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Opinion of Ecuadorians on Migration in the Target Country: Benefits and Challenges

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Abstract: Migration plays a crucial role in shaping destination countries' social and economic landscapes, including in Ecuador. This study aims to explore the benefits and challenges of migration by analyzing the perceptions of Ecuadorians who have directly or indirectly encountered its effects. Using a mixed-methods approach, we surveyed 1048 Ecuadorians and conducted 27 in-depth interviews to capture various viewpoints. The findings reveal a complex perspective: 47% of respondents view migration positively, emphasizing economic opportunities and cultural enrichment, while 53% express concerns about issues such as employment mismatches and barriers to social integration. These insights highlight the need for further research, e.g., to explore tailored policy solutions and deepen the understanding of migration's multifaceted impact on Ecuador's society and economy. The results highlight the need to investigate how media perceptions of migration influence the attitudes and decisions of migrants and host communities to design more balanced and realistic information campaigns for informed decision-making.

Keywords: migration impact; destination countries; economic benefits; social integration; migration challenges

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1. Introduction

Given that 3.6% of the world's population lives outside their home country, equivalent to 281 million people, it is clear that the phenomenon of migration is relevant in the current era (World Migration Report 2022). Migration flows now concentrate in a more limited set of destination countries (Charles-Edwards et al. 2023), based on their growth and development indicators (Castles 2015).

The choice of a destination country is strongly influenced by geographical proximity between nations, the size of the established co-ethnic community, and economic and cultural factors (Spörlein 2015). Migrants often anticipate that moving abroad will improve their living conditions and those of their families (Hendriks and Bartram 2019), perceiving the destination country as a space of great opportunities and income (Aruj 2008). However, while initial perceptions are positive in terms of opportunities, the political, economic, and social implications can lead to conflict in the host country (Pisarevskaya et al. 2019). Migration is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016) that can trigger a range of both positive and negative situations in host societies.

The academic literature indicates that a majority of contexts involving immigration are marked by adversity. These challenges span from competition in the labor market and immigrants' utilization of public services (Hellwig and Sinno 2017) to issues such as demographic density (Weng and Choi 2019), security concerns (Ceyhun 2020; Gattinara and Morales 2017), and anti-immigrant sentiments.

These sentiments are often fueled by perceived threats to national identity (Sniderman et al. 2004), values (Mckay et al. 2012), culture (Ceyhun 2020), conservative ideologies (Ford 2011), and the rise of nationalism in host countries (Jeong 2013).

Indeed, the realities encountered in host countries frequently diverge from immigrants' initial expectations. However, existing research on migration has largely concentrated on the causes and consequences within the context of emigration, often neglecting the implications for host countries. Several scholars, including Castles (2015), Pisarevskaya et al. (2019), and Scheibelhofer (2018), have addressed these issues, yet the focus remains predominantly on the emigrant perspective. On the positive side, migrants often experience improved economic and professional well-being, access to new educational opportunities, and contribute to cultural enrichment as they integrate into diverse communities. These benefits are not only advantageous to the migrants themselves but also enhance the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the host countries. However, the process of adapting to a new culture can also generate significant challenges, including labor market competition, discrimination, and social isolation. Such adverse outcomes are often exacerbated by a lack of effective integration policies, leading to conflicts and social tensions within the host society. Understanding these underlying effects of migration is crucial for developing comprehensive policies that promote harmonious coexistence, maximize the benefits of migration, and address its inherent challenges.

Ecuador is currently experiencing a profound socioeconomic crisis, marked by high levels of unemployment and inflation and a significant increase in poverty rates. According to recent data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadistica y Censos (INEC), the poverty rate in Ecuador rose to 32.7% in 2023, with extreme poverty affecting 15.4% of the population. Additionally, the unemployment rate reached 5.7%, exacerbating the economic hardships faced by many Ecuadorians. This dire economic situation has created a pressing need for migration, not as a voluntary pursuit of better opportunities but as a necessity for survival.

This research aims to explore Ecuadorians' perceptions of the impact of migration on destination countries, highlighting both the benefits and challenges that arise. By focusing on the Ecuadorian experience, this study offers a detailed and nuanced perspective on how migration is perceived by those who have directly or indirectly encountered its effects. This research addresses a gap in understanding the perceptions of Ecuadorian migration's impact on destination countries. It seeks to answer the following questions: 1. What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of migration for the destination country from the perspective of Ecuadorian migrants? and 2. How do the personal experiences and collective narratives of Ecuadorian migrants shape their perceptions of both the economic and social impact of migration in destination countries, particularly in relation to employment mismatches, emotional well-being, and cultural integration? By addressing these questions, this research will provide a comprehensive understanding of migration's effects and assist future migrants in making decisions.

1.1. Integration of Immigrants into Host Societies

Migration represents a global phenomenon that has profoundly influenced the social and economic landscapes of host nations (Van-Hear et al. 2018). Consequently, integration policies implemented by host governments play a crucial role in the adaptation, integration, and assimilation of immigrants into the labor market and education systems and in granting them rights such as voting, residency, and citizenship (Roelfs and Shor 2022). These policies can substantially enhance the material well-being of immigrants, driven by increased economic earnings and a broader range of employment opportunities compared to their countries of origin (Ji et al. 2022). In addition to the clear economic benefits, migration also yields significant social advantages. For instance, research indicates that immigrants often possess high levels of education (Blunch and Laderchi 2015; Schnell and Azzolini 2015), experience increased self-confidence (Minza and Herlusia 2022), and provide financial support to family members remaining in their home countries (Zuccotti et al. 2017; Schans 2009).

They also integrate into diverse communities where they can share their traditions, experiences, and individual perspectives, thus contributing to an enriching cultural exchange for both immigrants and natives (Scheibelhofer 2018). However, these benefits derived

from immigration can generate a widespread and equivocal perception of migration as a "win-win" scenario (Collins 2018), distorting people's decisions and perceptions in the face of this social phenomenon. Migration is not as beneficial to many of the immigrants who choose to leave their country of origin. This phenomenon is largely because most of them lack previous experience, i.e., they have never lived or traveled to the destination country (Hendriks and Bartram 2019). As a result, their misperception of the potential benefits of migration can lead to conflict and adverse challenges once they settle in the host country.

1.2. Challenges in Host Societies: Misperception?

It is a reality that immigrants face various challenges during their process of adapting to a new culture (Vohra and Adair 2000). Economic migrants are negatively perceived by host societies (Meidert and Rapp 2019), as they are considered a threat to the labor market (Yaman et al. 2022), which may result in reduced jobs and wages for native workers (Bahry 2016).

