. (Account 03, 2019)

The closure of the borders and the various factual obstacles to regular passage have not been an obstacle for some of the refugees and migrants in their efforts to reach their destination, either for family reunification or in the search for security and stability. Some of them decide to take non-regular pathways, putting their lives and those of their families at risk.

At that entrance they didn't ask me for the bag, but they did ask me for my visa. I had with me the decree that had been issued by the Chilean government, but they still asked me for my visa. By then, there were already many Venezuelans at the border wanting to enter. We were all homeless, desperate. Many decided to go through uncontrolled places and routes. I decided to take a risk, because I could not give up, there were people in Venezuela who depended on me. I decided to enter through that route, I know I did something wrong, but my circumstances forced me to do so.

I walked through the desert that divides Peru from Chile, specifically along the railroad tracks. I went with other Venezuelans. That was in May, from 11 at night until 5 or 6 in the morning. We only had water and some clothes with us. Cold, hungry. We walked until we reached Arica. When I stepped on Chilean land I looked for the terminal, because there were Venezuelans in the same condition. Rejected at the border. (Account 02, 2019)

Part three:
Host cities



Migrants sometimes reach a destination which is often uncertain, not chosen or simply the one available. Some refugees and migrants arrive at host cities by chance: they ran out of money, were offered jobs, or got tired of walking and going south.

My goal was to get to Lima with my 8-year-old daughter, but now I don't. In Zarumilla they offered me a job in construction, I am waiting for them to confirm it. My sister is going to continue to Lima because her husband is there. She is telling me to go with her, but I don't want to, because whatever I can do there, I can also do it here. (Account 68, 2019)

Other people were clear about where they wanted to go. "We always had a clear idea that we wanted to get to Lima", shared two sisters who crossed Colombia and Ecuador to get to Lima. Others that are still on the road insist on reaching Chile.

In Venezuela, children had not been in school for eight months. So, we decided that the children should go to study in Chile. We sold everything we had and sent them to Chile. My partner, who is Colombian, and I left for Chile. We went down. Since we work in circus art, we started from Cúcuta, went out from Cúcuta and went through all the towns. We were in several cities in Colombia, until we reached the border. In Ipiales (...) from there we passed through Otavalo, Cayambe, Quito and (...) well, today I continue the journey by land to reach them in Chile. My family is in Chile. (Focus Group, 2019)

**"We didn't know what we were up against, what to expect."
The surprise**

Many refugees and migrants admit that they did not know what they would find when they arrived in the host cities and places.

Most Venezuelans left because of the lack of basic health services, education and especially because of the difficulties in finding food. Others left for security and/or political reasons. Some said they had their own home, a place to live with the minimum conditions for living. Facing the new, the unknown, search for work, schooling for children, search for medical and health services, and having to be homeless or live in precarious housing conditions has been a shock to many Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

Once in Chile, we had nowhere to go and went to live with my cousin. But he lived in the most dangerous neighborhood in Arica. The house was in front of the municipal dump. There were cockroaches everywhere, insects, worms, a foul smell, a lot of pollution.

I had only two rooms: in one my cousin stayed with his wife; in the other, a very small room, my family, that was six people, and in the living room another seven people stayed.

During the day my cousin and his wife would leave early for work. My dad and I would get up early and go for walks. Since we didn't know the place, we would walk and walk, and we didn't have money to take a bus. That's how we would spend our days.

I started looking for a job and couldn't get one, so my dad and I would go around trying to get a job. We had no food, we had to take food out of the garbage. Sometimes we went three or four days without eating, asking God to help us. The days went by and we couldn't get work.

We went on like this for about 10 or 12 days. After that we were able to start earning money. I got a guitar in the garbage, went to the port of Arica and started singing on the tour boats. With the coins they gave me I started to buy food for both of us. My dad got a job at the fish market. (Account 01, 2019)

Opportunities

Upon arrival in a new city, often without relatives or acquaintances, refugees and migrants have encountered not locals or settled migrants who have helped them, as well as networks of international and national organizations, church organizations, particularly the Catholic Church, and the help of parishes and small churches that have welcomed and supported them in diverse ways.

Support networks: Organizations, the church, the community

The role of the different churches, especially the Catholic Church and its organizations, has been very important. Various accounts mention the role of the Church, shelters, community kitchens, Support Spaces and listening spaces as vital in their resilience, in their integration and in overcoming the various obstacles migrants and refugees have had to face.

The importance of facilities such as shelters, soup kitchens and/or Support Spaces for Venezuelan refugees and migrants goes beyond humanitarian work, to providing basic services and addressing needs. These places also provide the opportunity to feel useful, to help the nationals who manage these spaces, to integrate and in many cases to feel heard, to know that they have safe space to express themselves.

When I was told about the Pastoral I started to assist with psychosocial support. They were a great blessing; they helped us because we were in mourning from having left Venezuela, from having left behind all the comforts, to being here and sleep on the floor, having nothing or sharing a bathroom with 20 people. (Focus Group, 2019).

Spaces for listening and helping, designed for women survivors of gender-based violence, including sexual violence and sexual exploitation, are vitally important for the emotional and physical safety of women.

Some of them say they feel comfortable in these spaces, where they can talk and cry without hiding, share their realities without feeling judged and share with women who have gone through the same situations. (Focus Group, 2019)

Community kitchens

In the different cities, refugees and migrants find community kitchens. In some cases, these spaces are new. In others, some of the kitchens offer food to people on the street, people with special economic needs, or forcibly displaced nationals.

In all cases, these community kitchens now include Venezuelan refugees and migrants among their beneficiaries. The kitchen of the Pastoral Social CARITAS in Tulcán (Ecuador), has served up to 150 lunches in one day to Venezuelan refugees and migrants. In Cúcuta, for example, there are eight community kitchens managed by the Pastoral Social. Between all the community kitchens, as many as 5,000 meals a day can be served, although it is very likely that the figure is higher (Cúcuta context, 2019).

In some of the community kitchens, such as the one in the city of Cali, Colombia, refugees and migrants join in the work. A group of volunteers arrives in the morning and leaves in the afternoon, all involved in the kitchen work and helping their compatriots.

We collaborate in the kitchen. we don't get paid. What we do is collaborate to mitigate the mistreatment of Venezuelans. Colombians work here. And we help mitigate a bit because we know the people that come here. We try to make things easier. Because we [Venezuelans] have aggressive attitudes against other people who are helping us. Unfortunately, we don't appreciate the good things that happen to us, we try to turn the good things into bad things for everyone. (Focus Group, 2019)

These activities are carried out daily by men and women who are giving their lives with generosity to the cause of refugees and migrants, members of the Departments of Human Mobility of the Episcopal Conferences, Religious Congregations such as the Scalabrinians, Jesuits, Franciscans, Pastorales Sociales

CARITAS, and many other organizations of the Catholic Church.

Places for assistance: shelters, safe spaces, support spaces and others

As well as on the transit routes and in the host cities, refugees and migrants find different Support Spaces¹³, safe spaces and places of temporary shelter. These places can have different names: Shelter Houses, Migrant Houses, Transit Houses, shelters, residences, reception centers, temporary centers, care centers. They all aim to serve as a safe space for refugee and migrant men, women and children of different ages and profiles. In the temporary shelters, the time of stay can vary between the different places and depending on the needs of each person or family. In some of these centers, medical attention and training are also provided to the people who stay there.

I am 31 years old. I live with my mother who is 61 years old and my daughter who is 6 years old. I was a butcher and did repair work on computers, Canaima tablets and telephones.

I suffer a physical disability due to a violent incident. In 2017 a neighbor shot me, which pierced my vital organs. I almost died.

(...) We decided that I would come first. In 2018, I left for Maicao, I went to the 'Trece' through the 'Trocha', by foot.

(...) During that time my leg became very swollen and I spent almost two months in a hospital in Maicao.

(...) Then (...) I looked for a shopping cart and started to sell pieces. I got some money and told her, "Mommy, come here, I have something savings, we'll be fine here, you're starving there". I got a van to take them away, my mom and my daughter. And they came through the 'trochas' in 2019.

(...) My mom met a girl who had a 2-month-old baby girl. She told her to come with her to Riohacha, to help her take care of the child. Then my mom came here, the lady gave her 5 dollars a day.

When my mom came to Riohacha, I got sick and went to the hospital in Maicao. I had just been in surgery and needed to rest. By then I had already been hospitalized three times here in Colombia. Since they knew my family was here, they sent me here. At the hospital they didn't charge me and helped me with the tickets.

Here in Riohacha, I looked for my mother and daughter and they welcomed us here at the Centro del Migrante¹⁴. At the Center we have been here for about a month. I signed up for the tents in Maicao¹⁵, where they were giving a helping hand, and with that I wanted to buy a Canaima device and start repairing, but they sent me here.

Here they tell me that the first thing is health, they have cured me, they have helped me with therapies. I spent a lot of time in bed, and I have an ulcer that won't heal. Here they bought me the cream. I've recovered quite a bit, I couldn't walk properly, I had a swollen foot. Here I've been able to rest. (Account 33, 2019)

Some of the shelters are intended for refugee and migrant women traveling alone, without husbands or children. They are safe spaces where they can sleep and share their challenges, achievements, information about aid sites, work and regularization processes with other women.

Thank God, a very kind lady, Peruvian, who is still our friend and is always concerned for us, told me, 'look, in the church behind the subway, Venezuelans gather and I think they have a project, let's go'. So, we went there.

