

# Covid-19 and (Im)mobility in the Americas

## COLOMBIA

1. **Poverty rate:** 29,9% out of the total population up to 2018.<sup>1</sup>
2. **Migration data**
  - a. Sending country: About 3 million Colombians or 6% of the total population, reside abroad mainly in Venezuela (33.2%), the US (27.8%) and Spain (12.8%).
  - b. Destination country: About 1'200,000 immigrants or 2.29% of the total population live in Colombia. The main countries of origin are Venezuela (91.8%), the US (1.7%) and Ecuador (1.3%).
  - c. Transit country: Caribbean, South American, Asian, Middle East, and African migrants transit Colombia en route to the US. This transit is also heading south to Ecuador to continue en route to the countries of the Southern Cone. This is the case of Venezuelan, Haitian, Cuban and African migrants.
  - d. Country receiving national deportees: Colombian deportees are mainly coming from the US.
  - e. Sending and host country for refugees: Colombia is the country in the region that produces the largest number of refugees. There were at least 300,000 recognized by 2018. Likewise, it has recognized 140,000 Venezuelans as refugees.
3. **Impact of COVID-19<sup>3</sup> (as of July 14 2020)**
  - a. Registered cases: 154,277
  - b. % of cases out of the total population: 0,10%
  - c. Number of deaths: 5,787
4. **States Measures**
  - On March 14, the seven border crossing points between Colombia and Venezuela were closed. The entry of persons from any country in Asia or Europe is restricted. Only national citizens, members of diplomatic missions and resident foreigners are allowed to enter according to the resolution 408 of March 15. On March 17, the border crossing points with Brazil, Peru, Panama and Ecuador closed.
  - Colombia has had problematic diplomatic relations with Venezuela since a year ago. The closure and strengthening of borders (including militarization) is a policy that has been implemented even before Covid-19.
  - Before the emergency, in January 2020, the Colombian state resolved that Venezuelan citizens who had entered the country before November 29, 2019, with a passport and entry stamp to Colombia, could apply for the Permanent Residence Permit (PEP), service that was

<sup>1</sup> [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44969/5/S1901133\\_es.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44969/5/S1901133_es.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <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>

<sup>3</sup> John Hopkins University (2020). "Coronavirus Resource Centre" <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

suspended during the health crisis. The Special Permit to Stay for the Promotion of Formalization (PEPFF) was also created as an exceptional mechanism aimed at irregularized migrants who wish to work in Colombia.

- There has been an increase in immigration control, border closures, and deployment of monitoring, surveillance, and deportation operations associated with the compliance of the mandatory isolation by Covid-19.
- *Operation Mirror* was carried out, in conjunction with Ecuador. This operation consists of the militarization of the border between the two countries to reinforce surveillance which includes 500 soldiers and air forces overflights in the area. The focus was on routes and irregularized crossing points.
- *Borders for Migration*, an instance of the Presidency of the Republic in coordination with organizations of Venezuelan migrants, designed a plan that focuses on assisting the vulnerable migrant population and host communities.
- The Ministry of Health set guidelines to assist migrants, invited local governments to promote dialogue and the development of intersectoral strategies to deal with the pandemic. It also arranges to have spaces for preventive isolation and contagious of COVID-19 for migrants who have no place of residence and are in an irregularized situation in the country.
- The presidency manages the distribution of food in 40 municipalities prioritizing to assist Venezuelans in a vulnerable condition. It was calculated that the food will reach 800,000 Venezuelans, especially the ones irregularized.
- The government decreed that "the evictions are prohibited for Colombians, Venezuelans, those with one-month, and six-month contracts and those who are paid daily. In Colombia, it is illegal to evict families without a court ruling. This measure is extended up to two months after the emergency. "
- The Colombian government arranged a humanitarian corridor for Venezuelan migrants who decided to return to their country of origin due to the pandemic.
- After the closure of all points of entry at the border on March 17, the Mayor's Office of Pamplona gave power to the police to prevent the entry and stay of irregularized migrants.
- Bogotá's Mayor's Office launched a program to provide subsidies to 350.000 families below the poverty line and residents in the capital, which does not exclude migrants. It also launched the Bogotasolidariaencasa.gov.co platform to channel donations.
- Starting on March 22, a temporary app called "Tell us how you are" was launched, through a virtual platform installed on the website of Migración Colombia, which seeks to collect information and put in contact Colombians abroad with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the consulates.

