

Venezuelan Exodus: the 21st Century Pariahs

Summary of Tulio Hernández Presentation at
The Venezuelan Tragedy – A Panel Discussion
October 3, 2020

The three graphs below speak for themselves. In the first plot on world migrations, Venezuela appears as the second great migratory phenomenon on the planet after the one caused by the Syrian civil war. In the third plot on the exodus to Colombia, it is evident how the migration of Venezuelans has grown rapidly since the regime known as “Socialism of the 21st Century” began; and shows an exponential increase from the moment the oil prices fall, when Hugo Chávez dies, and when “that human disgrace” called Nicolás Maduro ascends to power.

Although they are the same phenomenon, each one has a different meaning. The fact that the Venezuelan exodus is about to surpass the Syrian – very soon to become the largest migration of the planet – is very revealing, because the Syrian migration is the result of a war similar to the one that fueled the European migration in the middle of the 20th century. On the other hand, the Venezuelan migration is the product of government failure, of a political elite’s stubbornness, of what the United Nations Organization calls a *Complex Humanitarian Emergency*, which is a phenomenon that had never occurred in America until now.

Complex Humanitarian Emergency is a category reserved by the UN to include those countries that can no longer defend themselves and need immediate international assistance. It is called “Complex Humanitarian” because they represent crises that are not caused by a single event – a war as in Syria or a natural catastrophe such as the earthquake in Haiti in 2012 – but by various causes associated with government incapacity; that is, a failed state. It is a term created by the United Nations to justify international aid to countries that were left in ruins after the fall of the Eastern Bloc, and which has only been recently activated for Somalia, Liberia, Syria, Libya, and Afghanistan; and in Latin-American, for Venezuela.

In the case of the migration to Colombia, the phenomenon acquires further significance because it is the largest human displacement between two shared borders in Latin-American history since the establishment of the independent republics. None of the migrations from Haiti to the Dominican Republic, from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, from Uruguay to Argentina, and from Bolivia to Brazil have involved the exodus of two million people – the entire population of a city like Madrid – very few by airplane, mostly by bus and, in recent years, on foot from one country to the other.

It has been a constant drain always on the rise. It is even more painful if one takes into account that Venezuela, from the 1940s to the end of the 20th century, was a host nation to large masses of immigrants – Spanish, Italians, Portuguese, Syrians, Lebanese, Argentines, Uruguayan, Chileans and, of course, Colombians – who, running away from war, poverty or military dictatorships, found a second chance in our country.

In the case of Colombia, it is pathetic. Venezuela was the destination of at least three million Colombians, but it was a migration that spanned one or two decades, with citizens moving from a country with economic difficulties to another with full employment. We never saw desperate masses of migrants requesting entry to the Venezuelan territory or begging for food in the streets of our cities.

On the other hand, the reverse case, the migration of Venezuelans to Colombia, is not made up by citizens who freely decided to move to another country to look for better living conditions, but by people who are literally forced, pushed to flee their country to survive, to find food, medicine and employment. To simply guarantee their freedom or life when persecuted by the criminal political police of a regime condemned by practically all western democracies except Mexico. A regime sustained by a loyal Iranian theocracy, Russian neo-totalitarianism, the savage Chinese one-party capitalism, Erdogan's Turkish dictatorship, and the Cuban communist anachrony.

For this reason, the International Commission for Refugees, UNHCR, has asked governments to recognize the displaced Venezuelans as refugees and not

