



Mixed
Migration
Centre

BRIEFING PAPER

DECEMBER 2022

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SUGGESTED CITATION:
Mixed Migration Centre (2022) *Returning to Venezuela: drivers, expectations, and intentions*. Available at: <https://mixedmigration.org/resource/returning-to-venezuela/>

LAYOUT AND DESIGN:
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:
This document uses 4Mi data to explore the profiles of Venezuelans heading back, the factors driving them to leave their host countries, and their motivations for returning. It also provides an analysis of the expectations of refugees and migrants about their return to Venezuela and their future migration intentions. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Danish Refugee Council or any of the donors supporting the work of MMC or this report. The content of this report is entirely the responsibility of MMC.

Returning to Venezuela: drivers, expectations, and intentions

Analysis of 4Mi data

- **80%** of refugees and migrants surveyed on their way back to Venezuela had tried settling **in one host country**.
- **61%** of respondents had been in the last host country for between **six months to two years**, which could show long-term difficulties in settling.
- **66%** of all respondents had **irregular migratory status** in their last host country, and less than 6% were officially temporary residents.
- **71% of respondents** lifted their host country due to at least one or more of those factors: **insufficient access to services (27%)**, and/or **difficulties making a living (26%)** integrating **(23%)**, or **regularizing their migratory status (22%)**. At the same time, 81% of respondents were heading to Venezuela to **reunite with family or friends** and 63% were going because **they were homesick**.
- 45% of respondents were also motivated by the **improved economic opportunities** in the country, **starting a new business or investing (19%)**, or **job opportunities (11%)**.
- **Even before reaching Venezuela, 27% of respondents said they intend to migrate again**, either to their last host country or another country.

Introduction

There are reports from the borders between several Latin American states of the movement of Venezuelans returning to Venezuela.¹ However, there is almost no information on the motivations and future migration intentions of the population willing to return to Venezuela. This briefing paper uses new 4Mi data to explore the profiles of Venezuelans heading back, the factors driving them to leave their host countries, and their motivations for returning. It also provides an analysis of the expectations of refugees and migrants about their return to Venezuela and their future migration intentions.

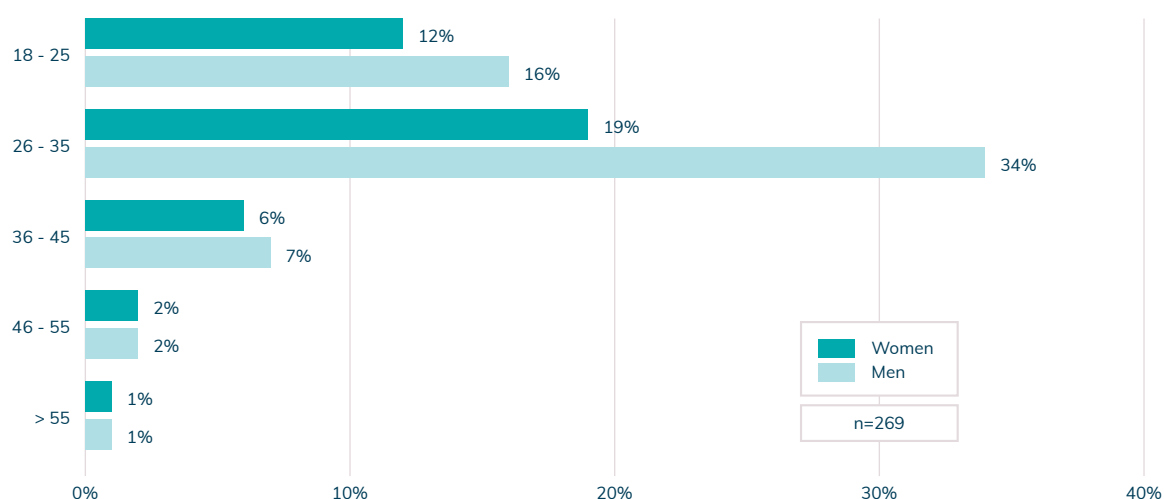
Methodology

This analysis is based on 269 surveys conducted between September 6 and October 31, 2022, during face-to-face interviews with Venezuelans who were on the return journey to Venezuela.² 173 surveys took place in Colombia (in the capital Bogota, and in Cucuta, at the border with Venezuela) and 96 in Peru (in the municipality of Desaguadero, at the border with Bolivia).

