



Gabriela Fernández\*

Kaloian Santos Cabrera

**E**xactly one year ago, in September 2022, together with *Le Monde diplomatique*, we presented the dossier “Migration myths”, composed of six articles that dismantled, with statistical information, rigorous analysis and robust arguments, the main prejudices that, in certain spaces and from certain narratives, are associated with migrants and their paths.

This work, which has made it possible to respond forcefully to perspectives brimming with misinformation, if not xenophobia, as well as to offer concrete arguments to the public debate on the subject, is now complemented by another approach that is absolutely necessary, although perhaps less well covered or made visible: the acknowledgment of the contributions that migrants make to the development of their host societies.

An early clarification is in order: highlighting the valuable role that mi-

grants play as agents of development requires avoiding any kind of transactional perspective. We would like to be clear on this point: migration is a human right, and it is on this certainty that our understanding of human mobility must be built.

However, it is no less true that this inalienable human right to migrate is also enormously beneficial for migrants themselves, as well as for their societies of origin and destination, provided that it occurs within frameworks in which a people-centered approach prevails, which promotes their wellbeing and integration, and which favors the true potential that migrants can unlock.

This undoubtedly requires that migrants take on an increasingly prominent role in the social, economic, civic and political lives of the societies in which they reside, and that States have the capacity to be the guarantors of the respect, protection and fulfillment of human rights when it comes to manag-

ing migration, its challenges and opportunities.

To this end, as urged by the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, it is necessary to approach migration as a process that can enhance development, reducing inequalities both within and between countries by improving the governance of migration. In short, as a process that promotes the full inclusion of the migrant population, equal access to opportunities and decent work, and the furtherance of their training, the recognition of their competencies and skills, and that combats xenophobia and discrimination.

Furthermore, it is absolutely essential to strive for a whole-of-society involvement, where all stakeholders have a space for debate, including the voices of governments, local communities, the civil society, the private sector and migrants themselves.

Argentina is a privileged place to thematize this virtuous pairing of migra-

tion and development, since migrants have played a fundamental role in shaping its cultural, economic, and social landscape since the dawn of the nation-state.

These contributions, which for methodological reasons we are again organizing today into six axes relating to economic development, life support, food production, culture, education and institutional and democratic strengthening, are by no means exhausted in these pillars. On the contrary, we must trace them in every area where traditions, practices, and perspectives intersect to give rise to a richer, more diverse and plural society.

In short, recognizing and valuing the contributions of migrants is not only a moral imperative; it is a strategic investment in the future of our country.

In this year in which we commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the return of democracy in Argentina and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, we are coincidentally witnessing the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Migration Law, a pilot case for the region and the world of progressive rights and openness to interculturality.

It is IOM commitment in Argentina, as well as in the world, to continue working to promote social cohesion, access to rights and the well-being of migrants. Working together, we can strengthen the transformative potential of migration to play a central role in building a more inclusive and prosperous Argentina that embraces diversity as a cornerstone of our path towards development. ■

\* IOM Argentina Head of Office.

## MIGRANT CONTRIBUTION TO FOOD PRODUCTION

# Agroecology as a path

Regional migrants were key in promoting a model of agriculture that bolsters care for the environment and food sovereignty.

## IOM and Brenda Canelo\*

**A**rgentina has a vast arable land area and migrant labor has historically been linked to it. During the first decades of the last century, within the framework of policies that granted benefits to European migration, projects were developed to promote rural work by migrant families, mostly from Italy, Spain and, later, Portugal. However, only a minority of these migrants settled in rural areas due to the existence of a preexisting structure of large landowners and a public policy that guaranteed settlement, but not access to land ownership (1).

Half a century later, in the 1970s, regional migration flows found new actors linked to agricultural work. Families coming mainly from Bolivia turned into “productive land” different regions of the country that, for various reasons, were not being exploited. In addition to being in charge of production, these workers began to play roles in distribution and marketing in wholesale and retail markets in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (AMBA) and beyond.

With the creation of markets or new spaces within older ones, this productive configuration developed by the Bolivian community expanded the supply

network of the AMBA population driven by new structures, practices, and actors with an innovative development (2). Thus, nowadays, the Bolivian population constitutes a fundamental link in the chain of production, distribution and trade of fresh food throughout the country and has earned its place in the municipalities where these activities are developed. Even in the horticultural area of Buenos Aires —the most important in volume— through the supply of fresh produce to the AMBA (about 15 million people) and other provinces, Bolivian migration has a wealth of connections and institutional experiences of very high value (3). Its epicenter is

the municipality of La Plata, but it also has other territorial anchor points in other areas such as Escobar, Pilar, Luján, Moreno or Florencio Varela.

For decades, organizations of small producers —both native and migrant— have played a fundamental role in the diversification of the industrial agricultural model based on increased productivity and profitability (4) towards a model that embodies social wellbeing as a value, with family farming, food sovereignty and the protection of the environment as goals to be pursued. This model also strengthens the urban development of areas destined for agriculture, allowing producer families to live their lives in these spaces, which in turn generates a greater population balance.

As part of these demands, Law No. 27.118 on the Historical Reparation of Family Farming for the Construction of a New Rurality in Argentina was enacted in 2014 (5). It promotes “family, peasant and indigenous agriculture for its contribution to the food security and sovereignty of the people, for practicing and promoting life and production systems that preserve biodiversity and sustainable processes of produc-





Kaloian Santos Cabrera

tive transformation” (Article 1).

These developments represent a promising step towards the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of producer families and their communities, including Bolivian horticultural producers. They join the conceptual universe of family, peasant, or indigenous agriculture, preserving features of peasant production (for example, the know-how

developed in Bolivia or family work and attachment to the land) combined with learning the production wisdom of the areas in which they live (6), including agroecology. Indeed, agroecology constitutes the inexorable model of family, peasant, and indigenous agriculture, and allows the provision of healthy food from the rural world, as well as for consumers—both native and migrant—in Argentina.

### The UTT model

Formed in 2013 as a worker cooperative that later morphed into the agroecological model, UTT’s main objective is to improve the life, production, and trade conditions of all its members. Its motto is “for healthy, safe and sovereign food, with access to land and fair trade”. It is made up of more than 22 thousand families across 20 provinces of Argentina, who grow 70% of the yerba mate, more than half of the vegetables and citrus fruits, and rear more than half of the chickens and pigs, almost all the goats, more than 20% of the cows and produce 30% of the milk consumed in Argentina (7). Although the UTT is not an organization born out of the initiative of the migrant population, it is constituted by a large number of migrant workers (especially from Bolivia).

The transition to agroecology made by this organization was facilitated by State agents (mainly, technical teams from the Secretariat of Family Agriculture and the Argentine Institute of Agricultural Technology, INTA), and was later incorporated by the UTT itself through “farmer to farmer” train-

ing (8). In other words, the transition towards an agroecological model was also due to a lore of the land that the families already possessed but had forgotten. This is how Marixa Puma Rocabado, Bolivian migrant and head of the UTT’s Seed Sector, describes it: “The comrades who gathered in the assemblies, workshops, meetings, always

## For decades, small farmers' organizations have played a fundamental role in the diversification of the industrial agriculture model.

remembered the ways in which their parents and grandparents prepared the soil. The ways they had to prevent pests from attacking their crops; they made teas, they made fertilizers with the manure of the animals they kept in their own fields. Unlike the manner in which they are producing now... They have that lore but they no longer practice it, because there is another model... It arrived and began to dominate. Now everything is bought: seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides. Everything is bought. But that knowledge was not lost, and we began to recover it, to remember how to properly prepare the soil and how to generate diversity in the field (...) We stopped depending on the dollar by producing our own seeds.” (9).

