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La Solidaridad o la Soledad? Cooperation and Tensions in the Regional State Response to the Venezuelan Migration Crisis

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ABSTRACT *The Venezuelan migration crisis has displaced over six million people and is the Americas' largest forced migration. Nearby countries have received the majority of the displaced and initially showed an impressive welcome to Venezuelans, regardless of whether they may be considered migrants, asylum seekers, or refugees. However, host country responses have mainly been uncoordinated, siloed, and impromptu. This paper examines the solidarities and tensions within the individual country responses of Venezuela's closest Latin American and Andean neighbors: Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and Brazil. The number of displaced people leaving Venezuela has steadily increased since 2015 yet limited long term-planning and inclusion of migrants in host communities has led to a growth in xenophobia. Additionally, many Latin American host nations have erected new barriers that make legal entry or residency forms more difficult for migrants to obtain. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded these issues as host countries grapple with supporting and offering resources to their citizens in addition to migrants. However, some promising regional solutions could be applied in a more coordinated regional approach to help ensure that host countries and IOs supporting them can better extend enduring solidarity and inclusion to Venezuelans. These solutions include longer-term visa options, such as the new Colombian 10-year visa, that can help regularize and include Venezuelans over a prolonged period. A particularly recommended approach would be the regional application of an inventive Latin America humanitarian-orientated accord, the Cartagena Declaration, a forward-thinking concept with a potential that has never been realized. The Cartagena Declaration could offer more comprehensive protection and fairer access to rights beyond temporary measures.*

KEYWORDS migration; displacement; asylum seekers; refugees; mixed migration; irregular migration

The Venezuelan migration crisis is the Americas' largest forced migration in recent times; the United Nations (UN) estimates that by the end of 2021 over six million Venezuelans had left the country, with most being hosted in Latin

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America and the Caribbean (RV4, 2022). Regional host countries have shown solidarity to Venezuelan migrants, welcoming them with various residency policies and showing accommodation to the displaced regardless of whether they would be classified formally as refugees or migrants. However, this response takes place on an improvised per-country basis rather than a coherent and systematic long-term regional strategy. As such, the initial welcome has increasingly become mired with tension; new and more stringent and exclusionary visa and residency requirements have become the new policy in some host countries, and xenophobia is escalating. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic has further aggravated tensions and led to more precarious living conditions for forced migrants (RV4, 2022). This paper argues that a coordinated regional state application of the Cartagena Declaration is a more inclusive approach to protection that can allow host countries to continue extending solidarity to Venezuelans displaced by the socio-political crisis. However, this requires ongoing regional dialogue and increased international support to reduce tensions and increase effectiveness. This research draws on a combination of secondary literature on recent events and policies related to Venezuelan forced migration, scholarly literature on regional hosting of Venezuelan migrants, and literature on migration theory and categorization of forced migrants. It examines the complexities of the Venezuelan migration movements, explores the evolving responses of regional states, and ultimately advances the argument of how and why migrant protection could be better coordinated, enhanced, and supported.

Background to the Crisis

During the 20th century, oil-rich Venezuela was among the wealthiest countries in Latin America and was an attractive destination for migrants and asylum seekers; the current Venezuelan migration crisis marks the stark reversal of these trends. The first wave of outgoing Venezuelan migrants was primarily of more affluent classes who expressed their reactions to the Hugo Chavez regime and his socialist-inspired "Bolivarian Revolution" through migrating to North America or Europe (Freier & Parent, 2019). However, under President Nicolas Maduro the country has been steered into a profound economic, political, social and humanitarian crisis. Years of corruption and grossly mismanaged socialist policies dating back to Chavez have ushered in state failure and triggered a newer, more significant wave of migration since 2015 (Freier & Parent, 2019). The oil industry and the economy have deteriorated to the point where fuel shortages have become commonplace, along with longstanding shortages of electricity, medicine, water, and essential goods (Economist Intelligence, 2021). Since 2018 there has been a political standoff between the Maduro government and Juan Guido, an opposition National Assembly leader recognized as the legitimate interim president by much of the international

