

How to prevent stigma and discrimination against migrants

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised existing prejudices in our communities. In some contexts, social networks are used to increase stigmatization and discrimination against migrants in the department of Nariño, in southern Colombia.

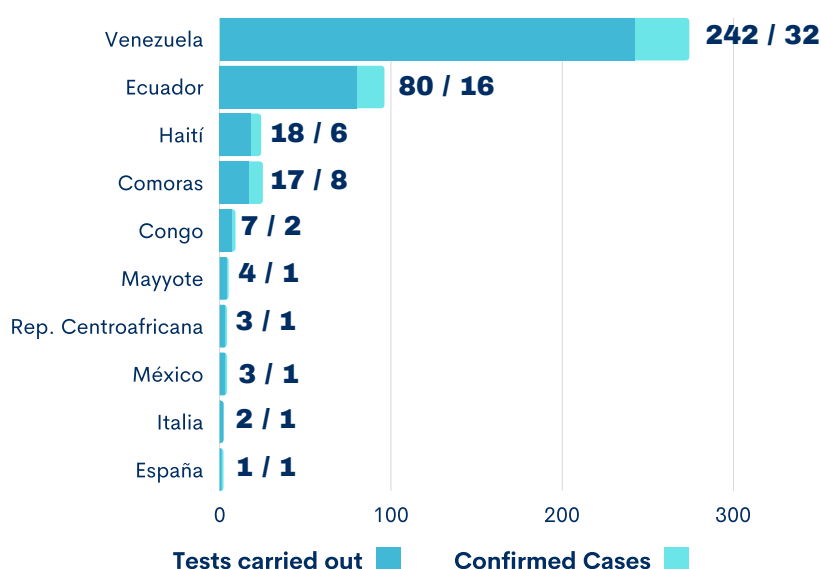
What do you need to know?

Migration Colombia has reported that more than 7 thousand Venezuelan citizens left Colombia to go back to their country during the month of September. According to the Interagency Group for Mixed Migratory Flows (GIFMM), there are currently 14,317 Venezuelan migrants in Nariño. The uncontrolled humanitarian crisis caused by the closure of the border left thousands of migrants "trapped" in Colombia, many of whom lived on the streets or in makeshift and overcrowded shelters, making it difficult to comply with the norms of social distancing and constant hand washing.

These shelters in the streets and highways have made them an object of discrimination and stigmatization. The economic and social difficulties that the country is going through as a result of the pandemic have many effects on citizens, with greater impact on the lower social strata and in the population in vulnerable situations. This is the case of many Venezuelan migrants, especially those who are in an irregular condition, since their immigration status creates limitations for effective access to their rights.

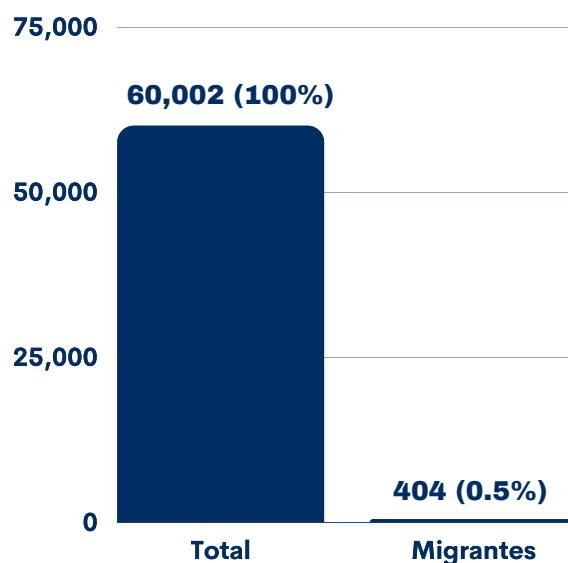
On the 14th of December in the department of Nariño, there were 27,214 confirmed cases of COVID-19, 9.46% in Ipiales (2,576 cases) and 7.71% in Tumaco (2,099 cases). According to the Departmental Institute of Health of Nariño (IDSN) until October 12, 2020, only 69 migrants had been diagnosed positive for COVID-19 in the south of the country, compared to the figures published by GIFMM, only 2.8% of the migrants has been tested in Nariño.

