A large crowd of displaced Venezuelans is gathered at a border crossing in Colombia. The scene is busy with people, some carrying bags and children, and vehicles like taxis and trucks. A sign above the road reads "Gracias por visitar la República de COLOMBIA". Another sign indicates "Fin Concesion Vial Unión Del Sur". The background shows a busy street with cars and a building with a sign that says "ECUADOR".

# Systemic discrimination and exclusion: COVID-19 vaccination and the health rights of displaced Venezuelans in Latin America

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Image from Reuters, 2018.

# Background

- Venezuelan mass migration is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest international displacement in contemporary history
- Vaccine nationalism and apartheid have widened inequities and prolonged the pandemic
- Marginalized communities face additional barriers to access COVID-19 vaccines



# Human Rights & COVID-19 Vaccine Access

“States are under the obligation to respect the right to health by...refraining from denying or limiting equal access for all persons, including prisoners or detainees, minorities, asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, to preventive, curative and palliative health services” (CESR, 2000)

States must, “as a matter of priority and to the maximum of their available resources, guarantee all persons access to vaccines against COVID-19, without any discrimination”



(PBS, 2021)



(Refugees International, 2021)

# Background

- Limited research assessing the sociopolitical climates shaping COVID-19 vaccine access for displaced Venezuelans
- There is an urgent need to understand how rising numbers of displaced Venezuelans will be addressed in country-level COVID-19 vaccination policies

# Methods

- Scoping review conducted between April and June 2021
- Original scoping review results published in *Migration and Health* (Perez-Brumer et al., 2022)
- Assessed country-level vaccination plans and statements from government officials alongside international human rights obligations to explore the human rights dimensions of COVID-19 vaccine access for Venezuelan migrants.
- Documents published in English, Spanish, or Portuguese between January 2020 and June 2021 included.

# Results



1) Lack of prioritization of migrants in vaccine distribution



2) Onerous documentation requirements to be eligible for COVID-19 vaccination



3) Pervasive anti-migrant discrimination limited health care access

# Lack of prioritization of migrants in vaccine distribution

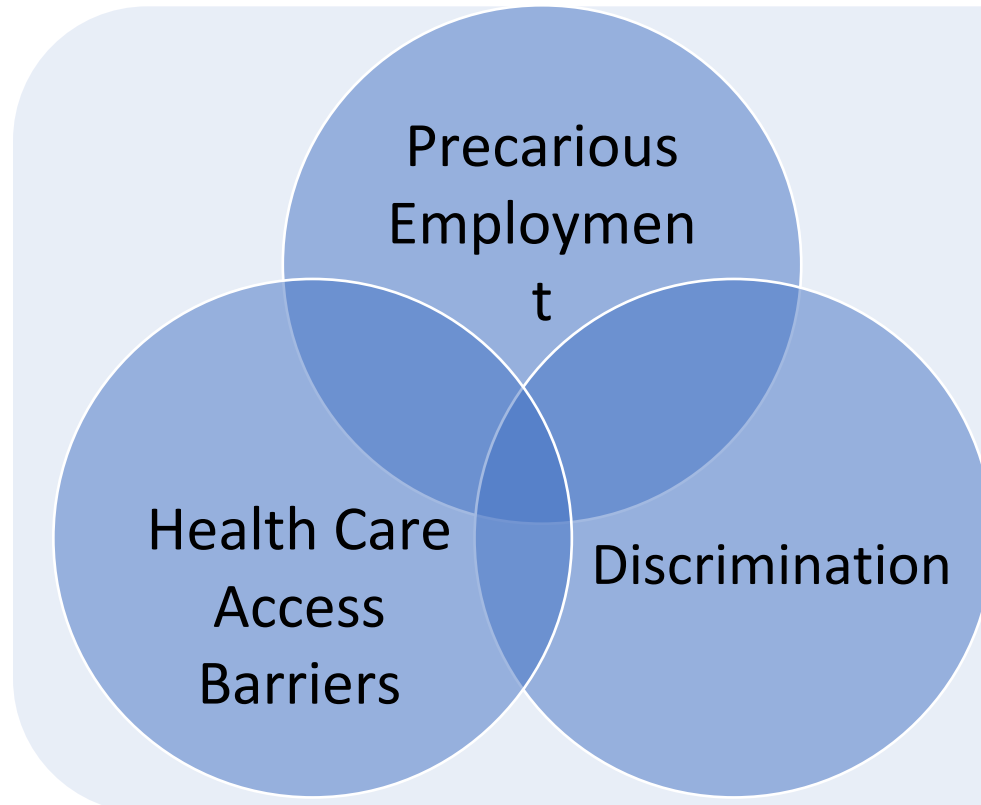
- Government officials in Colombia and Chile indicated migrants with irregular status would not be vaccinated against COVID-19

“Those who do not, at this time, have the status of being Colombian citizens and have not regularized their immigration status, of course they do not [have the right to be vaccinated]”  
-Iván Duque, President of Colombia

“Foreigners with a tourist visa and those with an irregular migration status will not have the right to be vaccinated in Chile”  
-Andrés Allamand, Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs

# Lack of prioritization of migrants in vaccine distribution

- Only Argentina and Ecuador identified migrants as priority groups
- Countries defined priority groups according to epidemiological risk, with limited attention to social vulnerabilities



Intersectional structural-level factors  
constraining access to social protections  
for made-vulnerable communities