community. The outcome of these crises has been a mass exodus of Venezuelans from all classes of society fleeing the recurrent shortages, breakdown of public services, political repression, widespread and profound corruption, appalling crimes rates, shocking levels of hyperinflation and pervasive hopelessness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the crisis inside Venezuela and has also had adverse consequences for displaced Venezuelans. By August 2020, more than 100,000 Venezuelan migrants hazarded the overland return to Venezuela, having been among the first to lose their livelihoods when the COVID pandemic struck their host countries. However, some of those returnees have since left Venezuela again, having found the conditions far more dire (Wolfe, 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic has also made journeys to and from Venezuela more hazardous and irregular due to increased border closures and mobility controls that affect migration and circular migration back to Venezuela (RV4, 2022). In response to the escalating situation, President Maduro has recently made some limited changes in Venezuela, such as accepting the use of the dollar, allowing some foreign investment in oil, opening import restrictions, and attempting to attract tourism again. Venezuela is also experimenting with moving toward using cryptocurrency, which has become very popular given the instability of the Bolivar currency (Economist Intelligence, 2021). The effects these new measures will have on the economy and on Venezuelans inside and outside the country are still uncertain.

Outside of Venezuela, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) actively support migrants displaced by the crisis. They have opened several temporary reception centers in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil to address basic needs and assist migrants with access to essential services. They try to maintain a presence in some central areas of the borders in those regions to offer protection from various risks like trafficking and exploitation. They also support government registration efforts throughout the region. The UNHCR and IOM coordinate with host governments, other NGOs, and volunteer organizations to assist migrants and collect data to understand migrant needs. The main form of coordinated IO response comes from the R4V Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V):

> To ensure a comprehensive UN-wide response, and to support the efforts of main receiving governments, the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for the Venezuela situation – led by UNHCR and IOM – launched the Regional Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants (RMRP) from Venezuela on 13 November 2019. The plan, developed with some 137 partners, aims to support refugees and migrants from Venezuela as well as its host communities. It is the first of its kind in the Americas: a strategic and operational blueprint, a coordination template, and a funding mechanism for responding to the needs of Venezuelans on the move. (UNHCR, n.d.a, para. 13)

Many of the statistics in this paper come from the *RMRP 2022 Report* (RV4, 2022) and the Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) data tracking platform (UNHCR, n.d.b). The RMRP also highlights a consistent issue underlying the response to the Venezuelan migration crisis: insufficient international response. In 2021, 45% of the 1.44 billion dollars the R4V called for was met. The number of those displaced by the Venezuelan crisis comes second only to the Syrian Crisis (UNHCR, n.d.b). However, it has received less international reaction (Freier et al., 2021). Contributing factors may be that the direct impact of Venezuelan forced migration is experienced to a much lesser extent in North America and Europe, and that Venezuelans are not displaced by war or traditional conflict, making it complex to comprehend and classify their situation.

Complexities of Classifying Displaced Venezuelans

Based on their individual and shared circumstances, Venezuelans have been forced to migrate in search of security, opportunity, or both. Regular migration refers to movement linked to some form of temporary or long-term legal residency status in their country of resettlement. Conversely, irregular migration broadly refers to the "movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination" (IOM, n.d.). A Convention Refugee is defined as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UN General Assembly, 1951, p. 3). In her research on migration management, McNevin (2017) explores how migration arises through an uneven distribution of security and opportunity, factors not unique to the Venezuelan crisis. She argues that many Northern countries manage migration through what she terms the "threshold" position, a sort of middle ground using international law that limits who meets this threshold, and therefore who will receive official status in their host country. Currently, refugees in need of security are more likely to meet that threshold than migrants looking for economic opportunities. Consequently, asylum or refugee status in Northern countries and the protections and societal benefits that it confers may be more limited to Venezuelans fleeing political persecution as opposed to those forced to migrate due to the general dire conditions in the country.

The mass migration of Venezuelans during the Maduro regime has primarily taken the form of South-South migration to neighboring Andean countries and other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean through a mixture of regular and irregular migration channels. Irregular migrants may be excluded from traditional labor markets, social and public services, and legal protections available to citizens and to regular residents. The relationship between social

justice and citizenship has been described as "tendentious" by scholars, which can be inclusive to citizens or members of nation-state and at the same time exclusionary to non-citizens; irregular migrants might suffer the exclusionary effects of this relationship more than other non-citizens (Stasiulis, 2013). Irregular migration status also increases vulnerability to various types of abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and fear of deportation. Some Venezuelans have sought asylum or obtained registered refugee status in their host countries. However, not all Venezuelan migrants meet the requirements specified by the 1951 Refugee Convention, nor do all Venezuelans necessarily consider themselves refugees or asylum seekers. In his study on "survival migration," Betts (2013) argues that categorizing migrants solely as refugees or economic migrants is limiting and arbitrary. He stated, "if one cannot survive or maintain the fundamental conditions of human dignity without leaving a country, then distinguishing between persecution and other causes is meaningless" (Betts, 2013, para 7). A more encompassing view of the movement of displaced people from Venezuela can be through the lens of "mixed migration." According to the IOM:

> The principal characteristics of mixed migration flows include the irregular nature of and the multiplicity of factors driving such movements, and the differentiated needs and profiles of the persons involved. Mixed flows have been defined as 'complex population movements including refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants and other migrants.' Unaccompanied minors, environmental migrants, smuggled persons, victims of trafficking and stranded migrants, among others, may also form part of a mixed flow. (IOM, 2008, p. 2)

Regional Unilateral State Responses to Venezuelan Migration

Regional host countries have displayed neighborly solidarity with the displaced by granting some temporary residency or protected status to Venezuelans arriving at their borders, accommodating the mixed flow of migrants without the limits of the "threshold position" (McNevin, 2017). This remarkable response accommodates the complexity and interconnectedness of security and opportunity factors required for survival and maintaining the basics of human dignity that impel Venezuelan displacement (Betts, 2013; Betts, 2019; McNevin, 2017). Furthermore, the Quito Process formed as South American migrant hosting countries (most of whom are also part of these regional organizations) began meeting in 2018 to communicate and coordinate responses to Venezuelan migrants (RV4, 2022). The Quito Process shows promise as a forum committed to coordinating for the specific purpose of responding to displaced Venezuelans. The solidarity of regional host countries is especially noteworthy considering that most host countries in the region have economic, political, and social issues of their own, as they have traditionally struggled with inequality, insecurity, and high levels of unemployment,

notwithstanding the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic (Blouin et al., 2020). Regarding their hosting of migrants on a sudden and large scale:

> There is widespread lack of experience and technical capacity. The main host countries of Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers have little or no experience in receiving migrants and refugees. Although they have benevolent laws on asylum and migration, they had never had to apply them to a large number of people. (Blouin et al., 2020, para 8)

Regrettably, as the longer-term nature of the Venezuelan crisis has become demonstrably apparent, the initial solidarity extended to migrants is now replete with tension and obstacles threatening to leave migrants increasingly restricted and solitary. More countries have begun requiring passports and criminal record checks for Venezuelan migrants rather than just accepting national identification cards as they had before. Although that requirement does not seem unreasonable, it can impede the process for years or entirely for some displaced people. Obtaining a passport in Venezuela is costly and nearly impossible for some due to the logistical requirements of dealing with bureaucratic backlogs, corruption and inefficiencies, the frequent lack of official paper for printing passports, and repeated electrical outages (Van Praag, 2019). In fact, the OAS has spoken out against the Maduro government's violation of migrants' rights by not issuing passports and official documentation (OAS, 2020). Overall, host countries have continued accepting expired documents, recognizing that renewing documents is next to impossible in Venezuela. Obtaining a police check from inside Venezuela is a highly onerous process that can be very inhibitive for migrants. These new obstacles may deter some migrants, but may induce others towards irregular migration movements if applying for residency status becomes unfeasible.

This section will shift focus to the reception of five of the closest major migrant-receiving countries in the region around Venezuela to Venezuelan migrants, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and Brazil, highlighting initiatives to provide regular status and inclusion and issues that have arisen in their response efforts. The numbers below are based on registered migrants as of March 2022, including up-to-date information in the R4V database, but when taking unregistered migrants into account, the actual numbers may be much larger (RV4, 2022).

Colombia

Colombia shares a border with Venezuela and has rapidly transformed into a significant migrant hosting country after only recently emerging from a decades-long civil war that resulted in mass internal and external displacement of Colombians. Colombia hosts the largest Venezuelan migrant population,

currently 2.45 million people (RV4, 2022). In addition to hosting Venezuelans, Colombia also integrates returnees who had moved from Colombia to Venezuela over the previous decades. Returnees include Colombians displaced from the civil war, or who sought economic opportunities in Venezuela and were forced to return to Colombia and need support services. The number of Colombian returnees is estimated to be 980,000 (RV4, 2022). Furthermore, most Venezuelan COVID-19 lockdown returnees have returned from their host countries by transiting through Colombia. Many arrive in Colombia in dire need; some have already re-entered Colombia after finding conditions in Venezuela to be still worse. It is estimated that more Venezuelan returnees from other host countries will ultimately end up in Colombia (Wolfe, 2021).