Profiles

60% of respondents were men, and 40% were women. 76% of the respondents were aged 26 to 35 years (See Figure 1). 34% of respondents were returning from Colombia and 30% from Chile. A smaller proportion of respondents were going back to Venezuela from Peru (14%), Ecuador (13%), and Bolivia (6%).³

Figure 1. 4Mi Sample: age ranges and sex



1 R4V (2022): [Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region – Sep 2022](#)

2 Only Venezuelans who reported not returning to Venezuela regularly (weekly, monthly, or seasonally) were considered. The 4Mi sample is purposive: respondents were randomly selected at strategic locations along the migratory route. Therefore, the data presented in this snapshot are illustrative and cannot be considered representative of the return movement of Venezuelans.

3 The data collection locations may have an impact on this result.

4 CARE. (2020): [An Unequal Emergency: CARE Rapid Gender Analysis of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela](#)

Findings

The majority of respondents were returning with family; more men were returning alone

38% of the respondents had migrated without family members and were returning to Venezuela alone, at the time of the interview. Of these, 86% are men (n=88/102).

This finding broadly corresponds to the dynamic of the first stage of the Venezuelan migration, when mixed movements were mainly composed of men leaving the country alone, to explore the possibility to settle in another country and provide for their families.⁴

31% of the 4Mi respondents were returning to Venezuela with all their family members, and 28% with only part of their family.

Almost all respondents had spent more than six months in one host country

80% of all respondents tried to settle (aimed to live for more than six months) in one country in the region, after leaving Venezuela. 20% reported that they tried to settle in two or more host countries.

