**Extended abstract**

*Population exodus from Venezuela. Coping strategies of Venezuelan migrants and xenophobia towards Venezuelans in Peru*

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## Introduction

This study focuses on the unprecedented exodus of Venezuelans in recent years, prompted by economic deterioration, a collapsing health system, and political instability in their home country (Mazuera-Arias et al., 2020). By August 2023, the global population of Venezuelan migrants and refugees had reached 7.71 million, with 6.56 million finding settlement in Latin America and the Caribbean (R4V, 2023). The aim of this paper is to explore coping strategies of Venezuelan migrants in Peru. Currently this country is one of the top destinations for population exodus from Venezuela, with a migrant population of 1.5 million people. In examining the coping process within this context, our aim is to contribute to the assessment of the potential for a global migration crisis arising from the outflow of individuals from Venezuela. Such a crisis could have the potential to destabilize the entire migration system in Latin America, especially if effective positive adaptation strategies cannot be implemented in this region.

## Background

In the paper we use definition of *coping strategies* by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) which describe them as those behaviors and cognitive skills that people use to cope with internal and environmental demands that are perceived as stressful. One of the coping strategies of individuals/households of solving a problem caused by push factors is *international migration* (Benda-Beckman et al. 2000). The emigration decision and its execution intended at solving an initial problem in the country of origin leads to new problems and stressful situations during the removal and in the country of destination (Cobb et al. 2016). It is presented in the theoretical framework developed for the MICLACAS project (Figure 1). Upon arrival immigrants have to decide and implement coping tactics in order to live, survive and thrive in a new environment. Negative outcomes of chosen tactics can lead to social and economic marginalization of a person/family living without contact with the local and immigrant population which in extreme

cases is trapped in a destination country not having even the resources to return to the origin country (Van Oudenhoven et al. 1998). Positive outcome of the tactics lead to several options for the immigrant who can choose to (a) stay in the destination country applying assimilation, integration or separation strategy, (b) successfully come back to country of destination, (c) continue migration to the other country, in our case Venezuelans can chose other Latin American country because of easy access to collect necessary resources to move alone or with family to more preferable and more distant destination like Europe or the United States.

Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the MICLACAS project.
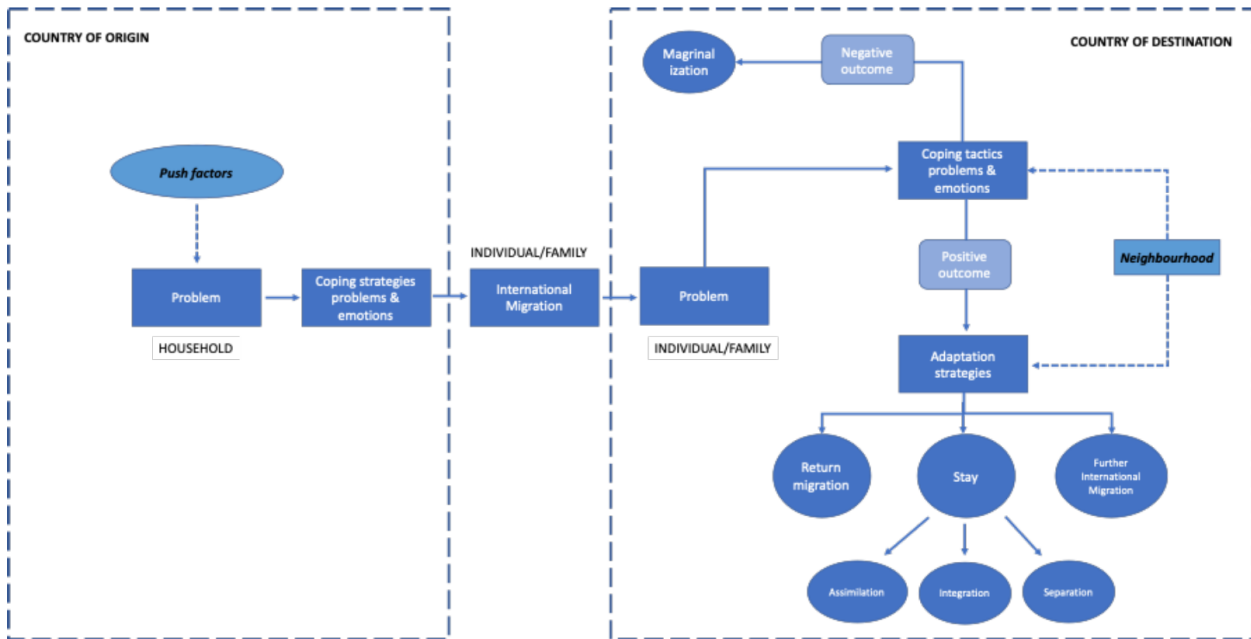


