

Venezuelan Migrants in Buenos Aires, Argentina: Barriers to Integration

A Qualitative Study of Venezuelan Migrants in Buenos Aires,
Argentina



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Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative case study of Venezuelan migrants living in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This study examines how migrants experience the four main barriers to socio economic integration – labour market exclusion, housing insecurity, institutional hurdles and everyday discrimination as well as the implications of these barriers. The theoretical framework of this thesis combines intersectionality, Social Identity Theory as well as the post-colonial lens to shed light on how unique identities, insider-outsider relations as well as power hierarchies interact in shaping migrant's experiences.

During a field study in the spring of 2025, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted, complemented with informal observations and NGO reports to understand the factors shaping integration experiences. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns in the primary data. A key finding of this study is that the four barriers are interconnected and mutually reinforcing; credential non-recognition and long administrative waits force migrants to work precarious jobs; subtle xenophobia erodes social acceptance. This thesis concludes that to reach positive integration outcomes, a holistic approach needs to be adopted. By providing the first in-depth qualitative study of Venezuelan migrants in Buenos Aires, this paper also fills a research gap; and offers policy takeaways transferable to certain other South American migrant host cities.

Key words: Venezuelan migration, migrant integration, Buenos Aires, Argentina, Venezuelan Displacement Crisis, Intersectionality, Social Identity Theory, Postcolonial analysis
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1 Introduction

The Venezuelan Displacement Crisis is regarded as the biggest forced displacement crisis ever recorded in Latin American history (USA for UNHCR, 2024). As of November 2024, an estimated 7.9 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants have left their country, with about 6.7 million residing in Latin America and the Caribbean, accounting for approximately 85% of the total displaced population (R4V, 2024). This is a crisis that has caused more displacement than the displacement crises of Syrians and Ukrainians outside of their countries; nonetheless, it has still received less international media attention (Munoz-Pogossio and Winkler, 2023).

Most of the research on migration and the Venezuelan Displacement Crisis has focused on the migration to the five key receiving countries: Colombia, Peru, Chile, Brazil and Ecuador. To exemplify, just Colombia and Peru together host 1.7 million and 1 million Venezuelan migrants respectively. However, Argentina – and specifically in the context of Buenos Aires – has been notably omitted from much of the literature; despite having a growing population of Venezuelan migrants. This thesis is going to focus on the experience of Venezuelan migrants in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

1.2 Research Aim and Questions

The research aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and barriers to socio-economic integration that Venezuelan migrants face living in Buenos Aires, Argentina – an understudied setting within the wider Venezuelan Displacement Crisis. This research is based on qualitative data that I collected during my fieldwork project in Argentina in the spring of 2025. The fieldwork project centers the voices of migrants with an aim to understand how structural and social challenges shape their day to day lives. The aim of this thesis is to explain how and why Venezuelan migrants encounter labour market exclusion, housing insecurity, institutional hurdles and social discrimination – and how these barriers interact.

The research question guiding this thesis is as following:

- How and why do Venezuelan migrants in Buenos Aires, Argentina experience labour-market exclusion, housing insecurity, institutional hurdles and social discrimination?

2 Background

Venezuela, once being one of the wealthiest countries in the world, has suffered a severe political and economic crisis this past decade. In the 1950's, Venezuela was the fourth richest country in the world with a GDP on par with the United States, New Zealand and Switzerland (The Policy Circle, 2019). However, starting in the 1980's, Venezuela entered a prolonged period of economic decline, sparked by falling oil prices, growing debt and political turmoil. This economic decline was further worsened in the 1990's, during the presidency of Hugo Chavez. The populist administration of Hugo Chavez pursued ambitious social reforms and state-led redistribution, funded by the nation's vast oil wealth (EBSCO, n.d.). While initially popular among the poor, these reforms soon proved to be unsustainable as they were heavily reliant on oil revenue and lacking diversification (Corrales, 2015).

Following Chavez's death in 2013, the crisis worsened under the administration of Nicolas Maduro. Venezuela suffered through one of the worst cases of hyperinflation ever recorded in history, which led to a near-total collapse of its currency and basic services such as electricity, public transportation, healthcare (Hausmann and Rodriguez, 2014; Weisbrot and Sachs, 2019). Between 2014 and 2016, inflation increased by ten times – reaching more than 600% (Paez, 2017). By 2018, inflation had skyrocketed to 80 000% annually (Hanke, 2019). As a result of inflation skyrocketing, food and medical shortages became widespread (Kurmanaev, 2019; Paez, 2017). All of this, of course, was reflected in poverty rates.

Between 2008-2013 the national poverty rate fluctuated between 32-33%, with extreme poverty at around 9% (ENCOVI, 2021). Just one decade later, in 2021, the national poverty was at around 94% and the extreme poverty rate at around 76.6% (ENCOVI, 2021). The percentage of households viewing their household income as a “major problem” was 7% in 2012. In 2016, that

figure was 41% (Weitzman and Huss, 2024). These numbers reflect the extent of Venezuela's social and economic collapse.

