A Socioeconomic and Demographic Profile of Migrant Households in the Main Emigration Hotspots of Colombia and Brazil

Abstract
Latin America is a vibrant region of origin, destination and transit for international migration. The last census round suggests that the region’s migration pattern is characterised by some long-term continuities, as well as changes in the volume and direction of flows, and in the composition and characteristics of migrants. Also, demographic studies indicate that rapid demographic changes in Latin America, especially the process of population aging in the coming decades, will have repercussions in multiple spheres, such as in the rates of economic dependence and pressures in the education, health and social security systems, as well as in the spatial distribution and mobility of the population. However, much remains to be understood in relation to migrants’ changing socio-demographic characteristics, their transnational practices and their potential broader impact on socioeconomic development at the micro, meso and macro levels in the region (CEPAL, 2016). In addition, there is a shortage of interdisciplinary and comparative studies (among countries, groups of migrants, etc.) of these impacts in migrants’ societies of origin and destination.

This paper aims to contribute to filling this lacuna through a comparative analysis of the migration dynamics in the Coffee Region of Colombia and Governador Valadares, Brazil, the main hotspots of international emigration in these countries. The analysis centres around comparing and contrasting migration flows, patterns and the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of migrant and non-migrant households in these key locations. It also reflects on the socioeconomic and political implications of these dynamics at the micro, meso and macro levels in these regions.

Methodologically, the paper employs a quantitative approach that includes analysis of data from the 2005 Colombian Census and the 2010 Brazilian Census, both of which added specific questions about international emigration for the first time, and which have been hardly explored in the literature. It also draws on other quanti-qualitative secondary data in order to qualify the complexity of migration processes at the regional and national levels.
Introduction

Latin America is a vibrant region of origin, destination and transit for international migration. The last census round suggests that the region's migration pattern is characterised by some long-term continuities, as well as changes in the volume and direction of flows, and in the composition and characteristics of migrants. In 2016, 18% of all international migrants originated in the region – 33 million people –, which received around 16% of global remittances flows – US$ 73.1 billion (IFAD, 2017). Also, demographic studies indicate that rapid demographic changes in Latin America, especially the process of population aging in the coming decades, will have repercussions in multiple spheres, such as in the rates of economic dependence and pressures in the education, health and social security systems, as well as in the spatial distribution and mobility of the population (CEPAL, 2007; Saad et al., 2009). Thus, migrants have increasingly being recognised, by scholars, international institutions and governments, as a current and potential economic and political force in the region. However, much remains to be understood in relation to migrants’ changing socio-demographic characteristics, their transnational practices and their potential broader impact on socioeconomic development at the micro, meso and macro levels in the region (CEPAL, 2016). In addition, there is a shortage of interdisciplinary and comparative studies (among countries, groups of migrants, etc.) of these impacts in migrants’ societies of origin and destination.

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Methodologically, the paper employs a quantitative approach that includes analysis of data from the 2005 Colombian Census and the 2010 Brazilian Census, both of which added specific questions about international emigration for the first time, and which have been hardly explored in the literature. It also draws on other quasi-qualitative secondary data in order to qualify the complexity of migration processes at the regional and national levels.

Comparing these two key migration regions is important for a number of reasons: i) historically, Colombia and Brazil have been among the countries with the worst income distributions in Latin America (PNUD, 2010); where rigid social stratifications may lead large segments of the population to see spatial mobility (migration) as key to achieving social mobility (Brito, 2002); ii) there are parallels in the historical evolution of migration patterns in both countries; iii) Colombia and Brazil experienced crises and socioeconomic restructuring...
in the 1980s and 1990s and subsequently, saw a significant increase and diversification of emigration flows; iv) migration flows are primarily urban and regionally concentrated in both countries with the Coffee Region (Colombia) and Governador Valadares (Brazil) as the main hotspots of international migration (Campos & Macedo, 2014; Khoudour-Castéras, 2007a); v) in these key regions, international migration and remittances have produced significant impacts in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres (Garay & Rodríguez, 2005b; Gomez et al., 2005; Khoudour-Castéras, 2007; Martes & Soares, 2006; Mejía, 2012; Sales, 1999; Siqueira, 2006; Soares, 2002); vi) there is evidence that social networks play an important role in the direction of migration flows and that the transnational links that migrants maintain with their countries of origin are of a personal rather than an institutional nature (Martes, 2000; Zapata, 2013); vii) the United States and Europe/Japan are, respectively, the main sources of remittances to Colombia and Brazil (Banco de la República, 2015a; Martes & Soares, 2006) and viii) comparing these two emigration hotspots may provide us insights with respect to the diversity of the constituent elements of migration processes in places with similar economic characteristics but different socio-spatial dynamics, especially in the current context of major socio-political and economic transformations in the ‘North’ as well as in the ‘South’.

