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## THE VENEZUELAN MIGRATION PHENOMENON: CONTEXTS AND UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS; A CASE STUDY OF SOBRAL, BRAZIL

O fenômeno da migração venezuelana: contextos e motivações subjacentes; um estudo de caso de Sobral, Brasil

Fenómeno de la migración venezolana: contextos y motivaciones subyacentes; un estudio de caso de Sobral, Brasil

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### ABSTRACT

Contemporary migrations are driven by multiple factors, especially political and religious motivations, internal conflicts, and wars. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2022), the global migrant population grew from 84 million in 1970 to 281 million in 2020. In Brazil, the state of Roraima has become the main gateway for Venezuelan migrants. Data from the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) indicate that, by 2024, approximately 568,058 Venezuelans had entered the country. This study analyzes the causes of Venezuelan family migration and the routes used to reach Brazil through a qualitative and exploratory approach, including literature review, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and content analysis. Most migrants originate from Carabobo, Monagas, and Anzoátegui, traveling between 600 and 1,200 km to reach Roraima. The main drivers of migration are socio-economic, including economic crisis, high living costs, unemployment, precarious public services, and food and health insecurity. Many migrants temporarily settle in cities such as Pacaraima, Boa Vista, Belém, Teresina, Brasília, and Fortaleza, where they access shelters and informal work. The findings suggest that Venezuelan migration to Brazil results from the violation of fundamental rights, characterizing a forced migration process shaped by structural vulnerability.


**Keywords:** immigration; migrants; international mobility; migratory route.

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## RESUMO

As migrações contemporâneas são impulsionadas por múltiplos fatores, especialmente motivações políticas e religiosas, conflitos internos e guerras. De acordo com a Organização Internacional para as Migrações (OIM, 2022), a população migrante mundial cresceu de 84 milhões em 1970 para 281 milhões em 2020. No Brasil, o estado de Roraima tornou-se a principal porta de entrada para imigrantes venezuelanos. Dados da Plataforma Regional de Coordenação Interagencial para Refugiados e Migrantes da Venezuela (R4V) indicam que, até 2024, aproximadamente 568.058 venezuelanos haviam ingressado no país. Este estudo analisa as causas da migração familiar venezuelana e as rotas utilizadas para chegar ao Brasil por meio de uma abordagem qualitativa e exploratória, incluindo revisão de literatura, entrevistas semiestruturadas, questionários e análise de conteúdo. A maioria dos migrantes é oriunda dos estados de Carabobo, Monagas e Anzoátegui, percorrendo entre 600 e 1.200 km até chegar a Roraima. Os principais fatores da migração são de natureza socioeconômica, como a crise econômica, o alto custo de vida, o desemprego, a precariedade dos serviços públicos e a insegurança alimentar e de saúde. Muitos migrantes se estabelecem temporariamente em cidades como Pacaraima, Boa Vista, Belém, Teresina, Brasília e Fortaleza, onde acessam abrigos e o mercado de trabalho informal. Os resultados sugerem que a migração venezuelana para o Brasil decorre da violação de direitos fundamentais, caracterizando um processo de migração forçada marcado por condições estruturais de vulnerabilidade.

**Palavras chave:** imigração; migrantes; mobilidade internacional; rota migratória.

## RESUMEN

Las migraciones contemporâneas están impulsadas por múltiples factores, especialmente motivaciones políticas y religiosas, conflictos internos y guerras. Según la Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM, 2022), la población migrante mundial creció de 84 millones en 1970 a 281 millones en 2020. En Brasil, el estado de Roraima se ha convertido en la principal puerta de entrada para los migrantes venezolanos. Datos de la Plataforma Regional de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela (R4V) indican que, para 2024, aproximadamente 568.058 venezolanos habían ingresado al país. Este estudio analiza las causas de la migración familiar venezolana y las rutas utilizadas para llegar a Brasil mediante un enfoque cualitativo y exploratorio, que incluye revisión de literatura, entrevistas semiestruturadas, cuestionarios y análisis de contenido. La mayoría de los migrantes proviene de los estados de Carabobo, Monagas y Anzoátegui, recorriendo entre 600 y 1.200 km para llegar a Roraima. Los principales factores de la migración son de carácter socioeconómico, como la crisis económica, el alto costo de vida, el desempleo, la precariedad de los servicios públicos y la inseguridad alimentaria y sanitaria. Muchos migrantes se establecen temporalmente en ciudades como Pacaraima, Boa Vista, Belém, Teresina, Brasília y Fortaleza, donde acceden a refugios y al trabajo informal. Los resultados sugieren que la migración venezolana hacia Brasil responde a la vulneración de derechos fundamentales, configurando un proceso de migración forzada marcado por condiciones estructurales de vulnerabilidad.

**Palabras clave:** inmigración; migrantes; movilidad internacional; ruta migratoria.

## INTRODUCTION

Immigration is a contemporary global phenomenon, driven by a variety of economic, social, political, and humanitarian factors. Individuals and groups migrate in search of better living conditions, human development, or even for subsistence needs. In more extreme contexts, migration occurs as a result of political instability, internal conflicts, and wars, reflecting situations of vulnerability that force population displacement.

This study considers immigration as the movement of people of other nationalities into Brazilian territory, with an emphasis on migrants from Venezuela. In this sense, the aim of this research is to

investigate the motivations behind the migration of Venezuelan families and to describe the migratory routes of this population to the state of Ceará, Brazil.

The concept of migration is broad. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2009), the Glossary on Migration defines various forms of migration, which are distinguished from each other. One of them is intentional migration, characterized by the movement of individuals across borders from a country of origin to a country of destination, where there is the possibility of residing either temporarily or permanently.

According to Castiglioni (2009), contemporary international migration is an extremely important phenomenon worldwide, presenting challenges that directly affect the country of origin, the transit countries, and the country of destination. This implies the need for the adoption of a series of measures by all countries involved in the migratory phenomenon.

In the global context, according to the IOM (2022) World Migration Report 2022, the number of migrants worldwide increased from 84 million in 1970 to 281 million in 2020. These annual data reveal a rapid growth of the immigrant population within a short period of time.