And we went there, talked to the priest and he referred us to Sister Jenny, who is in charge of the project. We were also at a meeting there and through her we learned about this project. When we talked to the sister, on the second day, she said yes, there are two rooms, so move. Okay, we moved in.

Well, since we've been here it's really been a good thing. It's a blessing, because it is to feel like in a home, in a house, among family.

¹³ Support Spaces, <https://r4v.info/es/documents/download/75787>, March 2020

¹⁴ Refugee and Migrant Assistance Center - Majayura.

¹⁵ Comprehensive Care Center - CAI.

All of us are Venezuelans and we really feel the support, perhaps from your compatriots, we are in the same situation. The only purpose is to work to help others. To offer us support, to get to know each other better and to make us feel at home. Like a piece of your own land. (Focus Group, 2019)

Safe spaces for children

One of the most shocking things is to see the large number of Venezuelan refugee and migrant children who are on the streets selling things or accompanying their parents to work.

Both parents, but especially women, travel with their daughters and sons alone. During the research we met with families and/or women who had between two and six children. When they arrive in the cities where they decide to stay, they have nothing. Many of them do not even have a place to live or anything to eat. In this situation many resort to informal commerce, selling coffee on the streets, buying sweets to resell at traffic lights. Having no one with whom to leave their children, they decide to take them with them to walk the streets, regardless of the weather conditions and their needs for food and shelter.

"I needed to work, but the child was not studying. The little one needed daycare, I was taking the older one to sell. Then I would go with the little one and the older one" (...) "I know it's not right, but what else can we do? we can't leave him alone in the room or in the street," several women shared in a talk.

In some cities, national and international organizations have created friendly/protective spaces for Venezuelan refugee and migrant children, as well as for the host community. Some of these centers were visited in Barranquilla, Cúcuta and Riohacha in Colombia, and are present in several countries in the region.

Hogar Niña María, in Cúcuta. In February 2019, the Diocese of Cúcuta, decided to create a protective space for children between 2 and 7 years old. The objective is to offer children, children of Colombian returnees and Venezuelans, a safe place to receive food and psychosocial support. These children are the children of people who work in different occupations, some have informal jobs on the streets and others are homeless but have nowhere to leave them. They work as a daycare center, offer classes and allow children to stay all day while their parents work.

The Home operates full time, between 7am and 5pm Monday through Friday. In addition to preschool education, the children receive five meals a day - breakfast, lunch and two snacks - as well as psychosocial and recreational support. The space works with the support of volunteer personnel from different parishes and students from public and private entities such as the National Learning Service, the Protelco Institute and the Simon Bolivar University. They also receive grants from the private sector for the adaptation of facilities and the provision of services. In February 2019 they started receiving 25 children. By September 2019 they were receiving nearly 200 children daily (Cúcuta context, 2019).

La Milagrosa, in Barranquilla. "I hadn't been able to get seats at the school and they put the sign outside, saying that children who weren't studying could register here. That they could find where to receive them and us. We are waiting", one of the women shared in one of the focus groups. La Milagrosa has become a safe space, not only for children, but also for their parents. Faced with the difficulty of getting their children into school and having to go out to work with their children next door, La Milagrosa offers them the peace of mind that their children are not only going to school in an informal way, but that they are receiving at least three meals a day - two snacks and lunch - while their parents work, children can socialize with other children, both Venezuelan and Colombian.

I started going every day. I came back from selling and arrived every day because we have to persevere. And I would go, morning and evening. And the teacher said to me, "How old is your son?" My son was about two years old, but he was still one. I told her, he will be two years old in October and she said, "Your child will be two years old in two weeks, I'm going to take your place, I'm not going to cut it. On your child's second birthday you will come, and I will register him". And the day my son turned two, I went and got him registered. The next day he started going to school, I had more possibilities to work. (Focus Group, 2019)

Another opportunity that La Milagrosa has provided is to include women/mothers in the program, through training and workspaces with the children, as well as psychological support for the women/mothers.

Coming to the meetings, they ask us for "mommies" for childhood level. In other words, we have to be mothers at least. We were selected. There were nine of us among 20.

Here they have the workshop leaders, who are the professionals, who are in charge of each room and we are the auxiliary moms. There are two of us in each group, helping the workshop leader. In total there are three of us per group of children. (...)

They guided us psychologically, told us what to do. The psychologists were our helping hand here, I think. The lawyer, he guided us with the routes of attention, what we should do, what process we should take. What we could do with the PEP and what we could not do. I mean, they were like, that helping hand that helped us here. Both myself and the people who benefited from the project. I believe that from that moment on our lives began to change. (Focus Group, 2019)

Work and social inclusion

As discussed below, one of the most important challenges that refugees and migrants point out when they arrive at their host and settlement is access to work, under dignified and non-discriminatory conditions.

Many Venezuelan refugees and migrants have a high level of schooling. The vast majority are high school graduates and many others have technical or professional degrees, some with two degrees or a master's degree. Some had a stable job in Venezuela, and some women worked in the care of their families.

In many of the cases in which a successful insertion into the local economy has been achieved, either through employment in dignified conditions or through productive projects, the support and/or guidance of social, church and/or international organizations has mediated.

In Ecuador, refugees and migrants have found support through "livelihood" projects, through which they "seek to improve the living conditions of families in human mobility and refugee status," said the advisor to one of the church organizations working with the Venezuelan population. Through the direct participation of refugees and migrants, "the idea is to encourage a culture of saving, entrepreneurship and self-employment," he added. To this end, training and education is provided through the stakeholders. The organizations provide constant support to design a business plan and access to credit under favorable conditions.

The organizations also seek to familiarize refugees and migrants with a financial system to which they have never had access.

Awakening "the creativity and social responsibility to create a new value in the practices they undertake, thus promoting business development in the country and community participation", mentioned one of the organizations interviewed, Scalabrinian Sisters (Ecuador, 2019).

The father also told us about a foundation that was approving loans for ventures. He told us to go and talk to the Scalabrinian Mission. We went to a meeting, got informed and decided to start a savings group. In the beginning we were a group of five: two Ecuadorians who got involved in helping us, my partner and I.

We continue with the savings group, but not the five that started. There are four of us, my partner's cousin and his wife, my partner and me. In the beginning we were going to buy a camera, work on photography, if we had done it now, we would have had some money saved. But we had to change the business plan, and we decided to set up a fast-food restaurant, close to where I live, in front of a school. We already made the business plan; it was approved, and we are waiting for the money to go and buy the things we need.

I also did an entrepreneurship workshop with the Jesuits, there they will approve another project to invest in photography, but only my partner and I. We see a lot of potential in this project, I think we can generate profits. Besides, I have been getting involved in photography. With a borrowed camera we have worked on a first communion, a baptism, a wedding. People liked the way we sold them the photos, the memories, the album, etc. Something different (...)

There are four of us, but my partner's cousins have three children, so there are really seven of us. Even though we live apart, not everyone wants the same thing, but design is a different matter. Besides, that's what we like. (Account 47, 2019)

In other cases, the labor inclusion has occurred through the same organizations, whether national and/or international. People, both men and women, who have been voluntarily supporting or who have been part of training or accompaniment processes in the organizations, become

laborers, part-time or full-time. In other cases, they begin to work flexible hours and shorter days, but always under decent working conditions.

With the help of the UNHCR, that gave us a letter of safe-conduct when we first arrived, I began to make the arrangements for affiliation with Sisbén. At the UNHCR they also gave me psychosocial support for almost three years, which helped me to get ahead.

Last year I went to psychosocial care and heard about volunteering, I asked to participate, because it was a way to be active and not stay alone in my house, because it made me feel frustrated and negative. This is how the opportunity to volunteer in the UNHCR's project La Humanidad no Tiene Fronteras came about. I felt very happy, everyone, including my daughter, was given a printed shirt of Humanidad no Tiene Fronteras. When they told me that I was going to volunteer, I cried so much. The volunteering was in November and part of December 2018, the project gave me the tickets and an incentive, but the most important thing was that I, being Venezuelan and in an irregular situation, could be part of a volunteering with the UNHCR, for me that was a big deal.

At the beginning of this year, some people from Germany came and visited my house, and there I learned that I was being given the opportunity to participate in the project of a UNHCR partner, which is CORPRODINCO and which started in April. I was shocked, everyone cried with me. Because, being a foreigner, it is difficult to find a job and knowing that the well-being of my family and me depends on it is a very big deal. (Account 25, 2019)

Access to health

As explained in the Causes for Departure section, some Venezuelans migrants have left Venezuela in search of medical attention for illnesses, some of them chronic.

In countries such as Ecuador and Panama with health systems that seek to ensure universal health care, some people find an "oasis" in the midst of the collapse of the Venezuelan health system.

I came because of the time we are allowed to stay. When I left things got worse in Venezuela and I decided to stay for a longer period to see if it was possible to work a little bit and bring some dollars to my grandchildren and my children who stayed there.

During that period (...) I had an illness. In April 2017, I was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer, I had two tumors in my chest, I was treated here in the health centers, just by presenting my passports I was very well treated. With that diagnosis I decided to stay, and I said to myself "I am going to choose life".

A Panamanian friend helped me get a private appointment with a doctor and he told me, "this is what you're going to do, stay and go to the Oncology Hospital here and go to Immigration". The, I thought, "I have this option that they are offering me". So, I decided to stay with a 'broken heart' because I have two children there with three grandchildren who are not having an easy time.