At the same time, the coping tactics of immigrants are deeply influenced by the attitudes among the members of society in a host country. Obviously, a more positive approach towards newcomers among the host society favors social integration (Naveed & Wang, 2021). On the other hand, negative attitudes including xenophobic violence constitute a serious obstacle in this process (Crush & Ramachandran, 2010). Therefore, in order to understand the context of immigrant reception, one cannot only analyze the behavior of immigrants, but also take into the account the attitudes of host society. Consequently, in our study we also conducted a survey among the Peruvians who live in neighborhoods populated by Venezuelans. In order to understand better their attitudes and behaviors, we use questions and scales on xenophobia (e.g., Symeonaki & Kazani 2011, Leong & Ward 2006).

**Data & Method**

In our analysis we use data from our own survey among 305 Venezuelans and 204 Peruvians at age 18+ living in Peru conducted in 2023 in a research project *"Migration Crisis in Latin America – coping and adaptation strategies of Venezuelan migrants and their families and the risk of global migration crisis [MICLACAS]"* funded by National Science Centre in Poland [UMO-2021/41/B/HS4/01680]. For Venezuelan migrants, we used a random spatial sampling in areas with high concentration of Venezuelan migrants (grid level, based on ENPOVE-2022 study conducted by Peruvian National Institute of Statistics and Information (INEI)) and quotas related to age, sex, education, and district. Peruvian neighbors were selected in the spatial proximity to Venezuelan migrants to fill predefined quotas, and because of this group is not representative for the Peruvian population. The fieldwork was conducted by Datum International - a well-recognized survey company in Peru.

To evaluate coping strategies used by Venezuelan migrants in Peru we apply the instrument developed by Addison et al. (2007) called Coping Strategy Inventory - Short Form (CSI-SF) which is a shorter version of CSI - 72-item scale created by Tobin et al. (1989) based on a seminal work of Folkman and Lazarus (1984) on Ways of Copping Questionnaire (WCQ). CSI-SF consists of 16 items but has a similar structure of the original CSI scale. It includes items from all four subscales on (a) *Problem–Focused Engagement*; (b) *Problem-Focused Disengagement*; (c) *Emotion-Focused Engagement*, and (d) *Emotion-Focused Disengagement* (see Figure 2). The answers are coded using a five-point Likert scale presenting frequency with which respondents utilize each coping strategy listed in the survey. The total subscale score is obtained by summing the answers of all the subscale's questions. As we survey Spanish speaking respondents in Latin American context, we use a Spanish version developed and tested by Tous-Pallarés (2022). In the paper, we divide population into three categories in each of the subscales: *low* (4-9 points), *medium* (10-15), and *high* (16-20) (overall alpha-Cronbach=0.63).

