

Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC OPINION ON MIGRATION DYNAMICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

2023 Edition



#OPINION



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I. Executive Summary

The past decade has seen unprecedented growth in human movement in Latin America and the Caribbean, which has experienced a greater proportional increase in international migration than any other region in the world. According to data from the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), in 2010, there were around 8.3 million migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean. This figure was set to double by 2022, reaching 16.3 million, most of whom are intraregional migrants—people who move between countries in the region (Seele et al., 2023). This surge in migration has forced Latin American countries to develop legal and institutional responses in record time. Countries that did not initially seek to welcome migrants have found it necessary to implement reception, control, assistance, and regularization strategies to integrate the migrant population into their societies and economies (Acosta and Harris, 2022).

As in other regions of the world, the increase in migration has led to a decline in how host societies view the migrants arriving in their countries. As a result, efforts to regularize the migrant population have faced obstacles that include not only the institutional barriers typical of government procedures but also public opinion, which is often hostile to the arrival of foreigners. In response, in 2023, the Migration Unit at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) launched the [Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration](#). This

platform analyzes different data sources to provide an aggregated, comprehensive view of what people in Latin America and the Caribbean think about migration and migrants. Understanding people's views and opinions is fundamental to developing evidence-based narratives that can contribute positively to the integration of migrants into local communities.

This report is part of a series of documents analyzing and summarizing attitudes toward migration in the region based on data collected by the [Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration](#). This report is a continuation of “[Public Opinion on Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)” which tracked the evolution of public attitudes toward migration in Latin America and the Caribbean between 2017 and 2022. This second report follows up on that analysis by monitoring the conversation on Twitter in the first half of 2023, supplemented by information from national public opinion polls for the same period.¹

First, this report provides a regional overview that shows a slight decrease in the volume of conversation about migration compared to the same period in 2022, even though the issues discussed are the same. **Security remains the most prevalent issue**, confirming that host societies' attitudes are strongly influenced by the belief that the arrival of migrants leads to an increase in crime and delinquency. Issues related to migration policy and employment

1. Due to changes in the platform's API access policies, the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration has data through June 2023. This report refers to the platform as Twitter, since its name was not changed to X until after this date.

also appear in the list of topics, with nuances worth noting: while xenophobic sentiments predominate in the areas of security and employment, messages on migration policy tend to be more positive.

Concerns about increases in crime and unemployment are often observed following the arrival of migrant populations in countries the world over. Research shows that hostility toward migrant populations in Europe and the United States is linked to the belief that they increase labor market competition and cause social conflict (Denninson and Geddes, 2021). In the Global North, however, cultural, ethnic, and religious differences affect the degree to which local societies are receptive to people from other countries. The 2022 crisis in Ukraine revealed that European societies were more receptive to the Ukrainian exodus than to asylum-seekers from other countries (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner, 2023). In Latin America and the Caribbean, this clash of identities plays a less significant role in relations between the native-born population and migrants.

Looking beyond issues that are specific to Latin America and the Caribbean, **22% of the total conversation on migration in this period were xenophobic tweets, that is, messages containing discriminatory language targeting migrants.** This is slightly lower than in 2022 but still well above the 6% recorded in 2017. During this year, there has also been an increase in xenophobic responses to institutional tweets, **although these seem to come from a particular niche. In other words, while the volume of messages has increased, these xenophobic tweets come from a small percentage of**

accounts—4% of the total, most of which have few followers and thus have limited reach.

For most of the population, interest in migration is triggered at certain moments around highly visible events. This report analyzes the conversation around two specific migration movements in Latin America. First, the response in the primary nations hosting Venezuelan migrants, who continue to represent the largest migration flow in the region. Second, the shifts in public opinion seen on Twitter in response to the new transit migration flows through the Darien Gap and the rest of the Central American corridor to the United States.

Growing numbers of Venezuelans continue to arrive in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, and Brazil with the intention of staying there. Our review of the conversation in these destinations reveals some trends. In some countries, such as Colombia, the volume of migration-related tweets has decreased, and with it the number of xenophobic messages. However, the opposite is true in countries such as Peru and Ecuador, where the volume of such tweets and xenophobic sentiments has increased. **In Chile, the total volume of migration-related content has decreased, but the number of xenophobic messages has increased, making it the country with the highest percentage of xenophobic remarks in the region.** In Brazil, which has quickly become the third-largest recipient of Venezuelan migrants, the volume of conversations has remained constant compared to previous years, besides, the proportion of xenophobic tweets has decreased.

Perhaps the most visible migration event in 2023 has been the increased number of

people crossing the Darien Gap and the rest of the Central American corridor. This flow has caused changes in the migration profile of countries along this route: countries that have traditionally expelled and returned migrants, like Central America's Northern Triangle, and others that have received migrants, like Costa Rica, have become transit countries. As is explained in the third section of this document, this transformation has influenced public opinion on social media platforms, leading to an increase in tweets on transit migration in Panama, xenophobic accounts in Costa Rica, and conversations in border cities and migrant waiting zones along the route.

The data presented here is part of a large, diverse data repository held online by the [Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration](#). This platform aims to provide tools to assist decision-makers and those interested in learning more about public opinion on regional migration dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean.