In May 2017, I went to the Migration Office of the ONPAR (National Refugee Office). They asked me for my passport, proof of diagnosis and gave me the Temporary Humanitarian Aid Card. They gave it to me two months later. With that, I got humanitarian aid. The card is for a limited time, only given in cases of illness. At the ONPAR they have treated me very well and recommended that I apply for a migrant's resource in a different condition, but I still haven't done it due to lack of time and money.

The Oncology Hospital is a public hospital of the State of Panama. This hospital is a blessing. At the Oncology Hospital a chemo is worth 5 dollars. That is to say, it is a big subsidy that the State makes. There they take care of insured and uninsured patients. They started seeing me there before I had my immigration card. They treated me and gave me 16 sessions of chemotherapy, one every 21 days. On January 4, 2019, I had a radical mastectomy and then about 25 sessions of radiation therapy. The hospital has a section for social work, psychology and psychiatry. They require you to go to social service and provide mental health support.

That is why I am grateful to God and to the people of Panama. (Account 55, 2019)

Peru, likewise, guarantees free health services for people living with HIV¹⁶. Refugees and migrants have found some form of care for their chronic illnesses, or those of their families.

In 2014, I left Caracas directly for Bogotá. I couldn't say goodbye to my family, because they live in Maracaibo. I crossed the border through Cúcuta with my Mercosur visa, and began my journey to Bogotá.

I started working as a waiter and at the same time I contacted NGOs working with HIV patients and human rights activists and started working with them. I worked with hospitals, with the Mayor's Office, with UNHCR, with the Pastoral Care of Caritas and with people living with HIV.

In 2016 the demand for Venezuelans with HIV began to grow [in Colombia], we were

receiving people with various medical conditions and we could not cope with the demand (...) In 2017, I began to suffer from stress and due to my personal health I decided to withdraw from my humanitarian work for a while.

I began to learn about the health care system in Peru and to contact the organizations that deal with HIV and decided to move to Peru. I arrived at the border in Tumbes and Lima in 2018. I enrolled in the HIV program to receive treatment at the hospital and I am still receiving it there today.

I started the procedures to obtain the Alien Registration Card due to vulnerability. First, you must go through the hospitals and comply with the requirements. Then, you must present your medical history to the Migration Vulnerability Department to apply for your Alien Health Card. In my case, the whole process took 15 days. I was given the Alien Registration Card in 2019 for four years, and I must update it annually. (Account 63, 2019)

¹⁶ The last technical norm of comprehensive care of HIV of 2018, establishes that: 'the comprehensive care of people with HIV infection is free in public health facilities', defining comprehensive care as "the care of people with HIV infection according to their expectations and health needs, to improve their quality of life" (UNAIDS, 2019)

Part four:
**The challenges
are evident**

The flow of refugees and migrants from Venezuela has taken everyone by surprise. The same Venezuelan people, then the States, the civil societies, the communities and the national and international organizations. "Nobody was prepared" was said in different spaces.

In this context, despite major coordination efforts such as the establishment of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform (R4V) and the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP), the challenges continue to exceed the capacities, efforts and resources available.

One of the great reflections in conducting the research is that the flow of people from Venezuela has not resulted in the creation of new social problems. The arrival of people, which has been massive, has highlighted the already weak infrastructure in health and education services; the poor housing conditions for the underprivileged; and the precarious working conditions in many Latin American countries. Therefore, it is the result of misperception to say that the refugee and migrant population has increased unemployment or caused the health and education systems of our countries to collapse. These problems already existed; the flow of Venezuelan people in mobility has made their weakness evident.

In this sense it is possible to affirm that the massive flow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants is giving us as a society and State the opportunity to identify the strengths, when they exist; and the challenges and opportunities of what can be improved in each system, seeking the integration of populations without creating false divisions in access and attention to all people.

It is not only Venezuelan refugees and migrants who face such diverse challenges in their host cities and places. We also face them all as a society, civil and international organizations, and above all, states. This is a collective work, which needs to be addressed from different perspectives, experiences and angles.



Xenophobia, the main issue

Just as on the transit routes, the Venezuelan people in condition of mobility who are victims of xenophobia also suffer it in the host cities. Verbal and physical attacks and acts of discrimination in the educational and labor fields are combined in some cases with public pronouncements made by private or public sectors in different countries.

With arguments that stigmatize and discriminate, mayors and officials of some municipalities in Peru have announced the decree of ordinances with the alleged objective of "regulating" and restricting the presence of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in their municipalities (Trade, 2019). Another situation promoted by representatives of the main neighborhoods and human settlements occurred in the district of Picharí, in Cusco, Peru. During a Popular Assembly, Venezuelan refugees and migrants were "expelled" from their district and given a period of two months, considering the presence of school-age children. This despite the call of authorities such as the Prosecutor for the Prevention of Crime, who warned that this measure represented the crime of discrimination. (Sequeiros, 2019). Later, a statement was issued annulling this decision and it was decided to register the Venezuelan people.

However, there are veiled manifestations of discrimination and xenophobia in other contexts and countries. For example, in access to health services or education, as will be read below.

Organizations of the Catholic Church such as CARITAS International with "Compartiendo el viaje", CARITAS Venezuela, Caritas Colombia, CARITAS Ecuador and the Sisters of St. John the Evangelist have developed important communication campaigns in favor of the culture of welcome and encounter, as an alternative to rejection and xenophobia, as well as the important work of advocacy with United Nations agencies, carried out by SIMN, Caritas International and the Good Shepherd Sisters from New York and Geneva.

Gender-based violence Stigmatization. Are you Venezuelan?

From north to south, in all the cities visited during this study, Venezuelan refugee and migrant women reported feeling discriminated against and sexually harassed. The obligatory question on their journey has been "are you Venezuelan?" This is not an innocent question since it is often followed by a sexual proposal either for money or for other goods such as food or a room to sleep. Other times the question is accompanied by some other violent act, physical attacks or attempts of sexual violence.

It happened to me; I was in a cab. When you barely speak and they know you're Venezuelan, they yell at you like you're a 'macanado' or something. Then I was in the cab and I saw all the people who were in it get out. Then the man [the driver] came to me and said, "well, you're Venezuelan," and I said yes. Of course, he talked about the situation in Venezuela... And the man began to bother me and grabbed me, and I said, "calm down, boy, what's wrong with you?". "No, I really like Venezuelan women who are on the streets, but I like them better this way", he said. And the man began to pull my shirt and we went upstairs, very high and blocked the door, the bolts.

I was saying, "my God, this guy is going to rape me here." "Calm down, calm down." And he started to take his thing out and wanted me to grab it. He took pulled out his penis. "Calm down, slowly, calm down." And I started to look in my purse, I found small bottle of cologne in spray and I sprayed him. And when I threw it at him, I opened the door and ran out. He let me go and I sprayed him in his face. When I got home, I smelled that bad odor on my body. I took a bath and I could still smell it. (Focus Group, 2019).

The stigmatization and sexualization of Venezuelan women do not distinguish between age, even girls who are forced to sell on the street or in the town squares are approached by men who offer them money in exchange for sex.

(...) I was also studying, but I couldn't manage because my mom and dad didn't have jobs to help me. We spent the money on food.

Eventually, we didn't have anything to eat. So, I started selling, went out to the street and stayed there.

When I was selling (...) men would come up to me and offer me money to be with them. One day a man offered me 60,000 pesos (USD 18), I went with him and he gave it to me. I saw a lot of money, and I bought food, diapers, milk (...) and I still had money left. So, I started working in that, I was doing well. At my home they don't know what I do. They think that I go out to the square to sell (...) (Account 24, 2019)

Sexual violence has manifested itself in various forms, including harassment and xenophobic violence, violence that is sometimes naturalized by women.

Once, it was my sister's birthday, so I went to buy her a gift at a market. And I was on the bus, they were talking about Venezuelans. Those "venecos" and what not. I don't know what else. And I was afraid to look at them or to talk to them, because I thought that if I spoke, they would beat me up. Because, I mean, there's a lot of xenophobia here in Peru. Anyway, like with those men, well, I've felt harassed on several occasions. In fact, I used to work in a nightclub before. I was a hostess in a dance club and many men came up to me offering me money to go with them. Others would touch my buttocks. They would go over the line. In truth, that was very rough. And I think we've all experienced that harassment here from the Peruvians, that is, from the men, towards us. (Focus Group, 2019).

Sexual exploitation in the context of mobility: "transactional sex" as a form of survival

"Let's not kid ourselves, here, more than one of us has had to sell our bodies in order to eat" ... "all of us", answered the others in unison, although passively and almost murmuring.

In the different countries of Latin America, many Venezuelan refugees and migrants are living in vulnerable conditions due to various factors: the lack of decent housing and work opportunities and/or chronic diseases or precarious living conditions during the migration and settlement process¹⁷.

These circumstances intrinsically lead to a situation of oppression and inequality of power, which adds to and aggravates the conditions of vulnerability in which they find themselves. This is the context that forces some people to sell their bodies, to offer sexual favors in exchange for money or help.

Sexual exploitation, sex in exchange for money, food or rides is not openly said or acknowledged. However, all refugees and migrants know that this happens, and some have experienced it: they are victims of sex for survival on the road, or in the cities where they have settled.

Transactional sex as a form of survival does not distinguish between gender and age. During the research, women, girls, people from the LGBTI+ community and young men stated that they had been victims of this type of violence. However, of the people interviewed, it is mostly women of all ages, gay and transgender people who are the greatest victims of this type of violence.

