

“RECEIVING OUR VENEZUELAN BROTHERS”: UNDERSTANDING RESPONSES TO DISPLACED VENEZUELANS IN COLOMBIA AND BRAZIL (2015-2020)

“Recebendo nossos irmãos venezuelanos”: entendendo respostas para deslocados venezuelanos na Colômbia e no Brasil (2015-2020)

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ABSTRACT

The issue of displaced Venezuelans has been considerably politicized by host governments in Colombia and Brazil, who often refer to this population as their “Venezuelan brothers” and frame their response as a compassionate act. Whilst maintaining ‘open door’ policies for this population, Colombia and Brazil have also created pathways to regularize their stay. Nevertheless, only Brazil chose to recognize Venezuelans as refugees. As elucidated in this article, responses to asylum-seekers arriving en masse tend to be impacted by a wide range of determinants at both international and domestic levels. Hence, this article aims to shine a light on the politics of asylum in Colombia and Brazil, looking to understand the factors driving their respective responses to displaced Venezuelans.

Keywords: Displaced Venezuelans; Asylum; Colombia; Brazil.

RESUMO

A questão dos deslocados venezuelanos vem sendo bastante politizada pelos governos receptores Colômbia e Brasil, que corriqueiramente se referem a esta população como seus “irmãos venezuelanos” e enquadram suas respostas como um ato solidário. Ao mesmo tempo que mantêm suas fronteiras abertas para esta população, a Colômbia e o Brasil também criaram mecanismos para regularizar a sua permanência. Todavia, apenas o Brasil optou por reconhecer os Venezuelanos como refugiados. Como elucidado neste artigo, respostas a fluxos massivos de refugiados tendem a ser influenciadas por diversos fatores nos níveis doméstico e internacional. Assim, o presente artigo lança luz sobre a política por trás da proteção de refugiados na Colômbia e no Brasil, buscando entender os fatores que influenciam suas respectivas respostas aos deslocados venezuelanos.

Palavras-chave: Deslocados Venezuelanos; Refúgio; Colômbia; Brasil.

1. INTRODUCTION

During ‘mass refugee influxes’, host governments’ policy making processes are influenced by a range of domestic and international determinants.² Accordingly, beyond making *stricto sensu* humanitarian considerations, host governments tend to weight their citizens’ perceptions on migrants, consider the possibility of receiving international assistance to their efforts, assess relations with countries of origin, *inter alia* (Jacobsen, 1996). In that, the protection of refugees is embedded in an inherently political context, where a diversity of interests and constricts are in play.

² ‘Mass refugee influx’ situations are often characterised by their scale, urgency, and impacts over a host society. During these events, mass displacement is triggered by significant incidents or conditions in a country or region of origin, influencing a large number of uprooted individuals to seek protection abroad. According to UNHCR, albeit there is no precise numeric threshold for what constitutes a mass refugee influx, it is considered a situation where, due to its suddenness and strain on State resources, local absorption capacity is inadequate and individual RSD procedures become impractical (UNHCR, 2001).

Several works in the literature have pointed to linkages between responses to refugees and foreign policy concerns (Abdelaaty, 2020; Basok, 1990; Betts, 2013; Jacobsen, 1996; Loescher, 1989, 1993, 2001; Memisoglu and Ilgit, 2016; Milner, 2009; Zolberg et al., 1986). Historically, refugee protection has also been employed as means of delegitimizing sending countries, which particularly occurred during the Cold War (Loescher, 1989). During that period, countries where refugees found their 'safe havens' used the flight of individuals from the Communist world as means of delegitimizing the Soviet Union and reaffirming their benevolence. According to Betts (2013) States have also implemented less restrictive asylum policies to help sustain their own legitimacy (in terms of being seen to respect the rights of refugees) vis-à-vis the international community. Conversely, authors also note how positive relations with a country of origin may lead a host State to refrain from according refugee status to its nationals (Jacobsen, 1992).

