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The Role of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the Humanitarian Response to the Venezuelan Migration Phenomenon in Ecuador (2021-2024)

Project prior to obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in International Studies

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
CAN	Andean Community
CARE	Relief and Assistance Cooperative Everywhere
CIM	Intergovernmental Committee for Migration
CIME	Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration
CPM	Certificate of Migratory Permanence
SCAM	South American Conference on Migration
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
SEI	School of Economic Inclusion
GFMD	Global Forum on Migration and Development
FUDELA	Foundation of the Americas for Development
GCFF	Global Concessional Financing Facility
GTRM	Working Group for Refugees and Migrants
HIAS	Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service
ML/CFT	Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing
LOMH	Organic Law on Human Mobility
MCOF	Migration Crisis Operational Framework
MIES	Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ILO	International Labour Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UN	United Nations Organization
PICMME	Interim Intergovernmental Committee on the Movement of Migrants from Europe
PMA	World Food Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
R4V	Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants
RDF	Network of Development Finance Institutions
UNASUR	Union of South American Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VIRTE	Exception Temporary Residence Visa

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ABSTRACT

This Study analyzes the role of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the humanitarian response to Venezuelan migration in Ecuador (2021-2024). A qualitative approach with data triangulation was Followed: literature review, six interviews with officials and partners, and a focus group with eighteen beneficiaries in Cuenca and Azogues. The results show that the IOM acted as a technical advisor to the State (VIRTE process) and as a funding agent through the R4V platform, channeling resources to partners such as HIAS and Fudela. Although most migrants do not recognize IOM as their first point of contact, its financial support generated a significant impact. IOM facilitated over 96,000 people to regularize their status, but less than 25% obtained a national ID card due to economic barriers (visa cost), digital barriers (limited internet access), and structural barriers (banks and employers did not recognize the visa). IOM promoted socio economic integration programs providing seed capital and technical training, enabling sustainable entrepreneurship. However, the reach was limited by the lack of coordination between regularization and integration, along with the absence of follow-up. Regarding the overall impact, 44.4% reached a high level, 33.3% medium, and 22.2% low. It was concluded that in massive crises, no intervention achieves total impact due to the high volume of people, complexity, and resource constraints. Nevertheless, for those who had direct contact with the IOM or its partners, the impact was clearly significant.

Keywords: Ecuador, humanitarian aid, international cooperation, international organization, migration.

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RESUMEN

Esta investigación analiza el rol de la Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM) en la respuesta humanitaria a la migración venezolana en Ecuador (2021-2024). Se utilizó un enfoque cualitativo con triangulación de datos: revisión de literatura, seis entrevistas a funcionarios y socios, y un grupo focal con dieciocho beneficiarios en Cuenca y Azogues. Los resultados muestran que la OIM actuó como asesor técnico del Estado (proceso VIRTE) y agente financiador mediante la plataforma R4V, canalizando recursos a socios como HIAS y Fudela. Aunque la mayoría de migrantes no la reconocen como primer contacto, su respaldo financiero generó un impacto significativo. En regularización migratoria, la OIM facilitó que más de 96.000 personas se regularizaran, pero menos del 25% obtuvo la cédula por barreras económicas (costo de la visa), digitales (acceso limitado a internet) y estructurales (bancos y empleadores no reconocían la visa). En integración socioeconómica, la OIM impulsó programas con capital semilla y capacitación técnica, permitiendo emprendimientos sostenibles. No obstante, la falta de articulación entre regularización e integración, y la ausencia de seguimiento, limitaron el alcance. En la representación del impacto, el 44,4% alcanzó nivel alto, el 33,3% medio y el 22,2% bajo. Debe reconocerse que, en crisis masivas, ninguna intervención logra impacto total por el alto volumen de personas, complejidad y limitación de recursos. Sin embargo, para quienes tuvieron acercamiento directo con la OIM o sus socios, el impacto fue claramente importante.

Palabras clave: Cooperación internacional, Ecuador, Migración, Organización internacional, ayuda humanitaria.

1. Introduction

Since 2018, Latin America has experienced one of the largest migratory movements in its recent history. It all originated from the political, social and economic crisis that Venezuela is going through. It is estimated that more than five million people have left the country in search of better living conditions, most of the migrants went to Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador and Peru (Organization of American States, 2019). In the case of Ecuador, migratory flows have been seen with different waves. The first wave was characterized by people with greater resources than the others and a real possibility of economic insertion in the country of destination; a second, made up mainly of professionals with documents in order; and the third, which is marked by high vulnerability, with undocumented migrants who make very long journeys to reach their country of destination and run risks of labor exploitation as well as greater barriers to regularization (United Nations Ecuador, 2020). This change in the reality of the migratory profile changed Ecuador's situation, as it went from being a transit territory to becoming an important destination, with an estimated population of more than 440,000 Venezuelans as of April 2025 (Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V), 2025).

The integration of this population is increasingly hindered due to a policy that is less favourable to migrants. Under Executive Decree No. 218 (2024), an internal armed conflict was declared, which caused border controls to be tightened and mobility to the country was hindered (R4V, 2025). To all this, institutional and social barriers were added. For example, only a minority of migrants have a regular status that allows them to work formally (World Bank, 2020c). More than 80% work informally, with low incomes and high instability, in addition, about 95% of migrants have experienced some type of labor discrimination (United Nations Ecuador, 2020). All this explains that, although there are laws that recognize rights for migrants, there are still structural problems that prevent those who integrate well into society and the economy.

Faced with this reality, international cooperation has been very important; However, as the Venezuelan migration crisis ceased to be perceived as urgent, governments in the region have progressively reduced their attention to the issue. This does not mean that the integration needs have been resolved. This silence of the institutions on a problem that continues to happen is just the starting point of this research. In this context, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) positioned itself as one of the most relevant actors of

international cooperation in the humanitarian response in Ecuador, both in its role as technical advisor to the State and in the articulation of regularization and socioeconomic integration programs for the Venezuelan migrant population.

This study aims to analyze the role played by IOM in the humanitarian response to the phenomenon of Venezuelan migration in Ecuador during the period 2021-2024, through its lines of action and the perceptions of the beneficiary population. To achieve this objective, three specific purposes were proposed; first, analyze the role of IOM in Ecuador and its humanitarian aid to Venezuelan migrants; secondly, describe the programmes, projects and lines of action implemented by the organisation for migratory regularisation and socio-economic integration during the period indicated; and thirdly, from the perspective of the beneficiaries. Analyze the relevance and scope of such humanitarian aid to meet their main needs for economic integration and migratory regularization.

To meet these objectives, the study adopted a qualitative methodological approach based on data triangulation, which is composed of a review of academic and institutional literature, a case study on IOM's intervention in Ecuador, semi-structured interviews with institutional officials and implementing partners, and a focus group with eighteen Venezuelan migrants residing in Cuenca and Azogues. The study has six sections. After the introduction, comes the theoretical and conceptual framework on migration and international cooperation, then the methodology, followed by the analysis of results, which is organized in three thematic clusters. And finally, the conclusions, where the objectives set are taken up and recommendations for public policies and future research are given.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1 A Look at the History of Human Migration

Migration is a phenomenon as old as the beginnings of humanity. The need to move in order to survive, to seek better living conditions or to escape conflict has been present in all historical stages. Over the years, population movements have occurred over time in order to satisfy basic needs such as food, security or a more favorable climate; which constitutes an essential element in the configuration of modern States.

The systematic study of international migration emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the context of the so-called “great migrations” or “mass migration”, mainly linked

to transatlantic flows to the United States. However, to understand current migration, it is necessary to review the historical processes that preceded it. Understanding the economic, political and social variables of each era helps explain why millions of people, from ancient times to the present, have made the decision to leave their places of origin with the expectation of rebuilding their lives in a different destination (León Castillo, 2015).

These concepts began to be applied, giving rise to a new era in which, as Roselló (2008) points out four key events are evidenced: the decline of European emigration, the boom in flows from Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the transformation of Latin America from a receiving pole to a source of migrants and, finally, the massive arrival of flows from Asia, Africa and the Middle East to the industrialized countries of the northern hemisphere. mainly on the European continent.

After the Second World War, the international community was faced with the problem of how to manage the mass displacement of people that took place in Europe. As a result, a system of institutions and agreements aimed at addressing the humanitarian consequences of the conflict was adopted. One of them was the creation of the International Organization for Refugees, which was founded in 1947 with the mission of helping to protect, assist and resettle the millions of displaced people who existed after the war. Although this organization existed until 1952, its work laid the foundations of the current international protection system (Muñoz, 2021). Similarly, in 1951, the United Nations General Assembly created the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and adopted the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which, together with the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, currently constitutes the foundation of refugee law at the international level and includes the principles of international protection and non-refoulement (Muñoz, 2021).

During the following decades, other complementary regional treaties were consolidated, such as the Convention of the Organization of African Unity (1969), the Convention on Territorial Asylum (1954) and the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (1984) in the American context (Muñoz, 2021). These attempts to protect human mobility also escalated to the workplace with the creation of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which promoted key instruments such as Convention No. 97 on Migrant Workers (1949) and Convention No. 143 on Migration in Abusive Conditions (1975), which sought to guarantee

equal opportunities and treatment between national and migrant workers. To these was added the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990) and the Palermo Protocols (2000), which extended protection against trafficking and smuggling of migrants (Muñoz, 2021).

Throughout the twenty-first century, there has been an emergence of various mechanisms aimed at responding to migration and refugee challenges. As he points out Muñoz (2021), this period was marked by the creation of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the Leaders' Summit on Refugees, both created in 2016, as well as the adoption of the 2018 Global Compacts; such as the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. According to the same author, these documents establish global guidelines to promote cooperation, shared responsibility and the protection of the human rights of people on the move.

Today migration has a global character. According to estimates reported by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), by 2024 the number of international migrants will reach almost 304 million, equivalent to 3.7% of the world's population, a figure that has practically doubled since 1990 (Castelló Roselló, 2008). This shows that, while economic and social motivations remain, the patterns and contexts of origin of migratory flows have been changing over time.

In the last decade, Latin America has faced one of the largest migration crises in its contemporary history. As they maintain Gandini et al. (2019), the mass exodus of the Venezuelan population was driven by economic deterioration, hyperinflation, shortages of food, medicine, and insecurity faced by their country of origin. According to the same authors, as of 2015 Venezuela went from a positive migratory balance of its population to experiencing a massive outflow of citizens from the country, in a process marked by conditions of high precariousness, violation of rights and absence of formal documentation.

The increase in human mobility began in 2016, when Colombia, Peru and Chile issued more than 1.6 million residence and work permits, while another 600,000 were granted in different countries in the region (Graham et al., 2023). This phenomenon, which initially seemed temporary, took on daily dimensions and placed the need for international cooperation and migration policies in Latin America on the regional agenda (IDB, 2021).

