

International migration in Latin America and the Caribbean: a development and rights perspective

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Abstract

In Latin America and the Caribbean, where every country is a country of origin, destination, return or transit, international migration is becoming ever more complex and intensive. Migratory flows are increasingly characterized by irregularity; and migrants represent one of the most vulnerable population groups, as victims of stigmatization, discrimination, xenophobia and racism. However, migrants contribute to sustainable development through work, entrepreneurship, remittances and tax payments, in addition to their culture. To enhance these contributions, public policies and migration governance are needed at the multilateral, national and local levels, based on the interaction between migration and development and fulfilment of the countries' human rights obligations.

Keywords

International migration, emigration, migrants, economic conditions, social conditions, employment, social security, human rights, remittances, sustainable development, Latin America and the Caribbean

JEL classification

F22, F24, F53

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I. Introduction

Latin America and the Caribbean is a land of migrations. Migration has accompanied the history and development of the region's countries and is a central dynamic of societies, both current and future. One of the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Sustainable Development Goal 10.7) is to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies. Migrants contribute to development and to economies, because they augment the local labour supply, pay taxes, and send remittances to their families in their countries of origin even in times of crisis, as occurred during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Migrants also contribute to cultural diversity in their countries of destination; and, to varying degrees in countries with ageing populations, they mitigate intergenerational demographic imbalances, as well as labour shortages in sectors such as agriculture, care and services.

The United States remains the leading destination for regional migratory flows, which are often irregular, as exemplified by the hundreds of thousands of people who venture across the Darién Gap and then continue their journey through Central America and Mexico to that country's northern border. Migration within the region has also increased, as evidenced by the substantial emigration from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Several South American countries, which until a few years ago were characterized mainly by emigration or did not receive migration, are now important destinations and transit points for migrants, which poses challenges from a humanitarian and public policy standpoint.

International economic asymmetries and inequalities within countries are at the root of migratory movements. These are explained partly by push factors, such as the structural lack of opportunities for decent work, compounded by economic crises, environmental disasters and the effects of climate change, the vicissitudes of democracies, humanitarian crises and violence of all kinds; but also by pull factors, such as greater opportunities for employment and study, along with higher wages, migratory networks and possibilities for family reunification. As noted by Maldonado, Martínez and Martínez (2018, p. 26), individuals who decide to migrate are often exposed to risks in their context of origin that put their safety, quality of life and livelihoods at stake, thereby diminishing their life chances irretrievably. Social and economic inequality thus shapes the framework in which the decision to migrate tends to be made, in pursuit of better living conditions and job opportunities.

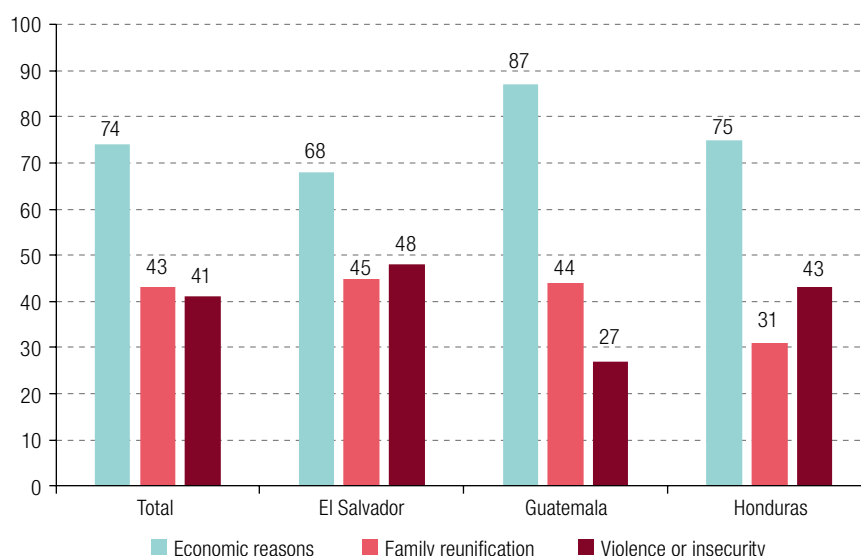
Emigration from northern Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) to the United States, along with flows from Mexico, represents one of the largest migrations in the world and exemplifies the multiple factors that drive the phenomenon (Canales, Fuentes and de León Escribano, 2019; ECLAC, 2019). Migrants often cite economic difficulties, related to insufficient productive capacity and the scarcity of employment and income, among the chief motives for migration, along with family reunification, violence and insecurity (Abuelafia, Del Carmen and Ruiz-Arranz, 2019) (see figure 1).¹

The vast majority of countries in the region maintain their commitments with respect to the key migration agreement, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. This was adopted in 2018; and, in the same year, it was complemented by the Global Compact on Refugees.² In addition, the region's countries exchange ideas and good practices on migration issues in intergovernmental mechanisms — those of South America in the South American Conference on Migration, and those of Central and North America in the Regional Conference on Migration. In 2013, the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean was approved, which includes a chapter on international migration and protection of the human rights of all migrants.

¹ Economic motives seem to have become even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ruiz and others, 2021; IOM/WFP, 2022).

² In 2018, Chile and the Dominican Republic did not adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Figure 1
El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras: main motives cited for migrating
to the United States between 2007 and 2017
(Percentages)



Source: Prepared by the authors, on the basis of E. Abuelafia, M. Ruiz-Arranz and G. Del Carmen, *In the footprints of migrants: Perspectives and experiences of migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras in the United States*, Washington, D.C., Inter-American Development Bank/United States Agency for International Development (IDB/USAID), 2019.

Note: Data were obtained from a survey of 1,859 migrants over the age of 18 from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras who migrated to the United States for the first time between 1 January 2007 and 31 December 2017. The survey asked: what were the two main reasons why you left your country and migrated to the United States for the first time?