Since 2013, when President Nicolás Maduro succeeded Hugo Chávez, Venezuela has been enduring one of the worst socioeconomic and political crises in its region. Instability has arisen due to violent protests in opposition to Chavism, political movement in power for almost two decades, and shortages, caused by the country's economic decline (Pinto and Obregon, 2018). As a result, during the time scope covered in this study, more than 5.4 million Venezuelans had left the country since 2015 (R4V, 2020a). The majority of displaced Venezuelans (approximately 4.3 million) have settled in other Latin American countries, such as Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, and Brazil. Most of these states are members of the recently created Lima Group, an intergovernmental body that condemns the Venezuelan government, and have created precarious mechanisms to regularize the stay of Venezuelans in their territories (Blouin *et al.*, 2020). Since 2018, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been calling on states to recognize displaced Venezuelans as refugees, pointing to the 'massive violations of human rights' in that country. In that, UNHCR has been evoking the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, a non-binding instrument widely adhered by countries in the region, which carries a more comprehensive refugee definition³. Nonetheless, regional responses to their arrival have varied considerably. With support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR, countries in the region have also established the *Quito Process*, to "articulate a regional coordination regarding the migratory crisis" (Declaration of Quito, 2018, p.1). However, achievements in this forum have been limited, if any.

Colombia and Brazil are neighboring countries to Venezuela. Recently, during public speeches, whilst criticizing President Maduro's administration, their leaders have been stressing the urgency of assisting displaced Venezuelans in their territories (Brazil, 2020; Colombia, 2020). Both countries share borders with Venezuela and have maintained an 'open door' policy for the displaced individuals of that country. While Colombia is hosting the majority of displaced

³ The 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol define refugees as those outside their countries of origin due to a "well-founded fear of persecution". Considering the limitations of these instruments, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration also considers refugees to be victims of "foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order" (UNHCR, 2006, p.36).

Venezuelans in the region (approximately 1.8 million), only 235,000 of them have settled in Brazil (R4V, 2020c). Moreover, despite having very similar legislations for refugees, the countries differ in terms of their legal and practical responses to these individuals, which may be related to their domestic conjunctures and international objectives.

Through a descriptive and explanatory study, this article attempts to detail how Colombia and Brazil have responded to the arrival of Venezuelans between 2015 and 2020, and understand which factors lie behind their responses. This article employs process tracing as a methodology. Therefore, through the amalgamation of different primary sources (such as official reports, meeting minutes, and interview transcripts) and secondary sources (mainly scholarly articles and book chapters), this research identifies some of the intermediate steps in policy-making to better comprehend the sequence and values of variables that affected the country's response (Bennet and Checkel 2014, George and Bennet 2005).

Following this introduction, the article consists of four main sections: the two first explore the wider conjuncture in Colombia and Brazil and describe their responses to displaced Venezuelans. The third interprets some of the main factors influencing these countries' responses. The fourth offers a conclusion.

Whilst maintaining an 'open door' policy, both Brazil and Colombia have created pathways to regularize the status of Venezuelans and allow them to have access to the same rights as its own nationals. Notably, both countries have been engaged in an effort against the Chavist administration in Venezuela. In the light of their foreign policy objectives and discourses, receiving displaced Venezuelans is not a simple sign of compassion or, in the case of Colombia, a way of honoring two nations' historical ties, but, *inter alia*, a manner of depicting the failure of the Venezuelan State and discrediting its government.

While the two countries have created special temporary stay permits for Venezuelans, only Brazil followed UNHCR's recommendations and started to recognize them as refugees, on the basis of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration. This is mostly related to the comparatively smaller number of Venezuelans in Brazil, the country's desire to achieve a position of prestige within the UN system, and UNHCR's advocacy during RSD meetings. Meanwhile, Colombia has preferred to deal with the arrival of Venezuelans through legal mechanisms outside the refugee regime, which allows the country to maintain increased room for manoeuvre in its response.

2. COLOMBIA

Colombia is a State party to the main instruments linked to the refugee regime. The country ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention in 1961 and its 1967 Protocol in 1980. Naturally, the country also took part in the process that led to the signing of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, which occurred on its territory (Ministério de Relaciones Exteriores, 2015; Reed-Hurtado, 2013). Nevertheless, Colombia is best known as a country of displacement.