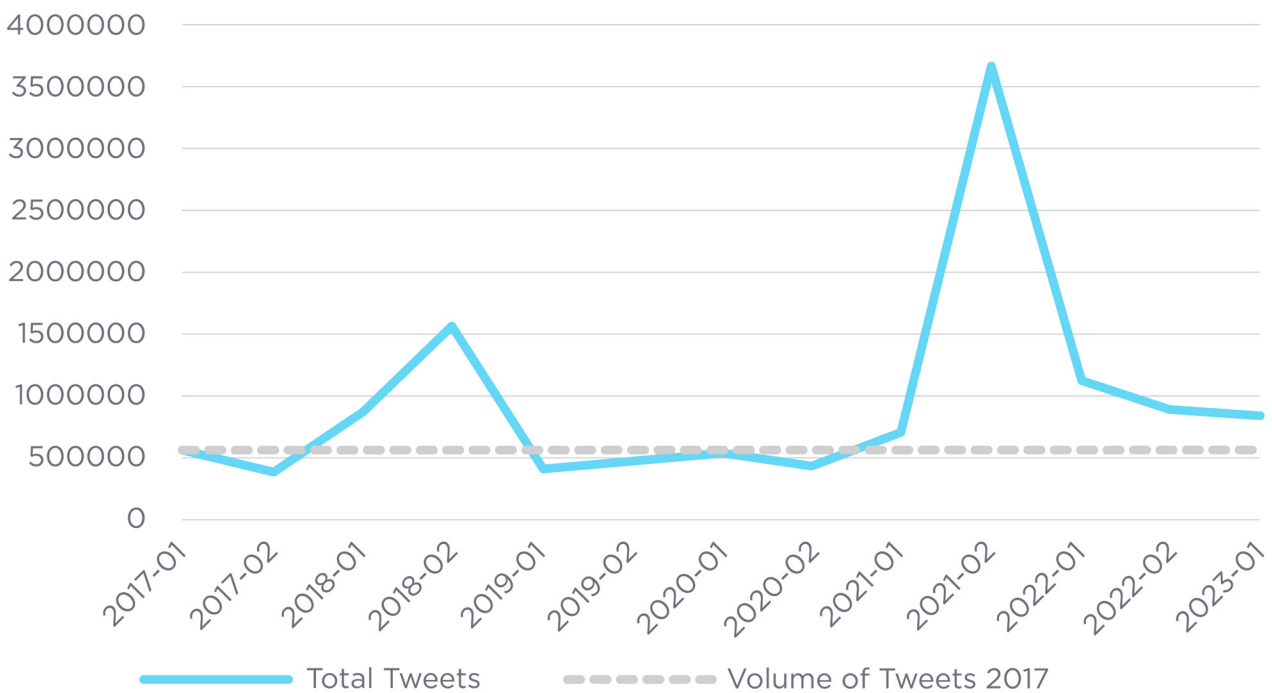


II. The Conversation on Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2023

In recent years, the increase in migratory movements in Latin America and the Caribbean has put migration front and center on the public agenda. However, in the first half of 2023, Twitter conversations about migration trended downward. By the end of

June, there had been around 840,000 tweets on migration-related topics, nearly 300,000 fewer than in the same period in 2022.² Despite this 25% decrease, figure 1 illustrates how the migration conversation is much larger than in 2017, when 385,000 tweets on

Figure 1. Volume of Tweets on Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2017–2023



Source: Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration (IDB, 2023a). Half-yearly.

2. The decrease in volume may also be related to changing dynamics on Twitter, including an increase in restrictions and account suspensions over the past year.

these topics were detected, representing an absolute increase of 118% in six years.

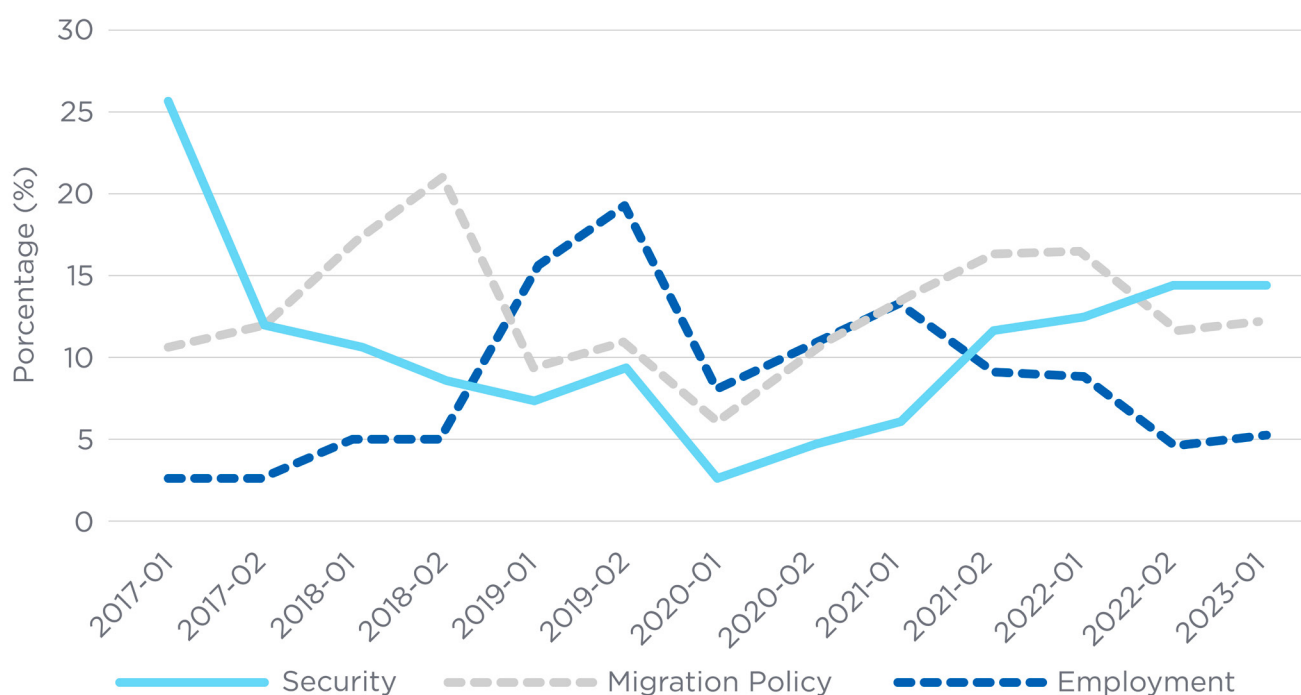
The issues that matter when we talk about migration