Figure 2. The hierarchical structure of coping
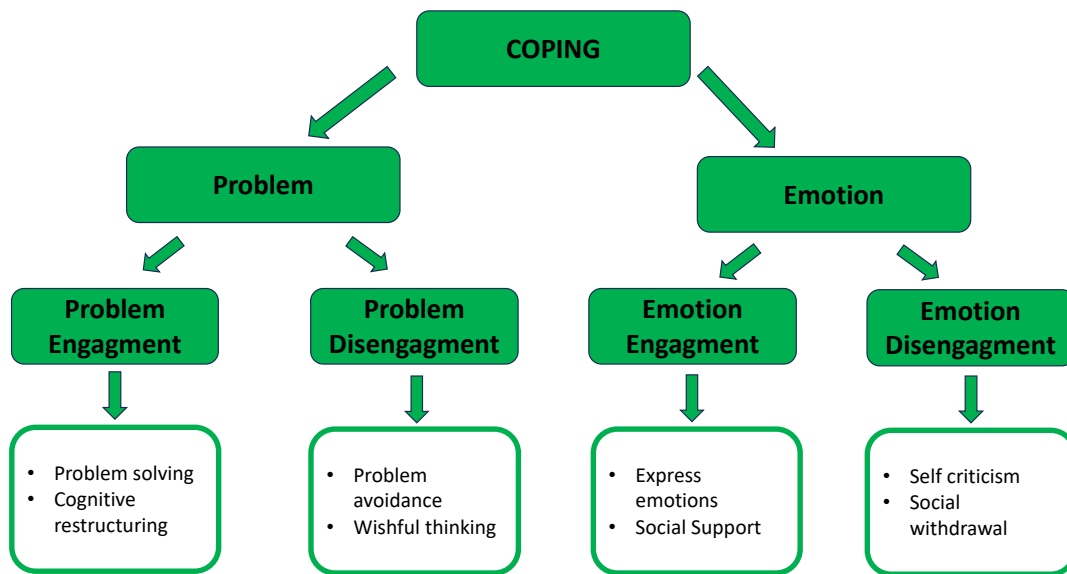


Source: based on Tobin et al. (1989).

To assess attitudes and behaviors related to **xenophobia** among Peruvian neighbors, we use an instrument created by Symeonaki and Kazani (2011) which includes 18 questions with five-point Likert responses scale (1- completely disagree to 5 completely agree) (alpha-Crombach=0.78). For presentational purposes we divide population of neighbors into three xenophobia categories: low (18-42 points), medium (43-66) and high xenophobia (67-90). The instrument also enables us to explore xenophobia in several dimensions: (a) *rights* – if foreigners should have equal rights (general, labour market, schooling), (b) *impacts* – evaluation of an effect of foreigners on a hosting country (criminality, unemployment, culture, economy, salaries) (c) *general issues* – assessment of general attitude towards foreigners (generally good or bad people; if respondent would marry a foreigner, work with a foreigner, acceptance of foreigner tourists) and (d) *actions* – evaluation of attitudes towards integrational actions (organization of multicultural events, training programs, reception classes, permission for stay and work, help for foreigners and border closing). In our study we were interested only in attitudes and behaviors towards Venezuelan migrants, thus we replaced in a word 'foreigners' in the original wording by 'Venezuelans' in our questionnaire.

**Results**

The findings provide evidence that Venezuelan migrants generally use more often engagement coping strategies which is visible on Figures 3 and 5. It is especially visible in case of *problem-focused strategies* - the distribution on Figure 3 shows high frequency of scores above 15 points. 61% of respondents get a high score which means they are frequently use the active

