

Academic freedom and the untold story of Venezuelan scholars under pressure

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Since 2010, Venezuela has faced a severe humanitarian crisis and growing restrictions on civic freedoms, forcing an estimated 5–6 million Venezuelans to leave the country. This accounts for 15%–20% of the country's population currently living abroad. A significant number of the people who see themselves as forced to migrate are highly qualified academics with postgraduate degrees, including postdoctoral researchers and university professors. Their situation and experiences of living in exile, however, rarely find their way into scholarly analyses. In this chapter, we address this gap by examining the factors that force Venezuelan scholars to flee their home country as well as the opportunities and challenges they encounter in their host countries. We focus specifically on the exodus of Venezuelan scholars during 2014–2020, the period when the emigration of Venezuelans increased dramatically due to the worsening political and humanitarian crises as well as the widespread violations of human rights.

Methodologically, the research draws on a systematic review of secondary literature and country reports by organizations such as Aula Abierta and Scholars at Risk (SAR) as well as insights from original semi-structured interviews conducted in online meetings with Venezuelan scholars in exile. The interviews were conducted from August through November 2020 using a snowball sampling technique identifying 230 Venezuelan scholars living abroad. Of this group, 50 scholars were approached for semi-structured interviews to gain a more in-depth understanding of their experiences of living and working in exile. Here, we aimed for a sample of Venezuelan professors from different universities and from a variety of disciplines who currently reside in one of the three main destination countries for highly qualified Venezuelans: Colombia, Ecuador, and Chile. All quoted interviewee statements in this chapter are translated from Spanish to English.

In the following sections, we first discuss the current situation of an unprecedented exodus of Venezuelan academics, which is followed by an analysis of the push and pull factors that cause them to migrate. We then synthesize the exile experiences of the scholars we interviewed to reveal the challenges they face in their host countries. We conclude with the implications of Venezuelan scholars migrating, including opportunities for the internationalization of knowledge as well as for reviving national academia when the return of scholars to Venezuela becomes possible.

An unprecedented exodus of Venezuelan scholars

Three different migration flows can be identified throughout last decades out of Venezuela. The first flow occurred from 2007 to 2013 after the reelection of president Hugo Chávez who pushed for constitutional reform. This period has been described by several academics who were interviewed as the “beginning of a new phase of authoritarianism in Venezuela” (personal interviews, August 24–30, 2020). Due to increasing chaos, Colombo-Venezuelan scholars in particular left Venezuela and migrated to Colombia. Colombo-Venezuelans have both nationalities as many Colombians who had to flee to Venezuela in earlier years due to the internal conflict in Colombia. The second migration flow followed from 2014 to 2019. This was caused by serious human rights violations during the protests of 2014 and 2017 and the worsening of the humanitarian emergency resulting from a severe shortage of food and medicines.¹ Besides the scholars with a dual nationality, more scholars saw themselves as being forced to leave the country due to human rights violations and the dire humanitarian situation. Finally, the third wave occurred from 2019 to 2020. The reasons given for this during the interviews were the ever worsening humanitarian situation, including the collapse of electricity systems and public services across the country (Aula Abierta Venezuela, 2020c, 2020d).

While the socioeconomic situation heavily affects the education and research system in Venezuela, neither the Education Ministry nor Higher

1 For several years the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has observed a gradual deterioration in the democratic institutional system and the human rights situation in Venezuela that has significantly intensified and become widespread since 2015 (IACHR, 2017a, 2017b; OAS, 2018).

Education Ministry has presented credible annual accountability reports as of 2016. This bespeaks a public policy of intentionally not informing and disinforming the public, including cases of disseminating unsupported information and even information that is proven to be contradictory (Gómez Gamboa et al., 2020a; Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos, 2017). Additionally, there is no reliable information about how many Venezuelan scholars have emigrated. A statistical study by Requena and Caputo (2016)² determined that 13% of the total researchers in the country have been forced to leave their jobs. It is estimated, however, that the numbers are much higher (personal interviews, August 24–30, 2020).