The data collected by the [Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration](#) has allowed us to identify the main topics of conversation around migration and track how these change over time, enabling us to infer how certain events trigger the discussion of issues on the migration agenda. In 2022, the most common issues were security, immigration policy, and employment, and these remained the top three issues in the first half of 2023. As we have noted in previous publications, these issues provide insight into how public concerns are mediated by beliefs

and stereotypes about the migrant population.

The issue of security includes conversations about the perceived impact of the arrival of migrant populations on public security in host countries. This includes tweets that mention real or hypothetical situations of violence, insecurity, and crime; arrests of migrants; and episodes of trafficking or repression. In the first half of 2023, security-related topics accounted for 23% of all conversations about migration, a percentage that has remained practically unchanged since 2022. Within the security topic, 44% of the conversation concerns the arrest of migrants. This subtopic has increased steadily since 2018, except in 2020, when it dropped dramatically due to border closures. The next-largest subtopic is messages that

Figure 2. Evolution of the Topics of Security, Migration Policy, and Employment in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2017-2023



Source: IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.

associate migration with crime. By mid-2023, these comprised 24% of the conversation on migration and security.

The increased discussion on security and migration on social media, especially in connection with arrests and crime, confirms that [fear shapes public opinion on migration in the region](#). As we noted in our [previous report](#), this finding is consistent with data from regional public opinion surveys and underscores the need for narratives that counter the widespread belief that the arrival of migrant populations leads to increased crime in host societies. To date, there is no evidence of a direct correlation between an increase in migrant numbers and crime levels, but the assumption that this is the case fuels negative sentiments that are conducive to xenophobia (Ousey and Kubrin, 2018; Bahar, Dooley, and Selee, 2020).

A second issue gaining traction in social media conversations is immigration policy. In the first half of 2023, tweets about migration laws and their implementation, agreements between authorities and countries, institutional measures, and consular and assistance services abroad accounted for 17% of the total conversation about migration. This volume is similar to the one observed in 2018, when migration policy was the most frequent topic in Twitter conversations about migration in Latin America. This may be due to recent policies announced or implemented by some countries in the region.³

Messages around employment constitute the third-

largest category. There has been a slight increase in the relevance of this topic, which went from 9 to 13% of the tweets on migration between 2022 and the first half of 2023, with conversations primarily related to unemployment and labor market participation. This finding confirms the trend identified in the first report published by the [Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration](#): there is a belief that the arrival of migrant populations creates unemployment in host societies, a view that is likely to be exacerbated in times of economic uncertainty.

What about xenophobia?

The topics themselves give some indications of what Latin Americans are concerned about, while the analysis of the sentiments underlying each topic provides additional information.⁴ Neutral sentiments predominate in conversations about security, immigration policy, and employment. If we focus only on tweets that express more extreme sentiments, xenophobic tweets outnumber positive ones in the conversations on security and employment, while the reverse is true for immigration policy. This may indicate that the security and employment situations prompt more negative opinions regarding migration.

Xenophobic tweets accounted for 22% of the conversations on migration in the first half of 2023, lower than the annual average in 2022 but higher than in previous years. Compared to 2017, the first year for which the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration has data, xenophobic messages have

3. Examples of recent legislation include the Critical Infrastructure Law in Chile, in force since February 2023, which authorizes the armed forces to request identity documents from people entering the country irregularly; the “You’ve still got time” program announced by Colombian immigration authorities in April 2023 and granting Temporary Protection Status to Venezuelans not listed with the Single Registry; and the executive decree announced in Ecuador in May 2023, which allows Venezuelans who entered the country irregularly to access the regularization process and apply for an Exceptional Temporary Residence Permit (VIRTE).

4. Sentiment analysis entails categorizing tweets as “positive,” “neutral,” or “xenophobic” based on their tone and emotional polarity. Those whose tone, language, and phrasing place them at the positive end of the spectrum contain pro-migrant content, while xenophobic tweets express antimigrant sentiments. Neutral tweets do not express feelings either way.

increased by 16 percentage points (p.p.). Taking a broader perspective, the fluctuation in the conversation this year does not seem to point to a change in the uptrend in xenophobia among Latin Americans on social media platforms.

In the first half of 2023, xenophobic comments also increased in the responses to institutional accounts such as those of migration institutes, consulates, and research centers that produce migration-related content. For four years in a row, positive sentiments outnumbered negative sentiments in reactions to these types of messages, which tend to be neutral and informative. Unfortunately, this trend reversed in 2023, which may be a sign of growing discontent.