Not now, but in the past, I even had to sleep with someone for money. Because, it was either that or starve, or end up on the street. I'm not ashamed to say it, because it was a very unpleasant experience to be with someone for money. (Focus Group, 2019).

"Webcam models", exploitation of gay and straight men

During the interviews, cases were identified in which gay or straight men were forced into transactional sex as webcam models or other forms of sexual exploitation.

There are people I know from my neighborhood, who are here and have had to sell their bodies to be able to rent a place. They also work with webcams; they film themselves and then get an envelope with money. (Focus Group, 2019)

Most of the time, in addition to being sexually exploited, they are paid much less than they were initially promised.

There were some friends who worked as "webcam models", they are guys who have sex on camera, live, for money. I worked there for three months; the truth was... I think I should have stayed selling arepas, because I got swindled the first three months, I didn't get paid, the lady didn't even give me a bus ticket to get back. I had to ask for money in the north to be able to return to where I lived before. (Focus Group, 2019)

Sexual exploitation of refugee and migrant women

Like many of the people interviewed, the economic and social crisis in Venezuela has forced women to leave. Some of them said that they studied in Venezuela, had stable jobs either because they were employed or because they worked independently. Some are mothers and worked. Others are also grandmothers of very young children.

I came here because I was widowed four years ago and have always worked on my own. I was doing well when I was working. (...) I've always worked on my own, but the situation became so grave there that you couldn't even get anything to work on your own. And what's more, I have children, I had to come with my eldest. I've been here for two years now. (Focus Group, 2019)

Women are "recruited" in different ways, sometimes on transit routes or during border crossings.

When I crossed the border in Tumbes, they approached me. When I entered, I was queuing, I waited a full day in Tumbes and a person approached me. He asked me if I had somewhere to stay. I had met so many good people on the way, so I agreed to talk to him.

Then he asked me if I knew where I was going and whether I had a job. I didn't have a job, so I said no. And he offered me a job. He told me, "you're going to earn 70 soles a day, you're going to work in a restaurant, in a 'cevicheria' as a waitress". I said okay, but I wasn't coming to Tumbes.

¹⁷ Constitutional Court Ruling SU-062/19. Dissenting opinion, M. Diana Fajardo Rivera. "2.(...) In the same vein, the representative of the Ombudsman's Office said that this entity had made two visits to the Barlovento tavern in which she was able to corroborate that the sex workers did not have an employment contract or any type of health service and that some of them were Venezuelan. She added that these women claimed to be mothers heads of household with three or even six children and that they were forced into prostitution because of their difficult socio-economic situation. In addition, they were not aware of any job offers or public policies from the municipal government that would allow them to engage in another occupation".

Then, I told a Venezuelan girl who was there, and she said, "no friend, that's prostitution. They offer a lot of prostitution here. They tell you'll work at a 'cevicheria', a restaurant, that they are going to pay you that amount; but you can't earn 70 soles anywhere and you're going to be paid per drink. So, that's prostitution". That's when I realized what the nice man was offering me. (Focus Group, 2019)

In some cases, they have been tricked into leaving Venezuela with the promise of a job in Colombia. An invitation to travel from friends to work at spas, bars or as models has been a constant theme in the motivation for the journey, without realizing that this entails sex work.

Many of the newly arrived women have to live in the "residences" of bars where they work and for which they were contacted from Venezuela. In some cases, they must also pay for the room they occupy. Faced with a lack of options, many stay until it is possible for them to pay the debt for the fares with which they left their country and the cost of the residence for the time they lived there.

I came with a friend, because they sent us the tickets. But she had already worked here. She told me that we were going to work in a place that was like a bar, but it had nothing to do with prostitution or anything like that. And when I got there, and it was that thing. That I had to be with men and such. So, I stayed there in that bar until I could pay the money, they sent us. And after that I left that bar. (Focus Group, 2019)

So, I did nothing that day. Nothing. Just five thousand pesos for a few chips. Some chips that they gave to me. That day she paid for my food and paid for my room. Even though the residence belonged to the owner, we had to pay him. So, the next day, all the girls who were her friends started talking to me, and I had to do it, because if I didn't do it, they wouldn't let me out of there because of the tickets they had sent to me. And I had to, I started working. (Focus Group, 2019)

Sexual Violence: Bars or the Street?

In other cases, women settled in the different cities faced with the lack of job opportunities and finding a stable job, have sought ways to survive working in bars or on the street. These two are the "workplaces" of most women who face sexual exploitation.

In the premises, the way of walking pays off (laughs). You pay rent on the premises. But I feel safer. Because in the street we see many people and run a greater risk (...) In the street, you do better because you don't pay rent; what you earn is for you. But in the premises, I pay rent and I also pay rent where I live with my children. In this business you have to pay ten thousand in daily rent. (Focus Group, 2019)

Work in bars, in principle, is perceived as safer. In Ecuador, women have access to a card, which gives them access to medical exams to prevent sexually transmitted diseases (Context Interview Ecuador, 2019). However, in almost all cases, women working in bars are obliged to pay "rent", whether they sleep in the room or only use it to "work."

Many of the women who resort to "job" offers in bars have found, not only the fact that it is sex work, but are forced to do so in precarious and unhealthy circumstances given the conditions in some of these premises¹⁸. In addition, they are forced to use drugs to withstand the long working hours to which they are subjected to. In some cases, drugs are sold in the premises.

In most places they force you to do drugs so you can last the night and hold your liquor. Yeah, that's what most people do. The money you earn, you use it to buy drugs. And they sell you the drugs because you have to put up with the night shift and go to sleep at one o'clock. So, a woman who does not do drugs is thrown out. And the women do it too because they want to endure. (Focus Group, 2019)

Some of the women who have a family in the city prefer to work "on their own". The working hours and long hours they face in bars, along with the control and use of drugs in some of the premises, cause them to prefer to work in the streets, despite the greater exposure and the additional violence they may suffer.

...Well, I work on the street, I like the street better but of course, there is more danger, one has to take care and know how to work the street; But I do it for the sake of my children's schedule. You understand me. Because, in case the kid gets sick I need to take care of her. If the girl studies until four in the afternoon I can go and pick her up at that time. I could not do this working in a bar, where, if you leave early, you get fined. (Focus Group, 2019)

In the streets, women face several types of additional violence, one of which is the control of areas that in principle were "managed" by local women, who gradually and in different cities have been displaced to other areas, cities and even countries. As a result of this "displacement", the territorial control that in principle was of national women began to change to become mixed or Venezuelan women, or to be controlled by illegal groups. (Context Interview Ecuador, 2019)

...I had to fight back because I was charged by a Venezuelan woman. And I asked why, we are both here for the same thing, we're both paying bribes, and the street is a free place. And I had already paid a Colombian paraco. He came to collect money from me. He came and asked where Tula was. They call me the Tula. He asked for money and said: "No exceptions or extensions, you have to pay tonight," he said. I said, "No, I don't have money today". And that's how they get you off the street. And then I had to pay.. (Focus Group, 2019)

Another risk they face is being sexually assaulted by their "clients". Some of the women interviewed shared some of the cases of sexual violence as a result of their work:

It happened to me also (...) A man arrived where I worked, in the seventh (street). He said he told me, "Let's go, but you're not going to do anything, because we live with my mom".

I had no money. It had been three days and I had not made a dime (...) So I went with him. I didn't say anything to the girls who were there, everything was quiet. I went with him (...) I'll give you a massage, he said. When he started giving me a massage, he started insulting me. He raped me. He raped me. He grabbed me like this, it was hard. He said, "don't scream because my mom is here, and it will be your loss". So, it was all very quiet. I was so desperate, and I didn't know where I was. I stood there quietly and cried in silence... (Focus Group, 2019)

Attempts to get out of "Prostitution"

"I was about three months without work, until this week I went back to work, because I got divorced. Things didn't work out and well, I started again..." says one of the women who participated in a Focus Group with sex workers.

All of them do sex work out of necessity, to feed their families, to pay the rent of the place where they live or to be able to pay the school expenses of their children.

I have a friend who was selling coffee. She tried hard, bought her thermos. I joked with her and said I was glad she made it out. And then on the next day, she was back in the business. She said she needed 11,000 pesos, and she had made 20,000 already. So, she stopped selling coffee. (Focus Group, 2019)

Some, even having regularized their migration status, face obstacles in obtaining decent and well-paid work opportunities.

Even if you leave the bar life, sometimes we have to do some work for the occasional "friend", because money is never enough. Even with a residence card, I have not been able to find a job after countless applications.

In the face of this, they all say they want to leave, "not reach old age" in these conditions, they accept that the economic "need" makes it hard for them to make the decision and above all sustain it... However, there are some who succeed.

One day I said, "I want to leave here, I don't want to stay here anymore". And I left, without money and without anything, because I had to answer for the services I didn't want to do.

¹⁸ Ruling of the Constitutional Court SU-062/19. Dissenting opinion, M. Diana Fajardo Rivera. "2. (...) at the public hearing held on August 16, 2018 the Police of Chinácota stated that the house where the Windward Tavern operated "did not have the health conditions to provide sexual services, the mattresses were very old, the rooms had no bathroom, the rooms themselves were very small (...)". About the sex workers who worked there, it added: "they don't have a good salary, they pay them what they want, they keep the money."