Venezuelan migration has characteristics that make it different from other migratory flows in the region. As a consequence of this, the person's vulnerability worsens, which generates difficulty in accessing identity documents, as well as the impossibility of renewing them, generates conditions of irregularity and legal uncertainty that restrict access to formal employment, education and basic services (Gandini et al., 2019). This scenario contrasts with other global migration crises, because in the case of Venezuela, the restrictions begin in the country of origin and not only in the country of destination. As border controls and visa requirements by receiving countries tightened, irregular routes and movements through high-risk areas, such as the Darien jungle, increased (Fajardo Rojas, 2022).

2.2 Migration Theories and Conceptualization

Migration is a complex phenomenon that has been studied from various disciplines such as sociology, economics and political science, due to its impact on both countries of origin and destination. To analyze this phenomenon from a technical and operational perspective, it is important to adopt a conceptual basis that allows the theory to be articulated with the principles and practices that international organizations have. Historically, human mobility has been constant, although difficult to measure accurately. Arango Vila-Belda (1985) He describes migrations as social transitions of imprecise contours and a relatively permanent nature, which are rarely susceptible to direct measurement. According to Castle (2015) Migration is the change of residence from one place of origin to another destination, motivated by economic, social or political reasons. It is also defined as the displacement of human groups that reflects not only a spatial movement, but a social and personal process that affects the lives of those who experience it.

Castle (2015) He explains that migration is made up of emigration, defined as the departure from the region of origin, and immigration, which is the arrival at the destination. These categories can be internal, if they occur within the same country, or external, when people come from abroad. Migration generally responds to the desire to achieve better economic, social or cultural conditions. Guillén de Romero et al. (2019) They complement this perspective by pointing out that it involves a deliberate movement where individuals establish their residence temporarily or permanently, according to their plans.

From a demographic perspective, the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center defines migration as a change of residence that involves the crossing of defined geographical or administrative boundaries. On the other hand, the IOM (2006) It states that international migration is the movement of people out of their usual place of residence across international borders. For the purposes of this research, the IOM definition is adopted as primary. This is because the study focuses specifically on the operational role and response of this organization and its work in the face of the cross-border displacement of the Venezuelan population.

As for the theoretical framework, international migration has been studied from different perspectives. One of the most recognized is the neoclassical theory, which explains that migration originates from rational individual decisions. In which under this approach, people evaluate the costs and benefits before emigrating, seeking to maximize their income when traveling from low-wage countries to those where economic opportunities are better (Gómez Walteros, 2010). From this perspective, the migrant acts as a being more focused on the economic part, which calculates the probability of employment and their income.

The push-pull theory emerges from this economic perspective, and it is one of the most widely used in migration studies due to its more intuitive approach. This theory states that migration is understood through two factors. On the one hand, there are those that expel people from their place of origin, such as economic crises, poverty, political conflicts or lack of opportunities; on the other hand, the factors that attract them to the countries of destination, such as political stability, labor demand or better salaries (León, 2005). However, when looking at it in more detail, it can be analyzed that this theory has limitations, since it fails to explain why, under similar conditions, some groups choose to migrate while others remain in their place of origin, nor is it insufficient to justify the choice of specific destinations that, in some cases, do not represent the option of greater economic prosperity.

Faced with these limitations, theories with more social dimensions emerge. There is the theory of migratory networks, which maintains that migration is not an individual process, but a deeply social one. Each person who migrates creates links and resources that facilitate the arrival of new migrants, because this reduces costs, risks and uncertainties. This phenomenon is known as chain migration, which means that family and community networks act as key support for displacement (Massey et al., 1993). It is not just a matter of

deciding based on the economic part. Sometimes, what ends up tipping the scales is having someone you know on the other side, someone who has already made the journey and can support. This type of link is directly related to social capital.

On the other hand, there is an approach that looks at migration from a more structural perspective. It is the theory of labor market segmentation, which states that the recipient countries have a market that is not homogeneous, which is divided into two sectors: a primary sector, characterized by stable and well-paid jobs, and a secondary sector, where precarious, poorly paid jobs without the necessary conditions predominate. Because the local population often rejects these types of jobs, migrants become the labor force that occupies these positions, not out of preference, but out of necessity and lack of alternatives (León, 2005).

Another important contribution is the new economics of labour migration, which distances itself from the individual vision of neoclassical theory. Rather than considering the migrant as an isolated subject who makes exclusively rational decisions, this approach points out that migratory decisions are made within the household or family as a strategy to face economic risks and compensate for failures in the local market, such as lack of credit, job instability or the absence of social security (Gómez Walteros, 2010). From this perspective, migrating can be seen as a way to diversify income to ensure the economic security of the household. Remittances are not simple economic transfers, but represent a survival strategy and also, over time, a way to achieve social mobility between generations.

The theory of cumulative causality complements the previous theories since it states that migration feeds on itself. Once a migratory flow is set in motion, it tends to grow and be maintained over time. Not because the initial conditions remain the same, but because the process itself generates changes that push more people to migrate. León (2005) points to several influencing factors such as the creation of networks, social capital, dependence on remittances and the transformation in the labour market, both of origin and destination.. All these elements, in some way, what they do is encourage migration not to stop. Thus, it must be considered that migrations are not only explained by the initial conditions, but also by the dynamics that they themselves produce.

For this study, the theory of migratory networks, cumulative causality, and labor market segmentation were mainly considered. These approaches help to understand how support among Venezuelan families, the permanence of the flow over time and the lack of formal jobs are the key points where IOM focuses its aid and its integration programs in Ecuador. As he points out León (2005), no single theory fully explains migration, so it is necessary to use complementary approaches that integrate both economic and structural factors as well as family, social and cultural elements.

2.3 Types of Migration

The phenomenon of migration can be classified according to various criteria. These categories allow us to better understand population movements and the causes that motivate them, whether economic, political, environmental or social. Within this framework, the main types of migration are presented below, considering their territory, duration, legal status, reasons and direction of flow.

a) According to the territory: There are two types of migration according to the territory: internal and international.

   Internal migration occurs when people move within the same country with the purpose of establishing a new one; home can be temporary or permanent. In this case, migrants do not cross international borders, but remain within the national territory (IOM, 2006).

   These internal flows are related to economic and social factors. In developing countries, the differences between large cities and small cities are stark, causing many people to move to areas with better public services or greater opportunities. According to Tiebout's theory, the population “votes with their feet”, that is, they migrate to cities that offer better local public goods (National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, 2025).

   In Ecuador, for example, internal migration processes began as temporary displacements from the countryside to the city, but over time they were consolidated as permanent migrations to the country's main cities (Guzñay, 2023). This was due to the continuous conditions of economic precariousness, social inequality,

insecurity and the low quality of education in rural areas. These factors continue to drive the abandonment of rural areas (Guzñay, 2023).

International migration, on the other hand, has a fairly clear definition. This type of displacement involves the movement of people who leave their country of origin or habitual residence to settle temporarily or permanently in another country, crossing a border (IOM, 2006). This type of migration is not something new, but it has intensified in the 21st century. Especially from developing countries to the most industrialized ones, where economic, educational and professional opportunities are greater (Méndez & Gómez, 2022).

b) According to the length of stay: Migration can also be classified according to the time people stay away from their place of origin.

According to IOM and the European Commission, the European Migration Network (2012; 2006), temporary migration refers to the movement of people to another country for a period of at least three months and a maximum of one year, with the intention of returning to their place of origin once the period has expired. This type of mobility responds to a specific motivation or purpose, such as work, studies or for the realization of a project. In Latin America, this phenomenon began to be noticed more clearly since the 1980s, when temporary migrations within the region began to become visible (Zunino, 2023).

Permanent migration occurs when the person settles for more than one year in the country of destination, with the intention of residing there continuously. In this case, the country of departure considers the individual as a long-term migrant, while the country of arrival recognizes him or her as a long-term immigrant (IOM, 2006; European Commission, 2012).

c) According to legality or legal status: Another form of classification is based on the legal status of migrants.

As mentioned the International Organization for Migration (2006), regular migration includes movements carried out in accordance with the regulations established by the countries of origin, transit and destination

In contrast, irregular migration occurs when people cross borders or stay in a country without meeting legal requirements for entry, residency, or work. This situation may involve the use of false documents, entry through unauthorized passages, or staying beyond the time allowed by immigration authorities (IOM, 2006; European Commission, 2012).

Based on information from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2005, worldwide it is estimated that between 10 and 15% of the migrant population is in an irregular situation at some point, while the vast majority maintain a regular migratory status**.** According to The Global Migration Data Portal (2022), irregularity should be understood as a legal situation that can change according to current laws, and not as a characteristic of the migrant.

d) According to the will to displace: In this aspect, a distinction is made between voluntary migration and forced migration.
Forced migration describes movements in which there is coercion or threat to the life and safety of people, either due to natural or human causes, such as armed conflicts, persecutions, natural disasters or development projects (IOM, 2006).

According to the Global Migration Data Portal (2024), within forced migration, displacements caused by human conflicts and those caused by natural disasters are differentiated. However, the two categories may be related, as some conflicts stem from disputes over natural resources or disasters caused by human activities.

Similarly, in recent years the number of forced displacements due to political conflicts, persecution or environmental crises has increased, which has diversified the causes and profiles of international migration (Méndez & Gómez, 2022). According to the United Nations global estimate, as of June 2020, there were around 281 million migrants in the world (IOM, 2022).

e) According to the reasons for the displacement
Armijos-Orellana et al (2022) agree that the causes of migration are multiple and interrelated, pointing out that socio-political crises, economic inequality and lack

of governance are determining factors in the decision to migrate. Similarly, they highlight the impact of overpopulation, insecurity and restrictions on civil liberties.

In this sense, Armijos-Orellana et al. (2022) grouped migratory causes into five main categories: economic, social, political, demographic, and ecological. However, these categories do not work in isolation, but are combined in different contexts, which makes migration a multidimensional process. In turn, Garzón & Safar (2017) add that international conflicts, government policies and structural inequality are the key factors that end up triggering migration. In addition, a study carried out by the (United Nations Development Programme, 2019), revealed that in Africa, insufficient development policies, low wages and lack of access to basic services drive people to migrate irregularly to Europe.

f) According to the direction of the flow: According to the IOM (2006) a distinction is made between emigration and immigration.
Emigration consists of a person leaving their country of origin with the aim of settling in another, while immigration involves entering a different country with the intention of residing there.

g) Based on protected status
Refugee or asylum-seeker status is considered to be people who flee their country due to well-founded fears of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions. These individuals qualify for UNHCR's international protection, in accordance with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (IOM, 2006).

2.4 The International Organization for Migration (IOM): history and most relevant interventions

According to official information from IOM, it was created in 1951 under the name of the Provisional Intergovernmental Committee for the Movements of Migrants from Europe (PICMME). Its initial mission was to assist European governments in the relocation of approximately eleven million people displaced after the chaos of World War II. In fact, during the 1950s, the organization managed to manage the transport of almost a million migrants to countries where they were resettled. Over the decades, the institution has

transformed its structure and mandate in order to respond to the new migratory realities. In 1952, it changed its name to the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (CIME); later, in 1980, it adopted the name of the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration (CIM), until finally, in 1989, it was consolidated with its current name. International Organization for Migration (IOM).