The current outlook in South America, according to R4V (2024), shows that migration originating in Venezuela has spread across different geographic regions, with 7,774,494 refugees and migrants from Venezuela worldwide, and 6.59 million settled in the Caribbean and Latin America as of May 2024. In particular, significant numbers of Venezuelans have entered countries such as Colombia, with 2,857,528 (as of January 2024); Peru, 1,542,004 (as of June 2023); Brazil, 568,058 (as of March 2024); Chile, 532,715 (as of December 2022); and Ecuador, 444,778 (as of March 2024).

In statements made by UNICEF (2024), reference is made to the growing economic problems in Venezuela, which have caused the flow of Venezuelans to Brazil to increase significantly in recent years, particularly since 2015, with greater intensity from 2017 onwards.

According to Chanagá, Diniz, and Holanda (2025), Venezuelan nationals arrived in the municipality of Pacaraima seeking to exercise their rights to health, food, education, and employment—rights that had been weakened in their country of origin.

The Brasil de Fato website points out a report presented by Venezuela addressing the economic blockade imposed on the Caribbean country. The document warns that “Venezuela is the fifth country with the highest number of sanctions, out of a total of 34 nations affected by the unilateral coercive measures of the United States and the European Union” (Brasil de Fato, 2021).

In response to the growing migratory wave, the Immigration Law was established, which “provides for the rights and duties of migrants and visitors, regulates their entry and stay in the country, and establishes principles and guidelines for public policies concerning emigrants” (Law No. 13,445, 2018).

According to the Monthly Bulletin of the Federal Subcommittee for the Reception, Identification, and Screening of Immigrants (IOM, 2022), approximately 700,000 Venezuelans were recorded in Brazil, ranging in age from 0 to 60 years or older, having arrived in the country between 2017 and 2022. Venezuelans entered through the city of Pacaraima crossing the border overland, and through São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro by air via their international airports; the information was provided by various Brazilian agencies.

Brazil is the third-largest host country for Venezuelans, surpassed only by Colombia and Peru. According to the gov.br website (2021), during Bolsonaro's administration, the policy of interiorization was adopted, which appears to have been a way to contribute to and ensure respect for the fundamental rights of Venezuelans in the country. However, the state of Roraima, focused on alleviating the migratory flow in the region and ensuring the human rights of Venezuelans, implemented Operation Welcome, which “consists of the voluntary, safe, orderly, and free relocation of these vulnerable individuals from the municipalities of Roraima to other cities in Brazil” (Presidência da República, 2018).

The operation was carried out by the Brazilian Army in partnership with both international organizations and Brazilian institutions, to provide basic emergency medical services such as immunization, migration documentation services, food, and shelter. This aimed to mitigate the growing migratory wave in the state of Roraima, under the argument of “the overload on public service provision and the low availability of employment in the state” (Level and Silva, 2019).

According to H. Castiglioni (2009), an individual's decision to migrate is associated with various conditions, primarily involving changes in the family and social environment.

The participants referred to in this text as Venezuelans, by their nationality, are also considered immigrants under Law No. 13,445 (2018). An immigrant is defined as a person of foreign nationality or stateless who is displaced from their homeland due to work or residence and is in Brazil temporarily or permanently.

On the other hand, it is essential to consider certain aspects of the migratory process, such as the point of departure and arrival, the means and forms of migration, as well as the social capital involved, represented by friends, acquaintances, family members, and other ties that may contribute throughout this journey. In this sense, Truzzi (2008) corroborates Massey's statement by describing migratory networks as “complexes of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, previous migrants, and non-migrants

in both origin and destination areas, through kinship, friendship, and community ties” (Massey, 1988 apud Truzzi, 2008, p. 203).

In Brazil, the scenario of international migration as a receiving country for South American immigrants, particularly Venezuelans in recent years, still suffers from a lack of comprehensive information regarding empirical studies available online. Therefore, it can be inferred that the topic has been little analyzed. On the other hand, this research aims to help readers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject under study.

Given the global and South American migratory context, it is essential to understand the migratory flow to Brazil, taking Venezuelan migration as a reference, and considering the perceptions of Venezuelan migrants who arrived in the Brazilian state and settled in the medium-sized city of Sobral, which has a population of approximately 200,000 and is located in the northwest of Ceará, in the Northeast region of Brazil.

In this regard, the following questions were posed: What was the context in Venezuela and within the families at the time preceding the decision to migrate to Brazil, ultimately choosing Sobral as their destination? How did the displacement to Brazil occur for these Venezuelan families? The study aims to provide answers to these questions.

## THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

This study was conducted in the city of Sobral, Ceará, between 2022 and 2024, and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Vale do Acaraú State University (UVA), under opinion No. 6,662,157.

This is a qualitative exploratory study, based on the lived experiences of individuals. Additionally, a bibliographic survey was conducted using the main indexing databases in the field of human sciences, with emphasis on the Latin American Open Archives Portal (LAOAP), Latindex: Regional Online Information System for Scientific Journals in Latin America, SciELO.org, ScienceDirect (Elsevier), SCOPUS (Elsevier), DOAJ, IOM, UNESCO, UNICEF, as well as reports, books, theses, dissertations, and news websites. The database search employed keywords related to the subject, such as immigration, Venezuelan immigrants, immigration and work, and immigration policy. To expand the scope of sources on the main theme, the survey was conducted in three languages: Portuguese, Spanish, and English.

According to Manzini (1990/1991), the semi-structured interview is highly relevant for the present research, as it does not rely on a pre-established standardization. Typically, this type of interview focuses

on the objective for which the guide is designed, with basic questions that are complemented according to the flow and specific circumstances during the interview.

Information was collected in Portuguese and Spanish, in accordance with the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE). The instruments were applied to eight family units, each represented by one adult.

