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Applying content analysis to the formulation of migration strategies: a comparative study

Abstract

Migration policy strategy papers have risen to the top of the security agenda in many countries, both in Europe and South America. The issue is highly relevant today due to the south-south migration driven mainly by the economic and political crisis in Venezuela. These new migration flows have turned traditional countries of origin of migrants into transit or destination countries. This study aims to examine and compare strategy documents from four South American countries (Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru), plus two European countries (Portugal and Spain) as benchmarks. It uses a qualitative content analysis methodology and examines current trends and challenges. The results point to the countries' readiness for a migration crisis, highlighting similarities and differences in their documents.

Keywords

Strategies, Migration, South America, Qualitative content analysis.

Cite this article:

Thomázy, G. (2024). Applying content analysis to the formulation of migration strategies: A comparative study. *Journal of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies*. 24, pp. 531-553.

1 Introduction

The aim of this article is to conduct a comparative analysis of the strategic documents of South American countries (Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru), and as a benchmark, of two Southern European countries (Portugal and Spain), using a qualitative content analysis methodology. The goal of this analysis is to demonstrate the level of readiness of the countries to deal with a migration crisis, also highlighting similarities and differences between the documents. It is important to identify good practices and limitations of strategies in order to determine the analysed countries' readiness for migration. Exhibiting an appropriate strategy may serve as an example to other countries and provide a basis for comparing other strategies in order to identify key criteria for their development and that of migration policies.

Several studies have used content analysis to compare strategies. This method may have multidimensional objectives and a variety of approaches. As an example, João Estevens' (2018) study focuses on European countries, examining the migration and security strategies of 27 EU Member States from three perspectives. Relevant research on the South American region includes the analysis by Daniela Briones Riverosa (2014), which assesses the security strategies of Spain and certain South American countries, as well as the study by Anna Urbanovics and Rodrigo Guajardo (2022), which analyses the cybersecurity strategies of six Latin American countries. Compared to the rest, however, here the content analysis is carried out by means of Maxqda Analytics Pro software and includes South American and European countries.

This article poses three fundamental research questions: 1. Do the strategies of the analysed countries generally meet the basic requirements for strategy formulation? 2. Which countries implement strategies that may be considered appropriate? 3. Are there differences between the migration strategies of European and South American countries? The study also seeks to verify the following hypothesis in relation to South American countries: South American countries have less developed strategies than those of European nations; and the Venezuelan migration crisis needs to be addressed from a security perspective. Following a brief presentation of the migration flows of the analysed countries and the methodology used, the study presents a detailed analysis of the strategic documents.

2 Migration flows of the countries analysed

Migration in South America is increasing, and migrants are seeking new destinations within the region as an alternative to the United States and Europe. This new migratory flow has turned former origin countries into transit or destination countries. There is extensive intra-regional migration, with approximately 11 million people deemed migrants in South America, of which 6.59 million are Venezuelans who have fled their country's political and economic devastation (International Organization for Migration, 2022; R4V, 2024). Colombia has been the main destination of Venezuelan

migrants (2.86 million), followed by Peru (1.54 million), Chile (532.7 thousand) and Ecuador (444.8 thousand) (R4V, 2024). Moreover, following the migration and refugee crisis in 2015, a significant number of refugees have arrived in the European Union since 2022, as a result of the war between Ukraine and Russia. Some 7 million Ukrainian refugees have been registered in Europe. In Spain, approximately 300,000 Ukrainians live with valid residency documentation (Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración, 2024; Statista, 2024).

To obtain a more accurate picture of migration flows, it is essential to consider the net migration rate. For example, this rate (Figure 1), which began to rise in Chile since the start of the 21st century with the arrival of Peruvian immigrants (Stefoni, 2002), reached a value of 6.02 in 2020. Currently, this indicator is slightly higher in countries such as Austria and Germany, with a rate of 7.35 and 6.57, respectively.