This transformation over the years goes hand in hand with a broadening of its field of action. It went from being a logistics agency for transport and resettlement for those displaced by World War II, to becoming the main intergovernmental organization specializing in migration issues that, according to IOM's official website, promotes orderly migration in humane conditions that benefits both migrants and host societies. Of his interventions in his first decades, his participation in the responses to humanitarian crises in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), Chile (1973), Vietnam (1975), Kuwait (1990) and Kosovo (1999), among others, stands out, consolidating his operational role and his international recognition.

During the 1990s, IOM experienced significant growth in its activities and visibility, accompanying the increase in global migration flows. This process culminated in 2016, when the organization became part of the United Nations system, as a linked agency, through a cooperation agreement that allows it to maintain its operational independence and strengthen institutional coordination (Pécoud, 2018). Thus, it has become a key player in the generation of knowledge and the dissemination of normative standards on migration in relation to sustainable development, security and climate change.

In recent years, IOM has proven to be much more than a technical institution; It has become a key humanitarian actor in almost every corner of the world. According to its report *Operating in Crisis* 2024, the organization worked in 183 countries and territories, reaching more than 26 million people affected by conflict, natural disasters or forced displacement, with a global investment that exceeded 2.6 billion dollars (IOM, 2024). Through *your Migration Crisis Operational Framework* (MCOF), IOM has been successful in connecting immediate humanitarian assistance with long-term development and peace strategies, recognizing that migration is not only a consequence of crises, but also an opportunity to rebuild stronger, more resilient communities.

IOM's interventions will now cover multiple fronts: from water, sanitation and hygiene assistance that benefited more than 8 million people, to the delivery of shelter, medical care, psychosocial support and cash-based programmes that reached families in Yemen, Sudan, Ukraine, Somalia and Afghanistan (IOM, 2025). It also promoted initiatives to strengthen emergency preparedness and response, training more than 19,000 local leaders and national authorities to improve risk management and promote more effective community action. These initiatives are based on the three main objectives of the Strategic Plan 2024–2028; saving lives and protecting people on the move, finding sustainable solutions to displacement, and facilitating safe and regular migration pathways (IOM, 2024).

3. State of the Art

This section reviews studies published in the last five years on Venezuelan migration in Latin America and Ecuador, as well as the role of IOM. Most of this literature has focused on the period 2015-2020, analyzing open-door policies, the effects of the pandemic, and the different profiles of migrants according to the country of destination (Chávez-Gonzáles & Echeverría-Estrada, 2020). There are also recent studies that address how Ecuador went from being a transit country to an important destination, and the barriers faced by Venezuelans in education, housing, and employment (Gálvez et al., 2024; Basantes & Gortaire, 2022).

3.1 Background of Venezuelan Migration

Venezuelan migration has become the most important phenomenon of human mobility in the recent history of Latin America. It is the subject of a growing number of investigations in the region. It is estimated that since 2015 more than 4 million people left Venezuela for other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, reaching 5.1 million in 2020 (Chávez-Gonzáles & Echeverría-Estrada, 2020). At the beginning of this phenomenon, many countries implemented open door policies, which facilitated the entry and temporary regularization of migrants. However, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 complicated the panorama; Both migration trends and the conditions of migrants within receiving countries changed drastically, limiting job opportunities and increasing the vulnerability of this population (Chávez-Gonzáles & Echeverría-Estrada, 2020).

Some studies show that the profiles of migrants vary according to the receiving country. According to Chávez-Gonzáles & Echeverría-Estrada (2020) These profiles are divided into 3 groups of countries. The first group is found in Brazil, Colombia, Guyana and Trinidad

and Tobago, Venezuela's closest neighbors. This group of countries is home to mostly people who had a low level of education, where most of them had only finished high school. In the second group are Ecuador and Peru, which are considered receiving and transit countries because they are close, but do not share a border with Venezuela, in addition to being an entry route for other countries. Respondents from these countries tended to be young, with a technical degree or higher. The final group is the countries furthest from Venezuela, such as Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay and Costa Rica, where more than 90 percent of respondents show high levels of education obtained, had completed a university degree or a postgraduate degree, and in addition to these is added a willingness to stay in the long term (Chávez-Gonzáles & Echeverría-Estrada 2020).

In the case of Ecuador, this country has established itself as one of the main destinations for the Venezuelan population. This is due to the shared language and dollarization, which represents an important economic incentive against the Venezuelan bolivar (Ynciarte González, 2021). In addition, for many migrants, the country also functions as a transit territory since it is estimated that around 1.2 million Venezuelans have passed through the country from 2017 to 2023, bound for places such as Peru, Brazil and Chile (Herrera & Cabezas, 2023). This is because from 2008 to 2010, Correa administration eliminated visa requirements, which led to migrants from different parts of the world using Ecuador as a stop on their way to other countries (Herrera & Cabezas, 2023).

According to Gálvez et al. (2024), by 2022 Venezuelans represented 55% of the migrant population in Ecuador, mostly young people of working age. This change in focus due to the increase in migrants made the state move from a strategy of a humanitarian response and short-term aid to one more of socioeconomic integration that already implied a medium and long-term process, as examples of this we have the registration and regularization processes implemented since 2019. This change in outlook made Ecuador the fifth receiving country for Venezuelans in the region according to the report of the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V) published in 2025.

Despite policies and efforts by governments, Venezuelan migrants continue to face different challenges and disadvantages in Ecuador. For example, in the field of education, the rate of school non-attendance of Venezuelan children is 8.3%, which significantly increases that of Ecuadorians, who have a rate of 2.1% (Gálvez et al., 2024). In the economic sphere, 32.4%

live in a situation of poverty measured by Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN), and most depend on informal jobs that are usually marked by labor abuses.

According to Basantes & Gortaire (2022), housing conditions are directly related to the employment situation, which mostly only allows them to have a leased contract. Other recurring problems are limited access to basic services such as drinking water and sewage. In addition, several reports document cases of xenophobia in state care and lack of protection for the children of migrants born in Ecuador (Basantes & Gortaire, 2022). In this scenario, these inequalities are not new for Ecuador, historically, the country had already faced significant migratory flows from countries such as Colombia, Cuba and Haiti, which set precedents in its migration policy. During the Correa Administration, a policy of greater openness was promoted, which reinforced the country's image as a destination for migration in the region (Basantes & Gortaire, 2022).

In this context, it is important to analyze the Regulatory Framework for Human Mobility in Ecuador, which provides legal support for the State's response to these migratory flows. This framework is based on the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008), which recognizes the principle of universal citizenship and establishes that no person shall be identified as illegal because of his or her migratory status (Art. 40). Under this regulatory framework, the Organic Law on Human Mobility (LOMH, 2017), reformed in 2021 to adapt the rights and obligations of foreigners to the current reality. However, in view of the migratory flow received in recent years, the regulatory framework was complemented by the Executive Decrees of extraordinary regularization, the most relevant being the Executive Decree No. 436 (2022). This decree allowed the implementation of the Temporary Residence of Exception (VIRTE) visa, making it easier for national regulations to respond to the humanitarian crisis through the technical cooperation of international organizations.

3.2 International Migration Agencies and IOM's Role in Ecuador

The humanitarian and integration response to the increase in migration in Ecuador does not depend solely on the State but is supported by a broad inter-institutional network of international cooperation. In this context, Ecuador has been strengthening in certain areas to face the challenges brought by human mobility, especially the massive arrival of Venezuelans in recent years. This openness helped to create strategic alliances with international organizations such as agencies of the United Nations system that provide

technical, financial and humanitarian support to the country. A clear example was that the World Bank it has maintained technical cooperation with the Ecuadorian State, achieving access to the Global Concessional Financing Mechanism (GCFF, 2020). This support has been essential between 2021 and 2024 to finance policies for the regularization and socioeconomic inclusion of the Venezuelan population, allowing the institutional response to the migratory flow to be strengthened. Likewise, with the IDB, which with the aim of contributing to improving labor insertion for people in human mobility, a cooperation framework has been developed (IDB, 2022).

Currently, the United Nations (UN) has shown itself to be a leader in cooperation on migration matters within Ecuador. On 12 April 2018, the UN Secretary-General designated UNHCR and IOM as the lead entities to coordinate the regional response to the Venezuelan migration crisis and created the Regional Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) which is made up of more than 200 organizations in 17 countries. This mechanism has been changing through the needs of the migrant, it has gone from immediate humanitarian assistance to a strategy of socio-economic integration and long-term protection, always working with governments to strengthen regularization policies (Regional Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), 2024b).

In Ecuador, the R4V Platform coordinates its actions through the Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (GTRM). This group organizes the partners by sectors of intervention. According to its operational planning for the year 2024**,** The humanitarian response is divided into different specialized thematic axes that include: water and sanitation, temporary shelter, health and nutrition, protection, integration, education, livelihoods, cash transfers, food security and transport (R4V, 2024b). Each sector has leading agencies and partners that carry out their projects on the ground. Among them are UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF, HIAS, NRC, CARE, Ecuadorian Red Cross, FUDELA, Caritas, JRS Ecuador, Plan International, WFP, ADRA, Hummingbird Wings Foundation, Tarabita Foundation, Women and Society Foundation and several local organizations.

In practice, each sector operates with its own teams. For example, in water, sanitation and health, there are partners such as UNHCR, IOM, WHO, NRC and UNICEF and their functions are to implement programs that guarantee access to basic services for both

migrants and host communities (Refugee and Migrant Task Force, 2022). In the field of protection and social cohesion, there are organizations such as HIAS, JRS, NRC and UNICEF that are responsible for the prevention of gender-based violence, provide psychological assistance and offer legal accompaniment (R4V, 2019). Meanwhile, in socio-economic integration and livelihoods, IOM, together with UNDP, CARE and FUDELA, promote employability, entrepreneurship and community development programmes. The idea is that people in a situation of mobility can access full integration (GTRM, 2022).

On the other hand, Ecuador participates in several international and regional spaces where different aspects of the migration issue are discussed, some of which are the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), the South American Conference on Migration, the Andean Community (CAN), the Ibero-American Conference and the Ibero-American Forum on Migration and Development. The reason for these meetings is for countries to agree on the creation of migration policies so that they are inclusive and sustainable (IOM, 2022). In addition, all the action programs implemented by Ecuador and international organizations are aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It could be said that of all the organizations involved in Ecuador, IOM has a central role in supporting migrants in the country.

According to the official website, IOM has been present in Ecuador since 1959, when the country was admitted as a Member State and recognized its legal status through Official Gazette No. 648 of 16 December 1965, and since then the organization has evolved from being a logistical actor for resettlement to becoming a key technical and humanitarian entity for migration governance. In 2019, it reaffirmed its commitment to safe, orderly and regular migration, based on humanitarian principles and the 2030 Agenda, resulting in human mobility being treated as a main axis of sustainable development (IOM, 2020).