All the girls who were there were Venezuelans and the owners of the place were Venezuelans. And they didn't care that I left without money that day. My family will never know I was a part of the bad joke that is prostitution. I will never tell my family.

(Focus Group, 2019)

In this field, it is important to highlight the work carried out by religious congregations such as the Hermanas Adoratrices, Oblatas, Buen Pastor, Hijas de la Caridad, Orden Mercedaria, among many others, as well as the Networks of Religious Life against trafficking, encouraged by CLAR, to accompany victims who are captured or at risk and, in prevention actions. This leads them to confront the mafias that traffic in human beings risking their own lives.

Violence against children in host cities

Girls and boys face various types of risks and violence in places of refuge. Mothers who are heads of household and

families, many young children face difficult living conditions. Many refugee and migrant families live in substandard housing and some in the street. Many mothers and fathers go out to work with their young sons and daughters in the absence of a safe place to leave them while they work.

In July (...) I went to pick up my baby from daycare. And when I picked him up from, the lady in the nursery pushed him out towards me. And I came and looked at her, surprised, (...) when I smelled my son's hands, they were full of poop. And I was like, what happened to him? She told me not to take him anymore to daycare, until I teach him good manners, not to take him anymore. A two-year-old boy. I could not believe it. Then she said he's been like that since 10:00 in the morning. I picked up my son at 4:00 in the afternoon. And she says, yeah, don't bring him anymore. Teach him at your place and then bring him to me.

When I got to my house, I took off his clothes, all his clothes, were glued to his skin because of the dry poop. In the bath was screaming (...) I took the baby out of the daycare facility, the woman treated him very badly (...) She was also in another nursery, because I went there to talk to her to get my son in. She said, no, I don't want any Venezuelan children here. There were three daycare places that didn't admit him because he was the son of a Venezuelan woman. Because he was Venezuelan. I was going to denounce her, but I talked to a woman who does social work in the hospital and she told me: "Who are you going to denounce, why don't you go back to your country where things are better for you?" She should have told me to report her and have that facility closed, but instead she said to go back to my own country. So, I left. *(Focus Group, 2019)*

Theft and trafficking of children

Some of the violence identified against children was the theft of babies. Mothers who have just given birth, who are alone at home with children or mothers who are hospitalized for chronic diseases or accidents and have no one to leave their children with put children at greater risk.

I gave birth in 2018 and two weeks later we moved into an apartment (...) The apartment has a room, a small room, a bathroom, kitchen and a living room.

Next to the little room, lived a girl who became very friendly and fond of me, she gave us clothes and helped us. She said she was going to be the godmother of the baby, gave her many gifts, before and after she was born. When the girl was born, she was always very affectionate.

When we moved six houses away, she kept visiting, she kept taking care of the girl, she played with her, she took her to places. One day she arrived very well dressed and said that she was going to take the girl to take some pictures. I let her take her because I didn't see any malice in her. But they did not return. It got dark and we went to her house, but we couldn't find her.

They were not coming back, and it had been a long time, we began to ask the neighbors and nobody knew about her or the girl. At about 9:00 p.m., we decided to call the police. The whole neighborhood started collaborating and supporting us, we thought something had happened to them. The cops, the GAULA were in the house. Searching, calling, talking to neighbors. Someone gave us information, said that the girl had gone to meet her boyfriend, and had deceived him by telling him that the girl was his daughter.

At two in the morning everyone left, my wife began to cry and a GAULA policeman told her not to worry, that they knew the girl was still in the city. It was a night of despair.

At about seven in the morning the girl called to talk to my wife and told her, that the girl was fine. By that time the police already had her, and she used her phone call to call my wife.

The Worst Days

"I traveled (...). That was last year around this same time. Well, let's try, a friend told me, come on (...) A girl arrived and told us that we were going to work in a spa, that she was going to pay us the ticket, that we were going to have so many things that she promised us, but she didn't tell us how, we knew what we were going to do, but that was not what we saw there. She spoke to us so nicely; we went to get the suitcase and we left.

When we arrived (...) it was the worst thing. Those were the worst days. In Venezuela I was never as hungry as I went there. Horrible, (...) it is harder and more expensive. When we got there, they put us in a room, we had to work 24 hours a day. We didn't sleep at all. Stripping on a runway, dancing on that runway, I just couldn't do it. I mean, women were all naked (...) All in the street naked. I couldn't do it. I was ashamed of myself.

And the cold. I had a lot of asthma attacks. If you don't go out, they don't give you food. Nothing. Then we wanted to leave because we didn't work, we didn't do anything, because we didn't want to undress, no. And they were forcing me to do it, or I couldn't pay back. It was 150,000 pesos.

Anyone who goes in (...) loses themselves to drugs, and everything. Because they put drugs in you so you can get like this. That's why I didn't like it, because there, you have to put stuff in your nose so that you can be active 24 hours, through the night and day. And I preferred to go to the town to see what happened. However, I became very ill because I suffer from arthritis in the bones and cold affects me. I lived with a lot of problems until a cousin sent me money and I came back. But it was horrible. *(Grupo Focal, 2019).*



The GAULA agent informed us that they already had the girl and that she was fine. We are very grateful to the people of GAULA and to those who collaborated and supported us.

This girl had everything organized to have the girl registered as her own. The kidnapping took place on a Friday and on Monday they were going to pay 600,000 pesos (almost USD 170) to register her. They had everything planned. (Account 07, 2019)

In some cases, children and teenagers go out to the streets to work selling different products, a situation that exposes them to various types of violence: theft, ill-treatment, discrimination, xenophobia and also trafficking in persons.

(...) On the street everything happens, a month ago a man offered to pay me 200 pesos (57 USD) weekly, but I had to work in another country, modeling. I told my mom I was going to work at a family's home, and I got in the van with that guy. In the van, they told me I didn't have to say anything, and they were going to get me to cross in a truck. There were two other girls there, one was 14 and the other 17 years old, they said not to get on because they were going to tie me up and beat me. They were going to take us to another country, sell us, and they weren't going to give me money. They were tied up and I was still loose. When they got careless, one man got off, I managed to set them loose and then we escaped.

We opened the truck and ran. They were armed and one of the girls was shot in the leg, we don't know what happened to her, the other girl and I kept running. (Account 24, 2019)

Rental of boys and girls

The need in which parents find themselves often leads them to borderline situations looking for ways to get money to feed their children. The "rental of children" is one of such precarious and cruel forms of survival.

You don't see that only here (...). I know you can see it all over Colombian territory. The need of Venezuelan mothers here in Colombia leads them into depression, and when you have four or five kids, they offer one for rent. They ask you to take him and take responsibility for that son. That way they can support, even for a day, their other children and part of the rent. What do they do? They knock on doors offering their children for rent. We do because we are Venezuelans and I'm including myself. (Focus Group, 2019)

Economic, social and cultural rights

"We struggle (...) to make ends meet, we pay the rent and food, we cannot think about tomorrow, much less a week from now". (Focus Group, 2019)

As has already been stated in other paragraphs of this report, many Venezuelan refugees and migrants face social exclusion in host countries; they want their children to have access to education; health services; decent housing and paid work and the social benefits to which they are entitled.

We both have a permit to stay. We don't have formal employment. He's already been selling coffee for three years. It's a job from Monday to Monday. He doesn't have time to socialize with the children because he goes out in the morning, arrives at two, gets the stuff ready and goes out again. He comes back at 11 or 12 p.m. That's his daily routine. Having work improves education, improves nutrition, improves all areas. Because you already have a source of employment, you are already producing something that can assure all other areas. My kids are studying. My children are healthy. Thank God, after the census, we were able to obtain the PEP, because we are all legally here. That would be my project, looking for something, self-employment, that would be ideal. (Focus Group, 2019)

Work in decent conditions

Venezuelan refugees and migrants, who generally have a high level of education and/or vocational training and who have jobs in Venezuela, face unemployment or, at best, are self-employed without a fair and adequate compensation for a decent standard of living. (IOM, 2018)

The lack of real and effective access to work visas, residence permits or even recognition of refugee status adds to the various obstacles faced by people in human mobility, to have access to decent and well-paid work, further deepening their vulnerable situation, in particular that of women, children and elderly.

The lack of regulation of their migration status is compounded by factors such as discrimination and xenophobia: wages below

the legal minimum, long working hours and sometimes non-payment for work are some of the situations that refugees and migrants in different countries have to face.

Like all Venezuelans who migrate, the most difficult thing, besides the trip, is to get work. One meets people who say they'll call us back and don't do it, because we are Venezuelans.. (Focus Group, 2019)

Reports from different countries show how the economic integration of refugees and migrants has been in each country. In Peru, for example, Banco BBVA made a report in which it states "that most Venezuelans in Peru are of productive age and have a higher number of years of studies than the average of the Peruvian population. However, their entry into the local labor market has not been with the best conditions: indicators of informal labor are very high (a large part of immigrants do not have regular permits to work and have not been able to validate their studies)". (BBVA, 2019)". (BBVA, 2019)

The World Bank in its report "An Opportunity for All: Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees and the Development of Peru", states that in Peru:

Although [Venezuelans] have high levels of participation and occupation in the Peruvian labor market, their working conditions are more precarious than those of Peruvians (sic). The informality of the Peruvian labor market has provided Venezuelan migrants and refugees with a relatively quick access route, but one that is likely to be a source of vulnerability. There is also a significant disconnect between the qualifications of the Venezuelan population and their occupation; for example, highly skilled workers in elementary occupations. (World Bank, 2019)

In Colombia the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) published a report that dispelled the myth about the responsibility of refugees and migrants from Venezuela for the high unemployment rate for Colombians in the country. Based on the results of the Large-scale Integrated Household Survey, the director of the DANE publicly stated, "The possibility that the Venezuelan migrant population is structurally affecting the level of the unemployment rate is quite remote at this time," citing the figure of 19.2% associated with the unemployed Venezuelan population at the national level compared to that of Colombians who stands at 10.1%. (GIFMM, Interagency Group on Mixed Migratory Flows, 2019)

Many Venezuelan refugees and migrants, regardless of the country or city they are in, work in the informal sector. In some cases, their source of work is the preparation of fast food. In one of the focus groups, a young woman said: "All Venezuelans in this city go out to sell *salchipapas* or *empanadas*, we don't make enough money". In other cases, they go out to sell coffee on the streets or sweets at traffic lights. The market is saturated with Venezuelan people and they are in the daily search with food sales businesses.