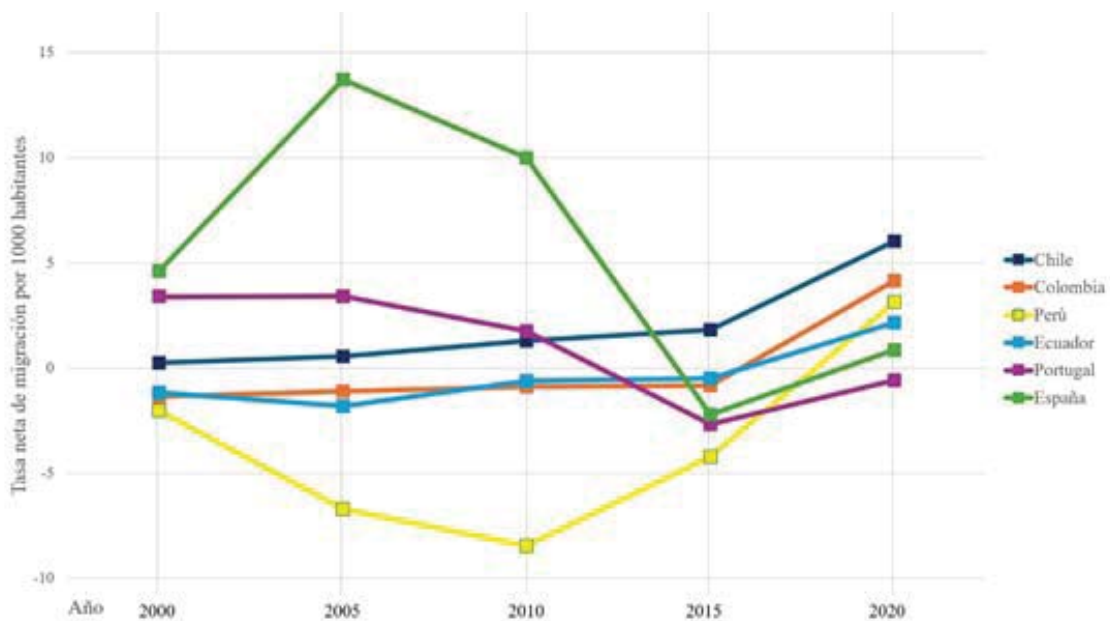


Figure 1: Net migration rate per 1000 inhabitants (2020) of the studied countries. *Source:* authors' own based on Our World in Data - Net migration rate

The other analysed South American countries (Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) have been mainly countries of origin of migrants and have become transit or destination countries due to the “Venezuelan exodus” since 2015, as shown in Figure 1. Peru displays the most notable change of the three countries analysed. In 2010, the net migration rate was negative (-8.46), however it reached 3.12 in 2020.

In the case of the analysed European countries, the net migration rate in Spain has been falling since 2005, becoming negative in 2015 (-2.22) as a result of the 2008 economic crisis. In spite of this, there is still a significant migrant population (6 million). Portugal is mainly a country of origin of migrants with a negative net migration rate (-0.58), although nearly one million migrants live in the country, mainly from Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde and France (Migration Data Portal, 2025; Our World in Data, 2024; Pires, Vidigal and Pereira, 2022).

3 Methodology

The research methodology consists of a comparative cross-sectional analysis of the strategy documents of six countries. The qualitative analysis was carried out via software (Maxqda Analytics Pro), which enabled the processing of the documents, building the categorisation system, designing the coding system, and then visualising the results in the code matrix viewer tool.

Content analysis is classified as a “hands-off” methodology (Babbie, 2008: 351) and has a large amount of literature devoted to it (Guix, 2008; Krippendorff, 2004; Gheyle and Jacobs, 2017). It is a research technique that allows “replicable and valid conclusions to be drawn from texts” (Krippendorff, 2004: 18). The analysis may be manual, but software-assisted content analysis, such as NVivo and Maxqda Analytics Pro, is becoming increasingly common.

The coding system was designed by means of a deductive procedure, and during documentation control, the codes were merged inductively, and a new code was determined, if necessary. When analysing the strategies, the unit of context was chosen, i.e. the analysis focused on the meaning of the text, not on the frequency of a word (Gheyle and Jacobs, 2017: 8; Krippendorff, 2004: 101). The codes are mutually exclusive and they were used only once for a single unit of analysis, which ensured the absence of duplication.

The countries selected were four South American countries (Colombia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru), which are the most affected by the Venezuelan migration crisis in the region, and two European countries (Portugal and Spain). Both Portugal and Spain have strong links (historical, cultural, economic, diplomatic, etc.) to South America and are also traditional destinations for South Americans. Both European countries must deal with migration and have developed strategy documents that may influence the formulation of similar documents in South American countries. For these reasons, it was important to select the two European countries as benchmarks for the analysis. Comparing the formulation of strategy documents of these six countries will allow for a more complete picture, highlighting both regional differences and similarities.

The main criteria for the selection of the strategy documents were the following:

- For South American countries, the strategies were developed following the Venezuelan exodus (2015).
- The latest migration strategy, effective in early 2023, coincides with the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, as several countries initiated new strategic processes following the pandemic. This enables the analysis of strategies developed within the same time period (cross-sectional analysis), while recent changes are analysed in the section on “Major Changes”.
- If the country does not have a migration strategy, the security and/or defence strategy is analysed.

Based on these criteria, the migration strategies of three countries and the security and/or defence strategies of three other countries were analysed. The detailed description of the documents selected for analysis is shown in Table I.

Country	Strategy	Publication	Pages	Graphs/images
Colombia	Ministry of National Defence - Colombia. Defence and security policy (PDS)	2019	84	YES
Chile	National Defence Policy of Chile	2020	110	YES
Ecuador	National Plan for Human Mobility. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility	2018	54	YES
Peru	National Migration Policy	2017	23	YES
Spain	Royal Decree 1150/2021, of the 28 th of December, approving the National Security Strategy	2021	36	NO
Portugal	Strategic Migration Plan	2015	74	YES

Table I: All 6 selected documents. Source: author's own

Taking into account the objective of the research, the coding system was divided into two main themes:

- Codes related to the topic of migration, focusing on the representation of migration in strategic concepts.
- Codes related to the assessment of the strategy, which examine and evaluate the structure of the strategy and whether it meets basic requirements.