From 2017 to 2020, alarming levels of professor dropout rates from 30%–50% were reported by Aula Abierta (2019a), a non-governmental organization (NGO) that works for the promotion and defense of human rights in the education sector within Latin America. Resignation by and requests for sabbaticals from professors at the universities became recurrent. In 2019, the Federation of Associations of University Professors of Venezuela (FAPUV) placed the dropout rate of university professors at 40% since 2013. The SAR's Free to Think Report of 2020 stated that by 2019, approximately 50% of professors from all Venezuelan universities had left the country. Likewise, 30% of the country's researchers (who work in labs or research centers) had emigrated by April 2019 (El Nacional, 2019). By 2018, budget constraints and the migration of researchers had reportedly left 77% of laboratories in Venezuela—including labs that until recently were major contributors to the country's public health system—paralyzed or abandoned (Conte de San Blas, 2018; SAR, 2020; University of Los Andes Human Rights Observatory, 2020). This represents dire circumstances, especially amid the spread of COVID-19.

To indicate the severity of the situation, from 2017 to 2020, the Law School of the University of Zulia (LUZ), one of the major universities in the country, suffered a 50% decrease in its faculty. Of 134 active professors in 2017, only 68 professors remained active in 2020. Counting the professors who resigned (18) and those who requested permits and sabbaticals (11), the number of

2 According to Requena and Caputo (2016), 1,670 Venezuelan scientists (from 1960–2014) have been forced to leave the country. They constituted 13% of the total research publication community, which was made up of 12,850 research publishers until 2014. They were responsible for the production of 13,240 accredited publications, or 28% of the national total of such publications produced by the country from 1960 to 2014 (42,783 publications).

professors who left the Law School of LUZ was 29 (21.6%) during this period, of which the majority stated that they intended to migrate to another country. The rest comprised 30 (22.3%) professors who retired during 2017–2020, and seven (5.2%) who passed away.

Simon Bolívar University, with one of the most prominent engineering programs in the country, had only 26 research programs left in 2018; in 1997, it had conducted 165 research programs. According to the National Observatory of Science and Technology, in 2012, the university financed 974 research projects, whereas only 62 projects were financed in 2015 (SAR, 2020, p. 111; Red Iberoamericana de Indicadores de Ciencia y Tecnología, 2018).

The emigration of doctors (professors or students from postgraduate medical programs) generates serious risks to public access to health services in the country. Along with the decrease in medical specialists in Venezuela, graduate students in 2019 also showed an increased tendency to migrate after completing their studies. At least 50% of graduates in 2016 emigrated in 2017. One hundred percent of the graduates from the specialty of otorhinolaryngology at University of Zulia (LUZ) migrated, 80% of graduates of thoracic surgery migrated, and 75% from the program on ICU of the LUZ medicine postgraduate program left the country as well.³ Notably, the brain drain of medics in the context of the current pandemic has had devastating effects on the public health situation in the country.

The massive exodus of scholars has also had a drastic effect on the overall research production of Venezuelan universities and their position in international university rankings. From 2017 to 2020, this effect was most obvious: based on the QS Latin American University Rankings, Venezuela's position fell from number 115 to number 160 (QS, 2020a, 2020b; Scimago Institutions Rankings, n.d.-a). According to the SAR's Free to Think Report (2020), the country's research output (the number of scientific publications) has also declined significantly since the start of the 2000s. Cited in the SAR's report, SCImago Journal & Country Rank, a publicly available online portal that ranks countries by journal output, revealed that Venezuelan universities provided 4.8% of the journal articles from Latin America in

3 During 2019 and 2020, an alarming dropout level devastated the postgraduate medicine programs at LUZ in cardiovascular surgery (71.4% dropout rate). The average number of students of every postgraduate course at LUZ is not even four students, while every program is designed for 25 students. That is 84% fewer students than were expected to sign up.

1998 (roughly proportional to Venezuela's population as a percentage of the overall population of Latin America at the time) (Worldometers, n.d.). By 2019, that number dropped to 0.8% (Scimago Institutions Rankings, n.d.-b). Thus, if in the late 1990s Venezuela's higher education and research system occupied one of the highest positions in Latin America, the severe humanitarian crisis, political repression, and resultant massive exodus of Venezuelan academics throughout the 2010s have left the country with few prospects for the development of science and progressive reforms in higher education.