Despite this, accounts posting xenophobic content remain an isolated minority, never representing more than 10% of the Twitter universe in most countries and barely reaching 4% by mid-2023. Xenophobic tweets also have a much lower reach than positive ones, which means that they are published by accounts with small follower numbers, and xenophobia is concentrated in a small user niche. Most people's feelings tend to be ambivalent and change depending on the context. They may be influenced by specific, more visible events on the migration agenda or may come at a particular moment when the conversation around migration is politicized, amplified by the traditional media, or has gone viral on online platforms.

III. Migration Dynamics in 2023 and the Conversation Around Them

Same dynamics, new conversations

The current displacement of people from Venezuela remains the largest migration flow in the region. According to data from the R4V platform, by August 2023, about 7,711,000 people had left Venezuela, almost 85% of whom went to other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Venezuelan migrant population has faced different challenges upon arrival, one of which is undoubtedly public opinion in receiving societies, which varies from country to country and has changed over time.

Colombia remains the main receiving country in 2023, with almost 2,895,000 Venezuelans now residing there (R4V). Although migration was a hot topic on social media in Colombia in previous years, public interest seemed to have declined by the first half of 2023, as the volume of tweets on the issue has decreased in the last two years and remains on a downward trend in 2023. As can be seen in figure 3, along with the decrease in the volume of conversation, there was also a decrease in the number of xenophobic tweets, putting this share 13 p.p. below the Latin American average. This made Colombia, along with Brazil, the Venezuelan host country with the least xenophobic activity on Twitter for this period.⁵

The decline in xenophobic messages on social media has not been reflected in other tools used to measure public opinion in Colombia. According

to the Invamer-Gallup survey, which is included in the national opinion polls section of the [Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration](#) more than 60% of those surveyed have an unfavorable opinion of the Venezuelan population arriving in Colombia with the intention of staying there. In June 2023, this figure reached 70%, a level previously observed only in 2020, probably related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Peru is the second-largest receiving country: it currently hosts 1.5 million Venezuelans (R4V) and continues to receive migrants who intend to stay on. According to a survey conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 60% of newly arrived migrants said they wanted to remain in the country (IOM, 2023). Peru is also a transit country: 40% of respondents said they intended to continue to other destinations, such as Chile, Mexico, or the United States. The data from the social media conversation shows that, unlike Colombia, Peru experienced an increase in the volume of conversation about migration on Twitter in the second quarter of 2023. In parallel, the number of xenophobic tweets increased, putting the country's share of 4 p.p. above the Latin American average. The number of accounts publishing xenophobic content in Peru also increased, reaching 10% of the total by mid-2023.

As in the rest of Latin America, the issue of security is present in the majority of conversations about

5. The main recipient countries are evaluated in this list.

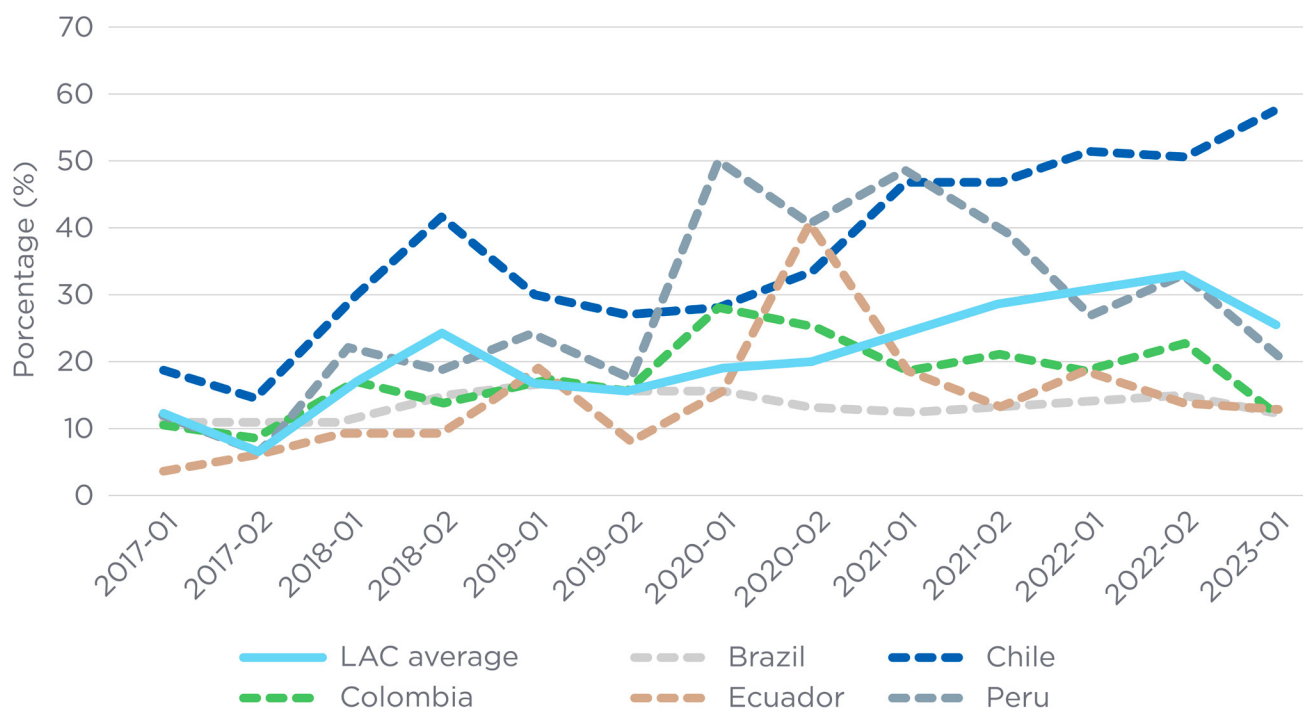
migration in Peru. Although the share of xenophobic tweets had been on the decline in recent years, it rebounded in 2023, when most tweets fell into this category. Between the first and second quarters of 2023, there was a 7-p.p. increase in xenophobic sentiment related to security issues.

