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Analysing the impact of the Venezuelan Refugee flows through MERCOSUR

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Abstract

The Venezuelan crisis has had a significant influence on the migratory pattern of refugees in South America. This thesis researched the cluster of refugees in the member states and associates within the trading bloc MERCOSUR. Geographical proximity was shown to be the most impactful factor, with neighbouring country Colombia being the destination for more than 1.8 million migrants. The research found that bordering states had large agglomerations, shown in Roraima, Brazil, as the largest cluster within the nation. Clusters were also present in the largest cities and capitals. Countries located further away had less migrants than those closest, as shown through Chile and Argentina. The thesis also backed previous academic data, such as by replicating the migration flows of migrants, which was shown by the lack of present Venezuelans in countries located in the centre of the subregion, through Bolivia and Paraguay. Finally, the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic was demonstrated through an analysis of refugee flows over time. Colombian data showed the greatest flows occurred in mid-2017 and ended in early-2020. MERCOSUR and its associate members should continue to prioritise their polices and further develop its residential agreement, further boosted through the Brazilian 2014 constitution, for the well-being of regional refugees.

Keywords*:* Migration, Refugees, MERCOSUR, Regional Integration, Geographical Proximity, Migration gravity model, Venezuelan Crisis.

List of abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
GIS	Geographic Information System
LAFTA	Latin American Free Trade Association
MERCOSUR	Mercado Commun del Sur (Southern Common Market)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
GMDAC	Global Migration Data Analysis Centre
RI	Regional Integration
RIO	Regional Integration Organisations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees

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Introduction

MERCOSUR Context

MERCOSUR (Mercado Común del Sur), also known as *The Southern Common Market*, is a leading regional integration project the EU, ECOWAS and ASEAN (Venturi, 2020). MERCOSUR was established in 1991 by the Treaty of Asunción to promote the free movement within its Member States of products, services, and factors of production (OECD International Migrant Outlook report, 2016). Figure 1 situated below demonstrates the membership status of countries located in South America in relation to MERCOSUR.

Figure 1 - MERCOSUR member and associated states
(Author, 2021) Source: IOM (2020a)

The current membership is made up of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, with Bolivia finalizing its entrance and Venezuela's membership being evoked in 2016 (Malamud, 2017). The associated members are Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, and Suriname. The only remaining country in South America that has not signed the agreement is the French Overseas Department of Guyana. It is now a true customs union and trading bloc, at least in theory.

MERCOSUR member states cover approximately 12,8 million square kilometres of territory, making it three times larger than the EU (Gov Brasil, 2021, translation is mine). In addition, it encompasses 288,5 million inhabitants and 76.2% of the GDP of the continent.

Altogether, that makes MERCOSUR the fifth largest economy in the world, with a GDP of US$ 2,79 trillion (World Economic Outlook Database – IMF, 2014 via MERCOSUR, 2021).

MERCOSUR's early success concentrated around increasing intra-regional trade flows, as well as growing direct foreign investment (Malamud, 2015). As a result of its growth, the free movement of persons has become a gap in its development. The free movement of persons was not a rule in its own, but rather was "subsumed within the concept of free movement of factors of production" (Brumat et, al. 2019, p. 57). The political atmosphere and dialogue is possibly more open in South America, leading to different national and regional approaches that are more common. This is both in terms of admissions and rights extended to migrants, despite implementation differences and a weaker regional governance environment. The original objective of MERCOSUR was to solve problems of intra-regional and irregular migrants (Brumat, 2020). Despite a period of liberalised policies, with the rise of right-wing movements in various members, the Venezuelan crisis has challenged MERCOSUR's institution capabilities with a huge flow of irregular migrants from Venezuela (Freier, 2019).

In the situation of a refugee crisis, the flow of migrants became as issue, especially concerning how countries can adapt, and more specifically how many refugees' countries are willing to accept. The problem present has to do with the ability to effectively address large scale migration movements.

Venezuela's Crisis

Latin America plays a crucial role within the context of international migration. Hosting up to 10 million immigrants in its territory, along with 38 million emigrants, it is the third leading sending region in the world (UN, 2017, cited in Brumat, 2020). For the past 2 decades, the region has been battling a migration crisis within the region, originating in Venezuela. Government mismanagement and corruption have been the main drivers of the economic free fall in Venezuela (O'Neil, 2018). The resulting humanitarian crisis, in which basic food and medicine is scarce, has pushed millions of Venezuelans to flee the country. The initial emigration occurred in 1999 after the rise of power of its Former President, Hugo Chavez (O'Neil, 2018). Moreover, the specific combination of deteriorating food supplies, spread of diseases and also exploding violence, all lead to refuge movements.

Ellis (2017, p. 2), describes the situation as "a criminal act without precedent in Latin America: the capture and systematic looting of a state." Expropriations, price restrictions, and currency controls, along with pervasive corruption and inefficiency in government firms, have gradually reduced the Venezuelan economy's ability to produce even the most basic items required by the country's people to survive (Ellis, 2017).

The crisis has further impacted its regional neighbours, as leaders in neighbouring nations such as Colombia and Brazil are being pressed to deal with both the flow of refugees and their own domestic problems (Caruso et al., 2021). Moreover, as Colombia recovers from its civil war, it is uncertain if the economy can absorb an additional 2 million (or more) workers, most of whom are unskilled. Further findings by Caruso et al., (2021), showed that income losses are the result of occupational downgrading, in which natives can only find work in fields where their skills are insufficient. In addition, in February 2021, Colombia announced it would grant a ten-year *Temporary Protection Status (TPS)* to 1.74 million Venezuelans in its territory (UNHCR, 2021b). Figure 2 displays the population distribution of Venezuelan refugees who migrated to Colombia over a span of 12 months.

Figure 2 - Percentage of Venezuelan refugees who immigrated to Colombia over 12 months. Source: Caruso et al., (2021).
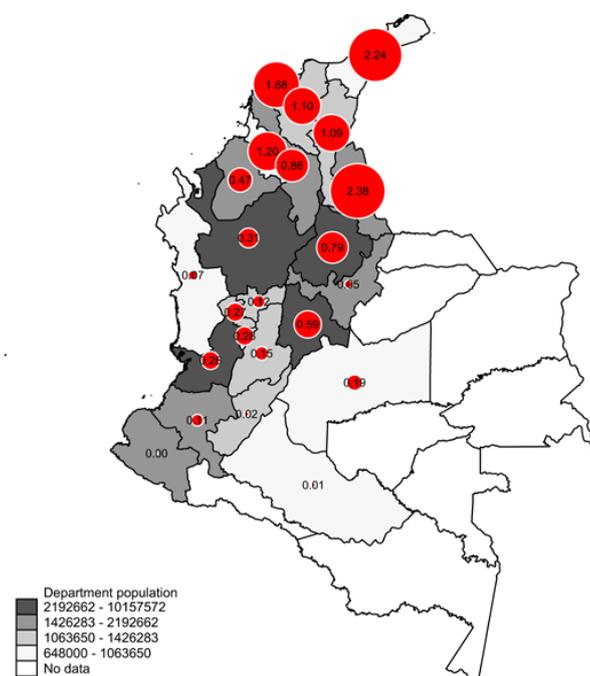
In Brazil, little was done in advance to prepare the local receiving systems (Aguiar et al., 2020). The increase in Venezuelan migration, as expected, put a pressure on already-stressed local food resources, healthcare, and educational systems, creating a problematic situation. Throughout 2018 and 2019, animosity and hatred manifested themselves in a series of xenophobic attacks against Venezuelans (Aguiar et al., 2020). Moreover, the existing poor connection between Brazil's northern border and the rest of the country limit the mobility of Venezuelan refugees the region of Roraima. This thesis will use the Venezuelan crisis as a case study to analyse the existing gap in terms of MERCOSUR itself.

Background

This thesis analyses 2 primary topics, RI, as well as migration, with the research focused on the MERCOSUR region. The literature previously has been heavily centred around the European and United States experience, overlooking the great influence and impact occurring on the southern subcontinent. As insinuated by Acosta et al., (2018), in reality only a few studies and authors have touched on the South American experience. Insights into the circumstances and understandings in the region which were previously neglected will be gathered.