Notwithstanding these signs, the panorama is discontinuous, replete with paradoxes and influenced by a political context that reflects tensions and contradictions. Progress has been made in terms of rights-respecting management of migration, through intense dialogue between countries, new institutions, regulatory reforms and public policies that promote access to social protection and combat discrimination, xenophobia and racism. Nonetheless, backlogs or setbacks persist, agreements are ignored, and there are difficulties in fulfilling the obligations assumed, which results in the persistence of vulnerabilities in the migratory process that affect many migrants.

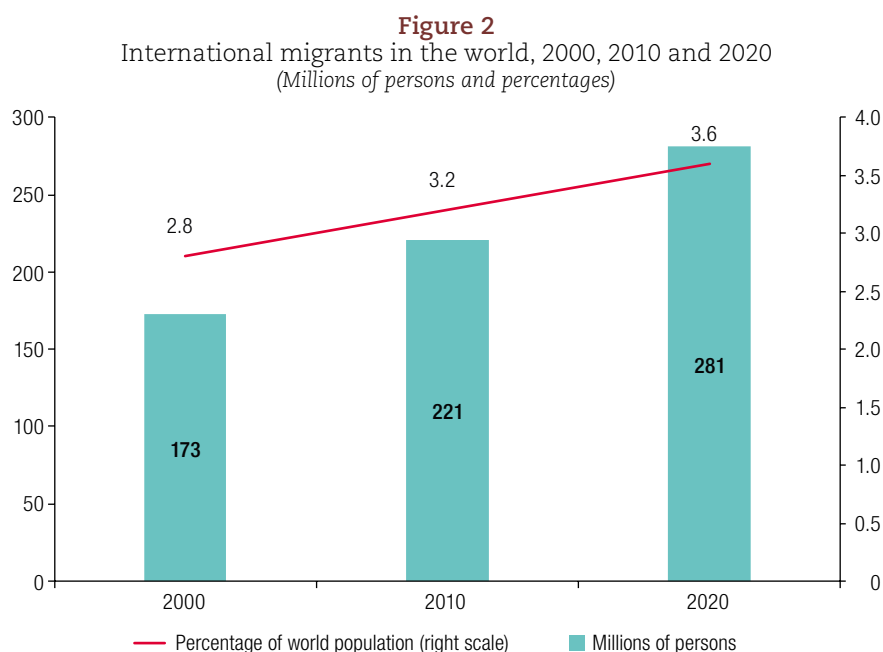
Thus, policies that promote integration, respect for human rights and safe, orderly and regular migration coexist with the hardening of borders, restrictive policies and the anti-migration discourse of certain sectors. This complex scenario, which is aggravated further by the immediate and extended effects of the pandemic, brings with it challenges and opportunities for the design of public policies that put people at the centre and create the conditions for migrants to contribute to sustainable development with all of their capabilities and potential, so as to ensure their safety and dignity and respect for their rights throughout the migration process.

This rest of this article reviews the regional migration panorama and the opportunities and challenges of international migration. First, it analyses the major trends in international migration flows and the growing importance of the intraregional pattern. Then, it highlights the fact that migrants represent one of the most vulnerable population groups in the region's countries, which calls for inclusion policies; and it presents evidence on the contributions that migrants make to sustainable development, both in the receiving countries and in their countries of origin. Lastly, the article concludes with reflections and policy recommendations, from a developmental and rights-based perspective, to implement and enhance these contributions, and thus enable migration to become a matter of free and informed choice, rather than a necessity imposed by deprivation and suffering.

II. Growth of international migratory flows and intraregional migration

International migration is a growing phenomenon in the world, with major economic, social, cultural and political impacts on the countries of origin, transit, destination and return. Although information on migratory flows is relatively scarce, United Nations (2020a) estimates that the volume of international migration has grown persistently worldwide over the past 20 years.

In 2020, the number of people living outside their country of origin reached an all-time high of 281 million (3.6% of the world's total population), compared to 173 million in 2000 (2.8%) and 221 million in 2010 (3.2%) (see figure 2) (United Nations, 2020a).³ Of the 281 million migrants worldwide in 2020, Latin America and the Caribbean accounted for 43 million, or about 15% of the total (see table 1).⁴



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of United Nations, *International Migration 2020 Highlights* (ST/ESA/SER.A/452), New York, 2020.

In 2020, 25.5 million (59.5%) emigrants from the region were living in North America; and almost 5.4 million (13%) were living in Europe, mainly in Spain (3.3 million). In addition, an estimated 11.3 million emigrants from Latin American and Caribbean countries were living elsewhere in the region (26% of the total), of whom 9.1 million were in South America (United Nations, 2020b).⁵

Between 2000 and 2020, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced the highest relative growth of intraregional migration worldwide (+72%) (see figure 3). During this period, several countries went from being net emitters to net receivers of population, including people in transit, with migrant

³ Global estimates of the international migrant population are based mainly on data obtained from population and housing censuses on the respondents' country of birth. In this sense, an international migrant is defined as anyone who changes his or her country of usual residence for a period of at least one year; but countries use different criteria to identify international migrants for statistical purposes, which affects comparability. Some countries define a migrant by country of birth (as is often the case in the region), while others use nationality (as in Europe).

⁴ Persons who were born in a Latin American or Caribbean country but live in another country, whether in the same region or elsewhere.

⁵ A total of 14.8 million migrants were living in Latin American and Caribbean countries in 2020; 11.3 million were migrants from other countries within the region, and 2.7 million were individuals born in Europe or North America (United Nations, 2020b).

numbers growing to unprecedented levels relative to national and some subnational populations. Moreover, migrant populations within the region have outpaced extra-regional movements. This has been particularly noticeable during the last 10 years and, especially, in the last five, when the migrant population within the region almost doubled (see figure 4). However, the greater growth of intraregional migration has not significantly altered the main structural feature of the region's migratory process, in which the largest volume of migration outside the region takes place from Mexico and Central America to the United States.

