



Policy Brief

Ageing on the Move: Access to Social Protection for Older Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants Living in Colombia and Peru

Key messages

The integration of older Venezuelan migrants and refugees into social protection systems should be seen as a critical component of their socio-economic integration and prioritised by host governments.

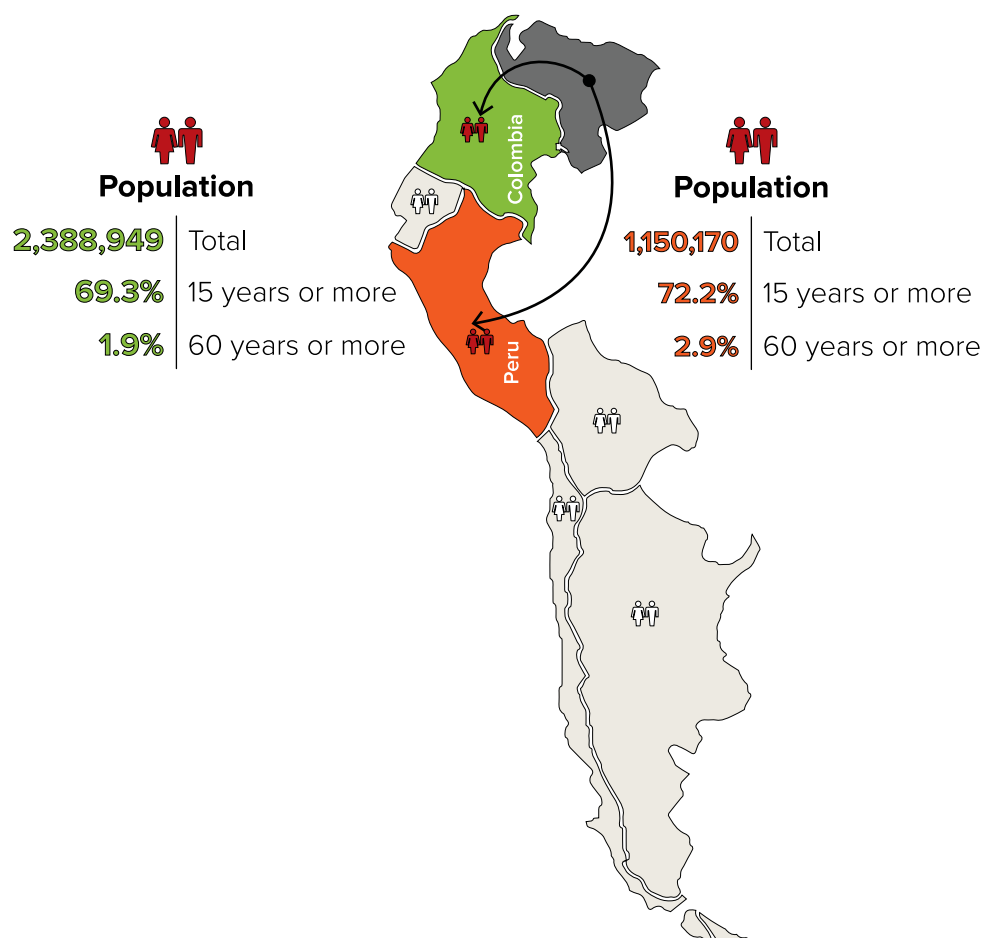
Access to pensions is especially crucial for older refugees and migrants.

Social pension programmes should be expanded so all vulnerable older people in Colombia and Peru, independent of citizenship, can have minimum income security in older age.

The integration of migrants and refugees into the pension system's contributory component should be promoted.

Efforts to integrate the Venezuelan population into the Colombian and Peruvian pension systems focus on both enabling vulnerable older Venezuelans to access social pensions as well as facilitating and promoting the incorporation of working-age Venezuelans into the contributory component of the pension system.