These circumstances have resulted in migrants being systematically subjected to various forms of hostility, such as unequal wages compared to native workers (Wojtyńska and Skaptadóttir 2021; Zwysen 2019), high rates of discrimination based on their nationality (Šedovič 2024), race (Imoagene 2018) and language (Li 2014), as well as episodes of xenophobia (Maekele 2023; Weng and Choi 2019). This picture represents a significant obstacle to the economic and social integration of immigrants into the social fabric of the receiving country (Grass and Bovenkerk 1999).

Immigrants at the time of arriving in the destination country experience a substantial decrease in their educational and employment status since they usually occupy jobs that do not correspond to their vocational training (Engzell and Ichou 2020). While facing higher unemployment rates than natives (Fleischmann and Dronkers 2010), they are forced to take on excessive workloads, which can have negative impacts on their physical and mental health (Fu 2014).

In most host countries, immigration is discursively represented as a threat to national security and economic stability (Koinova et al. 2023), contributing to the establishment of stricter restrictive policies driven by the fear of liberal legislation in many of the host countries (Brekke et al. 2023).

This research highlights the importance of understanding both the positive and negative impacts of migration on host societies. Addressing the challenges faced by immigrants requires comprehensive policies that promote integration while also acknowledging and mitigating the adverse effects on native populations. A nuanced understanding of migration's multifaceted nature is essential for informed decision-making and fostering harmonious coexistence between migrants and host communities.

1.3. Integration of Ecuadorians in Host Societies

Ecuador has experienced significant emigration, particularly to Europe and the United States, over the past few decades. This migration trend, which accelerated following the economic crisis of the late 1990s, has resulted in a complex transnational existence for many Ecuadorian families, which persists to the present day (Miranda-Nieto and Boccagni 2020).

The migration experiences of Ecuadorians in destination countries often result in complex and multifaceted challenges, both for the migrants themselves and for their families left behind in Ecuador. These experiences are shaped by a range of factors, including socioeconomic conditions, cultural dynamics, and institutional responses both in Ecuador and the host countries. This text will explore these challenges, drawing from various studies that examine the effects of migration on Ecuadorian families, particularly focusing on how family structures and relationships are transformed as a result of migration (Boccagni 2014). The migration flow, which is primarily female-led, has significantly influenced the roles and relationships within families. With many mothers migrating to seek better economic opportunities, children often remain under the care of extended family members, which can lead to a reconfiguration of caregiving responsibilities and emotional bonds. These changes are not merely logistical but deeply affect the emotional and psychological well-being of

the children involved, often leading to feelings of abandonment or detachment from their migrant parents (Boccagni 2013).

Moreover, the public discourse surrounding migration in Ecuador often stigmatizes migrant families, particularly those led by women. The societal narrative tends to portray these families as disintegrating or morally compromised due to the absence of parental figures, particularly mothers. This stigmatization is not just a societal perception but is also internalized by the migrants and their families, influencing their self-identity and their relationships with both the host and home societies (Handelsman 2020). Such narratives also fail to recognize the resilience and adaptive strategies that many transnational families develop to maintain their connections across borders despite the challenges posed by physical separation (Soruco et al. 2008)

The migration of Ecuadorians to host countries is a process that significantly alters family structures and relationships, with profound implications for both the migrants and those they leave behind. The dual pressures of economic provision and emotional connection, compounded by societal stigmatization and a lack of institutional support, create a complex landscape for these transnational families.

2. Methodology

The general objective for conducting this mixed-methods descriptive study was to analyze the perceived effects on the lives of migrants. We set the following as specific objectives: 1. Examine the perceived advantages and disadvantages of migration in destination countries from the perspective of Ecuadorian migrants. 2. Explore how individual experiences and shared testimonials of Ecuadorian migrants influence their perceptions of the impact of migration in destination countries.

Ecuador was contextualized as an object of study since it has had a migratory flow observed in defined decades: emigration in 1980 due to political instability and in the 1990s due to the economic crisis (Pedone 2003); also, important migration flows of Peruvians in the 1970s (Ramos 2010) and the Venezuelan exodus from 2013 onwards (Barbieri et al. 2020).

The use of surveys and interviews is required as data collection tools. For the surveys, 16 questions were used, out of which 4 were sociodemographic questions referring to age, city, gender, and the area in which they live, while the 12 specific questions were created from the validation of criteria stated by Hendriks and Bartram (2019), addressing the effects of migration on the socio-economic conditions and well-being of individuals in the perceived effects on the lives of migrants. The survey was formatted using a combination of Likert scales and multiple-choice questions to elicit quantitative data. Likert scale questions asked respondents to rate their agreement with various statements about migration on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). By gathering this information, this study aimed to explore how different demographic factors might influence perceptions of migration. For instance, respondents were categorized by age groups to assess the potential impact of age on their views. Similarly, data on city and area of residence, such as whether participants lived in urban or rural areas, helped identify geographical differences in attitudes towards migration.

The surveys were specifically targeted at secondary school students, aiming to capture their perspectives on migration. First, a pilot study was conducted among students who had direct or indirect experience with migration (n = 105) to assess the clarity and relevance of the survey questions. The results of the pilot allowed for minor adjustments in the language and format of some questions to improve the understanding and accuracy of the answers. The reliability of the instrument was ensured through an initial validation process of the questions based on previous studies and piloting with the total sample. Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 indicates a high internal consistency of the survey items. The validity of this study was addressed through triangulation of methods (surveys and interviews) and data sources.

Next, the survey was administered online in the Ecuadorian context to 1048 people (M = 567; F = 481) between 15 November 2023 and 15 April 2024. The data obtained were

organized and systematized through the software R v. 4.4.1, developed at the University of Auckland, located in Auckland, New Zealand, by Ross Ihaka and Robert Gentleman. The official distribution of R and its packages is carried out through the CRAN (Comprehensive R Archive Network), which serves as the main platform for obtaining and managing the software and its extensions, calculating descriptive and correlational statistical tests to determine the characteristics of the perceived effects on the lives of migrants. This study obtained valid responses from students aged from 15 to 18, coming from the last three years of secondary schools in the Ecuadorian education system (1st year = 33%; 2nd year = 33%; 3rd year = 34%). Seventy-five percent of the sample lives in urban areas, a distribution influenced by the location of the selected secondary schools in the three administrative capitals (Cuenca = 34%, Azogues = 32%, and Quito = 34%) of three provinces in the Ecuadorian highlands (Azuay, Cañar, and Pichincha, respectively).