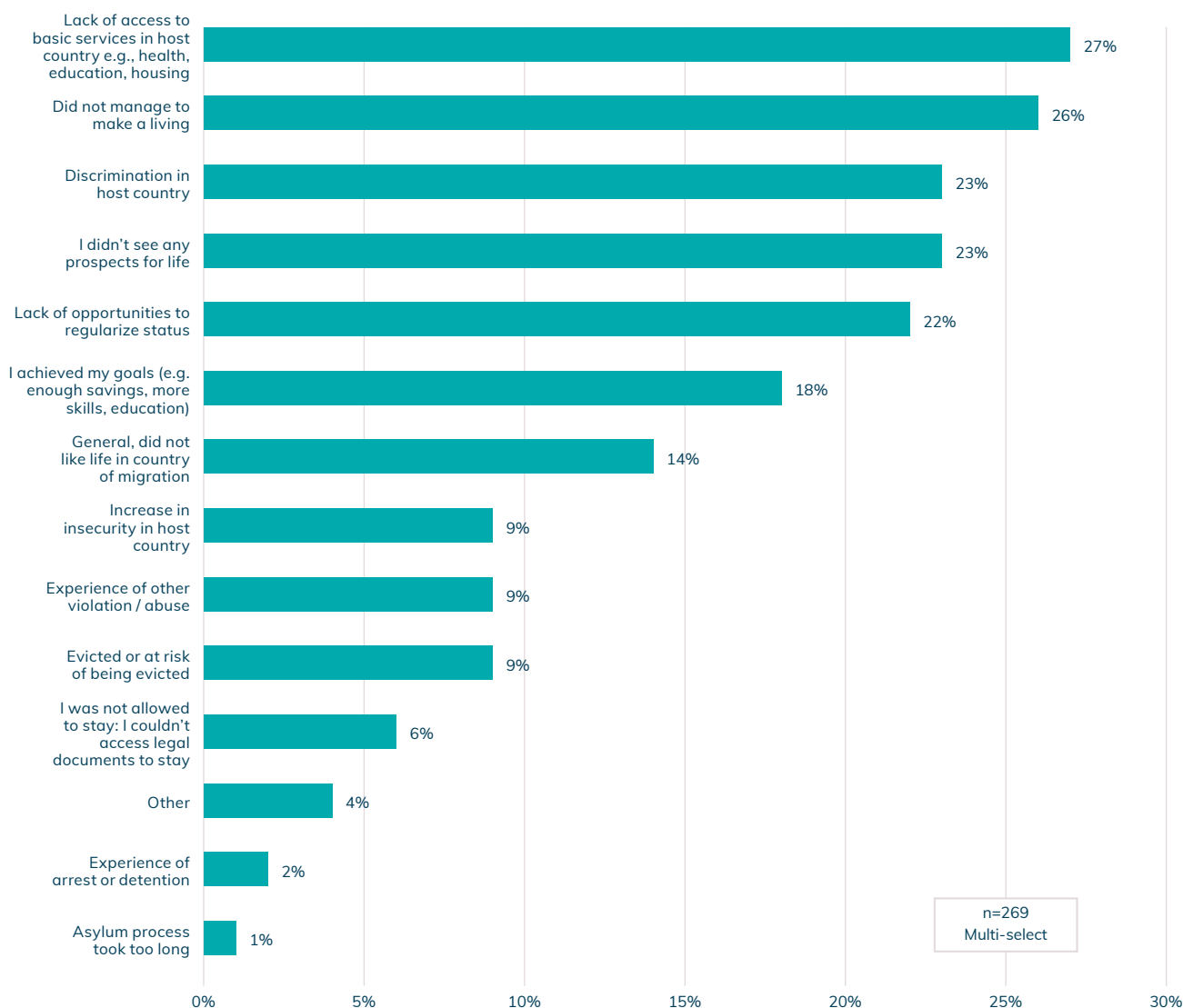
Most respondents (61%) had stayed in their last host country for a brief time (between 6 months to 2 years) before starting their return journey to Venezuela, which could show long-term difficulties in settling and regularizing their migratory status in their host countries. 32% of respondents had stayed between 2 to 5 years.

Only a small proportion of respondents had been in their last host country for less than 6 months (6%) or more than 5 years (1%) before they began to return to Venezuela.

Lack of prospects and integration in the host country, and reunification with family and friends, are driving return

Venezuelan refugees and migrants surveyed reported a range of reasons for deciding to return. Only 18% of them reported voluntarily returning to Venezuela because they have achieved their goals in the host country, while 71% mentioned that their return to Venezuela was partly driven by at least one of the following factors: insufficient access to services (27% of all respondents), the impossibility of making a living (26%), integrated into the host country (23%) or regularize their migratory status (22%, see Figure 2).⁵

Figure 2. Reasons for leaving the host country



5 Vanguardia (2022): [En Colombia, el 69% de migrantes está en condición de vulnerabilidad](#)

27% of all respondents reported that their decision to return to Venezuela was due to the lack of access to services in the host countries (health, education, and housing). This result is supported by “The Refugee and Migrant Needs Analysis” (RMNA) of 2022⁶, which found that half of the refugee and migrant population in the region does not have access to safe and decent housing. Also, the RMNA stated that an important proportion of refugees and migrant children and adolescents continue to face multiple obstacles in accessing educational services in their host countries.⁷

The persistent impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and high unemployment rates⁸ are likely contributing to an increase in difficulties making a living in the past 2 years: 26% of respondents reported that they have not been able to generate enough income to settle in their host country and 22% have not seen any prospects for life in their host country.

“ I lived in Trujillo, Peru, with my partner and my 3 children. We worked selling food, and sometimes I got a job cleaning houses. My partner sometimes got construction work, but we were paid very little (...) I could not take the children to school because they did not have documents and we did not have money to pay for their education. We had 3 years there and it didn't go well. ”
43-year-old Venezuelan woman interviewed in Cucuta, Colombia.