- Characterization Questionnaire: information on the family unit, ages, place of departure, transit and arrival locations, migration dates, among other data.
  - Semi-structured Interview: a) circumstances preceding the migration; context in Venezuela; b) decision to migrate; c) choice of destination; d) mode of migration.
  - Data Analysis: careful listening to and transcription of the interviews; extraction of survey data.
- a) A simple frequency analysis was conducted based on common words in the participants' statements.
- b) Maps were created using the free software QGIS, version 3.22, based on data from the IBGE and IPECE websites. For Venezuela and its administrative divisions, the HCMGIS OpenData plugin was used. Maps 1 and 2 illustrate the migratory flow sequence.

## MIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION IN THE PRESENT DAY

Currently, in various geographic regions across multiple continents, both migratory and immigration dynamics are observed. Some countries act as major sources of population outflow, while others serve as receiving countries for immigrants—individuals directly affected by the phenomenon, displaced from their country of origin to another country.

For example, migratory flows in Europe intensified, according to the UN (2015), when 107,500 people were recorded moving between European Union countries, thus increasing the number of refugees and resulting in a humanitarian crisis within the bloc. At the same time, according to the UN (2015), South Africa faced a growing migratory wave, which was accompanied by intensified xenophobia. According to the United Nations (2014), the increase in immigrants due to conflicts in the region did not hinder the arrival of people traveling from the African coast to Yemen.

Elsewhere in the world, in Southeast Asia, representatives from 17 countries gathered in Thailand. During the meeting, the arrival of immigrants by boat was emphasized, which had reached its peak and led to the rescue of a large number of vessels off the coasts of Malaysia and Indonesia—countries that provided assistance to stranded boats along their coastal areas.

Russians have not been exempted from the migratory wave affecting the world. According to a UN report cited by EXPANSIÓN (2015), Russian nationals migrate to other countries in the region. In 2015, there were 11,643,276 Russians abroad, equivalent to approximately 7.95% of the Russian population. These Russians became immigrants primarily in Ukraine (28.08%), Kazakhstan (21.99%), and Uzbekistan (9.85%), with the remaining percentage distributed among other countries in the region.

In the Americas, there are statistics regarding migration along the Mexico–United States border. According to the United Nations (2017), 232 Mexican immigrants died at the border over a seven-month period, a record number compared to the previous year, when 204 deaths were recorded. In addition, the border control patrol detained 140,024 immigrants.

According to Guevara (2023), migration of people from South America and other parts of the world, such as Africa and Europe, has become increasingly daring as they attempt to cross the Darién Gap, located in the Panamanian jungle on the border with Colombia. This area is characterized by its difficult land connection between the two countries, as well as the dangers posed by illegal armed groups operating in the region, who expose migrants to multiple forms of violence. Other risks include difficult terrain, encounters with wild animals, and lack of access to basic sanitation and potable water, exposing individuals to extreme levels of danger. Despite all these challenges, the number of people crossing this border area increased dramatically, from 10,000 in one year to 133,726 in 2021 and 248,284 in 2022.

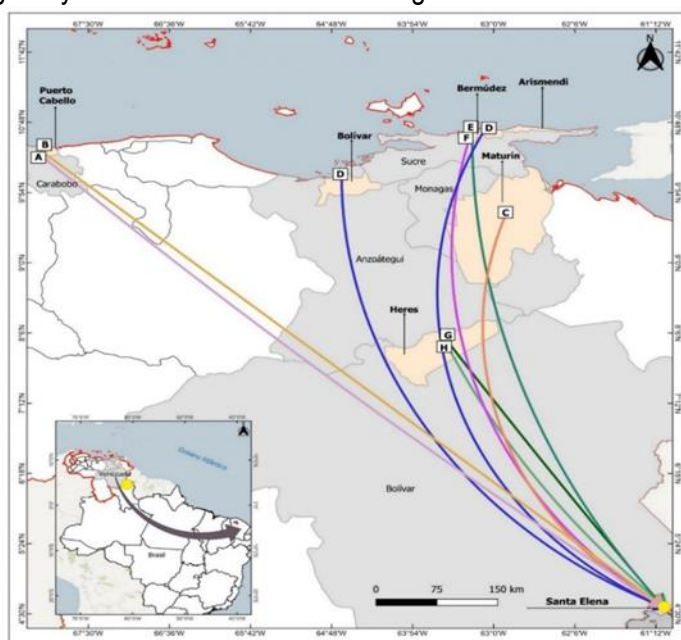
Immigration of Venezuelans to Brazil has increased since 2015. The difficulties caused by the economic and social crisis in Venezuela have led to a growing movement of people over time, with 2017 standing out as a particularly intense year in terms of migration.

According to UNICEF (2024), with the worsening economic and social crisis in Venezuela, the flow of Venezuelan citizens to Brazil has increased significantly in recent years. The arrival of Venezuelans in the country began to rise from 2015, but it was in 2017 that the migratory movement intensified notably.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To illustrate the displacement of Venezuelan families to Brazil, Figure 1 shows the routes taken by Venezuelan families who reached the border between Santa Elena, Venezuela, and Roraima, Brazil.

**Figure 1:** Map of Migratory Routes from the Cities of Origin in Venezuela to the Border (Santa Elena).



**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2025).

The main states of origin are Carabobo, Monagas, and Anzoátegui. In general, Venezuelans traveled between 600 and 1,200 kilometers within Venezuela to reach the border with the state of Roraima. The location for registering Venezuelans leaving the country is in the city of Santa Elena, Venezuela, where the border crossing to the city of Pacaraima (Roraima) took place.

The states of Sucre and Bolívar account for the highest proportion of Venezuelans in the city of Sobral. Figure 1 shows the migratory flow of families from their states of origin to the Venezuelan city of Santa Elena, on the border with the state of Roraima, Brazil. It can be observed that the states of origin belong to three geographic regions in Venezuela: a) Central Mountain Range (Carabobo); b) Eastern Mountain Range (Sucre and northern parts of Anzoátegui and Monagas); and c) Southern Orinoco Region (Bolívar State).