The non-probabilistic convenience sampling applied anonymously, also contemplated the type of educational institution so that a balance was sought that would allow for the greatest possible representativeness of the youth universe considered and the identification of significant patterns and differences in the data obtained. The reliability of the scale was measured by Cronbach's Alpha, obtaining a value of 0.86 for the 11 items. This high value suggests good internal consistency and that the questionnaire items consistently measure the same underlying characteristic.

Chi-square tests were performed to assess associations between categorical variables, optimizing the accuracy of these tests through Monte Carlo simulations. This approach allows for the analysis of sparse data while ensuring robust results. Also, the Benjamini-Hochberg (BH) correction has been used to control the false discovery rate resulting from the high significance levels reported by the Monte Carlo simulations. Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) has been used to explore the relationships between categorical variables. This technique allowed us to reveal underlying structures in the data by identifying patterns of up to four dimensions. In this article, we report the most relevant descriptions of the analysis.

In addition to the surveys, the authors conducted 27 interviews with Ecuadorians of legal age, ranging from 37 to 49 years old (M = 13; F = 14), from three provinces: Azuay, Cañar, and Pichincha, with the respective informed consent. These interviews provided a more detailed understanding of the perceptions of migration in the destination country. The interviews were specifically conducted with parents whose children attend the same schools where the surveys were administered, thus offering a familial perspective on the perceptions of migration in the destination country.

The selection of the following cities: Azuay, Cañar, and Pichincha, for conducting interviews in this study was based on their unique socio-cultural and demographic characteristics, which offer a broad representation of the Ecuadorian population. Each of these regions has distinct migration patterns and historical contexts, which could influence the perceptions and experiences of migration. In Azuay, Cuenca is a major urban center with a significant history of emigration; in Pichincha, Quito is the capital city with a diverse population, and Azogues in Cañar is known for high levels of emigration, particularly to the United States. These areas were likely chosen to capture diverse viewpoints and provide a comprehensive understanding of the migration impact from different parts of the country.

These interviews offered a more nuanced understanding of the perceptions held by individuals considering migration to destination countries. The process of selecting participants for interviews was performed through intentional sampling, selecting individuals who represented a diversity of perspectives regarding migration. Participants of different ages, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds were included to ensure a balanced and broad representation of views. The interviews were conducted in person with a duration of between 45 and 60 min, thus ensuring sufficient time to explore in depth the experiences and perceptions of the participants.

For the interviews, participants were selected through a convenience sampling approach rather than being drawn from the survey respondents. This method was chosen to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives across various age groups, social backgrounds, and geographical regions. Among the interviewees, some were directly affected by migration, either through their own experiences or through the experiences of close family members, providing rich, first-hand insights into the realities of migration. Notably, all participants, either directly or indirectly, have family members who have migrated, further enriching the depth of their perspectives. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, the primary language spoken by all participants, ensuring that communication was clear and culturally appropriate. Additionally, the interviews revealed significant perceptions regarding the migration policies of host countries, with discussions around the fairness of these policies and their effects on migrants' experiences.

The interviews were structured around a previously designed topic guide, which included open questions to allow interviewees to freely express their opinions and experiences. The topics covered included perceptions of the benefits and challenges of migration, personal or acquaintance experiences with migration, and views on the country's migration policies. This flexible structure allowed for adapting the questions according to the development of each interview, ensuring the obtaining of rich and detailed information.

The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and later transcribed literally for their analysis. The analysis of the interviews was carried out through an axial coding process using the MAXQDA v.24 software. developed by VERBI Software GmbH, based in Berlin, Germany, is a leading software tool for qualitative and mixed methods research. The official distribution of MAXQDA, along with its updates and resources, is managed through the company's official website and various authorized distributors. MAXQDA supports the analysis of text, multimedia, and quantitative data, providing researchers with comprehensive tools for coding, analyzing, and visualizing qualitative data. Two main code families were developed: (a) Positive vs. Negative feeling; and (b) Economic vs. Social factors. These families of codes allowed us to classify and organize the responses of the interviewees into coherent categories, thus facilitating the identification of recurring trends and themes. Axial coding involved an initial phase of open coding, in which emerging key concepts of transcripts were identified. Subsequently, an axial coding was performed to relate the identified concepts and build a more detailed and organized structure of the data. Finally, selective coding was carried out to integrate and refine the main categories, ensuring a deep and coherent understanding of the perceptions of the interviewees.

In short, quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns in participants' perceptions of migration. Qualitative data were analyzed using axial coding to identify emerging issues and provide a deeper understanding of migrants' experiences and perceptions (Williams and Moser 2019). In summary, this study provides a solid basis for understanding the complex and multifaceted effects of migration as perceived by Ecuadorians. The findings highlight the need to address both the benefits and challenges of migration through well-designed integration policies and strategies that promote harmonious and mutually beneficial coexistence between migrants and host communities.

3. Results

3.1. Perceived Impact on the Lives of Migrants

The perceived impact on the lives of migrants reveals a significant division of assessments. While 47% of Ecuadorian respondents perceive migration as positive, 53% consider it negative. This difference reflects the complexity of the migration phenomenon and the impact on recipient countries, especially when analyzing risk–benefit variables.

When analyzing the adverse situations associated with working conditions (Figure 1), the survey data indicate that young people believe there is a high probability that migrants may be forced to take jobs that do not match their professional profile. This perception highlights concerns about the underutilization of skills and deficiencies in job integration,

which are seen as crucial aspects that directly affect job and personal development. Additionally, young respondents believe there is a significant chance that migrants could experience a decline in their employment status, reflecting the job insecurity they might face. They also perceive a high probability that migrants may endure strenuous working hours, potentially putting their physical and mental health at risk and influencing their ability to fully integrate into the host labor market.

