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### **Experiences in Migration Policies for Venezuelans in Latin American and the Caribbean**

*Summary: This short presentation will explore the options of migration policies in the region for Venezuelans classified in four groups: 1) as members of regional pacts and Cartagena Pact 2) Ad Hoc special permits for work 3) Regularization of irregulars and 4) Deportation and no access Policy Migration policies of Chile, Panama, Argentina, Chile, Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, Panama, Mexico, Dominican Republic and Ecuador will be addressed under these groups with the pros and cons of each one. A final thought will be given the current situation in the ABC islands.*

Venezuelan migration is probably the most important problem in the region at the moment. Some would say that now it is a global problem. A few weeks ago the European Union declared that the second nationality that was asking for more asylum petitions in Europe were precisely Venezuelans. South –American, Central American and Caribbean countries have had the challenge to not only accept large numbers of Venezuelans into their countries, but also explain to their citizens how this affects their public services and their economies.

In this sense we can safely say that there has been a great deal of solidarity, especially of South American countries to receive Venezuelans. Now countries like Colombia (called “*un pais hermano*” to many Venezuelans), Chile, Peru, Ecuador have let hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans come to their countries, under very difficult circumstances and with less controversy compared to the Syrian experience in Europe.

The main responses in the region have been the following:

- 1) Countries that have accepted Venezuelans based on regional pacts including the Cartagena Pact

Argentina, Brazil y Uruguay have adopted a position whereas Venezuelan citizens are part of MERCOSUR or in the case of Ecuador UNASUR and have integrated the large number of Venezuelans into residence or work permits as part of a general agreement. Ecuador even created a special category for Venezuelans as citizens of UNASUR. It is also interesting to say that Ecuador, under Correa created a special program to bring University professors to the country. Today several hundreds of highly qualified Venezuelan professors now live in Ecuador. In these four countries the permits of residence include the right to work.

Mexico seems to be the only country that applied the Cartagena PACT, at least partially. (Acosta: 2019) In 2018, Venezuelans were the nationals of South America who obtained a greater number of permits from Mexican authorities. There were 45,000 Venezuelans registered with more than 4000 applications for asylum made by Venezuelans in this country. However, applicants do not have the right to work, so for many of them this strategy is not beneficial in the short term.

- 2) Countries with Ad hoc permits or Regularization of irregulars

The countries of Chile, Colombia y Peru fall into this category.

In Chile there are several ways to obtain a one-year resident permit; one of them is thru a visum of “democratic responsibility” that can be obtained in Venezuela itself.

In Colombia a Special Permit of Permanence (PEP) that allows Venezuelans to stay in Colombia for 90 days was created, but can be extended to two years and includes permission to work. In the beginning they were asking for a valid passport, but nowadays you can enter with an expired one.

Peru has created a Temporal Permit of Permanence where they are allowed to work and live for a year. When the year is over, they need to prove that they have work for a more permanent resident permit.

All these countries have looked for solutions to regularize their irregulars.

Perhaps the merit and at the same time the disadvantage of these *ad hoc permits* is that they were considered a transitory measure to organize the avalanche of Venezuelans coming thru the borders. According to our studies Chile and Colombia is the most desired country to go to (20% of Venezuelans that plan to leave believe this is the best place Data – (april-2019). .

### 3) Regularization programs for Venezuelans

Panamá and Bolivia and to a certain extent Chile have had this solution.

Panama carried out a regularization process in April 2018. Residents who had been in the country for one year in an irregular manner and who also met the following requirements could obtain a residence: a) A passport with a stamp or a certification of the consulate to prove that one was not available, b) a sworn statement made by a Panamanian national or a permanent resident who was responsible for the applicant and c) payment of \$ 1,022. Over 37,000 Venezuelans regularized their situation via this procedure

Chile has created a number of instruments for regularization of its migrants especially Venezuelans. One of the main requisites is that they find a job in this period.

### 4) Deportation and no access policy

A number of countries have decided not to accept migrants or implement strict measures of deportation or even in some cases ignore the problem altogether, like Trinidad and Tobago or Dominican Republic. More than 45.000 Venezuelans now live in DR. The interesting issue about these countries is that they are islands, thus the local opinion is divided on the arrival of Venezuelans. The literature tells us that islands contend with migration in different ways and the population tends to fear loss of jobs and the nature of the arrival of the migrants. Dominican Republic has from early on accepted Venezuelan investment and human capital especially in the first two waves of migration (Paredes 2019) but has problems with the third wave of migrants since 2017. Trinidad and Tobago regularly deports Venezuelan and it has become an issue taken by the media of my country and the National Assembly as a violation of human rights.

Some obvious conclusions from these migration policies are:

- All countries look for solutions in the short term
- The temporality of the measures, no more than a year of residence in most cases
- The ad hoc nature of the solution
- The fact that the countries have problems with dealing with of labeling the Venezuelans as refugees, economic migrants or others.

What is the best solution? Obviously the particularities of the islands must be taken into account. The literature on small islands economies is very clear – you need migration in order to develop, innovate and create better and stronger economies on one hand. Migrants give the islands new knowledge and skills. They complement the local population and connect the island with globalization and its potential benefits. They create transnational communities that are beneficial to the receiving country.

On the other hand the limitations of small islands (space, the economy, limited resources, public opinion among others) also have a specific weight in migration policy. The bottom line in my opinion is to a large extent is the following: are the islands asking some important questions about their future in the next fifty years?

- What kind of society do they want to be? Multicultural or pluri-cultural?
- How can globalization and the mobility of persons benefit them in the long run?
- What sort of integration/assimilation/adaptation do they want to generate among migrants with the local citizens?
- What role do migrants want to play in this society?

These questions need to be addressed to rethink a migration policy that is relevant to this age and place. In most of the countries that have received hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans research is just starting – ethnographic, quantitative studies are important. On the other side do we know the opinion of the population on migration? Have we done public opinion surveys to accommodate public and migration policies to create narratives that “sell” positive migration to our inhabitants?

Many questions and few answers – in the end understanding better the problem from different points of view is a key aspect. Linking migration policy with development goals is another.

Many thanks