

Sanctuary Cities in Andean Countries. A Literature Review (2000-2022)

Ciudades Santuarios en países andinos. Una revisión literaria (2000-2022)

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Abstract: This article analyzes initiatives of reception and hospitality in Latin America, specifically in Andean countries such as Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and Bolivia during the 21st century. Drawing on the experience of sanctuary cities in the global North, the study examines local and national initiatives of hospitality and solidarity towards migrant or displaced populations in these countries. The methodology included a review of ten years of scientific literature using various search engines and databases. The findings indicate that, in general, these initiatives arise through two main pathways: the first being from international organizations to countries and cities, “top-down”, and the second being from local social organizations, “bottom-up”. The former depends on political will, while the latter often consists of fragmented and temporary actions, making information availability challenging.

Key words: sanctuary cities, Andean region, solidarity initiatives, hospitality initiatives.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza las iniciativas de acogida y hospitalidad en América Latina, específicamente en los países andinos como Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Perú, Chile y Bolivia durante el siglo XXI. Basándose en la experiencia de ciudades santuarios en el norte global, el estudio revisa las iniciativas locales y nacionales de hospitalidad y solidaridad hacia la población migrante o desplazada en estos países. La metodología incluyó una revisión de diez años de literatura científica usando distintos motores de búsqueda y bases de datos. A partir de esta búsqueda, los hallazgos indican que, en general, se trata de iniciativas que surgen por dos vías: la primera, desde los organismos internacionales hacia países y ciudades de “arriba hacia abajo”, y la segunda, desde organizaciones sociales locales, es decir, “de abajo hacia arriba”. Las primeras dependen de voluntades políticas y las segundas suelen ser acciones atomizadas y temporales, lo que dificulta la disponibilidad de la información.

Palabras clave: ciudades santuarios, región andina, iniciativas solidarias, iniciativas de acogida.

Introduction¹

There is no doubt that the migration phenomenon has drawn significant attention from both academia and governmental authorities, given the challenges it entails as well as the impact it produces in countries of origin, transit, and destination. Evidence of this is the prolific production of publications and reports at different scales and across diverse regions, addressing its magnitude and its social, economic, and cultural effects, along with the increasing criminalization of migratory flows, particularly in the context of the pandemic. Nevertheless, one of the least explored dimensions in recent research in Latin America concerns initiatives of reception, protection, and hospitality in the spaces where migrant and forcibly displaced populations arrive. The reasons are varied; up until the pandemic, we witnessed a rapid process of re-bordering (Lara-Valencia & García, 2021: 53), that is, the tightening of borders, especially with regard to human mobility.

To illustrate this situation, it is worth noting that until 1989 there were only six border walls worldwide; today, however, there are 63. In addition, many countries have militarized their borders through the deployment of troops, drones, patrols, and armed forces (Ruiz *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, migration has been increasingly criminalized, accompanied by a punitive turn, particularly in the form of deportations and restrictions on entry to various countries. This has unfolded in the context of rising Euroscepticism and anti-immigration nationalist rhetoric with Trump's rise to power (2017), the Brexit vote (January 2020), and the growth of right-wing parties in France, Spain, and Germany (Bauder & Juffs, 2020), further compounded by the impact of the Syrian crisis in Europe in 2015.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the global measures of border closures and heightened controls revived the notion of borders as a form of protection. In practice, these measures helped to ease the anxiety triggered by the spread of the disease and became the primary means of

¹ This article was developed within the framework of the project “*Urban Sanctuary, Migrant Solidarity and Hospitality in Global Perspective*”, Partnership Grants 895-2021-1000, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Canada, led by Toronto Metropolitan University.

containing a virus that knows no boundaries (Tapia, 2022). However, the closure and travel restrictions also intensified notions of national identity and reinforced the perception of foreigners, or those arriving from “outside”, as a threat. As Cresswell (2021) notes, historically, those on the move have often been viewed with fear, since “contagion, epidemic, and pandemic are all terms with mobility at their core”. Yet, although the pandemic acted as a brake on migration and human mobility in general, movements did not disappear; rather, they became more dangerous and desperate (ECLAC, 2022).

In this context, the aim of this paper is to examine initiatives of reception and hospitality in Latin America, particularly in the Andean countries, namely Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and Bolivia, during the twenty-first century. Sanctuary or solidarity cities emerged in response to the restrictive policies adopted by states, especially those of the Global North, toward migrant populations. These were generally local initiatives designed to counter policies that denied migrants and refugees access to services and safety while seeking their deportation (Bauder, 2021), as we will discuss later. In Latin America, however, such initiatives do not emerge in the same way, although certain similarities or common features can be identified in the cases examined. For this reason, we seek to explore which initiatives have been developed in the case studies, their scope and time frames, as well as their characteristics and duration.