The benefits of producing under the

agroecological model are evident. In addition to the impact in terms of food quality and safety, by avoiding the use of products potentially hazardous to health, this type of production allows cost management in local currency, which results in a lesser degree of dependence on macroeconomic variables. As a result, this model favors access to cheaper, healthier, and traceable food in its production process, with an income-profit balance for all the stakeholders in the production chain.

Finally, the UTT demands that the whole agroecological model be accompanied by public policies that contain the small producers’ sector, for example, by establishing agricultural colonies in all the peri-urban areas. This constitutes a political and, at the same time, subjective advance, allowing people to make common and healthy use of the territories. Thus, for example, Marixa says: “I started to meet more people, to talk to neighbors I had seen for years, but with whom I had never spoken. And agroecology helped us start talking” (10).

### Nurturing knowledge

Regional migration flows, particularly those from Bolivia, have become vitally important economic and productive agents as they are in charge of a large part of the production, trade and distribution of vegetables in all the farmable areas of Argentina. Thanks to their work, knowledge and organization, they guarantee that what is produced in rural areas reaches the largest cities of Argentina.

For decades, the organization of small family farmers and peasants has been promoting environmental protection and food sovereignty. In this process, agroecology has become a fundamental way to strengthen the right to healthy and economically accessible food. In addition, this organizational change generated impacts of a productive and economic sort, as well as political and subjective implications. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted

worldwide, among other things, the enormous dependence of cities on the provision of rural production, especially in poor and densely populated urban areas. The scenario was not different in Argentina, with an urban population of 92% (well above the world average of 54%) (11). The agricultural supply of small producers—both native and migrant—is a key factor for the country’s productive scaffolding, since they have knowledge and expertise that can help in the fight against hunger, the promotion of healthy eating, and the care of nature. ■

- 1.S. Novick and M. C. Feito, “Introducción. Migraciones y agricultura familiar: un vínculo perdurable”, *Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, segunda época, year 7, N° 28, Bernal, Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, pp. 13-32, 2015.
- 2.R. Benencia, “Los inmigrantes bolivianos en el mercado de trabajo de la horticultura en fresco en Argentina”, *El impacto de las migraciones en Argentina*, Cuadernos Migratorios N° 2, IOM, pp. 153-234, 2012.
3. A. Barsky, “Las producciones familiares bolivianas y el rol del Estado: análisis de las políticas públicas para el sostenimiento de la agricultura periurbana en la Región Metropolitana de Buenos Aires (2000-2015)”, *Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, segunda época 28, 33-47, Bernal: UNQui, 2015.
4. In force since the 1970s until today, this model is based on the influx of financial capital into production and on a technological-scientific revolution that brought a growing simplification and homogenization of agriculture. These conditions favored large-scale production and the disengagement of the smallholder sector and their families (Novick and Feito, 2015).
5. Also in 2014, the United Nations celebrated the International Year of Family Farming and Member States undertook the commitment to developing this sector. Argentina had to wait ten years to regulate the law, which was enacted by Executive Order 292/2023 (approved on June 5, 2023). However, several articles remain “unregulated.”
6. M. García, *Análisis de las transformaciones de la estructura agraria hortícola platense en los últimos 20 años. El rol de los horticultores bolivianos* (tesis de doctorado), La Plata: Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2011 and Benencia, *op. cit.*
7. UTT, 2023. Available at: [https://uniondetrabajadoresdelatierra.com.ar/que\\_proponemos/acceso\\_a\\_la\\_tierra/](https://uniondetrabajadoresdelatierra.com.ar/que_proponemos/acceso_a_la_tierra/)
8. N.Vera, *Alimentación, medioambiente y salud: prácticas de producción, distribución, preparación y consumo de productores hortícolas agroecológicos del cordón periurbano bonaerense*, City of Buenos Aires: RCL Río Cultura, 2022.
9. UTT, *Agroecología: mucho más que un modelo productivo*. [Podcast audio], April, 2022. Available at: <https://uniondetrabajadoresdelatierra.com.ar/podcast-del-campo-a-tu-mesa/>
10. *Ibidem*.
11. Dirección Nacional de Población (s/d). *Población urbana en Argentina Evolución y distribución espacial a partir de datos censales*, Ministerio del Interior, Argentina. Available at: [https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/poblacion\\_urbana\\_dnp.pptx.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/poblacion_urbana_dnp.pptx.pdf)

\*Anthropologist. CONICET (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas - National Scientific and Technical Research Council) researcher at the Institute of Anthropological Sciences (UBA: Universidad de Buenos Aires - University of Buenos Aires) Professor of the Department of Anthropological Sciences of the School of Philosophy and Languages and of the Communication Sciences Department of the School of Social Sciences (both UBA). Contact: [brendacanelo@yahoo.com.ar](mailto:brendacanelo@yahoo.com.ar)



Migrants contribute to economic development in multiple dimensions: as consumers in the domestic market, as taxpayers, or with jobs in occupations with vacancies, such as nursing or engineering. Migrant work is always complementary to native work and contributes to the improvement of society as a whole.

## MIGRANT CONTRIBUTION TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

# Economic drivers

IOM and Corina Courtis\*

**A**rgentina is an emblematic country in terms of international migration. Historically, the national elites saw immigration as an expected source of economic, socio-cultural and civic-political dynamism. Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, they translated this view into policies that encouraged the settlement of a multitude of emigrants from an expelling Europe, who came to represent 29% of the country's total population. Early discourses on the contributions –both possible and real– of immigration to the growth of the nation established associations between migration and ideas of “civilization”, “progress” and “modernization” that resonated for a long time. Today, Argentina continues to be a vital space for immigration. It is the South American country with the highest concentration of foreign-born people: around three million people, representing more than 6% of its total population (1). The bulk of this population is the result of historical and contemporary migrations flows from neighboring countries, to which were added, in the 1990s, Peruvian migration and, later, those from Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela. There are also migrants from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, various African countries, Korea, Taiwan and continental China, among others.

### Complementarity, not competition

Migration acts as an injection for population growth, with immediate effects on the domestic market. As consumers, migrants increase the demand for goods (food, clothing, technology) and services. This demand has a direct impact on the balance sheets of small and large private and public companies, and stimulates production and trade. In addition, migrant consumption always implies an indirect contribution to the State's coffers through the payment of VAT. Those who argue that Argentina “imports poverty” and that migrants are “an expense for the State” are unaware of the conclusions reached by several studies: that in recent years, immigrants paid more in taxes than the public investment made in this population (2), that migrants do not spend proportionally more of the budget for health, education or social benefits than the population born in Argentina (3), and that the requirements demanded in practice (ID card, minimum number of years of residence in accordance with regulatory requirements) restrict access to welfare programmes. In fact, although Migration Law No. 25.871/2003 establishes that the migration status is not an obstacle to the enjoyment of basic rights, in 2019 only 1.4% of migrants were able to

collect the Universal Child Allowance (“Asignación Universal por Hijo”) (4).

The contribution of migrants to the labor force is more widely recognized. From this point of view, the demographic contribution of migration is doubly valuable in countries with increasing life expectancy and aging rates that are not compensated by their fertility and birth rates, a demographic trend that is increasingly affecting developed countries and is also evident in Argentina. Different local surveys highlight the decline in fertility levels in recent decades: in the Statistical Yearbook of the Argentine Republic of 2021, for example, the Argentine Statistics Institute (INDEC) cites an overall fertility rate of 1.5 children per woman for 2020, a historical low far from the 2.1 needed to maintain the balance between the working and dependent population. Given that the migrant population tends to be younger and concentrated in productive ages –according to the 2010 National Population Census, 71% of the foreign population was between 15 and 65 years old, compared to 64% of the native population– their work is invaluable to sustain economic productivity and social security funds for the elderly. This, of course, provided that there are policies and practices that facilitate the participation of migrant workers in the formal economy and ensure decent work. The fact remains that labor informality, one of the features that currently characterizes migrant labor around the world, constrains the contributions of the migrant working population.

