



Migration Profile

PARAGUAY

A. Executive Summary

The Republic of Paraguay is a landlocked country in South America, with a very low population density compared to most Latin American countries.ⁱ Its Eastern Region is filled with fertile plains, rivers, lakes, vast forests, and grassy meadows, while the Western Region is made up of an extensive plain with abundant vegetation and a great animal variety.ⁱⁱ Most of the population lives in the Eastern Region, thus leaving the Western part unoccupied.ⁱⁱⁱ

From 2004 to 2019 the Paraguayan economy improved very quickly, thanks to its supported agriculture and hydropower exports.^{iv} Likewise, institutional reforms targeting inflation and its fiscal system promoted its macro stability and fostered economic growth.^v In those years, poverty fell from 40.2% to 19.5% (US\$6.85 per day per capita, 2017 PPPs), while inequality dropped from 54 to 46 Gini points.^{vi} Nevertheless, in 2019 the country's financial growth decreased considerably due to the Covid-19 pandemic mobility restrictions, droughts, and poor trading partners' performance.^{vii}

Regarding migration, Paraguay is mainly an emigrant country^{viii} and is among the South American countries with the highest stocks of people living abroad.^{ix} In 2021, the top destination countries for Paraguayans were Argentina, Brazil, the USA, Spain, and Mexico.^x Conversely, immigrants are arriving in the country from Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, South Korea, and Canada.^{xi} In addition, refugees coming from Venezuela, Cuba and Syria flee their homelands looking for better living conditions in Paraguay, where they have access to essential services.^{xii}

In 2021 Paraguay's GDP amounted to US\$ 38,986,810,990,^{xiii} thus experiencing an annual growth rate of 4.2% compared to the previous year's decrease of -0.8, caused by the pandemic.^{xiv} Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) net inflows in 2020 represented 0.3% of the country's GDP.^{xv} The inflation rate in 2021 was 4.8% of its GDP compared to 1.8% of the previous year.^{xvi}

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Paraguay is located in the central part of South America and shares borders with Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia.^{xvii} It has a population of 7,219,641 (registered in 2021)^{xviii} and occupies an area of 406,752 sq. km.^{xix} In 2021 3,394,000 people were living in the capital city, Asuncion.^{xx} The country is divided by the Paraguay river into two regions, Eastern (where the main cities are Ciudad del Este, Encarnacion, Concepcion, Pedro Juan Caballero, Colonel Oviedo, and

Villarrica) and Western (Mariscal Estigarribia and Filadelfia cities, with a very low resident population). It is divided into 17 departments, plus the Capital District.^{xxi}

Most of the people (95%) are *mestizos* (mixed Spanish and Amerindian).^{xxii} 46.3% speak the official languages, Guaraní (34%) and Spanish (15.2%), while other groups use Portuguese, German, and other indigenous languages (4.1%).^{xxiii} Concerning religion, 89.6% are Roman Catholic, 6.2% Protestant, 1.1% Christian, 1.1% do not belong to any religion, and 1.9% are unspecified.^{xxiv}

II. International and Internal Migration

In 2020 there were 169,567 registered migrants in Paraguay (47.92% were women and 52.88% were men). 22.35% were between 30 and 39 years old, and 19.85% were between 40 and 49 years old, while a smaller group were between 18 and 29 years old representing 18% of the total number of migrants. Minors and individuals over 50 years old make up the remaining portion.^{xxv}

In 2020 immigrants mostly came from Brazil (47.12%) and Argentina (36.47%). A small percentage instead arrived from Uruguay (1.87%), South Korea (1.63%), and Canada (1.46%).^{xxvi}

Regular migrants usually cross the San Roque Gonzalez de Santa Cruz international bridge, linking the Argentine province of Misiones with the Itapúa province in South Paraguay.^{xxvii} Other immigrants, instead, use the Port José Falcón, connecting Formosa (Paraguay) to Clorinda (Argentina), and the International Airport Silvio Pettirossi.^{xxviii}