These dire conditions have been described by the United Nations as a complex humanitarian crisis, which has triggered one of the largest displacement crises in the world, prompting over 7.9 million Venezuelans to flee the country (UNHCR, 2023; R4V, 2024).

2.2 The Venezuelan Displacement Crisis

The Venezuelan Displacement Crisis is the largest forced displacement crisis ever in Latin America. The Displacement Crisis is not a result of one single conflict or extreme weather event; instead, it is a complex, multidimensional crisis rooted in years of political repression, democratic breakdown and economic collapse (Munoz-Pogossio and Winkler, 2023).

According to Profamilia, the push factors for migration from Venezuela are:

- insecurity
- despair
- hunger
- high level of stress in daily life
- uncertainty for the future

Interestingly, a majority of the Venezuelan migrants fleeing the country are of working age (18-45) (IOM, 2024) and tend to be better educated than other migrant groups from the region (Chaves-Gonzales et al., 2021). This has significant implications for Venezuela's labor market, creating a brain-drain situation as well as for the economies of host countries. The mass exodus of so many skilled Venezuelans has left Venezuela without much needed human capital, crucial for recovery (UNHCR, 2022). Despite Venezuelans as a migrant group generally being better educated than others in the region, the predominant majority of migrants have not been able to obtain their relevant professional credentials; for example, as of 2010, 10% of Venezuelans residing in Chile, Peru and Colombia reported having had their credentials recognized.

Therefore, many of the migrants that previously worked in professional sectors in Venezuela now work in low-skilled labor in receiving countries.

2.3 Argentinian context

Historically, Argentina has been considered one of the most welcoming countries in Latin America to migrants (BBC, 2017). Argentina is also one of the most welcoming countries to refugees in the world (Fundación ACNUR Argentina, 2020). This tradition has also been reflected in the country's legal framework; specifically, the passage of Migration Law No.25.871 in 2004. This 2004 Migration law recognises migration as a fundamental human right and guarantees migrants, independent of legal status, access to basic social services, such as healthcare, education, employment and legal protection (Garcia, 2021). This approach is in stark contrast to the migration policies of countries in the Global North.

As an example, undocumented migrants have the legal right to enroll their children into schools, to receive medical care. Furthermore, Argentina's economic instability further complicates migrant integration. Argentina has gone through multiple currency devaluations, out-of-control inflation and, as a result of that, austerity measures that have strained public resource and tightened labor markets. With the election of President Javier Milei in 2023, the country has undergone what has been called a "chainsaw approach" transformation, which implies aggressive public spending cuts; including in critical sectors such as health, housing, education and social welfare (The Guardian, 2025). At the same time, poverty has sharply gone up, with more than 50% of Argentinians living below the poverty line (AP News, 2025).

2.4 Local context

Much of the academic literature on the Venezuelan Displacement Crisis and the integration of Venezuelan migrants into different host societies has focused either on the United States or on one of (or all together) these five primary host countries: Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Chile and Ecuador — nations that together host over 80% of displaced Venezuelan migrants

(R4V, 2024). Argentina, on the other hand, and its capital Buenos Aires remain relatively unexplored and uncovered despite its rapidly growing Venezuelan population.

Colombia, which has taken in the most Venezuelan migrants with a figure around 2.9 million Venezuelans, has been applauded for its Temporary Protection Status (TPS) project that launched in 2021. This policy singlehandedly regularized the status of over 1.8 million migrants, paving a way for these migrants to obtain work permits and public services. However, as noted in the existing literature – in Bahar et al (2021), for example – integration still remains a challenge due to limited state and institutional capacity. Many migrants in Colombia often occupy low-income and informal jobs.

In comparison with other Latin American countries, Argentina offers one of the most open rights-based legal frameworks for migrants, with guaranteed access to education, healthcare and legal residency. Despite this, however, comprehensive legal frameworks do not imply meaningful integration. Labor market discrimination, housing insecurity, bureaucratic delays... A 28-year-old Venezuelan man interviewed during the field study project explained

It is not that I do not have any documents... I do – but it is still not enough; they still say I am not qualified... or they just ignore my emails.

3 Previous Studies

3.1 Migrant Integration

Migrant Integration is a broad concept that is used to describe how migrants settle in new societies. It includes factors such as socio-economic inclusion – that is, employment, education, healthcare, housing and others – as well as social, political and economical participation in the host country (Ager and Strang, 2008). Ager and Strang (2008) provide a framework for

evaluating and understanding integration across four key themes: markers and means, social connections, facilitators and foundation. Marker and means refers to the “symbolic” and “material” measures of integration, such as employment, housing, etc. Social connections refers to the social networks, links and relationships that refugees form within the host community, which foster a sense of belonging and community. Facilitators are the enabling factors that make the integration process easier – factors such as language and cultural knowledge, positive attitudes from the local population in host communities as well as others. Foundation refers to the structural factors such as the legal frameworks and citizenship in the host country (Ager and Strang, 2008). Successful integration, then, means progress across these domains; whereas “barriers to integration” refers to the factors that hinders progress across these domains.