Regarding the methodology, it should be noted that this study is part of a broader research project² in which Latin American countries were organized into different regions; in this case, the focus is on the Andean region, comprising Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru. This selection is based, first, on the geographical relevance of the group of countries, either through their location in the Andean region or their participation in the Andean Community (CAN). At the same time, the cases display variability in their policies and approaches, allowing us to examine how different political and social contexts within the Andean region shape the implementation and perception of practices related to sanctuary cities.

Once the scope was defined, a country-by-country literature review was conducted using various sources, including academic articles accessed

2 The project “*Urban Sanctuary, Migrant Solidarity and Hospitality in Global Perspective*”, led by Toronto Metropolitan University, is organized around regional hubs by continent: North America, Latin America, Africa, and Europe.

through Google Scholar, Scopus, and Crossref, as well as non-academic literature (news articles, reports, and other documents) accessed via Google and Google News. The keywords used in the searches were based on those employed in the scoping review by Godoy and Bauder (2021), with the addition of concepts such as solidarity, inclusion, and integration. This was done in order to identify practices that could be associated with sanctuary cities, even if they were not explicitly labeled as such. Documents were selected according to the relevance and applicability of the search terms in relation to the concept of “sanctuary cities” and their associated practices. Given that the term “sanctuary cities” is rarely used in Latin America (Godoy & Bauder, 2021), a broad range of practices related to solidarity and inclusion was included to ensure that all possible manifestations of these ideas in the region were captured.

Articles and news items from the past ten years were selected for Venezuela (n=6), Colombia (n=14), Ecuador (n=17), Bolivia (n=5), Chile (n=7), and Peru (n=6), including both studies describing the practice of “sanctuary cities” itself and other related solidarity practices that fit within this category, again considering the limited use of the concept in Latin America. The literature was organized and reviewed using the reference management software Zotero and subsequently categorized through content analysis with the aim of identifying practices associated with the notion of sanctuary cities. All data were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet, which allowed for visualization of the overall picture of the Andean region. Based on this review, the temporal scope of the study spanned from the beginning of the current century to the end of 2022, coinciding with the conclusion of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide.

The article is organized into three main sections: first, a brief overview of migration in the Latin American region to provide context for the initiatives under review; next, a discussion of the origins and characteristics of sanctuary cities; followed by a country-by-country analysis of the initiatives identified in the Andean region; and concluding with the study’s findings.

The Latin American Migration Landscape as Context for Solidarity Initiatives

To understand the scope of reception initiatives such as sanctuary or solidarity cities in the Andean countries, it is necessary to consider the region's migration landscape. Changes in migration flows within the region, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, have affected the patterns of human mobility, partly explaining the emergence, persistence, and disappearance of solidarity initiatives. These explanations are linked to the characteristics of migration in the continent in general and in the Andean countries in particular, most of which had historically been countries of emigration, especially toward Europe and the United States, until well into the twenty-first century. However, since the beginning of the current century, significant changes in the Latin American migration map have been observed. The first of these refers to the growth and consolidation of intraregional movements as an "everyday reality" (ECLAC, 2022), allowing us to distinguish three key moments.

The first period corresponds to the decade prior to the pandemic; the second, to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on human mobility at the regional level; and the third, to the period following the declaration of the end of the health emergency. In the first period, between 2015 and 2019, a continuous reorientation of migration destinations in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is observed, even when excluding the Venezuelan case. During this period, the number of international migrants increased from 8.4 million to 12.8 million, representing a growth of over 50% for the five-year span. Examining the cases under study, we observe a significant increase in migration to Colombia and Peru, establishing them as new destination countries in the region, with Colombia's migrant population rising by 10% and Peru's by 3% between 2015 and 2019 (IDB, 2021).

Meanwhile, migration from regions outside LAC decreased from 26% to 14% of total immigrants, reaching a low of 9% in 2018 (IDB, 2021). A decline in the absolute number of immigrants was also recorded, particularly among Europeans during the same period. This reorientation of migration patterns "suggests the beginning of a transition for LAC, shifting from a region predominantly of emigration to one of mixed character, with significant intraregional flows" (IDB, 2021). In this context, the Venezuelan forced displacement in the region must also be considered, especially between 2017 and 2019, as nearly 80% of

this flow was directed toward neighboring countries. By 2021, it was estimated that almost six million Venezuelans, comprising migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, had fled the country, constituting one of the largest human displacement crises in the world (UNHCR, 2021a).

During the pandemic, entry restrictions to countries via various routes (land, air, and sea) were the most widely implemented measures globally, estimated in 80% of cases (ECLAC, 2022). In Latin America, countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile adopted various pandemic containment measures, including the closure of land borders, border controls, and even the militarization of borders, particularly to curb the Venezuelan flow. Although migration did not stop, its complexity increased, especially due to the impact of forced Venezuelan mobility during this period and border closures, which led to irregular entry and transit.