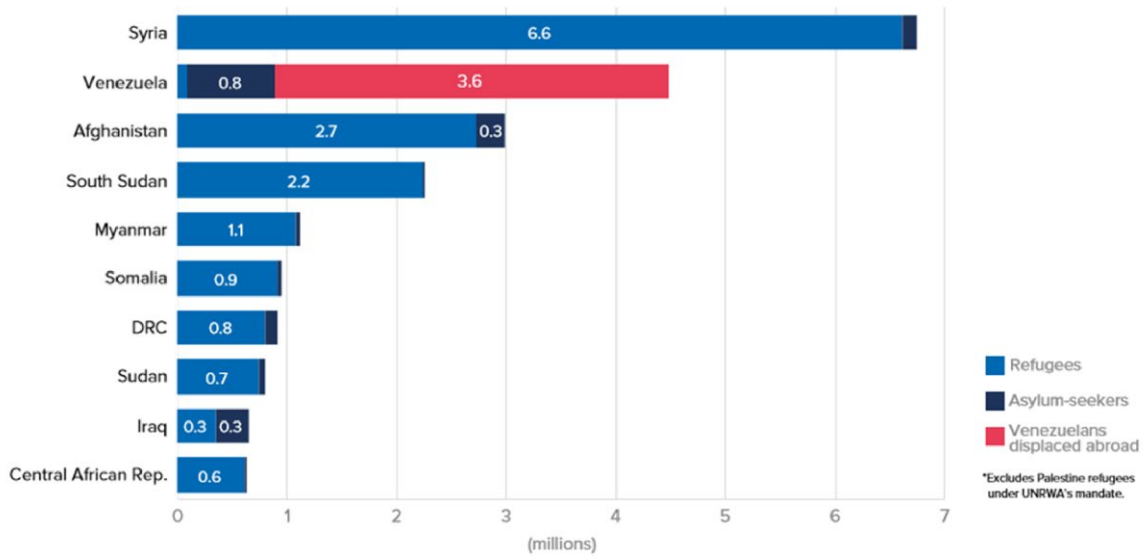
just as migrants. According to the definitions of international organizations, "in general, it is understood that the definition of emigrant covers all cases in which the decision to migrate is freely made by the person in question for reasons of 'personal convenience' and without the intervention of external coercive factors." On the other hand, a refugee "is a person who cannot return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution or serious and indiscriminate threats against life, physical integrity or freedom."

Migrants can return to their country of origin whenever they want while refugees cannot because their life or freedom, or both, are in danger. That is the current Venezuelan situation. For this reason, UNHCR considers the Venezuelan migrant as someone in need of protection and asylum because it is understood that "an asylum seeker is a person in need of international protection." Not all asylum seekers are recognized as refugees, but all refugees in these countries are initially asylum seekers. But since the nations do not want – or cannot – recognize that refugee status due to the responsibilities it generates, the Venezuelans have no choice, they are forced to leave even when knowing that they will be illegal, that they will not get a job and will not have civil rights. They take a risk and make the trip, and then they become forced emigrants; that is, refugees.

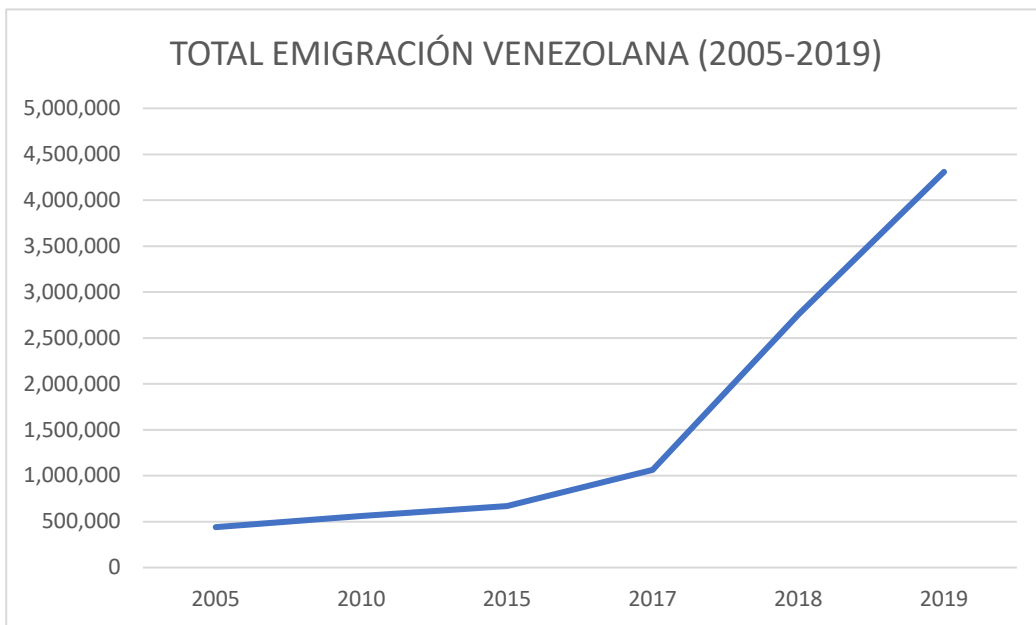
According to official figures, there are at this moment two million Venezuelan immigrants in Colombia; of that total, 57%, almost one million one hundred thousand, are illegal citizens who do not even have an identity card or passport because in their country they were denied them or they were sold at prices most of them with few resources could not afford. Venezuelans are then global beggars. They have been expelled from their country by a totalitarian, deeply corrupt and immensely criminal regime, whose leaders have just been found responsible for crimes against humanity. They do not even have an identity. They are stateless, wanderers, with no country to go to or to return to.

