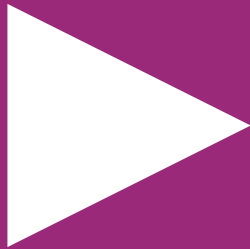


Maria Manuel Baptista
Rui Alexandre Grácio
Renata Castelo Branco Araujo
Thaís Azevedo
Francisco Welligton Barbosa Jr
(Org.)

Sexualities and Leisure





Maria Manuel Baptista
Rui Alexandre Grácio
Renata Castelo Branco Araujo
Tháís Azevedo
Francisco Welligton Barbosa Jr
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Maria Manuel Baptista
Rui Alexandre Grácio
Renata Castelo Branco Araujo
Thaís Azevedo
Francisco Wellington Barbosa Jr

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Travessa da Vila União, 16, 7.º dto 3030-217 COIMBRA

Telef.: 239 084 370

e-mail: editor@ruigracio.com

Site: www.ruigracio.com

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THE VENEZUELAN LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY IN ECUADOR: HOMOPHOBIA AND XENOPHOBIA?¹

Julio Merchán-Romero²

Angel Torres-Toukourmidis³

Jenny Pontón⁴

Abstract

According to data from the UN Refugee Agency-UNHCR- (2021), so far more than 4 million Venezuelans have been displaced abroad, representing 16% of forced migration worldwide. Even more worrying, by 2022-2023 these figures are projected to double. The factors that have brought about the Venezuelan exodus are the result of socio-economic and political conflicts that have been going on for years. As a result, Ecuador has been one of the countries with a large number of Venezuelan migrants, and cities such as Cuenca, Quito, and Guayaquil, as those with the highest economic growth, are important centers where these migrants settle or use them as transit cities to reach Peru (Condori, *et al.*, 2020), the second country with the second highest rate of registered migrants due to its economic and commercial dynamics. In this context, there is also an evident social problem with migration, and it is the increase of the LGBTQ+ community in the different countries that are destinations for Venezuelan citizens, which has caused the urgent need for public policies that can be used to control discrimination against this group within each country. This study presents the analysis of discrimination against a migratory group such as Venezuelans in Ecuador and the facets of discrimination also exercised against the LGBTQ+ community within these migratory waves in the country. In this initial perspective, we have the existence of the relationship of Venezuelan and Ecuadorian society with the LGBTQ+ community that historically has not been very good, specifically in Venezuela, where homophobia and machismo stand out as visible and commonly accepted forms of discrimination within concrete social environments in which the members of these communities lack the necessary resources at a formative level within their development. Taking into account that discrimination, is interpreted by attitudes that are socially linked to a concept of discrepancy with traditionally established standards in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation, on the other hand, machismo is understood as behaviors proper to the archetypal social construction of masculinity superior

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² Universidad Politécnica Salesiana, Ecuador. E-mail: jmerchanr1@est.ups.edu.ec

³ Gamelab-UPS Research Group Coordinator, Universidad Politécnica Salesiana, Ecuador. E-mail: atorrest@ups.edu.ec

⁴ Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales-FLACSO, Ecuador. Email: jponton@flacso.edu.ec

to that of women, subordinating them to a more utilitarian environment than as an equal (Alvarez & Lourenco, 2018). The following research poses as a general objective: to analyze the conjuncture of the Venezuelan LGBTQ+ community in Ecuador. It is also worth mentioning that beyond nationality, the Ecuadorian population tends to proceed with less familiarity with people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, increasing their distancing towards Venezuelans when they belong to this group.

Keywords:

LGBTQ+ community; migration; Ecuador; social distancing

Introduction

According to data from the UN Refugee Agency-UNHCR- (2021), so far more than 4 million Venezuelans have been displaced abroad, representing 16% of forced migration worldwide. Even more worrying, by 2022-2023 these figures are projected to double.