## 5. At risk populations

- *Venezuelan immigrants (in vulnerable situation prior to COVID 19, residing in main cities and border areas)* (this population is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19)
  - Before the pandemic:
    - Colombia hosts around 1'800,000 Venezuelans. 75% of them work in the informal market and 40% live under the poverty line.
  - During the pandemic:
    - In border municipalities such as Pamplona and Cúcuta, dining rooms and shelters were ordered to close because they failed to comply with the measures to prevent Covid-19 infection.

- In mid-March, abusive behaviour by the Police against migrants was noted. The Police stopped buses that were entering the municipality of Pamplona and got off all people in irregularized status to force them to walk back to Venezuela through the Berlin Wasteland.
  - In the opposite direction, hundreds of migrants are returning to Venezuela. Many are walking from Ecuador using irregular entry points and having little humanitarian attention. Another 3,000 arrived in Cúcuta through the humanitarian corridor that the national government opened. In turn, thousands would be stranded in San Antonio del Táchira, since the Venezuelan government has not yet allowed them to enter, and many others have been forced to quarantine in deplorable conditions on Venezuelan territory.
  - In early May, there was a strong repression by the Colombian military against a group of migrants who were trying to cross the Rumichaca bridge (border with Ecuador).
  - The National Urban Survey of Migrants in Colombia<sup>4</sup> carried out in the context of the Covid-19, shows that only 10% of migrants are working, 45% lost their jobs, and another 32% are at home without working despite having a regular job, 98% of the latter have not generated any income during the crisis.
  - 97% of them say they do not have a computer, which prevents schoolchildren from continuing with online education.
  - The access to health services for the migrant population is precarious, particularly for people of Venezuelan origin, and it is only available for certain emergency situations.
  - In the city of Bogotá, there were massive evictions of Venezuelans living in bedrooms paid per day due to the impossibility of sustaining the payment in quarantine. In addition, 200 migrants were expelled from the Maloka Shelter in Bogotá, to prevent the spread of Covid-19.
  - There are looting of supermarkets recorded and protests of "motorcycle taxi drivers" in La Guajira border area due to quarantine measures that prevent them from working.
- *Internal Displaced Persons (mainly rural population that leave threatened by violence)* (this population is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19)
    - During the pandemic:
      - The situations of precariousness and vulnerability of the displaced population within the country are exacerbated. In particular, in the department of Chocó where 2,025 people fleeing the war between the ELN and the Self-Defense Forces are confined in the Alto Baudó. They are overcrowded in the town's coliseum, with no state response.
  - *Colombian abroad ( thousands of refugees and forcibly displaced people are particularly vulnerable)* (this population is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19)

<sup>4</sup>Available at: <https://equilibriumcende.com/resultados-de-la-encuesta-nacional-de-opinion-cuarentena-covid-19-en-poblacion-venezolana-migrante-en-colombia/>

