



Governance and management of the Venezuelan migration flow in Ecuador: focus on stigma reduction and generation of opportunities for the mobile population

Gobernanza y manejo del flujo de migración venezolana en Ecuador: enfoque en reducción de estigma y generación de oportunidades para población en situación de movilidad

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the governance and management of the flow of Venezuelan migration in Ecuador has been questioned, so that several countries in the South American region have modified migration

legislation in accordance with international standards, protecting the rights of migrants as all human beings in vulnerable situations, who have traveled miles to reach Ecuador in search of opportunities, This has led to an increase in the number of evicted families, in a situation of mobility with a greater burden of difficulties when accessing basic services, including the most worrying, health in the face of a global health problem such as the pandemic, in addition to mental health problems associated with xenophobia, stigma, begging, among others. A qualitative approach was used with theoretical and analytical methods and data collection through interviews with representatives of the Venezuelan community in Guayas; information is generated on the needs of this target group and the management of the migration flow with a more conscious management, with a focus on reducing stigma, prevailing human rights with actions that allow the generation of opportunities by applying public policy with the objective of protecting migrants located in the city of Guayaquil.

RESUMEN

En los últimos años la gobernanza y el manejo del flujo de migración venezolana en Ecuador, ha sido cuestionada, por lo que varios países de la Región Sudamericana han modificado la legislación migratoria de acuerdo con las normas internacionales, protegiendo los derechos de los migrantes como todo ser humano en situación de vulnerabilidad, que han recorrido kilómetros para llegar al Ecuador en busca de oportunidades, lo cual ha provocado el aumento de familias desalojadas, en situación de movilidad con una carga mayor de dificultades al momento de acceder a servicios básicos, entre ellos el más preocupante, la salud ante un problema sanitario mundial como lo es la pandemia, sumado a ello problemas de salud mental asociado a la xenofobia, el estigma, mendicidad, entre otros. Se empleo un enfoque cualitativo con los métodos teóricos, analíticos y la obtención de datos mediante entrevistas a representantes de la comunidad venezolana en Guayas; se genera información sobre las necesidades de este grupo objetivo y el manejo del flujo de migración con una gestión más consciente, con enfoque en reducción de estigma prevaleciendo los derechos humanos con acciones que permita la generación de oportunidades aplicando política pública con objetivo sea proteger a los migrantes ubicados en la ciudad de Guayaquil.

Keywords /Palabras clave

Migration, Xenophobia, stigma, inclusion, harm reduction, refugees, Venezuela, Organization and Governance, society, cooperation.

Migración, Xenofobia, estigma, inclusión, reducción de daños, refugiados, Venezuela, Organización y Gobernanza, sociedad, cooperación.

Introduction

In the sensitive analysis of the regional context added to the pandemic as a global health crisis, the situation of people in a situation of human mobility from Venezuela is more deeply affected in Ecuador, framed in reception plans with weak responses, which in 2019 deepened inequality and increased the situation of vulnerability of these groups in the midst of a global health crisis.

The World Data on Migration portal (2021) details that: "The migrant working population, particularly those in low-wage jobs, may be more affected and exposed to the spread of COVID-19 in countries hit by the disease and in those where the pandemic continues to spread...". To this group of foreigners whose rights were violated and who were employed, must be added those who are unemployed and have been severely affected as a result of the pandemic and in many cases have been forced to live below the multidimensional poverty line.

According to the most recent data (June 2021) from the UN Refugee Agency- UNHCR, it is estimated that around 430,000 Venezuelan people reside in Ecuador. This massive displacement phenomenon is generated from the years 2017 and 2018 during which the Latin American region experienced an unprecedented forced migration originated by the continuous political, social and economic deterioration in Venezuela. The Venezuelan Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants estimates that there are currently 5.6 million displaced Venezuelan people (R4V, 2021a), most of them in Latin American countries that already had significant challenges to face and that were strongly aggravated during the COVID-19 pandemic. (UNHCR, 2021).