The internal migratory route, highlighted in colors, traces the paths from the cities of origin to Santa Elena, the border with Brazil, with the eight families marked using letters of the alphabet. Movements: A and B departed from Puerto Cabello, the city farthest from the border; D departed from Bolívar; E and F departed from Bermúdez; D departed from Arismendi; C departed from Maturín; and G and H departed from Heres—these families traveled a shorter route to the border (yellow point). All routes within Venezuela are compiled, followed by the journey to the city of Pacaraima in Roraima, Brazil, marking the beginning of immigration for Venezuelans. Brazil has become a viable destination for Venezuelans venturing out, entering through the state of Roraima, as emphasized in the following passage:

The number of people crossing the borders daily remains high. Various ethnic and social groups choose Brazil as a country of refuge, including indigenous peoples, children, and adolescents seeking a better life. Most enter the country through Brazil's northern border, in the state of Roraima, and concentrate in the municipalities of Pacaraima and Boa Vista, the state capital (UNICEF, 2024, p.1). Authors' Translation (2025).

According to the Inter-Agency Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V, 2024), the migratory flow originating in Venezuela has spread across different regions, primarily to neighboring countries in the southern part of the continent. These flows are directed toward countries that offer better basic opportunities, such as employment and quality of life.

In order to provide an overview of the individuals who were the focus of this study, Table 1 presents the characterization of the research participants. The sample is composed of eight families identified by the letters A through H. Among the participants, 13 women and 14 men were recorded, totaling 27 individuals distributed across different age groups. The group of children aged 0 to 5 stands out, with eight children. There are also eight young adults between 26 and 40 years old. In total, 14 participants are minors. Family E has the largest number of members, with six individuals, while Families C and H are single-person households. The details are presented below:

**Table 1:** Characterization of Venezuelan Families Residing in Sobral, Ceará, 2024.

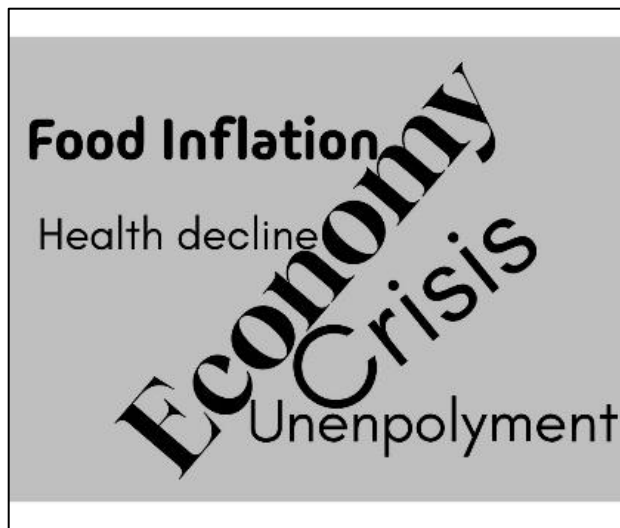
Families	Gender		Age group (years)							Total per family
	F	M	0 - 5	6-12	13-17	18-25	26-40	41-59	60>	
A	2	1	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	3
B	3	1	1	1	-	-	2	-	-	4
C	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
D	2	3	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
E	4	2	1	2	1	-	1	1	-	6
F	1	3	1	1	1	-	1	-	-	4
G	1	2	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	3
H	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>27</b>

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025).

After this initial characterization, the study sought to understand the situation experienced by these families in Venezuela. The following section presents the participants' perceptions of the conditions they faced in the country in the months preceding their departure. In general, when asked about the situation in Venezuela, participants provided brief and objective responses, avoiding direct references to politics,

the government, or specific leaders. These responses are graphically represented as a word cloud in Figure 2.

**Figure 2:** Word cloud about circumstances in Venezuela at the time of migration.



**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2025).

In Figure 2, terms such as economic crisis, food shortage, high cost of living, deterioration of public services, unemployment, and deficiencies in healthcare services prevail. Aspects related to uncertainty about the country's future are also present. The responses regarding living conditions in Venezuela at the time of migration are summarized in Figure 3.

**Figure 3:** Word cloud on the life of Venezuelans before migration.



**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2024).

In the context reflected in Figure 3, expressions such as “Joblessness”, “scarcity”, “Basic needs”, “Health services”, “food inflation”, “Children”, “food insecurity,” and “financial inability to purchase them” prevail. Concerns related to family structure, children’s future, and the desire to migrate in search of better living conditions also emerge. Among the factors that most influenced the decision to leave Venezuela, access to healthcare and employment opportunities stand out as priorities for the interviewees.

The analysis of Figures 1 and 2 reveals a clear convergence between the participants’ general perception of the situation in Venezuela prior to migration and their individual accounts of the context experienced immediately before displacement. A significant correspondence can be observed between these two representations, indicating that issues such as economic crisis, social instability, and deficiencies in public services were effectively experienced by the interviewed families. In this regard, the responses obtained demonstrate a high degree of consistency in the narratives and shared experiences, reinforcing the homogeneity of the factors that motivated migration.

The following are some statements from Venezuelans regarding the period preceding their departure from Venezuela: “The situation in my country was quite complex regarding food, healthcare, and the difficult conditions in hospitals; everything was expensive and very scarce” (G – 20-year-old woman).

Venezuela has attracted attention in recent years due to migration movements. The reasons for these displacements are multiple, as recorded in the text *Venezuelan Migrations*: “Political crisis, shortage of food and medicine, and high inflation, all these factors created a troubled social context that generated a massive flow of Venezuelans to several countries on the continent” (Rosa; Meriguetti, 2018, p. 306). In this regard:

“In Venezuela, the situation was very difficult for us, in fact for everyone we knew in the neighborhood, in the city, and in our family; everyone was going hungry because of the economic crisis, and that is what made me leave my country” (F – 34-year-old woman).

“Life was very difficult because there was nothing to eat, several days without food; the situation was without jobs or money to buy anything” (A – 28-year-old woman).

The testimonies of participants “A,” “G,” and “F” align with the description provided by various authors regarding the context that drove Venezuelans to migrate to different countries in South America. Their accounts highlight the hardships experienced in their country of origin, such as the economic crisis, food shortages, and the collapse of essential services, issues widely discussed in the specialized literature on the subject.