Push factors for the exodus of Venezuelan scholars

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has identified the lack of democracy and the severe humanitarian crisis as the main causes of the unprecedented exodus of Venezuelans.⁴ The situation in the Venezuelan higher education sector is indicative of these trends. After Hugo Chavez came to power in 1999, the higher education and research system became an ideological instrument in the hands of the country's leadership, and critical voices at universities were systematically targeted by the "revolutionary government" via both economic and political means, ultimately driving many intellectuals out of the country. In addition, the entire education sector faced a gradual reduction in faculty salaries and social benefits. Autonomous public universities had their operational budgets frozen, and staff salaries were not paid despite enormous hyperinflation.⁵ If prior to the 2000s, getting a university degree and working in the higher education sector was one of the main pathways for upward social mobility, by 2010 university employees faced an unprecedented decline in their economic resources and social prestige.

The situation worsened considerably in 2016 with the onset of the humanitarian crisis. From 2017 to 2020, a monthly university professor's salary in Venezuela ranged from US\$3 to US\$20 (Comisión Interamericana

4 The UNHCR has identified it as "One of the largest population exodus in The Americas since 1950" (Bastidas, 2018). The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on March 7, 2018 stated that he was deeply disturbed by the growing exodus of Venezuelans (IACHR, 2018; VenEuropa Canal, 2018).

5 For 2019, hyperinflation in Venezuela was around 10 million percent according to the International Monetary Fund (Hanke, 2019).

de Derechos Humanos, 2019; IACHR, 2019, p. 197), which was barely enough to survive. In September 2018, the National Assembly declared a humanitarian emergency in the education sector (Barboza Gutiérrez, n.d.). And, in November 2018, the FAPUV condemned the humanitarian situation of professors forced to cope with “starvation wages and very poor conditions to provide a quality education” (Aula Abierta Venezuela, 2018a, p.2; González, 2018, p.1). For many, leaving the country became a matter of their families’ survival. As one of our interviewees mentioned:

I felt that I could no longer bear to continue living in Venezuela. It was not only the economic situation or social insecurity, it was everything: food insecurity, insecurity in medicines, health, police violence, lack of basic services. It was the unworthy and inhumane treatment that the government applied to us in every way. My salary was barely enough to eat for a week, and I had to work like crazy to be able to keep myself afloat.

In 2020, with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the budgetary asphyxia of higher education institutions was aggravated even further (Aula Abierta Venezuela, 2020a). Public universities experienced record budgetary deficits of over 90%, as in the case of the Central University of Venezuela, or even as high as 99%, as in the case of LUZ (Aula Abierta Venezuela, 2020e; Efecto Cocuyo, 2018; Luque, 2020). This was accompanied by systematic infringements on academic freedom and university autonomy through the practices of criminalization of protest, discrimination and retaliation against university students and faculty who challenged the government’s narratives, and censorship of critical debates both on university campuses and beyond (Derechos Universitarios, 2020; Gómez Gamboa et al., 2019, pp. 101–206).

In May 2020, the President of the National Constituent Assembly threatened members of the Academy of Physics, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, who issued an academic report warning about a possible increase in the number of COVID-19 cases. He requested activating Operation Tun-Tun, meaning that repressive revolutionary forces should target and intimidate academicians. Similarly, the university professor and director of the Graduate School of Medicine at LUZ, Professor Freddy Pachano, was threatened by the governor of Zulia State after speaking out on two suspected COVID-19 cases in Zulia State. At the time, the Venezuelan government was still denying the presence of the coronavirus in the country. These practices of intimidation

restricted Pachano from freely speaking out on this important topic and forced him to leave the country.⁶

These are examples of how earlier patterns of the state's infringements on critical voices in academia were repeated. In 2017, Professor Santiago Guevara was arbitrarily detained and brought before a military court after his publications on the economic situation in the country. Gómez et al. (2020b) stated that in his trial, the prosecutor presented the scholar's books and academic papers as evidence of his crimes. In 2019, a resolution was issued by the National Council of Universities, which requested the initiation of a criminal inquiry against the members of the Universities Rectors Association for not recognizing the "de-facto government" of Nicolás Maduro (Aula Abierta Venezuela, 2019b; *Gazeta Oficial de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela*, 2019).