Prior research in the field of migrant studies and migrant integration into host societies a range of common barriers have been identified. One of them is legal status – in other words, migrants that lack the proper documentation which bars them from accessing formal jobs and public services. Obtaining this documentation is shown to improve economic outcomes – in Colombia, for instance, Venezuelan migrants with relevant documentation earned on average 20% more in income than those without documentation; and had greater access to public services (Vargas, Davalos and Suaza, n.d). This shows that these barriers are interconnected.

Economic and labor market access is another prominent barrier – even with proper documentation (work authorization), many new migrants face high unemployment rates or work informal jobs. Skilled migrants working low-skilled jobs is also prevalent; with reports from the International Crisis Group pointing out that only about 10% of Venezuelans in Chile, Colombia and Peru had their credentials recognised as of October 2020 (International Crisis Group, 2020) .

Lastly, social barriers are also widespread and significantly hinder migrants from integration; in numerous surveys carried out in key host countries (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru), Venezuelans cite discrimination and xenophobia as key barriers to formal employment (IOM, 2021). For example, qualitative studies and social media discourse analysis shows that many migrants are blamed for the increase in crime rates (Pressenza, 2023; Morales and Tirado, 2021).

This goes hand in hand with another barrier – forming social connections outside of migrant communities, leading to social exclusion. Much of the migration integration research supports that social isolation exacerbates other barriers; and conversely, supportive communities support wider integration (Vargas, Davalos and Suaza, n.d).

Importantly, all of these barriers are interconnected. Therefore, much of the recent literature adopts an intersectional approach (Vargas, Davalos and Suaza, n.d). Migrants often face multiple barriers at the same time, which reinforce each other. For example, the legal status barrier often leads to unemployment or informal employment, which then traps migrants in poverty and excludes them from taking part in many social networks. Additionally, different migrant groups experience these barriers differently; which can lead to different integration outcomes. Therefore, an intersectional approach is crucial when studying migrant integration – which is why it is used in this thesis, as shown in Chapter 4, Theoretical Framework.

3.2 Venezuelan Migration in Latin America

Given the scale of the Venezuelan displacement crisis, a large body of academic literature has been developing. Much of the existing literature on migration and the Venezuelan displacement crisis is focused on the key countries hosting the most Venezuelan migrants. This literature mainly explores the socioeconomic impacts of migration, responses of host governments, and the public discourse surrounding migration (source). Venezuelans are often portrayed in a negative light in the media as well as in political discourse: as criminals and economic threats (Pressenza, 2023; Morales and Tirado, 2021). Antiporta (2024) carried out a critical discourse analysis in Colombia and Peru, which shows how media narratives influence the public perception of migrants; fueling stereotypes and xenophobia, which in turn complicates integration. Castillo et al (2019) emphasize that in Colombian media, the Venezuelan migrants are shown from 3 angles: as economic contributors, as vulnerable victims and as potential criminals.

A study conducted by Plascencia (2024) shows that across Latin America, media and political coverage of migrants is based on racial stereotypes – which construct these migrants as “outsiders”; fueling the spread of anti-migrant attitudes. This does not only harm migrant

communities; it also plays a significant role in shaping government policy in response to migration as well as influencing public attitudes.

3.3 Filling the Research Gap

Despite the rapidly growing amount of research on the Venezuelan displacement crisis, Argentina and the context of Buenos Aires remain understudied. The majority of studies conducted focus on either key countries in South America – the countries that take in the most Venezuelan migrants number wise as well as North America (particularly the United States).

Therefore, by focusing on integration in Buenos Aires, Argentina, this thesis fills a research gap. This research is based on interviews and observations and informed by integration literature, but also applies a theoretical framework that situates the experiences of Venezuelan migrants in a broader context of power hierarchies. In doing so, this thesis moves beyond macro-level factors to provide a robust analysis of the realities faced by Venezuelan migrants.

4 Theoretical Framework

In order to understand and analyze the integration barriers Venezuelan migrants face in Buenos Aires, Argentina, this thesis makes use of four theoretical frameworks. Those frameworks are: intersectionality, social identity theory, postcolonial perspective. By employing these theories, one can gain a nuanced understanding of how different structures shape migrant experiences beyond individual factors such as legal status or income level.

4.2 Intersectionality

Intersectionality, initially developed by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), is the foundational theoretical framework in this thesis. Intersectionality argues that different factors – such as race, class, gender, legal status – all intersect and work together to produce complex forms of oppression. Migrants cannot be and should not be treated as a homogenous group that consists of solely being a migrant; instead, their experiences are shaped by the multiple factors that

intersect and create their unique experience. For example, building on the experience gained in the field, a female low-income Venezuelan migrant without legitimate paperwork is going to experience integration in Buenos Aires, Argentina differently than a male high-income Venezuelan migrant with legal residency. These differences in experience were evident throughout the research project.

By applying an intersectional lens in the research project, this thesis acknowledges the difference in experience (and, therefore, difference in integration outcomes) within the Venezuelan migrant community.