The protracted economic and political crisis in Venezuela has led to the largest external displacement crisis in Latin America's recent history. It is estimated that 5.7 million Venezuelans left their country in search of protection and a better life. The majority of them migrated to neighboring countries Colombia and Peru, which together host two-thirds of Venezuelan refugees and migrants¹.



¹ Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela [R4V], 2022b

This unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants has put host countries under enormous pressure to implement regularization measures and to promote the socio-economic integration of Venezuelans.

Colombia has made considerable strides in the regularisation of Venezuelans living in the country, and 88.7% of them now have regular status. In Peru, progress has been somewhat more limited, and only about two-thirds of Venezuelans have regular status.

Furthermore, both countries have placed a strong emphasis on labour market integration. In Colombia, there have been concerted efforts to remove barriers to employment, including certification of skills and diploma validation, and as a result, 73.8% of adult Venezuelans living in the country are economically active, although, like the host population, the vast majority are employed in the informal sector. In Peru, though quotas on hiring foreigners still apply, 78% of adult Venezuelans are economically active, with the vast majority also employed in the informal sector.

However, for the majority of older migrants and refugees, who face intersecting risks and vulnerabilities, earning a living through work is not a realistic option. Hence, these mainstream actions focused on labour market integration have fallen short, and they remain largely in a situation of high socio-economic vulnerability.

For them, a critical component of socio-economic integration is their incorporation into the host country's social protection system, as they often require financial support to live with dignity. This brief draws on HelpAge International's 2023 "Migration and Ageing: Income Security in Old Age for the Refugee and Migrant Population in Colombia and Peru" study to propose recommendations on how this integration can be facilitated and how the Colombian and Peruvian social protection systems can be adapted to become more inclusive to guarantee at least minimum income security to Venezuelan refugees and migrants in older age.

Earning a living as an older person on the move

Earning a living as an older migrant or refugee is often very challenging as they face all the barriers faced by younger migrants and refugees to find jobs, such as lack of documentation, lack of diploma recognition, and discrimination, compounded by older age-related ones, in particular health issues and ageism.

Analyses of Colombia's GEIH household survey² and Peru's ENPOVE survey³ offer a

snapshot of just how challenging the economic situation of older Venezuelans is. Only about a third of older Venezuelans living in Colombia and Peru are economically active (34.9% and 29.5%, respectively). The unemployment rates of older men are nearly double those of younger Venezuelan men in these countries: 13.9% compared to 7.8% in Colombia and 16% compared to 7.9% in Peru.

² Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares (GEIH) del Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE).

³ Segunda Encuesta Dirigida a la Población Venezolana que Reside en el País: II ENPOVE 2021- 2022

Declining health and increasing rates of disabilities are major reasons why older people reduce their levels of work. According to a recent UNHCR/HelpAge survey of older people on the move, 45% of people on the move in Colombia experienced some type of disability, and 42% had at least one chronic disease such as hypertension, heart problems, or diabetes. A similar picture emerges in Peru, where 38% of older migrants and refugees reported some type of disability and 41% had at least one noncommunicable disease⁴.

Ageism also plays an important role. According to the same survey, about a fifth of older people on the move in both countries experienced ageism, in particular when seeking employment.

Older women are even less likely to have any income from work. Only 23.1% of older Venezuelan women in Colombia and 23.7% in Peru are economically active, and two-thirds of them engage in unpaid care and domestic work.

Those who are able to engage in paid work face instability and low salaries. In Peru, for instance, only 13% of older migrants had a signed contract or received a receipt for services provided. In Colombia, the average income received by older Venezuelans is lower than the minimum wage.

With few opportunities to work and limited access to other income sources such as savings or rent, a large proportion of older Venezuelans living in Colombia and Peru rely entirely on their families for their basic needs. Nevertheless, high levels of poverty and economic vulnerability faced by the migrant and refugee population as a whole mean that families have limited resources to share, and the adequacy of this support is often limited.

