

## The numbers of Venezuelan international migration: reviewing estimations to measure its worldwide outflow.

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### Introduction

During the last two decades Venezuela has progressively transformed from immigration to emigration country due to the profound socio-economic, political and institutional crisis that began during the government of Hugo Chávez and have accentuated after Maduro's takeover. Traditionally, the country was known as one of the main Latin-American destination countries receiving considerable inflows not only from other countries of the region (mainly Colombia) but also from European countries (Spain, Portugal and Italy). The worldwide Venezuelan migrant stock (UN estimations) has significantly increased since 1990, being more than 3 times higher in 2015 than twenty-five years before, and two times higher since the beginning of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution.

The first thing that any professional, whether from the academic, political or media realm, interested in the phenomenon of the recent emigration of Venezuelans abroad ask for is: how many are they? How many people are we talking about? Give a quick response trying to establish the real magnitude of the phenomenon is not an easy task and for this it is necessary to consult the data published by the official sources in charge of collecting and systematizing the information available in the migratory field. A brief assessment of the situation through the main web portals of important institutions (UN/OIM, R4V, UNHCR) is enough to find important inconsistencies. Basically, numbers don't add up, are we counting about 2 million, or 4? The need to compare the available numbers and to carefully evaluate not only how the information has been collected but also what use it is intended to make of it thus immediately arises.

The political use of the figures has become very evident in international migration, where a large number is associated with a major problem. Much of the studies on migration concern quantification, but this concern is exacerbated mostly in the political sphere because if a migration phenomenon has not been measured, it does not exist. Without data it is not possible to recognize, define, debate, prioritize and when it is measured it is because it is necessary to act, the phenomenon acquires political relevance and it is necessary to take measures in this regard.

This research will describe **Venezuelan international migration beyond the current circumstances** (2013-2017) by highlighting the different stages of Venezuelans emigration since 1990. Special attention will be dedicated to **review available estimations as well as methodologies they are built on** by considering: i) administrative data (SICREMI, IOM, UNHCR), ii) demographic estimations (UN Migration Data) and other estimations + projections (R4V and OIM), and iii) statistical data sources (census, household surveys, ENCOVI). An important effort will be made to **examine differences by data source** to identify main issues and caveats they are fraught with and to **provide a set of recommendations for users of available estimations** (academia, NGOs, governments,

UN, OIM). So far, we do not know about the existence of similar contributions trying to approximate the level of congruence of the numbers of current emigration of Venezuelans.

This contribution will exploit different sources of data with very distinctive characteristics. On one hand, estimations from IOM which uses official data on granted residence permits and asylum applications. However, demographic literature has consistently warned on the risks of using administrative data to address the number of migrants. One of the most relevant potential risks is double counting (applicants to both asylum and residence, people holding more than one type of permit, digital governance is still developing in LAC, confounding immigrants with entries). On the other, UN estimations, derived from demographic methods (census data combined with fertility and mortality data, usually assuming zero migration).

Venezuelan emigration is taking place at an inter-census period. This turns into a major challenge when trying to approximate the figures of Venezuelans in regions strongly depending on census data to address international migration. This is particularly the case of Latin-American countries. Only extra-regional destinations of Venezuelan migration have regular statistical operations for counting international immigration (Europe: Population Register, harmonization of statistical operations through EUROSTAT; and USA, ACS or CPS or Border Patrol).

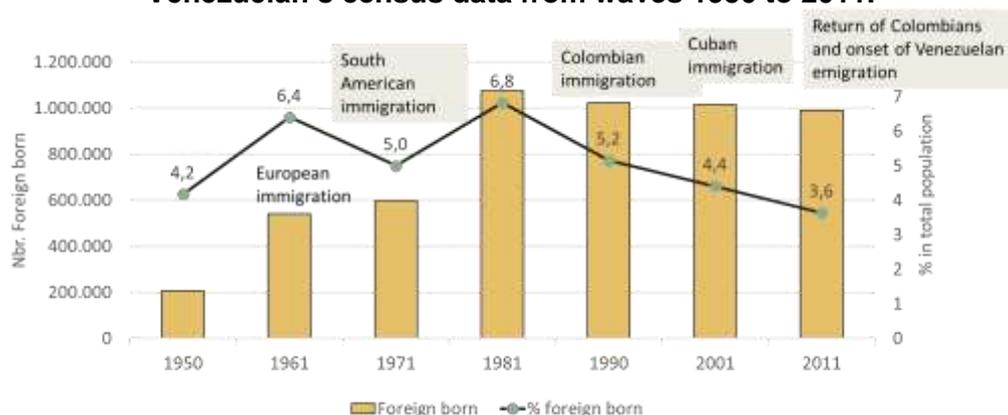
## Previous results

### *Venezuelan international migration: beyond the current circumstances...*

During the 20th Century, the country acted as one of the main destinations of Latin Americans (mainly from Colombia) and European migration (Spain, Portugal and Italy). Figure 1 shows absolute numbers and percentages of foreign population living in Venezuela and the most important immigration wave associated to each period.