In our country, according to a report by the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, at the end of 2016 the activity and employment rates among migrants from South America were 64% and 69%, while those of native people were 59% and 54%. However, high activity and employment rates do not correlate with registered work figures. Among South American migrants, unregistered work reaches 50%, while among natives, although high, this proportion drops to 33% (5). Unlike countries that, by hindering migration regularly, channel migrant labor towards labor irregularity, in Argentina, unregistered work among migrants is not necessarily linked to the lack of documentation. In 2015, 86% of migrants working in unregistered jobs had a valid ID card (6), in part, thanks to the application of the principles enshrined in the Migration Law. The prevalence of unregistered work is due, rather, to the existence of a segmented labor market that offers migrants jobs in smaller establishments, with high worker turnover and more precarious income than the rest of the population (7): low value-added jobs, less attractive to the na-

tive population, mostly linked to construction, the textile industry, domestic work, gastronomy, trade, agriculture and, for some years now –especially since the COVID-19 pandemic–, driving cars for private transportation and delivery services through applications or platforms dedicated to this purpose. In this sense, the contribution of migrant labor is complementary to native labor and not a competitor. Moreover, the demands to strengthen the labor insertion of migrants, both quantitatively and qualitatively, and the search for alternative and dignified forms of employment –such as the creation of cooperatives– bolster the struggles for better working conditions of the native population inserted in these sectors.

The fact that migrant labor is complementary to native labor also means that it favors the work of native workers in more skilled jobs. To illustrate this situation, we can quote the example of what happened with domestic workers from different countries in the region who joined the locals in continuing to relieve women workers from the upper and middle sectors of the labor market of domestic care tasks. The notion

**Argentina is the South American country with the highest concentration of foreign-born people.**

of complementarity also applies when certain occupations have vacancies that can be covered by migrants. In Argentina, for example, it is necessary to triple and geographically distribute nursing personnel (8) and there is a lack of engineering professionals in its various branches due to a low number of graduates (9). In recent years, the arrival of highly qualified migrants from Venezuela and Colombia (a large percentage of whom have university and postgraduate studies) has increased sharply and, according to data from the National Directorate of Migration, 13,000 Venezuelan engineers have settled in the country, more than 10% of whom specialize in petroleum. With the active participation of the Association of Venezuelan Engineers in Argentina, a state programme for the reorientation of migration flows was launched, which resulted in the hiring of professionals in companies in the provinces of Córdoba, Río Negro and Neuquén. The media have highlighted how this migration, willing to settle in different parts of the

country, provides specialists in oil and mining engineering, indispensable for the operation of the Vaca Muerta field. It is estimated that approximately 400 migrants are contributing with their professional expertise to these highly technical industries, people who found their first work opportunity in our country in areas of low professional qualification and in situations of informality.

The demand for professionals in different vacancy-affected areas throughout Argentina could be covered more quickly and efficiently by a skilled migrant population if the procedures for obtaining the ID card and the validation of academic degrees were streamlined, if the nationality requirement established in the National Public Employment Law No. 25.164 for access to positions in the public administration were reviewed and if the prejudices that still persist when hiring were removed (10).

### Migrant entrepreneurship

Finally, migrants contribute to the economic development of countries and communities of residence as entrepreneurs at different scales. Migrant-generated ventures create job opportunities for themselves, other migrants and non-migrants. They also stimulate international trade exchanges and promote innovation in many ways: from the development of patents to the introduction of novelties in the communities where they are located (products and services associated with cultural diversity or local businesses with favorable prices). Migrants, on the one hand, are motivated by the need to overcome obstacles in accessing the labor market and to integrate socially in order to develop new life projects in places far from their countries of origin; on the other hand, thanks to the lessons learned from their migration experience, they are often better prepared to take risks, to adapt and to change in the face of adversity, as well as to generate and take advantage of support and financial aid networks. All of this makes it possible to measure the added value contributed by migrants to productive activity.

One of the most visible cases of migrant entrepreneurship in Argentina is that of Bolivian families in horticulture, which, going from peonage to the ownership of farms, have advanced over the entire production chain, reaching the distribution and trade of more than 80% of the vegetables and fruits consumed in the country. As described in another article in this supplement, the creation of networks and partnerships is a key element here. At the other end of a scale with a variety of intermediary initiatives, we can find small-scale initiatives such as the e-commerce platform “Feria Migrante y Refugiada Virtual” [“Virtual Migrant and Refugee Fair”], implemented by the civil rights association “Mujeres Unidas Migrantes y Refugiadas en Argentina” [“United Migrant and Refugee Women in Argentina”]. This undertaking accompanies and provides visibility to projects developed independently by women and dissidents who suffered a negative impact of the pandemic in a differential way. The presentation of one of these projects illustrates this capacity for adaptation and the willingness for labor readjustment that characterizes migrant entrepreneurship: “My name is Deisy Rodríguez. I am from Peru and I trained as a teacher. I have been living in Argentina for 15 years. I work as a cake designer and decorator. Eight years ago I started my business Dolce



Dolce Pastelería (Cake shop). Nowadays, I not only make designer cakes, but I also give classes and help entrepreneurs in their growth and training. Dolce Dolce Pastelería is a sweet space where I share what I learned”.

It is clear that the potential of migrants to function as catalysts for the economic development of host societies is manifold. But it is even clearer that, in the heat of inclusive and sustainable policies, this contribution to development, understood in a broad sense that links the economic dimension to the social, cultural and political dimension with respect for fundamental rights, can become vast. ■

1. National Directorate of Population, *Caracterización de la migración en Argentina a partir de datos administrativos del RENAPER*, Buenos Aires, 2022. This figure refers to people with a digital ID card (Resolution 1800/20095, Resolution 585/20126). The UN, through UN DESA, estimated that the stock of migrants in 2020 was 2.3 million people. We use these figures provisionally pending the publication of the data of the 2022 National Population Census.

2. For more details on this point, we recommend reviewing the publication “Seis mitos sobre las migraciones” available at <https://www.eldiplo.org/archivo/notas-web/>

3. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and International Labor Organization, “How immigrants contribute to developing countries’ economies”, July, 2018

4. International Organization for Migration and M.L. Espiro, “Mito 2: “Los migrantes abusan del sistema de salud argentino” and Mito 3: “Las mujeres migrantes vienen a Argentina a cobrar planes”, *Le Monde diplomatique*, edición Cono Sur, December, 2022

5. Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, *Informe sintético sobre migraciones laborales*, 2017. Available online.

6. OIT, *Características demográficas y del mercado de trabajo de las y los migrantes sudamericanos*”, chapter. 1 *Migraciones Laborales en Argentina. Protección social, informalidad y heterogeneidades sectoriales*, pp. 13-26, Buenos Aires, 2015.

7. OIM, *Migrantes en la República Argentina: Inserción en el mercado trabajo*, OIM Argentina, City of Buenos Aires, 2020.

8. OIM, *Integración laboral en el sector salud de la población venezolana en la República Argentina* (Author: Mercer, Hugo), OIM Argentina, City of Buenos Aires, 2019.

9. OIM, *Ingenieros venezolanos residentes en el República Argentina* (Author: Sala, Adriana), OIM Argentina, City of Buenos Aires, 2019.

10. AAVV, *Agenda Migrante 2023*, City of Buenos Aires: s/d.

\*Anthropologist, CONICET researcher at the Institute of Anthropological Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires and professor at the School of Philosophy and Languages of that university. Contact: corinacourtis@yahoo.com.ar

## MIGRANT CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION

# The potential of diversity

Sharing different languages, beliefs and national backgrounds enriches the learning experience: it broadens knowledge and challenges parameters that tend to be imposed as unique.