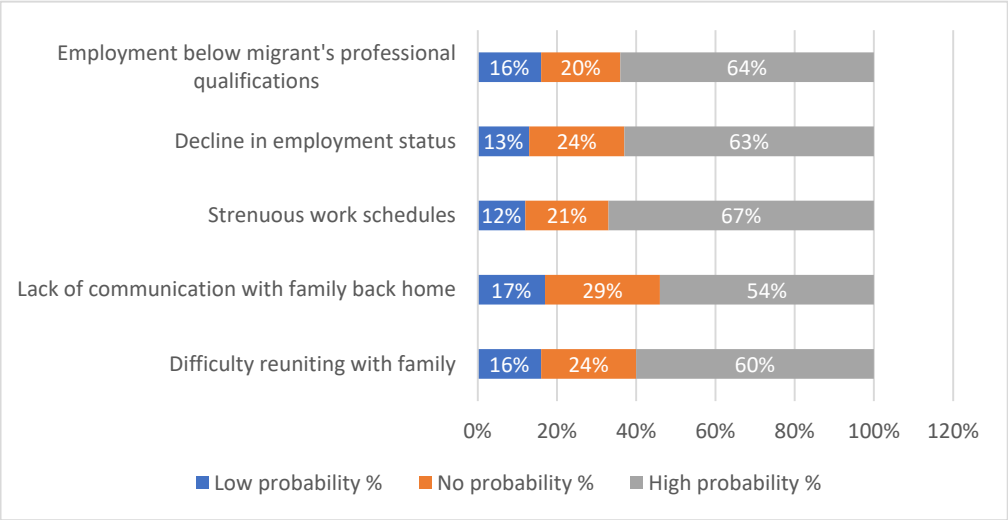


Figure 1. Adverse migration situations.

The analysis of adverse situations related to family conditions reflects the beliefs of secondary students, who perceive a moderate probability that migrants may face difficulties, such as a lack of communication with family members back home. They believe this could impact the emotional and social well-being of migrants, as well as their work performance and integration into the new environment. Additionally, these students perceive a high probability that migrants might encounter challenges in reuniting with their family in the receiving country, which they think could hinder family cohesion and complicate the migrant's adjustment to the new community, ultimately affecting their social and cultural integration.

A chi-square analysis assessed the association between socio-demographic variables and adverse migration situations (Table 1). The perceived effects on the lives of migrants are related to gender and do not match the variables such as area, province, and level of education (Table 1). The results of the Chi-square test indicate that there is a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 7.2044$, $p = 0.007$) between the responses of men and women regarding the perceived impact on the lives of migrants. Specifically, 276 women reported a negative impact, while 206 reported a positive impact. In contrast, 290 men considered the impact to be positive, while 276 considered it to be negative.

Table 1. Relationships between sociodemographic features and perceived impact and adverse situations.

	Perceived Impact on the Lives of Migrants	Job Mismatched to Professional Profile	Decrease in Employment Status	Exhausting Working Hours	Lack of Communication with Family at Home	Inability to Reunite the Family
Gender	0.019 *	0.299	0.237	0.302	0.252	0.691
Province	0.495	0.005 **	0.019 *	0.005 **	0.532	0.532
Zone	0.532	0.387	0.495	0.532	0.689	0.616
Institutions type	0.056	0.106	0.005 **	0.011 *	0.019 *	0.04 *
School level	0.502	0.019 *	0.149	0.540	0.106	0.056

Level of significance: "*" (10%), "**" (5%).

The type of institution is related to all variables except for the mismatch between professional profile and job, and, in terms of the variable considering the perceived effects on the lives of migrants, the students from the provinces of Azuay and Cañar had a more negative outlook on the experiences of migrants compared to students from Pichincha. Province is also related to lower job status and exhaustive working hours. Specifically, the majority of respondents think that migrant work is hard in the country of destination ($\chi^2 = 32.623$, $p = 0.000$), first of all those from Pichincha, then from Azuay and Cañar.

In addition to the challenges identified (Figure 2), it is important to stress that migration can also be an important means for individual and collective development for migrants as well as for countries of origin and destination. As shown in Figure 3, a high percentage of respondents agree that migrants are more likely to experience an improvement in their economic conditions, representing an opportunity for financial development.

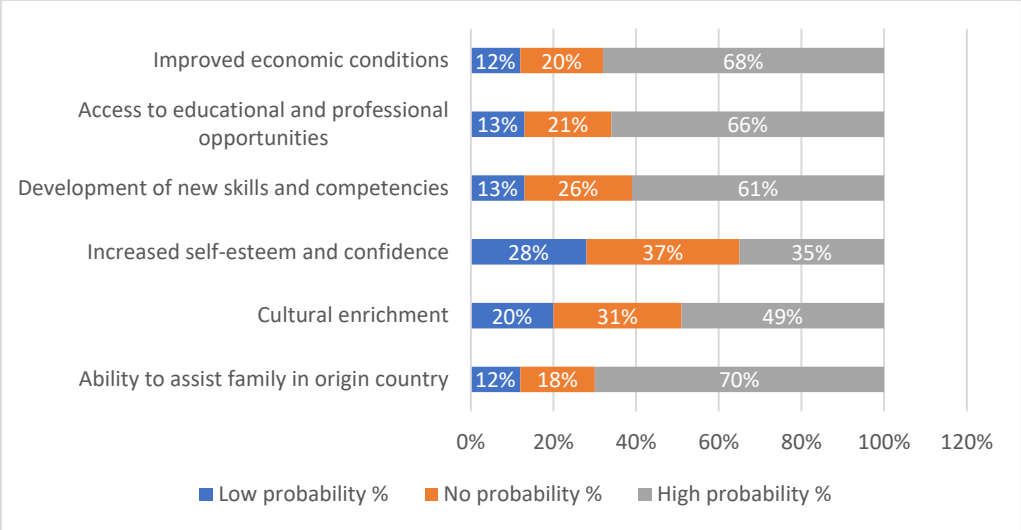


Figure 2. Positive migration developments.

They are also more likely to have access to educational and professional opportunities that allow them to improve and develop new skills and competencies that can make migrants more competitive in the labor market, increasing their options to find a better-paid job with better conditions and greater options for professional development.

In terms of increasing self-esteem and confidence, the results indicate a more critical perception with neutral assessment, suggesting that, although migration may offer some opportunities, adaptation, and integration in a new environment can present significant emotional and psychological challenges. On the other hand, almost half of the respondents believe that migrants contribute to the cultural enrichment of the host country. This perception highlights the importance of the cultural diversity that migrants bring and the possibility of fostering a more inclusive environment, benefiting society.

According to our young respondents, another positive migration development is the ability of migrants to support their family members in their country of origin. This support is mainly economic and can have a positive impact on the local and national economies of the countries of origin.

A chi-square analysis was used to assess the association between socio-demographic variables and the positive evolution of migration (Table 2). A significant relationship ($p < 0.01$) is observed between the type of institution and all the favorable effects experienced by migrants.