Figure 2 displays the seven main dimensions, and four sub-dimensions related to migration¹:

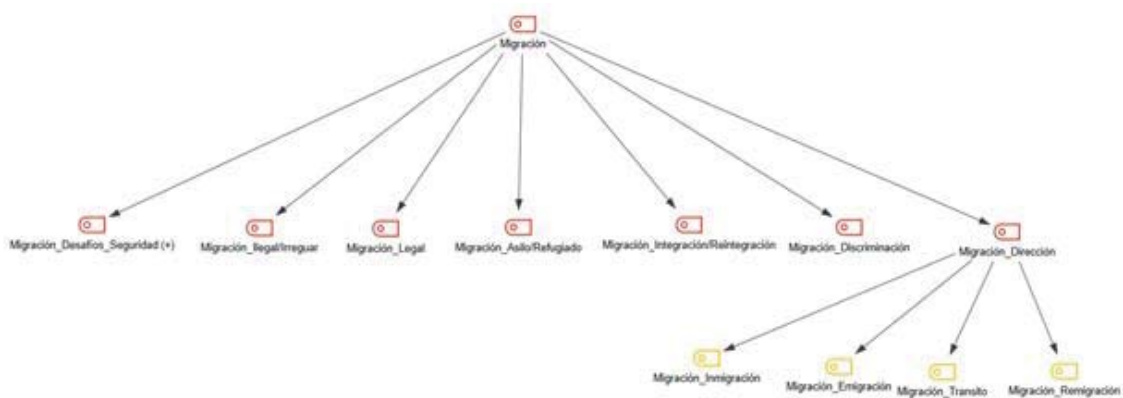


Figure 2: Coding system used for the content analysis of the 6 country-specific strategy documents: migration-related codes. Source: author's own with Maxqda Analytics Pro software

1 1. Migration: as a challenge to security; 2. Migration: illegal/irregular; 3. Migration: legal; 4. Migration: asylum/refugee; 5. Migration: integration/reintegration; 6. Migration: discrimination; 7. Migration: direction (immigration, emigration, transit, return). The 7 codes in red are at the same level and those in yellow are under code 7.

Figure 3 displays the five codes related to the strategic approach, whose objective is to assess strategic documents².

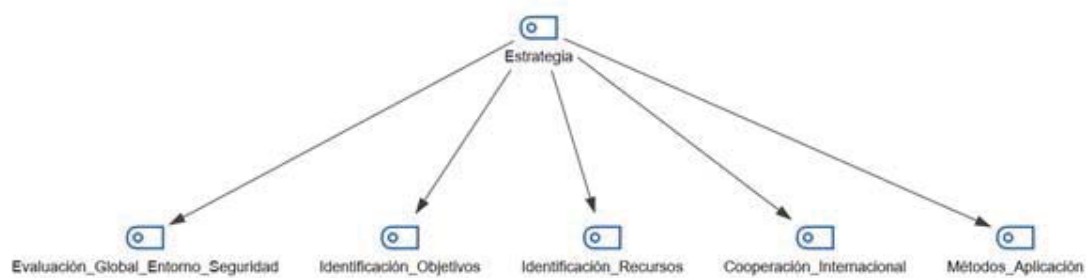


Figure 3. Coding system used for the content analysis of the 6 country-specific strategy documents: strategy-related codes.
Source: author's own with Maxqda Analytics Pro software

Over 2,000 codes were assigned in the coding of the 6 strategic documents under analysis (the coding was done manually). The software aids visualisation, making it easier to compare documents. The disadvantage of the methodology is that errors cannot be excluded during the coding process, and, on the other hand, a detailed codebook is essential for the research to be reliable, valid and reproducible. The research procedure and the results were reviewed by two independent researchers.

4 Strategy documents: theory vs. practice

Strategy, according to Bryson (2004: 46), is defined as “a pattern of purposes, policies, programmes, actions, decisions or resource allocations that determine what an organisation is, what it does and why”. Nickols (2016: 3) states that “strategy refers to a general plan of action for achieving one’s goals and objectives”. Strategies may emerge from policy reviews, scoping studies or specific planning; however, comprehensive approaches are rare (International Organization for Migration, n.d.).

Strategy documents, as well as the strategy formulation process itself, are not uniform. Depending on the goal and contents of the strategy, one may distinguish between declarative strategies that formulate guidelines, and descriptive, normative and prescriptive strategies that focus on tasks (Csiki, 2013: 29-30). At the same time, strategy documents are developed according to specific guidelines and expectations. According to Csiki (2013: 31), a well-founded strategy suitable for implementation should contain the following elements:

- A comprehensive assessment of the security environment, including challenges, risks and threats as well as opportunities.