IOM and Gabriela Novaro\*



Kaloian Santos Cabrera

Let us imagine a classroom where all the children have had the same schooling, similar formative experiences, speak in a similar way and think more or less the same things. This image, which, of course, does not correspond to any real classroom, has often operated in the educational system as an ideal of a space “where one can work”. Today we know that sharing different life paths, positions and memories enriches the educational experience. However, there still remain discourses and positions that conceive diversity in schools (the presence of students from different national origins, for example) as a problem and as a cost that would not have, for “us”, the nationals, any benefit whatsoever. This will be the main argument to be discussed in this article.

### Remnants of Eurocentrism

Argentine schools, as institutions linked to the formation of the nation, assumed at different times in history a strategic role in the inclusion and exclusion of the migrant population. The predominant mandate, although not the only one, was assimilationist. According to this mandate, migrants and their children had to renounce their references of origin as a

condition for their successful integration into Argentine society and schools. They had to identify with a flag, a language, a nation. Along with this, a large part of the organizers of the public education system adhered to Eurocentric assumptions according to which if any population could contribute to the progress of the nation, it was the one coming from Europe. We need only recall the words of Juan B. Alberdi (a foundational referent of the educational system): “Everything in the civilization of our soil is European... In the Americas, everything that is not European is barbaric: there is no other division than this one” (1).

From these conceptions, which have a significant validity almost two hundred years later, it is difficult to think about the contributions of the Latin American migrant population, the main migration contingent for many years now, to our country.

The paradigms of inclusion and interculturality are revising these assumptions, but Eurocentric visions and exclusionary forms of nationalism still persist in the educational sphere. These views, reinforced by various social and political actors, have installed the image of Latin American migration as an invasion, as a population that abuses rights that it should not have, as they are burdensome for nationals.

According to annual surveys conducted by the educational system, Argentine schools have a proportion of migrant students below 2% enrolled at the primary level (with a downward trend) and around 1.8% at the secondary level (with a tendency to increase). These proportions increase significantly when considering children and young people who have at least one parent from another country (2).

### The tension between uniformity and diversity

For migrant families and organizations, schooling has a very important meaning, although this does not always translate into concrete demands. Statistical and ethnographic surveys reveal that improving the educational journeys of their sons and daughters represents an important aspect in the decision to migrate. Also, planning schooling in the new territory that one inhabits speaks of a desire for permanence and inclusion. But, fundamentally, the schooling of migrant children and young people is the exercise of a right. Let us remember that both migration and educational regulations affirm the right to education of the migrant population regardless of their documentation status.

But let us return to the central objective. Reflecting on the contributions of the migrant presence in schools confronts us with a structural dilemma of the educational system: the tension between uniformity and diversity.

Contributions in the field of education are not as easily demonstrated with figures as in other areas of social life. However, they are verifiable if we think of education, and in particular the school, as a space for inclusion, for the promotion of equality, for the development of reflective and critical thinking, for civic training and for the development of intellectual and emotional skills for dialogue and understanding.

From traditional paradigms, uniformity (of backgrounds, previous knowledge, belongings, etc.) is a condition for classroom work. However, a growing body of research shows that the diversity of backgrounds, languages, experiences, beliefs and national origins has an unquestionable formative potential for all children and young people, both migrants and non-migrants. In principle, it allows for the broadening of knowledge and the questioning of parameters that tend to be imposed as unique: knowledge of a language and a history, identification with a flag.

The mere presence of children from migrant families, many of them born in Argentina, sometimes identified simultaneously with the territories of origin of their families and with the space they now inhabit, shifts installed images about countries, borders and identities. This is already a contribution inasmuch as it accounts for a situation that is very complex to install in schools: the relative, historical and dynamic nature of identifications.

Perhaps the field of languages is a clearer place to illustrate this argument. No one doubts that contact with more than one language is, in itself, a formative fact, which broadens the universe of thought, allows comparison and provides more tools for understanding the structure of one’s own language. A similar phenomenon can be observed with cultural manifestations and history (issues discussed in the article on cultural contributions in this supplement).

There is another aspect in which migration contributes to education that deserves to be highlighted: what knowledge of migration processes adds to the civic learning that takes place in schools. For Alina Larramendi, a specialist in Social Sciences didactics, dealing with migration in the classroom has a remarkable formative potential, enabling students to develop skills to analyze social processes and personal experiences, challenge prejudices, build a position respectful of rights, and empathize with diverse stories (3). Multiple situations reviewed in schools show that the treatment of this topic allows non-migrant students to recognize the voice of their migrant peers as knowledge, and those who are migrants to reflect on their own life experiences as part of broader social processes (4).

We said at the beginning that, in educational discourses still in force, it is difficult to distance oneself from the assumptions of uniformity, traditional forms of nationalism and Eurocentric speeches. However, we also know that a large part of the teaching profession supports with great effort (not always recognized) alternative projects. We have thus recovered the testimonies of two teachers who work in schools of Escobar, one of the many localities of the province of Buenos Aires where migrant presence is strong. One of them is Irma Juárez, a history and geography teacher in secondary schools. In research work carried out in schools in this locality, we recorded how this teacher enriched the stereotyped treatment of school events with the inclusion of references to the history and cultural expressions of neighboring countries, or how she worked with biographical accounts of migrant women, among other experiences.

“The presence of students whose families come from neighboring countries is enriching for my job as a teacher and also a challenge for the constant re-assessment of my practices. Considering the diversity in the classroom through dialogue with the students allows me to plan lessons based on their expressions and interests. Linking the contents of the History and Geography classes enables a grounded and meaningful teaching that in turn promotes relevant learning instances such as field trips, interviews, life stories, and organization of fairs. Approaching the contents from a renewed, Latin American, local perspective is much more motivating both for my practices and for my students. This perspective also brings a respectful attitude towards others, the

acknowledgement of an intercultural legacy made invisible or undervalued by official history.”

Gabriela Carballo, a teacher of History, Geography and Civic Learning in the same locality, expresses herself in a similar vein:

“The presence of migrant students in the classroom allows us to confront the hegemonic historical narratives that even today continue to circulate in the school environment. Keeping in mind the situations contributed by students who come from migrant families in reference to their experiences, situations of discrimination and segregation allows us not only to sustain a critical attitude towards this,

## Argentine schools assumed a strategic role in the inclusion and exclusion of the migrant population.

but also to advance in the explanation of its logic and its interaction with a model of society, to think about the relations of inequality in which differences arise in society. Schools where there is a significant presence of migrant students, or those who belong to migrant families, challenge us to make interculturality not only a perspective, but also a process and a concrete action project, with the aim of building more egalitarian and inclusive views and devices.”

This overview seeks to have installed at least some suspicions about the necessarily positive character of uniform classrooms and to think about the potentialities of diverse presences. It is also necessary to recognize that these presences pose a challenge and a test to teacher training, teaching and learning styles, and the forms of relationships installed in the educational system. It is a matter of paying attention to the formative value of situations that, as the teachers relate, enable a rapport with those we consider “others”, and not only to talk about them.

Before we conclude, we wish to make two final comments. On the one hand, it is necessary to bear

in mind that the context of inequality in which many migrant families live, especially those from Latin America, sometimes overshadows the contributions we have discussed. When socio-economic conditions are highly complex, the dialogue between families and the school and school career paths undoubtedly suffers. In these cases, it is important not to attribute to the migration condition problems that correspond to a material deprivation that threatens the schooling possibilities of all children and young people, whether migrants or not (5).