At the outset, Colombia had responded to Venezuelan migrants by issuing a Special Stay Permit (PEP), which typically is valid for two years and grants access to employment, education, and health care. This permit was issued to regular migrants at entry points and was also issued afterward for irregular migrants who later registered under the regularization initiative, the Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (RAMV). The RAMV did not require a passport (Selee et al., 2019). Colombia also issues Border Mobility Cards, which are for Venezuelans who cross into Colombia to purchase goods or access health services and then return to Venezuela (RV4, 2021), as well as transit visas for those passing through to ensure their journeys are regularized. In 2019 Colombia enacted measures intended to last two years to grant citizenship to over 24,000 babies born inside Colombia to Venezuelan mothers without residency, applying retroactively to 2015. Unlike many Andean countries where citizenship is automatic when born inside the country, Colombia usually requires at least one parent to be a resident (Barchfield, 2019). This new policy prevents statelessness due to the complications and frequent inability to obtain Venezuelan documentation abroad and prevents the potential exclusion of children from public services.

In another encouraging policy development, Colombia announced in February 2021 that it would offer temporary 10-year visas to Venezuelan migrants. Venezuelans in Colombia with irregular status will thus be eligible for status, and those who already have temporary status will be able to extend their residency. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi welcomed the announcement by President Ivan Duque as a humanitarian example for the region (Grandi, 2021). Research has shown that Venezuelans who are recognized in Colombia have been able to find a degree of inclusion in Colombia and some level of access to services (Selee & Bolter, 2021). It may be possible that extending the residency period to 10 years could help support inclusion by reducing liminal factors that impede Venezuelans. Selee and Bolter (2021) argued, for example, that employers are not sure what to think about short-term special stay permits.

Ecuador

Ecuador is located south of Colombia, so Venezuelans arriving overland must transit Colombia first. Ecuador is hosting 551,000 Venezuelans (RV4, 2022); additionally, for decades, Ecuador has been hosting displaced Colombians fleeing civil war or violence. The country continues to host the most significant number of Colombian refugees globally; resources, therefore, must still be allocated to Colombians seeking protection in Ecuador. Hence, the large numbers of Venezuelans arriving in Ecuador add additional strain.

Initially, Ecuador had granted Venezuelans residency through regular migration channels and offered the opportunity to apply for a resident visa when their tourist visa ran out after 180 days. In 2018 Ecuador started to require passports for legal entry of Venezuelans, as opposed to just their National Identification Card (Selee et al., 2019). In 2019 Ecuador implemented new requirements for Venezuelans to receive a Temporary Visa to enter the country for humanitarian purposes. As a result, Venezuelans must apply at a consulate beforehand with a criminal record check and passport (Malo, 2021). Such changes tend to limit protection to those in need and result in more irregular migration. In addition, migrants in Ecuador are legally entitled to access social services yet face challenges in doing so (Van Praag, 2019).

Peru

Peru is located south of Colombia, and migrants arriving overland have to cross first through Colombia and, in some cases, will cross through Colombia and Ecuador before arriving in Peru. Currently, Peru hosts the second largest number of Venezuelan migrants, at 1.45 million people (RV4, 2022). In addition, Peru now has the highest number of Venezuelan asylum claims in the region. At the beginning of the Venezuelan crisis, it was viewed as the most accommodating country for migrants (Wolfe, 2021). Peru initially offered Venezuelan migrants a Temporary Stay Permit (PTP), which requires legal entrance to apply and does offer the right to employment. Originally, it could be obtained without a passport, but that changed in 2018 (RV4, 2021). The PTP permit lasts for one year but is renewable and offers a path to permanent residency following a series of steps, such as having INTERPOL certify a lack of criminal record (Selee et al., 2019). The other issue with the PTP is that it does not offer full access to public services, which may be linked to a higher number of asylum claims (Selee et al., 2019). However, while waiting for asylum claims to be processed, migrants have difficulty accessing public and social services (RV4, 2021). Similar to Ecuador, in 2019, Peru implemented new requirements for migrants to receive a Temporary Visa to enter the country for humanitarian purposes. As a result, Venezuelans must apply beforehand at a consulate with a criminal record check and passport (Van

Praag, 2019), which creates barriers and limits protection. In addition, Venezuelans struggle to have their credentials recognized through onerous processes, which often compels them to work in the informal economy (Wolfe, 2021).

