United Nations hybrid Expert Group Meeting in preparation for the 30th anniversary of the International Year of Family 2024.

New York, 7-8 September 2022

Megatrends & Families: Focus on Digital Technologies, Migration and Urbanization.

Migration trends in Latin America and The Caribbean

Rosario Esteinou (CIESAS)

Figure 1

Mapa del continente Americano

Migration is a global phenomenon with multivalent consequences at all levels

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC):

- 40.5 million migrants = to 15% of world's migrant population.

Compounded by:

- Asylum seekers

- Economic migrants

- Environmental

- Irregular

- Victims of trafficking

- Strand migrants

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated vulnerabilities.

Aims

Main features of mobility in LAC, and its specific patterns in three subregions

A view to understand the transnational space and transnational families, gender conditioning factors, use of resources (multigenerational, motherhood, parenting)

Influences of family reunification migration policies on transnational family formation, and some limitations faced by families

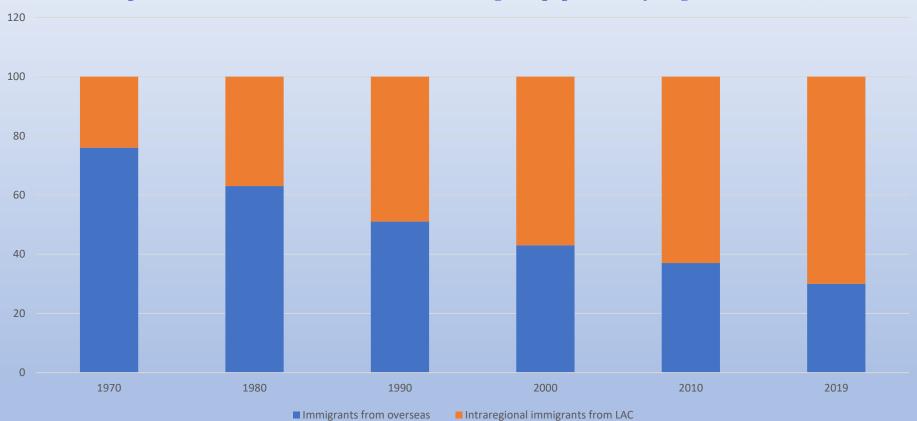Conclusions and recommendations

Mobility patterns in LAC

Three general trends in the last 7 decades:

1. Emigration from the region
2. Historical immigration from overseas
3. Intraregional exchanges
4. Less studied: Return to countries

Emigration from the region:

- Is the prevailing pattern: 6 emigrants/2 immigrants in the region
- To developed countries: US first, Spain second

Immigration from overseas and Intraregional mobility in LAC

Graph 1. Latin America and the Caribbean: immigrant population by origin 1970-2019 (%)

■ Immigrants from overseas ■ Intraregional immigrants from LAC

Source: Information retrieved from CEPAL (2019a: 164)

Some features of intraregional mobility in LAC

1. **+ number of migrants, + countries involved.** Examples:
- 5 million Venezuelans to Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile
- Nicaraguans to Costa Rica
- Haitians throughout the continent.

2. Increase of emigrants' proportion to national populations. Examples of 2019:
- 21% increase in the Caribbean and Central America, the region's highest proportion
- El Salvador = 24.8%
- Jamaica = 37.7%
- Puerto Rico = 68.4%

3. Main receiving countries:

Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Colombia

Relevant features of recent mobilities in LAC

1. New protagonists:

- Women – feminization of mobility
- Children and adolescents with or without their families
- Massive mobility: Caravans and indigenous migrants

2. Transit is longer, becomes life, and it is part of family life cycle

3. Migration is increasingly forced by structural factors (lack of opportunities and poverty; social, gender and domestic violence), not an informed and voluntary choice

4. COVID-19 Pandemic has exacerbated inequalities:

- Precarious economic integration
- Overcrowded dwellings
- Xenophobic reactions by receiving populations, institutional racism
- Restrictive migration policies lead to return, humanitarian crises, proliferation of irregular crossing and trafficking networks