Discrimination in the host countries is also considered by 23% of all respondents as a factor in their decision to return and was especially reported by the Venezuelans returning from Peru (mentioned by 35% of respondents who were leaving Peru, 13/37).

According to human rights actors⁹ in the country, recent migration policies towards easing expulsions, xenophobic political discourse, and the deterioration of coexistence in host countries have increased the intentions of Venezuelan refugees and migrants to return to their country of origin.

22% of respondents reported leaving their host country for the impossibility or lack of opportunities to regularize their migratory status. 66% of respondents had been in an irregular situation in their host country.

Only 17% of Venezuelans surveyed mentioned having had temporary protection status, and 6% of respondents had a temporary residence permit in a host country in the region (of all of them, 78% were in Colombia, 49/63).

The impossibility to regularize the migratory status as a factor to return to Venezuela was reported by more of the respondents leaving Peru (27%, 10/37) and Chile (24%, 19/80) than Colombia (14%, 13/90), where the government has made a significant effort to provide regularization to the Venezuelans in the country.¹⁰

Nostalgia and reuniting with family are the main motivations for returning to Venezuela

The principal motivation for returning to Venezuela is to reunite with family or friends (reported by 81% of respondents) and because respondents were homesick (63% of respondents).

6 UNHCR (2022): [Three quarters of refugees and migrants from Venezuela struggle to access basic services in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

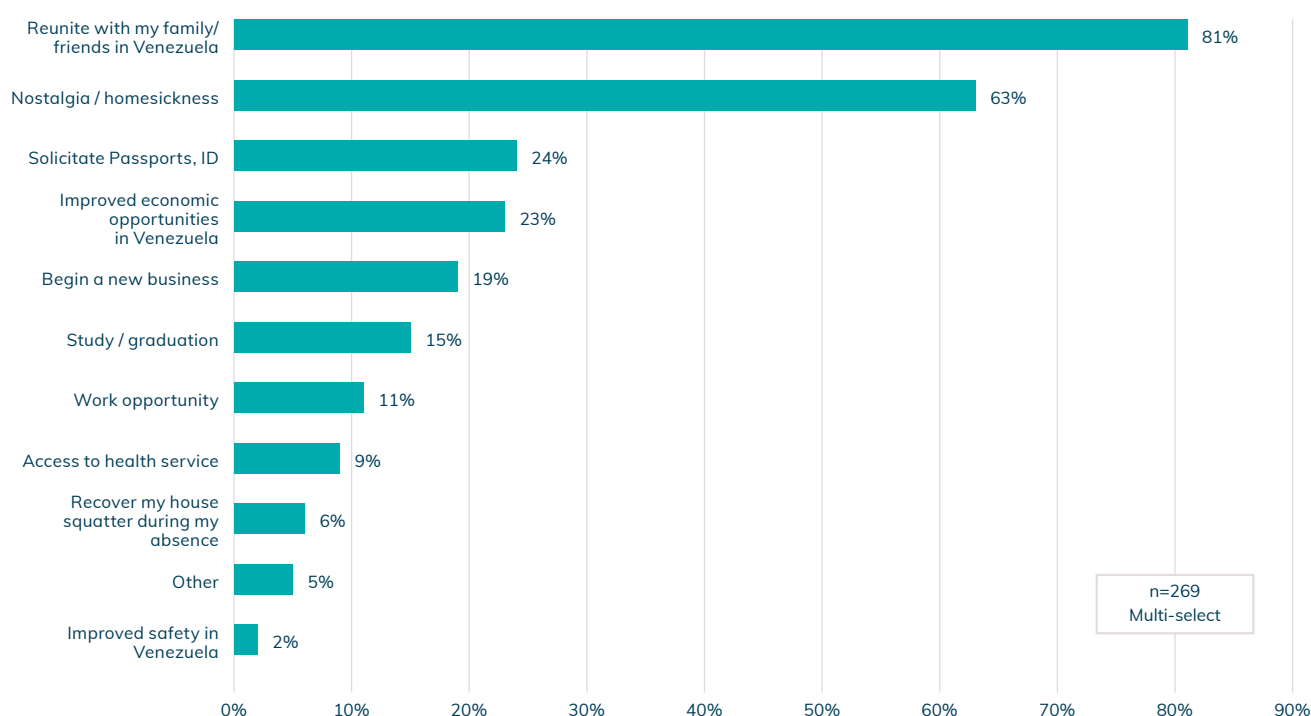
7 El Tiempo (2022): [En cuatro años, los estudiantes migrantes pasaron de ser 34.000 a más de 580.000](#)