Chile

As Chile is the furthest south of the Andean host countries, Venezuelans must first transit Colombia and then Peru to arrive, which is a significant journey if overtaken by land or a pricier flight for those with the resources. Chile hosts 562,000 Venezuelans, making it the third-largest host country after overtaking Ecuador (RV4, 2022). Initially, Venezuelans could enter Chile on tourist visas and apply for work visas inside Chile. Education and health care are generally accessible to migrants (Wolfe, 2021). In 2018 Chile began offering Democratic Responsibility Visas from consulates inside Venezuela for those from Caracas or Puerto Ordaz, and in 2019 Consular Tourists Visas for other Venezuelans (Wolfe, 2021). These visas entail a more onerous application process, increasing the likelihood of irregular undocumented migration, although with the visa migrants can access the labor market and services. Chile ultimately underwent a drive to regularize migrants and offer a one-year temporary residency permit to those who applied, with or without documents; however, this process requires a criminal record check from Venezuela (Selee et al., 2019). It is estimated that over 100,000 or nearly one-quarter of Venezuelans in Chile have entirely lost their jobs due to the COVID pandemic (RV4, 2021).

Brazil

Brazil shares a border with Venezuela in the Amazon region and hosts 336,000 Venezuelan migrants (RV4, 2022). Many Venezuelans have also moved from Brazil to other host countries; over 454,800 have crossed through Brazil from 2017 to 2020 (UNHCR, 2020). Brazil initially offered a temporary residency permit of two years; if Venezuelans apply before its expiration, they could follow the required steps and apply for permanent residency (Selee et al., 2019). Brazilian residency and asylum options for Venezuelans have been quite favorable, and the government has also initiated an assistance program to internally relocate Venezuelans to other parts of the country (Wolfe, 2021). Brazil has been unique in the region with its wider recognition of Venezuelan refugees based on their country of origin through its recent Operação Acolhida (Operation Welcome) initiative. It began in 2019 and is in line with the values of the Cartagena Declaration, which will be addressed later in this paper (RV4, 2022).

Despite the rather accommodating residency policies for migrants, Venezuelans in Brazil often struggle and some have since left. While refugees

and migrants with permits can access services and employment, the more remote Amazonian areas that border Venezuela are the poorest in Brazil and tend to lack access to health and other public and social services for citizens, let alone migrants. While Brazil is a vast country with a large population, the language and cultural differences also impact settlement and employment options in Brazil (Wolfe, 2021).

Analysis of Unilateral Regional State Responses

The section above demonstrates the substantial number of Venezuelan migrants that regional countries are hosting as of March 2022 and how they are responding to migration as it continues. Their response shows solidarity in accommodating all displaced Venezuelans, not just those displaced for political reasons that could qualify as Convention Refugees. However, these regional countries also show increased weariness with the unceasing flow of migrants, and the tension has become evident. It has created strain on host societies and resources, creating a social backlash against Venezuelans and the growth of xenophobia, which can also be observed socially and politically through residency arrangements. These countries suffer from social, political, and economic issues. They also struggle to provide their citizens with employment opportunities and access to adequate public services, let alone to ensure fair access to such for their growing migrant populations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the issue of migrant access to social services, as host countries' health care systems have become progressively more strained or overwhelmed. Latin American countries have some of the world's highest COVID death tolls due to fragile health systems, inequality, corruption, and insufficient social protection (Romero, 2020). Public access to COVID screening, health care, and vaccinations has been challenging for host countries. Informal workers can be at a higher risk for COVID due to their limited access to potential social protections and their limited ability to social distance or protect themselves from COVID while being forced to remain working (Romero, 2020). However, migrants must not be excluded from COVID screening and care efforts; in addition to increasing migrant vulnerability, excluding migrants from COVID care and vaccines could fuel xenophobia towards Venezuelans if they are perceived as harboring the virus (RV4, 2021). In addition, many forced migrants have suffered the loss of their employment or livelihood due to COVID lockdowns and the economic downturn. While some Venezuelan migrants have returned to their country due to the precarity that the Covid-19 pandemic produced in their host countries, the conditions in Venezuela are certainly not yet conducive to widespread return.

