

# **Migrants and Refugees in Latin America during COVID-19: An Inclusion/Exclusion Spectrum of Social Protection**

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## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 sanitary crisis has put to the test Latin America's already precarious social protection systems. This paper comparatively examines to what extent migrant and refugee populations have been included in social protection programmes in seven countries of the region during the COVID-19 pandemic, and what this tells us about the place of migrants' social rights and citizenship in the eyes of the state. Based on 70 semi-structured interviews with representatives of central and local governments, International Organisations, Civil Society Organizations and migrant-led organisations across 18 cities, we look at the inclusion (or lack thereof) of migrant and refugee populations in the Non-Contributory Social Transfer (NCST) programmes and other actions undertaken by public and private actors. We argue that there is an inclusion/exclusion social protection spectrum for migrant and refugee populations in pre-existing and new NCST programmes across the seven country-case studies, and that the emerging assemblages of actors providing social assistance, are furthering notions of migrant protection that are contingent and crisis-driven, imposing temporal limitations that often selectively exclude migrants based on legal status. This approach has direct impacts on migrants and refugees' lives, while also shaping the dynamics of migration governance in the region.

## **Biographies of Authors**

**Luciana Gandini** is a Senior Researcher at the Institute of Legal Studies at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in the field of sociology of law. She is the Coordinator of the University Seminar on Internal Displacement, Migration, Exile and Repatriation (SUDIMER). She is a Visiting Research Fellow at the American University's Center for Latin American and Latino Studies and a founding member of the Research Group CAMINAR, Comparative Analysis on International Migration and Displacement in the Americas. Dr Gandini is a specialist in migration and refugee policies in Mexico and Latin America, and the labor and socio-legal integration of people on the move in south-south and south-north migratory flows. Her recent research interests include: international migration, development, and human rights; voluntary and involuntary migration; and the Venezuelan exodus and Central American caravans. In 2020, she researched the impacts of the COVID-19 health crisis on access to socioeconomic rights among migrants and refugees in Latin America.

**Victoria Prieto-Rosas** serves as an assistant professor for the Population Program at the University of the Republic (Uruguay) since 2013. She has a Ph.D. in Demography from the

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**Marcia Vera-Espinoza** is a Lecturer in Human Geography at Queen Mary University of London. She is a founding member of the Research Group CAMINAR, Comparative Analysis on International Migration and Displacement in the Americas. Her current research examines the impacts of COVID-19 on migrants and refugees in the region, as well as the extent to which migrants have been included in the mitigation responses to the pandemic. Previously, she was an associate researcher in the ERC funded project 'Prospects for International Migration Governance' (MIGPROSP). She is a member of the international advisory board of *Forced Migration Review*. Her work has recently been published in *Migration and Society*, *Geopolitics*, *Global Policy*, and *Development Policy Review*. Her coedited book *The Dynamics of Regional Migration Governance* was published by Edward Elgar in June 2019. Her new coedited book *Latin America and Refugee Protection: regimes, logics and challenges*, will be published in April 2021. For more details please visit: <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/geog/staff/veraespinozam.html> and [www.marciaveraespinoza.com](http://www.marciaveraespinoza.com)

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