These movements shaped a new migratory corridor that had begun to emerge prior to the pandemic but was fully consolidated during the health emergency. The western corridor followed routes and informal crossings that originated in Venezuela, passed through Colombia, continued along the western regions of Ecuador and Peru, and then entered the Andes via the Bolivian border at Desaguadero, before reaching Chile through the Colchane border crossing (Tapia & Quinteros, 2023). The route involved travel by commercial buses, hitchhiking, and long, exhausting walks. In addition, coronavirus detection measures made it more difficult to process and issue visas and permits, hindering access to formal employment and complicating the lives of newcomers (Herrera, 2021).

By 2024, it is estimated that more than 7.7 million Venezuelans will have left the country in this century, of whom approximately 6.5 million have remained in Latin America and the Caribbean. The main destination countries have been Colombia, with 2.9 million, and Peru, with 1.5 million, followed by Brazil, Ecuador, and Chile (IOM, 2024). Thus, with the pandemic, the continent not only consolidated the intraregional migration pattern, most notably the Venezuelan case, but also witnessed an increase in mixed flows, that is, flows that combine irregular migration, human trafficking, smuggling, and refuge (ECLAC, 2022).

Sanctuary Cities in the United States and the Place of Solidarity

The “Sanctuary Movement” emerged in the United States in the 1980s, after religious congregations shifted their focus from assisting military service members who practiced conscientious objection during the Vietnam War to supporting Central American migrants who arrived in large numbers on the West Coast. Alongside this migratory flow, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was enacted under the Reagan administration, which placed a criminalizing focus on the group of migrants entering the country, most of them from El Salvador (Varela, 2018). The arrival of nearly one-tenth of El Salvador’s population, many of whom were unable to adequately prove refugee status, faced strong discrimination. This prompted five religious congregations in California and one in Arizona to publicly declare, by March 1982, their intention to protect, defend, and support Salvadoran and Guatemalan families.

The Sanctuary Movement in the United States went through several stages. The first involved the use of churches as sanctuaries, as they were considered “socially sensitive” spaces (Cruz Lera, 2019). This practice declined during the 1990s as a result of immigration control laws. In 2001, the movement was reactivated following the Patriot Act, a federal law introduced in response to the September 11 attacks, which granted the government expanded powers to prevent potential terrorist threats. These measures affected migrants by increasing surveillance, expanding detention and deportation, imposing restrictions on access to benefits and services, and strengthening border enforcement. A third stage corresponds to the “sanctuary campus” movement, driven by students and academics seeking to protect undocumented individuals in secondary and higher education. More recent iterations of the movement have a broader base, no longer relying solely on religious groups but also involving civil society organizations and even members of the U.S. Congress.

At present, the Sanctuary Movement is driven by local governments and seeks to mitigate the impact of the criminalization of migrants without formal status. In this sense, it can be argued that the Sanctuary Movement has a dual origin (Varela, 2018): on the one hand, from churches that sought to shelter, protect, and defend Central American migrants; and on the other, from the sanctuary cities movement, which had a broader political scope and whose purpose was not only to

protect migrants but also to foster their sense of belonging within the communities to which they had arrived.

Cruz Lera (2019) identifies three types of sanctuaries: rhetorical sanctuaries, *de facto* sanctuaries, and reception sanctuaries. Rhetorical sanctuaries are those where a pro-migrant discourse exists, but it does not translate into concrete measures that effectively counter anti-immigrant laws. This category also includes laws that ultimately go unused due to sporadic cases (such as in cities with low levels of migration) or, alternatively, laws that cannot be properly enforced because of budgetary constraints. As an example of a rhetorical sanctuary, the author points to the city of Denver, Colorado, where laws seeking to limit cooperation with ICE ³ coexist with laws requiring that immigrants be reported to immigration authorities 24 hours before being released from local jails.

De facto sanctuaries are places where, although there is a high rate of immigrants, there are no local laws supporting them, and informal tools are used instead, such as disregarding state law. In the case of San Antonio, Texas, migration is a prevalent issue due to its proximity to the border; however, internal state opposition has prevented pro-immigration measures from being codified into law, limiting them to a tacit agreement by the police not to inquire about, or report, the legal status of immigrants. This has caused national-level problems by hindering the enforcement of federal laws.

Finally, reception sanctuaries are places where a dialogue exists between public offices and organized migrants, allowing pro-migrant measures to be implemented with support from both the state and civil society organizations. Within this category, different types of cities are also recognized: *welcoming cities*, *compassionate cities*, and *freedom cities*, all of which have sanctuary ordinances. An example of a reception sanctuary is the case of Chicago, which has defended and expanded its public policies for migrants. In 2012, the city approved the *welcoming ordinances*, which allowed state-provided services to be extended to immigrants regardless of their legal status, including legal assistance, English courses, and other programs aimed at promoting their inclusion and highlighting the contributions of immigrants to the state (Cruz Lera, 2019).

³ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

In the European context, in 2016 a network of administrations from major cities was established under the name *Solidarity Cities*, which included Barcelona, Naples, Athens, Thessaloniki, Amsterdam, Gdańsk, and Berlin. This circle of cities, most of them port cities, sought coordination within the legal framework to address the so-called “refugee crisis” on the continent. Migration crises appear to disrupt the sense of community and, consequently, generate xenophobic and nationalist reactions, which in turn lead to the emergence of actors advocating for migrants’ rights (García *et al.*, 2019). Thus, sanctuary cities can be understood as largely reactive, since they tend to arise in response to a prior migration crisis rather than being developed as preventive measures.

Bauder (2017) summarizes sanctuary cities as a set of policies and practices developed at the local level, by municipalities and civil society, which rest on four key pillars. First, the existence of a local legal framework that involves the police and municipal administration in refraining from collaborating with central authorities in reporting irregular migrants. Second, a discursive dimension, in which these cities promote language and narratives grounded in compassion and solidarity within the local community, along with the recognition of migrants’ and refugees’ right to access a good quality of life. A third element is the construction of a city identity as a “space of belonging”, emphasizing that such spaces are shaped not only by local policies but also by their inhabitants. Finally, in terms of scale, sanctuary cities are configured as a countercurrent to national policies, as they seek to “rescale” migration policy to the local level, positioning themselves as legally external to national policy.

Recently, from decolonial perspectives, attention has been drawn to the historical continuity of colonial relations in migration, particularly through the criminalization of people migrating from the Global South to the Global North. From this standpoint, scholars have explored practices of solidarity and hospitality such as the Latin American concept of “*buen vivir*” and the African notion of “*ubuntu*” as alternative examples to the sanctuary concepts of the United States and Europe (Bauder *et al.*, 2023).

Reviewed Cases: From Local Initiatives to the Challenges of Venezuelan Mobility

Solidarity Cities and Migrant Seal in Chile

In our review of Latin America, we found that cases associated with concepts such as “solidarity cities” or “refugee cities” do not appear under these names, but rather linked to other terms such as “inclusion” and “integration”, especially in national and international public policies. The concept of a “solidarity city” was introduced by UNHCR in 2004 in Latin America and was signed by 20 countries in the region. Its implementation took place through the Mexico Plan of Action, which sought to strengthen refugee protection in Latin America. The main areas of action were: strengthening legal frameworks for refugees and internally displaced populations; legislation addressing specific protection needs related to age and gender; as well as the establishment of National Refugee Commissions and national and regional protection networks. It also included training and promotion of international refugee law and proposed the programs “solidarity borders”, “solidarity cities”, and “regional solidarity resettlement” (Varoli, 2010).

The purpose of the UNHCR’s Solidarity Cities initiative was to promote migrants’ access to services such as health care, employment, education, and housing through their inclusion in existing national programs. In terms of employment, the aim was to achieve self-sufficiency by placing migrants in jobs or providing funding to support the creation of small businesses. Among the Solidarity Cities implemented under this plan in Latin America are municipalities in Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Argentina. In Chile, participating municipalities include Arica, Estacion Central, Santiago, La Pintana, Recoleta, Valparaiso, Concepcion, and Talcahuano, among others (UNHCR, 2021b).

In parallel, UNHCR, IOM, and UN-Habitat created the “Inclusive Cities” program, whose main areas of action included developing tools to support decision-making regarding the integration of refugees and migrants at the local government level; building inclusive socioeconomic, urban, and integration strategies; implementing joint actions against xenophobia to promote social cohesion; strengthening the capacities of national and local governments, civil society, and other stakeholders;

and, finally, fostering a community of learning, practice, exchange, and solidarity. Cities participating in this program included Cucuta, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, and Villa del Rosario in Colombia; Quito and Canton de Manta in Ecuador; San Cristobal in Argentina; Lima in Peru; and Boca Chica in the Dominican Republic (EU, n.d.).

Along similar lines, we can mention the implementation of the Migrant Seal certification in Chile, created in 2016 (Passi, 2023). This measure sought to grant municipalities greater authority to design plans, programs, and projects aimed at the care and inclusion of migrant populations. The seal is awarded by the former Department of Immigration of the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security, now known as the National Migration Service (SERMIG). This entity is tasked with providing free advisory services regarding potential improvements for municipalities, sponsoring activities that promote interculturality and inclusion, and participating in dissemination initiatives both nationally and internationally, in coordination with the National Migration Service (UN, n.d.). This initiative connects the state's central structure with municipalities and operates as a certification that may take three forms or categories: (1) registered municipalities, (2) awarded or recognized municipalities, and (3) revalidated municipalities (Passi, 2023: 9). One exemplary case was the municipality of Quilicura, whose work was largely supported by UNHCR. There, in 2010, the Municipal Office for Migrants and Refugees (OMMR) was inaugurated in the context of a growing foreign population in the municipality, which rose from 0.82% in 2002 to 2.1% in 2012 (Thayer *et al.*, 2014).