8 GIFMM (2022): [Reporte situacional de integración - primer trimestre 2022](#)

9 New frame (2022): [Xenophobia towards Venezuelans on the rise in Peru](#)

10 Refugees International (2022): [Filling the Gap: Humanitarian Support and Alternative Pathways for Migrants on Colombia's Edge](#)

Figure 3. Motivations to return to Venezuela



Other studies have found that house ownership in Venezuela is an important motivation for return.¹¹ According to qualitative data from 40 interviews collected by 4Mi enumerators, some Venezuelan refugees and migrants mentioned returning to Venezuela because they had access to a house there, and the fees for public services were minimal, while in host countries the cost of the rent and services stood for almost the totality of their income (see next citations).¹²

“ We are returning to Venezuela because my wife is pregnant, and we want the child to be born in Venezuela (...) One can live in Colombia, but I cannot support my son there. It is hard to pay rent, utilities, and food. My wife does not work because she takes care of the children, but in Venezuela, we have a house, and my mother-in-law and my mother can help us while my wife gives birth and during the first months (...) I prefer to be there because we have a house.”

26-year-old Venezuelan man interviewed in Cucuta, Colombia

“ Back in Venezuela, we have our house. I want to see my family, my daughters who stayed there, and my mother. Having a house there is a problem less for me. I would only have to work to pay for my food.”

27-year-old Venezuelan man interviewed in Cucuta, Colombia.

Recently, some financial organizations and experts have reported an improvement in Venezuela's economy¹³, which has an impact on the decision to return.

45% of all respondents mentioned returning to Venezuela motivated by the improved economic opportunities in the country (mentioned by 23% of all respondents), to start a new business or invest (19%), or for job opportunities (11%).

24% of respondents mentioned returning to Venezuela to obtain official documents (passport, identity card, etc.). In the past few years, facilities to obtain a Venezuelan passport abroad have been limited.¹⁴

11 Barbieri, N. Ghio, G y, Silva, C. (2019): [Diáspora, integración social y arraigo de migrantes en Santiago de Chile: imaginarios de futuro en la comunidad venezolana](#), MIGRACIONES 47 (2019). ISSN: 2341-0833

