

Covid-19 and (Im)Mobility in the Americas

COLOMBIA

October - December 2020

1. Socioeconomic Data

According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), the percentage of multidimensional poverty in the country was 17.5% in 2019.¹ In June 2020, the rate of unemployment was 19.8%, which represents a 10.4% rise from the previous year.² CEPAL reporting indicates that in 2019, 29.9% of the population lived in extreme poverty.³

2. Datos migratorios ⁴

- a. Emigration: According to the magazine Datos Macro, and in keeping with data published by the UN, Colombia has 2,868,032 emigrants, which corresponds to 5.76 of the Colombian population. Of this total, 54.42% are women (1,561,138) and 45.58% are men (1,307,894). Colombian migration has been directed primarily toward Venezuela (33.23%), the United States (27.82), and Spain (12.82%).⁵
- b. Immigration: According to Datos Macro, in 2019, Colombia had 1,142,319 immigrants, which corresponds to 2.29% of the Colombian population. Of this total, 50.4% are men (575,805), and 49.59% are women (556,514). Immigration arrives mainly from Venezuela (91.81%), the United States (1.76%), and Ecuador (1.33%).

According to information from Colombian Immigration on the 30th of April 2020 (Radiografía, Venezolanos en Colombia): the total number of Venezuelans in Colombia rose to 1,788,380 of which 763,544 are considered regular (documented) and 1,024,836 are considered irregular. The number of women is 883,544 and 904,836 are men. While Venezuelans are present in almost the entire country, there are places where their numbers have reached more than 100,000, such as: Bogotá (352,627), Norte de Santander (203,604), Atlántico (165,229), La Guajira (158,708), Antioquia (156,424), and Santander (107,587).⁶

¹<https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/pobreza-y-condiciones-de-vida/pobreza-y-desigualdad/pobreza-monetaria-y-multidimensional-en-colombia-2019> . Consultado el 14/07/2020.

² <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/mercado-laboral/empleo-y-desempleo>

³ https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44969/5/S1901133_es.pdf . Consultado el 14/07/2020 (Página 100)

⁴<https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/emigracion/colombia>
<https://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/venezuela/migrantes-colombianos-cuando-colombia-tenia-la-mayor-poblacion-migratoria-de-suramerica-355162>

⁵ <https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/emigracion/colombia> . Consultado el 14/07/2020

⁶ <https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/inmigracion/colombia> . Consultado el 15/07/ 2020.

Migration Colombia reports that by the 3rd of August, there had been a little more than 1,730,000 Venezuelan citizens in Colombia, it is estimated that 57% (a little more than a million) count themselves with irregular status.⁷

- c. Country of Transit: Caribbean, South American, Asian, Middle Eastern, and African migrants transit Colombia on route to the US. This transit also occurs now to the south with migrants heading toward Ecuador en route to Southern Cone countries. This group of migrants is composed largely of Venezuelans, Haitians, Cubans, and Africans. According to declarations by Colombian Immigration, more than 80,000 people have returned to Venezuela through June 2020 by situations of forced return due to precarity of living conditions.⁸
- d. Refugees: Colombia is the country in the region with the largest number of refugees, 300,000 recognized in 2018. At the same time, there have been 140 Venezuelans recognized as refugees.

In the year 2020, Colombia became the country with the second largest number of refugees worldwide. According to Revista Dinero, the country hosted almost 1.8 million displaced Venezuelans. This is only surpassed by Turkey which hosts 3.9 million.⁹

According to the coordination platform for refugees and migrants R4V, for March 2020, the approximate figure of migrants, refugees, and asylum petitioners of Venezuelan origin in Colombia was 1,809,872. However, Colombian Immigration said that in April the figure rose to 1,825,000 people. Using these R4V figures as a base, in May 2019 there were 5,303 Venezuelan asylum petitions in progress, and 140 recognized refugees for December of that year. According to information from the consulate, reported by the project Migración Venezuela, in 2019 Colombia received 10,479 new asylum requests from Venezuelan citizens; meanwhile, Peru and Brazil together represent 70% of new Venezuelan petitions of the same year with 482,571 and 129,988 respectively.¹⁰

- e. Internal displacement: According to the government's victim registry, there are 8,036,014 internally displaced people in the country. According to the CODHES Information System, just in the first trimester of this year there have

⁷<https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/noticias/para-finales-del-mes-de-mayo-el-3-del-total-de-venezolanos-que-se-encontraban-en-colombia-al-comienzo-de-la-pandemia-habia-regresado-a-su-pais-y-un-2-mas-estaria-a-la-espera-de-poder-hacerlo>

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<https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/noticias/mas-de-1-millon-825-mil-venezolanos-estarian-radicados-en-colombia>