National development plans should include a clear vision for Venezuelan migrants, as Betts advocates (2019). While many Venezuelans wish to return

to their country as soon as political and economic conditions are favorable, it will likely take time for their devastated economy and public service sector to recover enough to permit large-scale returns. Having a longer-term approach to residency is crucial because short-term or temporary residency permits those Andean host states might favor are quite costly and often prevent integration into local communities and labor markets (Llosa, 2018). Migrants can benefit their host countries' economies over the longer term and contribute to social security payments when integrated into the formal labor markets and given access to public services. Access to the formal job sector also prevents the displacement of the local workforce by removing the incentives to pay migrants lower wages than locals (Selee et al., 2019). In-line with principles of social justice, proper longer-term planning to include migrant communities promotes more inclusion and participation in host economies and societies, which can simultaneously reduce the factors that give rise to xenophobia.

A Potential Longer-Term Protection Solution: Coordinated Regional Application of the Cartagena Declaration

Latin America is home to an instrument that could be utilized to provide more comprehensive and longer-term security to displaced Venezuelans: the Cartagena Declaration. An inventive regional notion that goes further than the 1951 Refugee Convention, the Cartagena Declaration of 1984 defines refugees as "persons who have fled their country because their lives, security or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order" (Declaración De Cartagena, 1984, p. 16). Formal refugee recognition under this aegis could confer indefinite protection and improved social equality within host societies. Scholars and major organizations such as UNHCR, IOM, Amnesty International and the OAS have widely emphasized its applicability in the case of Venezuelans (e.g., Betts, 2019; Blouin, 2020; Freier & Parent, 2019; Van Praag, 2019). A coming together of Latin American nation-states, regional actors, and international actors in a coordinated application of this "updated" interpretation of refugees could help advance regional norms and potentially global norms regarding legal frameworks for people displaced from non-traditional conflicts such as the Venezuelan crisis.

Unfortunately, the potential of this tool has never fully been realized by countries that have signed the agreement (Acosta et al., 2019). Interestingly, Mexico is one country that has undertaken to apply the Cartagena Declaration to displaced Venezuelans claiming asylum. In 2017, 99.5% or 907 out of 912 Venezuelan asylum claims that Mexico processed met the refugee definition in the Cartagena Declaration and were accepted (IRB, 2018). Conversely, in Canada, a Northern country that adheres more closely to the "threshold position" that McNevin discussed (2017), the acceptance rate of Venezuelans

during a similar period was not relatively as high: in 2018, 73.8 % or 525 out of 711 finalized claims were accepted (IRB, 2019). This data is certainly not intended to proclaim the Mexican asylum system an ideal model nor to suggest that all migrant groups in Mexico receive similar treatment. Mexico tends not to recognize migrants from Central America at similar rates (Sánchez & Freier, 2021), particularly in the wake of pressure the Donald Trump administration had applied in the U.S and the increase in detainment and overall poor treatment of migrants in Mexico that followed. However, it does indicate that this is one instrument that can successfully offer protection to Venezuelan migrants.

Brazil is the first of Venezuela's immediate neighbors to have opted to apply the Declaration and expand protection to more displaced Venezuelans, reflecting the higher rate of accepted asylum claims than other countries in the region (R4V, 2022). Brazil's application of this instrument began in 2019 as part of Operation Welcome. The RMRP report anticipates that Brazil will continue to use this expanded definition of refugees and explore other residency options (RV4, 2022). However, some researchers have cast doubts on the optimism of Brazil's application of the Declaration, arguing that its application only applied to a limited number of Venezuelans and after *ad hoc* temporary visas had already limited access to asylum (Zapata & Wenderoth, 2021).

Despite some promising applications in Mexico and Brazil, the Cartagena Declaration has been underutilized. Countries might be reluctant to formally apply the Declaration due to fears that they could receive a further influx of displaced Venezuelans if they extended full protection rights, which the continued development of *ad hoc* responses indicates (Freier & Parent, 2019). For example, while Colombia's new 10-year visa is certainly worthy of praise and is more in the spirit of the Cartagena Declaration, it is still a temporary policy. As Selee and Bolter argue (2021), temporary instruments still tend to provide fewer rights and less sense of permanence. Furthermore, there is also criticism that Colombia's portrayal of itself as a partner to the global North that cannot do it all alone ties into "rent-seeking behavior," which has become more common in refugee-hosting countries worldwide (Freier et al., 2021). In a later paper, Freir and Gauci argue that "if policy harmonization across Latin America led to the increased adoption and implementation of LGPs, the region could indeed become a global leader in refugee protection. Unfortunately, the current political context of increasingly restrictive shifts in immigration and refugee policy will likely hinder such policy harmonization" (2020, para 115). Regional harmonization of more humanitarian minded initiatives such as Colombia's 10-year visa would certainly be a progressive step that this paper would not discourage. However, if the countries that had signed the Cartagena Declaration were to internalize it within their own policies and systematically apply it to Venezuelans, they would be on a leading path to extending solidarity with long-term protections that could build towards fuller inclusion.