Migration contributes to the proper functioning and growth of the economy in the host nation if it is done in a secure, orderly, and synchronised manner. (Global Compact on Migration) (UN, 2019b). Migration governance can strengthen the resilience of both host and origin countries to the sudden and unpredictable movements of people who are a major component of the dynamic migration flows in the Global South (Marchand et al., 2020). Resilience, according to Adger et al. (2002, p. 358), can be understood as "the ability of communities to absorb external changes and stresses while maintaining the sustainability of their livelihoods." For countries in the Global South to prevail and experience long term development, they must grow to be resilient to regional challenges, including migration. Bourbeau (2015, p.1972) elaborates on the importance of understanding the constant and complex interplay between persistence and change, reproduction and transformation." Ultimately, this thesis aids the understanding of the level of resilience in the South America trading bloc MERCOSUR.

With that in mind, this thesis will address this academic gap by spatially analysing just how well RI has been conducted in MERCOSUR. This will be done through regional and national analysis. Moreover, this thesis will analyse the spatial distribution of the Venezuelan migration and the respective flows, clusters, and distribution of the millions of Venezuelan refugees. This thesis aims to examine if regional migration governance can result in the fair distribution of refugees across member states, specifically when relating to a refugee crisis into the region.

Ongoing efforts to promote migration and refugee governance have existed since the 1951 Universal Declaration in Protection of Refugees, and later the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (Marshall, 2011). Regionally, as recently as 2014, the Brazilian declaration was held to boost this governance (Regional Refugee Instruments & Related, 2014). The prevailing issue is how to effectively protect refugee lives, highlighted by the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants of 2016 (UN, 2016), in direct relation to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in 2018 (UN, 2019b). Internationally the trend of developing regional standards has continued in Africa, with the adaptation of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in 1981 (OHCHR, 2003).

Research objectives and problem

To demonstrate the issues of high scale refugee movements as the problem, the case and point of that this thesis focuses on is the refugee crisis that occurs from the Venezuelan crisis. The objective to analyse the distribution of refugees, including an analysis of which countries took more refugees than others and the reasons for agglomerations. In addition, this thesis will aim to address the void left in irregular migration research present for MERCOSUR. Moreover, the development of MERCOSUR will come into question to see if it has developed to effectively address a crisis. As a case study to demonstrate where they go, to demonstrate in how far the issue of effective migration governance in MERCOSUR, I will analyse where and why the refugees leave.

The research question that is central to this study is:

"To what degree does geographical proximity influence clustering of refugees within a trading bloc when facing a refugee crisis?"

To answer this question, several sub questions have been formulated:

A) What are the primary migration flows from Venezuela, including origin, pass-through, and destinations?

B) Which locations have been the primary clusters of Venezuelan refugees?

C) Are destinations located farther less likely to participate in the integratory process?

D) How has migratory behaviour developed over time?

Thesis Structure

The previous section of the thesis introduces the main theme, academic gap, and problem at hand. The subsequent section elaborates through academic literature. The third section is focused on the methodology, covering the quantitative data used and analysed. The results section follows, including the main takeaways and map presentation. The final 3 sections further discuss findings, conclude the thesis, and add recommendation for further research into the topic.

Theoretical framework

Venezuelan Emigration

Figure 3 - Migratory behaviour of migrants; Source: Acnur, BBC, cited in Arellano (2019, p. 176).

Figure 3 outlines the 2 primary migration flows for our study. The first flow occurs to the west, originating in San Cristóbal, through Cúcuta and Pasto (Colombia), Ibarra and Quito (Ecuador), Lima (Peru), ending in Santiago (Chile) and Buenos Aires (Argentina). The second flow through the eastern side of Venezuela, passing into Boa Vista (Brazil) and further south to the capital of the Amazon state, Manaus.

Main Theory

In order to understand the behaviour of refugees, it is important to analyse the academic depth of point regarding specific preferences. Simich (2003) adds that refugees need the aid of friends and family with common cultural backgrounds and experiences to interpret and bridge the ways of two worlds. A primary factor being reconnecting with family and friends, which is consistent with findings from Haines (1982), which showed that refugees resisted attempts to disperse geographically due to the strength of family and ethnic relations. Moreover, Zavodny's (1999) analysis of immigrant and refugee settlement patterns in the

United States concluded that the presence of other foreign-born citizens is the primary determinant of newcomers' locational preference.

Another key piece of literature which heavily influences the migratory behaviour is the law known as the *gravity model of migration.* Its relation to Newton's law of gravity comes through the spatial interaction of human behaviour mentioned by Anderson (2011). The law states that "any form of spatial interaction (migration, commuting, trade, information exchange, etc.) has the property of flows being positively related to stocks, whichever way measured, and inversely related to distance" (Poot, 2016, p 65). As a result of this mechanism, larger regions tend to gain population through internal migration, whereas smaller regions lose population. This pattern could represent agglomeration forces that lead to net inward internal migration, resulting in the expansion of larger cities on average. The inter-urban migration flows can be easily incorporated into an extended gravity model that also includes international (and urban-rural) migration flows (Poot, 2016). Additionally, "the effects of refugee populations on the host are expected to be most acute in closer proximity to the refugees" (Fisk, 2014, p.259).

In addition, a factor of importance is the cost of migration, specifically in relation to refugees being in familiar surroundings and culture. Since it entails leaving one's familiar environment and community and adjusting to new living conditions, migration is expensive. As a result, features of destination countries that reduce transition and adaptation costs would result in a higher proportion of asylum seekers. If the origin and destination countries, for example, speak the same language, transition and adaptation costs are reduced (Neumayer, 2004).Closer destinations lower migration costs as boats or land transport can be used, while a great geographical distance from the destination country increases migration costs because air transport is needed (Neumayer, 2005). As most refugees lack the resources to travel significant distances, they end up as internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees in neighbouring developing countries instead of asylum seekers in advanced nations.

Additionally, the time period studied includes 2020 and 2021, years impacted by the worldwide pandemic COVID-19 (SARS COV 2). The IOM (2021) report "COVID-19 and the State of Global Mobility in 2020" gives insights to the impacts in relation to mobility. The pandemic cut travel, halting migration, significantly reducing and slowing the process for foreigners to enter countries, and above all increasing the uncertainty of human movement to pre-pandemic state levels. The implementation of travel restrictions was followed by the closing of several entry points, either completely or partially, resulting in decreased refugee admissions. As a result, the limited utility of border controls during the pandemic might help to promote their reduction (migration), rather than their maintenance, in the long term" (Bieber, 2020, p.1). Many were forced to relocate due to necessity (such as migrant workers and refugees) have been forced to pay for costly quarantine and self-isolation (IOM, 2021).

Looking forward, the divide between "movers" and "non-movers" – that is, those who have the means and opportunities to move freely, and those whose mobility is severely restricted by COVID-19-related or pre-existing travel and visa restrictions and limited resources – could expand. Border closures and sanctions, on the other hand, have forced smugglers to take more risky routes and lift their costs, putting refugees at risk of exploitation and trafficking (IOM, 2021).

Regional Integration

Migration, despite being a major transboundary issue, lacks a readily recognizable institutional structure at the global level (Betts, 2011). Unlike trade, environment, and financial global frameworks, there is no singular approach to migration governance. Nor is there a top-down global multilateral framework seeking to regulate international migration (Arcarazo & Geddes, 2014). To address migration, states have historically turned to international cooperation to address the challenges brought forward by migration (Betts, 2011).

Regional policy, especially concerning dictatorships, has historically impacted the advancements regarding RI in Latin America (Vervaele, 2005). How it has evolved remains important for theoretical and practical understanding, as it has influenced the migratory flows in and around the region. The prevailing *North-South* prejudice in literature casts a veil over significant changes occurring in other areas of the world.

The Venezuelan crisis, in particular, has shown governments are not able to act alone and must turn towards regional corporations to accomplish their primary objectives. Based on existing theoretical understandings about governance, various levels of institutional arrangements and types of coordination all affect the negotiation and implementation of this regional migration policy (Hall & Bevir, 2011). As refuge from Venezuela occurs across multiple borders, this study will control the countries limited to status in MERCOSUR, Bolivia (ascending to full membership), and associated states (bar Guyana and Suriname).

Regional integration organizations (RIOs) are formal institutions capable of "purposive action like raising and spending money, promulgating policies, and making discretionary choices" (Keohane 1989, 175). Regional integration is defined as "how and why (national states) voluntarily mingle, merge and mix with their neighbours so as to lose the factual attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for resolving conflicts among themselves" (Haas, 1970, 6). "They do so by creating common and permanent institutions capable of making decisions binding on all members" (Malamud & Schmitter, 2011, 143). Moreover, Mattli (1999) states that RI involves the linking of domains of formerly independent

states towards a supranational level. It is apparent that it does not specify the situation of a state outside the institutional domain.