² 1. Overall assessment of the security environment; 2. Identification of objectives; 3. Identification of resources; 4. International cooperation; 5. Methods of application. All 5 categories are at the same level.

- The prescriptive approach required to achieve the expected end state.
- Consistency between objectives, means, implementing parties and methods of implementation.
- The identification of specific objectives.
- The precise identification and scheduling of resources for the planning period.

Palacios Rodríguez (2020) proposes a thematic approach for drawing up a strategy document, with similar ideas but specific emphasis on identifying those responsible for each specific objective, financial programming and the importance of monitoring results.

In many countries, the boundaries between security, defence or other strategies are blurred in terms of their purpose, so they are usually presented as a sort of combination (Csiki, 2013: 32; González Guyer, 2017: 18-19). Not all countries have a specific migration strategy but rather focus on migration and associated risks within security or defence strategies (Estevens, 2018:3-5). According to Caudle (2009: 1), there is a growing trend towards a holistic approach to security. This approach is reflected in strategic documents that combine national military defence with national and homeland security strategies, with the aim of developing a unified strategy to ensure the security of society as a whole. In parallel, migration is increasingly analysed from a security perspective, arguing that it could represent a risk to both national sovereignty and human security (Tálas, 2019; Aranda and Thomázy, 2023; Wohlfeld, 2014). Furthermore, “securitisation³ of migration mostly centred on the nation-State and national security rather than on people and human security” (Estevens, 2018: 3).

The migration strategy itself is a sectoral strategy within the security strategy. According to the International Organization for Migration (n.d.), “a coherent migration strategy is the perfect starting point for addressing the opportunities and challenges posed by migration ensuring its effective implementation”. The strategy papers for countries vary according to their concept of migration. The objective varies between former colonialist countries and Central European or Latin American countries, as the former are traditionally receiving countries and the latter, generally, sending countries.

The strategies of Ecuador, Peru and Portugal are classified as sectoral strategies, while Chile, Colombia and Spain do not have specific migration strategies, as these three countries address sectoral strategies, including migration, within their security and/or defence strategies. Considering the contents and objectives of the strategies, those of Portugal, Ecuador, Peru and Spain are rather normative, although they occasionally also include a descriptive approach, while the strategies of Colombia and Chile are mainly descriptive.

³ The concept of securitisation was first introduced in the work of Buzan, Wæver and Wilde (1998), *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Securitisation is defined as a process by which an issue is represented as an existential threat through discourses. In this context, migration, or the increase in the number of migrants, can become an existential threat.

5 Comparison of strategic concepts using qualitative content analysis tools

Table 1 summarises the most important information from the analysed documents. It may be observed that the longer strategy documents (Chilean, Colombian and Portuguese) are more complete and include numerous photos, figures, infographics and tables, while the relatively shorter Spanish strategy does not include any of these. In terms of pages, the Peruvian document is the shortest, but the font size and the two-page layout make it of average length, similar to the other strategies. The analysed strategic concepts are in Spanish, with the exception of the Portuguese strategy.

Within the methodological part, the content analysis was studied in detail. A total of 7+5 dimensions (4 sub-dimensions) were defined when designing the coding system. It is important to note that, although the texts vary in length, the content analysis measures relative rather than absolute frequency in the comparison. Maxqda Analytics Pro compares each code with the others and visualises the frequency. Figure 4 illustrates the result after coding.



Figure 4. Comparison of the researched countries' strategies via qualitative content analysis (Code Matrix Viewer).

Source: author's own based on Maxqda Analytics Pro software

The strategies were developed between 2015 and 2021. While each migration strategy is the first of its kind, the analysed countries were able to build on existing strategic concepts when preparing their security and defence strategies. Peru's and Ecuador's

migration strategies were driven by growing migratory pressures and were prepared in parallel to increasing migratory pressures in Venezuela. Portugal's strategy, on the other hand, was created in the opposite direction: "Portugal is facing a demographic deficit that has become a national social, economic and political emergency" (Alto Comissariado para as Migrações, 2015: 17).

The Portuguese strategy promotes immigration, and, in its introduction, the document also highlights the problems of an ageing society, emigration and the sustainability of the pension system. Compared to South American countries, Portugal has a high proportion of immigrants in relation to its population (9.8%, equivalent to 2.1 million). However, one of the main objectives of its strategy is to further promote immigration.

Chile, Colombia and Spain do not have a specific migration strategy, despite the fact that both South American countries have received significant numbers of migrants (8.6%, equivalent to 1.6 million; 3.7%, equivalent to 2.5 million, respectively) in recent years and are the main destinations for Venezuelan migrants. Among the countries surveyed, Spain (14.6%, equivalent to 6.8 million) is the country with the highest number of migrants (Thomázy, 2022: 23; Migration Data Portal, 2025).

Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the differences and similarities between the documents under study. In general, there is a fundamental difference between the two migration strategies (Ecuador and Peru) and the national security and defence strategies (Chile, Colombia and Spain). In migration strategies, the presence of codes related to migration is more pronounced, while in security and defence strategies, the presence of codes related to security and defence strategies is higher. The Portuguese document is an exception, as both the strategic and migration dimensions are relatively balanced, with a slight bias towards migration. The migration dimension is analysed first, followed by the strategic dimensions.

5.1 Assessment of strategic documents — migration-related codes

- *Migration as a security challenge*⁴. With regard to the security dimension, it was important to identify the security risks associated with migration in each country. In each document, migration, organised crime and human trafficking are mentioned. Spain is the only country that addresses migration in relation to organised crime, both in countries of destination and origin. Spain also highlights religious extremism and terrorist groups as a major security risk in relation to foreigners but indirectly links migration from the South (African countries and the Middle East) to the description of security risk. The surveyed countries do not consider migration or mass migration per se as a security risk,

⁴ Migration as a security challenge and code for human security have been merged (indicated by the "+" sign in the first dimension of the figure), as the two dimensions were not mutually exclusive in the analysis.

but associate the phenomenon of migration with some security challenges, such as human trafficking, organised crime, etc.

In Ecuador's paper, the human security of migrants is described as a security challenge. Migrants are identified as victims of crimes committed by smuggling networks and gangs. The Portuguese and Peruvian documents make similar observations. At the same time, the security risks for Peruvian migrants due to the high level of emigration are also analysed in detail in the Peruvian strategic concept.

In Portugal, the sexual exploitation of migrants is identified as a risk factor, as well as the recruitment of foreigners to participate in armed conflicts. In Ecuador, Peru and Portugal, the focus is mainly on human security, while Spain's strategic concept emphasises terrorists and jihadists. Chile presents a mixed picture in this respect. Its strategic concept includes terrorism and organised crime in general, but also human security in relation to migration.

- *Illegal/irregular migration-legal migration.* In the Spanish and Portuguese documents, the terms irregular and illegal are mainly used as synonyms and are therefore both included in the same code. These countries call for joint EU action on irregular migration, highlighting the control of employers and the dismantling of labour market-based migrant networks and irregular employment as means to eradicate irregular migration.

Chile and Colombia only superficially mention irregular migration, despite the fact that both countries were facing significant irregular migration at the time of writing. In turn, Ecuador considers migration as a fundamental right, citing in its strategy paper the 2008 Constitution, which underlines that it does not recognise illegal migration and therefore does not consider any person to be illegal. Thus, foreigners enjoy the same rights as local citizens in Ecuador. Peru is also taking a similar stance against the criminalisation of irregular migration. Both Ecuador and Peru analyse irregular migration in greater detail than other countries.

Legal migration only appears in the documentation of Ecuador and Portugal. Portugal explicitly seeks to promote legal migration, which it hopes will reduce irregular migration. It stresses the need for broad socio-political consensus on the issue, as well as the need to strengthen policies such as labour market mobility and family reunification. Ecuador will focus on reducing the administrative burdens of residence permits, which could also encourage legal migration. Labour market mobility linked to economic migration is only present in the Portuguese document.

- *Asylum/Refugee.* Only three countries mention this issue: Ecuador, Peru and Spain. Spain calls for an update of the definition and international regulation of asylum seekers. Ecuador underlines the importance of the refugee issue and stresses its leading role in the region in hosting refugees. Peru recognises that the number of asylum seekers has increased exponentially since 2004, making it imperative to develop new processes. Although the number of applicants for

refugee status has increased in recent years in the countries under study, the proportion of people with refugee status is low, with the exception of Spain. By way of example, in 2023, 23,382 people were considered as refugees in Chile, 1,382 in Colombia, 38,570 in Spain and 628 in Portugal (UNHCR Refugees Data Finder, 2023).

- *Integration/reintegration.* Spain briefly mentions the importance of integration, while Chile and Colombia do not. Among the strategic concepts, Ecuador, Peru and Portugal do not only analyse in detail integration but also reintegration and consider the integration of returnees to be essential. Reintegration is driven by significant emigration from these three countries, the main objective of which is to encourage young people to return through various programmes.

Ecuador, Peru and Portugal have similar strategic concepts, but in the case of Peru there is greater emphasis on the reintegration of nationals than on the integration of migrants. In Ecuador, knowledge transfer and cultural diversification are more prominent, and the recognition of higher education qualifications acquired abroad is mentioned as a difficulty for integration and reintegration.

The integration of immigrants in Portugal is not a recent phenomenon, for which NGOs, the Church and specialised government agencies were responsible. Since 2007, the High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (HCICD) has been overseeing this process (Kiss and Soltész, 2013: 61).

The Portuguese strategy specifically addresses the need for the differentiated integration of highly skilled migrants, as well as those with lower levels of education. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of language training and broad educational accessibility, which will make integration more effective. Within the process of integration into the labour market, it is crucial that highly skilled migrants are employed in their professions and not in low-skilled jobs, as this does not benefit the country. In this context, Portugal's local and regional needs are also considered.