In Ecuador, we have taken as a sample for analysis the province of Guayas, where the MUEVE Foundation works directly with people in mobility situations coming from Venezuela. This foundation began operations in June 2016, and is legally registered since June 2019 through the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES), in resolution No. MIES-CZ-8DDG2-2019-0051-R; its main objective is to provide support to the community in vulnerable conditions of human mobility in all aspects related to the migration process, such as: free medical days, immigration legal advice, support to entrepreneurs, delivery of donations of clothing, food, medicines, cultural activities, recreation, activities for children and seniors, defense of human rights, among others.

In order to learn more about the work and functioning of this foundation as a governance structure related to migration, we interviewed Andreu Eduardo Castro, a Venezuelan national, electronic engineer and specialist in fire systems, founder and President of the MUEVE Foundation, as well as Taimir Azuaje, a specialist in colorimetry and aesthetics, who fulfilled the responsibility of Coordinator of the MUEVE Foundation. Two people representing the foundation and knowledgeable about the reality of the Venezuelan community in Ecuador, with emphasis on their area of residence in the city of Guayaquil, who have managed to draw the profile of migrants and their needs. They have also been able to recognize that the life situation is more complicated for women and children who arrive in search of a better life, being involved in conditions of insecurity, discrimination, violence, prostitution, gangs, among others.

Materials and Methods

For approximately 5 years they have worked for the Venezuelan community with those people who have voluntarily been able to approach or have knowledge of the Foundation, developing activities and partnerships with different sectors to implement programs and projects such as:

Solidarity Route: Permanent program, through which food, medicine, clothing, kitchen utensils, mattresses, among others, are collected to be delivered to families in situations of greater vulnerability. This activity is supported by Venezuelan people who are stable and

Ecuadorians who are in solidarity with this cause, however, it does not meet the demand.

2. Free medical clinics: Every 2 or 3 months, free medical clinics were held for the community thanks to a group of 65 Venezuelan doctors who provided their support, as well as the support of personnel from the Red Cross of Guayas and the halfway house "Un Techo Para El Camino", it should be noted that during these clinics an average of 500 people were attended per day in 2020.

Venezuelan Market: Thanks to an agreement with the community of Sauces 3 (sector of the city of Guayaquil), a sports field is available on Sundays where a Venezuelan market is held as a mechanism to support entrepreneurs, who in return to the community of Sauces performed social work and maintenance of community areas. These activities allowed participants to have economic income, thus promoting inclusion; however, as of 2020 this market was suspended due to control measures implemented by the government to reduce cases of COVID-19. By the end of 2021, the aim is to revive this activity.

4. Immigration legal advice and labor legal advice: This type of advice is carried out through lectures, live broadcasts on social networks or in person for all those who require it, it is a permanent and free activity. In this process we have identified the lack of knowledge and gaps regarding issues related to the migration process, duties and rights of these citizens, as well as those of the authorities and the receiving community.

5. Support for people with chronic diseases: Prioritization of the delivery of medicines, food, blood donations, among others. In these cases, assistance is very limited, since medical expenses are usually high and the necessary funds are not available, nor is access to the required health services.

6. Integration and recreation activities: During the year, different integration activities are carried out for children, young people, adults, and senior citizens, which contribute to making the process of migratory adaptation, union, recreation and integration more bearable and continuous. These are important factors for people in mobility and refugees to overcome difficult moments and situations that involve adapting to a new country. Also, in many opportunities there is room for entrepreneurs, especially in the gastronomic area, so that they can generate income, as well as singers and artists who use

these activities to make themselves known and generate small incomes.

7. Human Mobility Network: The Foundation currently participates in working groups focused on people in a situation of human mobility, involving different authorities in Ecuador, as well as international non-governmental organizations and civil society. These meetings address issues such as violation of rights, vulnerability, discrimination, integration, among others, in order to seek or activate mechanisms to help those affected. It is unavoidable to indicate that according to the analysis and discussion with the representatives of MUEVE, the strengthening of legal knowledge is essential to contribute to these meetings.