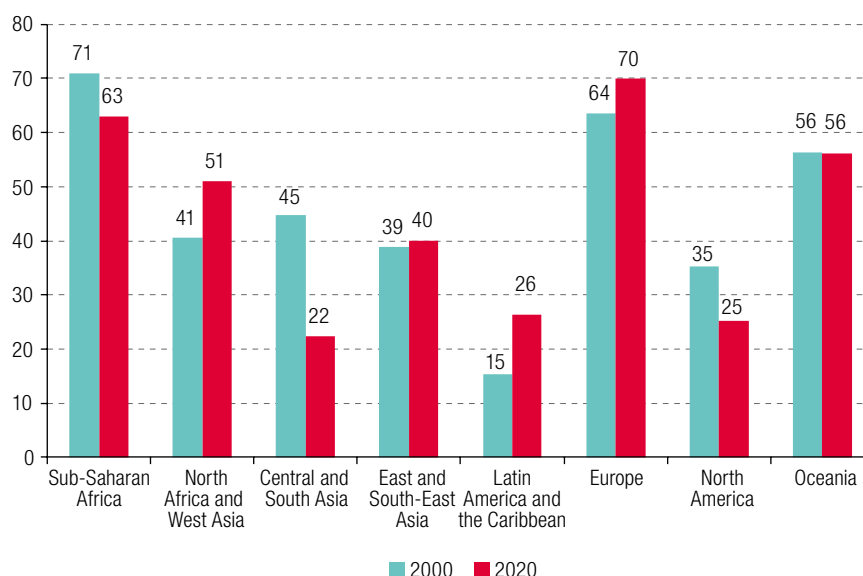
Table 1
Estimated number of migrants by destination and origin in each region, 2020

Region	Destination				Origin	
	Number of migrants	Percentage of the population	Number of refugees and asylum seekers	Percentage of migrants who are women	Number of migrants	Percentage of the total
Sub-Saharan Africa	22 221 538	2.0	5 893 738	47.6	28 284 538	10.1
North Africa and West Asia	49 767 746	9.5	13 481 636	35.8	37 563 820	13.4
Central and South Asia	19 427 576	1.0	3 569 787	49.9	51 229 549	18.3
East and Southeast Asia	19 591 106	0.8	656 437	49.4	38 400 740	13.7
Latin America and the Caribbean	14 794 623	2.3	4 797 904	49.5	42 890 481	15.3
Oceania ^a	313 069	2.5	11 042	47.1	565 281	0.2
Australia and New Zealand	9 067 584	29.9	157 455	50.6	1 404 924	0.5
Europe and North America	145 414 863	13.0	5 239 796	51.7	67 601 621	24.1
World totals	280 598 105	3.6	33 807 795	48.1	280 598 105	100.0

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of United Nations, "International Migrant Stock 2020" [online] <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/es/content/international-migrant-stock>.

^a Excludes Australia and New Zealand.

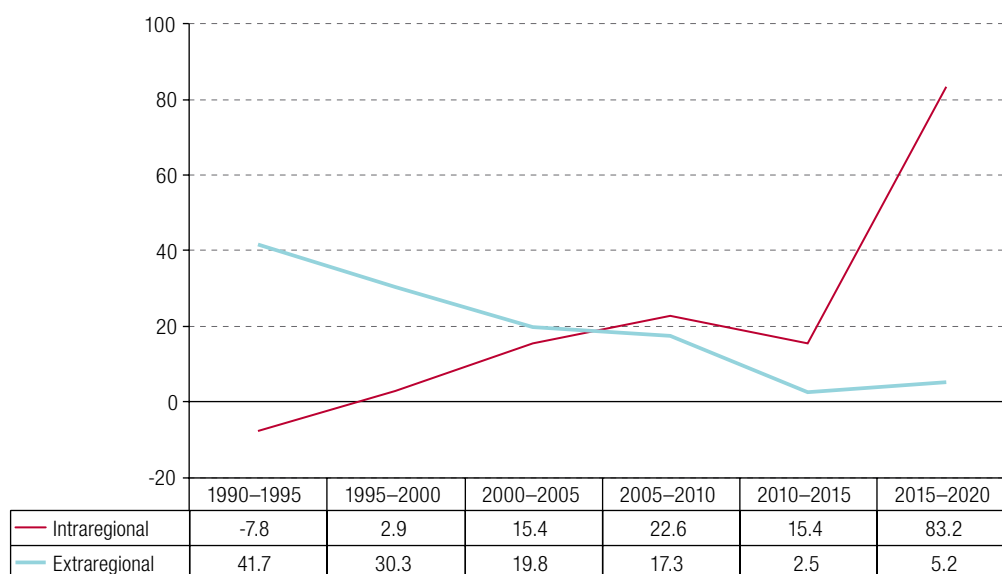
Figure 3
Intraregional migrants as a proportion of total migrants, by region of origin, 2000 and 2020 (Percentages)



Source: United Nations, "International Migrant Stock 2020" [online] <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/es/content/international-migrant-stock>.

Figure 4

Latin America and the Caribbean: five-year variation in the region's migrant populations, by settlement within or outside the region, 1990–2020
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of United Nations, “International Migrant Stock 2020” [online] <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/es/content/international-migrant-stock>.

The growth of intraregional migration is being driven largely by emigration from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V, 2023) estimated that there were 6.1 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees in the region in June 2023, living mainly in Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru.⁶ Traditional cross-border migration also continues, the most numerous cases of which have been migrants from Haiti to the Dominican Republic, from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, from the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Paraguay to Argentina and, until a few years ago, from Colombia to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