With the massive arrival of Venezuelan migrants, Latin American countries have had to face an excessive increase in their population, particularly Colombia- 1.7 million-, Peru- 1.04 million-, Chile-457 thousand-, Ecuador-417 thousand- and Brazil 262 thousand- seeking to coordinate actions effectively to respond at national and regional level with public policies aimed at the integration, economy, protection, health, food security and education of Venezuelans.

The factors that have brought about the Venezuelan exodus are the result of socio-economic and political conflicts that have been going on for years. As a result, Ecuador has been one of the countries with a large number of Venezuelan migrants, and cities such as Cuenca, Quito and Guayaquil, as those with the highest economic growth, are important centers where they settle or use them as transit cities to reach Peru (Condori, *et al.*, 2020), the second country with the second highest rate of registered migrants due to its economic and commercial dynamics.

In this context, there is also an evident social problem with migration, and it is the increase of the LGBTIQ+ community in the different countries that are destinations for Venezuelan citizens, which has caused the urgent need for public policies that can be used to control discrimination against this group within each country.

In Ecuador, the «GLBT movement», or LGTBI, has been constituted with the purpose of guaranteeing, enforcing and enforcing the citizen rights stipulated in the constitution, in order to consolidate a strong identity in the face of a country that until the 1990s considered homosexuality as a crime (Valarezo, 2016).

With this precedent, an analysis of the reality that has occurred within the growth of this community in Ecuador as a result of the Venezuelan exodus is pertinent (Altamirano & Torres-Toukourmidis, 2021), without leaving aside the fact that, since the declaration of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, this humanitarian crisis has become more complex, Daniels (2020) mentions that, despite the closing of borders caused by the virus, the collapse of the Venezuelan health system added to hyperinflation and political polarization has produced the exodus has become an act of survival. The social co-responsibility of the receiving countries towards the issue of refugees during the pandemic implied the implementation of exclusive strategies imperatively requiring the redirection of public investment to mitigate the potential consequences of contagion among the migrant population (Brito, 2020).

To further aggravate this situation where mass migration and pandemic are combined, the framing of the media regarding the situation of Venezuelan migrants is added, influencing public opinion and the audience's perception of this crisis by nurturing the discourse of hate, criminalization and xenophobia (Altamirano and Torres-Toukourmidis, 2021). Therefore, this research is prescribed towards the deepening of an analysis of the typology of discrimination, developed to identify, categorize and develop a direct dialogue with the Venezuelan LGBTIQ+ community found in Ecuador.

Theoretical Framework

This study presents the analysis of discrimination against a migratory group such as Venezuelans in Ecuador and the facets of discrimination also exercised against the LGBTIQ+ community within these migratory waves in the country. In this initial perspective, we have the interpretation of migrants and their situation in the country of arrival, since according to Eguren (2021) where he places individuals located between 20 and 40 years old, who happen to be considered relatively young, as individuals in full capacity of adaptability to different jobs, added to this, the existence of gender equity between migrant men and women is understood.

However, the reality of the receiving country is altered by the difficulty precisely because of competition for entry into formal employment, which turns informal work into an escape hatch to which is added the need to reduce pay for labor in order to obtain employment (Regional Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants, 2019). Depending on the labor requirements of each country, this situation is affected and is constantly changing due to the migratory process, which means that a concrete study of the demographic profile is only possible when the flow of migrants stabilizes.

Once the context of Venezuelan mobility and the existing reality in relation to the difficulty of having an efficient demographic reading in countries such as Ecuador are situated, the existence of discriminatory behavior within the migratory context is observed (Moscoso, Candela, & Torres-Toukoumidis, 2022), since the labor market for migrants, as in the case of services such as education and health services, is complicated (Poza, 2021). This situation, which generates economic discomfort and increases the level of insecurity, is part of the main causes of a bilateral crisis; in the host country such as Ecuador and due to the economic instability of Venezuela which, as we have seen, during the month of February and March 2022 went from having a crisis due to the price of crude oil to having an increase in prices due to the war environment of the moment, these abrupt fluctuations, added to the still present pandemic of COVID-19, aggravate a tense financial and social environment.