IOM's mission in Ecuador has combined two lines of work. One is direct humanitarian assistance, through cross-border transport, temporary accommodation, delivery of hygiene kits, shelter and food. And the other is the institutional strengthening of the State, in collaboration with the National Government, IOM has participated in the design and implementation of public policies on migration registration and regularization, documentation and visa issuance processes, while promoting the social and economic inclusion of migrants (IOM, 2020). The organization, together with UNHCR, co-lead the

national GTRM, coordinating response strategies and serving as a liaison between the State, civil society and international agencies (R4V, 2020).

In addition, IOM is working with the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) on an initiative called Guidelines for Mainstreaming Migration into International Cooperation and Development Policy. The objective is to incorporate migration into cooperation programs (IOM, 2020). Ecuador was chosen as one of the three pilot countries along with Madagascar and Nepal. The idea was to assess how migration is integrated into national development policies (IOM, 2020). Along the same lines, IOM prepared its Strategic Plan 2021-2025, which proposes four axes, which are: strengthening migration governance, improving protection mechanisms, promoting integration and promoting cooperation between institutions (IOM, 2022).

Another IOM tool is the Migration Profiles, a platform that serves to identify gaps and trends, and with that design public policies. In Ecuador, the first profile was made in 2006, and they have been published until 2022, always in collaboration with the national government. This document updates the diagnosis of human mobility, as well as informs the progress of socioeconomic integration and regularization of the Venezuelan population in the post-pandemic context, serving as a reference for the design of international cooperation policies and projects (INEC, 2025b).

As for the projects that IOM has launched in Ecuador, one that has been extensively promoted since 2021 is strengthening assistance and protection for Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador. The main idea is to help the Ecuadorian State in designing and implementing migratory regularization processes and to offer legal assistance to those who are in an irregular migratory situation. According to the official evaluation reports, this project focused on direct assistance to migrants for the processing of temporary or permanent residence visas, in addition to the training of institutional personnel in migration management, human rights and protection of vulnerable populations (IOM, 2022).

In the area of migratory regularization, IOM did not limit itself to providing humanitarian assistance but also supported the institutional strengthening of the country. An example is that since 2022, the support of this organization focused on migrants being able to obtain the VIRTE visa. According to Ramírez (2022), these extraordinary regularization processes in

Ecuador help to reduce what is called migratory clandestinity. With this, the State can regain some control over human mobility, something that in crisis contexts is usually more complicated. International cooperation allows recipient countries like Ecuador to implement mass regularization policies that would otherwise collapse local administrative capacities. This effort allowed that, by April 2024, 248.4 thousand people registered for an appointment for regularization and of these, 201.7 thousand received a certificate of temporary permanence, in the end 95.7 thousand VIRTE visas were granted and 72.3 thousand obtained an identity card (R4V, 2024a, 2024b).

As another component of the framework of the coordinated response under R4V, IOM assumed functions aimed at socio-economic integration and access to rights for the Venezuelan population in Ecuador. According to institutional reports, about 23% of IOM's interventions in the country were focused on this point in order to address problems such as unemployment, underemployment and high labor informality, which greatly affect the migrant population (IOM, 2022).

One of the most important projects in this area was the capacity building of the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES) developed in 2021. Through the "IDF IOM" project, which promoted the development of technical tools so that the MIES could implement a micro-entrepreneurship model aimed at the economic inclusion of people in conditions of human mobility (IOM, 2022). According to Koechlin (2019), the economic inclusion of the Venezuelan population in Andean countries not only benefits the migrant, but also generates a positive impact on local consumption and indirect tax collection. This technical model provided by IOM allowed for the implementation of seed capital programs and technical support and focused on the sustainability of businesses in the medium term. This type of initiative is key if one considers that the Venezuelan population in Ecuador has been an important actor in the economic contribution. According to some estimates, its contribution reaches approximately 900 million dollars annually to the national economy (IOM, 2025).

In addition to structural and institutional strengthening actions, direct assistance remained a main focus of IOM. In 2021 alone, the reported results include that 6,602 people accessed basic social information and services; 1,170 people received direct psychosocial support and 2,247 hygiene kits were distributed to cover the immediate needs of the Venezuelan population in vulnerable situations (International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2022).

In terms of socio-economic integration, IOM also took concrete actions to help migrants improve their productive capacities and get formal work. For example, they helped them certify their skills and gave them technical training, they also linked them to decent employment opportunities, either by helping them find a job or by supporting them to start their own businesses. Another action was to help them open bank accounts and access basic financial services. The latter is important because without a bank account it is very difficult to integrate economically. According to operational data for 2023, more than 13,000 people received technical or skills certification which were linked to decent jobs, especially in Ecuador's main cities such as Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca. All this was done within the framework of the response coordinated by the R4V Platform (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2024).

Lastly, within the projects that were coordinated from R4V, IOM also helped to provide protection services, health assistance and psychosocial support. This is important because these services have a direct influence on the ability of migrants to stay in the country and integrate both socially and economically. If a person is not in good health or does not feel protected, it is more difficult for them to get a job or lead a normal life in Ecuador. In addition, free legal assistance facilitated migratory regularization processes that, in turn, improved access to employment, education, and health services.

4. Method

This study was developed under a qualitative methodological approach, since it sought to analyze and interpret IOM's action in Ecuador between 2021 and 2024 from two dimensions: institutional level and that of the beneficiaries. It was an investigation of the perspective of the latter to understand their realities and contrast them with the institutional objectives, programs, projects and lines of action implemented by the organization. As pointed out by Hernández-Sampieri & Fernández-Collado (2014), qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena from the perspective of participants, exploring the meaning that people give to their experiences and the context where they occur.

The methodological design was based on the triangulation of data. According to Robson and McCartan (2016), this is a strategy that involves using multiple sources to increase the rigor

of the research, which makes it possible to counter threats to validity and facilitates the comparison and analysis of the results. For the development of this process, three axes were proposed.

The first component was a literature review. According to Robson and McCartan (2016), this review consists of a process of searching, selecting and analyzing documents that provide relevant information to the research topic. Such materials may include academic articles, abstracts, theses, books, scientific reports, and digital sources. For this study, official documents published by IOM, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, and agencies such as UNHCR, R4V and the World Bank, among others, were analyzed. This review made it possible to identify the main programs, policies, and lines of action implemented in Ecuador in relation to humanitarian assistance to the Venezuelan population during the period 2021–2024.

As a second component, a case study was applied. This consists of focusing attention on one or a few instances of a given social phenomenon, such as a community, a family or a group, which allows us to understand the particularity of the case studied, either for descriptive or explanatory purposes, thus offering a comprehensive vision of the phenomenon (Babbie, 2016, p. 318). Under this axis, IOM's role in the humanitarian response to the Venezuelan migration phenomenon in Ecuador during the period from 2021 to 2024 was analyzed.

The third component of triangulation consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews and developing a focus group. First, 6 interviews were conducted with IOM officials in Ecuador, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility (Azuay delegation), Implementing Partners of the R4V project. These interviews were conducted with the aim of knowing the institutional vision on how IOM has contributed to socioeconomic integration and regularization. In turn, a focus group was organized made up of 18 Venezuelan migrants residing in the cities of Cuenca and Azogues. The criteria for selecting the participants were intentional, with a prerequisite being that they had been approached or assisted by IOM or an implementing partner. This approach allowed the focus group to focus more on their perceptions and experiences of IOM's assistance, as well as the challenges they face in receiving this humanitarian aid.

The information was organized into four axes of analysis. These axes helped to separate the information from the different analyses carried out to have a better understanding of the subject. In addition, a traffic light methodology was used to categorize the impact perceived by the focus group participants with respect to IOM's support and role (Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1

Components of Analysis and Guiding Questions

Analysis Axis	Dimensions and topics addressed	Purposes of the analysis
IOM's Role	IOM's role as an advisor to the Government or executor of aid, and its coordination with the Ministries, as well as the migratory profile of migrants according to the perception of the interviewee	Does IOM act as technical support or direct aid? How do you articulate with the government so as not to repeat efforts? What is your main role?
Line of Action Implemented: Regulation	Support in the Registration of Permanence, the VIRTE process, the use of mobile brigades and attention to migrants in an irregular situation.	How did IOM support the Registry of Permanence and VIRTE visas? How important were the mobile brigades? What happens to those who entered through unauthorized passages?
Line of Action Implemented: Economic Integration	The model of entrepreneurship projects, delivery of technical tools, selection of participants and the link between having a visa and receiving economic support.	What do integration projects consist of? How were migrants selected? Were those who already had visas prioritized to give them seed capital?
Sustainability and Impact	The follow-up of the businesses after the programs, the adaptation of the models to the reality of the country and the autonomy of the Ecuadorian State.	Was there follow-up after the end of the support? Were the programs adapted to the reality of Ecuador or were they foreign models? Can the State already attend to migration on its own?

Table 2

IOM Impact Levels (Traffic Light Methodology)

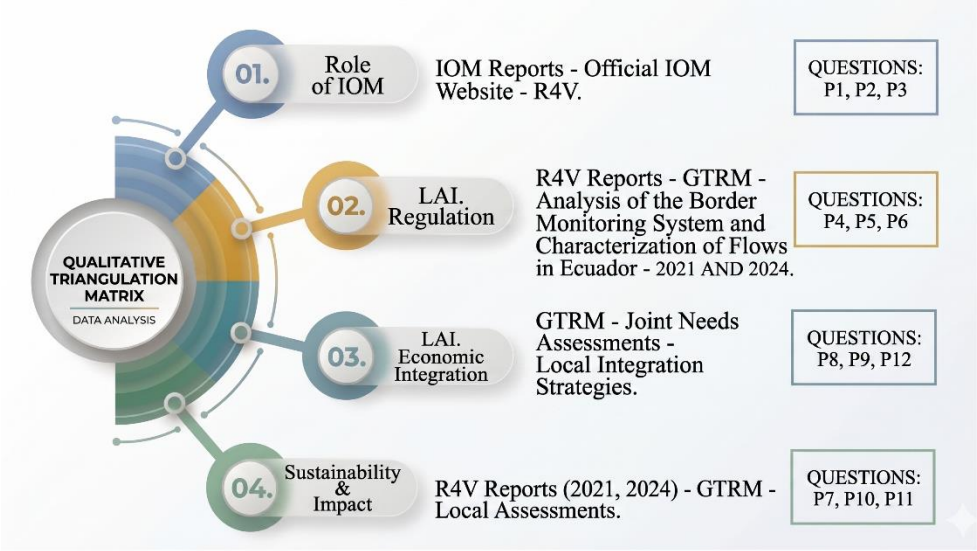
Impact Level	Description of qualitative parameters
High (Green)	I help the regularization process with good (regular) information; participated in an economic integration program and/or obtained seed capital for their entrepreneurship, had an effective follow-up after participation in the programs
Medium (Yellow)	I help the regularization process with limited or erroneous (regular) information; participated in an economic integration program and/or obtained seed capital for their entrepreneurship, but it was not significant for adequate integration, they did not have an effective follow-up after participation in the programs
Low (Red)	There was no accompaniment in the regularization process (regular or irregular); he did not listen to or participate in any economic integration program.