It was about two or three months before school started. At that time my daughter and I decided to do something on our own to get an income. We started selling Venezuelan empanadas. I'm a lawyer, but I love cooking, I did a chef's course and I think I cook well. I prepared the empanadas on a stove we borrowed, and my daughter went out to sell them. She made friends with some of the local kids and they sold very well. So much so that it was the beginning of something super spectacular, because we got to have a restaurant.

Eleven months later, in 2018, there was a massive migration of Venezuelans to Peru, because there were going to be more restrictions on entry, they were no longer going to grant the PTP. All those who entered as of November 1, 2018 were no longer going to be able to apply, so until the last day of October many Venezuelans walked out and arrived in Peru.

That affected us, because we had started from scratch, selling on the street, almost door to door, but later we had managed to have our own point of sale. And the fact that there were so many Venezuelans made it difficult to get work and for some of them it was easier to take advantage of the fact that we already had a point of sale and customers, and they became our competition, right next door and across the street from us. Unfortunately, the business went bankrupt, we had to sell everything and we had to get out of there.. (Account 70, 2019)

Despite the fact that all refugees and migrants yearn to be able to regularize their stay and have access to work permits, the truth is that even having them they face the economic realities of unemployment and job insecurity in Latin American countries, added to discrimination and xenophobia.

God began to open doors for us. We had no bed, we had nothing. We slept on some mattress outdoors, and scared, because that's a huge field with many snakes, so I didn't sleep because there was always a snake or a toad. I feared for the children. And I would go out and sell and by 8:00 I would be at home, we would go back to work, I would sell again in the afternoon, I would sell again in the evening. We went to bed at 12:00 to get up at 3:00. That was our daily routine. The process began. It was a long process. The advantage of being here (...), is that you go out with a thermos full of coffee and you can buy food (...)

In September, my husband was called to work in a company, loading and unloading trucks. He was paid every day. This was perfect because when that happened, we started to improve our quality of life. That there were days we didn't even make enough for food. When he got that job, we were much better (...)

My husband has a PEP. He's still working on the same job, but the conditions are bad. They pay him when they want to and what they want. 'Because you are Venezuelans, there is no money for you, you'll have to wait(...)' I do not lose hope that my husband can find work elsewhere, there has been a lot of discrimination. (Focus Group, 2019)

Crops for illicit use

The lack of real and dignified opportunities for work, coupled with the precarious living conditions of refugees and migrants, appear to be an opportunity for groups linked to illicit crops, which see in refugees and migrants "cheap labor" that is easy to obtain.

Although accounts of job offers on illicit crops were compiled in different parts of Colombia, most of them focused in Cali, in the south of the country.

They do offer us jobs, but jobs outside the law. In Bucaramanga a man wanted to take me to a farm, but he never wanted to tell me what it was, so I didn't go. Here (...), three times I have been offered a job in coke farms, but I tell them no, I'm looking for another kind of job. They arrive at the terminal in luxury vans, the second time a man on a motorcycle came to tell me that, if he was interested in working in a coca plantation, I could leave every three months and with that he could help my family. The others wanted to take us in the van. We were three of us and in the van, there were also three people, they rolled the window and told us "get on, we are looking for venecos (Venezuelans) to go to work at the farm". I always said I didn't want to work on it. (Account 13, 2019)

Education

As stated in the section on the causes of leaving, one of them is access to primary, secondary and college education. During the research it was possible to conclude this situation. In the universe of young people who were in high school or college, they did not continue their studies. Some of them had already been forced to abandon school in Venezuela.

We lived in the state of (...), my mom, my brother and me. I was in fourth grade, I had one more year to go. I stopped studying, because the teachers never went or there were no classes, I lost my motivation and I resigned myself to not continue with my studies. Actually, that's a very short time ago, it happened this year. I haven't thought about studying anymore. I didn't bring papers from my old high school, my grades, because I didn't come with the idea of studying, I came to work, I never thought about studying. My purpose is to work. I want to work and move forward. (Account 58, 2019)

School age children

In Ecuador "It was identified that some education districts requested original documents and apostilles for the enrolment process of Venezuelan children and adolescents

in the public education system"; (Operational Report, 2019; R4V, 2020), this situation seems to be repeating itself in other parts of the continent.

Getting a spot in public or private schools, even with the required documents, has been difficult for most Venezuelan children in different countries. Veiled discrimination has resulted in school authorities creating barriers to access and discrimination exists even they are when admitted.

I started the process of enrolling my eldest son, who was in first grade. I was denied a place because he didn't have Sisbén, he didn't have an identity card. At first, I was very discouraged, because I thought: my son is going to miss the school year. Then I began to seek advice in Pastoral, here in Caritas. They told me: go to the Ministry of Education, and there you are going to say that there is a law that states they cannot deny education to Venezuelan children. My boy took the test and passed it. My son is now studying. Psychologists there gave me a lot of support as well. (Focus Group, 2019)

The above-mentioned obstacles are compounded, in some cases, by the xenophobia of some of the school administrators, who in some cases also include sexual violence.

I was taking care of my babies, and I decided to take them to daycare, in a kindergarten, and I started selling on the street, because with a basic salary a household cannot survive. In Ecuador there are nurseries, they are called CIBVs, they have children from 7h00 in the morning to 4h00 in the afternoon and give them food and adequate stimulation. That guaranteed them a place in public schools.

We began to notice that the children came back from there with signs of being hit. When we asked in the school, they told us that it was normal because of their age, that they fight or pinch each other. But that only happened to our children and not others. They were being victims of xenophobia because they were children of Venezuelans. They told them that they were not Ecuadorians because they were carrying Venezuelan blood and that they were stealing the right to be there from an Ecuadorian child. In 2018, my oldest daughter was sexually abused at school, she was 3 years old.

She came home one day from school, my husband took her to pee, and she started crying in pain, saying it was burning, his clothes were stained with blood. All she said was "That kid is bad". We took her to the health center and they actually determined that they tried, but they didn't manage to break her hymen, but she was tainted, psychologically annulled, she cried, she screamed and she didn't let anyone touch her. She spoke absolutely nothing; those were three very hard months. We tried to file a report in the prosecutor's office, and nobody took our complaint, not even the health center that was supposed to give information to DINAPEN, which is the body of the police, specialized in children. They did not file it, nor did they do anything at all, because they were the children of foreigners. We never took the girl to school again.

(...) The headmistress of the school threatened us. She was the mother of the child who molested my little girl. She told us that if we filed a complaint, they would frame my husband for what happened to the girl. That they were going to put him in jail and because I was illegally there, they were going to take the children away from me. That they were going to warn DINAPEN, and they were going to adopt my children, so that their son could do what he pleased with her. Those were her textual words. His son was a boy who was not even supposed to be in the school, because it was a children's center, for children up to 5 years old. (Account 74, 2019)

Another obstacle, with regard to access to education for boys and girls in different countries, has been the lack of money to buy school supplies and uniforms, this makes it difficult to have real and effective access for girls and boys to attend school in appropriate conditions. Because of this, some children are even victims of bullying by their own classmates.

Housing

Venezuelan refugees and migrants face another challenge in the different countries of Latin America: precarious housing conditions. Faced with the search for a safe place to live without or with limited economic resources, many people are forced to be homeless:

We never expected to be on the streets. But since we are many Venezuelans in this situation, we have to adapt, because we are not alone. We find a way to survive.

We were 15 to 20 Venezuelans in the terminal, sleeping on cartons, on the floor, with suitcases on top and Chilean people came with food, with coats, with medicine. Church people or individuals came to us with food and shelter. Chile is cold. We were always invited to church, on one of those occasions we decided to accompany them. There we met other Chileans and they got to know us. So, I met a family that was always very attentive to Venezuelans. It's an admirable family, not many do that. During the 20 days we were in the terminal we met many of them. I told them I wanted to return to Venezuela. (Account 02, 2019)

Renting places such as parking lots or patios of houses adapted as housing:

When the three of us were in Maicao, we lived in a courtyard, in a residence, we slept in a hammock, with a blanket. We were safe within four walls, not on the street. There we paid three thousand pesos a night (less than a dollar), and two thousand to shower. First, we'd gather money to pay for that and then we'd see what to eat. A lot of people lived there. We spent about seven or eight months living in that courtyard. (Account 33, 2019)

Renting places in outlying neighborhoods where the land is unfit for living and has, among others, direct consequences on the health of mothers and children most of the time.