The decline in academic freedom under President Maduro, who continued along the line of the Chávez government and further curtailed the autonomy of universities, was also evident in the interviews we conducted for this study. A Venezuelan scholar now living in Colombia stated:

There was an indirect dismissal from the National School of the Magistracy, by taking away the position I had. This happened without prior notice and without any authority. I'm sure this was done for being clearly anti-Chávez. This made it difficult for me to get a job in my area The situation was becoming more and more difficult . . . Those who know me think that if I had stayed in Venezuela, I would probably be in jail by now. (Personal interview, August 24, 2020)

Moreover, scholars now living in exile mentioned they had faced threats of physical violence and were forced to leave Venezuela because of fear for their safety and that of their family members:

I received death threats aimed towards my daughters. Also, I had threatening graffiti on the door of my residence. . . . I was threatened several

6 After having published on his Twitter account the existence of two suspected cases of coronavirus in the Autonomous Service "Hospital Universitario de Maracaibo" (SAHUM in Spanish), Governor Prieto announced to the press that Professor Pachano had to inform the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM) about his statements and said that he would immediately request the Public Ministry to open a criminal investigation against him because his statements were related to state security issues (Aula Abierta Venezuela, 2020b).

times by criminals and uniformed personnel in the service of the regime. (Personal interview, August 28, 2020)

The situation as here described has been documented in international reports on the state of academic freedom in Venezuela. The SAR's 2020 Free to Think Report (SAR, 2020, p. 111) stated that according to the Academic Freedom Index (AFI), a global analysis of national levels of respect for academic freedom, Venezuela received a score of 0.28 out of 1.00 (a "D" ranking). This was near the bottom quintile of the 140 countries evaluated and was comparable with those of countries including Libya (0.24), Rwanda (0.22), Cuba (0.14), and Yemen (0.14) and well below the average of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (0.77) (V-Dem Institute, 2020). Thus, the major infringements on academic freedom, fear of prosecution, and security concerns have driven from the country even those academics who were not considering living abroad as a viable alternative:

I was really one of those who refused to leave the country. I wanted to continue to have hope and optimism. However, in 2017, we were victims of a lot of robberies at the university. I gave my professional life to academic work, and seeing the university in those conditions depressed me a lot. All my colleagues told me not to continue going to the university center for security reasons. (Personal interview, August 31, 2020)

Pull factors for Venezuelan scholars in host countries

The dataset of 230 Venezuelan scholars, which we compiled for this study, allowed us to identify the top three countries that were chosen as options for living and working abroad. These were Colombia, Ecuador, and Chile. In our sample of interviewed scholars, 42.5% migrated to Colombia, 35% to Ecuador, and 22.5% to Chile. The reasons for the choice of destination ranged from geographical proximity, sociocultural and family-related factors to welcome culture in host institutions, appreciation of academic credentials, the economic situation in the country of choice, and of course prior personal connections to the receiving institutions.

Colombia was the main destination country for Venezuelan scholars who were interviewed. Of the total number of scholars consulted who moved to Colombia, 31% found employment within universities in the capital, Bogotá, and 69% within universities in other regions of Colombia. Notably,

the majority of Venezuelan professors coming from regions that are close to the border with Colombia migrated to regions in Colombia that are geographically close to their region of origin and began working at Colombian universities there. Also, it is easier for displaced Venezuelans to migrate to Colombia as they have an “open-arms” approach by issuing special permits providing a protected status, work permits, and legal residency. While there was a lapse in official entries due to COVID-19, President Ivan Duque made “a welcoming border” one of his top priorities during his presidency and in April 2021 gave one million more undocumented migrants rights to legal employment, health care, education, and Colombian banking services for 10 years (Frydenlund et al., 2021). Thus, key factors of migrating to Colombia are the proximity and the easier legal pathways of entering the country.

In relation to the interviewed professors who moved to Ecuador, 54.5% started working in universities in Quito and 45.5% in other regions. Regarding professors who migrated to Chile, 80% are in Santiago and 20% in other regions. Most of the Venezuelan scholars who were interviewed stated that instead of the proximity and legal pathways as was indicated by the Venezuelan scholars who migrated to Colombia, the decision to move to Ecuador or Chile lay within prior institutional, professional, or personal connections with actors linked to the host university.