Access to social protection

Older migrants and refugees, who are unable to earn a living and have limited support from their families, need access to social protection to meet their basic needs and live with dignity. Therefore, their integration into protection systems should be seen as a critical element of their socio-economic integration and prioritised by host countries.

However, only a very small percentage of vulnerable migrants and refugees' access social protection in both Colombia and Peru due to a lack of knowledge about the existence of support, the complexity of the registration process, and citizenship or minimum residency requirements.

⁴ ACNUR and HelpAge International (2021) A Claim to Dignity: Ageing on the Move.

⁵ In Colombia, data from GEIH shows that only 1.9% of older Venezuelans have income from rent; and in Peru, data from ENPOVE shows that only 0.5% had income from rent and 0.4 % from investments.

The human right to social protection for all

Everyone, male or female, young or old, rich or poor, faces circumstances or vulnerabilities throughout their lifecourse that hold the potential to negatively impact their health, wellbeing, and ability to maintain an adequate standard of living for themselves and their dependents. Recognising these universally shared risks, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948; the International Covenant on Economic and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966; and the International Labour Organisation's Convention 102 on Social Security (1952) establish the human right to social security and an adequate standard of living. At regional level, The Inter-American Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Older Persons (2015) explicitly mentions the right of older migrants not to be discriminated against due to age (Art. 5), and their right to social security and pensions, calling on States to seek global mechanisms or agreements to guarantee this right (Art. 17).

On the basis of these human rights frameworks, an international consensus emerged that health care, maternity and childhood, sickness, unemployment, employment injury, disability, survivorship, and older age are stages in a person's lifecourse of heightened vulnerability that require societies to organise systems of support and investment in people. Today, we call these systems social protection.

The entry point into social protection programmes in both Colombia and Peru is their social registries - the Sistema de Identificación de Potenciales Beneficiarios de Programas Sociales (SISBEN)⁶ in Colombia and the Siste-

ma de Focalización de Hogares (SISFOH)⁷ in Peru - which are databases used to identify and select beneficiaries for social protection programmes based on vulnerability levels. The process of registering in these databases is notoriously difficult and convoluted, with several layers and checks. These processes are particularly difficult to navigate for migrants, who face additional barriers related to a lack of information, documentation, and discrimination.

Colombia has made important progress by allowing the inclusion of Venezuelan migrants and refugees into the SISBEN, which is used to identify beneficiaries for 31 social assistance programmes. In 2022, there were 371,879 Venezuelans registered in the SISBEN (roughly 15% of Venezuelans in the country), of which 55% were women, 5% had some type of disability, and 2.7% were older people.⁸ Venezuelans in the SISBEN were able to, for instance, access an emergency cash grant called "Ingreso Solidario" during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The equivalent in Peru is the Sistema de Focalización de Hogares (SISFOH) a system for the selection of beneficiaries for 13 social assistance programmes. The number of Venezuelans in the system is unknown, but they can in principle register in the SISFOH using their immigration card; however, temporary permits (CPP or PTP) are not accepted.

Although being registered in these databases is a necessary first step and a pre-requisite, it does not guarantee access to social protection programmes since many of them have additional requirements, some of which related to citizenship, and coverage is often very limited.

⁶ Identification of Social Programme Beneficiaries System

⁷ Household Targeting System

⁸ Colombian Observatory of Migration from Venezuela (OMV)

Of particular importance to older refugees and migrants is access to pensions, as these are the main social protection instrument to protect against the socioeconomic risks and vulnerabilities associated with older age. However, only 9.3% of older Venezuelans in Peru and 6.3% in Colombia receive pensions.