4.3 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1986, is used to analyze how migrants navigate and perceive themselves in new socio-cultural environments. According to the Social Identity Theory, individuals derive part of their identity from group affiliations, which are shaped by us/them dynamics. In the context of Venezuelan migration, the central question when using the Social Identity Theory is – are migrants perceived as “them”? Are migrants perceived as outsiders and how does that affect their integration?

4.4 Postcolonial perspective

Applying a postcolonial perspective in this context further broadens the scope by highlighting the historical and geopolitical context of migration and displacement in Latin America. The Postcolonial perspective analyses how power dynamics, hierarchies (from postcolonial paper insert notes)

When talking about Venezuelan migrants in Argentina, the postcolonial lens sheds light on the invisible power structures and hierarchies that exist in Latin America. A specific example of that is the discursive framing of certain migrant group as more favorable than others. For example, when interviewing Russian and Venezuelan migrants in Buenos Aires, Argentina, it was discovered that many white, Russian migrants were perceived as hard-working, cold, and skilled.

Venezuelan migrants, on the other hand, were perceived as lazy, warm and incompetent. This “ranking system” of different migrant groups are in line with colonial legacies and inequalities.

A paper that reinforces this perspective is the paper of Miraftab (2004), which focuses on spatial and discursive exclusion. Venezuelans may be welcomed legally but excluded symbolically.

4.5 Frameworks

By employing each of the previously mentioned frameworks, this thesis approaches migration as a multidimensional issue. These frameworks also align with the thematic analysis – where different barriers to employment are not looked at as isolated issues, but instead as interconnected, interlocked forms of exclusion.

Intersectionality provides the foundations for this thesis; the social identity theory, in turn, illuminates the psychological and sensitive dimensions of migrant integration. And the Postcolonial perspective broadens the scope to analyse the wider systems of inequality and oppression. By combining these three lenses, the study provides the tools to interpret the empirical material.

5 Methodology

5.1 Research design

This thesis is based on primary data that was collected during an independent qualitative field study in Buenos Aires, Argentina in the Spring of 2025. A qualitative research method was used to explore the lived experiences of Venezuelan migrants in Argentina; within the social, economic and political context. The qualitative research method is particularly relevant in the realm of migration studies as it allows to gather highly sensitive, rich, contextualised information that is otherwise difficult to capture using quantitative methods (Robson and McCartan, 2016, page 151).

To understand the experiences of Venezuelan migrants as deeply as possible, this study uses semi-structured interviews and field observation. Semi-structured interviews allow the participants to reflect on their struggles with housing, employment, legal status, discrimination, while also giving me the flexibility to navigate and influence the discussion in different directions.

5.2 The Case Selection: Why Venezuelans in Buenos Aires

This case was specifically selected as it is very relevant today and understudied. First of all, Venezuelans are the largest migrant group arriving in Argentina in recent years, with almost 180 000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants settled in Argentina, with the majority concentrated in the Buenos Aires area (Wu and Del Rey, 2023). Buenos Aires is therefore an epicentre for Venezuelan migration to Argentina – an ideal location to observe integration. Secondly, Argentina serves as a contrast to many other Latin American countries taking Venezuelan migrants in terms of legal framework. With a progressive immigration policy, and a smaller migrant population when compared with other South American host countries, Argentina makes a special case in terms of migrant integration. Third of all, the case of Argentina as a host country for Venezuelan migrants is an understudied topic in academic literature. In order to complete the regional lens, an Argentinian understanding is needed. Argentina's outcome in terms of integration success can also hint at the state of migrant integration in other South American countries – if the outcomes in Argentina, a country with a progressive legal framework, are bad, then the outcomes in for example Peru, a country with a restrictive legal framework, are worse. And oppositely – if integration is successful in Argentina, then identifying the factors for success can act as guidelines for other contexts in South America.

The representativeness of the case is twofold: Buenos Aires has its unique characteristics, but the integration barriers studied are to some extent universal – housing insecurity, institutional barriers, discrimination and labor market exclusion. Therefore, findings from this study can resonate with other similar studies conducted in the Latin American context or add new dimensions.

Lastly, and importantly, practical aspects also guided this case choice. My background of having spent significant time in Buenos Aires, Argentina as well as my experience of living in Colombia, Brazil and Mexico made me especially interested in this region. I also have an extensive contact network in Buenos Aires, which helped navigate some practical challenges. My Spanish language skills made things easier – and that also influenced my case selection.

5.3 The Field Study

The fieldwork for this thesis was carried out over approximately 8 weeks (January to March 2025). My data is based on in-depth 9 interviews as well as informal conversations and observations. These Interviews, as mentioned previously, are semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method because it best aligns with the goals for the research - to gather data on the personal experiences and perspectives of migrants living in Buenos Aires. Semi-structured interviews do just this – a semi-structured interview contains a predetermined set of open ended questions.

I was not affiliated with any NGO's – instead, I gained access to the participants through Facebook groups. Purposive and snowball sampling were used for this research project. As a researcher, I aimed for as much diversity as possible in the sample; in terms of gender, age, socio-economic background. However, there were still limitations due to the small sample size and sampling methods, which is mentioned in the limitations section of this paper.