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8. Corporate account in the blood bank: Thanks to an agreement with the Red Cross of Guayas, the foundation has a corporate account in the blood bank that is maintained with donations from Venezuelans and in which there are always pints of blood available for any person of this nationality who needs them in emergencies, something that is particularly striking, because despite being so far from their homes and families, they are still linked through solidarity and brotherhood among all members of this nationality.

9. Intervention during the health emergency: During the health crisis, the organization has been able to assist approximately 2,500 Venezuelan families with the delivery of food kits, totaling more than 25 tons of food until August 30, 2020, with the support of local and international organizations.

Results

The Uncertainty of a New Home: Voices of Migrants and Refugees in Ecuador

Human Rights are rights inherent to all human beings, without distinction of nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other condition, having all the same rights without discrimination.

One of the main indicators of the level of well-being of people in human mobility is their local integration in the countries of destination, with the communities that host them at the time, having

to build strong relationships in the locality and with other people in mobility, since feeling safe in the neighborhoods and communities where they live and enjoying the right to social participation can improve the living conditions of individuals and their families psychologically, socially and economically.

However, the actions of the Venezuelan migrant and refugee community in Ecuador face barriers in terms of access to health and social services due to their origin and condition as a result of the stigma rooted in their nationality; they also face rights violations, exclusion and social and labor discrimination. It is for this reason that it is necessary to analyze and rescue programs that include health (psychological and mental) and rights with a harm reduction approach more now for the attention of a humanitarian crisis deepened by COVID-19.

These programs must include new modalities of care for people in situations of human mobility and their environments, as well as the laws and policies that govern their health conditions must be transparent and democratically accountable to all, providing a meaningful context for social health, education, security and opportunities that materialize in integral human development framed in diversity.

The UNHCR National Protection Monitoring Report details that "of those surveyed who had felt discriminated against, 76% at the national level indicated that the main reason was their nationality, reaching 86% in the case of Venezuelans and 67% in the case of Colombians." (UNHCR, 2021). This statistical data evidences the barriers faced by people in mobility and refugees, and also contributes to the understanding of the stigma that falls on them rooted in their origin and nationality.

However, the high percentage of informal labor in the region also indicates a lack of social protection, which aggravates the situations of poverty and precariousness of migrants. Another factor that points to the difficult living conditions is that this population often lives in informal settlements and requires special attention.

Xenophobia: The challenge of inclusion faced by host communities in relation to Venezuelans.

Xenophobia towards migrants and refugees has increased in recent years and is felt day by day through stereotypes, prejudices, and

generalizations based on news or community comments that are mostly negative about the safety of communities receiving foreigners. Unfortunately, xenophobic reactions and stigmatization are more frequent when there is a lack of information about the realities faced by these vulnerable groups, mostly women and children who come to the country with the desire to fulfill their dreams and improve their living conditions for themselves and their families.

It is for this reason that the need for different projects and proposals that promote their realities, needs, current situation, and in turn transmit the contributions they generate to the receiving community is evident, it is important to emphasize the need to prioritize programs focused on gender and safe opportunities for migrant women, so that together they can offer services required and appropriate to their reality.

Likewise, it is necessary to strengthen the generation and development of work activities with the host community in order to forge inclusion, security and harmonious coexistence between both groups, improving health, social and economic conditions in this new stage in which the communities are seeking to recover after the COVID-19 pandemic.

From a sociological perspective, female migration is made invisible and denigrated, as well as their role in economic aspects, since they have always been considered dependent on their male relatives and in charge of their children. It is important to recognize that in recent decades the participation of a much more empowered and defiant woman in the world they face has also been rescued, especially in Latin American societies characterized by machismo. The reinsertion of migrant women into the labor market far from home, with children in their arms and based on their nationality, is an issue that affects this group of people psychologically, however something that is rescued is that Venezuelan migrant women in Ecuador support each other and seek other women in the same conditions to work together in search of the welfare of their families. This undoubtedly brings unequal and reduced labor modalities that are reflected in cases of begging, prostitution, underemployment, informal employment, among others.

A home "away from home" is not easy, but it is possible to start again.