Similarly, the Sky News en Español documentary (2025), presents stories of immigrants who arrived in Mexico from various countries in Latin America, Africa, and other regions of the world, heading toward the northern border between Mexico and the United States in pursuit of the so-called “American dream.” The documentary highlights the multiple challenges faced by migrants on Mexican territory during their journey northward, including precarious travel on the freight train known as *La Bestia*.

Venezuelan immigrants, in particular, share their experiences throughout the migration process, the challenges faced along the journey, and the motivations that led them to leave their country of origin. Among the narratives, the economic crisis in Venezuela, food shortages, difficulties accessing essential services such as healthcare and education, as well as the desire to improve their lives and secure a better future, stand out.

In line with Alonso (2011), it is noted that the characteristics of migration driven by economic difficulties are not the same as those in which the migrant seeks the opportunity to further their studies. Similarly, the motivations of those seeking employment with stability and income differ from those of individuals fleeing violence, persecution, or discrimination.

Once again, the participant expresses her feelings while recounting the experience that motivated the decision to migrate with her family:

“The problems in the economy, employment, everything became very expensive; some people left due to this, as they had no jobs and things like that” (D – 28-year-old woman). In participant D’s account, changes occurring in the country are mentioned; however, she reports that many people left Venezuela due to these circumstances without directly positioning herself as someone who experienced these difficulties. This contrasts with the other testimonies collected in the study, in which such situations were widely acknowledged and experienced more generally by the participants.

As noted by Claro (2020), three main factors influence migration processes: social, political, and economic. The latter is clearly reflected in the participants’ responses. This condition was also confirmed in the testimonies of the other families interviewed, whose narratives, recorded throughout the study, reinforce the centrality of economic difficulties as a motivation for migration, as indicated in the following excerpt: “Before leaving the country, the circumstances were terrible; we had no employment opportunities, we were experiencing food and healthcare crises, and many people like us sought to survive elsewhere” (B – 30-year-old woman).

Participant “B” expressed concern about the lack of employment, recognizing this factor as essential for ensuring access to food and related healthcare. These concerns appear consistently in her reflections and directly influenced her decision to leave the country in search of better opportunities.

Similarly, participant “C” also expressed concerns related to the economic situation and wage levels in his country of origin, identifying these factors as limiting access to food, particularly at the point of purchase. In this regard, he stated: “The economy became very bad; my salary was not even enough to buy food. I thought about leaving to look for work, so I could send money back to Venezuela” (C – 50-year-old man).

According to De Brito, Da Silva, and Do Carmo (2019), the crisis has resulted in restricted access to basic services, such as healthcare and food, in addition to directly impacting inflation and political polarization. The consequences of these adversities have led many Venezuelans to seek refuge and better living conditions elsewhere.

It is possible to perceive the concern with finding a job while, at the same time, being motivated by the salary, which is one of the attractive factors in attempting to address the economic difficulties experienced by the participant. Another participant states:

Our family went through many hardships in Venezuela. At home, the money we earned was not enough to buy anything, not even daily food; everything became so expensive. Our situation was so critical that we often went to bed without dinner, and many times the children cried from hunger—it was a country in decline (E – 57-year-old woman).

In participant “E”’s testimony, the economic crisis is once again evident as a determining factor in the decision to migrate. According to the participants, this circumstance is primarily reflected in the difficulty of acquiring basic everyday items, revealing the severity of the conditions faced in their country of origin.

According to Gonçalves (2023), the fact that Venezuela relies on a single commodity as its main source of revenue is unhealthy for a country’s economy, especially when it is tied to other geopolitical actors. The statements of the Venezuelans interviewed further confirm the observations of Soares (2004). The following testimony illustrates this: “The country was in an economic crisis; the monthly salary was not even enough for us to get by” (H – 60-year-old man).

The testimony, focused on the problem of Venezuela’s economic crisis, highlights the participant’s concern with wages and their inability to sustain themselves in the country. According to researchers Pennaforte and Oliveira (2019), the economic crisis in Venezuela cannot be attributed to a single cause. However, a possible explanation for the current collapse is the country’s financial isolation, combined with external, productive, and fiscal crises that affect it.

The statements made by the participants, recorded above, align with the observations of H. Castiglioni (2009). According to her, the act of migrating often stems from feelings of dissatisfaction with

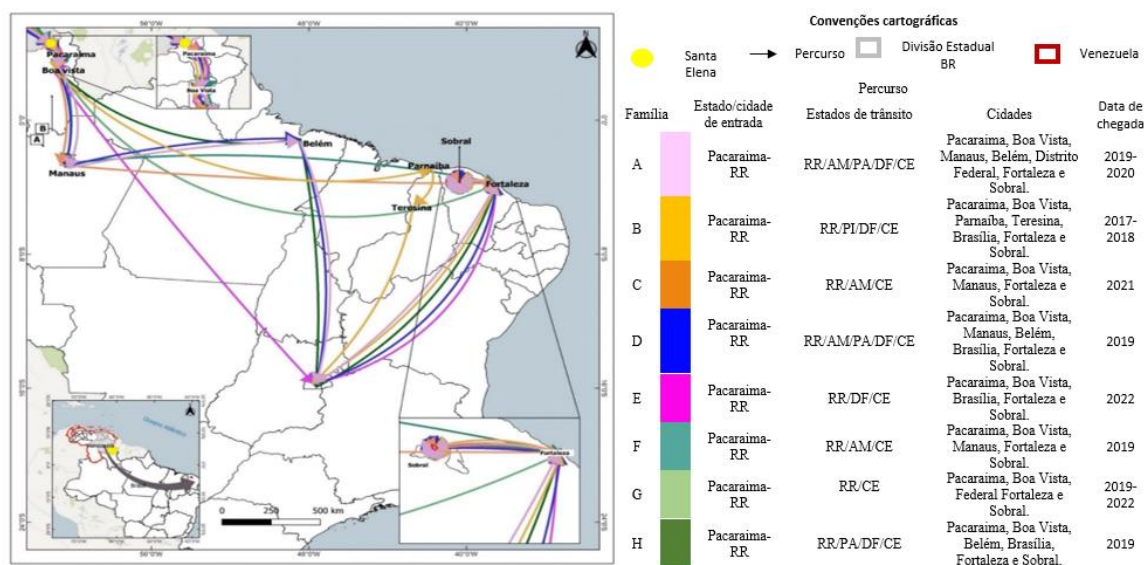
the country of residence, generating hope regarding a new country that may fulfill the immigrant's aspirations.