We're living badly, sleeping on the floor, cooking on a wood stove. The ranch where we live is small, so we asked they gave us some fabric, plastic sheets and some boards. That's how we build another little room. With the plastic roof, and with a little cement that they gave us we made a little apartment. We didn't have a bathroom, we went inside a bag, so the girls got sick. I am also getting sick, my eyes are burning from the stove, I had never cooked in a wood stove. (Account 21, 2019)

We have six days in Tumbes, in Zarumilla, we are staying in an invasion, in a house that a lady is lending us, it has no running water, no power, nothing. The little house is made of pure wood and a sheet ceiling. We eat whatever is available, yesterday a lady gave us some guineas. Because I have no money, I've been cleaning onions and I haven't been paid. They don't pay, there are people who have been waiting for three months to get paid. (Account 68, 2019)

In other cases, refugees and migrants manage to rent places in better conditions, but still precarious. Many of the Venezuelan refugee and migrant families are numerous. The average number of sons/daughters identified was between two and six, in some cases traveling together with grandparents, grandmothers and/or other relatives. These large families often live in houses or residences where up to eight people live in the same room and share a bathroom with 20 others.

Now we have a rental place that is uncomfortable, because we live with my two nephews, my father-in-law, my husband, myself, my three girls, my granddaughter and my two twins. Too uncomfortable. We have mats on the floor. We have a single mat that's upstairs, where my three girls sleep. And so... we live eight in one room.

(Focus Group, 2019)

In the different host cities, Venezuelan refugees and migrants have been looking for a place to live. In some cases, they have encountered outlying neighborhoods where land is vacant or without owners. Some examples are Villa Caracas and El Ferrí in Barranquilla, Colombia; the 6th quarter of Reyes in Cúcuta and Solanda in Ecuador.

In the case of Quito, Ecuador, the Solanda neighborhood located in the south of the city, which in the past also welcomed Colombians, Cubans and other nationalities, today, is one of the neighborhoods with the highest population density. "It is estimated to have more than 100,000 inhabitants," although in the 1970s it was designed for 20,000. Currently, the owners of the houses modified them to rent a part of them. " Venezuelans come to Solanda looking for those minimal spaces, which are rented between 150 and 250 dollars, and almost always share them with others". Given the high presence of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, many people refer to it as "Venesolanda". (Constant, 2019)

Health

Despite the identification of cases in which refugees and migrants have received the necessary health services, the challenges in this area remain significant.

The lack of clear and timely information affects access to both State and private health services by Venezuelan refugees and migrants. On the one hand, there is a general lack of knowledge about health systems in different countries and how to access them, and on the other hand, "there is no clarity about the coverage or system they can access" (Blouin, 2019).

Many of the people in mobility condition and who are just settling in different cities and countries turn to the experience of third parties in the event of a medical emergency, in this way they look for any health center that can provide care for them.

In Colombia, of the families that can access the PEP, approximately 30% are making proper use of the document.

"The reality is they don't use it. They do not know that having PEP they can join the Sisbén, and having Sisbén, they can be treated in the public health network, and two or three months after the Sisbén, they can join a subsidized EPS according to the offers of EPS in the region, but often they do not know that having the PEP they can make procedures".

For the affiliation to the EPS, they receive a visit to categorize their Sisbén level: 1, 2 or 3. Later, an affiliation to a subsidized EPS is made. According to the EPS that have access to membership of the migrant population: 25% are people who have PEP and of that 25% not even 5% are users of the health system due to lack of information. (Context Interview, 2019)

Because of the precarious conditions in which they find themselves, refugees and migrants in a non-regular situation and in a street situation are those who face the greatest health risks. Many of these people receive food leftovers from restaurants, search the trash at the end of the day or ration the food they have access to so they can eat for several days. Others simply eat once a day.

Difficult hygiene conditions increase their risk. Not having access to toilets and hygiene services means they have to shower once a week, look for rivers-sometimes polluted-to bathe, or use toilets that don't have the proper hygienic conditions, leading to skin or stomach problems.

In spite of, or in addition to this, it is perhaps this group of refugees and migrants who face the greatest obstacles in health care and services.

When I got sick from bathing in the river, I had no medical assistance, I looked for medicines in the garbage and found some pills that cured me. Right now, I have the bad teeth, it hurts, and I have not been able to solve that, because I do not have medical assistance, nor money to pay. (Account 15, 2019)

Villa Caracas, Barranquilla, Colombia

It was a land in the forest bordering on the barrio La Ceiba, in Barranquilla. That piece slipped because the land was moving, and the houses fell. The Colombian government relocated the Colombians who lived there, and the land was abandoned. It was filled with debris and weeds.

Three years ago, when Venezuelan migrants and refugees began arriving "en masse" in Colombia, some people began to clear the land and level it to settle there. At first there were five families, who lived in small houses that they stuck to the poles near the paved street. There, on that street, they found the main water intake and took it in a pipe to one of the ranches, about 300 meters away. On that ranch they installed the water and made a latrine. That's how Villa Caracas began.

Then more Venezuelans arrived and began to build ranches made of boards, with different types of roof: zinc, Eternit, recycled material or plastic, and some have no roof. The water pipe runs through all of Villa Caracas, because that first ranch was at the other end of the water source, and people used that same pipe and so a network of water was made that supplies all of Villa Caracas. At first that network of pipes was on the ground, then they started to bury them, now they are not seen, but all the ranches have water. That helped the families that were arriving to use the source of water.

On the part that's closer to the paved street, they found the sewage pipes from nearby houses and pulled a tube to Villa Caracas and they have sewage service in some ranches. In addition, they found the gas pipe that was previously in the houses, and they managed to open those pipes and connect. Currently there are about 200 houses that have gas service from this pipe, although it represents a risk due to bad connections.

For a while a security scheme was maintained in the neighborhood, but as Villa Caracas has grown to 1,800 people it has become more dangerous.

Those living in Villa Caracas are approximately 70% Venezuelans and 30% Colombians displaced or returned from Venezuela.

In the community there is no school, there are no health services, there are no parks, there is nothing, only ranches. Ten minutes' walk away, there is a school of Faith and Joy that welcomes all the children of Villa Caracas, no matter if they are Venezuelan or Colombian. (Account 06, 2019)

Medical attention has been denied. I've been sick twice and I haven't been treated. The first was in July, an ambulance gave me a meal, the moment I ate it, I got sick, I threw up, my blood pressure went down, I almost fainted. Here the Colombian doctors did not want to see me, they told me that I had to pay for the consultation at the San Juan de Dios hospital. I waited for about three hours and they wouldn't take care of me, so I had to leave.

And recently I got a fever and vomit, I went back to San Juan de Dios hospital and they didn't want to take care of me. I had to ask for help, the Venezuelans at the terminal gave me money to buy medicine. (Account 13, 2019)

The precariousness of health services deepens the conditions of vulnerability of people with specific needs such as children, women, elderly refugees and migrants, among others.

My son had just come with me from selling coffee. He was playing. And then I said, "Come, I'll make you some 'tajaditas'". I started heating them but there was water with oil, then it caught fire. And it was filled with smoke, I thought, my God, I'm going to burn everything here. When I pulled it out, that's when the oil exploded and the liquid from the oil spilled on my son. That was the worst thing that could happen to me because I had a similar experience myself. When I took him to the health center, my son was not cared for. It was a second-degree burn that needed medical care. I cried to the doctor and told him that he needed medical supplies that I don't have, I asked for his help.

The doctor did give me antiseptic soap, he gave me gauze, and painkillers. I started cleaning my son's wounds and started injecting the painkillers myself, because he was in a lot of pain at first. And the burns creams here so expensive, they cost 50 thousand pesos and I had nothing. I spent 15 days practically doing nothing, because I was taking care of the child. (Focus Group, 2019)

Sexual and Reproductive Health

The difficult and precarious conditions for access to health for refugees and migrants are aggravated for women. The lack of access to sexual and reproductive health coupled with obstetric violence, in some cases, intersects with discrimination and xenophobia.

I had medical appointments during pregnancy (...). The day I arrived in pain because I fell on a sidewalk, I slammed half my belly on the sidewalk. I gave birth prematurely. I got there with three cm of dilation. They didn't want to take care of me, even though I had my prenatal appointments there, they sent me to the house, to walk.

I was in pain for three weeks, supposedly with dilation. And the pains grew stronger every day until I was rushed to the hospital. By the time I got there, I was already eight in dilation and had almost no fluid. When I got to the hospital floor, I was nine cm dilated, but the baby wasn't born, because of the C-section that I had with my first pregnancy. I was crying because I couldn't give birth. I started screaming out of pain because the first C-section was reopening. I had to have another emergency C-section.

I remember I was very sleepy, I thought it was exhaustion, but no, it was because I was dying. The hemoglobin reached four. The placenta burst inside me. I had about 12 packs of blood. I had preeclampsia and my pressure through the roof. The doctors told my mom that I was dying, not to let me sleep. I don't know where my mom got the strength not to cry in front of me and tell me what was going on. They put the baby on me so I wouldn't fall asleep, while they were closing me up and stabilizing me. The doctors made the decision to perform tubal ligation on me, without my consent. (Account 51, 2019)

Overall

1.

Strengthen the work coordinated by the Catholic Church in the service of refugees, migrants and victims of human trafficking, consolidating the CLAMOR Network.

2.