For more than fifty years, the Colombian government has fought against non-State armed groups (NSAGs), more predominant in rural regions of the country. Hence, violence in Colombia has internally displaced more than 7.9 million individuals since 1985. In the 1990s, some analysts feared the country would become a failed State and, by most accounts, the Colombian government was only in control of one-third of its countryside in 2000 (Meacham *et al.*, 2014). In that year, the United States government launched the Plan Colombia, an initiative initially focused on counternarcotics and counterterrorism that has directed more than \$10 billion to the country since its creation. Since the signature of a ceasefire accord between the Revolutionary Colombian Armed Forces (FARC) – the country’s most prominent NSAG – and the government in 2016, the FARC’s forces have been dissolving. Through the accord, many of its members have delivered their armaments to the UN and the group was able to establish its own political party (Gonçalves, 2017).

Despite historical ties, relations between Colombia and Venezuela have been marked by ups and downs, especially in recent times. During the last decade, the states have cut diplomatic channelstwice (in 2009 and in 2019). Currently, under President Iván Duque’s leadership, Colombia has been defending a diplomatic blockade against Venezuela and supporting Juan Guaidó, who leads the opposition against Maduro in the National Assembly, as the de facto leader of the country.

Amidst this conjuncture, Colombia has been receiving the largest number of displaced Venezuelans in the world (more than 1.8 million individuals until the end of 2020) (R4V, 2020c). Whilst maintaining an ‘open door policy’, the country has spent approximately 0.5% of its GDP (during 2019) and received more than \$423 million in international aid (since 2017) to provide humanitarian assistance for them. Other types of aid under the Plan Colombia agreement, now referred to as Peace Colombia, also continued (Beittel, 2019; EU Commission, 2019; R4V, 2019).

Colombia and Venezuela share a 2,216-kilometer border. Since the 1980’s, the two countries have established Border Integration Zones (known as ZIF) to foster the free movement of capital, services, and people throughout the region. These were closed by the Venezuelan government in 2015, but Venezuelans still managed to go to Colombia through various irregular crossing points, known in the region as *trochas*. Since then, regular border crossing points have reopened and the Colombia has been creating legal pathways for Venezuelans who need to temporally enter or settle on its territory (Migración Colombia, 2019).

Until late 2020, Venezuelans in Colombia could obtain two temporary transit/stay permits: (1) a Border Mobility Card (TMF) or (2) an Especial Stay Permit (PEP). The first permit, aimed at pendular migrants, was introduced in 2016 and allows Venezuelans who live in bordering areas to transit in selected regions in Colombia for seven days. Venezuelans do not need to present a passport upon entry. On the other hand, the PEP was created to regularize the stay of Venezuelans already living in Colombia and is valid for two years. It allows Venezuelans to access basic public services, to work, and can be renewed. PEP permits were offered during six different regularization campaigns, all with retrograde cutoff periods (i.e. only Venezuelans who arrived before the

campaign announcement could apply). By the end of 2020, more than 4.8 million Venezuelans had TMF cards. Nonetheless, it is estimated that only 754,085 Venezuelans settled in the country had a PEP permit, in contrast to more than 1 million who were in an irregular situation (Selee and Bolter, 2020).

Colombia incorporated the 1984 Cartagena Declaration into its refugee act and President Iván Duque has consecutively denounced human rights violations in Venezuela. Nevertheless, the country has not applied the Declaration during RSD procedures and the overall number of refugees and asylum-seekers remains inexpressive *vis-à-vis* the large number of displaced individuals in the country. By the end of 2020, the country received 11,000 asylum claims from Venezuelans and only approved 140 of them (R4V, 2020b). According to Colombia's refugee law, UNHCR may take part in RSD procedures with 'voice no vote' status. However, the office remains excluded from these procedures (Ministério de Relaciones Exteriores, 2015). Moreover, the Colombian government has avoided touching the issue of access asylum and little information is available about its functioning in the country. Hence, although UNHCR has a wide presence in Colombia, its power to advocate for the application of the Cartagena refugee definition in the country has been constrained.

UNHCR established its first office in Colombia in 1998, at the request of the Colombian government. At the time, the government was interested in the agency's technical expertise and capacity to assist internally displaced individuals (IDPs) (Viana, 2009). Since then, it has expanded its activities in the country considerably. In 2016, along with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), it started leading the Inter-Agency Mixed Migration Flows Group (GIFMM), also composed by other 61 humanitarian organizations. Currently, the GIFMM has eight offices in Colombia and is working to implement the UN-led regional response for Venezuelans with the government. In tandem, UNHCR has an even wider presence and continues to provide assistance to Venezuelans and IDPs on its own (UNHCR, 2019a; R4V, 2020c).