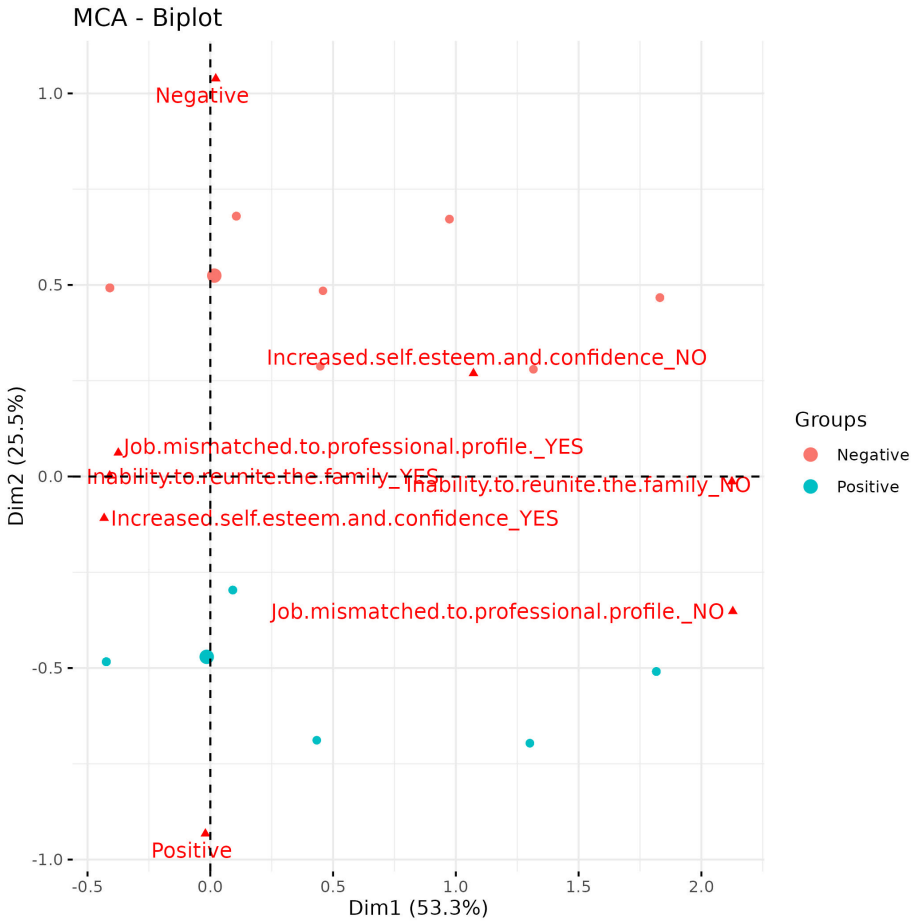


Figure 3. Multiple Correspondence Analysis of the perception of significant migration situations on the impact on the perceived effects on the lives of migrants.

Table 2. Relationships between sociodemographic features, impact on destination country, and positive developments.

	Impact on Destination Country	Improved Economic Conditions	Educational and Profesional Opportunities	New Skills and Competencies	Cultural Enrichment	Family Support in Country of Origin	Increased Self-Esteem and Confidence
Gender	0.016 *	0.655	0.689	0.523	0.523	0.493	0.523
Province	0.523	0.873	0.009 **	0.002 **	0.002 **	0.523	0.002 **
Zone	0.527	0.523	0.523	0.140	0.047 *	0.776	0.075
Institutions type	0.045 *	0.002 **	0.002 **	0.002 **	0.002 **	0.016*	0.03 *
School level	0.523	0.598	0.907	0.228	0.263	0.358	0.523

Level of significance: "*" (10%), "**" (5%).

Furthermore, the province is linked to enhanced professional and educational opportunities, as well as the acquisition of new skills and competencies, cultural enrichment, and self-confidence (Table 3). The perceptions of respondents from Pichincha are the most favorable regarding the positive effects of migration in the destination country. Young people from this province and from Cañar are the most likely to cite increased self-esteem and self-confidence as a positive outcome of migration. Similarly, students from Pichincha, particularly those from public–missionary schools, are more likely than those from other provinces and types of institutions to consider the development of new skills.

Table 3. Relationship between adverse situations and positive effects of migration.

	Perceived Effects on the Lives of Migrants	Improved Economic Conditions	Educational and Profesional Opportunities	New Skills and Competencies	Cultural Enrichment	Family Support in Country of Origin	Increased Self-Esteem and Confidence
Impact on destination country	0.001 ***	0.136	0.056	0.062	0.428	0.445	0.02 *
Job mismatched to professional profile	0.001 **	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***
Decrease in employment status	0.062	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***
Exhausting working hours	0.062	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***
Lack of communication with family at home	0.44	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***
Inability to reunite the family	0.03 *	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***	0.001 ***

Level of significance: "*" (10%), "**" (5%) and "***" (1%).

To study the relationship between adverse and positive migration outcomes, a chi-square analysis was performed between these two groups of variables and the impact on destination countries. The results show the existence of very strong significant associations (p = 0.001) between all the negative and positive situations (Table 1). The impact in the country of destination, on the other hand, is related exclusively to one positive situation, the increase in self-esteem and confidence, and to two adverse situations, the mismatch of the new job with the migrant's professional profile and the impossibility of reuniting the family.

The fact that all situation variables (positive and negative) are related suggests that, somehow, negative experiences in migration are associated with positive experiences. The p-value = 0.001 indicates a very reliable significant association between the variables, as the Monte Carlo method reinforces the validity of the result under conditions that could have been problematic for the standard chi-square. Given that BH was applied, the adjusted p-value = 0.001 indicates that the probability of this significant association being a false positive is still very low, even after considering the large number of comparisons. This further strengthens the confidence that the observed relationship between adverse and positive development situations is not a spurious result.

To explore the relationships between different migration-related situations and the perceived effects on the lives of migrants and to find possible patterns in young people's perceptions, Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) was used considering adverse and positive situations that show a positive association ($p < 0.01$) with the response variable. Figure 3 clearly shows the strong polarisation in perceptions of the impact of migration on destination countries. The analysis reveals that dimensions one and two explain 53.3% and 25.5% of the variance, respectively. This indicates that a majority portion of the variation in the data can be attributed to these two dimensions (Figure 4).

The red dashed line in the chart serves as a reference point for interpreting the significance of each category's contribution to the overall variance explained by the dimensions. Given that dimensions one and two explain 53.3% and 25.5% of the variance, respectively, the line likely indicates a benchmark for meaningful contributions. Categories with bars above the red line represent variables that contribute significantly to the explained variance in the data, while those below the line contribute less and may be considered less impactful in relation to the dominant dimensions (Figure 4).