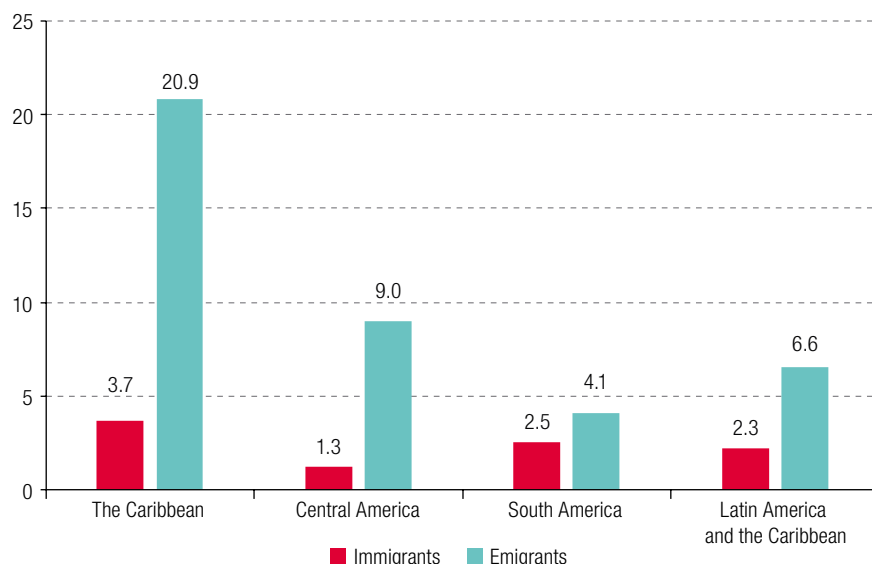
The Caribbean subregion has one of the largest diasporas in the world relative to its population, estimated at more than 9 million emigrants in 2020, representing more than 20% of the total population (see figure 5 below).⁷ The largest diasporas in absolute terms are, in decreasing order, those of Puerto Rico, Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. While most of the migrant population from this subregion are in the United States and Canada; the flow from Haiti to South America, mainly Brazil and Chile, has also been substantial.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, international migration in the twenty-first century has been characterized by an increase in flows, and by their diversity and complexity. Current flows, defined by some agencies of the United Nations system as mixed movements, include economic migrants, environmental migrants, forced or involuntary migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented migrants, victims of smuggling or trafficking and stranded migrants, unaccompanied children and adolescents, among others (ECLAC, 2019; IOM, 2019). The chief characteristic of mixed movements is the irregular and vulnerable status of many of the individuals affected.

⁶ R4V (2023) indicates that the total number of Venezuelan refugees, migrants and asylum seekers reported abroad by the host-country governments — many of which probably do not include irregular migrants — amount to more than 7.3 million.

⁷ The Caribbean countries have the largest numbers of emigrants relative to their national populations. For example, the number of emigrants from Montserrat is five times that of its national population, from Dominica it is double, and from other countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, Puerto Rico, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) it is 50% or more.

Figure 5
Latin America and the Caribbean: immigrants and emigrants
as a percentage of the population, by subregion, 2020



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of United Nations, "International Migrant Stock 2020" [online] <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/es/content/international-migrant-stock>.

Migratory flows were not halted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as many migrants continued to head to their destinations, despite the restrictions that were imposed. However, the imposition of border closures in several countries and changes in the migration policy of the United States increased involuntary return flows and contributed to trafficking, smuggling and irregularity (ECLAC, 2022b).⁸

In transit to the United States, migration has involved caravan-type movements and unaccompanied children and adolescents in Central America and Mexico. There has also been a marked increase in the flow of migrants through the Darién Gap, one of the most dangerous migration routes in the world (in 2022 there were around 250,000 irregular entries, almost double the number in 2021). In the first four months of 2023 alone, there have been around 128,000 irregular entries through the Darién Gap (National Migration Service of Panama, 2023). In South America, there are also other irregular routes, such as the Colchane border crossing on the Chilean-Bolivian altiplano, which has claimed lives (ECLAC, 2022b). These routes have generated profitable business for human traffickers, often linked to organized crime (Armijo and Benítez, 2016; Badillo and Bravo, 2020).

III. The vulnerability of migrants

Migrants, particularly recent arrivals, are one of the most vulnerable population groups in the region's countries, facing difficulties in obtaining decent work, social protection, health, education and housing. The vulnerability of migrants in the destination countries involves barriers to regularizing their status, the main gateway to the recognition of their rights, as well as sociodemographic characteristics that act as markers, such as age, sex, educational level, ethno-racial affiliation or family status. Irregular migrants, in particular, are highly vulnerable to criminal organizations that take advantage of them for sexual or labour exploitation (Maldonado, Martínez and Martínez, 2018). This is compounded by the

⁸ Nonetheless, according to United Nations estimates (2020a), the pandemic could have reduced the number of international migrants by about 2 million people globally by mid-2020.

lack of recognition of these individuals as agents who contribute to societies, cultures and economies, in addition to the persistent stigmatization, discrimination, xenophobia, racism and aporophobia to which this population is subjected.⁹

One area in which there are clear gaps between the native population and migrants (particularly those in an irregular situation) is access to formal employment and, consequently, to social protection. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the shortage of decent jobs is an exacerbated feature of migrant employment, and is related to the difficulties of regularization and the lack of institutions that facilitate labour market inclusion. Carrasco and Suárez (2019) study seven countries in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Uruguay) and find that, although in some cases the employment rate among migrants may be higher than among the native population, migrant workers, both male and female, are less likely to have skilled jobs (using control variables such as sex, age and education in the analysis).