Given this situation, it is necessary to rescue and implement a contingency plan aimed at covering the basic needs of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Ecuador, which could be implemented through cooperation with international, state, private and civil society

organizations that, based on a situational diagnosis, register and detect the protection and assistance needs of this population. Thus generating an information system that connects with public policy, in order to provide legal advice and guidance on migration options for informed decision making, and targeted interventions, areas in which it is necessary to work at present.

Among the different alternatives offered in terms of integration, it is necessary to promote alternative employment and entrepreneurship; this has been identified as one of the factors that is most affecting the migrant population due to the number of requests and needs that arrive daily in different areas to the MUEVE Foundation as stated by its president. It is for this reason that it is continuously planned as one of the annual prioritized projects, and during the year 2021 this project was presented to International Organizations with the objective of taking advantage of a space that is located in the TECHO PARA EL CAMINO facilities, in order to implement the house of multiple services and thus turn it into a place where it is possible to provide support to the Venezuelan community and in turn generate sources of employment and livelihood of the house (headquarters).

From what has been analyzed in previous paragraphs, the initiative in which La CASA DEL MIGRANTE would serve as an impulse and incentive for female empowerment is highlighted, thus evidencing the need to reduce gender stereotypes that limit their opportunities and performance in the economic and social areas. Another important point to consider is the need to implement a daycare center since, upon arriving in a new country in search of opportunities, taking into account that the number of women with small children and single mothers is very high, the main objective is to find sources of employment so they decide to leave their children in any place where they may be exposed to different dangers while their mothers work. For this reason, we seek to implement that women related to the foundation get a salary for taking care of their children and other children since there are also cases of women who become pregnant and lose their jobs, and after the birth of the baby they do not have a safe place to leave them to go in search of economic income to support their families.

Having a rotating job for mothers before and after childbirth would allow them to remain active, covering their needs, and taking care of the first months of their children's lives, while earning a salary, which is why it is important to provide a permanent and comprehensive

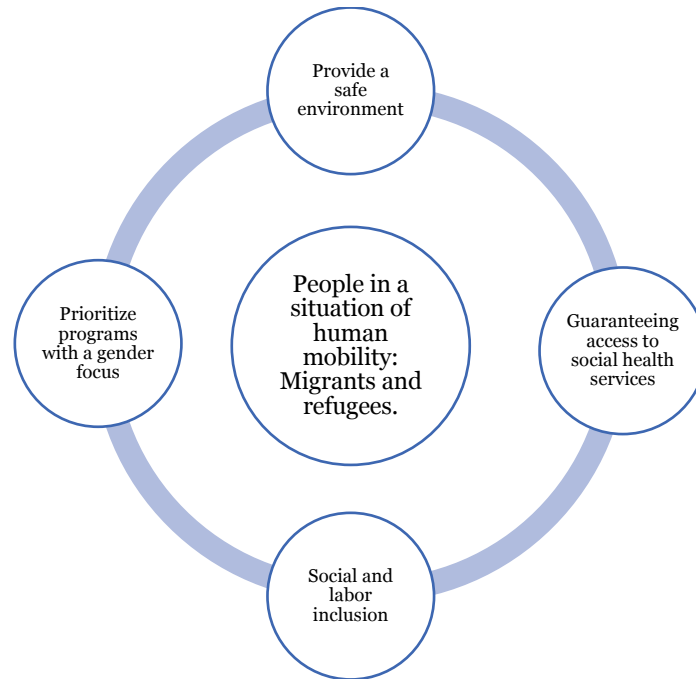
health service with the adequacy of a designated space for medical care.

It is also important to contribute to the improvement of the capacity of the local health system by training Venezuelan medical personnel who have been willing to help their compatriots by providing consultations with specialists. In this way, ensuring the universal attention of the health, education and labor integration systems, where all civil society organizations, government and citizens play a very important role in the efforts of the country, region and the world to recover from the serious effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and at the same time align with the SDG 2030 Agenda is a priority.