It is evident that the low importance attributed by young people to the fact that jobs do not correspond to the migrant's professional profile is associated with their perceived positive effects on the lives of migrants (Figure 4). The negative perception of migration in the destination country is associated with the low importance given to the increase in self-esteem and confidence as a positive situation resulting from migration.

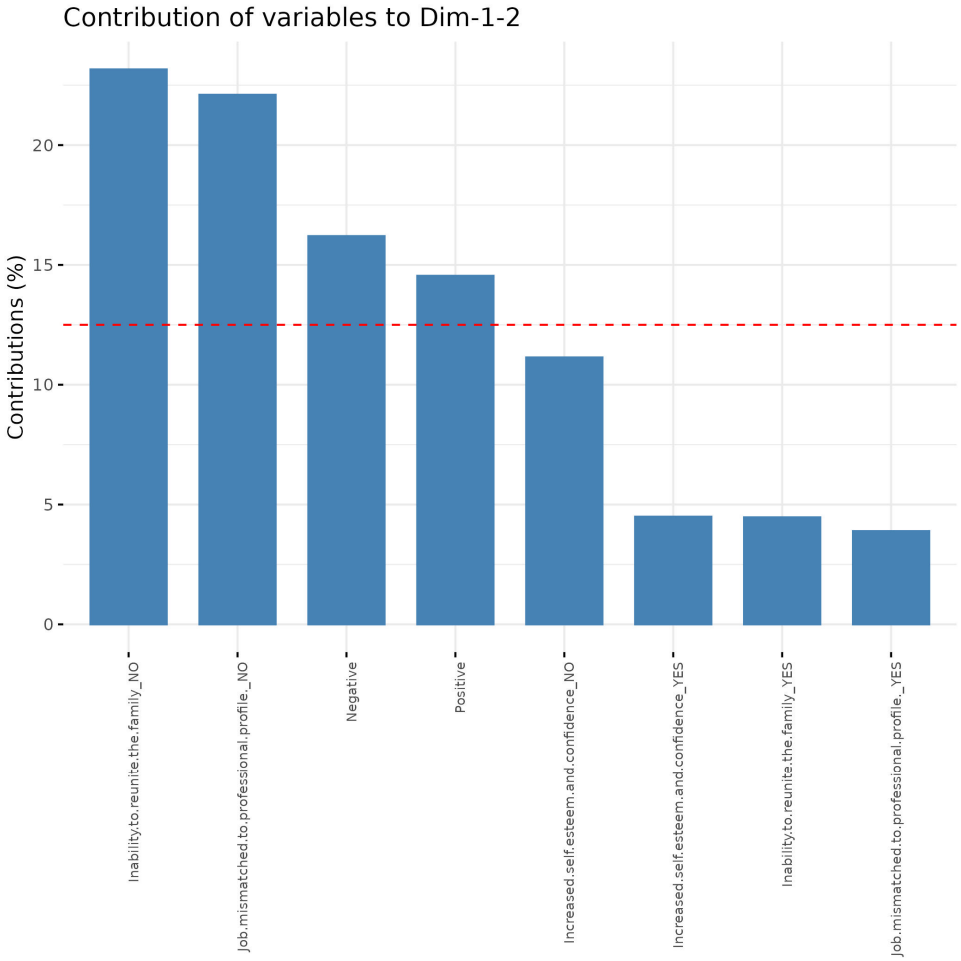


Figure 4. Contribution of variables to dimensions 1 and 2 of the ACM.

3.2. Interview Results: Parents' Perception of the Effects of Migration

The results obtained with the analysis of the interviews allow a more detailed and in-depth analysis of the effects of migration in the countries of destination. The axial coding applied to the transcribed data allows us to differentiate between two crucial aspects of the phenomenon: the perception of the parents and family representatives of young Ecuadorians regarding the impact of migration in the destination societies; their assessment of the factors that influence the integration of migrants in the new cultures, especially in the economic and social field.

In the analysis of the interviews, the impact of migration in the countries of destination and the negative and positive situations related to migration are considered as categories for coding, as well as economic and social factors. Province and type of institution, which arise due to the empirical method in the data collection and analysis processes, are used as subcategories of analysis. In this way, it is possible to highlight the differences that exist in the perceptions and opinions of the interviewees in relation to the characteristics of their own cultural and socio-economic reality.

The results are delineated into two distinct sections: the feelings and emotions of Ecuadorians concerning migration (Section 3.2.1) and the influence of economic and social factors on the impact of migration in the destination country (Section 3.2.2). The interviewees' narratives are structured around the identification of both positive/survival and negative/adverse aspects associated with perceived effects on the lives of migrants and their consequent influence on the lives of migrants and their families. The evaluative perspectives offered by the interviewees, particularly regarding economic factors, introduce a nuanced interpretation that informs the themes discussed in the subsequent sections.

3.2.1. Feelings about Migration: Emotional Perspectives of Parents

Parents' and representatives' perceptions of the impact of migration in the country of destination reflect a similar polarisation to that observed among young secondary students. The positions of the respondents are only unbalanced when it comes to aspects such as the province of residence or the type of institution in which their students are enrolled. Parents and representatives of private and, above all, public secondary schools are more likely to be positive about the impact of migration. At the provincial level, respondents from Pichincha are more optimistic about this impact than those from Azuay and Cañar.

Regarding the type of educational institution, it is the parents and representatives of public schools who express the greatest conviction about the negative impact of migration on destination countries, basing their opinion on direct knowledge of the reality of immigrants in the receiving societies. Competition for educational and economic resources and the destabilization of the cultural frame of reference of local host realities are the main problems caused by the massive influx of immigrants. This phenomenon is mainly observed in the central–southern part of the Ecuadorian highlands (Azogues and Cuenca), which concentrates most of the negative feelings towards migration. The following were mentioned by interviewees from two public and one fiscal–missionary institution in Azogues:

> "*An idea of idyllic migration is being sold, which makes people migrate by taking away opportunities in the host countries*". (E8)

> "*As popular migration destinations become overcrowded, opportunities to succeed diminish*" (E9)

> "*In other words, I think that for people who migrate, the United States is still a priority destination because I think it is the best known here in our country. But not all of them make it, I hope they can reach it*". (E15)

This feeling coincides with the perception of parents and representatives of public institutions in the city of Cuenca, who consider it to be difficult to obtain job opportunities even with a degree or professional qualification. Also, immigration generates waves of violence, crime, and discrimination in the host countries, so the perception of those who migrate changes when "[. . .] *upon arrival they realize that the situation in the new country is negative*" (E22).