In 2019, the office established its first shelter for Venezuelans in the border town of Maicao. Being the only one of its kind in the country (other refugee settlements are informal), the center has sixty tents and accommodates displaced individuals for up to one month. In a study conducted before the creation of the center, UNHCR concluded that more than half of the Venezuelans in the city were living in the streets or in situations of vulnerability (UNHCR, 2019a). Considering this, the UN agency created the facility to support Venezuelans while they find formal employment or gather the means to move inward the Colombian territory (UNHCR, 2019b).

The country is also facilitating Venezuelans' access to education, which is perceived as an important step towards their integration. In that, Venezuelans who cannot present their school certificates may take especial exams to assess their level of education. Until the end of 2019, more than 200,000 Venezuelans were attending schools in Colombia (Selee and Bolter, 2020).

Colombia is one of the few countries in the Americas where the principle of *jus soli* is not applicable for citizenship. In that, children of Venezuelans born on its territory could become stateless if their parents were incapable of returning to Venezuela to register them. Notably, in 2019, the government decided to grant citizenship to all children born to Venezuelan parents in Colombia from 2015 to 2021. This measure is in accordance to Colombia's 1993 Citizenship Act, which stipulates that stateless children born on its territory should become Colombian nationals and is expected to affect 24,000 children (Colombia, 1993; Migración Colombia, 2019).

3. BRAZIL

Historically, Brazil has interacted with the international refugee regime since its emergence. The country has been a member of the UNHCR's Executive Committee since 1958, year of its creation, and ratified most instruments related to the regime without much delay⁴ (Jubilut, 2007). Nevertheless, its real engagement vis-à-vis refugees has always been considered in terms of its possible political and economic impacts. During some periods, the country has prioritized its adequacy to international standards and, during others, it has given more importance to the maximization of its utilities (GONÇALVES et al., 2018).

UNHCR started operating in Brazil in 1977, but did not have official recognition from the government until 1980. During the country's military dictatorship (1964-1985), the Office's activities were limited to resettling refugees to third countries and Brazil maintained strict geographical restrictions for RSD procedures, which were only lifted in 1989 (Barreto, 2010). Nonetheless, the end of the military dictatorship in Brazil brought significant changes. In the early 1990's, the country inaugurated a foreign policy strategy aimed at increasing its adherence to international norms and renewing its credentials abroad (Fonseca, 1998). In this context, in 1997, Brazil created its first (and current) Refugee Act. Despite being the first law to implement a human rights treaty in the country, it is considered to be a modern and comprehensive regulation, which carries the 'expanded' Cartagena refugee definition and confers important rights to asylum-seekers before their RSD process is finalized. Moreover, UNHCR and civil society organizations are allowed to take part in RSD meetings with 'voice-no-vote' status and usually do so very proactively (Jubilut and Apolinário, 2008).

During the 1990s, Venezuela started to be perceived as a strategic partner to Brazil, mostly due its energy reserves, which led to an increment in the relations between the two countries since President Hugo Chávez came to power in 1998. In fact, both Brazilian presidents Fernando H. Cardoso (1995-2002) and Lula da Silva (2003-2011) maintained a personal relationship with Chávez. During the 2000s, trade and cooperation projects between the two countries increased exponentially. Moreover, Brazil had an important role supporting Venezuela politically, backing

⁴ Brazil ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention in 1960, its 1967 Protocol in 1972, and took part in the process that led to the Cartagena Declaration in 1984 (Jubilut, 2007).

Chávez during an attempted coup d'état in 2002 and the country's entry in the Mercosur, which formally occurred in 2012 (Moreira, 2018).

Nevertheless, soon after President Nicolás Maduro's ascension to power, the political climate in Brazil and the South Cone region started to change. Relations with Brazil took a downturn and, in late 2016, the country supported Venezuela's suspension from the Mercosur due to the non-implementation of some of the block's agreements and breach of its 'democratic clause' (Agência Brasil, 2016). Since then, relations between the countries deteriorated progressively and continue to do so since President Jair Bolsonaro took office in 2019, with the promise of creating a stronger alliance with the United States and "liberating Brazil from socialism" (Folha de São Paulo, 2019). In that year, at the opening of the 74th UN General Assembly, Bolsonaro called Venezuela a "dictatorship" that "experiences the cruelty of socialism" (Itamaraty, 2019). Similar to Colombia and nearly sixty other countries, Brazil started to recognize Juan Guaidó as the *de facto* President of Venezuela and, in early 2020, removed several diplomats from its consulates in Venezuela (Agência Brasil, 2019, 2020).