The integration of migrants is also presented in the Portuguese document as a way of harnessing talent and human capital, which can contribute to the economic development of the country. The strategic concept highlights the need for the political participation of immigrants, promoting family reunification and facilitating the acquisition of citizenship, all of which also strengthen integration processes.

- *Discrimination.* Discrimination is addressed in all three migration strategies and in Spain's strategic concept. The papers focus mainly on the importance of public policies in this area. In addition to discrimination, the Spanish strategy also highlights the issue of xenophobia: "It is essential to improve coordination between the three levels of the General State Administration and to establish public policies aimed at eradicating any form of discrimination, racism or xenophobia" (Spain, 2021: 30).

With regard to discrimination, the fundamental aspects are similar in the above-mentioned strategic concepts. The Ecuadorian document also speaks out against discrimination against Ecuadorians living abroad. It also refers to irregular migration, which can lead to forced labour and modern slavery.

- *Direction of migration (immigration, emigration, transit and return)*. An important question is how different countries deal with migration, as migration itself is a multi-directional process. South-South migration destination countries are both transit and sending countries. The strategy documents of Ecuador, Peru and Portugal reflect multi-directional migration flows, and all three countries analyse the four directions in detail.

In the case of Portugal, the specific objective is to encourage and facilitate skilled migration, which can contribute to addressing the problems of an ageing population, the sustainability of the pension system, as well as economic development.

The Peruvian strategy is the one that most emphasises emigration and its difficulties. Portugal and Ecuador analyse return migration and its facilitation in detail. As an example, the Portuguese strategy presents the diaspora as a new source of migrants, complementing the document with a detailed plan to promote the return of Portuguese individuals living abroad.

The Ecuadorian strategic concept summarises the initiatives in place since 2007 to encourage the return of Ecuadorians who have been abroad for at least two years. These include:

- Tax and customs benefits.
- Administrative aid for return, which also extends to family members.
- Preferential loans for the purchase of real estate and to help start businesses.

The Peruvian strategy, however, draws attention to the importance of reforming the current regulatory system regarding the return of migrants. The return and integration of Peruvians trained and educated abroad face numerous difficulties.

Of the countries analysed, Peru and Ecuador are transit countries, and both include information on this aspect in their strategies. In the case of Ecuador, the strategic concept highlights information from the Ministry of the Interior highlighting that: “two out of every three Venezuelan citizens who enter Ecuadorian territory, mostly by land, continue their journey to southern countries” (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana, 2018: 22).

This example shows that temporary migration can also be a problem for transit countries. These migrants often remain “invisible”. They do not apply for residence permits, they enter the country on tourist visas or by crossing

informal or unauthorised border crossings, so their numbers can only be estimated. If they work during their stay, they increase the proportion of workers in the informal economy.

5.2 Evaluation of strategy documents — strategy-related codes

- *Overall assessment of the security environment.* In relation to the assessment of the security environment, 338 codes were assigned. Of the countries analysed, Chile's document is the most comprehensive in terms of describing the security environment: it also conducts analyses at the regional and international level, as well as the emergence of new threats related to cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. The Spanish strategy also contains a comprehensive analysis and, of course, highlights the European Union and its security environment. Colombia provides a highly detailed description of armed conflicts, but because of this, the assessment of the security environment is more limited to regional problems. The Portuguese document also addresses the assessment of the local, regional and international environment in relation to migration. As in the Spanish concept, the European Union is also mentioned in detail in the Portuguese strategy paper. The Ecuadorian and Peruvian strategies only briefly address the analysis of the security environment.
- *International cooperation.* The description of international cooperation is reasonably detailed for each country. In relation to cooperation, neighbouring countries, international organisations and, in South American countries, organisations related to regional integration are mentioned. Examples include: UNASUR, MERCOSUR, as well as defence cooperation, which is also present in Chile and Colombia. In the two European countries, mostly the role of the European Union in descriptions of cooperation is emphasised. It is often over-generalised, as in the case of Chile.

International cooperation on migration, both in Portugal and in Spain, focuses mainly on joint cooperation with countries of origin. Ecuador details the rights of migrants and the need for international cooperation, also highlighting the rights of Ecuadorians living abroad. It is worth mentioning that the Spanish strategy already addresses the problem of climate refugees, stressing the importance of environmental protection and international cooperation, as lack of access to basic resources (such as drinking water) can lead to hunger and forced migration.

- *Identification of objectives/resources/methods of implementation.* From a strategy development point of view, the three themes are interconnected, therefore it is useful to analyse the related dimensions together. The identification of objectives is present in all analysed countries. Chile and Colombia define the objectives in great detail, unlike Peru and Ecuador. In the case of Southern European countries and South America, there is a difference in the definition of objectives. In the analysed South American countries, the identification of objectives is

often too general and less specific. The same applies to resource identification, which is completely absent in Ecuador.