In the last two decades Venezuela has transitioned from a net immigration country to a net emigration country not only of Venezuelans and but also of return migrants (Colombians and Colombo-venezolanos).

**Figure 1. Foreign population living in Venezuela (absolute numbers and percentages). Venezuelan's census data from waves 1950 to 2011.**



Source: Own elaboration based on INE's census data collection (Venezuela).

As observed in Table 1, foreign population living in Venezuela diminished after the beginning of the first millennium, independently of the country of origin. But there is an interesting exception: figures show a great increase of immigrants coming from Cuba. In fact, the number of Cubans arriving after 2000 is more than six times higher than those who arrived between 1980-1999.

**Table 1. Foreign population living in Venezuela by country of birth and year or arrival (Top 7 origins). Venezuelan's census data 2011.**

		Until 1939	1940 - 1969	1970 - 1979	1980 - 1999	2000 +	Total
	Total	2,904	179,199	218,071	302,250	287,499	989,923
1	Colombia	1,455	85,620	157,981	223,289	227,528	695,873
2	Spain	424	32,521	5,620	3,559	2,086	44,210
3	Portugal	126	16,482	12,027	6,183	532	35,350
4	Peru	14	1061	6,913	16,819	6,400	31,207
5	Italy	228	22,232	3,126	2670	1,242	29,498
6	Ecuador	34	1958	7,157	10,469	4,311	23,929
7	Cuba	94	1603	476	2,582	15,802	20,557

Source: Own elaboration based on INE's census data collection (Venezuela).

### *Stages of international emigration coming from Venezuela (1990-2017)*

According to UN estimations, the worldwide Venezuelan migrant stock demonstrates how the absolute number of Venezuelans living abroad has significantly increased since 1990 (Figure 2), reaching 657,439 individuals in 2017. This amount was 3,6 times higher in 2017 than twenty-seven years before, and two times higher since the beginning of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution. The highest five-year growth rate of the Venezuelan migrant stock in the world was observed in the 2000-2005 period (36.7%).

The percentage distribution of the stock in 2017 by continents shows that Europe concentrated 41.9% of Venezuelans living abroad, followed by North America with 38.2% and Latin America (19%). However, this geographical aggregation hides important differences regarding destination countries and timing of the respective emigration wave.

#### Second stage- emigration to Europe:

Europe is the continent that exhibits the greatest increment of the Venezuelan population since 2000, increasing from 111,237 to 275,162 in 2017, with Southern Europe concentrating 86.3% of the total stock of the continent. The fastest period of growth of the number of Venezuelans in Europe was between 2000 and 2005 (69.8%).

Among the top 6 European destinations in 2017, which concentrated 94.5% of the European stock, the first three are countries from Southern Europe (Spain, Italy and Portugal, in this strict order); the third is United Kingdom (Northern Europe); and the last two, Germany and France, from Western Europe.

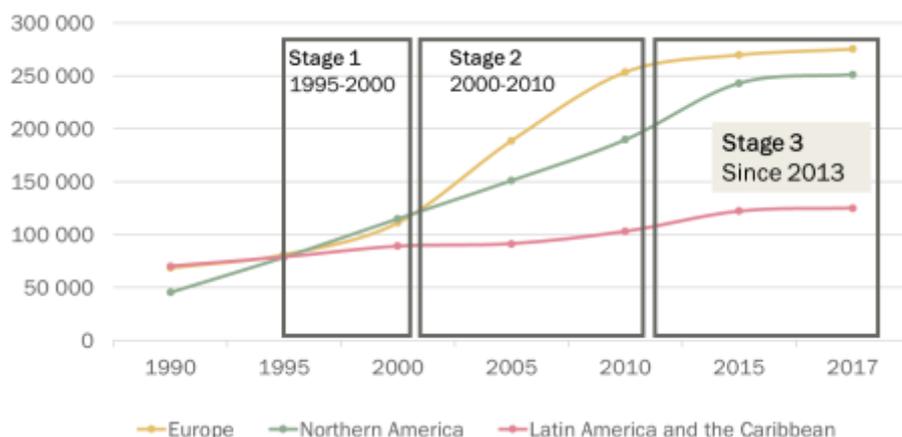
Europe is followed by North America, where the stock of Venezuelans was two times higher in 2017 than in 2000. Of the 251,056 Venezuelans registered in 2017, 92.6% were living in the United States. Even if the evolution is characterized by a continuous growing trend, the five-year rates indicate 1990-1995 as the fastest period of growth (73.1%) and diminishing hereinafter.