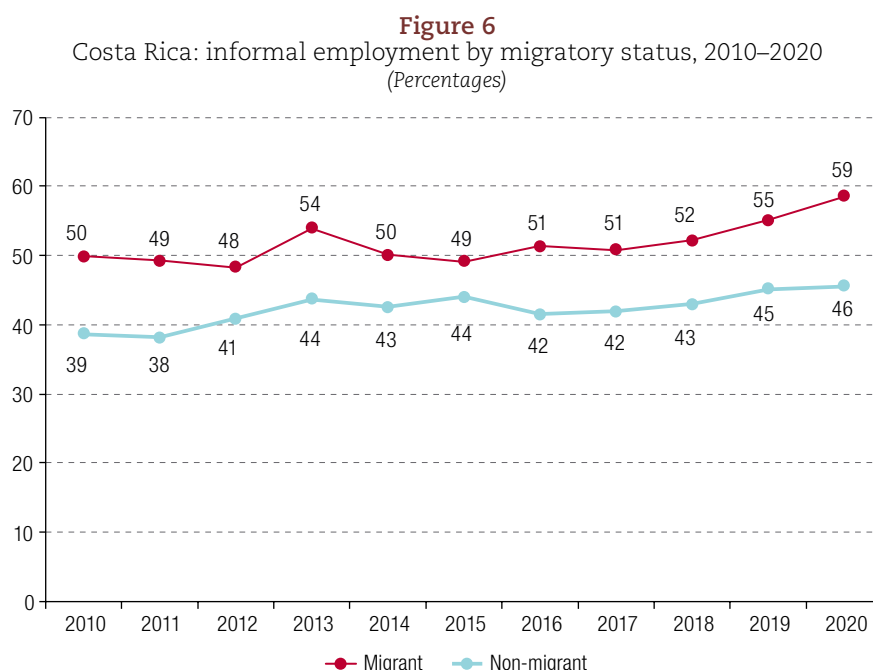
High levels of informality and lack of social protection undermine social cohesion and impact migrants' access to rights and better living conditions. In Peru, eight out of 10 employed migrants were working in the informal sector in 2019 (Vásquez and Aguilar, 2022); and, in Costa Rica, 58.7% of employed migrants carried on their activities in that sector, compared to 45.6% of non-migrants (see figure 6). The areas of activity with the highest proportions of informally employed migrants in Costa Rica are construction (78.7%), other service activities (79.4%) and paid domestic work (74%) (Oviedo, 2022). Another issue is skill-based underemployment among migrants, which occurs when migrants with high levels of education are unable to obtain high-skilled jobs (Carrasco and Suárez, 2019), because they face obstacles in validating their studies. In Peru, only 8.3% of the refugee and migrant population coming from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela with higher education degrees have validated them (INEI, 2022). Similarly, in Chile in 2022, only 12% of migrants had validated their higher education studies, because the revalidation process has complex requirements, is costly and subject to long delays (54% of those who validated their degree took more than six months to do so) (World Bank and others, 2022).

The shortage of decent jobs for migrants is a persistent problem that worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, even though the work of migrants on the front line was critical during lockdown periods and highly useful in the health emergency. Many migrants were employed in occupations with the highest risk of contagion, as they supported health centres, morgues and cleaning services, as well as working in areas related to home delivery services and paid domestic work (ECLAC, 2022a). In addition, while the pandemic led to significant job losses, it revealed how certain sectors of production rely on migrant labour. For example, in Costa Rica, mobility restrictions harmed the agriculture sector significantly, which led to the decision to relax the conditions on migrant workers entering the country to contribute to harvesting work, through the Binational Agreement to Regulate the Temporary Hiring of Nicaraguan Workers in Costa Rica (ECLAC, 2022a).

The worsening of access to decent work is reflected in higher poverty rates among migrants. Although indicators calculated from household surveys, which are subject to sampling error, are not always representative of the migrant population (Gutiérrez and others, 2020), ECLAC (2019) was able to compare income poverty rates between migrants — defined as persons who live in a country other than that of their birth, regardless of their year of arrival— and non-migrants in nine countries in the region. Controlling for a set of sociodemographic factors, such as age, sex, education, activity, area of residence, household structure and basic deprivations associated with housing and employment, a probit regression model found a heterogeneous relationship across countries. In Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador, poverty was between 3.9 and 5.9 percentage points higher among migrants than among non-migrants; in Brazil and Guatemala it was higher among non-migrants; and

⁹ In Chile, in 2022, 30% of migrants reported having suffered discrimination on the basis of their nationality (World Bank and others, 2022). Moreover, a growing number of studies on Venezuelan migration report manifestations of racism and xenophobia in border and urban areas (Acosta, Blouin and Freier, 2019).

in Argentina and Panama no statistically significant differences were found (ECLAC, 2019). However, it would be useful to be able to differentiate poverty levels not only between migrants and non-migrants, but also between recent and longer-term migrants, since it can be assumed that recent arrivals are those who face the highest levels of poverty and vulnerability.¹⁰



Source: L. Oviedo, "Contribuciones de la migración reciente al desarrollo sostenible: el caso de Costa Rica", *Sobre las contribuciones de la migración al desarrollo sostenible: estudios en países seleccionados*, Project Documents (LC/TS.2021/195), J. Martínez and M. Cano (eds.), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2022; on the basis of National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, Continuous Employment Survey.

IV. Contributions made by migrants to the receiving countries

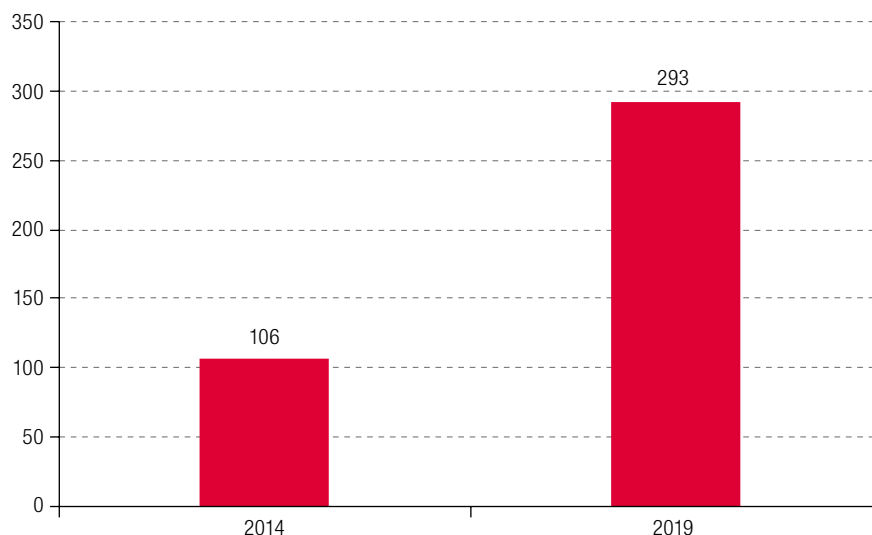
International migration makes significant contributions to sustainable development, through economic growth for example, and in other dimensions including demographics and culture. Migrants contribute to GDP growth in the destination countries through their work, entrepreneurship, innovation and tax payments. Moreover, as several of the region's countries are at an advanced stage of population ageing, exchanges of working-age population are likely to be necessary to make up for labour shortages that are emerging in crucial sectors of their economies (Martínez and Cano, 2022). This is an affirmative and comprehensive perspective, going beyond the evaluations of costs and negative impacts that were common among some authors in the field of migration and development relations and tend to be used in public debate (Delgado-Wise, 2014).