Methods of implementation, with the exception of the Portuguese strategy, contain few specific details in all countries. Often they merely refer to legislation (Chile) or mention general implementation methods that are likely to be defined in the future (Ecuador). Ecuador, for example, sets out a number of objectives in its strategic document, broken down by institutions, but lacks a specific implementation and resource identification method.

Portugal's is the only strategy where there is consistency between detailed objectives, methods of implementation and identification of resources. It summarises the main actions in tabular form, grouped around five main themes, including the name of the organisation responsible for implementing the action, the indicators and the duration of the action. The main themes are the integration of migrants, coordination of migration processes, policies that strengthen legal migration, etc.

6. Significant changes

Since 2015, the Venezuelan migration crisis and its impact have brought significant changes in the region. Ecuador has implemented a practice that hinders migration flows in the country. The modification of Ecuador's migration law even permits deportation. Changes were also made to the residence permit issued by UNASUR, which cannot be applied for or renewed since 2021, making it difficult for Venezuelans to immigrate and stay (Ecuador, 2021). The aforementioned modifications have resulted in a practice contrary to the concept of free mobility and "universal citizenship" enshrined in the Ecuadorian constitution (2008) (Velasco, 2020). As a result, there has been an increase in irregular stay and informal work among migrants, as well as xenophobia and anti-migration protests (Célleri, 2023).

In February 2021, Colombia decided to create a new migration strategy to address the Venezuelan crisis. At the same time, in August that year, it passed a law to facilitate the creation of a comprehensive migration policy. The new strategy will focus on human rights and the cultural and social integration of migrants (Colombia, 2021). In May 2023, the Colombian Ministry of Defence (2023) published its new strategy: *Security, Defence and Citizen Coexistence Policy 2022-2026*. The text makes little mention of migration or the problems of Venezuelans.

Chile, in comparison to other South American countries, has chosen to harden its stance. The Senate approved the new migration law in April 2021, which entered into force in February 2022 (Chile, 2021). At the end of 2023, Chile published its new national migration policy, which was criticised by the opposition due to insufficient migration control (Aranda, 2024; Chile, 2023).

El Tren de Aragua, a Venezuelan mega-criminal gang, has expanded in South America, mainly in Colombia, Peru and Chile, and engages in extortion, kidnapping and human smuggling, taking advantage of the vulnerability of migrants. This situation aggravates the humanitarian crisis faced by Venezuelan migrants (Ávila, 2022).

Spain's new strategic concept, "Spain 2050", was published in May 2021. The document includes the promotion of legal and skilled migration (191,000 people per year) in order to address the problems of an ageing society and the collapse of the pension system (La Moncloa, 2021: 221). Portugal's and Spain's migration policy may be significantly influenced by the European Commission's September 2020 proposal for a new migration and asylum pact, on which, after lengthy negotiations, an agreement was reached between the European Parliament and the Council in December 2023. An important element of the pact is solidarity between Member States, although it does not include mandatory quotas. Solidarity allows for technical assistance, sponsorship of returns or financial support (European Commission, 2023).

The number of unauthorised border crossings increased significantly in parallel to the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in South American countries due to the migration crisis from Venezuela. Travel restrictions and the closure of immigration offices during the pandemic resulted in a significant increase in irregular migrants, leading to the implementation of regularisation programmes in the analysed countries (Paez and Arrieta, 2024; Thomazy, 2022). In turn, the Spanish Parliament is discussing a possible extraordinary regularisation of migrants (Padinger, 2024). Arrivals of irregular migrants to Spain increased significantly in 2024, mainly to the Canary Islands from African countries. Although irregular immigration is one of the most important challenges the Spanish Government faces, the Spanish Parliament has not yet reached an agreement on the issue. According to the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, Spain requires 300,000 migrant workers per year (Mosquera, 2024).

The number of Venezuelan migrants may increase in 2024 and in the coming years, as following the presidential elections of the 28th of July 2024, the National Electoral Council declared Nicolás Maduro as President (Arias Montenegro, 2024; Campos, Prieto and López, 2024). A new wave of migration would affect several countries, not only in South America, but also in Europe, such as Spain.

7 Discussion

The three migration strategies (Ecuador, Peru and Portugal) have many similarities. The analysis clearly shows that as the oldest, the Portuguese document may have served as a model for both the Peruvian and Ecuadorian strategies. The Chilean and Colombian strategy documents are very similar, even in the code matrix table.

The three migration strategies include multidirectional migration flows (immigration, emigration, transit and return). Irregular migration is addressed in all three documents. Legal migration appears both in Peru and in the Portuguese

document. Although transit migration is the subject of analysis in Ecuador and Peru, neither offer solutions for the presence of migrants in transit, despite it being a real problem in the countries affected by Venezuelan migration.