MERCOSUR was designed as an improved RI model, to not replicate the historical Latin American attempts which were unsuccessful (Malamud & Schmitter, 2017). According to their own laws, most Latin American countries ought to recognize Venezuelan migrants as refugees (Freier, 2019).

On the 30th anniversary of the signing of the treaty of Asuncíon, MERCOSUR published its *Citizenship Statute* report, outlining the deepening social and citizen dimension of the integration process, seeking to achieve sustainable development, with justice and social inclusion, for the benefit of nationals of the MERCOSUR member states (MERCOSUR, 2021). The statute re-states regional ambition towards the harmonization of the conditions of movement across countries and in stronger legal guarantees to South American nationals of the right of free establishment (OECD, 2016). The report's purpose is "to achieve and implement a policy of free movement of people in the region; equality of civil, social, cultural and economic rights and freedoms for nationals of MERCOSUR states parties; and equal conditions of access to work, health and education" (MERCOSUR, 2021, p 3, translation is mine). The primary liberal course taken by MERCOSUR is represented through the 2002 residence agreement, enforcing prominence in human rights, a liberalist RI, and targeted towards the right to migrate (Acosta & Freier, 2018).
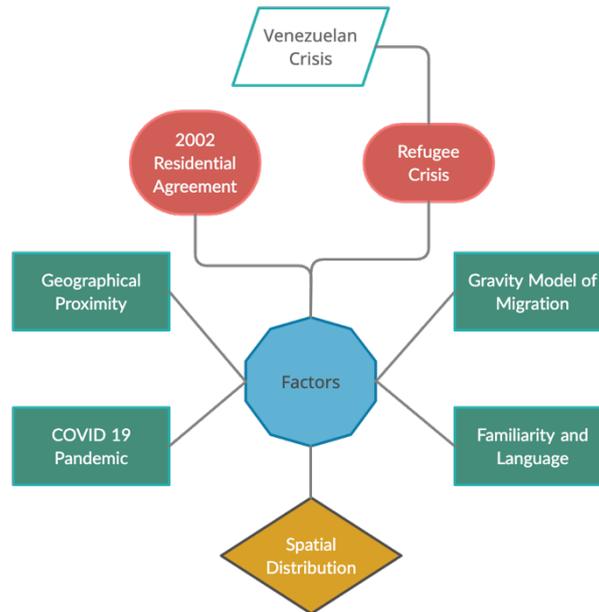
Conceptual model

Figure 4 - Conceptual Model (Author, 2021)

Figure 4 above shows the conceptual framework in use. In combination with the 2002 residential agreement signed by MERCOSUR states, the Venezuelan crisis, further a refugee crisis, leads to the spatial distribution of refugees in the region. Nonetheless, a number of factors are at play which influence this spatial distribution, including the geographical proximity, gravity model of migration, and familiarity and language.

Hypotheses

With the background and literature in mind, a series of hypotheses are presented to demonstrate what is expected to come out of the research in relation to the research question and sub-questions:

H1: The total number of refugees will decrease over distance.

H2: Nationally, the highest cluster will occur in the most populous cities.

H3: Countries located farther will receive less refugees.

H4: A constant growth of refugees over time, but a present impact in 2020 due to COVID-19.

Methodology

Data and method of analysis

The analysis done for this research consists of secondary data, consisting of datasets that provide a range of insights into migration numbers in the continent over time from a range of sources. The two primary methods of analysis are both quantitative, through spatial analysis and descriptive statistical analysis. This study contains descriptive comparisons/analyses of maps from the studied region.

Analyses are based on descriptive statistics, correlating migration flows and the residential destination, which will be visualized in order to observe any spatial patterning using Geographical Information Systems (GIS). According to ESRI (2021), GIS is "a framework for gathering, managing, and analysing data. Rooted in the science of geography, GIS analyses spatial location and organizes layers of information into visualizations using maps." For this study, the program in use will be QGIS, "a professional GIS application that is built on top of and proud to be itself Free and Open-Source Software (FOSS)" (QGIS, 2021).

Regional Datasets

Firstly, some datasets present information for the region as a whole. An important source being the Regional Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees from Venezuela (R4V), guided by the IOM and UNHCR. The Migration Data Portal (IOM, 2021a) provides data in relation to country, subregion, and region; concerning immigration and emigration, migrant flow, as the main options. The platform further provides timely, accurate migration statistics and credible migration data from around the world. The portal was launched in December 2017 and is operated and produced by the IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC). The Portal is financially funded by the German government, with financial contributions from the UK government for earlier phases (IOM, 2021b). The REES (Reunión Especializada de Estadísticas del MERCOSUR), translated into *Specialized Meeting of MERCOSUR Statistics*, was designed as a method to harmonize the statistical systems within the bloc. In addition, USAID's situation report (2020) offers data and descriptions.

National Datasets

Notably, not all information is available for every country, and research was conducted using national datasets. Brazilian information required data via the latest Brazilian Census (IBGE, 2010). The demographic census establishes the main understanding of the overall characteristics of the people within the country, and at times establishes that of foreign nationals. The specific data presented in the Brazilian map originates via the *Atlas Tematico*

(2020), which was an academic journal made specific in relation to the Venezuelan refugees located across Brazil. For Argentina, data provided by the Ministry of the Interior, Public Works and Housing (2016-2018) show distribution by province, cities and categories (Radicaciones Resueltas). For Chile, the primary source was an article by Razmilic, under chapter III titled Inmigración, Vivienda y Territorio (Immigration Housing and Territory). Within the article, the third table titled "year of arrival and country of origin of the immigrant residents of each commune" was used as it is based on the arrival to the commune period, as a percentage of the immigrants arriving per period in each commune (Razmilic, 2016, p 107). Moreover, the origin was used, determined upon by the proportion (%) of immigrants arriving from each country in each commune. For Colombia, data was gathered from the "Special Administrative Unit Migration Colombia (UAEMC), authority in charge of exercising Migration and Immigration Control in Colombia". For this thesis, the table "Ciudad Hospedaje" (City of stay, translation is mine). Lastly, despite aged data, a report from the Uruguayan government gives insights to the percentage of Venezuelan's in significant state. Presented during the "Meeting of MERCOSUR Labor Market Observatories" (Translation is mine), the 2012 data is an official representation of what is expected to be now, but to a much lesser extent.

Variables

The primary variables available and used for analysis were migrant total numbers and time period. It is critical to recognise that the migrant total values are not independent. This is because migration is influenced by a range of factors shown in section 2.2. Examples include, strength of family and ethnic relations, the *gravity model of migration,* migration and adaptation costs, mobilisation and proximity.

Ethical Considerations

As this study deals with secondary data, the primary issue at hand is data management. This thesis maintains that ethical conditions are guaranteed in this study. The datafiles were all kept in a secure location, all data was treated confidentially, and the data presented was not used for commercial reasons, nor was the data submitted without the correct citation of the various data sources. Moreover, this scientific research is analysing the spatial distribution of refugees, it is not interested in the specific individual income, cultural beliefs, or any sensitive concept that may fall within the research area. At the micro level, this study looks at regional areas for cities, but maintains its ambitions to focus on national and a larger regional level. Due to the sensitivity of the definition of economic status, secondary data is an acceptable option, as individual participants' financial situations are not needed.

Positionality

Taking into perspective my positionality as a Brazilian researcher, I purposefully illuminated the issue from a different angle, choosing to focus on MERCOSUR as a region instead of Brazil alone. To counter bias, I researched national datasets apart from Brazil. I view the situation from a globalised perspective, due to my personal experienced abroad. I do not hold strong religious opinions, therefore did not consider it as a factor in this analysis.