- Before the pandemic:
    - Colombia is the country with the second highest number of people abroad in the entire region. According to the OIM 2019 report, there are 2.9 million Colombian abroad, and approximately one million of them are in Venezuela and Ecuador. Many are forcibly displaced and/or refugees.
    - After the signing of the Peace Agreement, the government promised to design and implement an accompanied return plan for victims abroad that has made little progress. On the contrary, despite the Peace Agreement, violence continues and many people continue to be displaced.
  - During the pandemic:
    - It is known that Colombian refugees and displaced persons in Ecuador do not receive state or social aid during the emergency. They experience fear of being identified, which would put their safety at risk.
    - As for Colombian emigrants and tourists abroad, there are complaints due to the excessive increase in the cost of tickets to return to the country and the cancellation of humanitarian flights. Many do not have money for food, lodging or medicine. According to the Colombia Migration webpage, since March 24, 4,500 Colombians have been trapped in different countries and 2,300 requested some type of help to be able to return.
    - 200 Colombians from Australia are requesting government help to return to the country.
- *Deportation of migrants and tourist from Colombia (mainly due to the breach of quarantine)*
- During the pandemic:
    - 3,400 verifications of compliance with preventive isolation have been carried out on the Venezuelan migrant population, which has resulted in 130 people deported, 94 inadmissibilities and 59 who have had their entry and stay permits suspended.
    - On March 18, Migration Colombia expelled 40 foreigners of various nationalities (English, Israelis, Australians, Yemenis, Pakistanis, Haitians, Indians, Americans, Germans and Dutch) on a discretionary basis, for breaching the isolation measure. There is no consolidated information on more deportations or expulsions of this type.
- *Colombian deportees from the US*
- During the pandemic:
    - On March 30, it is reported that 64 Colombians were deported from the US. Upon arrival they remained in quarantine at the Tolemaida military base. Initially, it was claimed that medical checks had been carried out to confirm that they were not infected with Covid 19, however, days later, and after testing, they confirmed that more than 23 people were infected with the virus.

## 6. Social Responses

- *Migrant struggles*
  - Already before the quarantine, a group had protested for the lack of aid and guarantees from the Colombian government to face the imminent COVID-19 crisis.
- *Solidarity networks:*
  - The Great Agreement Venezuela platform that is constituted of 190 civil society organizations of Venezuelan migrant communities in Colombia and Colombian returnees is organizing donations.
  - The church promotes solidarity campaigns with the Venezuelan population. Piggy banks and bonuses will be delivered in different parishes. The house of Divine Providence provides almost 6 thousand daily rations of food and has 8 dining rooms at the border in the parishes on the outskirts of Cúcuta. The Diocese Migration Center assists many families with food and shelter.
  - Fundación Andresen has a nursery that cares for Colombians returnees and Venezuelan children.
  - UNHCR enables 30 telephone lines where they provide information on rights and routes of protection for the refugee and migrant population. Likewise, the Venezuelan embassy in Colombia enables a communication channel.
- *Xenophobia:*
  - The mayor of Bogotá made xenophobic public declarations in an effort to obtain financial resources from the central government to assist the Venezuelan migrant population residing in the city: “We have already paid for food, we have already paid for the birth, we have already paid for the garden, we have already paid school, we already gave employment. Too bad the only thing we can not cover is the lease. And for that we ask for a little help from the national government. One peso, just one. Because all these things are paid by the taxes of the Bogota citizens without saying a word. We have been paying it to 450,000 Venezuelans for three years”.

### Sources:

<https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/noticias/260-marzo-2020/cuentanos-como-estas-la-nueva-iniciativa-de-migracion-colombia-y-la-cancilleria-para-contactar-y-apoyar-a-los-colombianos-en-el-exterio>

<https://elpais.com/sociedad/2020-03-30/el-drama-de-los-4500-colombianos-varados-en-el-mundo.html>

<https://www.elspectador.com/coronavirus/los-mensajes-de-los-colombianos-en-el-exterior-varados-en-otros-paises-por-el-coronavirus-articulo-910192>