The interviews lasted about 20-40 minutes, conducted in Spanish. There were 6 initial questions in the interview that were complemented with follow-up questions during the interviewing process. The questions covered topics such as employment, housing, access to services, perceived discrimination. In addition to formal interviews conducted, I engaged in informal participant observation as a complementary method, which I documented in my fieldwork diary entries. These observations complimented the data by providing context to the research; sometimes corroborating the interviews, sometimes contrasting.

Before the start of the interview, I introduced myself and the research project, making sure to explain the purpose and use of these interviews. I also ensured to assure the participants of the confidentiality of this study as well as clearly explain the rights of the participants during the process; for example, their right to withdraw at any point of the interview and their right to not answer. Consent forms in Spanish were also printed out prior to the interviews, and all participants signed the consent forms. Secondary data, like government and NGO reports on migration, news articles and other academic literature complimented my primary data.

5.4 Analysis of Data

The theoretical frameworks informed my research throughout the fieldwork. Practically, this meant that my theoretical framework influenced the way I designed the interview questions, what follow up questions I asked, and how I coded and interpreted the data. A specific example is intersectionality. Intersectionality pushed me to formulate my questions in a way that covers multiple factors, not just one. Social Identity Theory, for example, was the basis for my question about feeling accepted – making use of the us-them, insider-outsider dynamic. The postcolonial perspective also informed my thinking and served as the foundation for my question about their experience of being treated differently based on their home country and whether they have noticed any hierarchical attitudes from the local population. Since this was a semi-structured interview, follow up questions were asked. The theories also informed me on this; for example, when one interviewee said that she had been subject to condescending attitudes, I followed up with a question asking why she believed this was the case – was it because she was a woman, a migrant, socioeconomic status, or another identity factor?

For data analysis, the thematic analysis approach was used as it is used to systematically code and identify recurring patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Theory structured this research as it helped me structure the initial codes into different themes. For example, occurrences of being denied work and working jobs unrelated to one's professional qualification, were grouped into one theme, which was then later titled "Labor Market Exclusion".

5.5 Ethics and Positionality

The ethical aspect played a central role in this research; from planning the research, to conducting the interviews, to analysing the data – questions such as “does my research respect the rights and dignity of the participants?” or “does my research, or how can my research, pose any harm to the participants?” were asked. As this specific research is political in nature, ethics is an especially important aspect.

Researching immigrants, many of whom are especially vulnerable, can be damaging and even dangerous if not considered carefully (Mackenzie et al., 2007). For example, if an immigrant has an uncertain legal status, doing research with no regard for ethics and their vulnerable position may threaten their status in Argentina. In order to ensure that the research is as ethical as possible and does not threaten or harm anyone, the following measures were taken:

- Informed consent – as mentioned previously in this thesis – makes sure that every participant is fully aware of the purpose of this research as well as the rights they have. For example, if a participant would want to withdraw or interrupt the interview process at any point, they are allowed to do so without any problems whatsoever. Prior to the start of the interview process, I also printed out consent forms in Spanish.
- Full anonymity. All participants were granted full anonymity. In all documents and transcripts, pseudonyms are used. The participants were also informed about this prior to the start of the interview process.
- Sensitivity. I understand that the data collected is sensitive and abusing it may be harmful to the participants. Therefore, it was made sure that all documents in this research project that contain information about the participants are only accessible by the researcher (me).

Additionally, all the information gathered in this project will only be used for the purpose of this project – which was also explained to the participants of this project. Throughout this research project, I also reflected on my positionality and what it meant in this research project. I am not

Venezuelan or Argentinian; I am a white male, half Swedish half American. While I am fluent in Spanish, there are significant cultural differences between me and the participants.

5.6 Language

Conducting research in a foreign language can mean possible translation errors and limitations. Much of the literature as well as all the interviews were carried out in Spanish. While I am not a native Spanish speaker, I am convinced that my Spanish language skills (level B2 according to the CEFR framework) are sufficient in carrying out this research; additionally, I am a Swedish and English native speaker. Worth noting is that there are a few sources in Portuguese – as an intermediate Portuguese speaker (level B1 according to the CEFR framework), my skills were sufficient to comprehend these sources. In order to minimize the risk of any interpretation errors, online dictionaries were used when needed.

5.7 Strengths and Weaknesses

As any qualitative data, this data has its strengths and weaknesses.

- Depth - using semi-structured interviews allowed me to deviate from the predetermined questions when needed. Using this flexible format allowed me to capture the nuanced and complex experiences of migrants. Quantitative research, for example, would omit many of these personal aspects – aspects that cannot be reduced to mere numbers.
- Language - being a B2 Spanish speaker allowed me to conduct these interviews in the native language of the participants. This eliminated the need for interpreters or other 3 party presence, which in turn enhanced trust between me and the participants, which strengthened my research.

The limitations of the data are:

- Sample size - conducting 9 interviews is not a lot; undoubtedly, a lot of important and diverse accounts were missed. Additionally, finding participants through purposive and snowball sampling omitted some groups of people. For example, finding people through Facebook groups gave access to the connected parts of the communities; using a snowballing sampling method just reinforced this limitation.