However, the scenario changes in the public–missionary institutions, in which a positive view of migration and the benefits for immigrants, such as the communities and countries of destination, predominates. Several opinions highlight the usefulness of immigrants for the development of activities little valued by destination societies, as well as a consistent response to the high demand for labor from the most industrialized countries and strong economies. According to a parent of a public institution in Azogues, "*Migrants do jobs that do not match their professional profile, but it is helpful since these are jobs that residents do not want to do*" (E13).

A greater understanding of ambivalent perceptions about the impact of migration on destination countries is possible after analyzing the survival and adverse situations migrants lived in. Most of the respondents report an improvement in the quality of life of migrants in terms of professional development, education, economic stability, health, and basic services. The positive perception of Azogues representatives regarding the benefits of migration is higher than in the cities of Cuenca and Quito, confirming Cañar as one of the provinces with the highest emigration rates in Ecuador (El Universo 2023). The interviewees of Azogues fully agree with the migratory perspective of economic growth, understood as greater purchasing capacity and financial support for the family that remains in an Ecuador in crisis. Two interviewees from private and fiscal–missionary institutions in the city stated the following:

> "*The new migration has been a trend in the last five years, they go there because of economic support and the crisis that our country is going through*". (E12)

> "*It is truly the necessity that families face—to provide food, education, and support themselves as parents—that drives or has driven them to migrate, often without fully considering the consequences*". (E13)

Parents and family representatives of public institutes are not entirely convinced of the positive perception of migrating, especially for those undertaking the journey. However, most see migration as a positive change based on the need to improve the situation and pay accumulated debts in the country of origin. Among the main positive situations experienced by migrants and expressed by respondents based on their direct or indirect experience of family and friends are family reunification and cultural enrichment, although in different ways.

This perception is the same in all provinces regarding the possibility of the cultural enrichment of the scholarship holders, although it may be associated with the aspiration to obtain better training and professionalization:

> "*The famous 'American Dream' persists, and it may continue from generation to generation. If we were to define luck, it would be the combination of opportunity and preparation, and young people see that abroad, not in our own society*". (E1)

> "*Young people are also eager to leave; they lose interest in studying here and say, 'No, Mom, why should I study if I just want to go to the US?'*" (E7)

Several opinions converge towards the myth of the "dream" related to migration as an illusion in the face of the strong conviction of its benefits, mainly economic. The contrast between the prospect of an ideal situation and the reality experienced by migrants leads to the account of adverse situations linked to integration in the destination country. Almost all the interviewees know or have experienced negative situations related to this phenomenon, especially the representatives of Azogues, who indicate several problems related to the employment situation, insecurity, and psychological impact on migrants. Parents and family representatives in this city are convinced that migration has negative sides and that the benefits are as real as the risks and harms that migrants may face.

Finding a job is not easy and is not included in industrialized countries such as the United States, Spain, and Italy, which are the preferred destinations for Ecuadorians, as confirmed by high school students. In addition, the workload is exhausting, and, in most cases, migrants do not have employment or medical insurance. Added to this are the psychological impact of integration, the high rates of stress and anxiety, and the loneliness or isolation experienced by the migrant when settling in a new community.

Parents and family representatives tell how migrants are subject to discrimination and xenophobia in their destination countries, and deportation is a constant risk lived by those who are illegal. This happens if they manage to complete the journey and enter the country of destination:

> "*It is known that they were arrested, and some were found dead in the container. I believe they are showing us the harsh realities, but the strong desire to reach their destination persists, which is why migration continues*". (E11)

> "*There are many people who migrate and face problems at borders, in different regions, jungles, and beyond. If the media were honest and showed everything that really happens, I might have been too afraid to say: 'I'm staying, I'm not leaving*". (E8)

Family breakdown is another adverse migration situation. Although this phenomenon involves both the country of origin and destination, its negative impact concentrates on the migrant, especially in the initial phase of the process, motivating the migration of entire families:

> "*We have seen whole families who try to follow on social media, the experiences of another person to know how to cross the border*". (E10)

The representatives of Cuenca and Azogues are the most sensitive to family separation, a topic particularly significant for those who entrusted their children's education to public–missionary institutions.

3.2.2. The Weight of Economic and Social Factors in Parents and Family Representative Perceptions

Regarding the integration of migrants, the results show 16 social (11) and economic (5) factors influencing the process. Respondents from Azogues and, to a lesser extent, Cuenca insist on the influence of both types of factors on the impact that migration generates in destination countries, in line with the main socio-economic indicators that differentiate both provinces in terms of adequate employment and poverty rates (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos 2023).

Regarding economic factors, only a decrease in employment status is identified as negative, and this is directly related to the saturation of migrants in the country of destination, a social aspect at the heart of current government policies in many Western countries (De-Santis et al. 2023).

> "*Here in Ecuador the possibilities for professional growth are almost nil. In the United States you can also make money with humble jobs, without the need to have studied or have a degree*". (E1)

> "*For example, in advertisements for housing in the United States, there's a woman who says, 'Get a loan for your house if you're a migrant—you can apply right away, and we offer opportunities'. This creates an impression that being a migrant gives you access to more resources*". (E22)

> "*We need to support their decision to migrate, because as I tell them, there's a better future in the United States, both economically and educationally, compared to Ecuador*". (E17)

It is possible to identify only four positive factors out of the eleven recorded in terms of social factors influencing the impact of migration in destination countries, highlighting the economic aspect as the most impacting in the immigrant experience, fulfilling the expectations that motivated the trip. Parents and family representatives, among whom are children of people who migrated decades ago, consider the economic benefits to be significant and that migrant friends and family members contribute to the development of the destination country, although they must face high costs, risks, and difficulties, mainly in the social field.

There are multiple reasons for making the decision to migrate, such as the opportunities for economic and professional development supported by the access to and quality of services for citizens. High wages allow for greater purchasing power and the relative economic stability that immigrants achieve in reasonable times. The cost of living is high but is balanced with wages, while the quality of education opens the door to cultural enrichment that does not necessarily arise through an academic degree or certification:

> "*When we talk about the possibility of him studying in another country, he is very happy and I tell him—Make an effort, make an effort, only with effort will you achieve this, and if you don't achieve it, it will be seen in a different way—but he is determined, he wants to study abroad*". (E27)

However, there are adverse phenomena affecting immigrants, such as discrimination, family disintegration, and labor exploitation. The will to migrate is so strong that it moves entire families, despite the cultural contrast that it may represent for the youngest, even if it means interrupting study:

> "*Even if they are told that they can face a situation of exclusion, racism or xenophobia, people simply pursue their goals, they seek to achieve their goals*". (E3)

> "*They are not yet very aware of the consequences, but they should know. I believe that we should intervene in all aspects, both educational and family, touching on these issues and raising awareness so that our young people and our children also have these criteria*". (E26)

According to parents and student representatives, many people decide to migrate without being informed about its consequences, risks, and dangers, as well as the real conditions in which they find themselves during the integration process.