In 2014, Quilicura, together with IOM and UNHCR, developed the Reception and Refugee Recognition Plan, aimed at identifying the main challenges in the initial incorporation and settlement process of migrant families in the municipality. What made this study particularly significant was that the challenges and needs identified stemmed directly from the migrants themselves and their lived experiences, which in turn served as the basis for designing public policies. The municipality identified four problematic dimensions: education, employment, coexistence and habitat, and health. In the field of education, the study highlighted the need for measures that promote respect and good coexistence, and further recommended extending such measures to other community settings.

Regarding employment, training programs were proposed to support the integration of migrants into the labor market, as well as training on labor rights, in addition to legal assistance to ensure the protection of their rights. The coexistence and habitat dimension received the largest number of proposals, all aimed at enhancing community organization and strengthening ties both within the migrant community and with the broader local community, adopting an intercultural approach. Finally, in the field of health, measures focused on the preventive use of health services were highlighted, along with the inclusion of staff in Family Health Centers (CESFAM) capable of providing care oriented toward mediation between the migrant community and health professionals, with the goal of increasing trust between both parties.

Ecuador: From Population Sender to Receiver and the Challenges of Reception

In Ecuador, the migration landscape became particularly active during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, when some international agreements, such as the 1969 Cartagena Agreement, facilitated increased transit among the countries of the Andean Community. Valle (2017) also highlights Ecuador's dollarization at the beginning of the century and the Colombian armed conflict, which led to the forced displacement of Colombians into Ecuador. Among the nationalities that have historically migrated to Ecuador, those from neighboring countries such as Colombia and Peru stand out, but migrants from Cuba, Haiti, and China have also arrived (Valle, 2017).

The 2008 Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador establishes migration as a right and introduces the concept of "universal citizenship"⁴, which was put into practice that same year with the elimination of entry visas during the government of former President Rafael Correa (Gissi *et al.*, 2020). However, this was a formal measure that had little practical effect, as it lacked a clear policy framework and sufficient resources for implementation (Ramírez, 2022). In 2010, together with Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru, Ecuador signed the *Migration Statute*, which allows access to both temporary and permanent visas among the member countries of the agreement.

By 2017, Ecuador established within its legal framework the concept of "Latin American citizen", which applies to individuals from

⁴ It declares that all people are subjects of rights, regardless of nationality, granting, among other things, freedom of movement.

the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and allows them to obtain temporary residency with certain restrictions, such as a fee of USD 250, the requirement to hold a passport, and an apostilled criminal record certificate, requirements that in many cases hinder the acquisition of these visas (Villamarín *et al.*, 2022). However, with the arrival of Lenin Moreno's government in 2017, there was a return to a border securitization approach, requiring identity cards validated by regional or international authorities, passports with at least six months of validity, criminal record certificates, among other documents, creating a paradoxical situation in the country's migration policies, and in some cases even resulting in unconstitutional practices (Ramírez *et al.*, 2017; Ramírez & Ospina, 2021).

Regarding practices aimed at promoting social integration in Ecuador, the 2013–2017 National Plan for *Buen Vivir* can be highlighted, implemented in the context of Rafael Correa's reelection in 2013. This plan included measures both for tourists and for individuals seeking refugee status. The strategy encompassed multiple lines of action in coordination with international organizations such as the United Nations and local municipalities. The various initiatives included integration programs, the promotion of non-discrimination, dissemination of existing national policies, training for public officials, and facilitation of refugee status acquisition through the deployment of brigades in border areas (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016).

This process of social integration for migrants was initially concentrated along the Ecuador–Colombia border, although efforts were hindered by the lack of resources and infrastructure already affecting local residents, which complicated the process due to the historical deficiencies of the population in northern Ecuador (Mejía, 2013). Additionally, measures were implemented by private institutions, such as economic and labor training provided by the Corporation for Economic Promotion *ConQuito* (ConQuito, n.d.) and the establishment of reception houses for transit migrants, managed by Caritas Ecuador, an international religious confederation (Villacis, 2019).

Another tool used by the Colombian migrant population in the Andean country was the MERCOSUR visa, due to the difficulty of obtaining refugee status. In this regard, Ramírez, Ceja, and Coloma (Ramírez *et al.*, 2017) note that this option was not widely known; therefore, the number of immigrants obtaining it was much lower than those who preferred to use other pathways. The authors highlight the

limited coordination regarding public policies aimed at assisting the migrant population, which was concentrated in northern border localities and the capital, Quito, but without nationwide coordination and with highly variable implementation depending on the locality and the officials deployed in the area.