Besides the personal motivations rooted in prior connections of Venezuelan scholars to host institutions, host countries' high demand for university professionals must be emphasized as an additional pull factor. This demand grew over time with the development of education sectors in the countries concerned throughout the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a strong development of higher education in most of the countries in Latin America. Expansion was funneled through the increase in the number of public universities and the multiplication of their enrollments. From 1991 to 2012, the gross enrollment ratio for the entire region increased from 17% to 43%. Chile and Colombia provide two examples: In Colombia, tertiary education enrollment grew from 14% in 1991 to 45% in 2012; in Chile, the gross enrollment rate increased even more, from 21% in 1991 to 71% in 2012 (González-Velosa et al., 2015).

Over the years, the expansion of higher education received more and more criticism by the population as a growing concern developed that this expansion in coverage would be accompanied by the massification and deterioration in quality impacting the universities. Critics have called it “academic capitalism” where there is a “capitalization of knowledge”

consisting of pressures for self-funding via tuition charges, privatization of universities, and the demand on researchers and teachers to collaborate more closely with private firms (Bernasconi, 2008, p.11). In addition, the growing numbers of students enrolled in universities were not necessarily reflected in the numbers of highly qualified faculty. In fact, Colombian universities, for instance, often face shortages of teaching staff with postgraduate degrees. A Venezuelan professor working now in Colombia described the situation at his host university as follows:

[M]ost of its professionals have only master's degrees or even pre-degrees. There are barely staff with doctorates. As you can only have a fixed contract in the Colombian university once you have a doctoral degree, I consider this a big opportunity for Venezuelan scholars. The demand here is higher, and salaries and wages are much better. (Personal interview, August 31, 2020)

Another scholar who migrated to Chile explained the demand for Venezuelan scholars as follows:

Chile is a country that has very expensive education fees, and for this reason, there are few Chilean academics with doctoral degrees. This allows and facilitates the reception of foreign professionals. As Venezuela has many skilled doctorates, we are a highly desirable group. (Personal interview, September 6, 2020)

Another pull factor for scholars to migrate was noted by the interviewees as the changing research policies of the host countries. In many countries in South America, for a long time universities focused more on teaching and less on their research productivity. As the world has moved increasingly toward a global knowledge economy over the past years, higher education and research has taken a more prominent place on the governments' agendas. Therefore, universities are increasingly called upon to guide socioeconomic development and help solve problems in countries (van Hoof, 2014). In Ecuador, for example, the government attempted to increase the research culture among its institutions of higher education in order to solve pressing socioeconomic problems. To do so, Ecuador's Secretariat of Higher Education started the Prometeo-Viejos Sabios grant program in 2011 that continued until 2017. The program aimed to attract international scholars to the country. The offered stipends were considered generous and sufficient to attract scholars in the global marketplace. This attracted the attention of many highly qualified

Venezuelan scholars, who were the largest group of beneficiaries with 156 laureates, followed by Spain with 269 laureates (Celi, 2017).

When gaining accreditation, universities are expected to compete for research funding and to engage in doctoral education in Chile, Colombia, and Ecuador, for which having highly qualified faculty is essential. Hence, having a PhD, as many Venezuelan scholars have, gave them a great advantage to be hired over many nationals who had fewer opportunities to obtain a PhD in the past. In this regard, one of the professors interviewed stated:

When I was hired, I thought it was because of my resume. But then I realized that the university was about to have an accreditation process and needed to have more doctors in the faculty. Since I arrived, they have only wanted to hire doctors. Those who only have a master's degree are left aside. (Personal interview, September 6, 2020)

This situation presented a good opportunity for universities in the host countries to hire highly qualified academics, but it also created economic opportunities for Venezuelan academics. Several of the interviewed scholars stated that in the universities they work at abroad, they are expected to produce publications periodically, as these universities have funds to support publication activities. They also claimed to be receiving wages that allow them to support their families, which in Venezuela was impossible (personal interviews, August 2020).