12 El colombiano (2022): [Aun con la frontera abierta, los venezolanos no saben si volverán](#)

13 France 24 (2022): [Repunta la economía en Venezuela: ¿a qué se debe este crecimiento?](#)

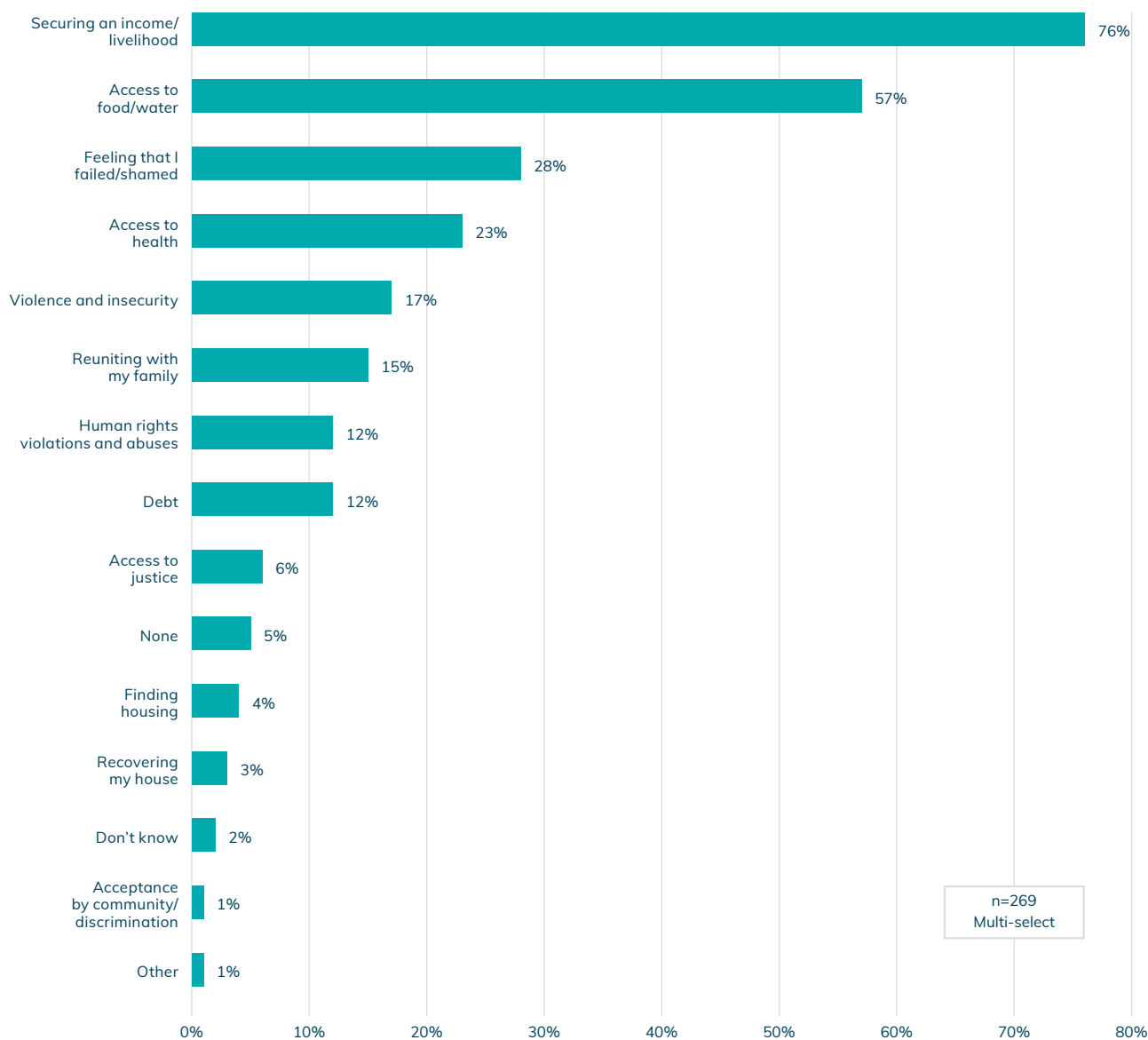
14 Voz de América. (2022): [“Es una tragedia la que estamos viviendo”: El drama de obtener un pasaporte venezolano](#).

Although economic improvement is being seen in some sectors, local actors point out¹⁵ that the Venezuelan economy is still unstable¹⁶ and that returnees could experience precarious socioeconomic situations again.

For the respondents, securing an income and access to food and water are expected to be the main challenges upon arrival in Venezuela

Respondents left Venezuela in the first place because of economic factors (reported by 97% of the respondents), barriers to access to basic services (41% of the respondents), and violence and insecurity (30% of respondents). They are preparing to face the same structural difficulties upon return.

Figure 4. What do you think will be your biggest challenge upon returning to Venezuela?