The last immigration law was enacted in 1996 (law no. 978) and promoted skilled migration to increase investment and avoid agricultural exploitation in the country.^{xxix} However, some immigrants, especially those with chronic illnesses, a criminal record, or those who have been deported, face multiple difficulties. Furthermore, irregular migrants are not allowed to work in Paraguay.^{xxx}

A lot of Brazilians migrate to rural areas, usually Alto Paraná, Amambay, and Canindeyú.^{xxxi} A significant number of them are businessmen involved in the agriculture sector. Many Brazilian and Paraguayan peasants are also implicated in ongoing land disputes near the borders of San Alberto, Alto Paraná, Caaguazú, Caazapá, San Pedro, and Misiones. Argentinian migrants, on the other hand, typically move to urban areas such as Asunción and Ciudad del Este, as well as smaller cities near the border.

In addition, Chinese and South Koreans over the years have moved to Paraguay, aiming to develop retail businesses to sell imported goods.^{xxxii} Many of them stay close to international borders or in main cities, such as Ciudad del Este, Guairá, or Pedro Juan Caballero.^{xxxiii} Additionally, bordering cities offer a lot of opportunities to migrants involved in the import-export sector, as well as to Brazilians who live in Foz do Iguaçu, Guairá, and Pora and cross the borders daily to work in Salto del Guairá and Pedro Juan Caballero.^{xxxiv}

There is no national data available regarding internal population displacements. However, the latest agrarian reforms have promoted the use of more productive systems in the agriculture sector and the occupation of large agricultural areas for these purposes.^{xxxv} Therefore, since 2019 Central and Alto Paraná have been the regions receiving the most internal migrants.^{xxxvi} Asunción and San Pedro, instead, have had negative migration rates,

mainly due to the agricultural intensification pushing small landowners to relocate into other regions.^{xxxvii} In 2019, the number of migrants moving into urban areas was 61.4% (nearly 40% were originally from inter-city areas, whereas migrants from rural areas were only 20%).^{xxxviii}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Among the South American countries, Paraguay has the highest stock of emigrants.^{xxxix} According to the local Government, in 2021 there were 417,522 registered departures (64.1% men and 46.9% women).^{xl} Of those, 69.3% were nationals, 23.4% were foreigners, and 7.3% were foreign residents. The departments with the highest number of emigrants were Itapúa, Presidente Hayes, Central, and Alto Paraná.^{xli} Most of them were relatively young. In 2021, 46% of them were between 18 and 39 years old. The third age range most common was between 40 and 49 years old (18.7%)^{xlii}. The top destination countries for Paraguayan emigrants were Argentina (61.3%), Brazil (18.1%), the USA (9.4%), Spain (6.5%), and Mexico (3.1%).^{xliii}

Historically, the massive exodus began during the civil war in 1947 and further increased during the following years of totalitarianism, which ended in 1989.^{xliv} However, in the last 25 years, Paraguayan emigration has been mostly linked to economic and social factors, especially missing health and education services.^{xlv} The main push factor today is the lack of job opportunities for young people.^{xlvi}

Paraguayan emigration is essentially due to the large number of households supported by remittances, representing 38.3% of their total income.^{xlvii} However, remittances are still low, considering the number of emigrants abroad.^{xlviii} During the pandemic, the country suffered a considerable decline in revenues: in 2020, they amounted to US\$ 540,000 million (1.6% of the GDP) compared to US\$ 704,073 million in 2017.^{xlix}

Unfavourable economic conditions in countries of destination and restrictive policies have increased the vulnerability of Paraguayan emigrants and triggered the return and repatriation of many of them.^l They also face severe salary issues, discrimination, irregular situations, and precarious labour conditions abroad.^{li} Paraguay's diplomatic services assist emigrant communities, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs works to protect their rights and ensure their access to services.^{lii}

IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)