# Onerous documentation requirements to be eligible for COVID-19 vaccination

- Documentation requirements are a recurrent vaccination barrier, particularly for migrants with irregular status
- As of March 2021, over 65 percent of Venezuelans in Colombia reported a lack of documentation as a health care access barrier
- To access vaccines in Colombia, Chile, and Brazil, displaced Venezuelans needed a passport, proof of legal status, or proof of enrolment in health care systems.
  - In Colombia migrants with irregular status can apply for Temporary Protection Status, but these applications are **costly and can take months to process**

# Pervasive anti-migrant discrimination limited health care access

“In situations of fear and uncertainty, such as the current pandemic, migrants can be particularly vulnerable to attitudes and behaviors that stigmatize and scapegoat them” – OHCHR, 2021

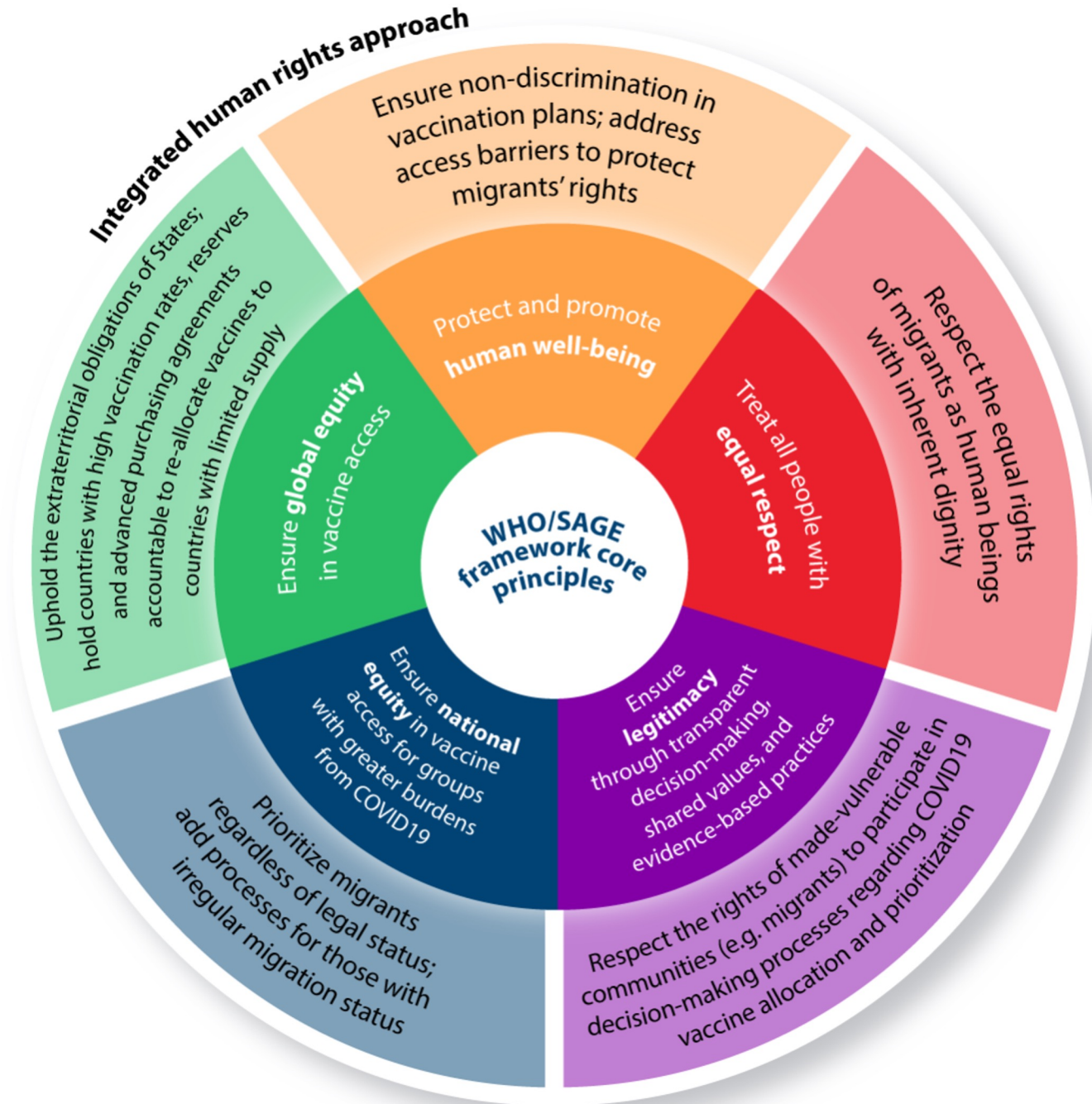
A senior government official in Venezuela referred to migrants entering the country illegally as “biological weapons

Colombian President Duque excluded Venezuelans from vaccination campaigns for fear that it would lead to a “stampede” of migrants at the border

# Discussion

- Human rights reinforce obligations of States to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines **regardless of migration status.**
- Systemic discrimination and exclusion of migrants from COVID-19 vaccination is a human rights issue
- Vaccination plans **lack clarity** regarding how and when migrants can access vaccines & **fail to address underlying health care access barriers**, particularly for migrants with irregular status
- If 'vulnerability' is to guide prioritization in vaccine distribution, this needs to **include social vulnerability in addition to medical vulnerability**

Fig 1. Integrating human rights into a modified WHO/SAGE framework to address the unmet COVID-19 needs of migrants



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