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In this case, seeking to reduce inequalities between and within countries, being able to rescue and understand that La Casa del Migrante focuses its actions on human-centered orientation in their contexts through social, medical and inclusive care that ensures transparent and democratically accountable policies; likewise innovation and productivity to the activities that could employ should offer accessible solutions for all those people who are imperceptible to many citizens, or who are stigmatized as problematic people creating barriers and stigmas. We must advance in an inclusive vision that allows boosting technical skills and abilities related to productive, social and environmental activities in the target group, promoting social and labor inclusion with a sustainable economy for these people.

All of the above focuses on building resilient and inclusive communities in which the rights of all are guaranteed and respected.

Figure 1. Resilient and Inclusive Migrant Communities

The approach with the actors of the Venezuelan community in Guayaquil, has allowed to expose the opportunity of the communities in mobility situation to take advantage of spaces located in the facilities TECHO PARA EL CAMINO and thus implement the house of multiple services. This house would provide support to the community and generate sources of employment, giving impetus and incentive to migrant women, promoting empowerment and reducing gender stereotypes that limit their roles in the economic and social part. Also generate additional opportunities for multiple services in the Casa del Migrante, such as childcare, to later expand services such as care for the elderly, training workshops, gastronomy among other activities that allow job growth, generation of entrepreneurship, strategic business units that could become the livelihood of these families and then contribute to the national economy and help families who have remained in their home country through the remittance of foreign currency.

Venezuelan migrants transiting through Guayaquil, especially women and children, could become part of a resilient and inclusive community through:

A safe environment for the care of children, seeing the need to implement measures that comprehensively safeguard the exercise of the rights of these people, harm reduction acting beyond the individual risk practices that could be caused, to have an impact on levels of complex contexts that interact in multiple ways in search of safe environments, capable of minimizing the impact of violence that this population in vulnerable situations could face.

Access to social health, a basic service for every human being that generates security and tranquility for him and his environment, allowing development and growth in all aspects. The arrival of COVID-19 highlighted the need for free and accessible health services, especially for women, children and the elderly.

Social and labor inclusion for people in a situation of human mobility (migrants and refugees), mainly women, endure pressures derived from prejudice, stigma and exclusion, partly due to their difficulties in complying with the conditions of formal employment, but also, and to a large extent, due to discriminatory labor practices. Access to legitimate and formal work options makes it possible to strengthen their autonomy and improve basic components of their quality of life. It also has a direct impact on the community, reducing crime and the perception of insecurity.

It is necessary to work with the migrant and refugee communities in training them on their duties and rights in the receiving country, in order to generate in them knowledge of the society in which they will live, its laws, obligations, benefits, culture and customs. This will facilitate their adaptation process and the acceptance of the receiving communities, reducing stigmas, discrimination, violence, aggressions and rejection.

As a last factor, it is necessary to develop all these programs and projects focused on the person as a human being, since in this way activities are strengthened and adjusted to the work inside the Casa del Migrante focused on the person and diversity, as well as in the harmonious coexistence where they can generate productive alternatives, being able to maintain in the future sustainable mechanisms of individual, family and collective support.

Conclusions

The proposals and ideas of the MUEVE Foundation with respect to the Venezuelan Migrant House can be a successful management model so that through the different programs and services, it can be a sustainable and replicable model for other cities and why not in the region.

The legal and illegal migratory phenomena continue to grow and become more complex in the region, and certain stakeholders are aware that the lack of protection for migrants is increasing every day, so measures in this field of action should be encouraged with comprehensive programs focused on the human being as a priority, with particular emphasis on the protection of women.

The efforts made by the Venezuelan community through its organization in search of mutual support are not enough to cover the national demand, so it is necessary to connect these already organized structures with government, non-profit and civil society programs for migrants and refugees in order to have a greater reach in their activities and improve their results.

Finally, in this visionary term we can conclude in another axis of action that would be to link the users of this center to health services, education, and other activities that could be carried out through the Autonomous Decentralized Governments of the Provinces, the different Ministries of State, or other actors in order to increase their knowledge about Ecuadorian society, its laws and benefits in order to influence the socio-emotional behavior of this group of people and establish good relations with the receiving communities.

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