A study by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) on the contributions of migration to sustainable development (Martínez and Cano, 2022) revealed several examples in the economic domain. In Chile, it is estimated that Latin American and Caribbean migrants contributed 11.5% to economic growth between 2009 and 2017, despite representing only 6.5% of the employed labour force in the latter year (Canales, 2022). In the case of Costa Rica, the total contribution

¹⁰ Gutiérrez and others (2020) find that, around 2017, household surveys in 16 out of 18 countries in Latin America make it possible to identify migrants, and 15 of them distinguish recent migrants. However, the sample sizes of the vast majority of surveys to small to measure poverty in a way that distinguishes between recent and longer-term migrants.

of migrant labour to economic growth increased in the last decade, from 8.7% between 1999 and 2008 to 9.3% between 2010 and 2019 (Oviedo, 2022). Similarly, in Peru, a country that has historically had negative net migration, the arrival of Haitians, Venezuelans and Colombians in recent years has fuelled economic growth and boosted the public finances. The share of revenue from general sales tax (IGV) paid by immigrants through their purchases of taxed consumer goods, almost tripled between 2014 and 2019, rising from 106 to 293 million soles (see figure 7) (Vásquez and Aguilar, 2022).

Figure 7
Peru: contribution of the migrant population to revenue
from General Sales Tax (IGV), 2014–2019
(Millions of soles)

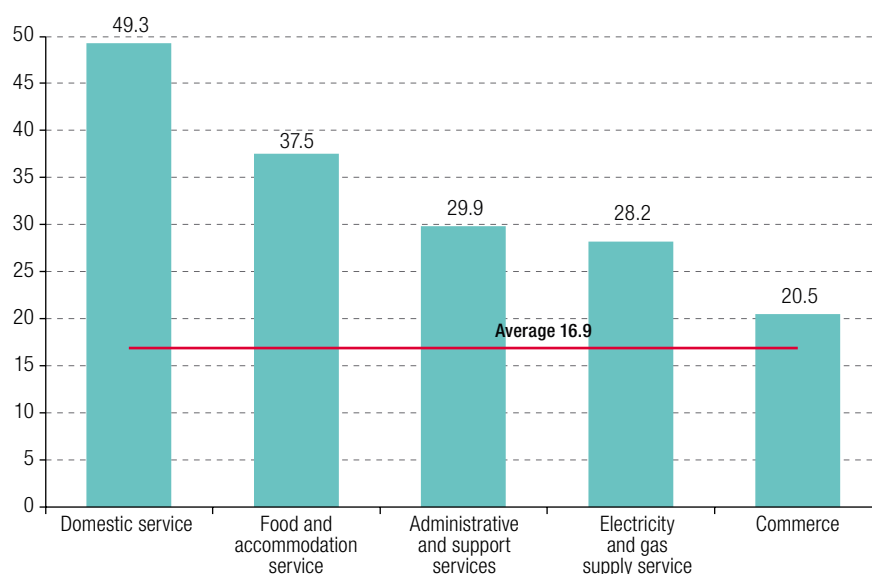


Source: Prepared by the authors, on the basis of T. Vásquez and D. Aguilar, “Contribuciones de las migraciones recientes al desarrollo sostenible: el caso de Perú”, *Sobre las contribuciones de la migración al desarrollo sostenible: estudios en países seleccionados*, Project Documents (LC/TS.2021/195), J. Martínez and M. Cano (eds.), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2022; National Institute of Statistics and Informatics, National Household Survey.

Migrants have also played indispensable front-line roles in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in key sectors such as health or care services (ECLAC, 2022b). In June–August 2020, in the Santiago Metropolitan Area, migrant workers (17% of the total labour force) contributed almost 50% of persons employed in paid domestic work, an essential occupation for the care of children and older persons in lockdown and mandatory quarantine situations. Migrants also contributed more than proportionately to the employed labour force supporting the population’s subsistence in the face of mobility restrictions—in activities such as food preparation and distribution services, the supply and distribution of essential gas and electricity services, and commerce (see figure 8) (Canales, 2022).

Lastly, in the case of Venezuelan migration, the immediate interpretation is that the size of this group exerts significant short-term pressure on social protection systems, the delivery of services, the labour market and social dynamics in the receiving areas. However, the World Bank (2018) notes that migrant inclusion policies aimed at reducing their vulnerability can stimulate economic growth in the destination countries in the medium and long terms. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) also points out that the receiving countries have benefited macroeconomically from the boost to domestic demand and the increased labour force resulting from the inflow of Venezuelan migrants. The Fund estimates that these migration flows have raised annual GDP growth in the main receiving economies (Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) by between 0.10 and 0.25 percentage points on average since 2017 (Álvarez and others, 2022).

Figure 8
Chile (Santiago Metropolitan Area): occupations with the largest share
of migrant workers, June–August 2020 quarter
(Percentages)



Source: A. Canales, “Estudio de las contribuciones de las migraciones recientes al desarrollo sostenible: el caso de Chile”, *Sobre las contribuciones de la migración al desarrollo sostenible: estudios en países seleccionados*, Project Documents (LC/TS.2021/195), J. Martínez and M. Cano (eds.), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2022; on the basis of National Institute of Statistics, New National Employment Survey, June–August 2020.

V. Contributions made by migrants to their countries of origin: remittances

Migrants also contribute to their countries of origin in several ways, for example by sharing their experiences in areas such as entrepreneurship and private investment projects, or research networks with study and technology centres. In this context, communities abroad can be an important resource for the country of origin; and this is made highly visible through remittances, which are income transfers from abroad that contribute to financing the basic needs of the recipient households.