Finally, the higher level of academic freedom in the host countries and the possibility of escaping the repressive environment at home were described by the scholars as additional motives to migrate. The AFI has demonstrated the differences in the situation of academic freedom between Venezuela and the top three countries of destination. On a scale from low to high (0–1), including indicators such as freedom to research and teach, freedom of academic exchange and dissemination, institutional autonomy, campus integrity, freedom of academic and cultural expression, the situation of academic freedom in Venezuela reached 0.28, Colombia 0.64, Ecuador 0.79, and Chile 0.93 in 2019. Therefore, the higher degree of academic freedom in combination with the previously mentioned opportunities of obtaining more security, a higher salary, and the demand for faculty members with a PhD in the host countries have been the main pull factors for Venezuelan scholars.

Challenging experiences in exile

Even though the universities in Ecuador, Colombia, and Chile offer opportunities for Venezuelan professors and researchers to continue their academic work, there remain many challenges to overcome. Many of the interviewed professors mentioned difficulties with documentation issues, as it is nearly impossible to obtain official documents such as passports in Venezuela due to the high prices of renewing or obtaining them. This complicates regular migration to host countries, as noted by one interviewee:

I have not noticed any discrimination for being Venezuelan. The limitations that currently affect me when applying to other universities is the difficulty of procedures in Venezuela. (Personal interview, September 1, 2020)

In Chile, many more barriers are placed along its legal pathway, caused by growing anti-immigrant sentiments in the country (The Economist, 2018). Moreover, a new visa option was introduced: the *Visa de Responsabilidad Democrática*. This visa provides Venezuelans with a legal pathway to permanent residency, as it allows them to reside in Chile for a year so the visa can be renewed. Acquiring this visa is very difficult, however, since the visa needs to be requested in Venezuela, and none are granted in Chile or in exterior consulates. In addition, the application requires a valid passport. This document is incredibly difficult to obtain since the current cost of renewing a passport in Venezuela can be hundreds or even thousands of dollars, depending on the level of inflation that day and what bribe is being arbitrarily asked for by the “official” in charge of renewing passports. Thus, the difficulties of obtaining a passport through official channels in Venezuela facilitate the proliferation of corruption (Guerrero, 2018; Transparencia Venezuela, 2020).

Similar restrictions are placed on the legal immigration process by Ecuador. Ecuador has maintained paths to regularization for Venezuelans, where the country has some of the most progressive human rights, migration, and asylum laws in the region, including its 2017 Human Mobility Law, which embodies an approach to regularizing the status of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. However, government policies have undermined the intent of the law, preventing Venezuelans from accessing their rights in practice. These policy changes appear to be politically motivated, coming in response to surges in arrivals, shifts in public opinion, and a spike in xenophobia. New

entry requirements imposed in late 2018 and early 2019 closed the border to many Venezuelans, including scholars.

Therefore, it can be a time-consuming, costly process for Venezuelan scholars to fulfill all the requirements necessary to obtain a legal status in a host country (IACHR, 2018). Adding to that, the recognition of academic titles can also be complicated. As one scholar noted:

A lot of time and money is lost in bureaucracy with all the processes that there are here [Chile]. It is very exhausting. (Personal interview, August 24, 2020)

The interviews revealed that even after finding a job in a university in the host country, there is often still a lot of uncertainty involved that is linked to the temporary contracts that are given. A professor who is now working in Ecuador said:

It has been difficult to stay active in the university because it is on a contract basis of two contracts a year of four or five months each. There is a lot of academic rivalry. . . . Every semester you have to enter a state of anguish whether or not they are going to hire you again. (Personal interview, September 9, 2020)

A similar statement was given by a professor living in Colombia:

In principle, when I arrived, the situation was easier. Now, with the mass exodus, it is harder to get opportunities. In my case, I especially feel anguish when I must renew the contract. There is always the uncertainty of whether or not they will do that. (Personal interview, August 21, 2020)

However, the most competitive and insecure climate for professors and researchers was found in Chile, as one interviewed noted:

The infrastructure and facilities of the university where I work are excellent, but the whole system is fiercely competitive. In my opinion, the university does very little to create a sense of belonging. There is a lot of academic staff turnover, many part-time professors and few full-time ones. At the slightest mistake, you are fired without an explanation. No matter how well you have done previously. I feel we are often being exploited by giving us many extra activities to do in addition to teaching and research. In fact, there is almost no time for research. (Personal interview, August 31, 2020)