behaviors to solve problems related to their lives (e.g. making plans, tackle problems) (see also Figure 7).
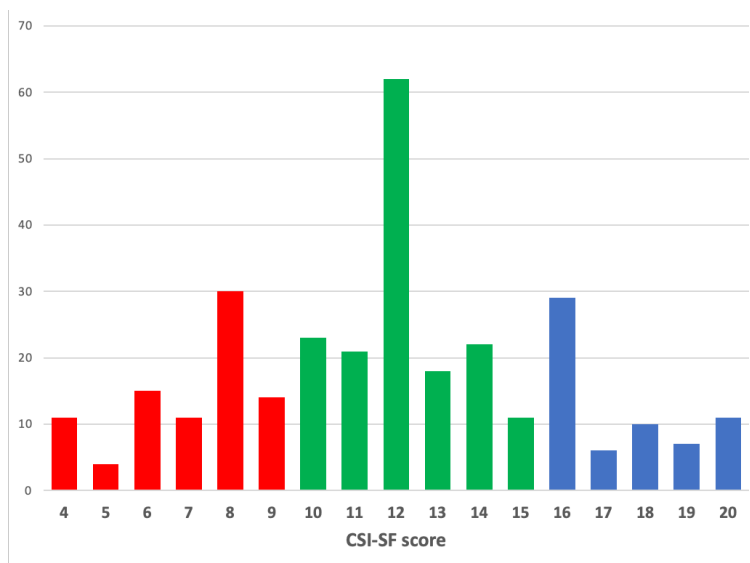
Figure 3. Distribution of CSI-SF scale: *Problem-Focused Engagement*
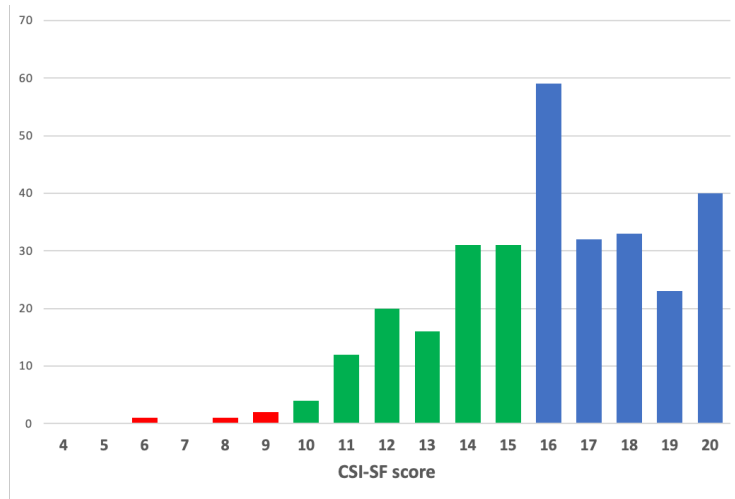


Source: own calculations based on MICLACAS survey in 2023.

It seems that problem-focused disengagement strategies are not common among migrants. Figure 4 shows that majority of migrants have low and medium scores on the scale. Around 28% is located in low and only 21% in high group that uses at least very often this kind of behaviors (e.g. letting the problem solve by itself, avoiding thinking about the problem or hoping for a miracle).
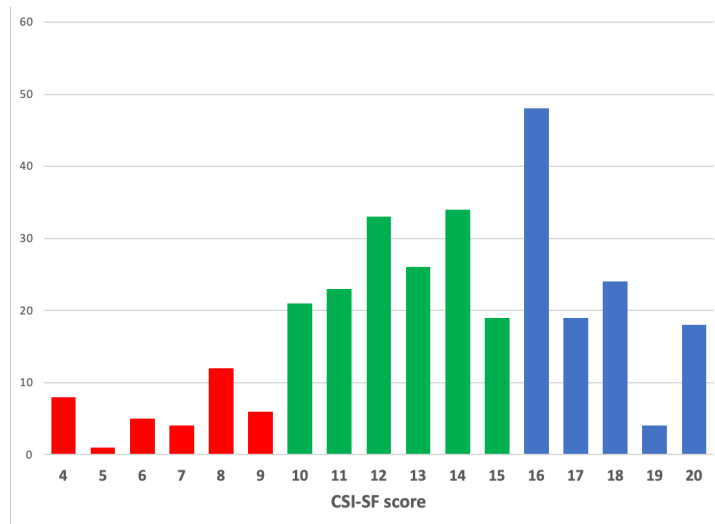
Figure 4. Distribution of CSI-SF scale: Problem-Focused Disengagement



Source: own calculations based on MICLACAS survey in 2023.