Comparative Chart for Positive COVID-19 Cases among residents in Nariño, according to nationality (Oct. 12 2020)



Source: UNHCR - Portal Operacional Situaciones de Refugiados y Migrantes

COVID-19 tests carried out in Nariño (Oct. 12 2020)



Source: GOV.CO - Datos Abiertos: Pruebas PCR procesadas de COVID-19 en Colombia (Departamental)



The Venezuelan Migrant Situation in Colombia

So far the figures of Venezuelan migrants infected with COVID-19 have been published in October 2020 by GIFMM. What is known is that the needs and deprivations they face have worsened since the start of the pandemic.

The Rapid Needs Assessment for COVID-19 was carried out, directed by GIFMM Colombia, in order to measure the impacts of COVID-19 on Venezuelan migrants and their needs. The Venezuela Migration Project has documented what it means for migrants to be in a country like Colombia, the conclusions of these two studies are as follows:

- Despite the measures the national government established with decree 579 of 2020 for the protection of those at risk of eviction, between March and August 2020, 381 incidents were reported. USAID identified at least 10 informal housing settlements inhabited by 2,000 people from Venezuela that were located in Arauca, Bogotá, Cali, Ipiales, and Villa del Rosario.
- Obtaining food has been one of the greatest difficulties for migrant families. In May and June 2020, 84% and 55% of households reported eating less than 3 times a day, although it must be taken into account that the food security of migrants even before mandatory isolation due to the coronavirus was already precarious.
- During the pandemic, only 58% of migrants had some type of employment income. Income generation in migrant households in the context of the pandemic is even more limited by imposed restrictions such as isolation and social distancing. The fragility of the livelihoods of migrants is largely related to the labor informality faced by the country.
- Migrants in Nariño have had to spend the quarantine in hotels and shelters in Pasto, Túquerres, Ipiales and Tumaco. Migrant households have reported in the GIFMM evaluation that housing is the second priority need during confinement after food.



According to data provided by the National Police to the Observatory of the Venezuela Migration Project, homicide greatly impacts Venezuelan migrants in the country. Although Venezuelan migrants are just under 4% of the population, they represent 5% of homicide deaths throughout 2020, with various peaks, like the one observed in September, when the figure reached 6.4%.

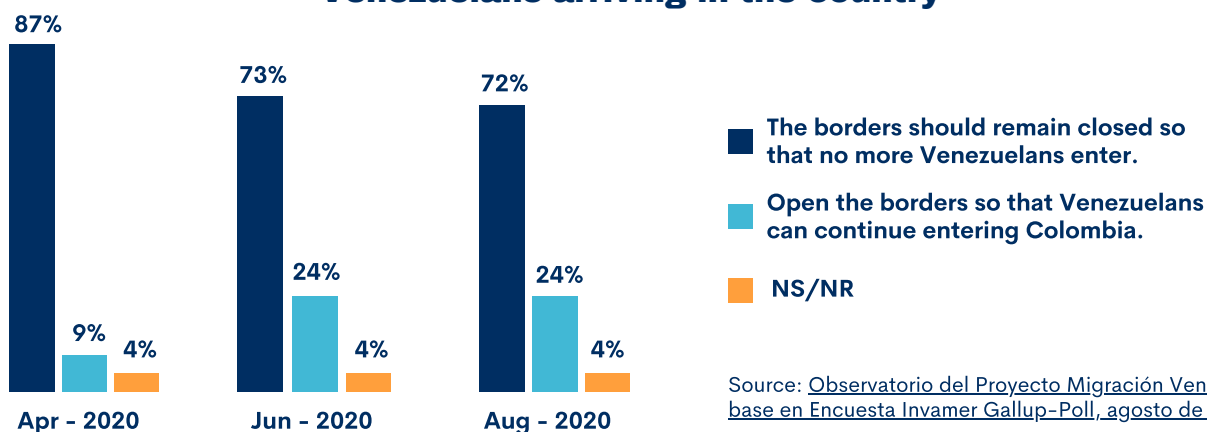
The panorama of migrant victims can be very worrying if one takes into account the under-registration of almost a million migrants in irregular condition in the country, who do not report the crimes they fall victim to for fear of being deported.