Amid the broader context of growing nationalism across the region, Venezuelan scholars also mentioned an increasing level of xenophobia in the host countries. This implies, among other things, a fierce competition or hostility among colleagues or, in some cases, even difficulty in entering a university. A professor who is now in Ecuador explained:

The PhD title has been the key that opened the doors for me in Ecuador six years ago. At present, xenophobia limits the entrance of Venezuelan professors however. It has become a double-edged sword because even though we are necessary for accreditation, it is also true that they are not very willing to pay a doctor's salary. In fact, I am paid as if I only obtained my master's degree, while I also obtained a PhD. Even so, I do not complain because there is no work in Venezuela. So, I keep silent in order to survive. (Personal interview, August 24, 2020)

Similar tensions were also mentioned by Venezuelan scholars residing in Colombia and Chile. A professor who is now in Colombia explained the sense of competition and nationalism that can be noted in the universities:

It is very usual to notice discrimination in the academia for being a foreigner. They consider that you take away the opportunity of a native professional of the country. (Personal interview, August 30, 2020)

In summary, Venezuelan scholars experience a plethora of challenges in exile. There are many barriers that they encounter on the legal pathways to enter Chile and Ecuador (to a lesser extent Colombia). Moreover, the rivalry and rising discrimination and xenophobia in the workplace in the host countries create additional insecurities for Venezuelan scholars, amplifying their already vulnerable situation.

Conclusion: Seeking cohesion and contributing to the internationalization of knowledge

As mentioned earlier, there are various positive aspects of emigration for Venezuelan scholars, such as finding more security and the fulfillment of basic needs and economic opportunities. In addition, migration to the host countries fosters further development of their professional networks and provides venues for new collaborative research projects. Many interviewed scholars mentioned the possibility to publish again, something that was

very difficult to do in Venezuela due to the restrictive circumstances and low university budgets. The exchanges through joint publications with colleagues at host universities offered many opportunities for novel knowledge production. A Venezuelan professor who now works at a university in Ecuador described this phenomenon:

Without a doubt, I consider that the contribution of foreign academics has been very important for Ecuador, mainly the arrival of Venezuelans. For example, the production of scientific articles has increased considerably in recent years. Currently, a master's degree in mathematics is taught mainly by Venezuelan mathematicians here. (Personal interview, September 1, 2020)

Drawing on their extensive training and previously gained research and teaching expertise, Venezuelan scholars bring new theoretical and methodological approaches and teaching techniques, contributing to the diversification and internationalization of knowledge production in the host academic systems. But Venezuela could also benefit from the exile experiences of the scholars should they be able to return in the future. As was mentioned by an exiled academic:

Our work to which we were entrusted is teaching and research. Here, in exile, we are consolidating and validating our knowledge. This experience and the links between professionals makes us stronger and enriches us as individuals. So, when we return to our country, we will take our bags and a load of new experiences that will undoubtedly improve what we have in Venezuela and what we did not know how to value before. (Personal interview, September 1, 2020)

In their responses to the question of whether the Venezuelan scholars would be willing to return to their home country when possible, nearly all answered that they would want that. Additionally, exiled scholars who were interviewed were very willing to form networks abroad, have joint research programs, and find ways to keep the universities open for Venezuelan students. This transnational dynamic shows that many opportunities have been created with the aim of keeping Venezuelan universities open and supporting academia. A professor now in exile in Ecuador mentioned this:

In support of the Venezuelan academy, I have offered to give virtual classes in the schools of law and political science of LUZ. Recently, I also helped

three colleagues from LUZ's law school to teach and participate in research projects in universities in Ecuador. (Personal interview, August 26, 2020)

These examples show the value of academic cohesion and the need to search for further ways to overcome the disconnection between Venezuelan academic communities in exile and those back home. Notably, at-risk Venezuelan scholars have received little attention in respect to the international initiatives that support academics in exile, despite the UNHCR declaration of March 11, 2018 establishing the dimension of the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis as comparable to that of Syria (IACHR, 2020; OHCHR, 2018; UNHCR, 2020). Therefore, more support programs are needed to help exiled Venezuelan academics enrich their professional skills, promote their development and professional integration in the host countries, and expedite their reintegration in Venezuela once conditions allow it.

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