15 UCAB (2022): [Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales Informe de Coyuntura Venezuela](#); BBC News Mundo (2022): "[La economía mejoró un poco y quería estar con mi familia](#)"; los migrantes venezolanos que regresan a su país

16 Bloomberg (2022): [Los venezolanos que regresan, ¿en cuánto tiempo vuelven a irse?](#)

Most respondents (76%) report that securing an income will be the main challenge after their return. 57% are returning while still concerned about access to the very basics¹⁷ such as food and water, in Venezuela. According to humanitarian actors, the Venezuelan population still has unmet basic needs in the country.¹⁸

Likewise, access to services like healthcare is still precarious¹⁹ and was reported as an expected challenge by 23% of respondents.

“ We left Necocli one month ago. We do not know yet if we will stay in Venezuela or migrate again. It depends on the economic situation in Venezuela. We are used to having an income: which would be the most complicated challenge in Venezuela. ”
39-year-old Venezuelan woman interviewed in Cucuta, Colombia

Additionally, violence and insecurity²⁰ (reported by 17% of respondents), the possibility of human rights violations and abuses, and access to justice (reported by 12% and 6% of respondents, respectively) are expected to be challenges in Venezuela. According to humanitarian actors in the field,²¹ the country continues to face a profound crisis of human rights and fairness in the justice system.

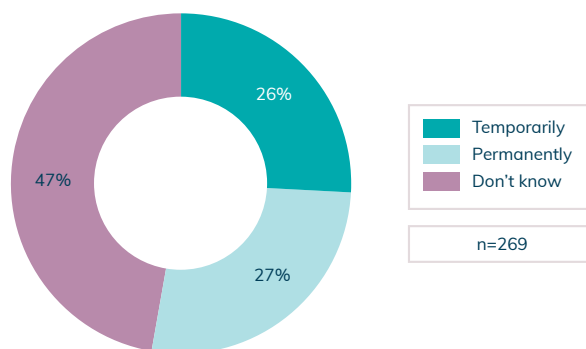
28% of Venezuelan refugees and migrants perceived their return to Venezuela as a failure and with shame. Local actors in Venezuela report that those difficulties could provoke another departure from the country.²²

“ It is possible, we will return to Cucuta later or go back to Bogota. Or stay in Venezuela, but only if the situation has improved, which I don't believe. I will adapt, I am used to being on the move, doing little jobs, and having money, even if it is not much, in my pocket. ”
19-year-old Venezuelan man interviewed in Cucuta, Colombia.

Uncertainty about staying in Venezuela

47% of respondents said they were unsure whether they would stay temporarily or permanently in Venezuela. According to qualitative information collected by 4Mi enumerators, respondents often mentioned that their decision would depend on the evolution of the situation in Venezuela (around 60 volunteered this information through an open question). Of those who knew, there was an even split between those who planned to stay permanently, and who said they would stay temporarily (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Do you intend to stay in Venezuela permanently or temporarily?



When asked about their plans for the next two years, 47% of respondents reported they will be staying in the place that they left (see Figure 6). However, 27% said that they intend to migrate again, either to their last host country or another country. 23% of respondents said they do not know.

17 Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad social (2022): [874 protests for quality of basic services during the first half of 2022 were documented.](#)