Relevant features of recent mobilities in LAC

5. Remittances, a very positive outcome:

- Especially sent from US to Mexico and Central America
- Contrary to expectations, they increased during the COVID-19 Pandemic. In 2021 LAC recorded the highest increase worldwide: 131 billion USD = 25% increase over 2020 (World Bank, 2022)
- Countries with double-digit growth rates:

  Guatemala = 35%, Ecuador = 31%, Honduras = 29%,

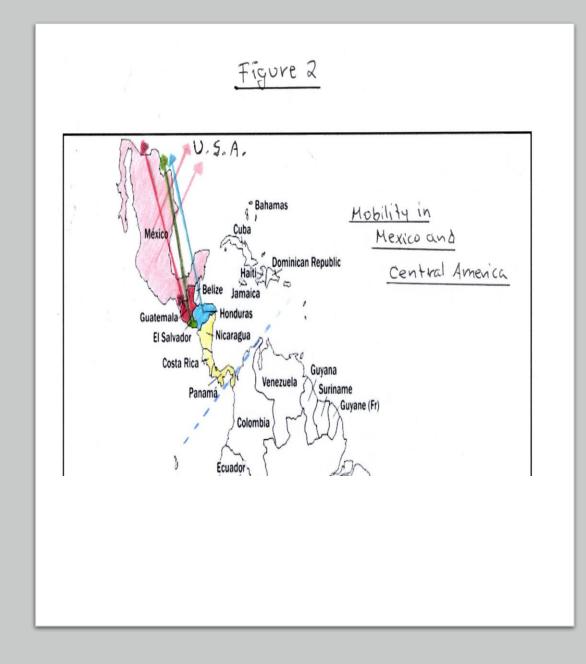 Mexico = 25%, El Salvador = 26%, Dominican Republic = 26%, Colombia = 24%, Haiti = 21%, Nicaragua = 16%

- Remittances represent at least 20% of GDP in some countries: El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, and Haiti
- They have been the main informal social protection mechanism for families
- They promote local development, migration infrastructure and transnational businesses.

Mobility patterns in 3 subregions

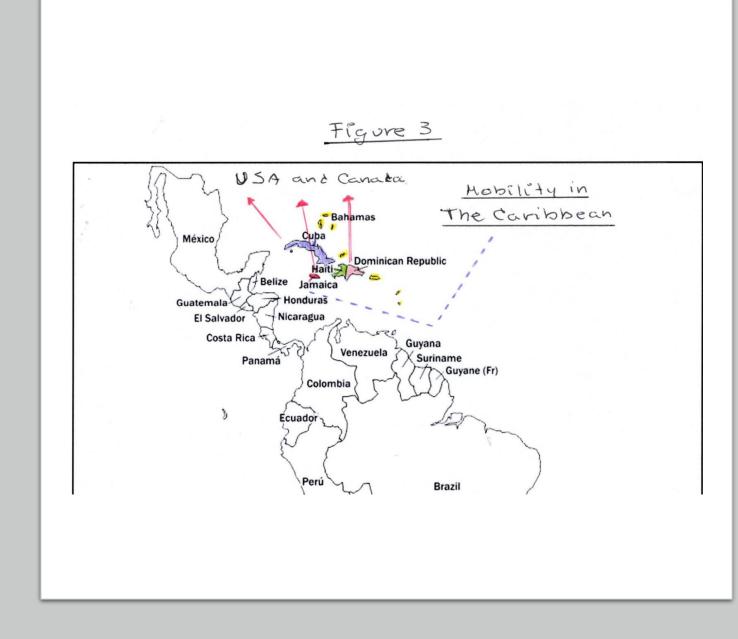**1. Mexico and Northern Central America**

- Large volume of flows interconnected
- Highly complex social, economic and political processes and humanitarian crises
- Emigration: US, the main destination
- Northern Central America migration stands over Mexican: El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.
- "Caravans of Central Americans", 3,000 to 6,000 migrants transiting together: unaccompanied minors, whole families, older adults, disabled, with chronic diseases
- Mexico has become an origin, transit, destination and return country. In 2019, 400,000 Central Americans were in transit, exposed to risks.
- Great increase in asylum applications
- Insufficient institutional capacity to face massive mobility
- Every year 700,000 Northern Central American adolescents reach legal working age (14 or 15).