On this point, it is important to emphasize how far the traditional media influences public opinion regarding the migrant population. People tend to express more negative opinions in their tweets when immigration features more heavily in news coverage (Menshikova and Van Tubergen, 2022). When discussing migration dynamics, the press constructs narratives that fuel negative perceptions in different ways, be it intentionally or unintentionally. This may include drawing attention to the nationality of foreign criminal groups;

using a belligerent tone, portraying foreigners as invading the country; employing hyperbole, such as describing migratory flows as massive; and taking an alarmist tone, calling the situation a crisis or an emergency (Red Acoge, 2022). This is the case in Peru, where media coverage of organized crime groups constantly emphasizes their Venezuelan origin, constructing a narrative of danger around foreigners (CIES, 2023).

The criminalization of the migrant population has had an impact on public attitudes as measured by public opinion polls. A 2023 study carried out by the Institute of Peruvian Studies (Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, IEP) and the Economic and Social Research Consortium (Consortio de Investigación Económica y Social, CIES) and included in the [Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration](#)

Figure 3. Regional Comparison of Xenophobic Tweets, 2017-2023



Source: IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.

repository shows that 86% of respondents said they did not think Venezuelans were trustworthy, which impacts their willingness to include them in social and economic life in Peru. According to data from this survey, 45% would mind if one of their children married a Venezuelan, and 65% would not hire Venezuelan employees.

Ecuador currently hosts 6% of Venezuelan migrants. The volume of migration-related conversations on Twitter has been on the rise since late 2021, accompanied by an increase in xenophobic content, which was particularly pronounced in 2023. Some 32% of tweets on migration in Ecuador were categorized as xenophobic in the first half of 2023, the highest since 2017.

Ecuador is experiencing unusual, multidirectional migration dynamics that involve the arrival of Venezuelan migrants and other nationalities but also the departure of the Ecuadorian population. According to data from the experimental module of the IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), approximately 93.8% of the Ecuadorian population intends to migrate in search of better employment opportunities, with the United States as the main destination (IOM, 2023). Ecuador's economic and employment situation features in 15% of conversations about migration on Twitter. This percentage has been growing steadily since the first quarter of 2022 and is currently at its highest point to date. The data for Ecuador confirms that unemployment triggers negative attitudes toward migrants, as 18% of the tweets on this issue are xenophobic.

In sum, in Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador, there is a correlation between the scale of the conversation about migration on Twitter and the proportion of xenophobic tweets. In Colombia, this correlation is negative, while in Peru and Ecuador, it is positive. The situation is different in Chile, which receives

the Venezuelan population that travels south along the Andean corridor and has become one of the main destinations for Venezuelan migrants in the Southern Cone. As in Colombia, the conversation about migration on Twitter has decreased, but the volume of xenophobic tweets has increased rapidly in recent years, outstripping the Latin American average. By the end of 2022, more than half of the conversation on Twitter was xenophobic, and while that share shrank slightly in the first half of 2023, at 41%, it remains the highest in the region.

The data suggests that security is the issue that Chilean society is most concerned about in relation to the arrival of migrants. This topic accounted for almost half of the conversation on migration in 2022 and remained above 30% in the first half of 2023, with more than half of the messages falling into the xenophobic category. The link between migration and crime seems to be deeply entrenched in public opinion. According to the latest survey by Chile's Center of Public Studies (Centro de Estudios Públicos, CEP), which collected data between May and July 2023 and is included in the [Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration](#) repository, irregular migration is seen as the main cause of crime in the country. Half of the Chilean population attributes the country's deteriorating security situation more to the arrival of immigrants than to other context-related factors (such as impunity, poverty, or inequality) or individual factors (such as drug use and loss of family values) (CEP, 2023). As in Peru, the Chilean media has negatively influenced public opinion by portraying the country's migratory dynamics as a crisis allegedly caused by the irregular entry of migrants through the country's northern border (Callís and Gómez, 2023).

Negative attitudes toward migration in Chile have also been identified in global opinion polls conducted in 2023. In the October edition of

the Ipsos “What Worries the World?” survey, immigration control is an issue that worries 29% of the Chilean population. Chile ranks sixth in this regard, ahead of other countries with high immigration rates, such as France and the United States (Ipsos, 2023). A similar trend is reported by the Best Countries Survey, which shows a 15-p.p. drop in openness to immigration: while in 2022, 57.5% of respondents in Chile said they agreed that their country should be more open to immigration, only 42.5% said so in 2023 (Davis, 2023).

