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**Sample Size**

1,400 Venezuelan Migrants

**Research Implemented by IPA**

Yes

# Higher Program Take-Up? The role of awareness, bottlenecks, and trust

## Abstract

Displaced migrants who settle in new countries may encounter numerous barriers to accessing host country programs that could potentially provide helpful relief and accommodation for them. These barriers include low awareness of the program, distrust in the government, and registration bottlenecks. In Colombia, Venezuelan migrants face these barriers when registering for a migrant regularization program that grants them access to labor markets and social services. Can providing information to migrants about such social protection programs help overcome registration barriers and increase registration rates?

## Policy Issue

At least 82.4 million people globally have been forced out of their homeland,<sup>[1]</sup> whether due to extreme socioeconomic conditions, conflict, or famine. Most often end up settling in neighboring countries. Consequently, host country governments are tasked with resolving how to resettle the migrants without overextending capacity. Some host countries may attempt to assimilate migrants into society, and in recognizing their rights, grant them work permits and labor market access, housing, and health and education services instead of having them stay in the periphery. However, migrants who want to register for these programs may face several barriers in doing so, including fears of being persecuted by host country governments or citizens, bottlenecks in the registration system that slow permit processing, and information gaps about what the program entails. These barriers have the potential to keep registration low and prevent migrants from accessing valuable relief assistance.

Past research<sup>[2]</sup> notes how registration for public programs is often strained by three barriers, including lack of awareness, information gaps or confusion about the program, and distrust in the government. This intervention builds on the research by targeting the barriers specifically to increase registration for a migrant regularization program in Colombia.

## Context of the Evaluation

The ongoing crisis in Venezuela has displaced more than 4.6 million people as of 2021, a number that continues to grow. Colombia remains the primary destination for these migrants, having taken in 1.7 million people, accounting for 32 percent of Venezuelan migrants in Latin America,<sup>[3]</sup> and three percent of Colombia's population. In 2021, the Colombian government announced the creation of a permit called ETPV which would grant Venezuelan migrants ten-year work permits along with access to health care, education, and other social benefits. Registration began in May 2021 and will end in May 2023, allowing migrants to enroll in the program. The first step is to fill the Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (RUMV), which requires irregular migrants to verify that they arrived in Colombia prior to January 31, 2021. However, several barriers are in place that limit migrant enrollment, including a lack of awareness and information, distrust in the government out of deportation fears, a lack of resources like transportation, internet, time, and documents, as well as registration bottlenecks.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Details of the Intervention

In Colombia, researchers are partnering with the Hilton Foundation to evaluate whether delivering information videos to Venezuelan migrants through WhatsApp about the ETPV permit is effective in overcoming registration barriers and influences permit registration rates among migrants. The specific registration barriers of interest include low awareness, distrust

in the Colombian government, and registration bottlenecks.

The study takes place in Atlántico and Magdalena Departments and includes 1,400 Venezuelan migrants who have access to a phone with WhatsApp, are eligible to register for the ETPV permit, are at least eighteen years of age, and live in the municipalities of Fundación, Ciénaga, Santa Marta, Baranoa, and Sabanalarga. The participants were randomly divided into the following groups:

- **Information Video:** Participants receive an information video through WhatsApp about ETPV with a Colombian narrator describing benefits associated with the permit and how to register for one.
- **Information Video + Trust Component:** Participants receive an information video about ETPV through WhatsApp with a Venezuelan narrator, involving a trust preamble to leverage migrant trust in the permit, a description of the permit's benefits, and how to register for one.
- **Registration Process Video + Trust Component:** Participants receive an information video about ETPV through WhatsApp with a Venezuelan narrator, involving a trust preamble to leverage migrant trust in the permit, and a step-by-step walkthrough of the permit registration process.
- **No Intervention:** Participants will not receive an information video.

Following the intervention, the researchers will conduct four rounds of surveys over one month with participants about the information video, permit registration, and changes in social capital and cohesion, migration intentions, and future plans.

## Results and Policy Lessons

Research ongoing; results forthcoming.

## Sources

<sup>[1]</sup> Fleming, Sean, "This is the global refugee situation: in numbers," World Economic Forum, 18 June 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/unhcr-how-many-refugees/>

<sup>[2]</sup> Bertrand et al (2006), Chetty et al (2013), Gonzalez-Barrera et al (2013), Liebman et al (2004), Smeeding et al (2000).

<sup>[3]</sup> World Bank Staff, "Supporting Colombian Host Communities and Venezuelan Migrants During the COVID-19 Pandemic," The World Bank Group, 31 October 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2021/10/31/supporting-colombian-host-communities-and-venezuelan-migrants-during-the-covid-19-pandemic#:~:text=As%20of%20March%202021%2C%20an,70%20%25%20of%20all%20Venezuelan%20migrants.>

<sup>[4]</sup> Ibañez, A. M., S. V. Rozo, A. Moya, M. A. Ortega, and M. R. Chatruc (2020). Life out of the shadows: Impacts of amnesty programs on migrant's life.

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