Results

Spatial Analysis

Regional Outlook

Figure 5 situated below visualises the total number of refugees present in the studied regions. With data collected by the IOM, the map introduces the substantial presence of refugees located by bordering countries. The highest cluster is evident in Colombia, where upwards of 1.8 million Venezuelans are present. The second highest cluster is Peru, and further leads to the third, Chile. The map confirms the migratory behaviour, specifically the Western pathways, set by Arellano (2019). The migratory movement West is stronger than movement South. In addition, there is strong evidence of the distance factor, with the lowest number of residing refugees located in Paraguay (3.8 thousand), and Bolivia (5.8 thousand).
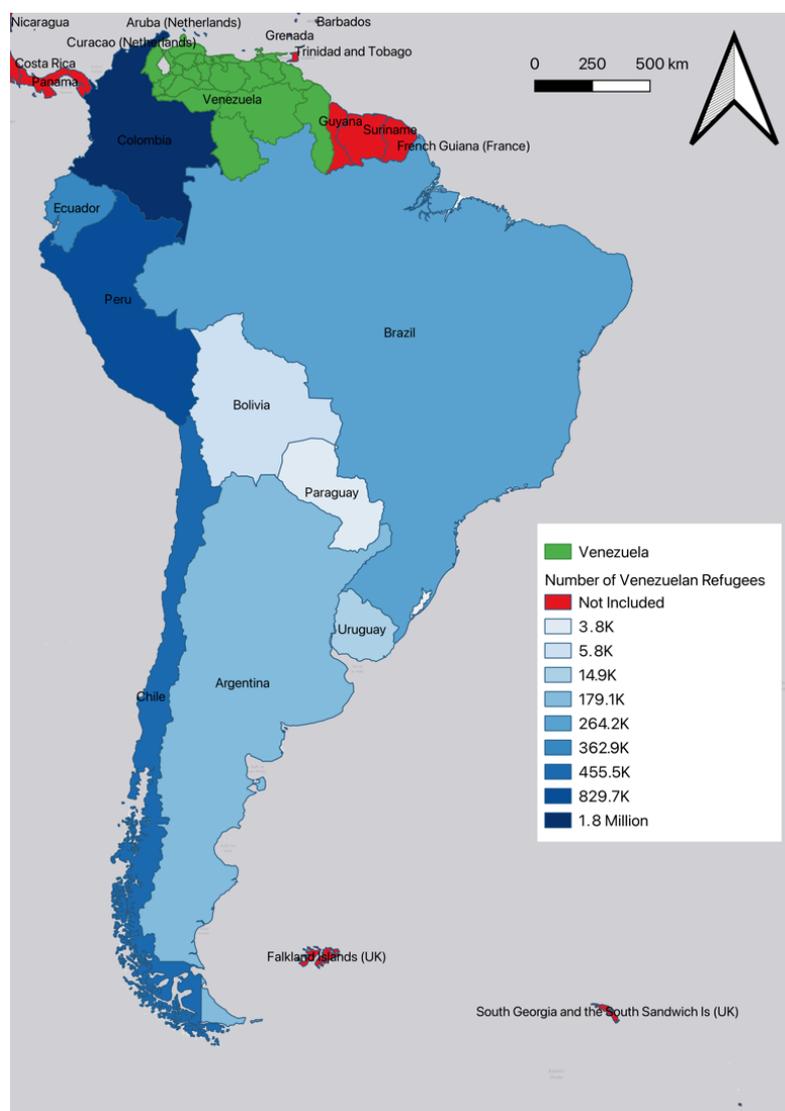
Figure 5 - Number of Venezuelans (totals) in studied regions
(Author, 2021) Source: IOM (2020b)

National Outlook

Figure 6 demonstrates the Venezuelans residing in Colombia. As shown in figure 4, the strongest agglomeration is in Colombia, and within, the strongest agglomeration is in the city of Bogota, followed by Ipales and San José de Cúcuta. Colombia is a neighbouring country, but nonetheless the strongest cluster occurs in the major cities. Large clusters are present in the bordering regions, especially in the north in Maicao, Riohacha, and Valledupar, which border the cities in Venezuela of Maracaibo and Machiques de Perija. This agrees with findings from Caruso et al., (2021), despite the data's city specific illustrations, as well as destination agglomerations from previous research from Arellano (2019).

Figure 6 - Distribution of Venezuelan refugees in Colombian cities

Venezuelan Migrants registed in Brazil
2000-March 2020

Number per state

- 48
- 87
- 88
- 136
- 173
- 189
- 234
- 285
- 644
- 722
- 829
- 938
- 1108
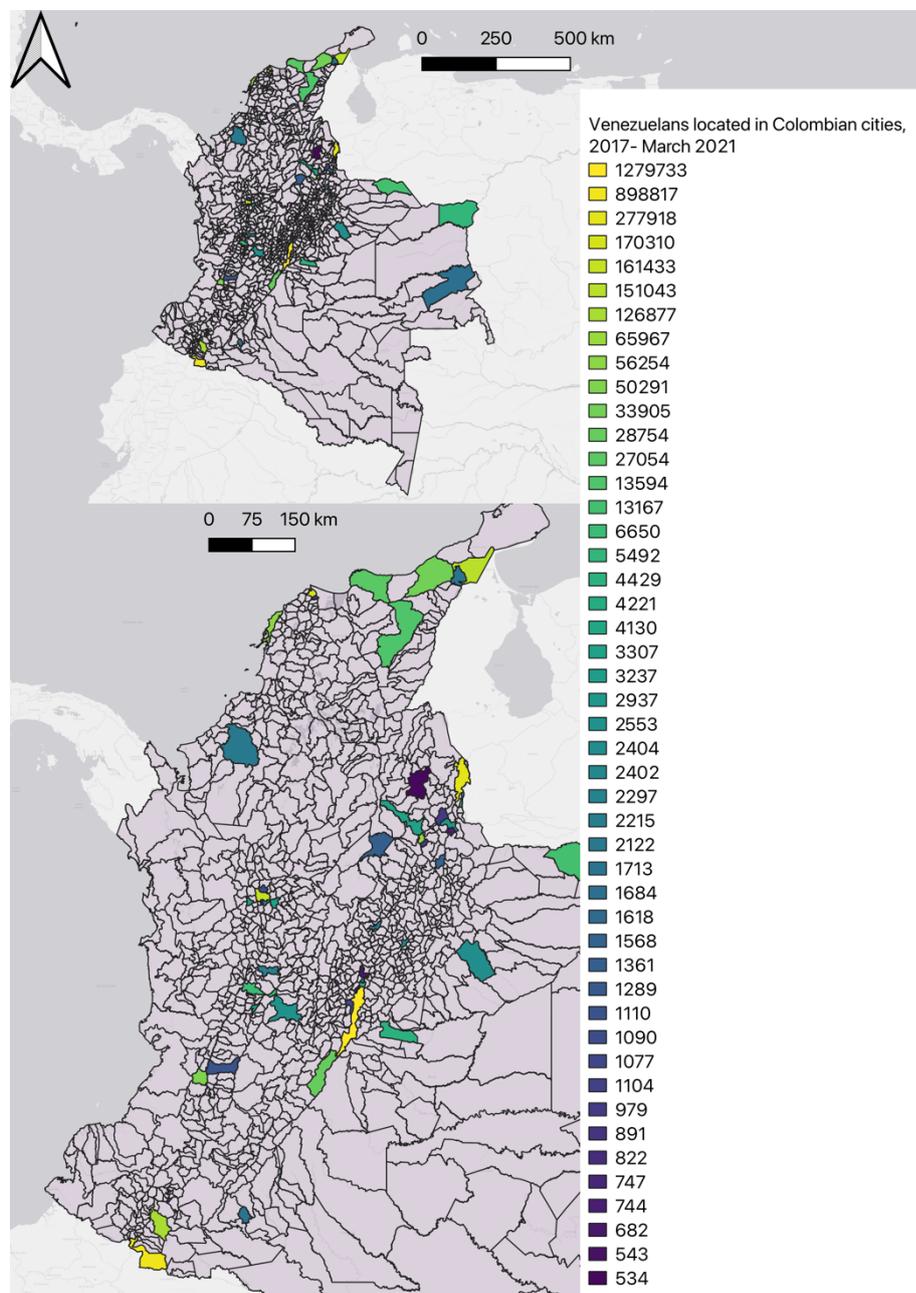- 1444
- 1454
- 1765
- 2150
- 3886
- 4171
- 4344
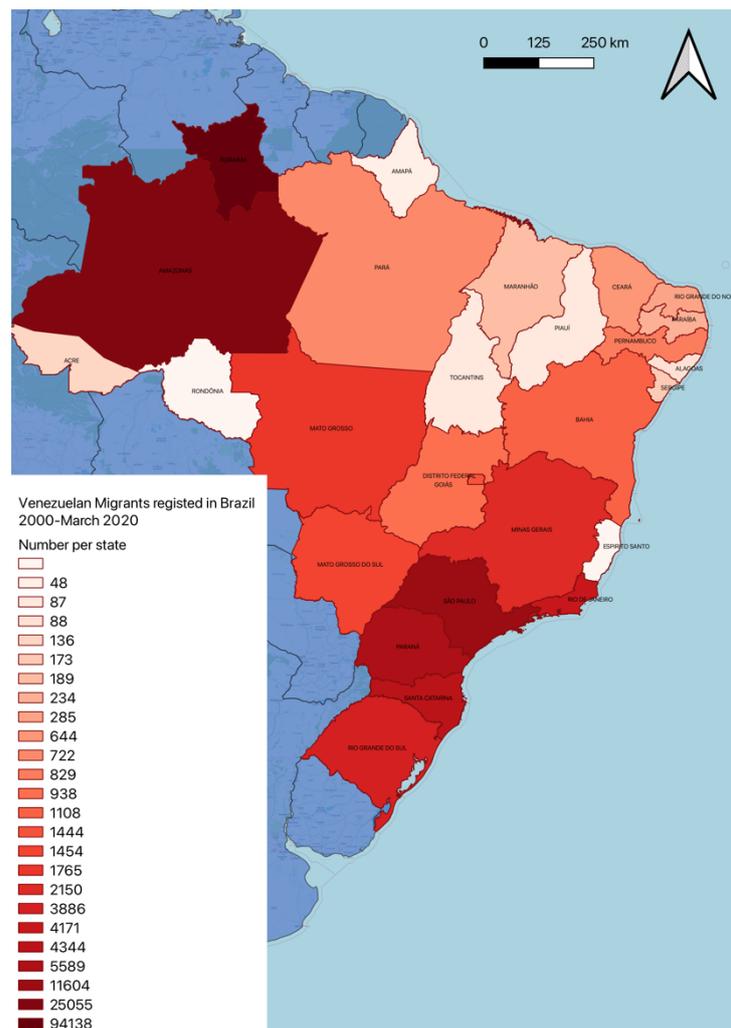- 5589
- 11604
- 25055
- 94138