In a short period, Brazil has come to host the third-largest Venezuelan migrant community in the region, which numbered close to half a million by August 2023 (R4V). The number of arrivals is similar to before the pandemic. Although the volume of conversation about migration is on par with pre-Covid levels, the percentage of xenophobic tweets, which was above the Latin American average before 2020, is now 6 p.p. below it, as figure 3 shows (IOM, 2023).

One striking factor about the conversation in Brazil is that gender-related topics—sexual diversity, specifically—accounted for more than 50% of the total conversation about migration in 2023. This trend contrasts with other Latin American countries, where security and border management are more prevalent issues. The increase in the conversation around sexual diversity may be related to a measure adopted by the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) in May 2023, which simplifies the process of recognizing refugee status for sexually diverse individuals seeking international protection in Brazil (UNHCR, 2023).

New dynamics, new conversations

In addition to the wave of migration from Venezuela, which has been occurring for several years now, Latin America experienced new migratory dynamics

in the first half of 2023, which has changed the conversation on social media. Developments in migration policy, the increase in the volume of transit flows, and the arrival of migrant populations in new countries have led to an increase in the volume of conversation on migration on social media in countries where it was not a major issue before, while also influencing public opinion.

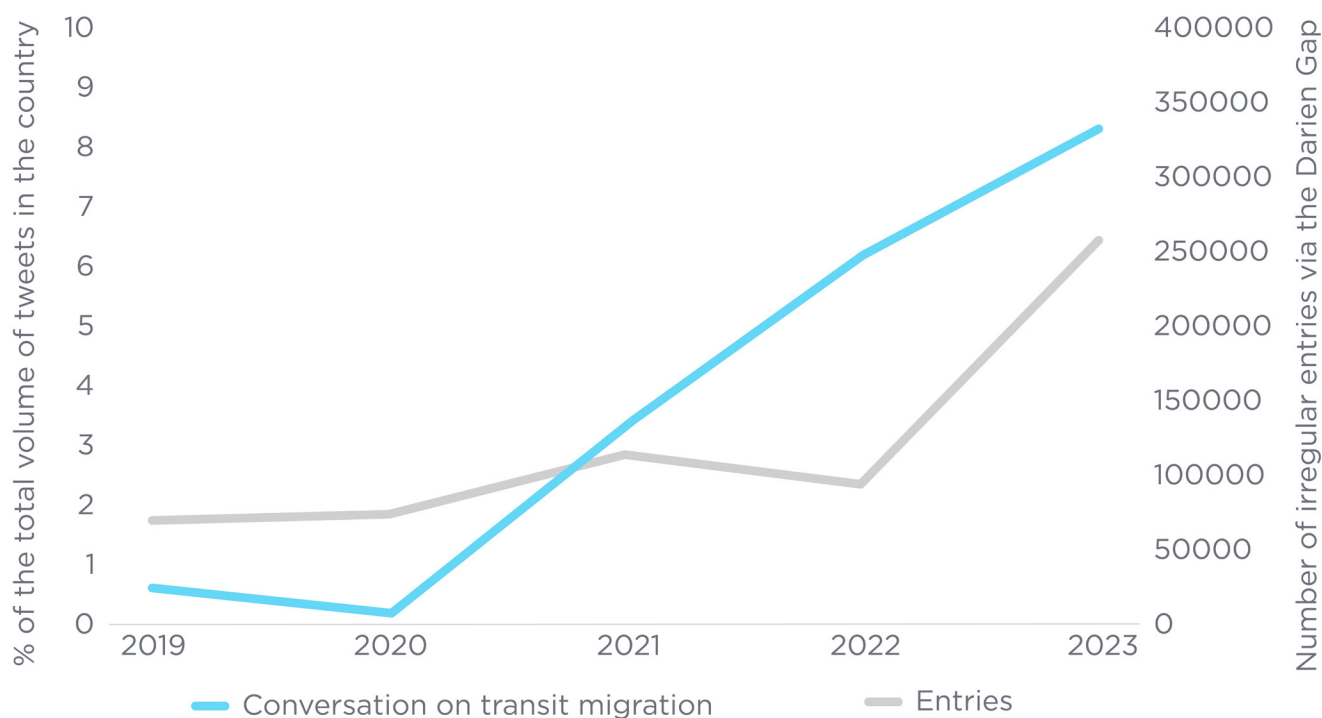
Perhaps the most visible migratory dynamic this year are the irregular crossings of the Darien Gap. Crossing this inaccessible jungle region on the Colombian–Panamanian border is extremely dangerous, as it is rough terrain with no road infrastructure and is under the control of organized crime groups. For many years, the only migrants traveling through the Darién Gap were Asians and Africans heading to the United States from South America. However, recent changes in migration and border management policies in some Latin American countries have diversified migration flows through the region.⁶ In addition to migrants from outside the region, there are now intraregional migrants from Cuba, Haiti, Ecuador, and especially Venezuela crossing the continent on foot, as they no longer have access to safer forms of travel.

Between January and August 2023, 333,704 irregular entries into Panama were registered, three times more than the same period the previous year (IDB, 2023a). This has influenced Panamanian public opinion on Twitter, as evidenced by the increase in tweets related to crossing borders on foot. According to data from the [Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration](#), tweets discussing transit migration accounted for 19% of the conversation in the first half of 2023, compared to just over 5% in the same period in 2022.