The Venezuelan LGBTIQ+ Community and Migration

When taking into account the migratory history that has occurred in the last four years, in which, since 2018 according to UNHCR (2018), the number of migrants in Ecuadorian territory, of Venezuelan nationality, already exceeded half a million, with the entry through Rumichaca being the most sought after, with a figure greater than 4 000 people per day crossing the Colombian border, it can be understood that within this migratory movement members of the LGBTIQ+ community have also been forced to use Ecuador as a settlement or transit destination to reach countries of the southern cone. This is really useful to determine the experience of the migrant upon arrival in Ecuador and discrimination, an element that is born according to Millán (2015), by the friction of the two countries through the migratory waves that, in addition to being opportunities in which empathy with refugees

and migrants arises on the part of the receiving country, also become a breeding ground in which negative situations arise in which discriminatory acts stand out, because if we go back to historical facts, Venezuela in the years of prosperity went through this with Ecuadorians and now vice versa.

Added to this, we have the existence of the relationship of Venezuelan and Ecuadorian society with the LGBTIQ+ community that historically has not been very good, specifically in Venezuela, where homophobia and machismo stand out as visible and commonly accepted forms of discrimination within specific social environments in which the members of these communities lack the necessary resources at a formative level within their development. Taking into account that discrimination, is interpreted by attitudes that are socially linked to a concept of discrepancy with traditionally established standards in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation, on the other hand, machismo is understood as behaviors proper to the archetypal social construction of masculinity superior to that of women, subordinating them to a more utilitarian environment than as an equal (Alvarez & Lourenco, 2018).

Social perception of the LGBTIQ+ community

Stereotypes reinforce common conceptualizations that foster indiscriminate discrimination, which leads to these ways of thinking expanding in an alarming way at a generational level within sociability in environments where intolerance is seen as commonplace. Under this premise, expressions such as «closet faggot» become common and their use represents a derogatory social sentence that members of the LGBTIQ+ community feel directly in their context, in which the very terminology of «closet» is in itself an act of discrimination and flagellation, as the use of this term has come to cause such damage that it is no longer seen as a form of disintegration but as an identification, where opinions such as «I am gay/lesbian/closeted» become more and more common (Gumilla Center, 1993).

Nevertheless, the character itself of the forms, even linguistic, produced by the Venezuelan's own socially accepted behavior, it should be clear that different factors can alter the interpretation of this message, in which expressions such as «*mama huevo*», «*jala bolas*» or «*marico*», although at first glance they may have a certain linguistic meaning, can be seen as a form of identification, although at first sight they may have a discriminatory or offensive per-

ception, within the slang, these expressions are completely distant from their meaning as interpreted by a non-Venezuelan person (or even a Caribbean person, since there are expressions such as «marico» that are common in Caribbean countries such as Dominican Republic or Colombia). Dominicana or Colombia).

The concept of violence [...] that is exercised against people who are perceived as transgressors of traditional gender norms, of the male/female binomial, and whose bodies differ from the known standard bodies i.e. feminine and masculine (Gómez-Dueñas, 2012, p. 48).

From another perspective, an element that has been highlighted and has become a health issue, made invisible by the latest global crisis surrounding the HIV/AIDS pandemic, is the increase in the number of cases of patients testing positive for HIV, in which the LGBTIQ+ community has shown an exponential increase in recent years, and if we reduce the search spectrum to the Venezuelan LGBTIQ+ community found in Ecuador, we can observe, in the same way, a strong xenophobic charge coming from the still stigmatized fear and rejection of the convergence of factors between LGBTIQ+ members, foreigners, specifically Venezuelans and HIV.