On the other hand, it is necessary to issue a warning about the spot we have given to the diversity of backgrounds, experiences and projects. This emphasis is related to the intention of pointing out what this difference can contribute to an educational system that continues to debate between homogeneity, inclusion and interculturality. Together with this, it is important to highlight what migrant and non-migrant families, children and young people have in common and what they project in similar terms: a better life for their children, where school has a prominent place enabling or inhibiting paths of greater equality. In this sense, natives and migrants find ourselves projecting and wishing in very similar terms for more justice, more equality, more construction and transmission of common knowledge and know-how, and a society where territorial borders, but also those of class, gender or generation, are not an insurmountable wall. ■

1. Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina*, Library of Congress, pp. 92 and 93.

2. M.L. Diez et al. (in print), *Informe técnico sobre el derecho a la Educación. Estudiantes Migrantes en la educación argentina*, Ministry of Education.

3. A. Larramendi, *Las potencialidades del tratamiento de las migraciones en la escuela*, Audio in the course “Migraciones internacionales en la escuela. Pensar la enseñanza y las relaciones sociales”. INFOD, Our School, Ministry of Education, 2023.

4. G. Novaro, *Conocimientos e identificaciones en la población boliviana de Buenos Aires. Entre las organizaciones comunitarias y las escuelas*, en C. Rosenberg and A. Barreiro (eds.) *Interacción social, desarrollo y aprendizaje*, CIIPME-CONICET-FLACSO, 2022.

5. In this regard, recent statistical studies that consider aspects such as grade repetition, over-age and school performance in migrant and non-migrant students are revealing. It is noted that, if socioeconomic level is considered, migration status seems to have less impact on all these aspects (Ministry of Education, 2019, Diez et al., in print).

\*PhD in Anthropology, Professor at the University of Buenos Aires, Independent Researcher at CONICET.

## MIGRANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SUSTAINABILITY OF LIFE

# A key piece of care

IOM Argentina and Corina Courtis\*

Migrants, the majority of whom are women, play a leading role in domestic and caregiving work, both within the home and in the health system. Their struggle has been fundamental to improve working conditions generally marked by precariousness and informality.

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic forced us, as a society, to focus on the concept of care. Care in the specific sense of health care for sick people, but also in the broader sense that refers to the tasks necessary for the social reproduction of daily life. This critical juncture also made it clear that the participation of migrants in the whole spectrum of care has been and remains crucial for the wellbeing of the country's population.

During the pandemic, migrant health professionals, particularly those from South American countries, gained notoriety for their performance on the front line against the coronavirus. A few days after the health emergency was declared, the government, foreseeing the additional demand for nursing and medical personnel that this situation

would cause and knowing the existence of a significant number of professionals in this field among the foreign population residing in the country, authorized “the hiring and practice of health professionals and technicians qualified abroad, whose degree is not approved or authorized in the Argentine Republic” (Decree of Necessity and Urgency No. 260/20, art.2, par.8). This measure made it possible to strengthen the healthcare system during the COVID crisis. For hundreds of foreign residents, it also meant an opportunity to apply for vacancies in public hospitals and primary health care centers, and to practice their profession in Argentina. The fact is that the practice of many professions requires the validation or authorization, through a national university, of the degrees obtained abroad, a procedure which involves migrant regularity and which generally takes a long time.

According to administrative records of the National Directorate of Migration, degrees in health sciences are the second most frequent among the high number of Venezuelans with university and tertiary degrees who applied for residence grants between 2015 and 2018. A quarter of those health degrees corresponded to nursing and another quarter, to psychology. However, most of these professionals have not managed to validate their degrees and have been inserted, to a large extent, in care occupations outside the health sector and within the sphere of homes: as nurses—including a portion of male nurses— or therapeutic home companions, sharing the same precarious and unfavorable working conditions with those who perform non-therapeutic care work and general tasks in private homes.

This brings us to the notion of care in a broad sense. The temporary suspension of classroom schooling, mandatory lockdown and home confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the burden of the tasks necessary to maintain a household and the wellbeing of its members. Thus were amplified the reflections, generally promoted by feminism, which conceive of these tasks as work in the strict sense of the term: work historically assigned to women that has tended to remain invisible, devalued and unpaid, but which is essential to social reproduction. Moreover, feminist economics considers domestic and care work to be the primary activity that ensures that life continues. It also notes that the unequal sex-gender division of labor that has dominated the social organization of care intersects class and racial-ethnic inequalities. Thus,



in those households where it is possible to outsource these tasks, it is mostly ethnicized and racialized women who assume them, in situations that range from absolute precariousness to low-wage formal employment. Migrant women are a key cog in the transnational caregiving mechanism.

### Main labor market insertion

In Argentina, the dynamic relationship between domestic work and international migration can be observed as a conjunction of processes reflected in the Population Census from 1960 onwards. On the one hand, with the cessation of overseas migration, intra-regional migration increased its relative weight, evidencing the constancy of flows from neighboring countries and progressively adding flows from other countries in the region (Peru and, later, Colombia and Venezuela). On the other hand, the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires has become a priority destination, especially for women. In fact, there is a correlative trend, although differential depending on the countries of origin, towards the feminization of migration: this is highly noticeable in the case of Paraguayan and Peruvian migration flows near the turn of the century. In turn, the concentration of these women in domestic work, a labor niche where foreign workers has always been overrepresented, is beginning to be noticed.

Indeed, if domestic work in Argentina—an almost entirely feminized sector—has a significant labor insertion among working women in general, occupying 17% of all salaried women, it is even more so among migrant women: the Argentine Institute of Statistics (INDEC) data from the 4 quarters of the Permanent Household Survey (EPH) of 2021 show that 28.8% of them were concentrated in this sector; however, when the universe is restricted to those who are not registered, this percentage grows to 45.7% (1). For women from Paraguay and Peru, this represents their main labor insertion. In 2001, this sector accounted for 70% of Paraguayan and 60% of Peruvian women workers—proportions that, a decade later, dropped to 40% and 35%, respectively. In the regional migration dynamics, these figures place Argentina as the main recipient of migrant women employed in this activity. However, as analyzed in the article “Economic drivers” in this supplement, this is not a competitive insertion but complementary to that of native women, since foreign women represent around 9% of the total number of women employed in private homes.

There are several reasons why intra-regional migrants have been joining native workers in the tasks of cleaning, cooking, washing and ironing, caring for children, elderly people and people with various health conditions in Argentine households. On the one hand, various socioeconomic situations and expulsion policies of the countries of origin in which Argentina presented some factor of attraction (for example, the peso-dollar convertibility of the 90’s that attracted Peruvian migrants) (2). The migration of Latin American women also tends to coincide with marital breakups and responsibility for children, and can only occur to the extent that there is another non-migrant woman (generally mothers or aunts) available to take care of them until family reunification is achieved in the country of destination. On the other hand, in Argentina’s large urban centers there is a sustained demand for domestic workers. The existence of a consolidated demand in Argentina accelerated the migration of single women from neighboring countries, even at very young ages, as in the case of Paraguay, and generated migration chains and assistance networks made up of migrant women already settled in the destination countries who provide information on job opportunities, finance the trip and provide the first home for the potential migrant. Finally, if domestic work is the main insertion niche for migrant women, this is so because it is an occupation that can be accessed quickly and does not require any experience other than that acquired in caring for one’s own family.

### Successful activism

Of course, this occupation often exposes women to exploitation and the invisible abuses that employers exercise in the private space of the home, since the high concentration of migrant women in domestic work is closely related to the low job formality and strong precariousness of this branch of work. Ac-

ording to data from the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, in 2004, 96% of women in domestic work were not registered as employees; in 2020, after various state interventions, the figure of non-registration was close to 77%. But, unlike native workers, for foreign women, labor irregularity is intertwined with the problem of documentation and access to information, which is not always easy to resolve despite regulatory advances in Argentina.

