

## Advocacy case studies

# Establishing rights for migrants through a regional campaign in Latin America

**Country:**

Latin America

**Themes:**

Human rights; migration and refugees; stigma and discrimination

**Advocacy approaches:**

Church and community mobilisation; educating community members; legal mechanisms; working in coalition and alliances; government officials: lobbying

After the collapse of the government of Venezuela, millions of Venezuelans were forced to migrate to neighbouring countries to survive poverty and hunger. They faced xenophobia and discrimination from the countries they sought refuge in, closure of borders – especially during the Covid-19 pandemic – and a lack of rights and identity as their host countries tried to avoid taking the responsibility of supporting them. Many were not able to find employment in their host countries or access state support for healthcare, housing, or education, as they fled without their papers. Venezuelan migrants were also shunned from their host communities as they were thought to carry Covid-19. Xenophobia and discrimination were experienced both by the migrants in the region and by those trying to help them.

In response, Tearfund mobilised hundreds of churches and Christian organisations throughout Latin America to meet the migrants' humanitarian needs and informed them of their legal rights through an innovative and free mobile phone app. This app provides migrants with information on the laws that protect them in each country and a directory for humanitarian and psychospiritual support.

Tearfund has created a powerful movement in Latin America to protect vulnerable migrants by linking up various spread-out Christian actors. Previously, these Christian actors were disjointed in meeting the humanitarian needs of the Venezuelan migrants. Also, churches didn't understand the Biblical mandate to

care for foreigners in their communities. Tearfund has supported these churches to understand this Biblical mandate, meet migrants' humanitarian needs, and engage in local, national, and regional advocacy on behalf of and with migrants.

As Tearfund has connected together churches across the region on this issue, the movement has become stronger. As this movement to welcome migrants has increased, officials from governments across Latin America and other civil society actors have increased their collaboration with the movement too. The joint work with faith communities, government authorities, and civil society contributed to changing attitudes and the approval of new laws that benefit migrants.

Examples of the changing policies and practices can be seen in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. In Colombia, children previously born in the country to Venezuelan parents could not claim Colombian citizenship. They were stateless, so could not access support for education or healthcare. As a result of Tearfund and a Latin America wide coalition lobbying the Colombian government, more than 24,000 stateless children received Colombian nationality when the government approved the law that allows them identity and rights. Another example in Colombia is when the Tearfund migration campaign, together with other regional coalitions of which Tearfund is a member, supported legal reform bills that legalise the status of migrants.

Tearfund's migration campaign has also changed government practices in favour of migrants in Ecuador and Peru. In Ecuador, Tearfund and our partner, Paz y Esperanza (Peace and Hope), as part of the migration campaign, lobbied the Ecuadorian Foreign Office and other government officials throughout Latin America to return unaccompanied child migrants to their families before the Covid-19 lockdowns were enforced. This helped protect these children from human traffickers.

In Peru, Tearfund supported our partner, Paz y Esperanza, as part of the migration campaign, to influence Peru's Ombudsman's Office to expedite humanitarian visas for Venezuelan migrants entering Peru. Thus securing these migrants access to vital humanitarian services in Peru.

This movement has brought together diverse churches and Christian actors throughout Latin America to impact the policies and practices of multiple governments in the region. Tearfund has been able to help change negative attitudes within churches across Latin America towards migrants. Churches in the region now understand the Biblical mandate to support the foreigner amongst them, by meeting their physical needs and changing policies.

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