Figure 7 - Map of Venezuelan Refugees in Brazil (Author, 2021)

Figure 7 presents the findings from the national analysis of Brazil. Despite not having the strongest agglomeration of Venezuelan refugees, there is evidence of a strong pull in particular states. The highest cluster is located in the North, in the bordering state of Roraima, where almost 100 thousand refugees reside. Again, signifying that border regions are the most attractive. This map supports the migratory behaviour flow as shown in Arellano (2019), as the second greatest cluster occurs in the state of Amazonas, where a strong cluster is present in the capital, Manaus. Noteworthy from this map is the strong cluster of refugees in the South-East of the country, specifically in the States of São Paulo and Paraná. This reiterates the gravitational model discussed in the theoretical framework, as not only are Venezuelans migrating to a bigger country, but within the country they are moving to the biggest cities. This is made evident by the small number of Venezuelans in the state of Rondônia, as well as Acre and Amapá. Lastly, this specific model defies the model of distance. Even the states located further South, being Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, there is a significant number of refugees located there.

Figures 8 (Chile) and 9 (Uruguay) further support of strong agglomeration in large cities. In regard to figure 8, the highest numbers of Venezuelan refugees are found in and around Santiago, Chile, with the centre itself residing 41% of Venezuelans. An interesting note here is the beach city of Viña del Mar, which is the only other significant point stated in the report, therefore present on the map. Nonetheless, the Chilean map suggests that fewer residents reside outside of the capital city.
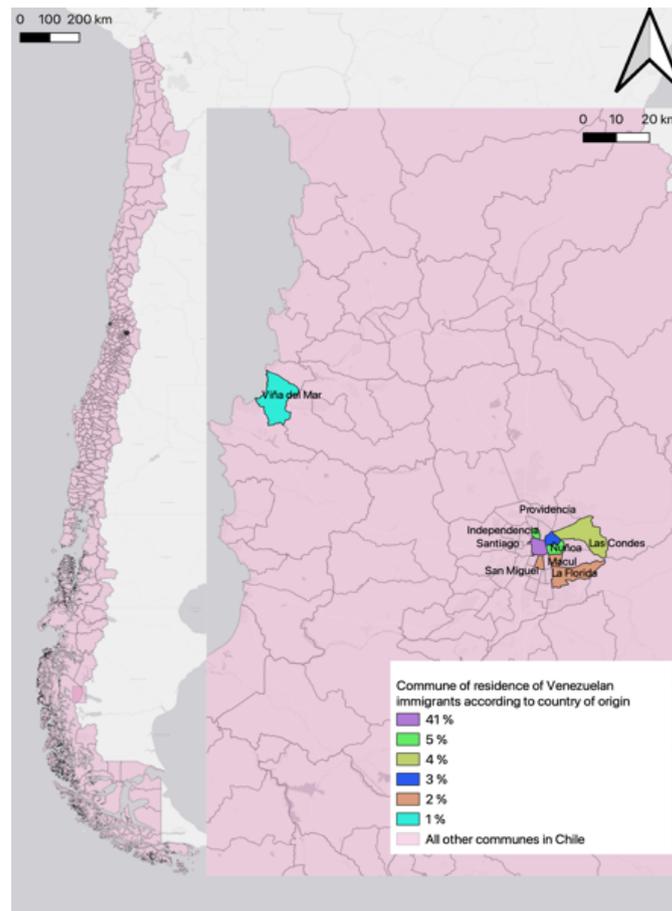
Figure 8 - Venezuelan distribution in Chile (Author, 2021)
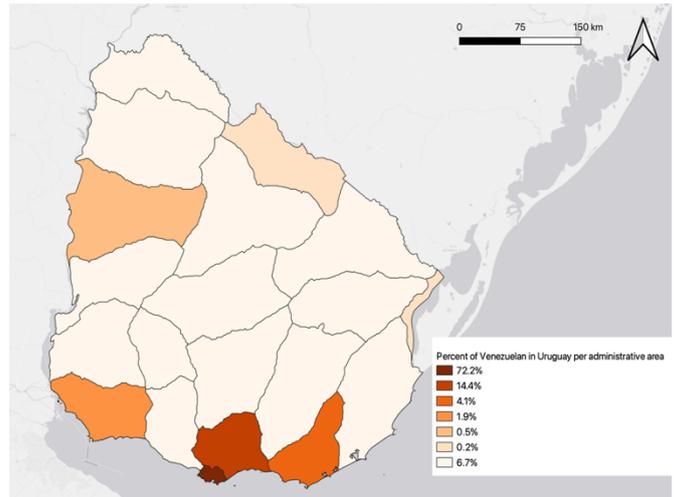
Figure 7 - Map of Venezuelans in Uruguay up to 2012(Author, 2021)

In Uruguay, 72.2% of Venezuelans live in the capital city of Montevideo. Figure 9 simply suggests the distribution in the city, but with data is aged back to 2012, it is not adequate to make any serious conclusions from this map. There is no shared border in either case, and through the data presented, it is suggested that in nations located farther away, the gravitational migration model is more influential.
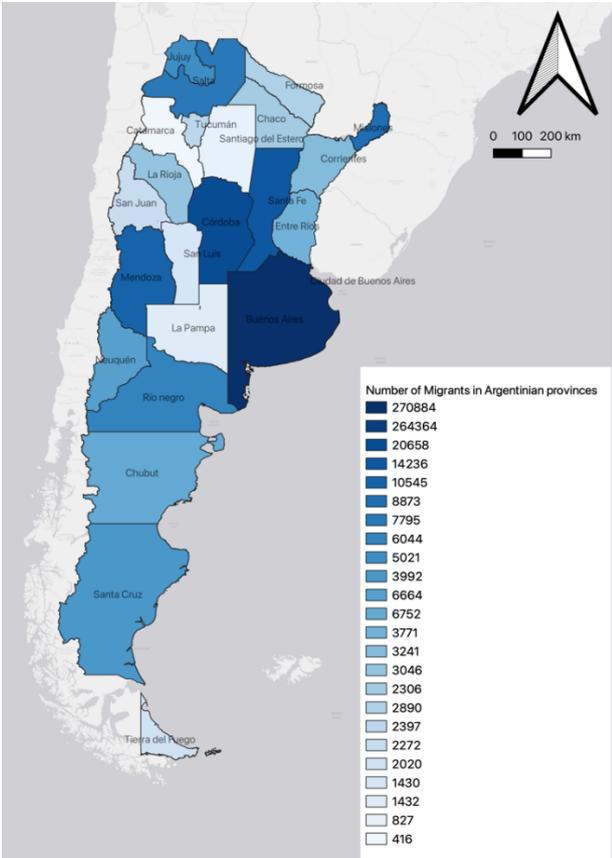
Figure 9 - Venezuelans located in the states of Argentina (Author, 2021)