At this crossroads of social and legal vulnerability, migrant women workers have added, to the contribution that their work in socially indispensable tasks represents, an active voice to the demand for the improvement of working conditions for all domestic workers. The associative experience of migrant women and the political skills acquired through their previous participation in the struggle for the sanction of a migration law founded on the respect of human rights have been a fundamental contribution for a group of workers in adverse conditions to organize themselves. The political incidence of migrant women—through public tribunals, petitions to the highest authorities of the country, the call for a public hearing in the Argentine House of Representatives, among other innovative initiatives—did its part to achieve the approval of Law No. 26.844/2013 on the Special Regime of Work Contract for Domestic Workers and the ratification of ILO Convention No. 189. Against an obsolete norm founded on the tradition of service, these new regulatory instruments placed female domestic workers on an equal footing with the rest of the working people, requiring the registration of the employment relationship and guaranteeing such basic rights as the maximum 8-hour working day or maternity leave. The activism of migrant women does not stop there: the civil rights association “Mujeres Unidas Migrantes y Refugiadas en Argentina” [“United Migrant and Refugee Women in Argentina”], for example, has been in charge of monitoring progress and challenges in the application of the law through an investigation of the situation of domestic workers after the hard blow dealt to this group by the pandemic.

The health crisis, which left thousands of migrant women workers without any income, brought to

light another modality of care that these women carry out in addition to the unpaid work they do within their own families: community care. Migrant women contribute with their skills to obtain and manage resources, their food knowledge, their organizational capacity and their work for the soup kitchens in the communities they are part of; they educate in kindergartens and community centers and promote rights and create protection networks against gender violence (some of which are specific to migrant women, such as the movement “Not One Less Migrant Woman”).

It is time to give care, in all its forms, the importance it deserves. An aging society that demands more and more care must aim at a greater state supply of care and a more equitable participation of men. But, above all, it must “care for caregivers”, especially those in conditions of greater vulnerability. It is pressing to recognize the work of migrant women who contribute to sustaining our lives and to assume the responsibility of contributing to sustaining theirs, facilitating their full insertion, guaranteeing the effective enjoyment of greater forms of social protection and institutionalizing support for community networks. ■

1. IOM, *Las personas migrantes en la pospandemia ¿Un retorno a la normalidad?: condiciones de vida y situación laboral de las personas migrantes en la República Argentina durante el año 2021* / Ariel Lieutier [et al.], 1<sup>a</sup> ed., City of Buenos Aires: OIM Argentina, City of Buenos Aires, 2022.
2. Cerruti, Marcela, *La migración peruana a la Ciudad de Buenos Aires: su evolución y características* Población de Buenos Aires, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 7–28, General Directorate for Statistics and Censuses of Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2005

\*Anthropologist, CONICET researcher at the Institute of Anthropological Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires and professor at the School of Philosophy and Languages of that university. Contact: corinacourtis@yahoo.com.ar

## MIGRANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

# For a plural democracy

Since the return of democracy, the role of migrant organizations has been fundamental to its strengthening, not only because of their role in bringing about improvements for migrants, but also as active stakeholders in the struggle for more rights for the population as a whole.

### IOM Argentina and Brenda Canelo\*

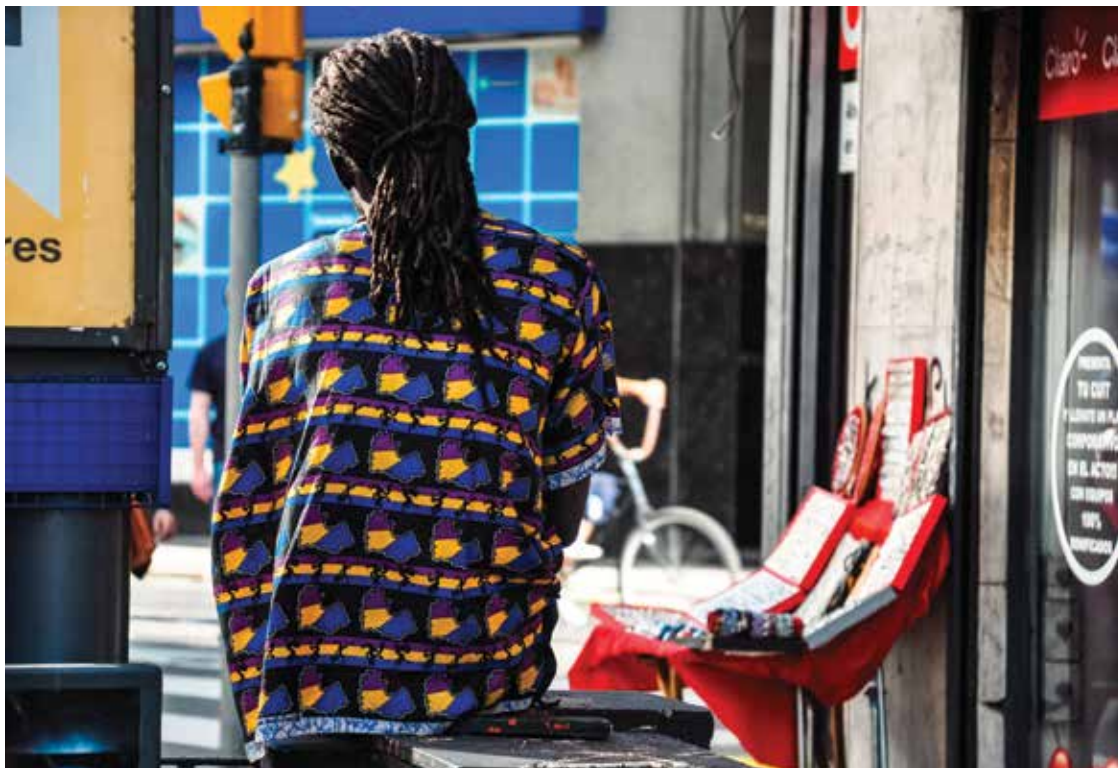
**W**e are witnessing the celebration of 40 years of uninterrupted democracy, in which the achievements of the contemporary migrant population have strengthened and expanded the rights of all people living in Argentina. Therefore, it is the right time to analyze and value the contributions made by the migrant population to the consolidation and strengthening of democratic institutions and the promotion of a pluralistic exercise of social participation.

The democratic transition was permeated by the work of social, religious and human rights organizations that began to incorporate migrant issues into their work agenda. Along the way, the leading role of migrant organizations varied from a social role and the vindication of their idiosyncrasies and cultures, to participation as actors with clear demands made to the State.

### Organization and coordination

We will focus on the National Migration Law No. 25.781/03 since, after years of resistance against the General Decree Law on Migration and Promotion of Immigration No. 22.439 which came into force during the civil-military dictatorship in 1981 under the National Security Doctrine (1), the current migration law turned migrant organizations into leading actors in the debate on the law, allowing them to (re)make their voices heard and participate in the public arena. This law is innovative for incorporating the perspective of migration as a human right, setting the country as an example in terms of rights standards worldwide. Law No. 25.871 undoubtedly represents a democratizing and plural project since it made consultation and participation effective by enabling a dialogue with State decision-making spheres that migrant populations could not exercise until it was sanctioned.

During the last decades, in the context of a re-emergence of discriminatory and xenopho-



Kaloian Santos Cabrera

bic public speeches, migrants have been devoted to the defense of their rights to migrate and live with dignity in Argentina. Thus, several migrant organizations were constituted and joined networks, associations, political parties, trade unions, alternative media, and human rights organizations central to the democratic dynamics of the country. Among others, we can mention the Network of Migrants and Refugees in Argentina, the Migrant Workers Block, the Secretariat of Migrant and Refugee Workers, the Union of Workers of the Popular Economy, the Human Rights Civil Association for United Migrant and Refugee Women in Argentina, Not One Migrant Less, Migrants for Migrants, the Common Motherland Migrant and Refugee Assembly and Migrant Students from the University of Buenos Aires.