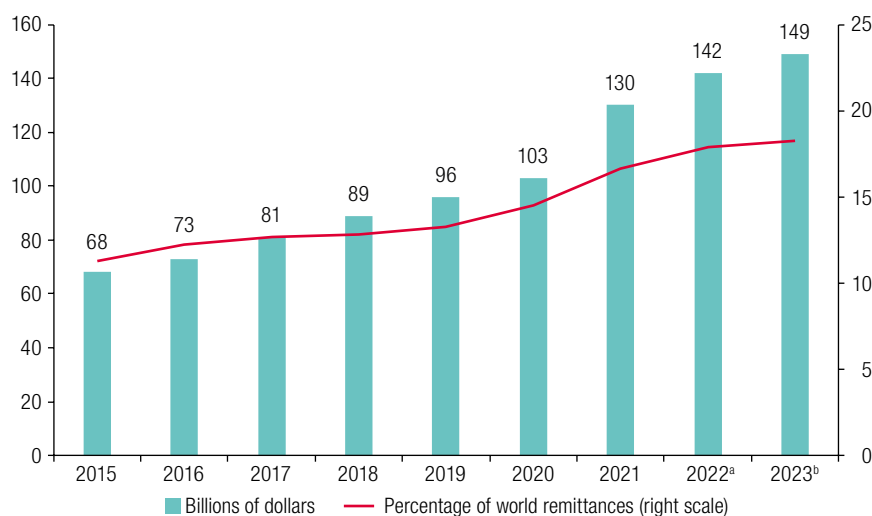
In 2022, the World Bank estimated remittances received in Latin America and the Caribbean at US\$ 142 billion. Mexico continues to be the main recipient, accounting for about 42% of remittances received in the region. In this country, however, remittances account for a much smaller share of GDP (4.2% in 2022) than in other countries, where they represent about one-fifth or more: El Salvador (23.8% of GDP), Guatemala (19.8%), Haiti (22.5%), Jamaica (21.2%) and Nicaragua (19.9%) (World Bank, 2022).

World Bank data (2022) show that both the total amount of remittances received by Latin American and Caribbean countries and their share of the world total have increased consistently over the last decade. During the COVID-19 pandemic, remittances displayed considerable resilience, with flows to Latin America and the Caribbean growing by 26% between 2020 and 2021 and by 9.3% between 2021 and 2022. In 2023, the region is projected to receive 18% of total global remittances (see figure 9).

In the region, remittances are decisive for alleviating poverty among the persons receiving them, and they have a differentiated impact on the overall poverty rate. The information available from household surveys makes it possible to analyse the extent to which the income received from remittances contributes to poverty reduction, both relative to the national total population (see figure 10A) and in the households that actually receive this type of transfer (see figure 10B). The aggregate contribution of remittances to poverty reduction is up to 2 percentage points higher in countries in which a relatively large proportion

of households report having received remittances, such as the Dominican Republic where this is close to 9%, and El Salvador and Honduras, where over 15% of households receive income of this type. The effect on recipient household poverty is greatest in the Dominican Republic, where the poverty rate in this group would be almost double in the absence of remittances (ECLAC, 2019).¹¹

Figure 9
Remittance flows to Latin America and the Caribbean
(Billions of dollars and percentages of total world remittance flows)



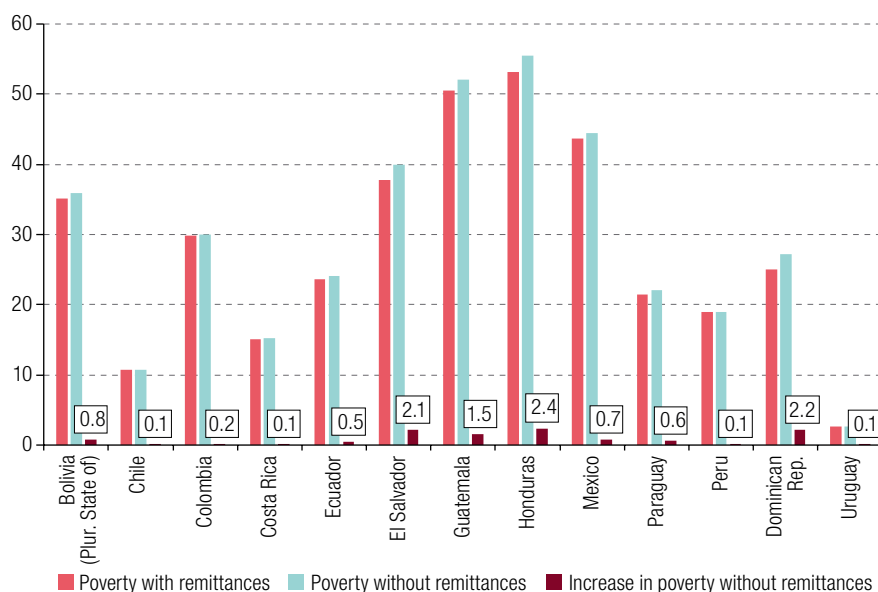
Source: Prepared by the authors, on the basis of World Bank, "Remittances brave global headwinds. Special focus: climate migration", *Migration and Development Brief*, No. 37, Washington, D.C., 2022.

^a Estimate.

^b Projection.