In the case of the Ecuador–Peru border, the review indicates that it experiences less migrant movement than Ecuador’s northern border, resulting in fewer policies or actions aimed at assisting migrants, as well as fewer social integration initiatives. Nevertheless, national public policies also benefited Peruvian migrants in Ecuador, until 2011, when the Permanent Migration Statute was established, a bilateral agreement between Ecuador and Peru that allowed for the regularization of undocumented Peruvian migrants (Valle, 2017). In 2016, Binational Border Assistance Centers (CEBAF) were implemented along this border, a joint initiative of the Andean Community, executed by the respective government of the territory, with the purpose of providing assistance to Venezuelan migrants using the border crossing to settle in Peru (Dedios & Ruiz, 2022).

In the context of Venezuelan forced displacement, it is observed that, initially, Venezuelan citizens had some facilitation for entering Colombia, supported by the Organic Law on Human Mobility, the Migration Statute, and the UNASUR visa. This situation changed in 2018 due to the increase in migratory flows, leading to the declaration of a state of emergency in border cities and the tightening of control measures. This, combined with the Covid-19 pandemic, exacerbated the situation for Venezuelan migrants, activating a support network that included civil society organizations but was primarily led by international agencies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), among others. Their main forms of assistance included access to food, housing, and legal and psychosocial support (Suárez & Castro, 2020). Notably, the emergence of “digital solidarity” (Mantilla, 2022) also allowed for the coordination of social media groups where Venezuelan migrants in Ecuador assisted other Venezuelan migrants in the country, creating a chain of aid, information, and recommendations for integration, while also fostering group cohesion.

As can be seen in this case, practices appear to emerge, at first instance, from the top, that is, from the central government, which activated

measures at the local government level. Likewise, it is evident that while there are actions by governmental bodies or international organizations, initiatives from civil society organizations are fewer.

Colombia: From Country of Emigration to Primary Destination of Venezuelan Displacement

Colombia is an emblematic case, as for much of the late 20th and early 21st centuries it was primarily a country of emigration, due to economic problems and the escalation of the internal armed conflict. By 2005, it was estimated that more than three million Colombians were living abroad (Courtis *et al.*, 2011), increasing to 4.7 million in 2012 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018a). According to 2024 data, nearly 4.7 million Colombians live abroad (Rodríguez, 2024). Among regional destinations, Venezuela was one of the most important; however, in recent years Colombia has risen to become the main destination of forced Venezuelan displacement, with nearly 2.5 million people.⁵ In fact, the country has absorbed “50% of the Venezuelan migratory flow and serves as a mandatory transit route for over 40% of the remainder” (Rodríguez & Ramos, 2019), a situation that has emerged over the past two decades. In this context, Colombia has promoted migration policies focused on the newly arrived (Aliaga *et al.*, 2018; Aliaga *et al.*, 2020; Echeverry, 2011; Mejía-Madroñero, 2019). For this reason, the results of the literature review aimed at identifying practices related to Sanctuary Cities refer primarily to recent migratory flows.

In 2017, Colombia implemented a *Special Permit of Permanence* (PEP) for Venezuelan migrants, which granted free temporary residency with access to healthcare, employment, and education. At the time of the literature review, the permit had a duration of 90 days and was automatically renewable for two years. The requirements included having entered the country legally, having no criminal record, and not being subject to expulsion or deportation orders (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018b). That same year, the Border Mobility Card (TMF) was also created, allowing transit across the Colombia–Venezuela border for Venezuelan citizens who crossed frequently into Colombian territory. This card did not grant the right to work legally, nor did it provide access to health or education benefits in Colombia. Since 2018, the issuance of this document has been suspended (Koechlin & Eguren, 2018).

⁵ <https://www.r4v.info/es/colombia>

During the pandemic, Colombia also implemented the Special Permit of Permanence for the Promotion of Formalization (PEPFF), which allowed migrants in irregular situations to obtain regular status through an employment contract of up to two years. This measure excluded those already holding a PEP or those still within their authorized period of stay. In addition, the Temporary Protection Statute was created, which included the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (RUMV), a process aimed at registering all Venezuelan migrants in Colombian territory regardless of their migratory status. Finally, the Temporary Protection Permit (PPT) was introduced, an identification document granting migrants access to basic services for up to ten years while they applied for permanent residency. The statute was intended to replace the previous permits, granting residence in the country both to regular migrants who had entered Colombian territory up to January 2021 and to those entering through authorized border crossings within two years of the statute's implementation in November 2023⁶ (Bitar, 2022).