The work undertaken by migrant organizations, specifically through territorial coordination to respond to social needs, has positioned them as unavoidable spaces for community support and relief, opening doors to facilitate access to health and education, helping with bureaucratic processing of regularizations, providing contacts to access employment or housing, contributing to reducing language or cultural barriers for non-Spanish-speaking migrants, and promoting soup kitchens, among other resources. Zulma Monges, a Paraguayan migrant from the “Kuña Guapa” Women’s House, emphasizes: “I would like to finish my studies and convey all this territorial work to other places. There are many community experiences in the neighborhoods, very enriching, and nobody takes them as an example. I would like to show them, to accompany these processes and to organize ourselves, to generate other forms of activism with a higher degree of commitment to others, because in the neighborhoods we do not need to be assisted. We need to be part of the solution” (2).

As “part of the solution”, migrant organizations were, and are, important architects of the economic, social, cultural and labor incorporation of other migrants, at a local, provincial and national level, both from community practices, as well as from the work in activism for the expansion of rights. The migrant population was involved, for example, in the process that led to the enactment of the Labor Contract Law for Domestic Workers (No. 26.844/13) or the Transvestite and Transexual Labor Quota Law (No. 27.636/21).

Two other participatory experiences that deserve to be highlighted are the National Migrant Survey of Argentina (ENMA) and the Migrant Agenda. The ENMA had its first edition in 2020—in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic—and then in 2023. Its aim is to research on and promote public policies on migration issues based on reliable information, appealing to the commitment and participation of more than thirty migrant organizations throughout the country, different academics from CONICET (nucle-

ated in the Migration and Asylum Axis of the Institutional Network Oriented to the Solution of Human Rights Problems) and other colleagues (3). The Migrant Agenda, on the other hand, developed in the last days of 2019 and in 2023, was discussed and drafted in participatory, democratic and federal terms by migrant organizations, human rights organizations, civil society organizations and academics, and was addressed to the Ministries and Secretariats at the national sphere, which thus became stakeholders of these demands. Both devices, together with the processes carried out by indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, have contributed to disarticulating the myth of a homogeneous society, identified with European migration, and to make other ethnic and racial narratives visible based on the census information of the last two decades.

#### The debts of migrant vote

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, access to political rights for different social actors in our country was expanded. Thus, the right

## It is necessary to tackle the issue of the migrant vote at the national level as part of the democratic debate.

to secret, universal and compulsory voting for all Argentine men aged 18 and over came into force only in 1912, women’s vote in 1947, and in 2012 it was the turn for the “young vote” (from the age of 16). Despite these advances in civic terms, it is necessary to continue installing the issue of the migrant vote at the national level as part of the democratic debate. The participation of migrant organizations, however, was key to generating their demands in legislative, social and political terms. An example can be found in the campaign “Here I live, here I vote”, implemented in 2012 (4) through which migrant organizations, human rights organizations and academics raised the challenge of separating the right to vote from nationality. In this framework, they organized street activities, talks in universities and lower-class neighborhoods, and judicial and administrative presentations in several State areas to petition for their right to vote (5). They argued that the country of origin constituted something fortuitous for thousands of families with permanent residence who decided to settle down and plan their lives on Argentinean soil.

However, even today, the migrant vote at the national level is mediated by naturalization; that is to say, by a procedure before a civil judge involving numerous bureaucratic obstacles (6). In local elec-

tions, on the other hand, the right to vote is provided for by provincial constitutions, specific provincial laws or municipal charters which, among other requirements, contemplate permanent residence in the country. In recent years, there are five provincial jurisdictions that enabled foreigners to vote: one for the election of the Head of Government (City of Buenos Aires in 2000) and four for the election of the Governor (Tucumán in 2007, Córdoba and La Rioja in 2008, and Buenos Aires in 2009). Three of these jurisdictions (two at the provincial/jurisdictional level and one at the municipal level) have automatic registration of migrant voters; the remaining ones require active registration to vote (7). Certainly, the inclusion of the automatic voter registration is part of the conquests the migrant population is achieving, since it guarantees the interest and demand to participate, and turns it into a fundamental political actor in the public agenda. This, paired with the dissemination and information campaigns, is what fosters a real participation of the migrant population in their right to vote (8).

#### Actors with a voice of their own

The migrant population in Argentina assumed a very important role in the struggles for the conquest of new rights. Over time, they became actors with voices of their own and achieved political, social and civic improvements for society as a whole.

The National Migration Law No. 25.871/03 or the Labor Contract Law for Domestic Workers and the Transvestite and Transexual Labor Quota Law confirm the importance of migrant democratic participation. Their interaction with and effects on academic entities and the generation of public statistics allowed to make visible identities that had historically been left out of the social imaginary. All these achievements enabled the expansion and strengthening of democratic institutions, mechanisms and practices in Argentina.

Building a plural democracy in which all voices can (and should) be heard is a great challenge, but it also offers enormous opportunities thanks to the benefits of intercultural dialogue and the plurality of perspectives. Certainly, the views and demands of all people residing in Argentina contribute to the expansion of politics and the political arena and lead to a mutual enrichment of natives and migrants. ■

1. In 1981, during the civil-military dictatorship, a General Decree Law on Migration and Promotion of Immigration No. 22.439 was drafted, which replaced the guaranteeing spirit of the Avellaneda Law of 1876 with a logic in line with the National Security Doctrine. Due to its proposals, it made the legalization of immigrants even more difficult, worsening the precariousness of their stay in Argentina.
2. CAREF, *Las que fuimos, las que somos: relatos de vidas en movimiento*. (Authors: Cecilia González; Celeste Farbman [et al.]) City of Buenos Aires, CAREF; Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género; Fundación para el Estudio y la Investigación de la Mujer - FEIM; Fundación Mujeres en Igualdad - MEI; Jujuy: Fundación Siglo XXI, 2021.
3. N. Debandi, J. Nicolao and A.P. Penchaszadeh, (eds.), *Anuario Estadístico Migratorio de Argentina 2020*. Buenos Aires: RIOSP DDHH - CONICET, 2021.
4. Campaign arguments may be found at: <http://aquivivoaquivoto.blogspot.com/>, 2012.
5. Observatorio sobre Migraciones y Asilo en Argentina “Gabriel Chausovsky”, *Voto migrante en Argentina: un camino a medio recorrer*, Informe N° 5, CAREF (CABA); AEC (Mendoza); ANDHES (Jujuy); CECOPAL (Córdoba); Fundación Germán Abdala (CABA); BTM (Buenos Aires); Red Nacional de Migrantes y Refugiadxs; UCIC (Córdoba); Programa “Acompañamiento Migrante” (Mendoza), 2022. Available at: <http://observatoriomigracionyasilocaref.org.ar/inicio/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Observatorio-Informe5-VotoMigranteEnArgentina.pdf>
6. C. Courtis and A. P. Penchaszadeh, “El (im)posible ciudadano extranjero. Ciudadanía y nacionalidad en Argentina”, *Revista SAAP*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 375-394, 2015.
7. Observatorio sobre Migraciones y Asilo en Argentina *op.cit.*
8. The demand that migrant organizations have been making today is “for the right to elect representatives, based on residence, at all jurisdictional levels, and with automatic conformation of the voter registration” (Observatorio, 2022), in terms equivalent to the bill presented in 2012.

\*Anthropologist. CONICET researcher at the Institute of Anthropological Sciences (University of Buenos Aires), Professor of the Department of Anthropological Sciences of the School of Philosophy and Languages and of the Communication Sciences Department of the School of Social Sciences (both at the University of Buenos Aires). Contact: [brendacanelo@yahoo.com.ar](mailto:brendacanelo@yahoo.com.ar)



Migrants are constitutive of the Argentine nation-state. Their culture enriches the national imaginary.

## MIGRANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

# An enriched national identity

IOM Argentina, Natalia Gavazzo and Gabriela Novaro\*

Immigration to Argentina is constitutive of national identity. However, the study of migration flows from other countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa has highlighted the dynamics of inclusion and (above all) exclusion of migrants in the imagination of the nation, as well as the high levels of racism and xenophobia that still persist in society.

The myth of the “racial melting pot”, which reaffirms the European origin of the country, has been repeated by generations that still today build identifications on this idea and perceive themselves as a homogeneous society. But do we really “descend from ships”? (1).

In the exposition which follows, different meanings of the concept of citizenship come into play: the one that designates a legal status of rights and obligations and the one that marks identity belonging. The State is the main agent in defining who belongs to the Nation and who does not. It is important to dismantle some of its actions and practices in order to understand the ways in which cultural and political citizenship is constructed, considering the place occupied by migration and the contributions it makes to this construction. At the same time, it is essential to consider what cultural productions represent for migrant collectives in their associative and identity processes, their possibilities of making explicit and legitimating demands and their future projects.

### A broad and dynamic view of culture

Addressing the contributions of migrants to culture involves raising some starting points and problematizing consolidated stereotypes. In principle, we start by understanding culture as something that all human beings do and that is inherent to social life. Likewise, we understand every production of culture, inasmuch as it is the creation of shared meanings, as a dynamic process, the product of constant changes, fusions, revisions, the sum of diverse histories and traditions.

On the other hand, we propose to place cultural processes in the context of power relations, inequality, domination, but also in interaction with social and political movements.

Finally, we seek to distance ourselves from certain associations between “nations” and “cultures” that presuppose cultural homogeneity and conceive the presence of “others” as threat to national identities. Cultural expressions associated with nations coexist with others that are referenced in localities, ethnic groupings, gender issues and many other possible ways of producing meanings that enrich the production of imaginaries and creative practices.

### Against the myths of homogeneity

Many authors highlight the role of culture in the negotiations carried out by

social movements in transnational and globalized contexts (2). In times of globalization, in which for some uniformity is reinforced and the borders of national territories are blurred, diverse cultural consumption (sustained, among others, by migrants) can constitute creative acts and ideological positioning in the face of a homogenizing scenario.

In Argentina, these processes acquire particular expressions. The immigration of people with diverse historical traditions, identifications, languages, and styles of interrelation undoubtedly questions the myths of cultural homogeneity rooted in the narrative on the formation of the national State. The processes of identification with the cultural expressions associated with the migrant population—especially those from Latin America—must be understood within the framework of the transformation of the representations and classifications that had been legitimate until now to refer to Argentina’s “racial melting pot” (3). The presence of these populations raises questions to the nationalisms that naturalize and territorialize identifications (and that alter/foreignize the other). In the last two decades, the national imaginary has undergone significant changes (4). Bolivian and Paraguayan immigration, among others, began to be seen through a prism of brotherhood that emerged accompanied by multi- and intercultural policies and a growing expansion of migrants’ rights consolidated by the Migration Law enforced two decades ago.

A new “Latin Americanism” thus encourages the questioning of traditional images of a “white and European” Argentina and opens up possibilities for the creation and recreation of migrants’ cultural identities. The positions and experiences of the different generations are a key aspect to consider in the analysis of the processes of identification and cultural creation, contributing visions of national identity that differ from the hegemonic one; they question identity essentialisms and show an active exercise of reflexivity (5). Some testimonies are revealing of these processes:

Nancy is 22 years old; she is the daughter of Bolivian migrants from rural areas of the Department of Potosí; she is studying History at university and works at her family’s vegetable stand in peri-urban areas of the city of Mendoza. She comments: “I do not feel I belong to any nationality, it is an invention for me; they are an invention in which the nations did not even participate... If you go through... Yacuiba, you go through Villazón and it is the same, you do not notice the difference.” Walter’s position (also the son of Bolivian parents, born and raised in La Matanza, collaborator of a newspaper of the Bolivian community and Caporales dancer) also shows these dynamics; he defines himself as “porteño” (meaning

that he was born and raised in Buenos Aires), “mendocino” (meaning that he lives in Mendoza) and “son of Bolivians” (6).

Thus, “being Bolivian”, “being Paraguayan”, “being Argentine”, “being Latin American”, but also “being Argentine-Chinese”, “Afro” or even “being a migrant”, are combined in different ways for different purposes, showing that identifications can constitute active processes in which—far from the stigma of the “unwanted” migrant—the “leading role” in cultural and social changes is assumed, redefining Argentineness in each historical moment

#### Art as a space for expression

Art is a space where cultural contributions become evident. Music, crafts, and dance, associated with different national folklores, reveal common cultural characteristics: self-representation, reference to place of origin/destination, identity (self-perceived, ascribed by others, essentialized or constructed, denied or valued), the marking of difference and the creation of individual, family and collective memories (7).

Let’s take Laura’s case. She is 32 years old, was born in Bariloche, but has lived, studied and worked in Buenos Aires most of her life. She is the daughter of a father and mother from Paraguay. She feels that what she learned most about that country when she was a child is music. Her father played the guitar, especially polkas. However, she says “my old man left Paraguay and didn’t want to know anything more about Paraguay and cut absolutely all the ties he could.” Laura’s mother recalled that “she was never treated as Paraguayan” until during a re-

**Keeping “their” culture alive is a political act that enrich social meanings.**

irement procedure, she was reminded “but you are not Argentinean; you are naturalized.” Laura’s reference to Paraguay is precisely through her mother: she is the one who “felt she belonged” and who always tried to preserve those ties. As we can see, there may be a mismatch between legal and emotional or imaginary belongings to a nation, especially after the changes that have occurred with far-reaching migration processes.

The processes of visibilization and national affirmation at play in these expressions highlight situations that should not be overlooked. Like the contributions of native peoples and Afro-descendants in Argentina, these are productions of collective meanings that are in situations of subordination and whose histories, memories and artistic expressions have been the object of successive attempts at deletion. In these cases, the reproduction of cultural practices associated with the territories of origin can assume meanings of recovery of diverse experiences and of collective questioning and vindication.

These productions challenge the hegemonic versions of history that usually leave them out. Keeping “their” culture alive, teaching it to future generations, and showing it to Argentines are undoubtedly political acts that enrich the social meanings, aesthetics and creations

shared by migrants and non-migrants. They can contribute to social transformation as long as they are associated to collective strengthening processes and question stereotypes and installed images, and are associated to the expansion of rights, fighting against discrimination and for the inclusion of other stories in our cultural configuration.

### A permanent vindication

To manage immigration, the Argentine State went from a conception based on control and persecution founded on a law of the 1976 civil-military dictatorship, to one of regularization based on Law No. 25.871, which declares migration as a human right. It was in that political climate at the beginning of the century, dominated by an integrationist discourse appealing to Latin American brotherhood, that a new generation of descendants of immigrants from neighboring countries came of age, awakening a self-awareness that was accompanied by migration regulations and policies and by a society that began to approach the countries of the region, to review its own history and to question its origins. A movement driven largely by migrants and descendants of immigrants of different origins managed to win some battles in the struggle for the declared equality.

However, these advances in terms of openness and appreciation of otherness and identity pluralism are never crystallized conquests: they must be systematically reissued and vindicated. The risks of a regression towards xenophobia and racism are still present, which is why a continuous exercise of reflection, denaturalization of assumptions and valuation of the enormous contributions that migrants make to society as a whole is imperative. An open, plural and inclusive society, beyond a place of destination, is a horizon to which we sometimes arrive partially, but which must guide, day by day, what we build. ■

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\*Respectively, PhD in Anthropology from the University of Buenos Aires. Adjunct Researcher at CONICET and Professor at the National University of San Martín (EIDAES-UNSAM) and PhD in Anthropology, Professor at the University of Buenos Aires, Independent Researcher at CONICET.