⁹[https://www.dinero.com/pais/articulo/colombia-es-el-segundo-pais-con-mayor-numero-de-refugiados-en-el-mundo/289965#:~:text=46%3A00%20AM-,Colombia%20es%20el%20segundo%20pa%C3%ADs%20con%20mayor%20n%C3%BAmero%20de%20refugiados,para%20los%20Refugiados%20\(Acnur\)](https://www.dinero.com/pais/articulo/colombia-es-el-segundo-pais-con-mayor-numero-de-refugiados-en-el-mundo/289965#:~:text=46%3A00%20AM-,Colombia%20es%20el%20segundo%20pa%C3%ADs%20con%20mayor%20n%C3%BAmero%20de%20refugiados,para%20los%20Refugiados%20(Acnur))

¹⁰ <https://r4v.info/es/situations/platform/location/7511> <https://migravenezuela.com/web/>

been 11,000 newly registered forced and massive displacements across 22 events, with afro-descendant and indigenous populations most affected (56%).¹¹

3. State Measures

- During the first days of October, Migración Colombia announced that there will be [a new Special Permit of Permanence for Venezuelans](#), who will be able to apply between October 15, 2020 and February 15, 2021. Those who entered between December 31, 2020 and August 2020 are eligible, stamping their passport. At the same time, they will not be eligible if they have a judicial record in Colombia or abroad, nor if they have deportation or expulsion measures in force.
- Since the end of September, [international flights have been authorized](#). Since October 1st, to enter Colombia authorities require travelers to show a negative PCR test. [Criminal penalties will be enforced for individuals and airlines that fail to comply](#) with this measure.
- Surveillance on the border with Venezuela has been reinforced. [700 soldiers and 200 police will monitor illegal crossings](#).
- [A law has been proposed for a comprehensive immigration policy](#) in Colombia that would include returnees, Colombians abroad, and foreign migrants to regularize the situation of immigrants and support emigrants.
- [The new immigration law has been approved](#) after a second round of debate. The law aims at the situation of Colombians abroad as well as foreign migrants in Colombia.
- The government of the north of Santander announced that [the Simón Bolívar and Francisco Paulas border crossing points will be open for two days](#) so that Venezuelan students enrolled in the Colombian educational system can take the “Saber” exam to access higher education.
- By the end of November, it was announced that the [border closure measures between Colombia and Venezuela will extend until January 16, 2021](#), allowing only essential needs, humanitarian emergency, cargo transportation and acts of God or force majeure.

4. Migrant Situation Reports

Population in Transit

- [Two migrants died on the border with Panama](#), within the Darien region, one of these was due to COVID-19. At least 2,600 migrants in transit remain stranded in the Darien Gap.
- By mid-November, [about 500 Venezuelan migrants were stranded on the Simón Bolívar International Bridge](#) while waiting for authorization from the Venezuelan government to re-enter their country. The physical integrity of the bridge is in risk due to the gatherings in combination with the tidal rise in flow of the Táchrina river.

¹¹<https://codhes.wordpress.com/2020/05/21/corte-constitucional-solicita-al-estado-proteccion-diferencial-para-poblacion-victima-de-desplazamiento-en-medio-de-emergencia-por-covid-19/>

Venezuelan Immigrants

- By mid-September, [thousands of Venezuelan migrants had registered their return to their country of origin](#) during the pandemic. It is expected that 200,000 return in the coming months.
- There has been an observed deterioration in the working and living conditions of migrants, [especially Venezuelan women](#), who work in precarious and informal conditions and earn less. This situation affects their access to basic services and fundamental rights.
- The official municipal watchdog in Medellín (personería) indicates that [there are some 87,000 Venezuelans living in conditions that violate their fundamental rights](#).
- In September, ACNUR registered that approximately [5,700 personas entered the country in the La Guajira region on footpaths](#).

Deportations

- One of the scenarios that most affects Venezuelan migrants in Colombia are the ongoing protests. Just on the 21st of November, [59 migrants were expelled, according to the El Derecho a no Obedecer project](#).

Girls, Boys, and Adolescents

- According to figures from the Migration Directorate which serves some 1.7 million Venezuelan migrants, [363,000 children and adolescents are enrolled in the educational system](#). The problem with this figure lies in the fact that this population remains vulnerable and requires an education that is designed through public policies that avoid xenophobia and segregation while being adequate to meet their educational needs.

5. Social Responses

- *Migrant Resistance*
- Venezuelan migrants stay mobile to support their migratory and vital projects. From Colombia to Venezuela due to the impacts of the pandemic, and vice versa.
- *Xenophobia*
- [Growing hate speech on social networks](#) registered on the Xenophobia Barometer, a project that seeks to systematize, analyze, and disseminate as public information the analysis of data collected on Twitter, web pages, and the media about the migrant population in Colombia.
- The mayor of Bogotá, [Claudia López, made xenophobic statements](#) linking Venezuelan migration to crime in the city. In response, the director of Migration Colombia, Juan Francisco Espinosa, assured that criminality in Colombia cannot be explained by

Venezuelan migration (only about 4% of registered crimes are committed by Venezuelan migrants).