In 2021, 4,484 refugees and 860 asylum seekers were registered in Paraguay.^{liii} By the end of 2022, 4,473 refugees and 1,594 asylum seekers were reported.^{liv} They mainly came from Venezuela (76.09%), Cuba (20.67%), and Syria (1.83%). 53.93% were men, and 44.23% were women.^{lv}

Traditionally, the main country of origin for asylum seekers has been Cuba due to economic instability.^{lvi} Likewise, since 2014 Venezuelans have started to flee their country because of its humanitarian crisis; in fact, millions of people currently do not have access to primary health care or adequate nutrition in Venezuela. Limited access to safe water in homes and health centres has also contributed to the spread of Covid-19.^{lvii} Nevertheless, the flow of refugees and migrants from Venezuela to Paraguay has grown quite slowly compared to other neighbouring countries, where more reception facilities are available for their settlement.^{lviii}

Refugees mainly reside in the Central Department of Paraguay, Asunción, Alto Paraná, and Itapúa.^{lix} They are highly educated, with more than half of the Venezuelan refugee population holding a bachelor or a master degree.^{lx}

In Paraguay, asylum seekers receive temporary documents issued by CONARE, allowing refugee-status applicants to remain legally in the country.^{lxi} They also have the right to access essential employment, health, and education services.^{lxii} This document is valid for the entire period of evaluation of their application until a final decision on the request is taken.^{lxiii} This process usually lasts approximately three months, starting from the presentation of the refugee application. In reality, though, this span of time has substantially increased, making it difficult for refugees to integrate into Paraguayan society.^{lxiv}

Regarding stateless people, Paraguay was a pioneer in establishing a special law to speed up their naturalisation process and protect their rights. This law also allows Paraguayan children born abroad to become its citizens without the requirement to be a resident in the country.^{lxv}

Finally, according to the latest data available, in 2020 only 5 displacements were recorded because of flooding.^{lxvi} Nevertheless, in the previous year, Paraguay suffered drought problems that had significant social repercussions, especially in terms of loss of income due to reduced agricultural production or total crop failures, and an impact on agricultural employment.^{lxvii} This led in 2019 to the displacement of 315 people.^{lxviii} In the same year, floods in Paraguay also caused the displacement of 53,747 people.^{lxix}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Paraguay is tier 2 in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report, since it does not meet the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking, but it is making significant efforts to do so. In Paraguay, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims, mainly arriving from South American countries. Likewise, Paraguayan victims are trafficked abroad in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Spain. Traffickers recruit women as drug couriers to Europe and Africa. Children are exploited in the cultivation and sale of illegal drugs in Brazil. In 2021, the local Government identified 166 trafficking victims (74 involved in sex trafficking and 86 in forced labour). Among them were 72 women, 46 girls, 9 men and 33 boys.^{lxx}

The most common trafficking activity in the country is “criadazgo”, which consists in forcing children to labour as domestic workers. An estimated 47,000 Paraguayan children (mainly girls) live in this condition and are highly vulnerable to sex and labour trafficking. Women and girls are primarily victims of sex trafficking, while men are employed in forced farming labour, domestic service, criminality and, in some cases, horse jockeys. The Tri-Border Area in between Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina is especially vulnerable to trafficking due to the lack of regulatory measures and the fluidity of illicit goods and services. Within the county, children from rural areas are exploited in urban centres. Debt bondage is a common practice in the Chaco region. In addition, social media is increasingly being used to recruit victims.^{lxxi}

In 2021, authorities initiated 53 trafficking investigations (24 for sex trafficking, 24 for forced labour, and 5 for undefined exploitation), while continuing the investigation of 196 ongoing cases. Authorities filed preliminary charges against 4 suspect sex traffickers (compared to 53 in 2019), and there were 25 ongoing prosecutions involving 15 alleged traffickers. Over all, judges convicted 3 traffickers. The Anti-Trafficking Unit cooperated with authorities from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, France, and Spain on 29 trafficking investigations, resulting in the

arrest of 13 alleged traffickers and the identification of 40 Paraguayan victims exploited abroad. There were specific shelters available with a capacity for up to 38 female trafficking victims, 1 for adults and 2 for child victims, but it is still lacking any protection for male victims. The government reported providing support services to 160 trafficking victims. It referred 45 victims to shelter services, but most returned to their homes due to shortage of accommodation. It provided hotlines to report crimes against women and children, and a webpage for filing complaints.^{lxxii}