Venezuelan displacement towards Brazil reached its peak between 2018-2019. As of the end of 2020, more than 545,000 Venezuelans had entered Brazil, mostly through the northern border state of Roraima. Since 2017, approximately 235,000 Venezuelans have settled in Brazil.

According to the Mercosur Residence Agreement, in force since 2012, most nationals from Mercosur countries have the right to live and work in another country of the bloc. However, Venezuela never adhered to the agreement. In order to address the irregular situation of Venezuelans on its territory, in 2017, Brazil decided to grant Mercosur residency rights to this population. As stipulated by the bloc's residency agreement, Brazil started to distribute two-year residence permits that, after expired, can be converted into permanent permits. Moreover, Brazil maintained the applicability of the bloc's 2008 Agreement on Travel Documents for Venezuelans, which allows Mercosur nationals to travel between member states without a passport. At the end of 2019, over 145,000 Venezuelans in Brazil held temporary or permanent residency permits (R4V, 2020d).

Despite facilitating residency mechanisms for Venezuelans, Brazil avoided addressing their asylum claims for a while. Notwithstanding incorporating the 1984 Cartagena Declaration refugee definition into its 1997 Refugee Act, historically, the country has only applied the Declaration's criteria in very specific cases. It was not until mid 2019 that Brazil officially recognized the situation in Venezuela as one of 'massive violations of human rights'. In December that year, twelve days before the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, the country followed UNHCR's guidance and recognized Venezuelans as refugees *en masse* through simplified RSD procedures. At the occasion, 21,000 individuals had their asylum claims accepted at once. According to UNHCR (2019c), "this move [was] a milestone in refugee protection in the region". Since then, 46,300 Venezuelans were recognized as refugees and over 96,000 still have pending asylum claims.

In 2018, Brazil launched the ‘Operation Welcome’ in the northern states of Roraima and Amazonas. The Operation is carried out by the Brazilian Armed Forces, UN Agencies (most prominently the UNHCR and IOM), and various NGOs. Rather than being a sign of increased securitization, the employment of the military in Brazil’s response is better explained by the entity’s logistic capacity of setting up a large-scale operation in one of the most remote regions of the country.

Since its establishment, the Operation has set up several triage posts near border crossing points (aimed at providing access to documentation and health services) and thirteen temporary shelters, currently accommodating approximately 6,500 Venezuelans (Ministério da Defesa, 2020). Additionally, considering how distant the northern region of Brazil is from the rest of the country and how costly onward movements on the territory can be, the Operation is also carrying a voluntary relocation scheme. So far, nearly 46,600 Venezuelans have been relocated, usually to pursue opportunities in more prosperous regions or to be reunited with their families (Brazil, 2020).

To date, the Brazilian government has invested approximately \$100 million in the Operation Welcome (FGV, 2020). In 2019, President Jair Bolsonaro came into power with the promise of promoting austerity measures and shrinking the State’s public debt. Since then, expenditures with the Operation have been heavily criticized by the population and some politicians (Bergamo, 2019). Consequently, the attraction of international is seen as an increasingly important factor by the government. Since 2017, Brazil has received more than \$78 million in aid from the UN-led regional response group and the US government alone (R4V, 2019; USAID, 2020). The figure is more than five times smaller than the amount of international assistance Colombia has received during the same period. Nevertheless, the number of displaced Venezuelans in Brazil is 7.5 times smaller than the one in Colombia (R4V, 2020c).

4. UNPACKING RESPONSES IN THE LIGHT OF GLOBAL POLITICS

Overall, responses to displaced Venezuelans in Colombia and Brazil have been positive. Both countries have provided Venezuelans with a pathway to regularization and access to the same services as its own nationals, even if they have done so through different legal mechanisms. While Colombia opted to grant Venezuelans temporary stay permits, Brazil followed UNHCR’s recommendations and started to recognize Venezuelan nationals as refugees.

Colombia and Brazil share borders with Venezuela. As noted by President Bolsonaro, “we can close the border with Venezuela, but [their entry] would occur through another place” (Weterman, 2020). In that, various irregular border crossing points are known by both governments, making the implementation of *non-entrée* policies potentially ineffective.