Figure 2

Mobility in Mexico and Central America

Mobility patterns in 3 subregions
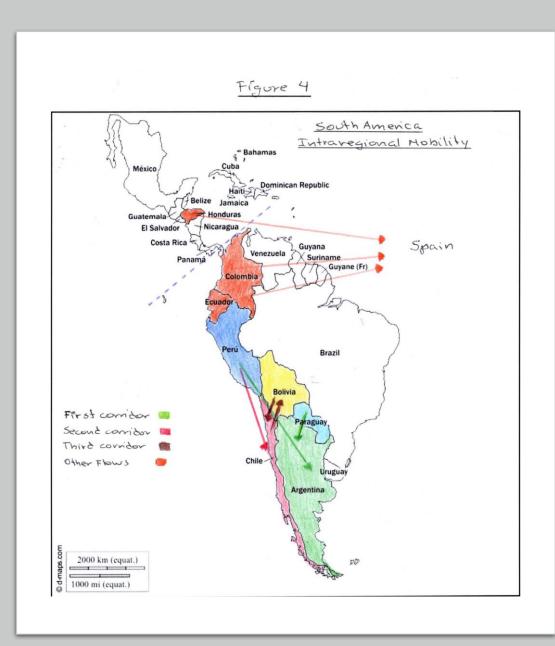
2. The Caribbean

- Countries and populations are small, very high mobility
- Migrants represent 20% of total population of the Caribbean
- US and Canada, main destinations

- Two patterns of mobility:
  - Due to disaster situations caused by climate change, great displacements
  - Emigration of skilled labor force. Decline in highly skilled workers, averages 70%. Challenges: worker shortages, lower accumulation of institutional knowledge

Figure 3

Mobility in The Caribbean

Mobility patterns in 3 subregions

3. South America

- Intraregional mobility, the main pattern: emigration, immigration, transit and return

- Stand out women in paid domestic work: poor, indigenous, and afro-descendant. Rooted in colonial slavery and hacienda tradition

- Second half of 20th century, LA had the highest proportion of paid female workers in the world

- Women worker's mobility created "global care chains" from lower income level countries to developed or higher income level countries (US, Spain, Argentina, Chile)

- Domestic workers have no social security, informal contracts, low social status and bargaining power. Very vulnerable

- First corridor: a) Peru-Argentina; b) Paraguay-Argentina.

- Second corridor: Peru-Chile

- Third corridor: Bolivia-Chile, a circular pattern

Figure 4

Understanding the transnational space and transnational families

- Understanding implies overcoming "methodological nationalism" and the idea of nuclear family as the only referent guiding re-construction
- Transnational space = social space built by migrants and their families, from broader conditions shaping their lives
- Transnational families = life is built in a deterritorialized manner, doesn't imply necessarily adverse and disintegrative effects
- Migration transforms, reorients, and changes the order of priorities in family relationships (roles, parenting), which move into the transnational social space
- Different normative, organizational, and cultural traditions, among others, are involved when decision-making. Families (including kinship) evaluate available resources and decide their migratory strategies and family arrangements, and create a sense of collective well-being
- However, gender, intergenerational and other inequalities mediate decision-making and family arrangements. Inequalities pre-exist before migration and mold relationships. They may reproduce in the transnational space despite achievements on individual autonomy and more balanced relationships

Understanding the transnational space and transnational families

- "Social remittances" = norms, values and beliefs about gender relations, parenting and care, circulate back and forth in the transnational space.

- Informal social control mechanisms, such as "gossip", pressure women to fulfill their traditional roles and may affect their reputation.

- Familism is another social remittance in the transnational space. It is an organizational mechanism of support (economic, emotional, and care) at a distance. Multigenerational ties represent a latent kinship network ready to serve as a safety net and as alternative resource of love, support and comfort for children's wellbeing.