Thus, according to Bolivar (2021a) people in this spectrum prefer not to attend health centers to start treatment, which has generated that the more than 1,062 Venezuelans with HIV in Ecuador are only a speculative figure because these have been the cases in which patients have opted to enter the health system, which casts doubt on the real number of people found with this disease. In addition to this situation, the pandemic has caused massive layoffs so that also after a certain time, access to health insurance is withdrawn, making the MSP (Ministry of Public Health) must attend to the uninsured population, this achieved by the pressure exerted by civil society organizations although it is still limited by the impact exerted by the pandemic, This includes multiple sectors of the population and the LGBTIQ+ community in which are found, for example, the case of sex workers, who due to their difficulties of stability in terms of residence, makes it difficult to follow up for effective treatment.

Although the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008) in Article 11, paragraph 2 declares: «All persons are equal and shall enjoy the same rights, duties and opportunities», which offers rights and protections for people of different sexual orientation and gender identity. However, as far as

the labor market is concerned, there is no code that deals more in depth with the issue of labor exclusion and discrimination (Araujo-Cuauro, 2018).

Discrimination against the migrant LGBTQ+ community

The case with the greatest difficulty is that of Venezuelan transgender persons found in Ecuador. The difficulty in accessing rights due to the absence of a public policy that helps in the sense of assistance in terms of information and guidance on available resources, added to their mobility, which prevents them from being monitored and accompanied in terms of their health and reproduction, the greatest risk for this group is informal and sexual work, which puts them at great risk of violence and aggression in the streets (Bolívar, 2021b).

The loss of economic and social well-being affects the quality of life of the LGBTI community, making them vulnerable subjects exposed to violence, exclusion and discrimination. Exclusion is reflected in various factors such as age, which like the heterosexual population suffers labor exclusion when they are older (49 years and older), as they are considered individuals with lower labor productivity (Cisneros-Freire, 2017, p. 48).

The discrimination involved in Venezuelan LBGBTIQ+ people, because of their sexual orientation and identity, in conjunction with the crisis in their country forces them to migrate causing even more problems of discrimination in their countries of transit and/or destination, the few people who seek refugee status on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity are analyzed under by «belonging to a certain social group». While aid agencies do not take into account the specific circumstances of LBGBTIQ+ persons as a refugee which makes them in certain cases, unreachable for members of this collective (Araujo-Cuauro, 2018). For Serrano and Cabezas (2020), the sex work that many transvestites and transgender people engage in is explained by a cultural aspect that, through mechanisms related to discrimination whose purpose is exclusionary, prevent non-normative identities, thus denying them job opportunities and the recognition of their identities.

Because of this, the choice of sexual or stereotypical work for non-normative identities is subject to social, economic, political and cultural pressures. While for the rest of the LBGBTIQ+ members, discrimination by employers

with discriminatory tendencies, what is sought by organizations that defend the rights of the community is the non-inclination of preferences and the equitable recognition of work effort, establishing a meritocratic criterion that does not suggest an equal salary for all employees regardless of hierarchy, but rather that gender identification or sexual determination is not part of the salary model, since the following analysis by surveys seeks to determine the effectiveness of the actions carried out for the welfare of this community. In which it focuses not only on the labor perception but also on the general perception of the population and thus make a reading on the situation of migration, identity and recognition of rights of the Venezuelan LGBTIQ+ community in Ecuador.

Recognizing this situation produced in Ecuador on both social groups, the following questions are presented: What type of closeness exists between the local population and the members of the LGBTIQ+ community, what type of closeness exists between the local population and the Venezuelan migration, what type of closeness exists between the local population and the Venezuelan migration belonging to the LGBTIQ+ community, and finally, how has the experience of the Venezuelan members of the LGBTIQ+ community been in Ecuador? For these questions a systematized process will be established that will allow understanding this situation that intertwines social groups -mass migration and people with gender identities and sexual orientation different from heterosexual-, which by antonomasia and as seen in the academic readings previously reviewed, both groups have suffered different degrees of discrimination, seeking to glimpse a detailed picture of their corresponding social situation in Ecuador.