- Biases - given the political nature of my research, many participants opt for more neutral and “careful” responses, ensuring their answer does not put them at risk. Therefore, many of the accounts are incomplete and fail to tell the full story.
- My positionality - as mentioned earlier, being a White European male affects the way I am perceived in the field. The way I am perceived, in turn, influences what the participants choose to share with me.

Overall, the advantage in this research material lies in its human aspect. The human aspect is the personal stories shared in the interviews by the participants. A Venezuelan woman talking about how her child is perceived at school; a Venezuelan lawyer that works at a construction site in Buenos Aires. Data like this cannot be measured in quantitative research. However, I do recognize that this research is also narrow. Almost all participants in this research project were around the same age – for example, I did not interview a single Venezuelan retiree. This is something that my sampling method – snowball sampling – reinforced.

6. Analysis

This part analyses the findings from the 9 interviews in the research project – namely the integration barriers that Venezuelan migrants face in Buenos Aires. A thematic analysis was conducted on the 9 semi-structured interviews. Based on the thematic analysis, diverse recurring themes were derived.

These themes are: labour-market exclusion, housing insecurity, institutional barriers and discrimination. Intersectionality, Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Post Colonial Theory are components of the theoretical framework.

6.2 Labour Market Exclusion

In all nine interviews, the interviewees expressed difficulty securing jobs, especially those that align with their credentials. Securing a job is one of the most central aspects of integration – and affects all other parts of integration. This is consistent with the broader academic literature and surveys of Venezuelans in Argentina, which show that approximately 70% of Venezuelans in Argentina have concluded post-secondary education, however, less than 30% have skilled jobs (Debandi et al, 2021).

Venezuelan migrants have themselves pointed out the main barriers in securing a job that aligns with their qualifications – in Debandi et al (2021), lack of available jobs was the most cited barrier, cited by 33%; difficulties obtaining formal recognition of foreign degrees and credentials was cited by 24%; and age bias was cited by 23%. Documentation issues (13%) and open xenophobia (8%) were cited less.

Interview participants shared stories mirroring these numbers in detail. A lawyer who now works as an Uber driver shared:

Home in Venezuela, I worked as a lawyer for 6 years and finding a job had never been a problem. But now it is different – but it pays the bills, yeah.

The administrative backlog is troubling as well: the median wait time for a national identity document, called Documento Nacional de Identidad (DNI) , is more than 12 months (INDEC, 2020). Pre-pandemic levels show that the unemployment rate for undocumented Venezuelans was hovering at around 21%, which is almost double that of their documented peers (INDEC, 2020). This is despite Argentina's welcoming migration and regularization policies. Not being able to obtain a national identity document, many Venezuelan migrants are left out of formal employment as formal employment requires the Documento Nacional de Identidad (DNI). Therefore, many Venezuelan migrants are left out of the formal employment sector, at least for the first number of months (in some cases, years). This leaves them struggling to secure informal or gig-economy jobs, such as domestic work, street vending, et cetera. This is also

consistent with the wider Latin American context – approximately three-quarters of Venezuelan migrants across the continent struggle to secure formal employment (OIM, 2022).

From an Intersectionality point of view, labour market exclusion is shaped by intersecting factors, for example education level, age, gender, immigration status etc. For example, a Venezuelan migrant woman with a child – despite having the same education credentials as a Venezuelan migrant man – has a totally different experience accessing the job market due to these overlapping factors mentioned above. It is, then, not nationality or legal status alone that determine access to the job market; instead, it is a combination of these overlapping factors. And data supports just that – it is documented that Venezuelan women in Argentina have significantly worse employment outcomes than men; and are far less likely to hold formal jobs (Nicolao et al, 2022).

The postcolonial lens offers an interpretation based on the hierarchical, core-periphery relationship. This relationship highlights how knowledge and credentials from the “periphery” (Venezuela) are less valued in “core countries” (Argentina). Many Venezuelan migrants are then regarded as “incompetent”, despite possessing the relevant credentials.

6.3 Housing Insecurity

The second major theme derived from the primary data is housing insecurity. Interview participants often shared poor living conditions, with some describing overcrowded living conditions and unsanitary conditions. Many of the participants lived in shanty towns. Shanty towns are informal living settlements, typically made of materials such as wood, cardboard, corrugated iron sheets with often poor sanitary conditions and poor infrastructure, normally located on the outskirts of a city or close to a railway station. Barrio 31, or Villa 31, is a large settlement in Buenos Aires, close to a railway. It is known to be notorious.

It was hard finding a place to stay. Just getting a call back was hard. Finding someone willing to rent out an apartment without an Argentine guarantor was impossible. So we ended up renting a cheap shanty in Barrio 31 in Retiro.

This is further backed up by the complimentary data – according to OIM (2022), the absolute majority of Venezuelan migrants in Latin America have troubles with housing. In Buenos Aires specifically, the participants are also faced with an extremely tight labor market. Discrimination in housing has also been reported in the interviews by many respondents.

After hearing my accent, the room was all of a sudden “occupied”.

