

Executive Summary

The Politics and Processes
of Refugee Leadership



Recent migratory flows in South America have generated significant attention from both political arenas and academia. The mass movement of Venezuelan and Haitian migrants has drawn interest due to its scale, the reasons behind this migration, and the regional media coverage. Although there is a wealth of research on Venezuelan and Haitian populations across various parts of the continent, it is challenging to find studies examining their capacity for agency, leadership, and their potential for influencing and participating within the political structures of the countries they inhabit.

Chile and Colombia have been positioned as recipients of these migratory flows. Colombia is the country that has received the most Venezuelan migrants in the region - according to the R4V platform (2024)-, with almost

3 MILLION
displaced persons

and 600,000 Colombians returned from Venezuela, while Chile's latest estimate by the National Migration Service (SERMIG) indicates that there were 728,586 Venezuelans and 188,131 Haitians in the territory.

In this context, the research asks and analyzes the political structure of opportunities for refugee leaders in Colombia and Chile, what is refugee leadership and how is it understood in displaced communities, in what forms refugee leadership is expressed, and what variations exist in the expressions of refugee leadership in South America?

The methodology was structured to be comparable between the two countries and with the East African region and sought to be ethically responsible with the leaders interviewed. In the case of South America, the countries selected were Colombia and Chile. In the case of Colombia, the study focused on forcibly displaced Venezuelan leaders. Two regions were chosen for this purpose: La Guajira (with fieldwork in Riohacha) and Bogotá (capital of Colombia). In Chile, interviews were conducted in Santiago (capital of Chile) and online in other cities in the north of the country such as Iquique and Antofagasta.

Non-participant observation was carried out at different events in both countries that addressed issues relevant to the study, followed by

38

semi-structured interviews with Venezuelan and Haitian leaders

4

focus groups with leaders

5

interviews with representatives of government institutions

2

interviews with international organizations

5

interviews with experts

5

field visits of RLOs

MAIN RESULTS

Definition of leadership

Regarding self-recognition as leaders, not all interviewees recognize themselves as such. In this aspect, gender is relevant. It is more difficult for the women interviewed to define themselves as leaders; many of them dissociate themselves from the category of leader by using others to describe themselves, such as promoting “participatory leadership” and “humanitarian collaborator”, among others. Some leaders have a long history in their country of origin (either as politicians or activists), which has helped to consolidate leadership, while other leaders emerge from circumstances based on a specific situation or needs.

A common definition is that leadership is about speaking up for the voiceless and the ability to guide and inspire others to achieve common rather than individual goals.

However, leadership takes different forms depending on the nationality, gender, city and background of the subject.

Strategies and obstacles to leadership

There are different objectives of the leaders and their organizations: humanitarian aid, public policy, and advocacy. Determined by these objectives, four strategies for exercising leadership were identified during the analysis.



Strategy 1: The first strategy is to raise awareness and training, which seeks to promote a positive discourse on migration and facilitate inclusion processes and emphasizes the training of authorities and professionals from governmental institutions.



Strategy 2: A second strategy is to inform and facilitate access to services.



Strategy 3: The next one is lobbying as a strategy. In this type of strategy, different actions are used to carry out advocacy processes such as negotiating with authorities or going to Congress to present projects or perspectives regarding a bill, meeting with politicians to present an idea, etc.



Strategy 4: Finally, media leadership seeks to position the reality and needs of migrant communities in different media spaces.

These strategies encounter various obstacles to the exercise of leadership, such as lack of institutional knowledge about inclusion in spaces for participation and the legal structure, lack of information, language -for the Haitian community-, fear of approaching the authorities, lack of knowledge about forms of institutional financing, lack of political will or political affinity.

There are also barriers to leadership and participation such as a climate of hostility, lack of recognition, lack of binding bodies, and hierarchical relations with the authorities, among others.

Power relations within the leaders & with other actors

Some characteristics or variables can be determinant in the exercise of leadership, such as a racist structure in Chilean society that excludes some people from participation and advocacy spaces, mainly Haitian leaders.

Another important factor is gender. Generally, women play an important role in organizations and networks. However, it was difficult to find Haitian women leaders in Chile to be interviewed, or they put more obstacles to being interviewed. Also, in the Haitian community, there are hierarchies related to the gender and age of leaders. In general, there is greater recognition and respect for male and older leaders.

In contrast, in the Venezuelan community, in both countries, women leaders are in the majority and have been at the forefront of important political processes.

In terms of funding, different forms of financing are available in both countries. In Colombia, international cooperation agencies play a significant role by facilitating the advocacy and participation of community leaders. However, some leaders feel that these agencies impose solutions aimed solely at achieving predetermined objectives. In contrast, Chile does not have this type of funding. Instead, the activities of leaders and organizations are sustained through individual donations and the efforts of their members. Additionally, the relationship that these organizations establish with authorities can significantly impact their ability to participate and advocate effectively. Once again, political affinity with the authorities plays a crucial role in this dynamic.

The report outlines four main areas to focus for addressing and supporting the needs of refugee leaders.

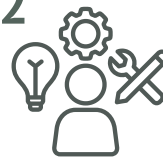
1



First is mental health and psychosocial support, many leaders struggle to take care of themselves

while responding to the needs of their communities.

2



Secondly, capacity strengthening in a range of issues from

administrative to communication with institutions and with their communities.

3



Thirdly, creating more opportunities for meaningful refugee

participation and advocacy through mechanisms that facilitate the participation and give leaders a voice and vote in decisions that affect them.

4



Finally, funding is essential for most leaders who rely on their multiple

jobs and are given less attention by international donors.

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The Politics and Processes of Refugee Leadership: A Comparative Analysis of Factors Conditioning Refugee Leadership in The Global South

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