This diverse flow is changing migration dynamics in Central America. Traditional destination countries (such as Costa Rica) or expulsion and return

6. For example, countries north of the Darien that Venezuelans had previously been able to visit easily as tourists, such as Mexico and Costa Rica, began requiring visas in 2022. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/latin-american-caribbean-venezuelan-crisis>.

Figure 4. Irregular Crossings of the Darién Gap and Twitter Conversation on Migrant Transit in Panama, 2019–2023



Source: IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration and DataMIG.

countries (such as Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador) are becoming transit countries. Costa Rica has a long history of receiving migrant flows, mainly from Nicaragua, and was hosting more than half a million foreigners by 2020 (IDB, 2023b). The existing foreign population, which represented 10% of the total population in 2020, has been joined by migrants of other nationalities. The first half of 2023 saw an 86% increase in applications for refugee status compared to the same period in 2022, mostly from Nicaraguans, followed by Venezuelans and Cubans (Mixed Migration Centre, 2023). The arrival of migrants intending to stay in the country may explain the concern expressed by the Costa Rican population on social media regarding employment. According to data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration, this was the main topic of migration-related conversation on Twitter in Costa Rica, accounting for 45% of the total in June 2023.

The majority of tweets expressing sentiment were at the xenophobic end of the spectrum.

The mixed flows that now define Costa Rica's migration landscape have led to an increase in negative attitudes toward migrants. Data from the [Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration](#) reveals an increase in the number of Twitter accounts publishing xenophobic content in Costa Rica, which rose from 2% to 14% between January and June 2023. This data is consistent with the findings of the United Nations report on hate speech and discrimination on social media in Costa Rica, which found a 110% increase in messages using discriminatory language against migrants compared to 2022 (UN, 2023).

There has also been a significant increase in irregular entries into other countries along the

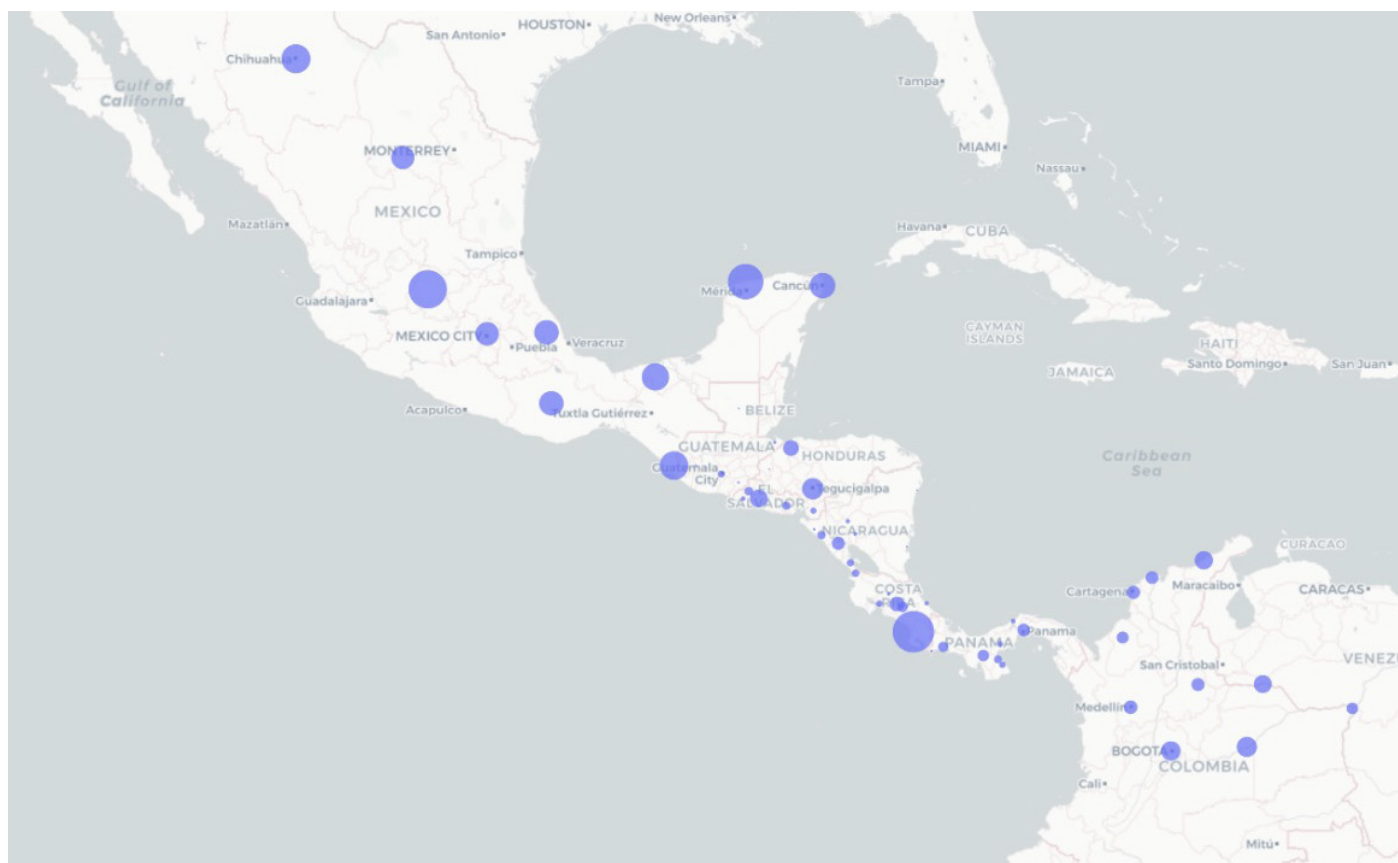
route north through Central America. For example, record numbers of migrants have been recorded at Honduran border crossings. According to data from the National Migration Institute of Honduras (Instituto Nacional de Migración, INM), 184,825 irregular entries were documented between January and July 2023, almost three times more than reported for the same period the previous year (INM, 2023).⁷ In contrast, the flow of returned migrants decreased by 48% compared to January

and July 2022, and a similar pattern was observed in El Salvador and Guatemala, with decreases of 32% and 31%, respectively (IOM, 2023).