Authorities in Colombia and Brazil have maintained very similar discourses vis-à-vis the autocratic style of President Nicolás Maduro and the plight of the Venezuelan people. Parallely, the “moral duty” to assist Venezuelans in their “fight for freedom” has been repeatedly invoked

(Concordia, 2018). In the words of President Iván Duque, “we should do everything we can to let the Venezuelan people liberate from the most brutal dictatorship we have seen in years and this is a moral cause” (Georgetown University, 2019).

Scholars have pointed to the manner refugee protection was employed as a political tool during the Cold War (Loescher, 1989). The United States, in particular, used the flight of individuals from the Communist world as means of delegitimizing the Soviet Union and facilitated their RSD procedures and overall protection opportunities. As an example, during the 1970's, whilst involved in the conflict against the Viet Cong, the United States pushed other western countries to recognize displaced individuals from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as *prima facie* refugees (Betts *et al.*, 2012). In that, “recognizing persecution and identifying its perpetrators caused no headaches and the grant of asylum was generally used to reaffirm the failures of communism and the benevolence of the West” (Loescher, 2010, p.50).

In a similar manner, ideological positions and poor relations with the Maduro-led government are seen to influence a more positive response to displaced Venezuelans in Colombia and Brazil. Both countries, currently under right-wing administrations, are contrary to the Chavist movement and members of a global coalition to get Nicolás Maduro out of office. Moreover, Colombia and (more recently) Brazil have established strong alliances with the US government, a prominent critic of the Chavist movement since its emergence. At the international stage, the countries' generous responses are also showcased to the international community.

It is not unusual for governments to be reluctant when spending their scarce resources on foreign nationals. Despite being vinctuated by international instruments, democracies operate under the public scrutiny of their citizens, who might perceive big expenditures on non-nationals in a negative way. In that, international assistance from both multilateral mechanisms (such as the UN-led regional response plan) and bilateral partners (in particular, the US government) has also influenced the capacity of both Colombia and Brazil to maintain their policies for displaced Venezuelans.

Evidently, the UNHCR has also been playing a key-role in supporting and shaping the response to displaced Venezuelans in Colombia and Brazil. First, the UN agency has been channelizing additional international resources and incrementing these states' responses through its various programs. Secondly and, because of its power to direct financial resources, the UNHCR carries some influence over them. For Jacobsen (1996, p.662), once states accept the agency's assistance, the UNHCR sets standards for the operation and assumes a “watchdog role”. Moreover, the agency has also been publicly calling on all states in the region to recognize Venezuelans as refugees and follow the 1951 Geneva Convention non-refoulement principle. Nonetheless, Colombia (and most states in the region) has preferred to legally address the arrival of Venezuelans through temporary stay permits, therefore, maintaining more room for manoeuvre. In Brazil, in addition to the country's desire to be reengaged with the UN system, the

change RSD practice can be traced to the arrival of a comparatively smaller number of displaced Venezuelans on its territory and UNHCR's presence in RSD meetings.

CONCLUSION

In essence, responses to displaced Venezuelans have been positive in Colombia and Brazil. Whilst maintaining an 'open door' policy, both countries have been creating pathways to regularize Venezuelans and allow them to have access to the same rights as its own nationals. While the two countries have created special temporary stay permits for Venezuelans, only Brazil followed UNHCR's recommendations and started to recognize them as refugees, on the basis of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration. Moreover, despite having a bigger number of Venezuelans on its territory, Colombia is receiving far less asylum applications. This research considers that the country's refugee act, which does not allow asylum-seekers to work, might be related to this atypical pattern.

The article elucidated how the host countries' policies were not only based on stricto sensu humanitarian considerations, but on important factors related to their domestic conjunctures and international relations. In the case study, both Brazil and Colombia have been receiving considerable amounts of international assistance to support their responses, in particular, from the United States government and UN-related mechanisms. Notably, both countries have been engaged in an effort against the Chavist administration in Venezuela. In the light of their foreign policy objectives and discourses, welcoming their 'Venezuelan brothers' is not a simple sign of compassion or, in the case of Colombia, a way of honoring two nations' historical ties, but, *inter alia*, a manner of depicting the failure of the Venezuelan State and discrediting its government.

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