This also aligns with the broader academic literature in the region. A recent study conducted in Colombia, examining discrimination against Colombians and Venezuelans in the housing market, found that local Colombian real estate agents and landlords were far less likely to choose a Venezuelan family over local (Colombian) family or OECD family (Zanoni, Dias; 2023). The Social Identity Theory can explain this occurrence by the insider-outsider, us-them dynamic. This dynamic implies that local landlords or real estate agents favor insiders (in this context, locals) rather than outsiders (Venezuelan migrants). Using an intersectional lens, on the other hand, sheds light on how certain identities are affected by housing insecurity more. To broaden the scope, situating housing exclusion in a historical and racial context by employing the postcolonial perspective may show that in the Argentinian stratification of migrants, darker-colored migrants end up in the lower strata of this classification.

It is also worth noting that Argentinian legal framework explicitly states that no one should be denied rental or public services due to nationality or other factors. And recent policy developments go even further to protect renters by limiting how much one can charge in rental deposits.

6.4 Institutional Barriers

The third derived theme from interviewing the Venezuelan migrants are the legal and institutional barriers. As mentioned previously in this paper, Argentina has a welcoming migration legal framework with its 2004 Migration Act, that guarantees education, healthcare as well as regularisation.. This is seen in permitting Venezuelan migrants regularise their status under the Mercosur agreement and on humanitarian grounds. However, many of the participants shared their struggles with long waiting times, financial costs and unclear instructions.

I waited 19 months to get the DNI. 19 months without a bank account. In order to get money from my brother, I used Mercado Pago. It helped a lot. Yeah, I don't know what I would have done without Mercado Pago.

Another participant recalled the confusion with the current Argentinian legislation:

Now, my son is in school. But it was also not so easy. When we first came to Argentina 2 years ago, I went to the school with my son for him to start his education. They told me I needed this DNI. I did not have it then, so Miguel [the name of the son] could not start his education. Only after some weeks, my sister called me and said it was not true and told me that they must accept him because it is the law.

These institutional delays have implications to integration: long processing times prevent migrants from opening bank accounts. Unclear instructions prevent children from accessing education. This also shows that while Argentina may have an open immigration legal framework, effective implementation is not guaranteed. The non-recognition of professional credentials, as mentioned previously in this chapter, is also related to institutional barriers. This kind of institutional discrimination is not only a barrier on the individual level; it also impedes integration as a whole. A Venezuelan nurse, not having had her credentials verified, is prevented from contributing to the host society (Argentina).

Social Identity Theory, in this context, is not directly applicable as institutional barriers are primarily barriers related to bureaucracy and documentation.

Importantly, two participants also noted Argentina's institutional openness.

I hope to apply to university next year. I never thought about it, but it is free and I need to take advantage. University in Venezuela is bad, classes are always cancelled and it is not safe.

Another participant noted Argentina's free healthcare.

Here, we can go and get help... medicine... appointments. Anything. When we were in Colombia, they told us they did not have any space at the hospital so we had to go back home. And Venezuela is just a shit with healthcare.

These positive experiences show that if an open migration framework is efficiently implemented, then institutions can be facilitators of integration.

6.5 Discrimination

Beyond the formal marker barriers discussed above, social integration is a crucial, interconnected aspect in migrant integration. A positive factor in the context of Venezuelan migrants in Buenos Aires, was the shared language and Latin American culture, which contributes to positive integration outcomes. As one interviewee noted:

Of course it makes it easier that we share the same language. Everyone here listens to reggaeton, just like we, and yeah we have a lot of things in common.

Nonetheless, despite this cultural and language advantage, many migrants still face discrimination. An interviewee shared how a potential employer reacted to their Venezuelan accent:

As soon as they heard my accent, they changed their attitude. I am then already in a different category for them [them as in the local residents of Buenos Aires].

Such attitudes fall in line with the Social Identity Theory notion that migrants are perceived as an outsider, “them” group. This, of course, leads to feelings of exclusion and hinders integration, reinforcing the social barrier.

It is important to note, however, that many participants reported coming across friendly interactions with local Buenos Aires residents as well. Many highlighted their negative experience in other host countries, as Argentina was not their first country:

Sure it is hard, but where is it easy? For us, Argentina is a better place. They say things are going to get worse, but we already went to Colombia and were forced to return to Venezuela. I don't think it is going to be that much worse, I have my documents now, too.

This shows that discrimination is not universal; attitudes in Argentina vary, and migrants navigate these conditions differently. Discrimination remains a relevant barrier to full integration in Buenos Aires, Argentina; along with labor market exclusion, institutional barriers and housing insecurity. Through the theoretical framework of this thesis, these findings can be interpreted from different angles: intersectionality sheds light on how not all Venezuelan migrants experience discrimination equally – it depends on a plethora of factors, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status and others. It is possible that one migrant experiences Argentinian society in a more positive way due to lighter skin color, a milder accent, or because of their gender. Social Identity Theory shows the relationship between insider-outsider dynamics, which can fuel the local populations' negative attitudes. The Postcolonial lens exposes the broader historical context, in which biases against Latinos is deeply rooted. Acknowledging and addressing this dimension of integration barriers is crucial – ignoring it will undermine even the most welcoming and progressive legal and economic integration frameworks. Policies and initiatives, such as those by the International Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism

(INADI) in Argentina, that promote intercultural integration and anti-discrimination efforts can play a key role in improving integration outcomes.