Figure 10 above demonstrates findings for Argentina similar to those in Brazil. First, even though to a lesser extent, large amounts of Venezuelans migrate to a large country in size. Second, the strongest cluster is found in the state of the Capital, Buenos Aires. Argentina does not neighbour Venezuela, and therefore the presence of one primary cluster in the capital is noteworthy, restating the influence of the gravity model of migration. Moreover, a large number of refugees are present in the southern states of Santa Cruz, Chubut, and Rio Negro. The lowest numbers are present in La Palma and Catamarca.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis
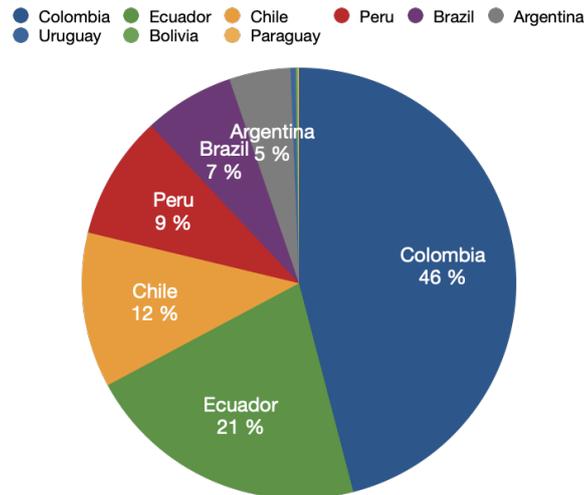
Figure 10 - Percentage of where Venezuelans reside (Author, 2021) Source: IOM (2020b).

Figure 11 above demonstrates a pie diagram which shows where Venezuelan refugees are the most likely to reside. Colombia contains 46% of Venezuelans refugees, followed by Ecuador with 21% and Chile with 12%.

Figure 12 shown below gives a visual demonstration of the movement of Venezuelan refugees over time, a larger image is found in appendix 7. This study used the Colombian situation, considering it hosts the largest number of Venezuelan refugees in the region, to demonstrate how the movement has developed. Using a time frame of January 2017- April 2021, it is evident that the largest flows occurred from June 2017 until January 2020. During this period, an average of 97 thousand refugees were registered to enter the country.
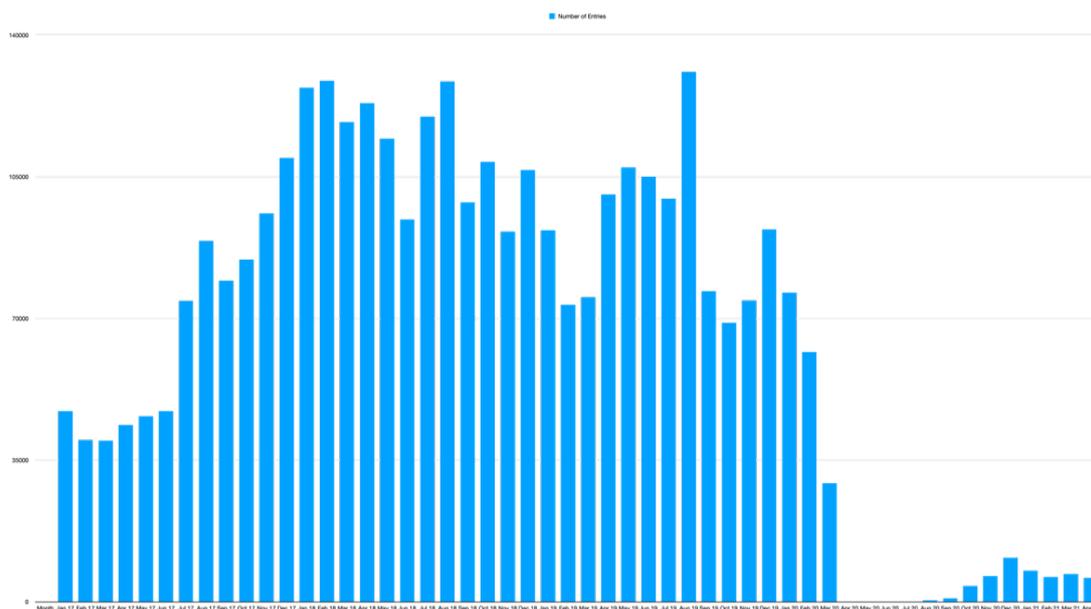
Figure 11 - Venezuelan Entries into Colombia (Author, 2021)

The highest peaks were 130,925 (August 2019), 128,674 (February 2018) and 128,494 (August 2018). What the diagram importantly demonstrates is the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic towards the flow of refugees. From Feb to March 2020 the number of entries almost halves, and by April 2020 only 24 refugees were registered to enter the country. Arrivals were very low through August 2020, where a gradual increase occurred until December 2020, where 10895 refugees were registered. The drastic fall in number is due to the radical impact of the COVID pandemic, as explained by Bieber (2020).

Figure 13, demonstrates the linear pathways of increases or decreases between months. The greatest decrease occurred in the following month of September 2019 (-54219), following the largest peak where 131 thousand Venezuelans migrated in August 2019. The greatest increase occurred in August 2019 (31376).
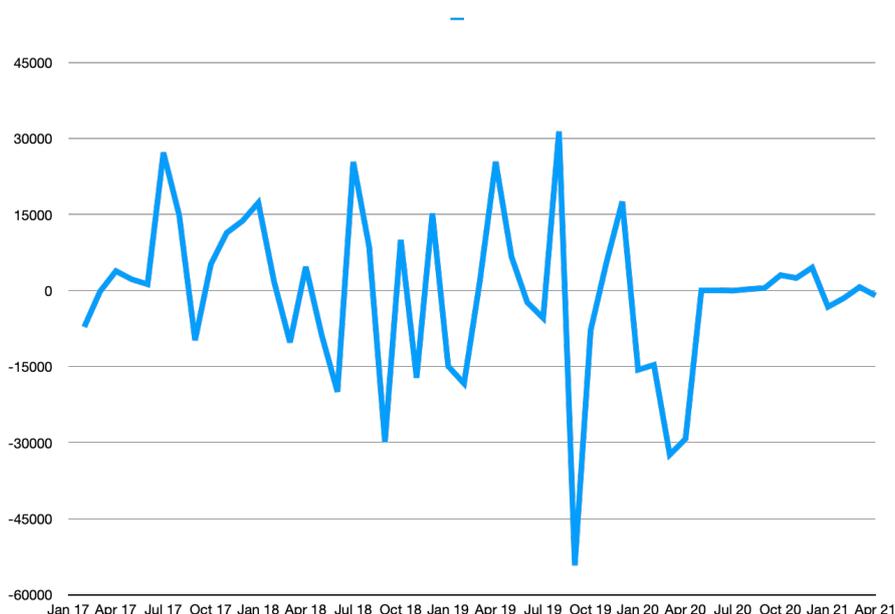
Figure 12 - Linear pathways for Venezuelan refugees to Colombia (Author, 2021)

Discussion

There is an ever-present influence analysing migration, and that is its lack of independency. The findings show that indeed migration is influenced by previous migration, including cultural factors and adaptation costs. The findings do indicate that refugees rather migrate to a country of equal language, such as Colombia, with a large movement of refugees occurring to the West of the sub-continent, more than through Brazil, the only studied member not Spanish speaking. Therefore, it reiterates Neumayer's (2014) theory presented about adaptation costs, as well as Haines' (1982) with family and ethnic relations, through a stronger pull of migrants to Colombia.

Moreover, findings suggest the Colombian TPS program will have an even stronger impact in the future, despite the sudden impact of COVID-19 on migration numbers. Numbers presented are likely also influenced by the high likelihood of illegal migration taking place, which is not accounted for in the datasets, setting a limit to the findings. Especially in the pandemic, with official borders closed, refugees likely had to opt for illegal methods to seek refuge, and this was not thoroughly represented in this thesis. Due to the large distance between origin and destination, countries located farther away do not host the equal or the largest number of Venezuelan refugees as neighbouring countries. This may suggest less available options for receiving refugees, such as transportation costs and mobility opportunities.