<https://twitter.com/ColombiaNosUne/status/1245502107580534784>

<https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/noticias/260-marzo-2020/cierre-de-frontera-con-venezuela-una-de-las-nuevas-medidas-contener-el-coronavirus>  
<https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2020/04/05/colombia-militariza-su-frontera-por-miedo-a-que-el-coronavirus-avance-fuerte-desde-ecuador/>  
<https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/noticias/260-marzo-2020/desde-hoy-y-hasta-el-proximo-30-de-mayo-todos-los-pasos-fronterizos-terrestres-fluviales-y-maritimos-estaran-cerrados>  
<https://migravenezuela.com/web/articulo/asi-enfrenta-el-gobierno-la-crisis-migratoria-durante-el-covid19/1798>  
<https://migravenezuela.com/web/articulo/covid-19-estos-son-los-lineamientos-de-minsalud-para-atender-a-los-migrantes/1797>  
<https://migravenezuela.com/web/articulo/el-gobierno-dara-800-mil-mercados-para-venezolanos-irregulares-en-colombia/1793>  
<https://migravenezuela.com/web/articulo/nadie-puede-lavarse-las-manos-con-los-venezolanos-presidente-duque/1791>

<https://migravenezuela.com/web/articulo/las-30-lineas-telefonicas-en-donde-los-migrantes-pueden-pedir-ayuda-para-el-coronavirus/1762>  
<https://migravenezuela.com/web/articulo/urge-financiacion-para-ayudar-a-migrantes-durante-el-covid19-onu-colombia/1792>  
<https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/bogota/consejero-para-la-crisis-migratoria-se-encargara-de-la-situacion-de-venezolanos-en-bogota-articulo-912600>  
<https://www.acnur.org/noticias/press/2020/4/5e848b214/refugiados-y-migrantes-de-venezuela-durante-la-crisis-del-covid-19-segun.html>  
<https://www.infobae.com/america/agencias/2020/04/03/enfoque-migrantes-venezolanos-regresan-a-casa-desde-colombia-en-medio-de-pandemia-de-coronavirus/>  
<https://www.acnur.org/noticias/press/2020/4/5e848b214/refugiados-y-migrantes-de-venezuela-durante-la-crisis-del-covid-19-segun.html>  
[https://caracol.com.co/emisora/2020/03/01/cucuta/1583077999\\_808172.html](https://caracol.com.co/emisora/2020/03/01/cucuta/1583077999_808172.html)  
<https://cerosetenta.uniandes.edu.co/el-covid-19-venezolanos-migrantes/>  
<https://cerosetenta.uniandes.edu.co/el-covid-19-venezolanos-migrantes/>  
<https://cerosetenta.uniandes.edu.co/el-covid-19-venezolanos-migrantes/>  
<https://migravenezuela.com/web/articulo/migrantes-venezolanos-en-colombia-en-medio-de-la-crisis-por-coronavirus/1763>  
<https://cerosetenta.uniandes.edu.co/el-covid-19-venezolanos-migrantes/>  
<https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/index.php>  
<https://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/salud/gobiernos-de-duque-y-maduro-ya-se-reunieron-para-tratar-coronavirus-en-la-frontera-EG12636031>  
<https://cerosetenta.uniandes.edu.co/el-covid-19-venezolanos-migrantes/>

<https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/index.php>  
<https://cerosetenta.uniandes.edu.co/el-covid-19-venezolanos-migrantes/>  
<https://semanarural.com/web/articulo/hacinados-asi-viven-2025-desplazados-en-altobaudo/1374?fbclid=IwAR2KlnAP5aLrXzmIMbTe0WeUg7Tesn8cgjbr1cGXGf-HqUdOKGSDwEEOozg>  
<https://www.facebook.com/antonio.sanguino.79/videos/252977619073613/>  
<https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/noticias/260-marzo-2020/mas-de-40-extranjeros-expulsados-una-colombiana-dejada-a-disposicion-de-la-fiscalia-y-mas-de-700-alertas-por-el-no-cumplimiento-de-la-medida-de-aislamiento>  
<https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/noticias/260-marzo-2020/cerca-de-2-mil-visitas-para-verificar-el-cumplimiento-de-la-medida-de-aislamiento-ha-realizado-migracion-colombia-en-la-ultima-semana>  
<https://cerosetenta.uniandes.edu.co/el-covid-19-venezolanos-migrantes/>

\*For more detail go to the digital archive that we created:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1gEHiv-U1i0cPf3WzLr-ZGRzIbL3LP7zI>