In Colombia, national public policies on migration have focused on the regularization and integration of immigrants, primarily Venezuelans. These measures have enabled this population to access social services such as education, health care, and other forms of assistance, as well as training related to employment and entrepreneurship. This approach is particularly evident in the initiatives undertaken by the municipality of Bogota, including the implementation of Migrant Assistance Centers (CAM),⁷ and programs such as Venezuela Aporta (“Venezuela Contributes”), which aimed to highlight the contributions of the Venezuelan population in Bogotá in order to reduce instances of xenophobic discrimination.⁸

Colombia also endorsed the Plan de Acción de México (Mexico Plan of Action to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees in Latin America) and is part of UNHCR’s “Solidarity Borders” program alongside Ecuador, Venezuela, and Panama. As a result, initiatives were also carried out to assist refugee populations from Venezuela. These

6 <https://help.unhcr.org/colombia/otros-derechos/estatuto-temporal-de-proteccion-para-migrantes-venezolanos/>

7 <https://bogota.gov.co/mi-ciudad/teusaquillo/centro-de-servicios-integrales-para-venezolanos-en-teusaquillo>

8 <https://www.elnuevosiglo.com.co/nacion/bogota-aumenta-oferta-para-atender-migrantes>

international policies focused on border areas, providing legal advice, access to basic necessities such as food, housing, basic medical care, and other services (UNHCR, 2019). According to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, almost half of the aid received by migrants in Colombia came from the government, similar to the situation in Ecuador, where the coordination of solidarity practices originates at the central level (Bitar, 2022).

However, similar to Ecuador, alongside measures for integration and regularization, measures were implemented aimed at restricting the entry of Venezuelan citizens into Colombian territory. These included the creation of the Special Migratory Group, a border control police unit composed of the National Police, the National Tax and Customs Department, the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare, and Migración Colombia (Colombian immigration authority), with the purpose of controlling smuggling at the border, in addition to the use of the TMF and PEP (Gissi *et al.*, 2020). Criticism was also raised regarding the registration and implementation process of the Temporary Protection Permit (PPT), which, although it protected the majority of Venezuelan migrants in Colombian territory, restricted access for those who did not meet the requirement of having entered the country within a specified date range (Ramírez & Ospina, 2021). This situation left a portion of the irregular migrant population without mechanisms to access a status that would guarantee greater rights.

Peru and Bolivia: Between Destination and Transit in Venezuelan Displacement

Similarly to Colombia, Peru faced a novel situation with the increase in immigration, as it was the first time the country confronted a flow of the magnitude of forced Venezuelan displacement. By 2019, it was the second-largest recipient of this population, accounting for 50% of Venezuelans living outside their country together with Colombia (Sacristán-Rodríguez & Anaya, 2022). Currently, it is estimated that more than 1.5 million people from Venezuela have arrived in Peru, making it the second-most important migratory destination in Latin America.⁹ However, as Peru has historically been primarily a sending country, its migration policy was outdated, even after the enactment of a new law in 2015, which was not implemented due to the lack of regulations (Blouin & Freier, 2019). In 2017, with the new Migration

9 <https://www.r4v.info/es/refugiadosymigrantes>

Law, the Peruvian government implemented a Temporary Stay Permit card (PTP) for Venezuelan citizens, which allowed beneficiaries to access employment, health services, education, banking institutions, and other rights. This program was even highlighted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights as a regional example (Parent, 2017). However, paradoxically, the new Migration Law also increased the period for deportation. At the same time, it allowed the intervention of the National Police of Peru to enforce sanctions, so it can be considered a control policy with a humanitarian face (Domenech, 2013), once again consistent with what has been observed in other Andean countries.

In 2020, a new type of permit was implemented, the Temporary Stay Permit Card (CPP), which provided a temporary identity document for people in an irregular situation in the country. Then, in 2021, Peruvian migration policy changed again, this time establishing measures to facilitate the regularization of children and adolescents and expanding the foreigner's identification card. This allowed those who had not yet received a residence permit, but had submitted their application, to access the document (Dedios & Ruiz, 2022).

Regarding integration measures, initially, as mentioned in the case of Ecuador, these were implemented at the Ecuador-Peru border through the Binational Border Assistance Centers (CEBAF), in coordination with the Migration Superintendence, the National Police, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and international organizations such as the IOM, UNHCR, the Red Cross, among others. The busiest CEBAF was in Tumbes, which assisted Venezuelan migrants in obtaining refugee status as well as other humanitarian aid, although it did not coordinate with other organizations to provide medium- or long-term assistance (Dedios & Ruiz, 2022). During the pandemic, the CEBAFs remained closed. Public policy focused on expanding programs already in place for the Peruvian population, rather than creating new measures specifically for migrants.

At the local level, practices focused on Lima, the city with the highest number of Venezuelan migrants in the country, accounting for 10% of the total population (Infobae, 2022). In addition to expanding programs such as Vaso de Leche,¹⁰ Lima te Cuida,¹¹ and

10 Food assistance program focused on children aged 0 to 6 and pregnant women.

11 Program implemented in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic that provided information, humanitarian aid, and psychological support to the population of Lima.