Achieve greater synergy between the organizations of the Catholic Church that aid people in human mobility with United Nations agencies and other international bodies, in order to jointly promote the integral development of refugees and migrants.

3.

Despite notable coordination efforts in the response to the situation of refugees and migrants, there is a need to further strengthen and align coordination at the national level in different cities, by both national and international organizations. Some refugees and migrants feel that the response in cities could be stronger and better articulated.

4.

Think, design and implement campaigns for the eradication of discrimination and xenophobia from different networks and organizations. A partnership between different actors is essential. There is a need for strong social awareness-raising and work with State operators, both in the places and cities of reception and on transit routes, dismantling the preconceived prejudices about refugees and migrants. Currently, there are economic and security studies that dismantle the false notions and myths that support discrimination.

5.

Advocate with the National States so that, by overcoming migration policies that see refugees and migrants as "a security threat", they may comply with international treaties and agreements, respect the human rights of refugees and migrants and promote their integration, especially those most at risk.

6.

Continue to work with public servers in different countries to raise awareness when it comes to caring for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, as many of them continue to suffer from discrimination and xenophobia.

7.

Efforts to provide adequate and accessible information to people in mobility have been of relevance. However, they remain limited in scope. It is necessary to rethink how to reach the population in a more articulate, accurate and effective way.

8.

There is a need to strengthen attention to refugees and migrants through a gender-equality perspective and differentiated approaches to service delivery in various areas, both on transit routes and in reception places..

9.

Given the significant number of cases with specific needs, it is difficult to monitor each case individually. However, it is essential to provide greater and better support for such cases, especially those involving persons most at risk, such as single mothers or the elderly, unaccompanied/separated children and adolescents, survivors of gender-based violence, LGBTI+ people, people with disabilities, among others.

10.

Strengthen the psychosocial support component for refugees and migrants in support spaces, temporary reception centers and other places of care and presentation of services. In this regard, it is important to have a gender, intersectoral and age-group approach, promoting listening, self-help and trust spaces for women and girls.

11.

Continue to promote the participation of refugees and migrants in the processes and projects that concern them. Promote, listen to and include the age, gender and diversity approach and community participation. Promote processes of empowerment where refugees and migrants are the protagonists of their struggles and not mere objects that receive charity. Listen to refugees and migrants not only in their stories of suffering but in their proposals to drive change.

Salud

12.

Strengthen cooperation with States to increase medical brigades in neighborhoods and areas where refugees and migrants find themselves on the streets or in precarious housing, overcrowded or unhealthy conditions. Where they exist, increase information campaigns on these services in areas where refugees and migrants live or work so that they are aware of and have access to existing services.

Labor market insertion

13.

Continue to strengthen efforts to map and diagnose labor market needs in cities and places of shelter, focusing livelihood or entrepreneurship projects on the results of these studies. This avoids the saturation of the "independent work" markets of refugees and migrants, diversifying and filling identified local gaps.

14.

Design or strengthen, where available, training for the economic and professional reintegration of refugees and migrants. This includes training in digital and technological issues, which can provide new opportunities for income generation. In the case of women, it is necessary to consider the impact of the "domestication" of work and the "sexualization of the female body", in order to generate positive impacts during professional reintegration into working life.

Integration

15.

It is necessary to continue to think, design and implement social integration plans based on the provision of services, considering the needs of the host populations and integrating them into the implementation of the programs designed.

16.

Replicate successful programs and adapt them to other contexts, which can be highly beneficial.

Corollary

We'll keep walking

The feet of Noelia, Edwin, John Jairo, Jesus, Miguel Angel, Olivia, José Manuel, Jackeline, Kelly, as well as those of the more than five million Venezuelan refugees and migrants, are tired of walking and retracing paths in search of protection and a dignified future in Latin America and the Caribbean.

They are strong, agile feet, but they hurt, they are wounded by kilometers of roads, by fears, frustrations and uncertainties that have marked their steps since they left the country that saw them grow.

This is why, from the CLAMOR Network, with the invaluable contribution of UNHCR, we decided to look beyond numbers and statistics to tell life stories of Venezuelans who one day decided to let their feet take them away and jumped onto transit routes in search of a safe destination.

In this text, which is full of life and concrete experiences, we share the suffering and risks that refugees and migrants have faced; but especially the courage, inner strength and resilience of men and women who are relentlessly struggling, creatively, to achieve goals and realize their dreams.

The words in these texts sprang from extraordinary and resilient people in search of a dignified and safe life where they can enjoy their full rights.

Like those who tread sacred ground, in the organizations that make up the CLAMOR Network, of the Latin American Episcopal Council CELAM, we take off our sandals to meet them.

They told us that none, in the midst of the humanitarian crisis that plagues their beautiful Venezuela, could survive on two dollars a month, competing with the highest inflation in the world.

They were only allowed to buy bread flour and a kilo of cheese and were condemned to starvation.

They refused to die because they could not buy the medicine for their diabetes or hypertension, because no hospital could do the surgery they urgently needed, give them dialysis or chemotherapy.

We sharpened our ears to hear that they got tired of struggling to survive without running water in their homes, with long interruptions of power every day, cooking on wood as their grandmothers did, not being able to obtain a domestic gas cylinder, long lines every day to buy a few groceries; seeing how misery diminished their family and especially their children.

Others had enough of political persecution, torture or abuse of power. The insecurity of feeling in danger at every step. Therefore, they decided to flee. They stuffed a worn backpack with some clothes and a suitcase full of dreams and hopes of being able to conquer their right to a better life in some corner of the continent.

They fled, they were forced to leave their country, and so they must be recognized by States, international organizations and transit and host communities.

They also opened their hearts to tell us that the journey was full of dangers. Along with the inclement weather, they had to endure violence, assaults, sexual abuse, sleeping in the streets, being unable to shower for days, starving, praying to God for help for themselves and their own in the open.

And so, the cities of Latin America and the Caribbean are filled with Venezuelan refugees and migrants struggling to survive.

All around, we get used to seeing a white box with arepas, which, although light, weighs on the shoulders of those who struggle to earn just enough to eat, pay the rent and send something to their loved ones.

It is outrageous to read the stories of slave labor, of refugees and migrants forced to work in subhuman conditions, for less than the minimum wage, more than 10 hours a day, from Monday to Sunday, and then be dismissed, often without receiving any pay, leading some to the inescapable need of begging.

Painful pages of this text where we heard testimonies of women who were sexually exploited and abused in exchange for food, of transported on a dangerous stretch of the road or deceived with an offer to regularize their immigration status.

Children and adolescents exchanged schools and toys for the streets, working or being used for begging or sexual exploitation.

Unfortunately, many recounted that they have felt rejected, insulted, stigmatized as criminals, responsible for taking jobs from nationals and aggravating social ills.

Many of those interviewed expressed concern that most governments in the region have imposed visas and demanded documents that are difficult to obtain in Venezuela. As a result, many people have not been able to comply with the established requirements and have been exposed to crossing irregularly, increasing their situation of vulnerability.

The virus of exclusion

This work culminated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that exacerbated the vulnerability of refugees and migrants.

The virus has increased the risks faced by Venezuelans in the region. They have lost their income, and many have been left on the streets. Because of their irregular status, most are unable to access basic services, such as health services that are so necessary at this time, or are afraid to do so, scared to be apprehended.

That is why many of those feet now walk along dangerous routes, with closed borders and more difficulties in mobilization, some trying to return to their land, where they are also victims of xenophobia and pointed out for bringing the virus with them to their country.

The most worrying part of this is that they are returning to a country in a worse situation than when they left. Based on the stories they share when they pass through the shelters, we believe that many of the returnees, God willing, if the impact of the pandemic is lessened, will flee again.

Source of hope

However, without a doubt, Venezuelan refugees and migrants are a positive force that, with their honest and professional work, are contributing to the development of host nations.

Also noteworthy are the Venezuelan refugees and migrants who have contributed to the renewal of missionary dynamism in parishes throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

Their testimonies attested to the capacity of struggle, of resilience, of the nobility of a people who, in the midst of so much suffering, never ceases to smile, to sing, to dance, to believe that tomorrow will be better and who work for it to be so.

The Venezuelan refugees and migrants are grateful for the solidarity of so many good people in their path. Simple families who share a hot bowl of soup and allow them to use the toilet and even sleep in a clean bed. And they express special gratitude to the works of the Catholic Church that we recognize Christ in refugees and migrants and through them we serve Him.

According to the mapping efforts carried out by the CLAMOR Network in 2020, in Latin America there are 627 projects of the Catholic Church that care for refugees, migrants, and victims of trafficking, in 354 cities, in 22 countries.

All this work is part of the Four Verbs that Pope Francis presented to us: Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting and Integrating (Message for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees. 2018). Always encouraged and supported by the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery at the Service of Integral Human Development of the Holy See.

They also appreciate the support spaces and other services they have received from United Nations organizations, international cooperation and other civil society and national and local governments. Venezuelans are grateful and that is clear in this research paper.

Their feet must not fail them, they must keep walking, there's still a lot to do.

Getting out is a right. Not being forced to do so is a right as well.

It is urgent to build bridges instead of walls. We must promote the culture of encounter and fraternal welcome, recognize ourselves as universal citizens, where every man and every woman, no matter where they were born, can have life in abundance (Cf Jn 10:10).

And we will be blessed when we hear the voice of the Lord saying, "Blessed be by my Father, for I have walked as a stranger and you have welcomed me" (Mt 25:35).

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