In case of emotions, Venezuelan migrants in Peru often apply active strategies like talking with friends and family, letting out emotions to reduce the stress. Around 37% respondents score high on the scale, with majority located in the middle of distribution. Only 12% use the strategies seldom or never.
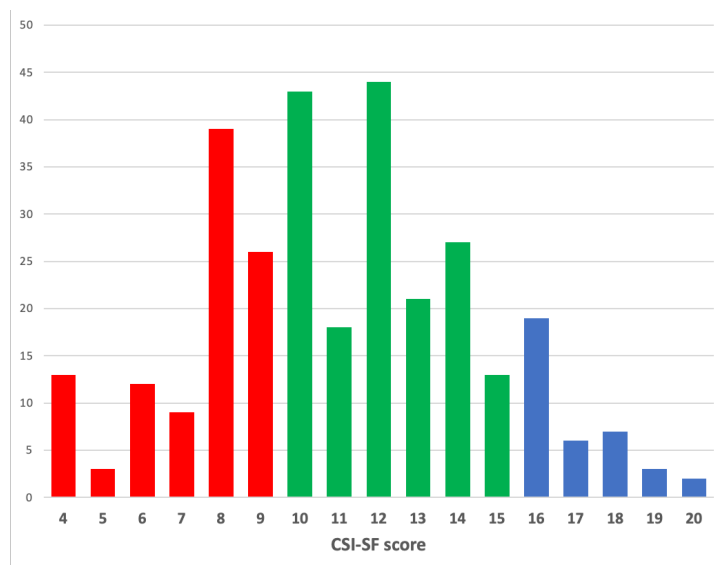
Figure 5. Distribution of CSI-SF scale: *Emotion-Focused Engagement*



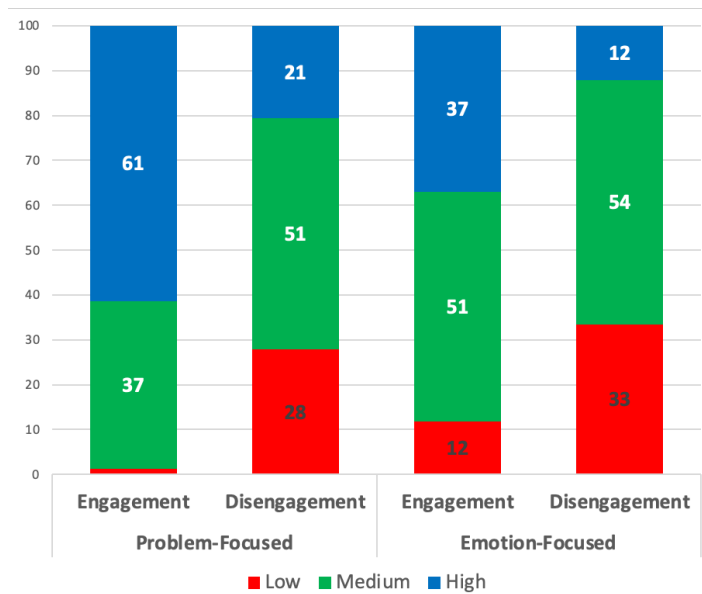Source: own calculations based on MICLACAS survey in 2023.

Many Venezuelans avoid disengagement strategies in emotional sphere, e.g. spending time alone, criticizing himself/herself, keeping thoughts and feeling to himself/herself (Figure 6). One out of three migrants do not use these strategies or use them occasionally getting low score on the scale.

Figure 6. Distribution of CSI-SF scale: *Emotion-Focused Disengagement*



Source: own calculations based on MICLACAS survey in 2023.

6

Figure 7.  Distribution of Venezuelan migrants by CSI-SF subgroups

Table 1 presents average scores in each subcategory of coping. Venezuelan migrants residing in Peru get the highest score in *problem-focused engagement* strategies – 16 out of 20 points – with corresponds to high level. The next are emotion-focused engagement strategies with an average score of 13.6 points. The lowest are disengagement strategies problem-focused – 11.8 and emotion-focused – 11.1 points.