The Role of the Global North

Comparatively few Venezuelans have protection in Northern countries due to constrictions presented by visa regimes, distance, finances, etc., and those who do arrive primarily through regular channels on tourist, study, or work visas (Wolfe, 2021). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic further impeded travel to Northern countries. However, there has been a significant increase in Venezuelans applying for asylum after arriving in Northern countries (R4V, 2021). Nevertheless, most Northern countries continue to adhere to the "threshold position" that McNevin outlined (2017), and have not expanded the definition of refugee that they use or engaged in formal long-term resettlement programs for Venezuelans refugees. By way of illustration, in 2021 the US recognized 15,706 Venezuelan asylum claims with a pending 104,979 (R4V, 2021). During the Trump administration, Venezuelans arriving at the border without pre-existing visas were made to wait in Mexico for the asylum claim process (Wolfe, 2021). With the government of President Joseph Biden, it is conceivable that asylum request access and rates will change. In March 2021, President Biden did grant temporary protected status (TPS) to Venezuelans already living in the US for 18 months (BBC News, 2021). As previously observed through discussion on the Cartagena Declaration, Canada also has received a smaller number of Venezuelan asylum claims and currently has recognized 3,067 claims with 1,388 pending (R4V, 2021). Spain also hosts refugees and migrants from Venezuela and has recognized 57,481 asylum claims (R4V, 2021). Northern countries such as the US, Canada, and Spain have offered protection to some Venezuelan refugee claimants; however, most of the support for displaced Venezuelans coming from North America and the European Union has been through financial aid rather than hosting large number of migrants (Wolfe, 2021). The trend of preferring financial aid as opposed to receiving or hosting migrants and refugees can be plainly demonstrated by the somewhat controversial 2016 EU and Turkey deal, in which the EU offered to pay Turkey 6 billion Euros to gatekeep and prevent irregular migration. This deal has essentially closed that migration route to Europe and confined migrants and refugees to Turkey, currently the host of the world's most significant number of displaced peoples (e.g., Mandiraci, 2020; Rygiel et al., 2016). In the case of Venezuela, regional governments have already stepped up to accommodate the majority of displaced Venezuelan mixed migrants, and do not need to be induced to hinder mobility. Increased Northern support for a regional coordinated response would simply encourage regional host governments to continue to offer the solidarity that they extended, reduce tensions and improve their capacity for providing improved long-term, inclusive protection under the auspices of social justice.

Conclusion

The Venezuelan migration crisis affects the surrounding region most, and regional host countries have responded by accommodating displaced Venezuelans regardless of how they would be classified. However, individual countries' long-term planning and inclusion strategies have been inadequate for the large numbers of displaced Venezuelans, thereby placing limits on the initial solidarity displayed. As a result, rising fatigue and xenophobia have led some states towards policies that are more restrictive in application, resulting in furthered exclusion and irregular migration, yet not resolving the migration crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic also increased conditions of precarity for Venezuelans in the region. Despite the growing numbers and increased tensions, some of Venezuela's neighbors have begun responding to displacement in more generous, practical, and inventive ways. Brazil's application of the Cartagena Declaration and Colombia's new 10-year visa reflect a more inclusive, humanitarian, and longer-term response to the Venezuelan migration crisis in the Americas that is more in tune with fairness and social justice. Colombia's new 10-year visa is exemplary in the region and offers a more expansive outreach. The Cartagena Declaration further offers more durable protection, which would help guarantee that displaced Venezuelans have access to more equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities in their host countries, by a shared recognition of being deserving of such status owing to the general conditions in Venezuela. However, all efforts are required to encourage and support a fuller and broader regional response to displaced Venezuelans so that they can access regular status and rights in the societies where they are currently living. Increased regional coordination and international support of such efforts can help individual host countries improve their response to the displaced Venezuelans they host, allowing them to continue and even improve upon their initial solidarity while reducing tensions and conditions of precarity. Host countries can achieve this by guaranteeing access to basic social benefits and allowing displaced people to be included as more equal participants in their host societies.

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