MERCOSUR's resilience to the refugee crisis indicates it has not developed institutionally to match the crisis. Due to large clusters in neighbouring countries, with significantly less through increased destination, MERCOSUR must strive for further development, such as a new declaration directly addressing the crisis in Venezuela.

In relation to the hypotheses, the findings offer support for the decreased refugee numbers over distance (hypothesis 1); countries located farther received less refugees (hypothesis 3); COVID-19 impacted the inflow of refugee numbers in 2020 (hypotheses 4). Conversely there is no support for highest clusters in most populous cities (hypotheses 2).

Conclusion

The thesis at hand focused on the following main research question, *"To what degree does geographical proximity influence the clustering of refugees within a trading bloc when facing a refugee crisis?"* Geographical proximity did prove to have a major impact, evidenced by the strongest cluster of refugees outside the country being located in Colombia. Moreover, in Brazil the greatest cluster being the bordering state of Roraima. Countries located further from the origin indicated fewer migrant numbers, demonstrated in Chile and Argentina, proving sub-question B (*Which locations have been the primary clusters of Venezuelan*

refugees?). Further, it proposes that destinations located farther are indeed less likely to participate, sub-question C (*Are destinations located farther less likely to participate in the integratory process?*), but no direct conclusion can be made from this analysis. Indeed, the number of refugees is less than in the clusters, but willingness to participate cannot be directly answered. The lowest numbers present are located away from the primary flows (Arellano, 2019), shown through Bolivia and Paraguay, but these potentially bypass destinations are where Venezuelans are least likely to reside. The analysis also proved that there was a drastic fall in migrant numbers due to the radical impact of the COVID pandemic. In the early periods of the pandemic, the fewest refugees were registered. Through the specific study of Colombia, there was a steady increase of refugees over time, peaking in mid 2017 until end of 2019 (answering sub-question D). As the highest conglomerate of refugees occurs in Colombia, it is an adequate indicator of numbers over time for other states, therefore indicating what the migratory pattern was like for MERCOSUR members over the migratory period. Conversely, MERCOSUR and its associate members should continue to prioritise polices and further develop its residential agreement, further boosted through the Brazilian 2014 constitution, for the well-being of regional refugees and to boosts its Resilience to regional crises'.

Reflection and Recommendations

When reflecting on the research process, the spatial distribution visualisation was a accomplishment. Through the use of GIS, it was possible to demonstrate the spatial component of the migratory model, which could then be used to compare to the theories and hypotheses. Nonetheless, a number of possibilities of improvements and future research can be built upon. In regard to the research itself, in the future more attention could be aimed towards analysing the problems created in the region or in terms of migration governance with regard to members who failed to adhere to the provisions of the agreements. Further research should include the countries of Guyana and Suriname, as despite being associate members, the were not included in this study, primarily due to the lack of data acquired and available, as well as language (Suriname). Also, national datasets for Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, should be further researched, and made more readily available.

The datasets themselves proved to be a challenge. There is a clear limitation in using quantitative data from South America, as data is not as easily available nor up do date. This is a strong contrast to studies done in the European context through EU and OECD reports are data rich and up to date. MERCOSUR data is limited, and for further research to occur, it is heavily suggested that a regional dataset composed of all regional data be built and improved on, providing potential for further and more concrete conclusions could be made from the analysis. Furthermore, the use of different languages makes the process of collecting data challenging. The researcher is fluent in Portuguese, but not fully equipped to deal with Spanish

based context. To facilitate this, availability of language options including English should be improved, particularly in MERCOSUR's database, to ensure that the data is well understood and not taken out of context.

To expand on the use of statistical methods, future research should build on the time component as a variable. Through software such as SPSS, there is great potential for a number of tests to be run, if the adequate data is acquired. Time series analysis could be investigated, as well as a set of tests using the dataset. Tests can further be applied to research the extent to which the gravity model of migration is present in the studied region. Moreover, space and time is difficult to analyse together, but is possible through analysis within a similar time frame. Future research could look at using index numbers, with a base level making it easier to compare each country. This can be further done to analyse how the pandemic evolves, and if refugee numbers rise back to pre-pandemic numbers. Moreover, the study did not account for different land area classifications and should be analysed in the future. For example, researching potential for residence in the Amazon rainforest or in the deserts found in Chile and Argentina.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Argentina, State data

PROVINCIA CONSTITUÍDA	PERMANENTE	TEMPORARIA	TOTAL 2018	Total 2017	Total 2016	Total 2016-2018
Buenos Aires	35430	49789	85219	86699	98.966	270884
Ciudad de Buenos Aires	33844	62.288	96132	89.361	78.871	264364
Córdoba	2638	5224	7862	5.622	7.174	20658
Santa Fe	3112	2772	5884	4.258	4.094	14236
Mendoza	1945	2167	4112	3.249	3.184	10545
Misiones	1146	1366	2512	2.942	3.419	8873
Salta	1076	1901	2977	2.397	2.421	7795
Chubut	915	1414	2329	2.407	2.016	6752
Neuquén	832	1976	2808	1.992	1.864	6664
Río negro	776	1378	2154	2.027	1.863	6044
Jujuy	608	620	1228	1.956	1.837	5021
Santa Cruz	477	703	1180	1.535	1.277	3992
Entre Ríos	539	703	1242	1.089	1.440	3771
Corrientes	494	443	937	1.049	1.255	3241
La Rioja	537	609	1146	1.095	805	3046
Formosa	544	453	997	843	1.050	2890
Tucumán	324	748	1072	620	705	2397
Chaco	276	426	702	809	795	2306
San Juan	236	565	801	980	491	2272
Tierra del Fuego	259	364	623	689	708	2020
La Pampa	129	664	793	353	286	1432

San Luis	261	408	669	479	282	1430
Santiago del Estero	111	250	361	244	222	827
Catamarca	66	86	152	150	114	416

Appendix 2 – IOM DATA 2020

Country	Venezuelan migrants and Refugees
Colombia	1800000
Ecuador	829700
Chile	455500
Peru	362900
Brazil	264200
Argentina	179100
Uruguay	14900
Bolivia	5800
Paraguay	3800

Appendix 3 – Data for Chile

Comuna de residencia de los inmigrantes según país de origen	Venezuelans
Santiago	41 %
Independencia	5 %
Ñuñoa	5 %
Estación Central	4 %
Las Condes	4 %
Providencia	3 %
La Florida	2 %
San Miguel	2 %
Macul	2 %
Viña del Mar	1 %

Appendix 4 – Data for Colombian cities

City of Hospitality	Total During 2021	Total During 2020	Total During 2019	Total During 2018	Total During 2017	TOTALS
Bogotá, D.C.	8620	82254	414684	475911	298264	1279733
Ipiales	29	23096	303397	420735	151560	898817
San José de Cúcuta	1586	30182	103832	93664	48654	277918
Barranquilla	1305	6880	35155	67485	59485	170310
Medellín	1586	10511	54306	53399	41631	161433
Maicao	861	6471	37657	61293	44761	151043
Pasto	14	4080	30961	50776	41046	126877
Bucaramanga	205	2454	14725	28713	19870	65967
Cartagena de Indias	854	5263	17910	16512	15715	56254
Cali	448	2878	15918	16914	14133	50291
Riohacha	370	2945	13500	9702	7388	33905
Colombia	56	1093	8367	7908	11330	28754
Santa Marta	146	1294	8182	8674	8758	27054
Valledupar	52	524	2988	4877	5153	13594
Arauca	113	678	3621	7313	1442	13167
Pereira	80	486	1923	2334	1827	6650
Puerto Carreño	11	197	713	1022	3549	5492
Villavicencio	51	319	1338	1630	1091	4429
Chía	122	384	1285	1183	1247	4221
Villa del Rosario	151	1496	1824	539	120	4130
Rionegro	79	326	1472	873	557	3307
Armenia	35	225	904	1133	940	3237
Pamplona	9	103	454	1582	789	2937
Ibagué	25	171	705	866	786	2553
Yopal	10	160	655	1013	566	2404
Tunja	17	139	699	873	674	2402
Envigado	128	298	729	600	542	2297
Manizales	20	125	665	767	638	2215
Montería	8	97	536	835	646	2122
Albania	1	71	329	912	400	1713
Inírida	5	88	422	304	865	1684
Cajicá	38	174	528	449	429	1618
San Andrés	129	194	598	362	285	1568
Barrancabermeja	17	97	362	477	408	1361
Sabaneta	80	162	430	385	232	1289
Palmira	20	74	358	328	330	1110
Floridablanca	28	85	278	247	466	1104