Table 1.  Descriptive statistics of CSI-SF score subscales

| Indicator | | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Problem-Focused | Engagement | 15.97 | 2.77 |
| | Disengagement | 11.83 | 3.91 |
| Emotion-Focused | Engagement | 13.65 | 3.70 |
| | Disengagement | 11.08 | 3.47 |

In case of coping with problems related to difficulties in living in Venezuela, our respondents choose *migration* as a strategic option in their lives. However, before international reallocation they used several other coping activities to mitigate their socio-economic challenges (Figure 8). The most common reactions where to use up savings (50%), reduce non-essential expenditures (44%) and quantity and quality of eaten food (38%).  Only 12% respondents do not use any of these actions. Very small number received help from public institutions (9%) or humanitarian agencies or NGOs (4%).

Figure 8. Coping actions used in Venezuela by migrants before migration
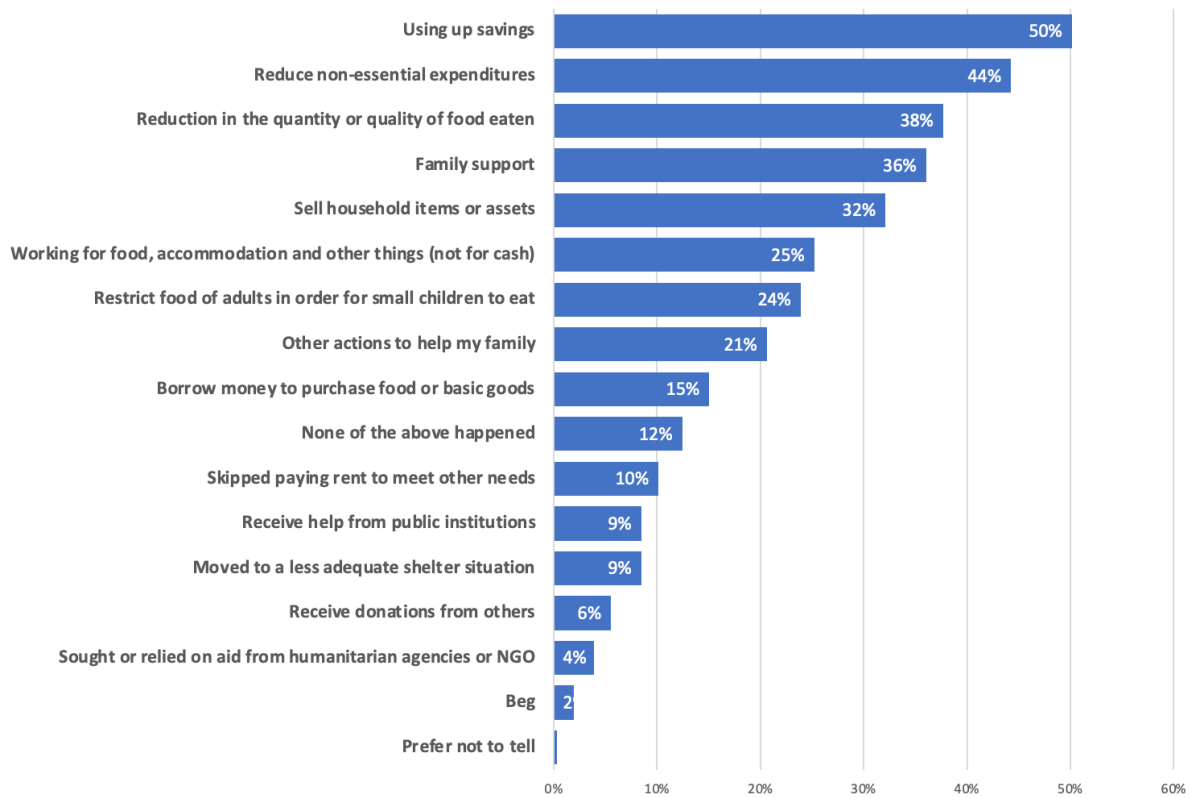


Source: own calculations based on MICLACAS survey in 2023.