As presented in this section, the context experienced in Venezuela during the period preceding migration was strongly marked by the economic crisis and the resulting chaos. The motivations for migrating varied according to each individual's reality, and were recorded in the testimonies as expressions of the feelings experienced at the moment of deciding to choose Brazil as the destination country. These accounts also describe how the migration process took place, as will be presented in the following section.

### Decision to migrate from Venezuela and immigrate to Brazil

International family migration is represented in Figure 4, where the migratory route is illustrated on the map through colored arrows, each corresponding to the path taken by one of the participating families. Some Venezuelans remained temporarily in cities such as Belém (PA) and Teresina (PI) for periods ranging from two to six months. According to the testimonies, during this time they were received in temporary shelters in the border region and engaged in informal activities, such as street vending and other trades. Air travel followed the route between the cities of Boa Vista (RR), Manaus (AM), Belém (PA), Teresina (PI), Brasília (DF), and Fortaleza (CE), completing the journey to their final destination.

**Figure 4:** Map of the migratory route of Venezuelans to the state of Ceará.



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

Figure 4 contains captions identifying the families (A through H), with arrows representing the route taken by each family group. It is noteworthy that families A and B departed from the same city of origin and arrived at the same final destination, although on different dates; in both cases, the men traveled first, followed later by their wives and daughters.

In the case of family G, two distinct dates were recorded, indicating that the man migrated first and the wife only years later. Meanwhile, the members of families E, F, and H entered Brazil in the same year. Families C and H presented only one migration date, as they consisted of single-person households, unlike family D, which also recorded a single date but referring to the joint journey of all its members.

From the testimonies, it is possible to grasp the families' feelings regarding the displacement from their communities of origin, the difficult events faced along the journey, and the experiences at the border between Venezuela and Brazil, leading up to the immigration process that culminated in their arrival in the medium-sized city of Sobral. The following testimonies describe this journey:

My expectations were of a good place to find work. My husband was already living and employed in Brazil. The journey from the border, where we stayed for two months, went like this: from Boa Vista to Belém. We rested for a day and then, I remember we left on a trip from the airport and went to the Federal District, to finally arrive in Fortaleza at two in the morning. My husband was waiting for us to take us to Sobral. (A – 28-year-old woman).

Family A did not emphasize the internal displacement within Venezuela, merely mentioning that they used their own resources for the journey. They reported arriving in Boa Vista, where they stayed for two months with their daughter, before continuing on their own, departing from the local airport toward Belém (PA). There, they remained for a short period before boarding a connecting flight, whose final destination was the city of Fortaleza (CE), where, at dawn, they reunited with their partner.

The journey was just the two of us, my daughter and me; the idea was to keep the family together. It took two days from my hometown to the border, with some mandatory paperwork at the Federal Police here in Brazil. From Boa Vista, we went to Teresina and then to Parnaíba, where we lived for two months—my husband was in that city for work. Afterwards, we decided to leave for Fortaleza; on the way, we went to the Federal District by plane, and finally to Sobral by bus. (B – 30-year-old woman).

In the testimony above, Family B's motivation for immigration was recorded as the pursuit of family unity. The journey to the border occurred without incidents, with the only noteworthy event being the registration at the Federal Police. Their trajectory in Brazil began with departure from Boa Vista toward Parnaíba, their first destination, where the family was hosted by a relative. After staying in that city for two months, they proceeded definitively to Sobral, motivated by employment opportunities.

The journey to Brazil happened by chance. A neighbor in my neighborhood told me to go to the border; he convinced me to travel in search of work. I had already planned to leave; I just had to change the destination. With no expectations, I was willing to go wherever there was a possibility of work—it could have been Boa Vista or Manaus. I walked a lot looking for a job but

found nothing, only day labor. At the border, I met a Venezuelan who invited me to Ceará. A few days after he left, I called to ask about job opportunities, and he told me to come to Sobral because there was a vacancy for me. I left Boa Vista for Manaus, stayed there only a few hours before taking a flight to Fortaleza, and finally arrived in Sobral. (C – 50-year-old man).

Participant C reported that, initially, he had planned to migrate to Colombia but abandoned this idea on the eve of the trip after receiving an invitation from a neighbor to go to the border with Brazil. He stated that he covered all the expenses of the journey, emphasizing that the route was guided, above all, by his own will. It is noteworthy that his main motivation was work-related, seeking a source of income to support the family that remained in Venezuela.

We left for Brazil because it was close to the Venezuelan border; no one had a plan. I think that if there had been another closer option, we would have gone there. I traveled alone with some acquaintances who worked at the border, exchanging money. In Pacaraima, there was three days of paperwork; I stayed in a hotel and was called to receive the documentation that allowed my entry into Brazil. That same night, I went to the city's airport, as the tickets were already booked for the next day, and I flew to Ceará. Knowing that I had already arrived at the destination gave me a sense of relief; my father-in-law and boyfriend went to Fortaleza to bring me to Sobral. (G – 22-year-old woman).

Participant G reported that the choice of Brazil as the destination country was a family decision, taking into account the geographical proximity between the two countries. The journey was carefully planned by her, with financial support from her boyfriend, who was already living in Brazil at the time. The departure was organized, accompanied by acquaintances from the city of origin to Pacaraima (Roraima), where she stayed for three days while waiting for her documentation to be processed. After this period, she continued her journey to Fortaleza, where she was met by her boyfriend and father-in-law, who took her to her residence in Sobral. The testimony highlights that prior planning was essential to minimize the difficulties of the journey.