5. Discussion and Results

This section presents the results achieved through the analysis of the study carried out in 2026, which included a focus group with 18 Venezuelan migrants who have had some previous approach to IOM or its implementing partners, as well as six semi-structured interviews with migration experts, which are represented in Table 3. To facilitate the understanding of the information provided, the analysis was organized into three thematic clusters aligned with objectives of this research (Table 1). To ensure that the results were correctly analyzed and interpreted, a Qualitative Triangulation Matrix (Figure 1) was used to contrast the perceptions of beneficiaries, experts and academic sources.

Figure 1

Data Triangulation Matrix



Note. The visual support and organization of this figure was done through Google. *(2025). Gemini 2.5 Flash [Large Language Model]. https://gemini.google.com*

Table 3

Interviewee Matrix

Code	Professional Profile/ Role
E1	Implementing Partner
E2	Former IOM official
E3	Implementing partner (voices project)
E4	IOM Officer (Regulatory Expert)
E5	IOM Officer (Economic Integration)
E6	Official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azogues and former IOM official
GF	Focus group (18 participants)

5.1 The Role of the IOM in Ecuador and Its Humanitarian Assistance to Migrants Venezuelans 2021 - 2024

According to official IOM records, its main function is to coordinate the humanitarian response to serve the population in crisis; in addition, it focuses on strengthening the capacities of government agents in preparedness and risk reduction issues. As a result, this coordination has an evident duality that is reflected in the evolution of its intervention. On the one hand, the organization provides "direct technical assistance to governments to design and implement public policies ... and, on the other hand, it also provides direct assistance to the migrant population" (I2). This approach is aligned with what the organization itself has proposed at the local level with the creation of IOM Ecuador's Strategic Plan 2021-2026, which has as a priority to provide technical support to the government and public institutions to build migration governance that is both safe and regular (IOM, 2023).

During the early years of the Venezuelan crisis, they focused on immediate enforcement. "IOM was one of the first organizations to enter to provide humanitarian aid ... aid kits, medical care" (I1). This assistance also extended to the legal field, as it provided support in document management and visa processing (I1). To expand its coverage, it articulated actions with external organizations - implementing partners - as in the case of the Norwegian Fund (I1). This management was key because "no country in the region was ready to receive the level of people that was received at the time" (I2).

However, from the experience of the migrants themselves, the first contact with the support system was usually not through IOM directly, but through partner organizations such as HIAS or Fudela, which acted as the first institutional contact (FG), showing that IOM appeared later, as a secondary actor in the chain of care. Of the eighteen participants, only one reported hearing about IOM before arriving in Ecuador; the other seventeen indicated that they did not know her (FG). This perception of a second institutional actor can be explained by reviewing the structure of the R4V platform, in which IOM is one of the coordinating and financing organizations of 76 partner organizations that are in charge of executing the actions in the territory (GTRM, 2024).

This structure also occurred in the academic field. The University of Azuay was the first university to partner with IOM to train migrants in entrepreneurship, administration and finance (I1), and it was through that alliance that several beneficiaries accessed seed capital

and machinery for their businesses (FG). This explains why IOM is not as visible among the migrant population, as its presence is channelled through partner organizations operating closer to the territory. Still, once contact is established, either with IOM or its partners, impact was perceived as transformative (FG), meaning that even if the organization is not the visible face, the programmes come in and bring about change.

Over time, as the crisis stabilized, IOM's role took a different approach. “It went from a view of humanitarian assistance in the early years ... to a development and integration approach” (I4). This evolution responded to the need for sustainability, as IOM went from being a field actor to “providing support and technical assistance to the government” (I2). This allowed the Ecuadorian State to manage its own flows and implement tools such as the “MIDAS system, which allows supporting the government in the registration of persons” (I4). This new approach also responded to a change in the migratory profile. At first, people arrived who were mostly in a situation of high vulnerability (I1) but, over the years, a slight improvement in their stability was observed, although the Ecuadorian economic crisis reversed part of those advances, causing “many Venezuelans ... return to their countries or migrate to other destinations” (I1). As a result, interventions changed and “shifted from basic humanitarian aid to regularization and eventually to formal stability, access to credit, and economic sustainability” (I5).

In the focus group, it was observed that most entered the country between 2018 and 2021. This risk makes sense if one takes into account that, although Ecuador continues to be a transit country for many, there are also those who “have begun to settle more permanently in the country” (I6), which qualifies the fact that more than 80% enter in transit (I2) and suggests that a part of those who arrive in the country have reoriented their life project towards integration. This change of course is reflected in the profiles of the focus group, where several participants had been in Ecuador for between five and eight years at the time of the interview, had completed regularization processes and had active enterprises (FG), confirming that there is a part of the migrant population that managed to transition from transit to permanence.

It should be noted that in most cases the decision to stay was related to the previous presence of a family member in the country, either because a sibling, niece or partner already resided in Ecuador and facilitated their arrival, or because they arrived with the whole family

and the situation in Venezuela made the return unfeasible (FG). This finding coincides with the theory put forward Massey et al. (1993), maintain that migration is a social process where family networks function as social capital that reduces risks and uncertainties. In this sense, the existence of previous ties in Ecuador acts as an anchoring factor that transforms migratory transit into a permanent life project (Massey et al., 1993). This suggests that family networks appear to be stronger anchoring factors than economic or institutional conditions.

Regarding the perception of IOM's role, fourteen of the eighteen participants expressed favorable evaluations, noting that support organizations help establishment and development, not only in emergency situations (FG); Phrases such as "it helps a lot, ... so that you establish yourself as a citizen in the country" reflect this vision. Three participants had a more critical view, expressed in comments such as "I think it's more like an emergency", "they always put obstacles in the way of many things" or "it does help, but more in their central offices" (FG). This is related to the fact that those who received seed capital or training were among the fourteen with a favorable opinion, while the other three had not accessed this type of aid.

Despite the advances, structural problems persist, among the most mentioned by the interviewees is the duplication of efforts. "One of the great pains has been the duplication of efforts" (I2). Although there are coordination mechanisms such as the GTRM that "seeks to ensure efficiency in the use of resources" (I4), in practice "IOM worked with migrants and refugees and UNHCR also did the same ... there was no differentiator in their role" (I3). This fragmentation in humanitarian assistance, far from being a merely bureaucratic issue, is due to an inefficient redistribution of resources that ended up destabilizing the equity of assistance. A concrete example was assistance with the payment of rent; IOM and other NGOs supported families with financial assistance without coordination between them, causing "some to receive half a year of support when others could not access even a month" (I3).

Added to this is the lack of follow-up after the assistance since "it was carried out superficially due to lack of funds" (I1). This shows that the inefficiencies were not only problems of coordination, but also of the scarcity of resources to monitor the results. This is reflected in the experience of some beneficiaries who, despite having participated in training,

never managed to access seed capital. Staying only with the training without the accompaniment to take the next step leaves people in limbo.

From the perspective of migrants, there are also barriers of geographical access and schedule. Participants from Azogues or Loja pointed out that the distance and schedules of the training prevented them from participating (FG). “It does help, but more so in its central offices because in Azogues there is no office and it is more difficult” (FG). This shows that, although the programs exist, they do not always reach all places or adapt to the conditions of those who live outside the big cities. The World Bank's own report (2020) already warned that the economic and social situation in Ecuador determines a significant lack of resources on the part of the State to face the various challenges, evidencing the need to resort to international cooperation to improve the integration capacities of the migrant population (World Bank, 2020b). And although they are a minority, some participants express a more critical view, “they always put obstacles in the way of many things” (FG).

5.2 Lines of Action Implemented by IOM in Ecuador for the Migratory Regularization and Socioeconomic Integration of the Venezuelan Migrant Population during the Period 2021-2024

Migratory Regularization

To understand IOM's role in regularization, it is necessary to start from the context of the Extraordinary Regularization Process (VIRTE). This mechanism was created through Executive Decree No. 436 (2022), art. 3, with the aim of granting an Exception Temporary Residence Visa to Venezuelan citizens entering Ecuador. This regularization process was one of the largest efforts made by the State to move to a policy of integration and migratory regularization. Beyond the legal process, analyzing this regularization process is useful because it allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of international cooperation both in strengthening the operational capacities of the State, and in reducing the vulnerability of the migrant by giving him or her legal status.

In operational terms, the VIRTE visa was one of the largest regularization processes in the country. According to the Ministry of International Relations and Human Mobility (2022), 19 permanence registration points and 77 windows were set up nationwide with an estimated service capacity of up to 324,591 people. To carry out this process, applicants had to comply with the biometric registration so that they could be given the Certificate of Migratory

Permanence (CPM). All this was carried out under the “I am here” campaign, from October 2022 to August 2023, which sought to promote the social and economic inclusion of the Venezuelan population in the host communities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, 2022).

As mentioned previously, the MIDAS system was used. The implementation of this technology not only optimized state management but also prevented the collapse of the registry in the face of the massive collection of biometric data (I4). In addition, IOM provided “support in the hiring of personnel to support this regularization process, as well as technical advice from experts in the regulatory framework” (I2). IOM's support was not limited to the first process; in 2024 there was a second phase for those who had obtained the CPM, to reactivate the system and allow the renewal of expired certificates, guaranteeing the continuity of regularization. The UNHCR (2024) points out that, thanks to the registration and regularization processes with legal and financial assistance from various organizations, more than 96,000 people managed to regularize their status in Ecuador between 2022 and 2024.

But having a robust technological system was not enough for people to complete the process, becoming a bottleneck, “the subsequent identification process became a funnel where, out of every ten people who started the registration process, less than three managed to complete the obtaining of the final visa” (I2). In the first process, between 380,000 and 500,000 people registered, only 80,000 applied for a visa and around 50,000 managed to obtain it (I2). If the two processes are added, the trend is similar, some 370,000 CPMs issued or renewed, 160,000 visas granted, and only 90,000 people had an ID. That means less than 25% of beneficiaries completed the entire process (I4).