The study of Peruvian neighbors of Venezuelan migrants in Peru reveals generally medium level of xenophobia in this population. Based on scores from the instrument used to evaluate xenophobia, 75% of respondents have a medium level of xenophobia towards Venezuelans, around 5% have high level and 20% low level (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Overall xenophobia levels of Peruvian neighbors
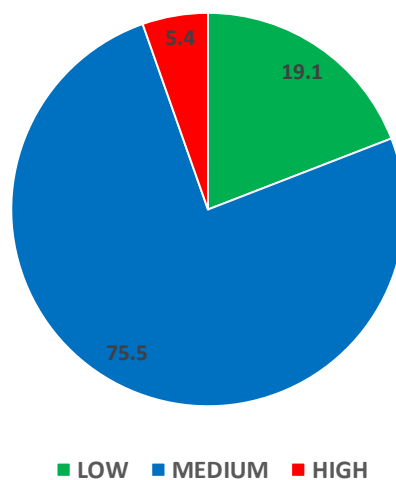


Source: own calculations based on MICLACAS survey in 2023.

However, there is a significant difference in level of xenophobia between dimensions. Half of Peruvian neighbors were very positive to give rights to Venezuelan migrants, but only 14% were positive of economic impact (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Xenophobia levels of Peruvian neighbors by dimension



**Rights**

**Impact**

**General Issues**

**Actions**
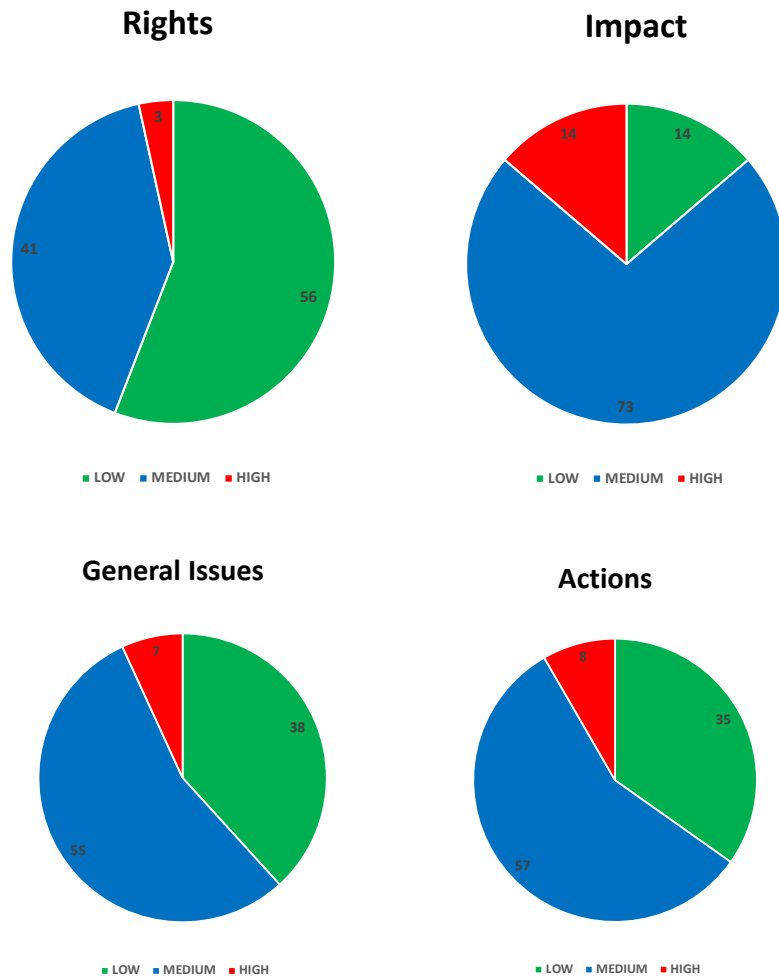
Source: own calculations based on MICLACAS survey in 2023.

**Conclusions**

Our study provides evidence on the coping strategies of Venezuelan migrants. The population residing in Peru predominantly chooses engagement strategies over disengagement solutions in dealing with both problem- and emotion-based challenges. We also find that among Peruvian neighbors of Venezuelan migrants, there is a moderate level of xenophobia, with much higher levels in the economic dimension. This is mostly related to competition in the labor market between migrant and native populations.

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