Hugo Chávez, the hallucinating military leader who led this delirium, promised the creation of a new man. And he succeeded: the new Venezuelan is an outcast, a pariah of the 21st century.

Figure 2 | **Top international displacement situations by country of origin** | end-2019*

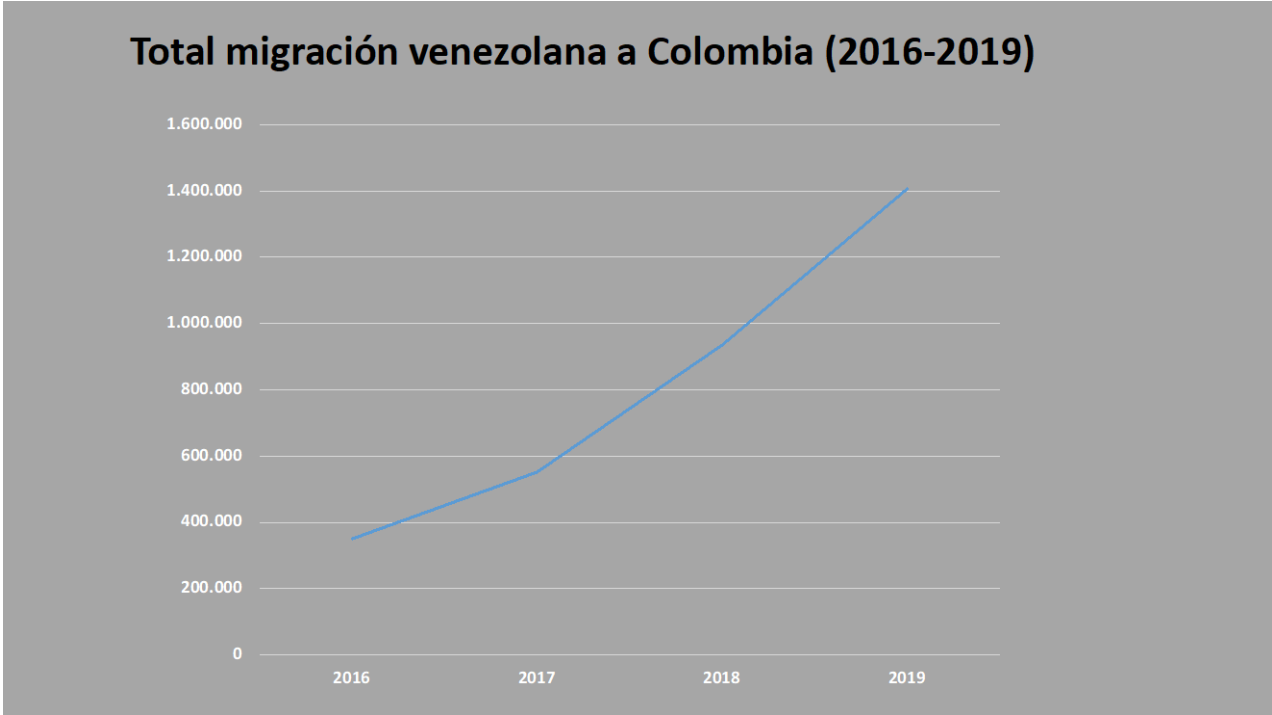


Total Venezuelan emigration



Source: Own development with data from UNHCR.

Total Venezuelan migration to Colombia



Source: Own development with data from UNHCR.