Methodology

Taking into consideration this context, the following research proposes as general objective: to analyze the situation of the Venezuelan LGBTQ+ community in Ecuador. To this end, the following specific objectives were established: [SO1] To examine the perception of the Ecuadorian population regarding Venezuelan LGBTQ+ migration; [SO2] To explain the appreciation of Venezuelan migrants of the LGBTQ+ community in Ecuador; finally, [SO3] To contrast the current situation between Venezuelan migration of the LGBTQ+ community and the Ecuadorian population.

To meet these specific objectives, a quantitative-qualitative approach of descriptive scope was applied, showing the dimensions of a social phenomenon by establishing a series of properties and characteristics subjected to analysis (Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández-Collado and Baptista-Lucio, 2014). Under this tessitura, the methodological design selected has been mixed ethnography, defined by the perspective that those involved in the study may have and on what it may reflect in a spectrum of generalized opinion before the members of the collective involved who belong to the Venezuelan nationality.

To analyze the degree of social distancing of the Ecuadorian population with respect to the Venezuelan LGBTQ+ community. In this perspective, a Guttman scaling was applied, the scalogram was ordered hierarchically based on the distance and the degree of intimacy of the Ecuadorian population with the Venezuelan LGBTQ+ community, for this purpose 3 levels were established, the first exclusively to the Venezuelan population, the second on the LGBTQ+ community and the third with respect to the Venezuelan LGBTQ+ community. This questionnaire was answered by an exploratory probabilistic sample of 68 people of Ecuadorian origin, resulting in a gradual increase of exclusion in the three levels when they begin to have greater intimacy, that is, there is almost total acceptance when they are visitors, but when they become involved as residents, co-workers, neighbors, friends or relate to blood relatives, the degrees of repudiation begin. This survey was applied from March 15th, 2022 to May 15th, 2022, being extracted by means of an Excel where the information was systematized.

Results

With the results of the surveys applied to a representative sample of Ecuadorian society, we can infer that the level of closeness to members of the LGBTQ+ community and to the Venezuelan migrant sector of the population is mostly of acceptance, showing a behavior of rejection towards the indiscriminate exclusion of members of both groups.

However, it should be mentioned that the rejection of behaviors that reflect a dislike of migrant groups and people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community are proportionally linked to the level of closeness of Ecuadorian society to these groups, as shown in Figure 1 and 2.

1. Selecciona las opciones que mejor describa tus sentimientos hacia los VENEZOLANOS/AS en base a los siguientes enunciados:

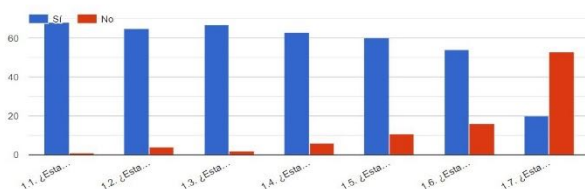


Figure 1: Results on the perception of the Venezuelan migrant community

2. Selecciona las opciones que mejor describa tus sentimientos hacia la COMUNIDAD LGBTIQ+ en base a los siguientes enunciados:

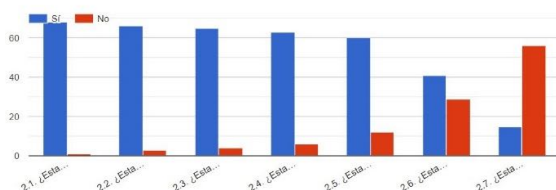


Figure 2: Results on the perception of the LGBTIQ+ community

It can be observed that as long as the contact of Ecuadorian society with members of the LGBTIQ+ collective or with the migrant community is alien to the close social environment of the individuals, they have no qualms in showing a clear empathetic inclination to the behavior of the groups about which they are asked questions.