#### Third stage- emigration to Latin America:

According to UN estimations, 125,054 Venezuelans were living in Latin-American countries by 2017, 60% in South America. Venezuelan population in this continent displayed the fastest growth after 2005, but it was especially fast between 2010-2015 (18,5%).

Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Ecuador concentrated 68.4% of Venezuelans living in Latin America. The role of Panama and Mexico are particularly important because in these countries the Venezuelan stock was 10 and 5 times higher in 2017 than in 2000, respectively.

**Figure 2. Total Venezuelan migrant stock at mid-year by region of residence. UN estimations 1990-2017.**



Source: Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2017).

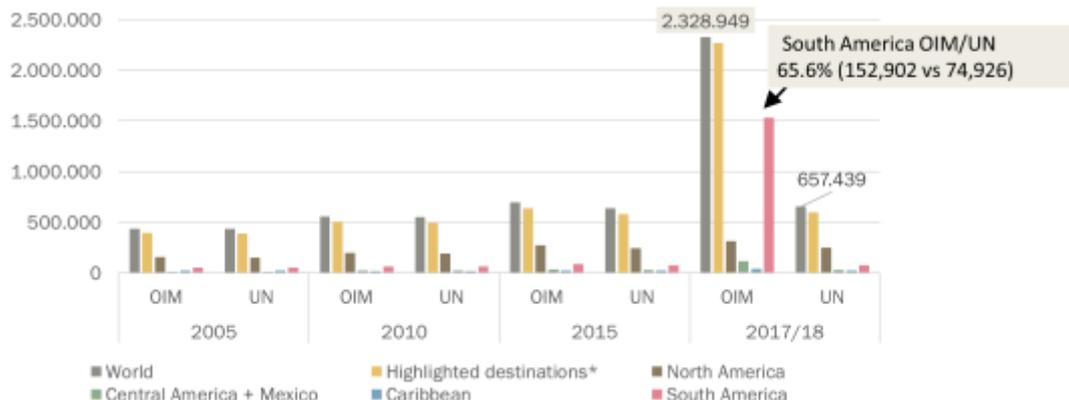
### Research in progress

The very recent increase of Venezuelan emigration, accentuated after Maduro’s takeover (2013), is part of a broader process that started way back in the previous decade during the government of Hugo Chávez (1998). Its roots can’t not be dissociated from a longer-term Venezuelan history of immigration (from Europe, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina and Uruguay) or from transnational migration networks and transnational families established decades before (e.g.: Colombo-venezolanos).

Summarizing: USA behaves as a traditional destination country of Venezuelans since the nineties; European countries were important destinations between 2000-2010 (mostly Spain, Italy and Portugal), a rapid growth that tends to slow its pace; Latin America are new/recent destination countries, which gained importance since 2005, but particularly between 2010 and 2015.

In 2017, the differences in the estimation of Venezuelan international migration between IOM and UN surpasses 1.5 million. Though minor differences in the estimations could be observed since 1990 (Figure 3), its magnitude has reached an overwhelming scale recently (2015, 2017). The greater differences between estimations are observed in LAC, particularly in Peru, Colombia, Chile and Argentina.

**Figure 3. Stock of Venezuelans living abroad. OIM vs UN estimations, 2005-2018.**



Source: Own elaboration, OIM & UN estimations. Note: \*UN estimations do not include Paraguay.

Where statistical, census or register data was available we found that IOM's estimates overestimate population while UN's (based on demographic projections) underestimate the figures.

Caution is needed when looking at estimations based on administrative data, such as IOM and R4V.

Further research:

- Continue the review and systematization of available estimations.
- To compare differences by age and sex in Dominican Republic, Chile and Spain for 2017 (following latest available national statistical sources).
- Case study on the functioning of Latin American administrative registers to address whether there is double counting and how that could be corrected.
- Analysis of the data derived from administrative registers matched with the study of the migration governance and its implementation. For example: The enforced migration governance enables multiple applications? More than one institution counting residence permits or transit authorizations?

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