4. Discussions

The mixed perception of the impact of migration in the destination country reflects an intrinsic complexity of the migration phenomenon that is aligned with the current theoretical framework. Specifically, in response to the first question posed in this article concerning the identification of perceived advantages and disadvantages of migration for the destination country from the perspective of Ecuadorians, the results align with previous studies that underscore both the benefits and challenges of migration.

The literature suggests that migration can act as an engine of economic development for destination countries. According to Grebeniyk et al. (2021) migrants not only provide the human capital needed to drive industries but also facilitate the constant flow of knowledge to countries of origin, promoting a reverse transfer of technology, science, and medicine from more developed to less developed countries. The results of this study corroborate these claims, with 68% of respondents perceiving improvements in the economic conditions of migrants and 66% highlighting access to educational and professional opportunities as a significant benefit. However, the perception of both young students and their representatives is nuanced according to the socio-economic and cultural conditions and characteristics of their territory, showing the existence of marked patterns and trends regarding the impact that migration generates in the destination country and the different situations that arise in the integration process.

Thus, the inhabitants of Pichincha are more optimistic about migration and its possible benefits, while the south of the country (Azuay and Cañar) show a diffuse negativism about the impact of the current migratory phenomenon both in the country of destination and in the lives of migrants, without ignoring the opportunities for improvement, especially economic ones, that migration offers. Similarly, students from public high schools and their representatives show greater knowledge and awareness of the adverse conditions that migration to another country presents, although they believe that, in many cases, it is a forced decision due to the economic instability they suffer in their country of origin. These results confirm the continuity of historical trends in migration flows in the Ecuadorian provinces analyzed (El Universo 2023) and offer more information on the relationships that interact between the different aspects that influence the decision to migrate, in this case, perceptions about the impact of migration and migrants' expectations about their integration in the destination countries.

Regarding the disadvantages of migration to the destination country, the high probability that they will take jobs below their professional qualifications (64%) and face exhausting working hours (67%) highlights skills underutilization and poor job integration. This finding aligns with studies that indicate that job competition and perceived threats to national identity can lead to anti-immigrant attitudes and discrimination (Hellwig and Sinno 2017; Sniderman et al. 2004). In addition, the decline in employment status (63%) and difficulties in reuniting with the family (60%) highlight the emotional and social challenges faced by migrants and their families, which coincides with the scientific literature that points to social exclusion and mental health problems among its main effects (Fu 2014; De Jong-Gierveld et al. 2015).

In relation to the second research question concerning the influence of individual experiences and shared testimonies of Ecuadorian migrants on their perception of migration's impact in the destination country, the findings yield ambivalent conclusions. The strong and significant ($p = 0.001$) association between adverse and survival situations related to migration suggests an intrinsic relationship between experiences that most respondents claim not to have experienced directly but which influence their perception of the different factors. However, some of these factors are shown to have a direct relationship with the impact of migration on the destination country, while others may be important for the

individual or family decision to migrate but are not considered as such in terms of the effects that the migration process may have on the destination territories and communities

In these terms, this study highlights the mismatch between employment and the migrant's professional profile as a consequence with the strongest association with the impact of migration in the destination country, in line with Engzell and Ichou (2020), who explain how this determines a decrease in the migrant's employment status. On the other hand, the increase in migrants' self-esteem and confidence in the integration process is the survival situation that most influence their perception of the impact of migration, confirming the importance attributed to it by Minza and Herlusia (2022), together with the possibility of helping family members left behind in the country of origin (Zuccotti et al. 2017; Schans 2009), a concern expressed by parents and representatives as central to the migration and integration process in the destination country.

The results also reveal a discrepancy between the initial expectations of migrants and the reality they face in destination countries. This misperception can be due to the idealization of opportunities abroad, motivated by survival narratives and success stories that often fail to reflect the complexity of integrating into a new culture. According to Hendriks and Bartram (2019), migrants anticipate a significant improvement in their living conditions, which can generate unrealistic expectations and, subsequently, a mismatch between expectations and realities.

5. Conclusions

Research on the perception of the effects of migration in the destination country offers a comprehensive and nuanced view of migration. The economic benefits and career opportunities for migrants are evident, but they come with significant challenges related to social and labour integration. The findings of this study confirm that people believe that migration can contribute to the economic development of the destination country by providing human capital. However, they also highlight that migrants face significant challenges in terms of underutilization of skills and difficulties in integrating into the labour market and society. These results suggest that while migration offers substantial opportunities, it also requires effective policies and strategies to mitigate its adverse situations and maximize its benefits.

This study suggests that, while migrants face multiple challenges, such as misalignment between their skills and available work, isolation from family, and strenuous work, they also experience improvements in their economic situation, opportunities to grow professionally and acquire new skills, and a rich cultural experience. These benefits can help mitigate some of the difficulties they face, resulting in personal growth and increased self-confidence.

Among the limitations of this study is the focus on a single geographical and cultural context, which may restrict the generalization of the findings. In addition, perceptions of the effects of migration may be influenced by contextual factors specific to Ecuador, such as its regional migration history and integration policies. The methodology used, although robust, could benefit from a greater diversity in data collection techniques, including longitudinal studies that allow a deeper analysis of changes in perceptions over time.

For future research, it is recommended that the analysis be extended to different contexts and destination countries to obtain a more comprehensive and comparative view of the effects of migration. This would allow identifying common patterns and significant differences that can better inform integration and support policies for migrants. In addition, it would be beneficial to further explore integration strategies that can mitigate the identified challenges and maximize benefits for both migrants and host societies. Future research could focus on the development and evaluation of public policies that promote the social and economic inclusion of migrants, as well as the creation of support programs that facilitate their cultural and emotional adaptation and integration.

Likewise, it is suggested that the impact of media perceptions on migration and how these influence the attitudes of both migrants and host communities be investigated. Understanding the role of the media in shaping these perceptions could help in designing

more effective and balanced information campaigns that present a realistic view of the challenges and opportunities associated with migration. Information presented on social media is often selective and may not reflect the full reality of migrants' lives, leading to unrealistic expectations and decisions based on incomplete information. Therefore, there is a demand for more information and a more balanced and realistic view of the situations migrants face so that citizens can make informed decisions about their future.

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