However, it is important to take into account the number of people who, at the beginning, show a certain level of dislike or disagreement about this group and the communities, because as the circle of sociability with the subjects studied shortens, the perception changes, showing an exponential growth in the rejection of the interaction, this can be noticed to a greater extent with the question related to the feeling about the LGBTIQ+ community, in which a much more notable growth is shown, in which a greater number of people, in which up to 42.03% of those surveyed reject the fact of agreeing to the introduction of a member of this collective in their family circle.

In contrast, after reflecting a difference of 40.58% in the rate of negative responses between the first and the sixth question, a difference of 59.42% is shown in the questioning on whether the exclusion of the members of the collective from the country would be preferred, leaning towards a negative response, even so the margin of affirmative responses represents 21.74% of the total responses.

In the case of the perception of the Venezuelan migrant community, Figure 1 shows a gradually decreasing behavior in positive responses, similar to Figure 2, with the difference that the degree of rejection is lower. However, as in the case of Figure 2, when referring to whether respondents consider that Venezuelan migrants should be excluded, the difference between those who reject this position and those who accept it is less than in Figure 2, with a 56.52% difference.

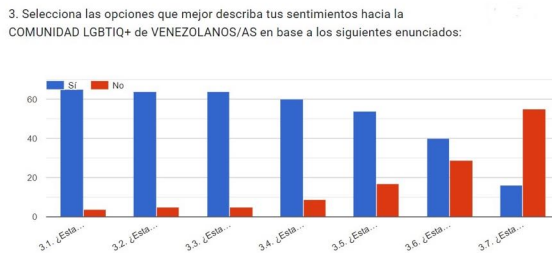


Figure 3: Results on the perception of the LGBTQI+ group of Venezuelans

For 81.15% of the sample rejects the exclusion of this group, while 18.84% of respondents are in favor of exclusion, 2.9% lower than with the LGBTQI+ group.

In conjunction with the previous questions, when questioning the sample subjects it is determined that, according to Figure 3, there is an increase in the tendency of acceptance compared to Figure 1 and 2, unlike question 6, which represents the same percentage as in Figure 2, question 7, however, shows a middle ground between acceptance and rejection with respect to questions 1 and 2, which consists of 79.71% of people against exclusion and 20.29% of the sample in favor of exclusion.

When we chose a mixed ethnography mode, we looked at our results in a quantitative-qualitative way, which gives us a much broader view of the per-

sonal panorama regarding LGBTIQ+ participation present in the Venezuelan migrant community and the perspective of a local sample in Ecuador.

The subjective and optional participation in the last question for the respondents shows the interpretation of the previous questions. They show a reaction of clear discontent to the vision of excluding a person, regardless of their condition, on the other hand, there is a vision related to the condition of «foreigner», which expresses the need to address in a deeper way the vision of the foreigner in Ecuadorian society.

Conclusions

The vision of the LGBTIQ+ collective is shown as accepted under certain parameters for the members of a society such as the Ecuadorian one. Although the interaction of the collective with society has gained strength over time, the range of acceptance of the members of a society is increasing.

With the passing of time, as reflected by Ortega *et al.* (2020), in which they show the participation of the LGBTIQ+ collective and the evolution of its public recognition. However, there is still a clear disagreement with the presence of members of the collective within the family circles of the respondents, being almost on a par with those with whom they do not show displeasure with it.

It is thus determined that the reflection of a society and its perspective towards the LGBTIQ+ collective is positive for the most part, with still latent traits of rejection and that leads us to the next statistical analysis, which is the migrant community, which has a moderate rejection by comparison, and that its standard of acceptance decreases when it comes to close relationships with the subjects in the sample, with its acceptance being even more marked than that of the LGBTIQ+ collective by a little.

As a conclusion, the environment of foreigners, migrants, identified as Venezuelans, who belong to the LGBTIQ+ collective is analyzed, which shows a level of acceptance relative to that of the groups separately, with which a similar result has been obtained, with the acceptance indexes decreasing as the closeness of the study subjects to Venezuelan migrants, members of the LGBTIQ+ collective grows.

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