Added to this were economic barriers. IOM and UNHCR acknowledged that many people were unable to regularize their status in the previous process because they were unable to qualify and pay for administrative procedures (IOM, 2024). Many migrants saw no point in paying the $80 visa cost if the benefit was limited. In this regard, one interviewee points out that “many migrants chose not to renew their visas because they did not find sense in paying the fee; in the end, you end up with a document that, in practice, did not allow you to work formally, and that cost is unaffordable for families who live from day to day” (I2). Faced with this obstacle, IOM managed financial relief alternatives, including “the management of

funds to cover the cost of the migration fee to prevent the payment from being the cause of the irregularity" (I4)**.**

In addition to the economic barriers, there was also a digital barrier that slowed down the process before reaching the ID. "It happened a lot that people did not have access to their emails, so they could not continue with the process because someone had created the account and then they lost access to continue with the procedures and procedures" (I4), which meant that in some cases the most vulnerable were excluded from regularization, even if there was a will. Finally, in the focus groups, twelve of the eighteen participants said they had some legal status. The distribution is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4
Legal Status of Participants (FG)

Status	No. of participants
VIRTE visa (first or second)	8
Permanent visa	3
Refugee Visa	1
No legal status	2
Expired visa	1

Note. 2 participants did not specify their legal status, which is not counted in the table

For those who managed to complete the process, access was not so complicated. "The instructions are very clear and easy" (FG). Support in other channels was key, for example, a relative of a participant "already had a UNASUR visa and when they released the information from VIRTE, she told us" (FG). There were also those who received guidance at the Public Defender's Office or at HIAS (FG). This shows that the information came from various places such as social networks, family members, support organizations, and to a lesser extent through direct institutional channels. But not everyone had a positive experience. A specific case was that of a participant, who said that she received wrong information from an organization: "I went to the Norwegian Council and due to a bad explanation from them I was left without a visa... They told me that I had to wait and my visa expired. I was irregular" (FG). He was able to recover when the possibility of taking the VIRTE (FG) was opened. This shows that, although there were support mechanisms, coordination between organizations and at the inter-institutional level the quality of information can be improved and strengthened.

With respect to the population that entered through unauthorized passages, divided opinions were generated among the interviewees since there was a change in regulations over time. At first, Executive Decree 436 (2022) it required to have entered through official checkpoints, which left out those who had entered through unauthorized passages. “Those who entered through unauthorized steps were excluded from the VIRTE process and from the institutional options for regularization” (I2). But later, with Executive Decree 698 (2023), a migratory amnesty was granted for Venezuelans who had not registered their entry through official points. This opened the possibility of accessing the visa, as long as they had made the Migratory Permanence Registry. That is why some interviewees maintain that “the regularization process did not close the doors to those who entered irregularly; in fact, the regulations allowed mechanisms so that they could regularize themselves, as long as they complied with the permanence registry” (I4). The positions of the interviewees were not necessarily exclusive but reflected different moments of the process.

In terms of attention on the ground, the mobile brigades had mixed results. Although they managed to bring the process closer to peripheral areas (I4), the distribution of the points did not always respond to the real demand. “Attention points were installed in areas where the flow was lower, while, in sectors with a high concentration of migrants, the brigades arrived late or with few personnel” (I3). This is confirmed by the experience of the migrants themselves, none of the participants in the focus group used service points at borders or land terminals, all accessing the process from the city (FG). A participant from Azogues points out that IOM did arrive in her city, although this happened after she, as head of a support group among Venezuelans in the area, informed the organization about the situation of need (FG).

This suggests that the arrival in intermediary cities depended more on the migrant networks themselves activating demand, but not on systematic territorial planning. As part of the efforts to reach more people, IOM implemented the *Route of Rights programme* together with the Public Defender's Office, with the aim of “bringing services to more remote communities where people cannot go to an urban area to seek care” (I4). But from the experience of the beneficiaries, that arrival was not equitable. “It does help, but more so in its central offices because in Azogues there is no office and it is more difficult” (FG).

Labor insertion was one of the problems that appeared most in the testimonies of the beneficiaries. On paper, the visa "did allow access to the formal labor market" (I4) and allowed registration with the IESS once hired (I2). But in practice, things did not work that way. Having the VIRTE visa was not enough in the face of the demands of the private sector. The problem was not the visa itself, but that companies asked for the Ecuadorian ID, and that final step was the one that many were unable to complete. "The real bottleneck is that, even if the migrant has the VIRTE, the companies ask for the Ecuadorian ID, and that final step of identification is where the vast majority stagnates" (I4). This gap prevented access to formality, causing "the migrant to obtain the VIRTE, but does not complete the identification process, and without the plastic of the card, the private sector did not collaborate" (I2).

This same gap extended to the financial system. Migrants with years of residence, active RUC and up-to-date tax returns reported not being able to access direct loans or microcredits because banks classified the VIRTE as a "visa for humanitarian reasons", denying credit products regardless of their economic history (FG). These cases are not isolated, according to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank (2020), a very strict application of the rules on the prevention of money laundering and terrorist financing (ML/CFT) can result in the unjustified exclusion of clients from the financial sphere. This explains why, although one participant presented an Ecuadorian guarantor, she was rejected because of the visa type (FG). As the World Bank report points out, in Ecuador 12% of the population lacks an account due to lack of accepted documentation, which makes regularization a formal title with no real economic utility. For this reason, the participants describe that "they see it as something humanitarian, it does not qualify for direct credit, nor for microcredits... not even for a housing contract" (FG), "I had a meeting with someone from the bank... the only way to get a loan ... is with a permanent visa" (FG), another participant confirmed.

What these testimonies show is that regularization alone is not enough. The private sector, banks, landlords, employers, did not recognize the VIRTE visa as a document that accredited solvency or stability. An IOM official said it clearly: "It is one thing to help people to be regular, but then, if the private sector does not understand these changes, inconsistencies are generated" (I4). And those inconsistencies were what ended up stopping migrants when they tried to work formally or access credit.

Socio-Economic Integration

It is essential to understand IOM's role in Ecuador in economic integration because it allows us to see beyond immediate assistance and assess the extent to which international cooperation helped Venezuelan migrants to have more stable living conditions. As there has been increasing evidence of Venezuelan migrants showing their intentions to remain in Ecuador, governments have had to move from a short-term humanitarian response to more durable integration policies (Chaves-González et al., 2021). For this to work, it is essential that migrants can be incorporated into the country's productive structure because that facilitates their integration into other areas. The main challenges in this regard are migratory regularization, the validation of degrees and access to the banking system (Freitez, 2022). Regularization efforts should be complemented by socio-economic integration initiatives that include education, skills validation and access to the formal labour market. Without these measures, irregularity and informal work remain difficult obstacles to overcome.

In this context, between 2021 and 2024, IOM promoted several projects together with universities, social organizations and state institutions focused on the economic integration of the migrant population. One of them was *Educa Sin Límites*, which was carried out in conjunction with the University of Azuay. This project allowed 115 people to be trained and certified in technical areas such as electricity, bakery and automotive. IOM also created a School of Economic Inclusion (SEI), in conjunction with MIES, where 150 migrants participated in the creation of entrepreneurship in four months. Not only did they give them technical training, but also childcare, psychological support and legal advice to regularize themselves. Another project was the Inclusive Microentrepreneurship pilot plan that operated in several cities in the country offering training in financial education and digital marketing. HIAS Ecuador joined these efforts as an implementing partner, an organization that through its economic inclusion program provided beneficiaries with business and vocational training, seed capital, and mentoring for the development of microbusinesses. HIAS also implemented the School of Entrepreneurship with a Gender Approach, aimed at promoting social integration and community cohesion among migrant women.

The impact of these programs is reflected in the testimonies of the beneficiaries themselves, who undertook everything from tailoring workshops to healthy confectionery (FG). A participant who received a sewing machine for his design workshop says that “the issue of courses, of training, is priceless” (FG). These stories show that when training and seed

capital are combined, the impact can be real. The logic behind these programs was “to function as an institutional bridge to connect with the population in situations of human mobility with productive opportunities” (I5). To this end, they focused on strengthening capacities through the validation of previous knowledge, and self-employment through entrepreneurship and “both training and seed capital were provided” (I2), through specialized implementing partners such as Fudela and *Fundación Acción Solidaria* (I2). They were also provided with “technical tools, such as management training guides and financial manuals, designed to provide migrants with basic management notions” (I1).

The process of selecting the participants was not the same in all the programs, it usually depended on the source of funding since, “each program had its own logic; if the fund was for development, you were looking for sustainability; if the fund was for protection, you looked for the most needy, even if that meant starting from scratch with training” (I5). Some projects sought to make businesses sustainable, focusing on those who already had a minimum structure, since “in some cases, it was necessary to prioritize those who already had an established business idea, to facilitate implementation” (I1). In other cases, “the criteria included having been in the country for at least six months, being the head of the household, and the number of children, since sometimes mothers with five or six children were present, which made it more complex to complete the classes” (I1).

In contrast, other projects prioritized vulnerability above all else. It didn't matter so much if the business was going to be profitable, but to reach those who were in the most critical situation. “The vulnerability criterion could not be sacrificed for profitability; the main task was to reach those who were at extreme risk, not only those who have a consolidated business profile” (I4). In some cases, the implementing partners themselves made the selection, because “they already had the expertise and proximity to the territory to identify the cases” (I2). A concrete result of this model was the formal certification of the participants, who at the end of the project received “a certificate from the University of Azuay and IOM ..., which could be used to have your own business or to present it as part of your portfolio for a job in a company” (I1). In the focus group conducted, eight of the eighteen participants said they had participated in some level of entrepreneurship or training programs. The distribution is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5
Participation in Entrepreneurship Programs (FG)

Type of participation	Number of participants
Participated and received seed capital	7
Participated only in trainings	5
Did not participate	6
Total	18

Regarding the articulation with the regularization process (VIRTE), it was evident that there was no strategy that connected obtaining the visa with a plan so that people could work or undertake. The interviewees pointed out this disconnection, qualifying it as parallel tracks due to the lack of specific funds to integrate regularization with career or entrepreneurship plans (I1). In fact, "in most entrepreneurship programs they allowed the participation of people who were not regularized in the country without any problem" (I5). Added to this was the lack of follow-up, a problem that was not only of an organization but of the cooperation model in general, due to the fact that the projects only received funds to implement actions, but "the follow-up part was not considered" (I3), leaving the real impact on the communities served unevaluated.

Even so, being regularized indirectly helped to enter integration programs because it facilitated access to "resources and also to formalize oneself in the financial area" (I2). But this connection depended more on individual conditions than on an institutional strategy. In certain processes, institutional databases were used to select beneficiaries of seed capital or certifications, prioritizing gender and vulnerability criteria (I4). However, this connection had structural limits, since "the regularization numbers were very high, and the economic integration programs do not have the capacity to absorb and offer support to all these people" (I4).

The most important achievement was that the State was strengthening its capacities, although the process depended a lot on external financing. This dependence conditioned the continuity of the efforts, since "when the funds ran out, the presence of the organizations was reduced or disappeared" (I1). To mitigate this problem, the programs sought to create support networks among the beneficiaries themselves, so that "when these organizations leave, the processes can be sustainable" (I5). A clear example was when IOM left Cuenca when funding ran out. "The funds ran out because there began to be many problems with

international funds" (I1), and that interrupted the programs that were underway. Despite these difficulties, the testimonies of the participants show that when the support arrived completely, the enterprises could be sustained and people managed to consolidate their businesses.