I migrated to Brazil because it is close to Venezuela. We saved some money at the border, where we arrived with my son, and immediately thought of finding work to cover food and housing expenses, through an informal sale of papelão, a cold drink made with rapadura and lime. The city we chose to go to was decided suddenly. During the time we lived in Boa Vista, I met a Venezuelan and his family who invited us to try our luck in Sobral. My son researched online and found that the city was calm, small, and pleasant. The two of us left at night to reach Fortaleza by plane. At the airport, we took a taxi that brought us to Sobral. The journey was smooth, and we were welcomed by an acquaintance of the friend who had made the invitation. (H – 60-year-old man).

The member of Family H reported the reasons that led him to choose Brazil as a destination, stating that he came in search of a new life opportunity. He described his arrival at the border, the initial period in temporary housing through rent, and the strategies used to support himself in Boa Vista. The choice of Sobral as a place to restart was influenced by the invitation of a familiar family during their stay at the border between Venezuela and Brazil. It is also noteworthy that upon arriving in Sobral, Family H was

welcomed into the home of an acquaintance of these friends, highlighting the bonds of solidarity established throughout the migration process.

The analyzed testimonies pertain to families A, B, C, G, and H, all of whom fully bore the costs of the journey from their cities of origin to the city of Sobral. Each family independently determined the routes and modes of transportation used. With the exception of family H, all traveled separately, with the men (usually the primary providers) going first, followed by the women and children, as was the case for families A and B.

It is worth noting that none of the families reported experiencing significant discomfort or adversities during the immigration process in Brazil. Upon arrival, these families were initially assisted by the Federal Police, which provided support with entry procedures and other formalities established by Operation Welcome Operação Acolhida. In parallel, many Venezuelans received help from friends and acquaintances in the border region, who provided guidance on locations, internal routes, available means of transportation, and offered them accommodation upon their arrival in Sobral.

The families perceive the border not only as the gateway to Brazil but also as a space imbued with significant memories experienced by Venezuelans. The cities of Pacaraima and Boa Vista serve as key reference points in this process: Pacaraima represents the initial point of entry into the host country, while Boa Vista stands out as the place where immigrants seek guidance on shelters, healthcare services, education, and, for some, opportunities for informal work—a reality experienced by several participants.

These experiences are consistent with IOM (2022) data, which recorded the entry of approximately 700,000 Venezuelans into Pacaraima by land over a five-year period.

According to the UNICEF portal (2024), more than 60,000 people arrived in Brazil in this context, including 21,000 minors; many of these young people came unaccompanied or accompanied by individuals outside their immediate family. In the first eight months of 2024 alone, approximately 250 Venezuelans crossed the border daily through the city of Pacaraima.

Similarly, the arrival of Venezuelans in the city of Sobral was also observed. As reported by Chanagá, Diniz and Holanda (2024), the families expressed the need to migrate to Brazil in search of the fulfillment of fundamental rights, such as access to healthcare, education, and decent work. Along the same lines, the G1-Roraima portal (2024) reported that Venezuelans have been entering the country in pursuit of these same basic rights.

In the testimonies below, from families D, F, and E, it was found that the migratory paths from leaving their places of origin to choosing the country and arriving in their destination city in Brazil were largely conditioned by circumstances beyond the participants' control, such as the integration process in

Ceará, directed by the Federal Government. In this context, it was the migratory procedure itself that determined the course of these families, rather than planned or voluntary decisions. The testimonies on this matter are presented below:

My life before leaving was very good; I lived with my husband at the border and was able to work to support myself properly. I became pregnant, and in the middle of my pregnancy I experienced the beginning of a miscarriage, which complicated everything. That's when I decided to go to Pacaraima in search of healthcare services to deliver my daughter. However, once there, they did not allow me to leave with the baby because she was a newborn and Brazilian. So we stayed there. I took a course that lasted several months and learned so much. Later, I was selected to travel to Ceará for work with Lojas Renner—practically, destiny decided for us to come and live in this city (D—Woman, 28 years old).

In the testimony of the participant from family D, there is an absence of detailed information about the migratory route from her city of origin to the border. She reports that, while still at the border, she was able to work and support herself alongside her husband. It is noteworthy that the migration to Brazil was directly related to seeking basic healthcare, particularly due to her pregnancy. The participant highlighted the care shown by the medical team for both herself and her newborn daughter. Subsequently, she entered a shelter, where she lived and took part in training activities until being transferred to Sobral through the employment opportunity facilitated by Operation Welcome, motivated by a job offer from a nationally recognized company.

In those days when I decided to leave my city, life was so difficult. I was recovering from a cesarean to deliver my youngest child, unemployed, and unable to support myself. Days passed without food; I became very thin and worried about what could happen to my children. I packed a suitcase with a few clothes, took the children, and went to the border as best as I could, partly by hitchhiking and partly on foot. In Pacaraima, we spent five days and nights on the street without even a blanket; we slept on the ground. There were some Venezuelan youths who were heading to Boa Vista and told us to go there, saying they would help carry the children. That day, my 2-year-old son went missing, but thank Good we found him that same evening. We were welcomed into a shelter, where we lived for a year and a half. At the shelter, I received training until a job opportunity in Sobral became available; I imagine that if this job had been in another city, we would have gone there. (F—Woman, 34 years old).

In the testimony of the participant from family F, it is possible to perceive the difficult trajectory experienced from the period preceding her departure from Venezuela. The decision to migrate and the way the process unfolded were marked by significant challenges. Upon arriving in Brazilian territory, she faced severe limitations, even living on the streets with her three children, until they were taken in at a shelter in Boa Vista. From that moment, the opportunity arose to participate in a training program, which culminated in securing a job at Lojas Renner through the employment opportunity facilitated by Operation Welcome—a decisive factor in her transfer to the city of Sobral, where she was finally able to start anew.

My eldest daughter had left for this country a long time ago, and we also decided to migrate to Brazil. The idea was to find a job for me and my youngest daughter, the adults in the household. We arrived in Pacaraima, where we lived for three months. In Boa Vista, we spent several days

on the street under the sun and rain until UNHCR took us in. We stayed in the shelter for several months; the nights there were good and safe, especially because the children slept well and we had three meals a day. During the day, we would walk around the city so much that the children's shoes got worn out. Getting to Sobral involved a lot of paperwork; from there, we traveled by plane, with the Brazilian government paying for our journey. Everything was very beautiful. You know, this country helps immigrants, and here we have the same rights as Brazilians. (E—Woman, 57 years old).