Bello	42	111	352	263	322	1090
Soacha	97	155	362	232	231	1077
Cucutilla	22	103	397	344	113	979
Soledad	28	66	199	174	424	891
Albán	3	78	453	227	61	822
Mosquera	30	89	273	200	188	780
Itagüí	27	98	243	139	240	747
Cácota	6	78	298	275	87	744
Zipaquirá	18	83	251	174	156	682
Cota	13	67	208	162	93	543
Ábrego	3	75	292	141	23	534
San Andres de Tumaco	60	122	176	47	18	423

Appendix 5 – Data for Uruguay

Departamento	Venezuelans
Montevideo	72.2%
Canelones	14.4%
Rivera	0.2%
Maldonado	4.1%
Colonia	1.9%
Artigas	n.a
Cerro Largo	n.a
Paysandú	0.5%
Others	6.7%
Total	956

Appendix 6 – Data for Brazilian States

Imigrantes da Venezuela com registros ativos (Registro Nacional Migratório - RNM) no Brasil, segundo grandes regiões e Unidades da Federação de residência, 2000-Março/2020

Grandes Regiões e Unidades da Federação	Registros	
	2000-2019	Janeiro a Março de 2020
Acre	96	40
Amapá	38	10
Amazonas	18.582	6.503
Pará	632	90
Rondônia	535	160
Roraima	83.220	10.918
Tocantins	81	7
Região Norte	103.184	17.728
Alagoas	80	8
Bahia	995	113
Ceará	563	81
Maranhão	172	17
Paraíba	195	39
Pernambuco	744	85
Piauí	81	8
Rio Grande do Norte	257	28
Sergipe	163	10
Região Nordeste	3.250	389

Grandes Regiões e Unidades da Federação	Registros	
	2000-2019	Janeiro a Março de 2020
Espírito Santo	257	37
Minas Gerais	1.814	336
Rio de Janeiro	3.940	231
São Paulo	10.454	1.153
Região Sudeste	16.465	1.757
Paraná	4.527	1.062
Rio Grande do Sul	2.973	913
Santa Catarina	3.349	995
Região Sul	10.849	2.970
Distrito Federal	1.227	217
Goiás	776	162
Mato Grosso	1.459	306
Mato Grosso do Sul	1.119	335
Região Centro-Oeste	4.581	1.020
Sem informação de UF/ Residência no exterior	251	59
Total	138.580	23.923

Fonte: Sistema de Registro Nacional Migratório (SISMIGRA), 2000-Março/2020. Departamento da Polícia Federal - Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública do Brasil/OBMigra. Tabulações Observatório das Migrações em São Paulo – NEPO/UNICAMP – CNPq/MPT.

Appendix 7 – Data for Colombia over time

Month	Number of Entries	Linear Pathways
Jan 17	47124	
Feb 17	39953	-7171
Mar 17	39787	-166
Apr 17	43631	3844
May 17	45845	2214
Jun 17	47088	1243
Jul 17	74303	27215
Aug 17	89122	14819
Sep 17	79314	-9808
Oct 17	84512	5198
Nov 17	95906	11394
Dec 17	109649	13743
Jan 18	126977	17328
Feb 18	128674	1697
Mar 18	118460	-10214
Apr 18	123149	4689
May 18	114407	-8742
Jun 18	94443	-19964
Jul 18	119821	25378
Aug 18	128494	8673
Sep 18	98646	-29848
Oct 18	108654	10008
Nov 18	91433	-17221

|		
Dec 18	106657	15224
Jan 19	91727	-14930
Feb 19	73394	-18333
Mar 19	75237	1843
Apr 19	100638	25401
May 19	107319	6681
Jun 19	104969	-2350
Jul 19	99549	-5420
Aug 19	130925	31376
Sep 19	76706	-54219
Oct 19	68866	-7840
Nov 19	74416	5550
Dec 19	91960	17544
Jan 20	76323	-15637
Feb 20	61652	-14671
Mar 20	29270	-32382
Apr 20	24	-29246
May 20	58	34
Jun 20	101	43
Jul 20	82	-19
Aug 20	357	275
Sep 20	856	499
Oct 20	3897	3041
Nov 20	6368	2471
Dec 20	10895	4527
Jan 21	7681	-3214
Feb 21	6177	-1504
Mar 21	6869	692
Apr 21	5894	-975

Appendix 8 – Venezuelan Entries into Colombia.
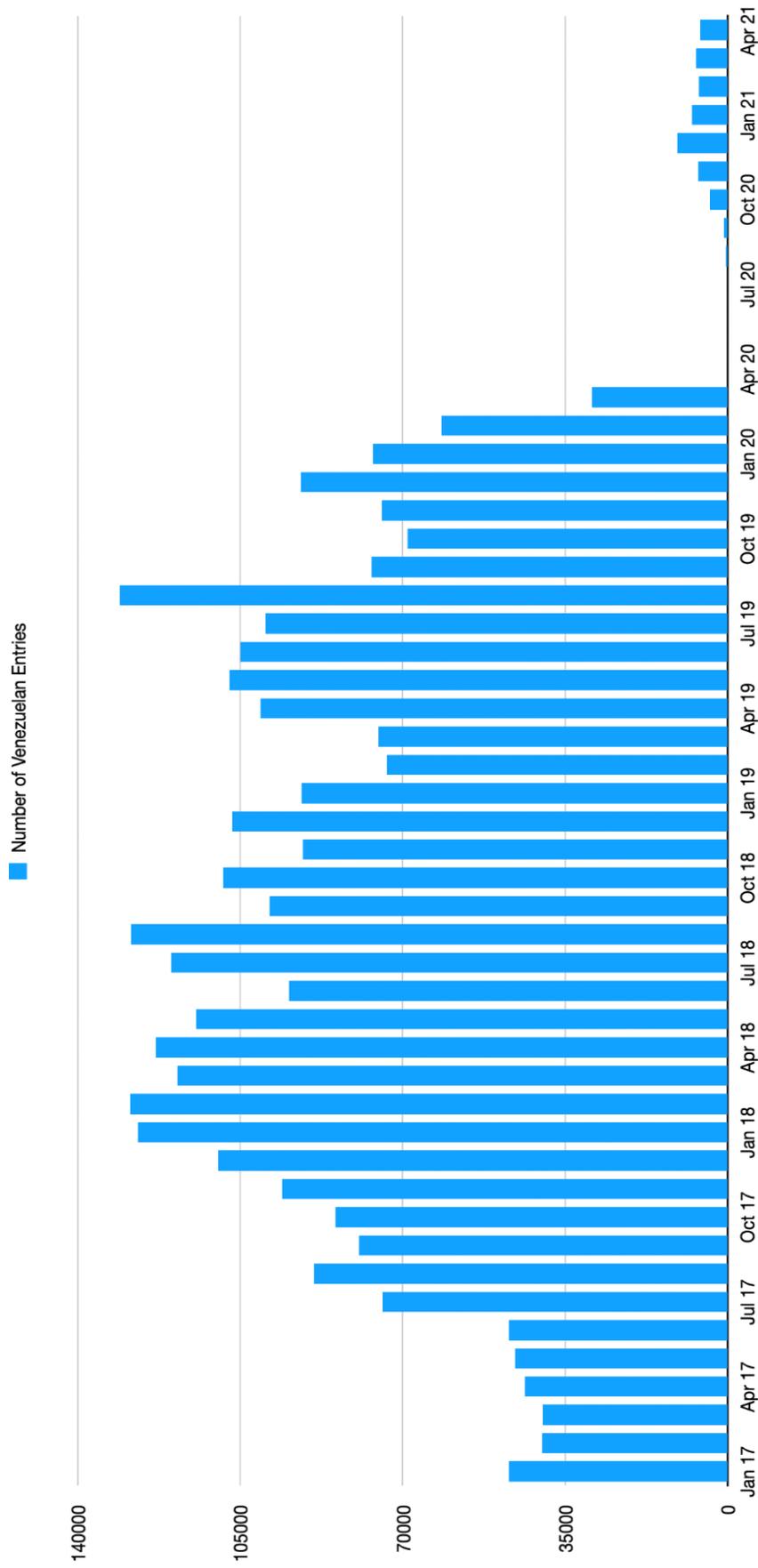
Figure 13 - Venezuelan Entries into Colombia (Author, 2021)