When developing a strategy, it is important to underline that it should not only focus on irregular migration, as in the case of the Colombian or Chilean documents, but should analyse the entire migration flow. Of particular note is the Portuguese strategy, which describes economic migration and the promotion of return in detail. The same may be said of the Ecuadorian strategy, which promotes return programmes (credits, tax and customs exemptions) for those who decide to return to the country. An important innovation in the Portuguese and Ecuadorian strategies is the detailed analysis of migrant integration. Portugal sees integration as a comprehensive long-term process and extends its integration programmes also to returnees.

The Colombian and Chilean strategies are more general and do not address migration in detail in the documents. They focus mainly on irregular migration and related security challenges (organised crime, human trafficking). Although these strategies were drafted during the Venezuelan migration crisis, migration is not presented as a prominent security challenge in either strategy.

Conversely, the Spanish strategic concept provides much more detailed information on migration, even though it is not a migration-specific strategy. It also links migration to a security challenge.

The strategies of Peru and Ecuador, in comparison to those of the countries analysed above, are highly people-centred (human security, migrants' rights, migrants' security, etc.). In the Ecuadorian and Peruvian documents, as in the Chilean document, migration is not presented as a security challenge, although human security also appears in the Chilean document.

International cooperation is present in all strategies. In the case of South American countries, the lack of cooperation in defence and security, and the disintegration of regional organisations (UNASUR, PROSUR, etc.) pose obstacles to this cooperation, and only a few recent initiatives are considered viable (Nolte, 2022; Frenkel and Dasso Martorell, 2021).

8 Conclusion

The study analysed the strategic concepts of four South American countries (Chile, Ecuador, Colombia and Peru) and, as benchmarks, two Southern European countries (Portugal and Spain), using qualitative content analysis tools. Answers to the following questions were sought: 1. Do the strategies of the analysed countries generally meet the basic requirements for strategy formulation? 2. Which countries implement strategies that may be considered appropriate? 3. Are there differences between the migration strategies of European and South American countries? Additionally, the study sought to analyse and test the following hypothesis: South American countries have less

developed strategies than those of European nations, and the Venezuelan migration crisis needs to be addressed from a security perspective. The analysis clearly demonstrates that all strategies meet the basic formulation requirements; however, implementation and resource identification methods are incomplete in most documents. The second research question, which sought to determine which national strategy may be considered the most appropriate, can only be partially answered. The Portuguese strategy is the one that best meets the basic requirements, as the identification of objectives, resources and methods of implementation are well defined.

With regard to the third research question, there is a clear difference between South American and Southern European strategy documents in terms of migration. South American documents deal with migration from a more social and humanitarian perspective. Another difference is that the identification of objectives is too general in South American countries and resource identification is either completely absent (as in the case of Ecuador) or very perfunctory. Finally, the research hypothesis is confirmed: the strategic concepts of the South American countries are less developed than those of the two European nations. Moreover, they are insufficient to address the crisis. In the case of Chile, despite significant migratory pressure, the strategy does not include a detailed analysis of migration and related security challenges. The same may be stated of documents from Ecuador and Peru, or even Colombia.

However, based on the methodology proposed in this research, it is possible to identify the most appropriate strategy, considering the dimensions established in the analysis (section 3). Figure 4 presents the results of the qualitative content analysis (Maxqda Analytics Pro, Code Matrix Viewer), using two coding systems: a) migration-related and b) strategy formulation. Furthermore, this methodology may be applied in the future to analyse and compare strategic texts in different contexts. The Portuguese document is the most complete and meets all fundamental requirements, as illustrated in the code matrix. Although basic requirements can be established during the strategy formulation, adaptation to said requirements and the approach adopted by the contents of the strategy will always depend on the country in question. Spain conducts an in-depth discussion of terrorism, while Portugal omits this issue, as it has not had to deal with terrorist attacks.

Based on the analysis of the six studied documents, good practices and shortcomings as key criteria for the formulation of migration strategies may be identified:

- A complex analysis of migration flows affecting the country⁵.
- Identification of migration-related security challenges and threats.
- Identification of short- and long-term objectives (supplemented by integration programmes).

⁵ The strategy must define a complex concept of migration, including immigration, emigration, transit and return migration, as well as internal migration.

- Determination of resources.
- Methods of application.
- Identification of the bodies in charge of implementation and monitoring.

However, the contents of the strategy will always be influenced by the specific country and the migration flows that affect it, as well as the region, including political and social objectives and needs.

In the case of 21st century migration flows in South America, migrants mostly share a similar language and culture. However, migration management and administration, human rights protection and social and economic integration pose challenges for South American countries. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that South America has successfully integrated large groups of Arab (Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian), Japanese and Chinese immigrants over the last century (Vilchez, 2016; Wail, 2019). Integration processes have turned South America into a “culture melting pot”.

Among the countries analysed in the study, mainly those affected by the Venezuelan migration crisis, it is essential to formulate appropriate migration strategies to address, in both the short and long term, the challenges posed by the massive influx of migrants. Portugal provides an example of integration programmes that have welcomed and integrated large numbers of immigrants from its former colonies.

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Article received: September 14, 2024

Article accepted: January 14, 2025