It can be observed that the migration decision of family E was directly influenced by the prior experience of their daughter, who was already residing in Brazil, and by the hope of finding employment opportunities for the two adult women in the family. The testimony provides details about their arrival in Pacaraima, where they stayed for three months. Subsequently, they faced travel under extreme conditions to Boa Vista, where they were received by a non-governmental organization that provided them with food and shelter. One of the most memorable aspects of their time in the shelter was the daily effort to move around the city, to the point of wearing out their shoes from the long walks. During this period, they awaited the granting of the Residence Authorization for Family Reunification, which enabled formal immigration and reunion with their daughter, who was already established in Sobral.

Families D, E, and F were assisted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), receiving shelter, food, and other essential resources during their stay in the camps. It is important to highlight that these three families faced severe economic hardships, which left them fully dependent on the support of the Brazilian State. As outlined in the interiorization policy, emphasized on gov.br (2021), this action seeks to guarantee the fundamental rights of the Venezuelan population in Brazilian territory. According to UNICEF (2024), the Brazilian cities of Pacaraima and Boa Vista serve as host cities for those who arrive and remain, as well as for the thousands of Venezuelans who transit through them on their way to other destinations in Brazil.

On the other hand, the women from the mentioned families expressed in their testimonies the fundamental importance of work for their own subsistence. As Lisboa (2006) points out, countless women around the world migrate each year in search of employment opportunities, particularly in the domestic sector, which often represents the only means of ensuring their survival and achieving a certain degree of independence.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is evident that, in the face of the adversities triggered in Venezuela—especially after the fall in oil prices and the intervention of foreign actors—a wave of suffering spread among the population. The shortage of essential products, medical supplies, and other goods, aggravated by trade blockades that hinder free negotiation with international suppliers, has intensified the crisis experienced in the country. Overcoming this scenario depends, to a great extent, on political will, both at the national and international levels.

Despite the adverse context, Venezuela has demonstrated a certain resilience in the face of the challenges imposed by external factors, such as the reduction of oil revenues and the restrictions on importing goods essential for the population's survival, such as medicines and food.

It is concluded that the displacements of Venezuelans presented in this study were conditioned by a set of specific circumstances experienced in Venezuela. It is observed that the migratory phenomenon led by these Venezuelans in the city of Sobral presents particularities both in relation to the migratory flow and to the population characteristics involved.

In the migratory flow analyzed, it is observed that the Venezuelans' states of origin belong to three distinct geographical regions of Venezuela: (i) Central Cordillera (state of Carabobo), (ii) Eastern Cordillera (state of Sucre and the northern areas of the states of Anzoátegui and Monagas), and (iii) the Southern Orinoco region (state of Bolívar). Internal displacement within Venezuelan territory was carried out by land, with routes ranging from 600 to 1,200 kilometers, having as an intermediate destination the city of Santa Elena de Uairén, in the state of Bolívar.

From that point onward, uncertainty prevailed regarding the final destination in Brazil. For most of the Venezuelans who initially arrived—particularly the heads of households—it was unclear which city would become their place of resettlement within Brazilian territory, rendering the migratory process even more unstable and uncertain.

The migratory route within Brazilian territory began in the state of Roraima, specifically in the city of Boa Vista. All respondents had access to information about the city of Sobral; many of them, through conversations with fellow countrymen, heard accounts of Venezuelans who had settled in the city and found employment.

Once the final destination was determined, the migrants faced various adversities, such as the lack of temporary shelters, scarcity of employment opportunities, and insufficient food. Consequently, many—

particularly the heads of households—resorted to informal activities as a means of generating resources to fund the continuation of their journey.

Those who were relocated through Brazilian government programs reported that the journey to Sobral included stops and connections in other states of the country, highlighting the complexity of the internal migratory process en route to the final destination.

It is important to emphasize that the primary aspiration and need of Venezuelans is centered on the pursuit of better basic living conditions, particularly regarding economic aspects, access to employment, healthcare, and food. Consequently, it is understood that these demands should be urgently addressed and reviewed within the scope of public policies at the federal, state, and municipal levels.

Regarding pre-migration living conditions, it is evident that the decision to leave the country of origin was driven primarily by the pursuit of economic stability and the fulfillment of fundamental rights, such as access to work, healthcare, and food.

In the specific case of migration from Venezuela to Brazil, with the final destination being the city of Sobral, the motivations stand out as access to food, employment opportunities, and healthcare services. These aforementioned drivers, in turn, prove to be recurring factors in various migratory contexts around the world.

The understanding of the reasons driving migration is directly related to the expectations of the immigrants. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the host country to anticipate these needs through the formulation and implementation of effective public policies, enabling the dignified and organized integration of these individuals into their destination territories.

It should be added that the fundamental role of migratory networks was identified, established through contact with family members, friends, and acquaintances—both in the country of origin and in the border region. These connections play a significant role in the circulation of information regarding possible destinations, routes, and modes of migration to Brazil. This phenomenon, as noted by Truzzi (2008), highlights the importance of social networks in the migratory process, particularly in providing guidance and support to individuals during their displacement.

It was observed that the migratory flow of three of the families participating in the study was directly influenced by the interiorization policy promoted by the Brazilian government. However, it is noted that this policy exhibited a markedly short-term bias, relocating immigrants to locations that, at the time, did not yet offer concrete guarantees for labor market integration for one of the families. This circumstance highlights the need for more structured planning, taking into account not only physical displacement but also the effective social and economic integration of immigrants in the host destinations.

From the perspective of the immigrants, it is possible to identify consistent patterns both in terms of knowledge about the host country's history and with regard to their own migratory experience. The main observations indicate a limited engagement of these individuals with topics related to the government or local politics. In the respondents' accounts (all adults over the age of 22), there was no direct mention of these issues.

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