The georeferenced map in figure 5 shows how the Twitter conversation evolves along the migration route through the Central American corridor.

In terms of absolute volume, most tweets are concentrated in capital cities or those with the

Figure 5. Map of the Conversation in Panama, Central America, and Mexico. Cities with the Most Conversation on Migration in Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. Rate Per 100,000 Inhabitants.



Source: IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.

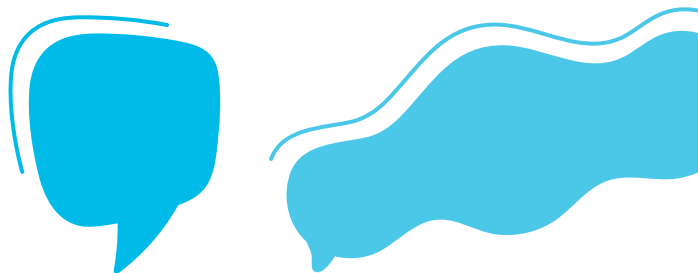
7. Obtaining accurate statistics on irregular migration is methodologically complex, particularly as many of people entering the country are doing so clandestinely. In Honduras, the National Migration Institute keeps records of people who have entered the country irregularly and are in transit. An amnesty was issued in August 2022 to exempt migrants in transit from paying a fine levied on those who were in transit in an irregular manner. This has enabled migrants in transit to take safer routes and has led to more accurate record-keeping by migration authorities, which may also explain the sharp increase in the numbers of migrants in the country.

highest population density. However, if we look at the data per 10,000 inhabitants, we see significant activity in border and transit cities, which are cities along the migration route where people may spend a season before continuing their journey. This is true of David in Panama, Ciudad Cortés in Costa Rica, Puerto Barrios in Guatemala, and Tapachula in Mexico.

Mixed migration flows continue to converge in Mexico. The country has a history of emigration, return, and transit migration and is currently one of the main destinations on the intraregional migration corridor. Like Brazil, Mexico has used its asylum system as a migration regularization mechanism (Gandini and Seele, 2023). According to the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados, COMAR), a decade ago, Mexico received no more than 2,000 applications for refugee status annually. However, it closed 2022 with more than 120,000 applications and received nearly 88,000 new applications between January and July 2023, a 29% increase over the previous year. In the first half of 2023, 16,545 applications were processed, of which 71% were accepted (COMAR, 2023). In addition to responding to rising numbers of asylum-seekers, Mexico granted almost 95,000 Visitor Cards for Humanitarian Reasons, in the first half of 2023, up 30% from the previous year. These permits temporarily regularize the status of irregular migrants. The country has also issued just over 35,000 new temporary residence permits, 8% more than the previous year (COMAR, 2023).

In line with these patterns, the conversation on Mexican social media shows a slight but constant increase: there were almost 47,000 tweets on migration in 2022, but this rose to 56,000 in the first half of 2023. While this volume is nowhere near the levels recorded in 2018, when migrant caravans made migration a much hotter topic, the security issue is now more significant, accounting for 25% of the total. Even so, most tweets on security and migration in general are neutral

in tone, and xenophobic sentiments do not predominate when strong emotions are present. Xenophobic messages on Twitter continued to account for about 5% of the total in Mexico, 17 p.p. below the Latin American average.



Final Considerations

This second report from the [Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration](#) has analyzed the Twitter conversation in Latin America and the Caribbean in the first half of 2023. Its findings align with those of the first report: the issues that prompt the most concern around migration are security, employment, and migration policy, although the relative importance of each depends on the context in each country.

The findings presented here underline the importance of constructing narratives that help allay the fears people have in response to the arrival of migrants in their countries. For example, migration does not increase crime rates and, contrary to popular belief, it often benefits the economy.

On the matter of insecurity, the role of the media and its influence on public opinion needs to be

considered. The media sets the agenda through the issues and stories it chooses to focus on, often using hyperbolic, alarmist, and belligerent language that portrays the migrant population as a threat rather than highlighting the positive aspects of their arrival.

Large numbers of people continue to migrate from and through Latin America and the Caribbean, making migration an extremely topical issue in the region. This report focuses on the Twitter conversation around two of the most prominent aspects of migration in the region in the first half of 2023: the continued arrival of Venezuelan migrants in several countries and the number of migrants transiting through the Darién Gap and along the Central American corridor to the United States.

Social media monitoring is a tool that complements other ways of measuring public attitudes toward migration, such as opinion polls. By analyzing the conversation on social media, we can see how public opinion shifts around the dynamics of migration, which topics generate animosity toward the migrant population, and which events trigger conversation about the issue. The data obtained can help counter the spread of misinformation about the migrant population, which fuels misperceptions and, consequently, negative attitudes and discrimination.



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