Manos a la Olla,¹² assistance was coordinated for at-risk populations, including people experiencing homelessness, victims of gender-based violence, and the LGBTQ+ community. Labor market inclusion was promoted through entrepreneurship (International Labour Organization, 2020) with support from the ILO, and access to municipal public services was facilitated through the Migrant Neighbor Office, implemented with assistance from the Mayors Migration Council and its Global Cities Fund for Inclusive Pandemic Response¹³ (Dedios & Ruiz, 2022).

Despite the multiplicity of recognized good practices, the UNDP report on recent migration to Peru (Dedios & Ruiz, 2022) also highlighted the lack of coordination among global, national, and local actors. This hindered the effective implementation of all the measures introduced, making it difficult to ensure their continuity over time and their proper documentation for evaluation.

Finally, within the Andean case we have Bolivia, which, like the other countries in the region, has seen a considerable increase in migration in recent years, also in relation to the Venezuelan migration crisis. However, it has been the country with the lowest number of arrivals, as it has primarily functioned as a country of transit. It is estimated that in Bolivia, until 2019, there were around seven thousand Venezuelans (Gissi *et al.*, 2021), rising to 15,000 in July 2022 (R4V, 2022). Within the literature review, it is the country with the least available information. There are top-down initiatives, such as the Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Venezuela 2023–2024, a joint effort by UNHCR and IOM through the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V). These are complemented by civil society initiatives, which include programs in education, health, food security, transportation, integration, sanitation, and hygiene, among others.¹⁴

12 Municipal support program for community kitchens managed by civil society organizations, also in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

13 In English: Global Cities Fund for Inclusive Pandemic Response.

14 <https://bolivia.iom.int/news/acnur-y-oim-presentaron-el-plan-de-respuesta-para-refugiados-y-migrantes-de-venezuela-2023-2024-rmrp-para-bolivia>

Conclusions

The review of cases and policies resembling sanctuary cities in the Global North highlights the differences and gaps between the two contexts. The closest cases in Latin America are found within the Solidarity Cities program led by UNHCR. Unlike in the United States, these initiatives emerge as a set of good practices framed as international-local collaboration in the participating countries. Their focus lies on securing rights for migrants that have already been recognized by the states. In general, these initiatives take shape through two main channels: the first, promoted by international organizations toward countries and cities, “top-down”, and the second, driven by local actors such as municipalities, NGOs, and civil society organizations, “bottom-up.” The former depends on political will in each case, while the latter tend to be fragmented and temporary actions. Moreover, these local initiatives often suffer from limited or scattered information and a lack of systematic record-keeping.

The cases reviewed (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru) are countries that have ratified and participated in international frameworks for the integration of migrant and refugee populations, which, to some extent, has ensured that the local-central government dichotomies do not mirror those that existed in sanctuary cities in the United States. This aligns with the observations of Godoy and Bauder (2021), who identify certain features in global South migration policies: a predominance of top-down initiatives, in which supranational organizations establish links with local governments and civil society organizations. This is complemented by the ongoing involvement of religious organizations, reminiscent of the origins of the “sanctuary cities” movement in the United States, although the authors note that the literature employs alternative terminology such as “hospitality” and “interculturality”.

The cases reviewed share certain elements while also exhibiting differences that help explain the findings. Regarding the former, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia were, until recent decades, primarily countries of emigration. However, from 2010 onwards, the first three became destination countries, particularly for forced Venezuelan migration. In other words, the situation reversed in a very short time, and although the net balance remains negative, it is undeniable that the Venezuelan exodus has shaped the current migratory landscape.

Added to this was the impact of the pandemic and the public health control measures on human mobility, which made it more vulnerable and precarious. The humanitarian crisis resulting from the convergence of these two phenomena highlighted the need to incorporate humanitarian measures along migratory routes and in border cities, as well as in residence permits and entry procedures.

In the case of Chile, since the 1990s the country has appeared on the migration map, initially experiencing an increase in border migration, followed by Caribbean and cross-border migration in the first decades of the current century. The concentration of foreign populations in certain cities and municipalities posed the challenge of implementing inclusion and interculturality strategies and practices, in line with the political will of the authorities in office. Meanwhile, Bolivia, with a long history of emigration and limited immigration, became a transit country for forcibly displaced Venezuelans during the pandemic.

What can be observed in the reviewed cases is a lack of preparedness to address the challenges of immigration in general, and of forced Venezuelan displacement in particular. The involvement of global organizations such as UNHCR and IOM, as well as the actions of churches and NGOs, has helped respond to this situation in a context that fostered the emergence of xenophobic and racist outbreaks. On the other hand, there are few initiatives from civil society or local governments that resemble or are similar to the sanctuary cities in the United States. However, we also note underreporting, as many social organizations carry out inclusion initiatives but leave little record of their actions, and these are generally highly fragmented. This situation presents an opportunity to consider social media in the future, as it provides information, often in brief audiovisual formats, about different initiatives. Some aim to introduce elements characteristic of sanctuary cities, such as reporting situations of injustice, while others promote the human rights of migrants.

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