Despite all of these efforts, Paraguay is still encountering serious challenges in combating human trafficking. The national legal framework does not meet international standards, and in 2021 officials were not trained on victim identification, referral, or care.^{lxxiii}

VI. National Legal Framework

The Decree no. 4483 and the National Migration Policy from 2015 safeguard the fundamental rights of all permanent and temporary migrants, including access to health care and other essential services.^{lxxiv}

The current migratory legislation in Paraguay entails the new migration Law no. 6984/2022, which repeals Law 978/1996.^{lxxv} This norm regulates the rights and duties of migrants and visitors, their entry and stay in the country, and establishes the guidelines for public policies for emigration.^{lxxvi} Paraguay also recognises in its Law no. 1938/2002 the right to asylum, enacting the whole process for refugee and political asylum.^{lxxvii}

Paraguay enshrined the protection of migrant workers in its Constitution, outlawing any discrimination on nationality or other grounds.^{lxxviii} The Constitution also bans torture, slavery, and indebted servitude, and upholds the right to decent employment.^{lxxix} The Comprehensive Anti-Trafficking Law no. 4788/2012 criminalises sex and labour trafficking.^{lxxx} In addition, the Criminal Code, in its articles 139 and 129, outlines penalties for trafficking offences involving children and pimping crimes.^{lxxxi}

At the international level, Paraguay is a signatory to the 1949 ILO's Migration for Employment Convention, which provides a number of measures that member states should take in order to safeguard the rights of migrant workers.^{lxxxii} The Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) grants the right of residence and work to their citizens with no requirement other than the nationality between the signatory member States (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay and associated States), Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.^{lxxxiii}

Paraguay also ratified the 1969 International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. It signed the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Palermo Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons.^{lxxxiv} The Republic of Paraguay is a member state of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.^{lxxxv} It also signed the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Stateless.^{lxxxvi}

VII. Main Actors

The State

The General Directorate of Migration (GDM) under the Ministry of Home Affairs handles the national immigration policy and coordinates labour immigration activities at national,

regional, and border levels. The GDM is the government body responsible for drafting and updating the National Migration Policy approved in 2015 and coordinating migration policy implementation.^{lxxxvii}

The National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) is a legal body linked to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior. CONARE provides protection and seeks durable solutions for refugees.^{lxxxviii}

The Paraguayan National Police Anti-Trafficking Unit (PNPTU) and the Anti-Trafficking Unit (ATU) cooperate for the investigation and prosecution of trafficking crimes.^{lxxxix} Three agencies are involved in victim identification: the ATU, the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MWA), and the Ministry of Children and Adolescents (MINNA).^{xc} The Directorate for the Attention of the Overseas Paraguayan Community (DACPE) is the governmental entity responsible for coordinating anti-trafficking programs.^{xc1}

The Directorate for Attention to Paraguayan Communities Abroad coordinates efforts to interact with the Paraguayan diaspora.^{xcii} Its functions include assisting with the regularisation of nationals abroad, providing legal aid in connection with their human rights, coordinating actions relating to remittances by Paraguayans abroad, and assisting returnees.^{xciii} In addition, the Development Secretariat for Returnees and Refugee Compatriots, which reports directly to the Office of the President of the Republic, is also involved in this specific area of concern.^{xciv}

International Organisations

The leading international organisations dealing with migration in Paraguay are the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).^{xcv}

The UNHCR Office in Paraguay is responsible for providing access to territory, asylum regulation, and family reunification. Simultaneously, they offer essential goods and services to refugees and asylum seekers.^{xcvi} UNHCR also looks after the identification of refugees needing resettlement and referring them to host sites.^{xcvii} The Regional Office is in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and oversees Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay.^{xcviii}