5.3 Sustainability and Impact

Following the traffic light methodology described in the method section and to further inquire into the perspectives of the beneficiaries and the impact on the assistance received, a traffic light matrix was made as a qualitative analysis tool in which the 18 participants of the focus group were classified into three levels of impact according to their regularization process. their participation in economic integration programs.

The high level (green) groups those who received comprehensive support: they were able to regularize themselves with clear and timely information, participated in entrepreneurship programs and received seed capital, and had effective follow-up after the programs. These are the cases where institutional intervention achieved its objective of generating conditions for sustainable integration.

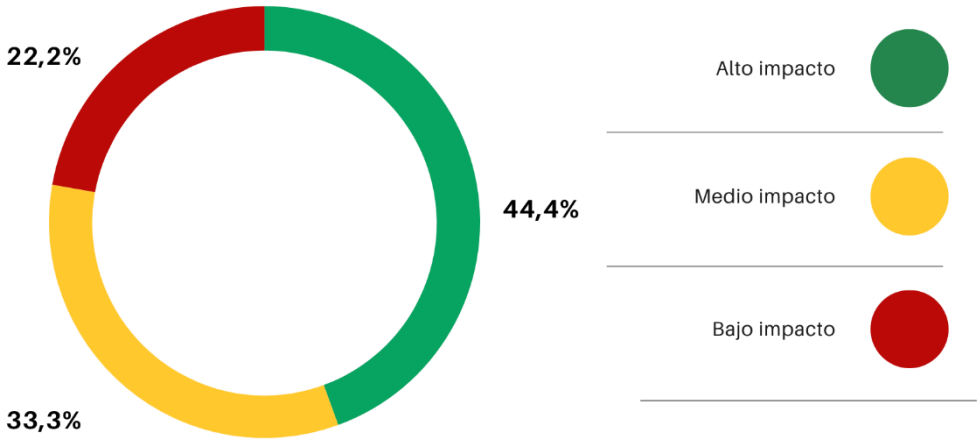
The medium level (yellow) includes those who had partial support or with limitations. This may mean that they regularized, but with erroneous or late information, or that they participated in entrepreneurship programs, but only in training without access to seed capital, or that they regularized, but did not participate in integration programs. In all these cases, support was limited to achieve full integration.

The low level (red) groups those who did not receive accompaniment in their regularization process (they were irregular or with expired status) and did not participate in any economic integration program. In some cases, they did not even know about the existence of these programs. This level reflects those who were left out of the benefits of international cooperation, either because of geographical barriers, lack of information, or because programs failed to reach them.

Figure 2 illustrates the qualitative distribution of the perceived impact among the group participants.

Figure 2

Qualitative Distribution of Impact Perception in the Focus Group



Note. Legend items translated from Spanish: Alto impacto = High impact; Medio impacto = Medium impact; Bajo impacto = Low impact.

As seen in Figure 2, the impact was not even. In other words, more than four out of ten people who participated in the study managed to integrate well thanks to the support they received. But almost six out of ten also remained at medium or low levels, which makes it clear that the impact of organizations did not arrive in the same way for everyone. However, reading these data only in percentage terms would be to reduce the complexity of what the participants experienced. What the numbers do not say is that behind each classification there is a different story, a person who arrived alone without money and found in IOM a support network that helped her integration not to be so hard, and another who arrived in similar conditions, but never knew that these programs existed. Both realities coexist within the same institution, in the same city, in the same period. For this reason, in the following pages, each traffic light group is analyzed in more detail, to understand what made some more advanced than others.

When analyzing the real experiences of migrants, it can be seen that the impact of IOM does not depend only on the quality of the programs, but on a series of preconditions that the migrant must have in order to access them, such as migratory regularization, access to information networks, the geographical factor and the scope that this institution can have. In addition, along the way you can see a pattern of conditions that the migrant achieved around his stay in the country; to have the different perspectives he has on IOM.

The green group is made up of eight participants who had a high level of impact. The matrix shows that in these cases IOM was able to articulate several components such as regularization, training, seed capital and, in some cases, follow-up. What is of interest here is not only to describe the participants, but to understand what IOM that worked, how that translated into impact, and what limits that intervention had.

A first pattern that could be seen in the matrix is that all participants in this group received seed capital. This suggests that participants tend to have a more positive view of IOM's role when IOM prioritizes the delivery of capital as part of its programmes. Regularization also appears as a common factor, eight of the participants have legal status, which IOM or its partners supported in obtaining it. In the testimonies of the participants, it is noted how these strategies translated into concrete changes and the combination of both components generated an effect that neither alone would have achieved.

However, one aspect that deserves attention is how IOM operates in these cases. Of the eight participants in the green group, IOM was not the first actor they had contact with, but rather their implementing partners. IOM then appears more as an organization that finances, articulates or joins at a later stage. This is due to the work model that IOM has on the R4V platform. What IOM does is assume a more strategic leadership and coordination role, while direct execution in the territory falls more on the implementing partners. From the institutional perspective, his role was both with a presence on the ground and strategic coordination, but, from the experience of migrants, he was more like a secondary agent. One participant expressed clearly that her first contact was with HIAS and from there was IOM (FG). Migrants often do not meet IOM before leaving their country, only to discover that they can count on it when they are already at their destination, usually because other local organizations introduce them to it.

This model has clear advantages since the implementing partners know the territory, have trust previously built with the communities and can adapt the programs to local realities. For example, the University of Azuay not only trained the participants, but also gave them a certificate with academic value that they could use to seek formal employment. Each partner contributed what they did best, and IOM provided the resources and coordination, but there are also implications in the visibility of IOM's impact of operating through partners, because its direct presence is diminished. Beneficiaries associate support with the organizations that

served them directly, not with the person who financed it. This does not invalidate IOM's impact, but it may change the way its role is understood. It is not so much a direct executor but acts as a facilitator who makes it possible for others to act. Their impact is measured not only in the direct results of the programs, but also in their ability to articulate with actors, mobilize resources, and generate synergies.

Follow-up was another factor that made the difference, albeit unevenly. In some cases, there was subsequent accompaniment. For example, a participant was called twice to give her more supplies; others maintained contact with IOM from Azogues, where there was not much of an IOM presence or offices. But in other cases, follow-up was poor or nonexistent. It seems that it depended more on the initiative of the beneficiaries themselves or on the fact that the organizations had resources at the time rather than on a follow-up mechanism that the organization offered. However, despite this limitation, several ventures managed to consolidate. This is because the participants themselves did not expect follow-up to be part of the deal; they had internalized that the help received was only training or information to regularize themselves." That grain that organizations give, if you know how to take advantage of it, you put it into production" (FG). The beneficiaries see it as "a task on both sides" (FG). This does not justify the lack of institutional follow-up, but it helps us to understand why the absence of follow-up did not necessarily stop those who were already determined to move forward.

The yellow group is composed of six participants who reached a medium level of impact. Unlike the green group, where the eight participants managed to consolidate their ventures and regularization, here the support received was partial or encountered barriers that prevented full integration. In this section there are those who regularized but did not participate in economic integration programs and those who participated but did not manage to access seed capital or their ventures were not sustainable over time. The important thing here is to understand that the impact of IOM was not equal to that of the green group.

A first pattern that emerges from the matrix is that, unlike the green group, none of the six participants received seed capital. All had some kind of contact with IOM or its partners, but the support remained in training or regularization, without reaching support in economic integration. This is perhaps the most determining factor in explaining why this group failed to consolidate itself as the Green.

Within this group, three subtypes can be identified, with different types of impact.

The first subtype is made up of those who were regularized, but did not participate in economic integration programs, in this case the regularization worked, but the economic integration was pending. Unlike the Green group, where regularization and seed capital went hand in hand, here the connection between the two dimensions did not materialize.

The second subtype is made up of those who participated in training but never managed to access seed capital. Here the participants confirm that they took courses with different institutions, but they never received this benefit and in some cases their situation is informal. In another case, the beneficiary's visa is expired and could not be regularized because she was required to have a *"*Venezuelan criminal record" (FG). In addition, his perception of the aid is mediated by distance because "it does help, but more in his central offices, in Azogues there is no office and it is more difficult" (FG).

The third subtype is made up of those who had ventures that were not able to sustain themselves over time. Although they regularized and had contact with implementing partners such as HIAS, the venture was not sustainable and ended up abandoning it. In these cases, the support existed, but it was not enough.

What unites these six participants is that, unlike the green group, none managed to articulate the three components that made the difference in the high-impact group. Several external factors explain why these participants failed to make further progress. The first is geographical location, which suggests that the programs were not adapted to the conditions of those living outside of Cuenca or major cities. The second factor is the lack of information or access to networks. Several participants noted that they did not know about entrepreneurship programs or had only heard something but were not informed (FG). This contrasts with the green group, where information came through family networks, organizations or WhatsApp groups.

The third factor is the way of arrival in the country. Three of the six participants arrived alone in Ecuador. In the green group, on the other hand, most arrived with family or pre-existing support networks. Arriving only implied facing migration without support with

some contact link. This did not prevent them from regularizing or having some contact with organizations, but it does seem to have limited access to information networks and continuous accompaniment. The participation of the organizations was punctual, without continuity. This group reveals some shortcomings of IOM's intervention model in this group. The organization was unable to articulate its different lines of action in a systematic way, leaving out people who, having the will to participate**,** could not do so due to geographical, information, or origin barriers.

Finally, the red group, which is composed of four participants who reached a low level of impact. Unlike the green and yellow groups, here there was no effective accompaniment in either regularization or economic integration. Three of the four have no current legal status. Only one has a VIRTE visa, but its regularization was not accompanied by integration programs. Two situations explain this level. On the one hand, those who never had contact with the IOM, nor with its partners and on the other hand those who had some rapprochement, but without concrete results. In all cases, exclusion responds to a combination of factors such as living outside the urban area, not being integrated into information networks, and having arrived alone in the country, without the family support that in the green group facilitated access to the programs. In addition, it is important to consider that not all people give the same impulse to seek support and improve their situation, as well as it must be recognized that in large-scale migration crises, the high volume of people, the complexity of the processes and the limitation of resources mean that no humanitarian intervention achieves a total impact on the entire population.

6. Conclusions

This study concluded that IOM had a dual role in the humanitarian response to Venezuelan migration in Ecuador during the period 2021-2024. On the one hand, he functioned as a technical advisor to the State that supported the design and implementation of migration policies; and on the other hand, it acted as a bridge connecting migrants to direct aid through a network of implementing partners. This duality had strategic advantages as it allowed IOM to move from an emergency logic to a more stable approach to integration that was aligned with its Ecuador Strategic Plan 2021-2026. However, this same structure explains the organization's low institutional visibility among the migrant population, precisely because its presence occurred mainly through the Ecuadorian state and its implementing partners, which were closer to the territory.