The Invamer Gallup-Poll in April in 2020, found that 8 out of 10 Colombians surveyed had an unfavorable opinion of Venezuelans who came to stay, the highest negative peak since October 2018.

Likewise, for that same period about 9 out of 10 Colombians agreed that the border should remain closed to prevent the entry of more Venezuelans.

In the following months, once the quarantine restrictions eased up a bit, this perception improved registering at a proportion of 7 out of 10 Colombians having an unfavorable opinion of migrants in August 2020.

Opinion of Colombians towards Venezuelans arriving in the country



Source: [Observatorio del Proyecto Migración Venezuela con base en Encuesta Invamer Gallup-Poll, agosto de 2020.](#)

Xenophobia, the Virus of Hate

The Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio Gutiérrez, said that: "the pandemic continues to unleash a wave of hatred and xenophobia, looking for scapegoats and fomenting fear" and urged governments to "act now to strengthen the immunity of our societies against the virus of hatred."

The right to health is universal, all people should receive medical care if they suspect they have been exposed to the virus. In Colombia many migrants are in an irregular situation and do not have access to health services, which puts everyone at risk (nationals and foreigners) and increases the chances of contagion.

Economies and societies are strengthened by the rich contributions of migrants around the world. This can mean: compliance with corporate social responsibility, filling difficult-to-place vacancies, meeting needs for temporary labor, diminishing high attrition rates and staff turnover, and the possibility of designing strategies to win a new audience in the market.

For the indicators of perception to continue improving, it is necessary to promote an environment of equality to facilitate the integration of Venezuelan migrants. If all migrants had a defined and regular status, it would be easier for them to fully participate in Colombian society and myths about them that aren't supported by facts can be debunked and forgotten.



HOW TO REPORT ON IT?

How can you intervene in time to bring communities together and neutralize stigmatization?

Help people to understand and get to know the context and stories of Venezuelan migrants who have had to leave their country, what it has meant for them to change their quality of life and break emotional, economic, and familial ties to assume this new reality where they have to start from scratch in a country that is not theirs. This is a powerful way of transmitting empathy, discouraging xenophobia, and encouraging solidarity.



You can also counter the stories about migrants spreading COVID-19 and about returnees being a risk to communities by using sources that you and your audience can trust. In order to prevent worsening the current situation, which is already delicate, you have the responsibility to present reality ethically, ensuring you don't widen the gap between Nariño residents and migrants entering the region, and promoting discourses of inclusion.

Focus on the positive stories: How do foreigners contribute to the development of the department of Nariño? You can highlight in your reports that the migrant population also contributes to the transfer of knowledge and skills, because people on the move are often innovative and entrepreneurial. Additionally, in response to the prejudiced rumor circulating in Nariño, the **Internews Rooted in Trust** project published the investigation into this rumor as well as some recommendations in the **Venga le Cuento** newsletter. Here are some of the recommendations mentioned:

- Focus on the measures taken by local and national authorities and humanitarian organizations to face the pandemic among the migrant population.
- Provide useful information to the refugee and migrant community, especially the most vulnerable.
- The fear and uncertainty in the midst of a pandemic are understandable, but this fear should not justify xenophobia and racism.
- Misinformation about migrants, saying that they are spreaders of the virus, can wreak havoc, endanger lives, and prevent people from making sound health decisions.
- Migrants are already in a vulnerable condition and xenophobia exacerbates exclusion, undermining the response to COVID-19. The flow of truthful information about and for refugees, migrants and their host communities needs to go beyond community circles, in order to silence fear and misinformation.

**Arraigados
en la Confianza
(Rooted in Trust)**



More information: <http://eepurl.com/hkvBC5>