As for UNICEF, it cooperates with national and local institutions linked to migration regularisation, health and education, ensuring that the care provided takes into consideration the cultural peculiarities of beneficiaries.^{xcix}

IOM supports migration activities in the Republic of Paraguay. Together with the government and its ministries, it has developed migration protocols to enhance refugee protection during their travel.^c IOM has also been responsible for a programme to aid returnees to Paraguay, tailored to the unique needs returnees have, and help them develop the knowledge and skills to streamline their reintegration.^{ci}

Likewise, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) regulates labour migration and migrants' access to labour markets and decent working conditions. The Republic of Paraguay, the Ministry of Justice and Labour, and ILO share common programs for good work to promote employment and institutional strengthening.^{cii}

NGOs and Other Organisations

Semillas para la Democracia provides humanitarian assistance to refugees and displaced people in extremely vulnerable conditions.^{ciii} The organisation assists Venezuelan refugees in Paraguay and carries out projects on refugee women's empowerment and entrepreneurship. It aims to support women to exercise their rights with an emphasis on protection against gender-based violence and effective social involvement in their communities.^{civ} Likewise, it helps these communities access social services, specifically health services.^{cv}

Ayuda en Acción is an NGO that focuses on children and adolescents, as Paraguay faces the social challenge of putting an end to *criadazgo* (unpaid domestic work).^{cvi} For this purpose, this organisation oversees the only shelter in Paraguay for girls and adolescents who are victims of sexual violence, trafficking and *criadazgo*.^{cvi} Additionally, they provide humanitarian aid to migrant communities (both in transit and those who intend to stay) and internally displaced persons. They offer psychological attention, medical care, and accommodation.^{cviii}

The regional delegation located in Brazil supports the Paraguay Red Cross. Currently, in response to the needs of Venezuelan migrants and refugees living in Latin America and the Caribbean, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement are strengthening their response to provide protection and assistance to Venezuelans and host communities in 17 countries in the Americas, including Paraguay.^{cix}

The Catholic Church

The Episcopal Conference of Paraguay has a Social Pastoral Commission, whose 2021-2024 Project involves several areas of concerns and objectives. One of these is the Pastoral Care of Human Mobility.^{cx} The *Secretaría Ejecutiva Pastoral de Movilidad Humana*, a body under the Social Pastoral Commission since 1960, coordinates these activities.^{cx}

The Pastoral Care of Human Mobility works with the migrant population in Asunción. It supports people displaced by violence, provides legal assistance, advice on documentation, spiritual aid, health care, food, clothing, help to find work, entrepreneurship, as well as sociocultural and educational integration.^{cxii}

Furthermore, the *Pastoral de Movilidad Humana* in Paraguay promotes activities to assist and accompany migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, climate-displaced persons, and victims of trafficking through various Catholic institutions.^{cxiii} One of the main projects has been developed since 2018 and has focused on promoting entrepreneurship among the migrant and refugee population to address the economic crisis caused by the pandemic in Asunción.^{cxiv}

The Parish and Chapel of Santa Maria de los Migrantes are coordinated by the Scalabrinian Missionaries of San Charles Borromeo, working with migrants in Asunción, by providing them with spiritual assistance, job placement, socio-cultural integration, clothing, food, and mobilisation support.^{cxv} In addition, the Scalabrinian Congregation works in Ciudad del Este giving migrants legal assistance and advice on documentation and spiritual guidance.^{cxvi}

The Jesuit Congregation of Paraguay has created a social network called *Red con Migrantes y Refugiados* (Network with Migrants and Refugees) that works with migrants and refugees living in vulnerable situations. This network seeks to accompany migrants, displaced persons,

and refugees in an effective and coordinated manner in various areas: pastoral, educational, social, legal, research and advocacy.^{cxvii}

December 2022

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