18 OCHA (2022): [Informe de situación: Venezuela, Julio-Agosto 2022. Última actualización: 13 oct. 2022](#)

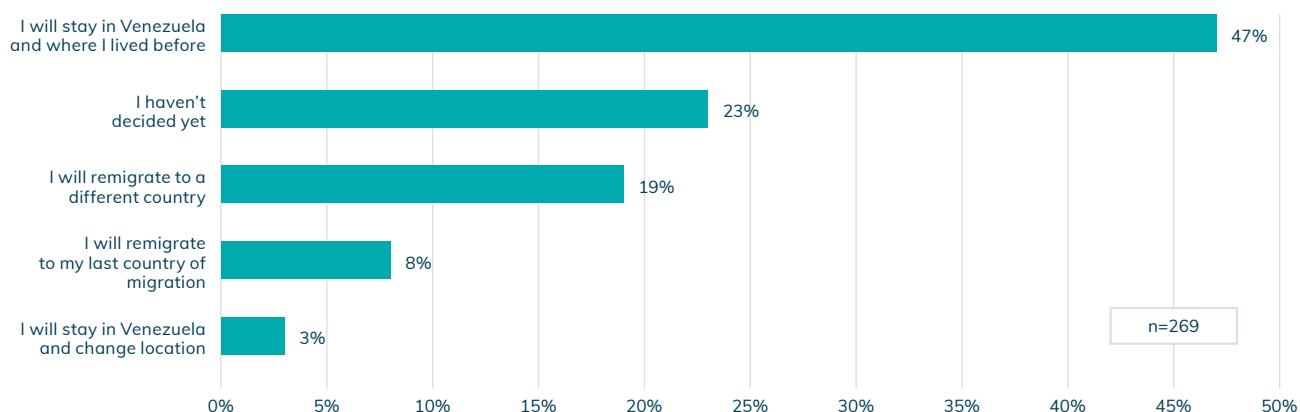
19 ONG Médicos por la Salud (2022): [Encuesta Nacional de Hospitales: Boletín Octubre.](#)

20 Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia (2022): [Informe: Violencia letal y no letal en Venezuela \(Primer semestre 2022\)](#)

21 Consejo de Derechos Humanos de las Naciones Unidas (2022): [Venezuela: Nuevo informe de la ONU detalla las responsabilidades por crímenes de lesa humanidad para reprimir a la disidencia y pone la lupa en la situación en las zonas mineras remotas](#)

22 El colombiano (2022): [Aún con la frontera abierta, los venezolanos no saben si volverán](#)

Figure 6. What is your plan in terms of movement for the next 24 months?



Colombia continues to be an attractive country for Venezuelan refugees and migrants

Of the 27% of respondents who intended to migrate in the next 24 months, 27% mentioned Colombia (n=20/73, 15 of whom had been in Colombia before returning to Venezuela). Of them, 75% (n=15/20) had Colombia as their last settled country. Colombia continues to be an attractive destination for Venezuelan refugees and migrants due to its proximity to Venezuela, the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between their governments, and the recent reopening of borders to trade between the two countries, after seven years of being closed.²³

26% of respondents who planned to migrate in the next 24 months intended to migrate to the United States. However, most interviews (80%) took place before the US government introduced a new immigration control process for Venezuelans.²⁴ Peru, Mexico, Brazil, Panama, and Chile were also reported, with lower mentions.

²³ El País (2022): [Colombia y Venezuela arrancan una nueva era de relaciones diplomáticas](#)

²⁴ On October 12, the United States government implemented a new immigration control process for Venezuelan citizens: Since that date, Venezuelan nationals who do not meet specific requirements are returned to Mexico under Title 42. Recently, this measure was blocked by a federal judge.

Conclusion

Venezuelan returns are becoming an increasingly common characteristic in the Latin American mixed migration landscape. Though the discourses on return migration tend to focus on improved economic opportunities in Venezuela, Venezuelan refugees and migrants appear to be undertaking return journeys with much more mixed motivations.

This paper shows that in Latin America, those returning to Venezuela are often driven by difficulties settling in the host country, combined with the wish to reunite with families and friends and to come back to their own house. Refugees and migrants returning to Venezuela are aware that the situation stays unstable, and expect to face some quite critical challenges, and only a minority expect to stay permanently in Venezuela.

Faced with the difficulties of settling in their own country, it seems that at least part of the population who returned to Venezuela may continue to engage in back-and-forth migration between Venezuela and various host countries, in particular Colombia.

4Mi data collection

4Mi is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move. 4Mi field enumerators are currently collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe.

Note that the sampling approach means that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide rich insights, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi

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MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs hosted in DRC regional offices in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, and a global team based across Geneva and Brussels.

MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis, and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move, and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Brussels, Geneva, Dakar, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota, and Dhaka.

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