- However, multigenerational care is deeply gendered, and responsibilities lie mainly on grandmothers. They convey language, values, customs and promote a sense of belonging to the native country

- Tensions and conflicts arise from different expectations, values between grandparents-parents-grandchildren. If not managed properly, can erode their bonds.

The role of family reunification policies in shaping transnational families

In addition to structural factors (e.g., poverty, labor markets, violence) and restrictive migration policies, family reunification policies have molded migration trends and transnational family formation.

Families assess reunification regulations in decision-making about their migratory strategies and family arrangements, as they may contribute on their wellbeing or expose them to processes of exclusion and risk.

Migrant's use of family reunification policies: differences between US and Spain

Currently, family reunification policies are the main drive for mobility, over labor policies, but there are differences between countries
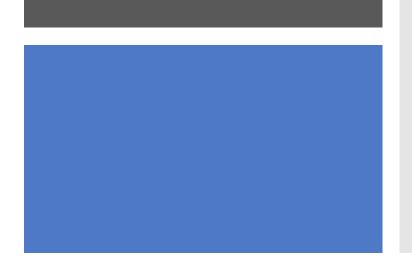
US is the first destination country of LAC migrants.
- The visa system is stagnating and collapsing due to high demand.
- Requirements are strict and difficult to meet.
- Thus, families resort less to family reunification policy, and transnational family arrangements (multigenerational motherhood, fatherhood and parenting children) tend to be more permanent, forced.
- Before leaving, migrants know that family projects involve new family arrangements, and are experienced as part of the life cycle.
- Family reunification is not longer a goal or is achieved by irregular and clandestine means (e.g., "coyotes" and trafficking networks).

Migrant's use of family reunification policies: differences between US and Spain

Spain is the second main destination for LAC migrants, especially women (Honduras, Ecuador, Colombia).

- Most labor positions in Europe concentrate in the service sector, especially in domestic work and care, activities considered female.
- Explains why LAC women far outnumber men and explains growing feminization of migratory flows.
- Their vulnerable economic condition challenge complying the requirements for approval of their visas' applications.
- In addition, the right to family reunification is lost when children reach the age of majority in the Spanish legislation.
- Therefore, women's migration strategy is built around this policy. They resort more to family reunification and transnational motherhood becomes a transitory strategy, especially for single mothers.
- To access residency and legal status, some women marry a European man or a legalized status migrant to facilitate family reunification. But for others, family reunification is no longer a desired goal due to material and emotional hardships, actual and potential conflicts resulting from reunion, the arrival of new children and partners in the destination country, among others

Some conclusions

1. Emigration from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, and intraregional mobility in South America are the main patterns.

2. These flows have significantly impacted families, with ambivalent outcomes

3. Positive outcomes: a) remittances; b) transnational families and networks, familism, multigenerational parenting as informal mechanisms of social protection and safety nets. But they rest on and reproduce gender and intergenerational inequalities.

4. Negative: Mobility tends to be forced, not an informed and voluntary option.

5. Negative: "Caravans" and massive migration show institutional capacity shortcomings to manage them orderly and protect migrants' rights.

6. Negative: restrictive measures, far from being a viable solution, have promoted illegal and disorderly migration, and have given rise to humanitarian crises accentuating social and psychological suffering of migrants and the vulnerability of their families.

Recommendations

Our recommendations align to the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection published last June (The White House, 2022), and signed by 21 countries in the Americas. It represents a significant effort to face migration. It intends to work to:

- Develop and provide multilateral mechanisms for financial support

- Improve regional cooperation mechanisms for law enforcement, border protection management, visa regimes and regularization processes.

- Strengthen and expand temporary labor migration pathways, new programs promoting connections between employers and migrant workers, robust safeguards for ethical recruitment, and legal protections for worker's rights.

- Improve access to public and private services for all migrants, refugee, and stateless persons to promote their full social and economic inclusion in host communities.

- Expand access to regular pathways for migrants and refugees to include family reunifications options.

THANK YOU¡ **MUCHAS GRACIAS¡**