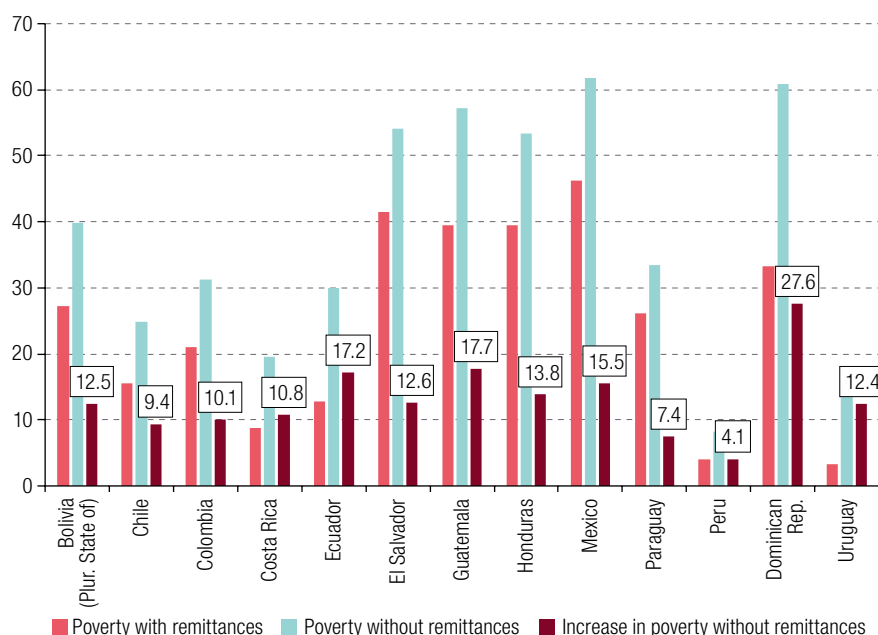
Figure 10
Latin America (13 countries): poverty rate with and without remittances, total population
and remittance-receiving households, national totals, around 2017
(Percentages)

A. Total population



¹¹ It is also important to note that households receiving remittances are distributed across the five per capita income quintiles. In seven of the 13 countries analysed, the proportion of households receiving remittances tends to be higher in the middle- and high-income groups (ECLAC, 2019, p. 205).

B. Remittance receiving population



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

VI. Final thoughts

This article has reviewed the broad outlines of the very complex panorama of regional migration, highlighting its main characteristics, and some of the many challenges and opportunities it poses for public policies and the international agreements and instruments that underpin the migration architecture. The latter include the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. As ECLAC has noted, the challenges of international migration clearly must be addressed multilaterally, and that “managing international migration requires a regional approach, establishing shared responsibilities among States and taking into account the entire migration cycle and conditions and processes for the departure, transit and destination of migrants” (ECLAC, 2022a, p. 31).

It cannot be denied that migration has left —and will continue to leave— a deep social imprint, as a force for structural change that has marked the future of nations and the lives of those who migrate. This essentially multidimensional process is accompanying demographic, economic, political and cultural transformations in the countries of the region, and will continue to do so in the future. In the context of public attacks that highlight the negative externalities of the migratory processes, fuelling racism and xenophobia, ECLAC has for decades promoted the triad of migration, development and human rights. This triad needs to be reinforced, defended and promoted, as a basis for free and informed decisions by migrants to contribute to their host societies, and for supporting countries in the multilateral sphere of migration governance. Protecting the rights of migrants makes it possible to address vulnerabilities in the migration cycle; it also helps create conditions for the process to be genuinely safe, orderly and regular; and it benefits societies by preventing the undesired effects of immigration.

The contributions made by migrants to sustainable development in the countries of the region range from the expansion of labour markets and economic growth to the creation of more rejuvenated and culturally diverse societies (ECLAC, 2019; Martínez and Cano, 2022). These contributions can be extended in two ways. Firstly, migrants should be integrated into their territories of residence and into public social services, to guarantee their access to social protection, basic health coverage, suitable housing conditions and opportunities to maintain schooling for children and adolescents. Secondly, it is important to recognize, encourage and increase the contribution made by migrants to sustainable development, especially by promoting labour inclusion, with policies that permanently address the regularization of migration status, and measures to address labour informality and make it easier for them to validate their studies and have their skills recognized. When migrants join the local labour supply, it is also important to prevent their greater vulnerability from giving rise to abuses that weaken or segment the labour market and foster inequality (ECLAC, 2022a).

The need to integrate migrants socially and economically at the local level is increasingly important, because direct entry into the territories is what largely determines the experience of migrants and how the receiving populations perceive them. Territories and local communities will benefit by managing migration with a development and rights-based approach, through comprehensive policy solutions based on dialogue between multiple actors — governments, employer associations, migrant organizations and civil society organizations— that work to combat discrimination and foster the inclusion of migrants.

The countries of the region have examples of regularization policies that need to be extended and adopted on an ongoing basis, as a necessary but not sufficient, nor the only, condition to promote the full inclusion of migrants (Cerrutti and Penchaszadeh, 2023). A clear example of the efforts made by some countries to regularize migrants and thus enable them to access decent work, protection and social services, is the Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants, which was established in Colombia in 2021. This mechanism, which complements the international refugee protection regime, includes a Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (which by late 2022 included about 2.5 million people) and a Temporary Protection Permit; and it offers the Venezuelan migrant population the possibility of moving from a temporary protection regime to an ordinary migration regime (R4V, 2022).

The pandemic elicited examples of good practices in terms of respect for the rights of migrants, exceptions to border closures for workers in agricultural activities considered a basic necessity, or the possibility of humanitarian transit for migrants and asylum seekers.

In conclusion, in the face of a migration narrative that emphasizes issues of security and irregularity, and which often criminalizes all migrants, public policy needs to promote an affirmative approach. This should demonstrate the benefits of migration for local populations, address discrimination and prejudice, and recognize, facilitate and promote the realization of the contributions made by migration to sustainable development, fostering both the design of more migrant-inclusive public policies and better migration management.

Thus, to empirically demonstrate the contribution made by migrants to sustainable development and to fulfil the first of the 23 objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (“to collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies”), national capacities for producing appropriately disaggregated data on international migration need to be strengthened. This could be achieved through traditional data sources — such as population and housing censuses, household surveys and administrative records— or through non-traditional ones, and through better coordination among the institutions responsible for producing such data (ECLAC, 2023). At the same time, it is essential to apply qualitative methodologies to complement, make visible and deepen the elements that quantitative data fail to elucidate. This will improve the knowledge base and give rise to recommendations that will nurture public policies on inclusion, in the framework of an affirmative vision of migration that recognizes its contribution to sustainable development.

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