A significant proportion of older Venezuelans, particularly men, were entitled to a pension in Venezuela but are either unable to access it from Colombia and Peru, or these are now virtually worthless due to years of devaluation and hyperinflation.⁹

Both Colombia and Peru have relatively well-developed pension systems that include contributory and non-contributory components. Contributory pensions are regular cash transfers financed by workers and employers' contributions over a defined period of time and linked to an individual's salary and work history. The non-contributory component, or social pensions, are tax-financed cash transfers paid regularly to older people. Social pensions are particularly relevant to older refugees and migrants, as they are independent of employment history or contributions to pension schemes. Access to social pensions is especially critical for older women since they are even less likely to have an income from work or a contributory pension.

Colombia Mayor, the Colombian social pension, provides a monthly payment of 85,000 Colombian pesos (US\$18.50) to women aged at least 54 years and men aged at least 59 years who are in a situation of moderate or extreme poverty, according to the SISBEN. However, the programme also requires beneficiaries to be Colombian citizens who have lived the country for at least 10 years. These requirements automatically disqualify all Venezuelans, even the nearly 6,000 who meet the age and vulnerability criteria and are registered in the SISBEN.¹⁰

Peru's Pension 65 provides 250 soles (about \$68) every two months and is targeted at

people aged 65 and over who are in extreme poverty, according to the SISFOH. There are currently a total of 500,000 beneficiaries (about 25% of the population over 65). Unlike Colombia, there are no citizenship or minimum period of residency requirements, but given the difficulties older Venezuelans face registering in the SISFOH and the numerous additional requirements for enrolment in the programme, it is unlikely that there are significant numbers of Venezuelans benefiting from Pension 65.

Although the contributory component of the pension systems is less relevant for the current cohort of older Venezuelans in Colombia and Peru, the integration of younger, working-age migrants and refugees into the contributory pillar is critical for ensuring that they will have access to a pension in older age. Moreover, the integration of younger migrants into the contributory system could offer an opportunity to mitigate some of the impacts of rapid population ageing on the sustainability of the system.

However, high levels of informality, low levels of income, lack of information, and administrative hurdles mean that very few Venezuelans working in Colombia and Peru are making mandatory or voluntary contributions to the pension system. There is no exact figure for Peru, but in Colombia, only 11% of Venezuelans working in the country are linked to the contributory system.¹¹

In this sense, it is important that efforts to integrate the Venezuelan population into the Colombian and Peruvian pension systems focus on both enabling vulnerable older Venezuelans to access social pensions as well as facilitating and promoting the incorporation of working-age Venezuelans into the contributory component of the pension system.

⁹ ACNUR and HelpAge International (2021) A Claim to Dignity: Ageing on the Move.

¹⁰ According to DNP data, in May 2022, there were 5,943 older people registered with Sisbén classified in levels A and B.

¹¹ GEIH

Recommendations

In order to guarantee the socio-economic integration of older Venezuelan refugees and migrants into the Colombian and Peruvian social protection systems, governments should:

- **Continue to invest in the regularisation processes of Venezuelans, with a special focus on those who face additional risks and vulnerabilities.**
- **Offer guidance and advice to people on the move on the different schemes for joining and contributing to social protection in the host countries.**
- **Actively promote the registration of Venezuelans into the SISBEN and SISFOH databases, as they are the entry points to accessing social protection in both countries.** In the case of Peru, the government should ensure that temporary permits (CPP or PTP) are also accepted for registration.
- **Expand and strengthen social pension programmes so that all vulnerable older people in Colombia and Peru, independent of citizenship, can have minimum income security in older age.** Both “Colombia Mayor” and “Pension 65” should have sufficient resources to cover all who meet the age and poverty criteria, and in the case of Colombia Mayor, citizenship requirements should be removed so that all non-Colombians who meet the criteria can also benefit from the programme.
- **Facilitate migrants and refugees’ integration into the pension system’s contributory component, in both compulsory and voluntary schemes.** In the case of Colombia, it is particularly relevant to remove the citizenship requirement for enrolment in Beneficios Económicos Periódicos (BEPS), a voluntary contribution programme for low-income informal workers.
- **Strengthen pension portability through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms.**

HelpAge International is a global network of organizations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.

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