In terms of migration regularization, IOM's support to the VIRTE process was important through the MIDAS system, technical assistance and management of funds for migration fees. Thanks to this, more than 96,000 people managed to regularize themselves in the country between 2022 and 2024. However, less than 25% of those who started this process managed to complete it until they obtained the Ecuadorian ID. The reasons were several, such as economic barriers, digital divides and even those who obtained the visa found that employers and banks did not recognize it as a valid document. Companies asked for the physical ID, and banks treated the VIRTE visa as a humanitarian visa that was not useful for opening accounts or requesting credits. This shows that regularization was not equivalent to full integration; Without the recognition of the private sector and banks, the legal document loses much of its value for the daily life of the migrant.

Regarding socio-economic integration, some of the programmes that IOM promoted had different results. The School of Economic Inclusion, Educa Sin Límites and the Pilot Plan for Inclusive Microentrepreneurship worked well when they managed to combine training, certification and seed capital to support their businesses. The results show that the impact depended not only on the quality of the programs, but also on preconditions such as regularization, access to information networks, and geographic location. Those who lived outside the main and urban cities or arrived without support networks had limited results, not because of the absence of programs, but because of access barriers that the organization was unable to overcome systematically. In addition, regularization and economic integration functioned as separate lanes and there was no strategy that linked one thing to the other. When international funds ran out, projects were interrupted. The clearest case was the departure of IOM from Cuenca due to lack of funding.

It must be recognized that this research has limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. The research was carried out only in Cuenca and Azogues, so the results cannot be generalized to all of Ecuador. Was it possible to interview directors of HIAS Ecuador, who would have provided an important view from the side of the implementing partners.

For future research, it would be important to focus on the role of implementers since it has greater visibility among the migrant population. Generate possible articulations between the

Ecuadorian state and IOM on the validation of VIRTE visas in the private sector. It is also recommended that similar studies be carried out in the future with other organizations, as well as the implementing partners that have greater visibility with the beneficiary population. It would also be useful to do an analysis in other countries such as Peru and Colombia, to analyze the role of IOM at the regional level.

Finally, this study makes sense at a time when Venezuelan migration is no longer at the center of the agenda of governments in the region. What a few years ago was called a humanitarian crisis today competes with other problems such as insecurity or the economic crisis. In addition, Ecuador's local elections are in November 2026, and the migration issue is conspicuous by its absence in political discourse. The same happens at the time of the presidential elections, where despite being an issue of international nature and of great importance for different sectors of the country, they are deliberately omitted from the political agenda to avoid the loss of votes.

International funds have also been reduced and IOM's presence in the territory has decreased, as happened in Ecuador. However, the migrant population has not disappeared. More than 90,000 migrants who have regularized continue to live in Ecuador and the barriers that this study documented, such as the fact that many migrants do not complete the identification process, financial institutions do not grant credit, the distance to offices, the duplication of efforts and the lack of follow-up persist. As one of the participants in the focus group said, “that grain that organizations give, if you know how to take advantage of it, you put it into production.”

The challenge now is that this initial support reaches more people, that it is not lost due to lack of follow-up or because it is no longer a priority for the institutions, and that those who live in Azogues get the same opportunity as those who live in the center of Cuenca. Integration does not depend on a single actor or a single program. It's a chain of conditions that must work together. If one fails, the entire institutional effort is weakened and, in the end, the person who ends up paying for the consequences is the person who most needs that chain to work.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A
Impact Levels (Traffic Light Methodology)

8	6	4
Alto impacto	Medio impacto	Bajo impacto

PARTICIPANTE	REGULARIZACIÓN	PROG. ECONÓMICO	SEGUIMIENTO	IMPACTO
Participante 1	Tiene estatus legal. Usó carpas OIM.	Panadería con OIM — capital y capacitación.	OIM llegó a Azogues por su grupo.	Alto
Participante 2	Visa VIRTE. Apoyo directo OIM.	Apoyo OIM en emprendimiento.	Seguimiento FUDELA y OIM.	Alto
Participante 3	Visa permanente. Consejo Noruego en 3ra visa.	Crowdfunding OIM/FUDELA, capacitación Childfund+OIM.	Vinculación con instituciones.	Alto
Participante 4	Visa VIRTE (2da). Consejo Noruego a padres.	Participó y recibió apoyo OIM.	Participó en ferias. Seguimiento presente.	Alto
Participante 13	Visa VIRTE (2da). HIAS orientó proceso sin pasaporte.	Curso OIM + máquina como capital semilla. Negocio activo.	HIAS en proceso migratorio. OIM aportó herramientas al taller.	Alto
Participante 14	Visa permanente. Orientada por Defensoría Pública con seguimiento de abogada.	Capital semilla OIM/UDA (2 veces). Taller activo. Permiso artesanal MIPRO.	Seguimiento Casa de la Mujer y UDA. Dos rondas de apoyo efectivo.	Alto
Participante 15	Visa VIRTE. Orientada por HIAS y familiar. Proceso sin inconvenientes.	Capital semilla FUDELA/OIM en postres saludables. Emprendimiento en crecimiento.	Formación con HIAS y UDA. Ferias con varias organizaciones.	Alto
Participante 18	Regularización completa y en regla.	Participó en programas económicos con resultados positivos.	Expresa haber recibido acompañamiento efectivo en todo el proceso.	Alto
Participante 5	Visa permanente por cuenta propia.	Conoce programas pero no pudo asistir (horarios/Azogues).	Solo asistió a una charla. Sin seguimiento.	Medio
Participante 6	Visa refugio con HIAS.	No participó en programas económicos.	Sin seguimiento de emprendimiento.	Medio
Participante 7	Visa VIRTE. OIM apoyó en proceso.	No sabía de programas de emprendimiento.	Sin seguimiento económico.	Medio
Participante 8	Tiene estatus. Sin apoyo OIM en proceso.	Participó con HIAS. Sin negocio actual.	Orientación alternativa. Seguimiento limitado.	Medio
Participante 16	Visa VIRTE (1ra). Irregularidad por mala orientación del Consejo Noruego. Se regularizó con censo VIRTE.	Repostería saludable un tiempo. Ejerce enfermería homologada. Sin capital semilla OIM.	Contacto con HIAS y Fundación Grace. Sin seguimiento continuo en integración económica.	Medio
Participante 17	Visa VIRTE (2da). En riesgo de vencimiento, no cumple requisitos para permanente.	Capacitaciones OIM, UTPL y Prendho. Sin capital semilla (COVID). Emprendimiento informal activo.	Formación sin seguimiento efectivo. Discriminación por edad y nacionalidad.	Medio
Participante 9	Sin documentos. Hija tampoco regularizada.	No sabía de programas. Sin trabajo.	Sin orientación ni seguimiento.	Bajo
Participante 10	Visa VIRTE. Sin apoyo OIM. Hija sin regularizar.	Ha escuchado pero no participó.	Percibe trabas institucionales.	Bajo
Participante 11	Visa vencida. Sin acceso por antecedentes.	HIAS 2020, negocio por cuenta propia.	Sin seguimiento. Lejos de oficinas OIM.	Bajo
Participante 12	Sin estatus. Sin contacto con organizaciones.	No conoce ni participó en programas.	Sin ningún acompañamiento.	Bajo

Note. Design of the matrix made using the Anthropic artificial intelligence tool. (2025). *Claude 4 Sonnet* [*Large Language Model*]. https://claude.ai/new

Appendix B

Questions asked to experts

1. From your experience, what would you say has been IOM's main function in Ecuador: to be an executor of direct aid or to act more as a technical advisor to the government?

2. From your perspective, what has been the most significant change in the profile or needs of Venezuelan migrants in Ecuador between 2021 and 2024?

3. How does IOM articulate with the Ecuadorian Government to complement the work of the Ministries and avoid duplication of efforts?

4. How did IOM support the Ministry of Government to manage the Migratory Permanence Registry, which was the previous and mandatory step for the VIRTE visa or other regularization process, and then at the time of carrying out these processes?

5. Within the framework of the VIRTE process or other regularization process, how important was IOM's support in the installation of service points or mobile brigades to reach migrants in remote areas?

6. How does IOM manage support for the Venezuelan population that entered through unauthorized passages and was therefore excluded from the current VIRTE process and those who cannot pay?

7. After the end of IOM's direct technical or financial support periods, was there any follow-up?

8. You have seen the regularization process (VIRTE) up close and the livelihood part. In your opinion, to what extent has regularization really facilitated formal labor insertion?

9. How are the relationship of the implementing partners and the importance for migrants to have that assistance

10. How did IOM manage to articulate the regularization process (VIRTE) with the economic inclusion programs, was there a strategy for the migrant who obtained their visa to be prioritized or immediately linked to microenterprise projects?

11. What specifically did the economic integration project model consist of and what technical tools (guides, manuals, training) did they provide?

12. How were migrants selected for these entrepreneurship programs? Was it intended that they already had a business base or did they start from scratch? Was there a strategy for the migrant who obtained their visa to be prioritized or immediately linked to microenterprise projects?

13. What happens when the migrant finishes the program? Was there a follow-up mechanism (by IOM) to verify if the business was still active months later?

14. Do you think that, thanks to IOM, the government now has better tools to deal with migration on its own, or do they still depend a lot on international support?

15. If you had to summarize IOM's role in these three years, what would you say was the most important outcome in socio-economic integration?

16. You, who saw the projects from the outside, do you think that the integration programs were well adapted to the reality of Ecuador, or do you think that they were foreign models?

Appendix C

Questions Asked in the Focus Group to Migrants

1. How was your experience of the trip when you arrived in Ecuador? Did he arrive alone or with his family?

2. What was the first contact you had with an aid organization (IOM, Red Cross, etc. And what impression did you have of Ecuadorian institutions at that time?

3. Did you know what IOM was before leaving Venezuela or during the journey? Do you recognize your logo on the brigades, tents or terminals you have visited?

4. Have you ever used IOM's information tents or waypoints at borders or land terminals? Has IOM reached out to you?

5. Do you currently have legal status in the country and what do you have (VIRTE visa, refugee card or other)?

6. How did you find out about the VIRTE regularization process and how clear IOM's role was in guiding you (they gave you information, lent you computers or accompanied you in the brigades)?

7. During your registration process or visa application, did you receive direct support from IOM or another organization to complete the steps before the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

8. If you were unable to access the VIRTE process (e.g., due to irregular entry), did you receive any guidance or alternatives from IOM or another organization for your situation?

9. Did you know that there are entrepreneurship programmes offered by IOM, supported by IOM or organizations, to help migrants with training or tools? participated in any?

10. Did the job or business you have today come from any support from IOM or another organization (seed capital, training, fairs), or did you have to look for alternatives on your own?

11. Have you participated in entrepreneurship fairs or business networking organized by IOM or another organization to sell your products or services?

12. In your opinion, do you think that IOM is an institution that really helps the migrant to settle and progress in Ecuador, or do you feel that its help is only for the emergency of the journey?