6.6 Theoretical implications

In the Buenos Aires research project, a few empirical patterns are evident. While these patterns are similar to the findings of the wider Venezuelan Displacement Crisis migration literature in the region, there are also some divergent findings. Just like in the Argentinian context, in Peru, Chile and Colombia the three commonly cited obstacles are the same as in the Argentinian context – credential non recognition, improper employment as well as social bias (Bahat et al, 2021; IOM, 2022). However, there are two unique features that stand out in the Argentinian case.

The first unique feature is the gap between legal, on paper policy and what happens in practice. This is about the 2004 Migration Law in Argentina – which frames Argentina as one of the most welcoming places for migrants. In theory, Venezuelan migrants seeking refuge in Argentina seek refuge in one of the most welcoming and progressive places in Latin America (Garcia, 2021). The primary data shows, however, that the waiting times for the DNI in Argentina are well over 12 months, with some participants reporting up to 20 months of waiting times. This is almost double the waiting time that is reported by Venezuelans in other Latin American capitals – Santiago in Chile and Bogota in Colombia (IDB, 2024). As mentioned before, this once again demonstrates that a progressive and welcoming legal framework does not imply a positive outcome. Implementation, then, is the limiting factor – not the legal framework as in other countries.

The second unique feature is related to Argentina's economic instability. As discussed in the Chapter about the Argentinian context in this paper, Argentina has suffered severe macro-economic turbulence, with poverty rates and inflation skyrocketing. While real wages continued to fall, in the beginning of 2024 annual inflation reached over 250 percent, which was the highest inflation number in the world at the time, strongly reducing the purchasing power (Misculin and Lo Bianco, 2024). Real wages, however, did not grow; conversely, they either

stagnated or went down (public sector wages, for example, dropped over 15% the year after Milei took office) (Misculin, 2025). Poverty spiked over 50% (Misculin and Lo Bianco, 2024). The aggressive austerity measures pushed by the Milei government slashed public spending, cut down on social housing budgets, and reduced subsidies (Misculin and Lo Bianco, 2024). These measures, designed to fight inflation and reduce deficits, burdened low-income households. This had a clear effect on Venezuelan migrants in Buenos Aires – they not only had to navigate the previously mentioned barriers, but also an extremely volatile economic climate, which weakened their incomes and hindered their access to services (IDB, 2021; INDEC, 2025). These 2 factors make the integration experience in Argentina unique compared to other countries in the region.

7. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to investigate the barriers to socio-economic integration faced by Venezuelan migrants in Buenos Aires, Argentina as well as to understand the underlying factors affecting these barriers. Through qualitative interviews, observations and literature this thesis has shed light on a complex reality – Venezuelan migrants in Buenos Aires, Argentina face many legal, social and economic barriers to integration. This is despite a progressive and open legal framework.

There are several key conclusions that can be drawn from the findings:

First, a progressive legal framework does not imply efficient integration. This was particularly evident with Argentina's framework – despite granting Venezuelans broad rights and access, in practice, migrants still face significant barriers (long waiting times for regularisation, trouble securing appropriate housing among others). There is a clear discrepancy between formal, on paper inclusion and the inclusion that actually happens in practice.

Second, integration barriers are not uniform; they are interconnected and made up by migrants' identities. The research substantiates the intersectional lens: factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status among others determine how an individual migrant is affected by a given barrier. For instance, from the primary data it was evident that women faced more difficulties in

securing housing and finding formal employment than men. Therefore, isolated efforts targeting a specific barrier or issue is not enough – a holistic approach is needed.

Third, societal attitudes play a key role in integration. The interviews revealed that “hidden” discrimination, that is, subtle biases, stereotypes, social exclusion – can hinder integration even when the other barriers are addressed. And the other way around – welcoming, positive experiences significantly elevated migrants' experiences. This suggests that positive integration outcomes are not just dependent on policy reform, but also wider, civil society based initiatives (anti-racism campaigns, public awareness campaigns, and others).

To sum up, while Venezuelan migrants residing in Buenos Aires do benefit from certain upsides – such as a shared language, similar cultures, a welcoming legal framework – they continue to face serious integration barriers. In order to address these barriers, a holistic approach is needed. In practice this means combining efforts aimed at combating structural issues (expediting administrative processes, streamlining foreign credential recognition processes, eliminating housing barriers and expanding affordable housing options) with efforts aimed at combating discrimination and xenophobia. The experiences discussed in this thesis highlight the importance of viewing migrant integration through a multidimensional lens. Ensuring that Venezuelan migrants in Buenos Aires, Argentina are not only welcomed legally on paper, but also economically and socially is crucial – not just for the wellbeing of the migrants themselves, but also for the benefit of the host society.

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