**Data and research methods**

This paper employs a quantitative approach centred on the analysis of data from the 2005 Colombian Census and the 2010 Brazilian Census, both of which added specific questions about international emigration for the first time and which have been hardly explored in the literature. It also analyses other secondary quanti-qualitative data in order to qualify the complexity of migration process at the regional and national levels. In this sense, the paper develops a historical characterisation of the contexts of origin in Colombia and Brazil as well as the main countries of destination, reconstructing their socioeconomic, political and demographic conditions at a multi-scalar level – meso/regional and macro/national. This will allow us to make explicit the social construction of the conditions of push and pull of individuals and their relation with broader processes of international labour mobility.

The questions about emigration introduced in the 2005 Colombian and 2010 Brazilian censuses were different to the ones used in other Latin American countries, which employed the approaches proposed by Somoza (1977) and Hill (1979). Particularly, the censuses in these countries did not include a question on the relationship between the informant and the

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1 These are the two most commonly used approaches to estimate the number of individuals residing abroad – international emigrants – in a given community/country. The method proposed by Somosa (1977), is based on asking mothers about the place of residence of their children; while the method proposed by Hill (1979), is based on asking individuals about the place of residence of their siblings.
emigrant, and so their use for measuring the total number of international emigrants is quite limited. However, the potential of the questions introduced in the Colombian and Brazilian censuses lies not so much in providing us an exact estimation of the total number of international migrants. Rather, they help us to qualify the migration process by providing us with information about the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the households they belonged to prior to migration. This is the first systematic attempt to compare these data in the emigration hotspots of these countries.

Results and discussion

Migration, as a phenomenon of human population mobility across diverse spaces and frontiers and a strategy for the fulfilment of diverse economic, social, political and cultural needs, implies several processes of change and impacts on migrants’ places of origin and destination. Colombia and Brazil share a similar history of processes in relation to the macro-structural conditions that have been driving, more forcefully since the 1990s, the emigration of their citizens to the United States and Europe. In particular, the embracing of neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programmes led to a deterioration of real wages and labour conditions, a sharp increase in unemployment and poverty, recurrent crises and the worsening, of historically unequal, indexes of wealth distribution. In Colombia, this harsh economic reality, the deterioration of the socio-political situation of the country in the 1990s and the collapse of the coffee economy meant that the adverse effects of these multiple crises were felt more acutely in the country’s Coffee Region. In Brazil, poor economic performance at home and a combination of high labour demand in the North, pre-established social networks and the emergence of an illegal immigration industry, fuelled the reversal of migration flows, primarily from the Governador Valadares Microregion.

Our analysis suggests that migration flows have been varying in tandem with regional, national and international social, economic and political dynamics. Before 1996, most Colombians and Brazilians settled in the United States but began to search for new destinations at the turn of the new millennium, in the context of tightening migration policies in the United States, increasing hurdles to obtain tourist visas and the militarisation of the US-Mexico border. At the turn of the century, Colombians began moving in significant numbers to Spain, Ecuador, Panama, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica the United Kingdom and Italy; while Brazilians went to Paraguay, Japan, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Italy and Spain.

In terms of gender composition, the data indicates that the proportion of women in migrant households is greater than in non-migrant households in the Coffee Region as well as in the Valadares microregion. Moreover, migrant households have significantly higher
aged dependency ratios and lower child dependency ratios, in both regions. This household composition indicates that emigration from the Coffee Region and the Valadares microregion occurs primarily in the prime working years for labour/economic reasons. Also, the bulk of migrant households in the Coffee Region are made up of single people or people who are married and/or in a civil partnership, while in the Valadares microregion, women with children without a husband/partner in the household predominate. The Brazilian census also captured the gender composition of the migrant stock: women from the Valadares microregion were heavily underrepresented in the emigrant stock that left the country before the turn of the new century. Moreover, while there is a gender balance in the flows from Brazil to the United States, flows from the Valadares Region to the US are predominantly male, while migration to Portugal is more gender-balanced.

Migrant households tend to be slightly more educated than non-migrant households in Colombia while the opposite seems to be the case in Brazil. Also there are lower rates of employment among people over 14 years of age and heads of household living in families that have one or more members residing abroad, both in the Coffee Region as well as in the Valadares microregion. In addition, in Brazil and the Valadares microregion as well as in Colombia and the Coffee Region, migrant households tend to be better off than non-migrant households, although the bulk of migrant families still sit at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale. As some scholars have pointed out, rather than absolute poverty, a minimum level of social and economic development along with feelings of relative deprivation, may be at the root of these population movements (de Haas, 2010; Stark & Taylor, 1989). This is not surprising given that these countries' rigid social stratification systems and the absence of perspectives for social mobility have been pointed as conducive to migration.

Although it is difficult to establish causality in terms of the socioeconomic and demographic composition of migrant households, there is evidence that social networks play an important role in the direction of migration flows from Colombia and Brazil. In addition, the high concentration of migrants in particular localities indicates that migration tends to be a strongly patterned process influenced by micro (personal/social networks), meso (family/household dynamics) and macro-structural (local, regional and national socioeconomic and political) factors, which determine the direction and composition of migration flows (Margolis, 1994; Martes, 2000; Zapata, 2013, 2016).
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