

Social perceptions of internal and external migration in Latacungueñas families

Percepciones sociales de la migración interna y externa en las familias Latacungueñas

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Resumen

La migración interna y externa es un fenómeno social que influye en la dinámica familiar, económica y comunitaria de muchas familias ecuatorianas. El objetivo de la investigación fue analizar las percepciones sociales de la migración interna y externa en familias latacungueñas. Se desarrolló un estudio con un enfoque cuantitativo, descriptivo, no experimental, transversal y de diseño de campo. La población y la muestra estaban formadas por 200 familias residentes en el cantón de Latacunga, seleccionadas mediante un muestreo no probabilístico de conveniencia. La información se recogió mediante una encuesta aplicada a un representante de cada hogar mediante un cuestionario estructurado con una escala tipo Likert. Los resultados mostraron que el 53,5% de las familias tenía un alto nivel de percepción social de la migración, con una media global de 2,39 de 3 puntos posibles. La dimensión más valorada fue la migración externa ($M = 2,49$), seguida de las percepciones sociales ($M = 2,40$) y la migración interna ($M = 2,29$). Los participantes asociaron la migración con oportunidades de empleo, mejora económica y acceso a mejores condiciones de vida. Sin embargo, también identificaron efectos relacionados con la separación familiar, la distancia afectiva y la reorganización de los roles dentro del hogar. Se concluye que las familias latacungueñas mantienen una percepción predominantemente favorable hacia la migración, reconociendo tanto sus beneficios económicos como los desafíos sociales y emocionales que este fenómeno genera en la estructura familiar.

Palabras Clave: Percepciones sociales; migración interna; migración externa; familias.

Abstract

Internal and external migration is a social phenomenon that influences the family, economic and community dynamics of many Ecuadorian families. The objective of the research was to analyze the social perceptions of internal and external migration in Latacungueño families. A study was developed with a quantitative approach, descriptive, non-experimental, cross-sectional and field design. The population and sample were made up of 200 families residing in the Latacunga canton, selected through a non-probabilistic convenience sampling. The information was collected through a survey applied to a representative of each household using a structured questionnaire with a Likert-type scale. The results showed that 53.5% of the families had a high level of social perception of migration, with an overall mean of 2.39 out of 3 possible points. The most highly valued dimension was external migration ($M = 2.49$), followed by social perceptions ($M = 2.40$) and internal migration ($M = 2.29$). Participants associated migration with employment opportunities, economic improvement and access to better living conditions. However, they also identified effects related to family separation, affective distance and the reorganization of roles within the home. It is concluded that Latacungueño families maintain a predominantly favorable perception towards migration, recognizing both its economic benefits and the social and emotional challenges that this phenomenon generates in the family structure.

Keywords: social perceptions, internal migration, external migration, families.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is one of the most significant social phenomena of the twenty-first century due to its demographic, economic, cultural and family implications. Currently, the number of people residing outside their country of birth reaches approximately 304 million international migrants, representing 3.7% of the world's population, evidencing a growing trend of human mobility driven by economic, political, social and environmental factors (Naciones Unidas, 2024). This reality has transformed the structure of millions of households around the world, generating new family dynamics,

processes of social adaptation and diverse perceptions regarding the migratory phenomenon. Likewise, the World Health Organization (2025) It points out that more than one billion people are currently displaced or mobile, making migration a priority topic for contemporary social research. From a social perspective, migration does not only imply a geographical change, but also a transformation of family, community and cultural relations. Social perceptions built around migration according to Cabieses et al. (2024), influence the acceptance,

integration or rejection of those who migrate, as well as the assessment of the benefits and consequences associated with this process. Recent research has shown that social narratives about migrants can generate stigmatization, discrimination or, on the contrary, attitudes of solidarity and inclusion, directly affecting social cohesion and community well-being. Consequently, understanding social perceptions about migration allows us to analyze how communities interpret and respond to changes brought about by human mobility. In Latin America, migration has experienced considerable growth in recent years due to economic crises, insecurity, political conflicts, and structural inequalities. The region has simultaneously become a territory of origin, transit and migratory destination, generating important transformations in family and productive systems.

This scenario has increased the economic dependence of many households on remittances sent by migrant family members, strengthening the relationship between migration and economic well-being. However, it has also caused processes of family fragmentation, changes in parental roles, and challenges in the construction of affective bonds between those who migrate and those who remain in their communities of origin, aspects that directly influence social perceptions of this phenomenon.

In Ecuador, migration continues to be a phenomenon of great social relevance. According to the official records of the

National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC) (2024), 6,153,591 international migratory movements were registered, with a negative migratory balance of 137,265 people, which reflects that departures exceeded entries into the country (INEC, 2024). Similarly, according to, González (2025), more than 94,000 Ecuadorians left the country and did not return during 2024, consolidating a new migratory wave associated mainly with economic and security factors. These figures show that migration continues to be a strategy used by many Ecuadorian households to improve their living conditions, although it also generates social and emotional effects that have an impact on the families that remain in the national territory. At the same time, the importance of migration for the Ecuadorian economy can be seen in the sustained growth of remittances. During the first quarter of 2024, Ecuador received USD 1,393 million in remittances, representing an increase of 16.9% compared to the same period of the previous year (Banco Central del Ecuador, 2024). Although these resources contribute to the improvement of the economic conditions of many families, various studies warn that the financial benefits do not eliminate the effects derived from family separation, parental absence or the reconfiguration of affective relationships. For this reason, migratory experiences are often interpreted differently by household members, generating positive perceptions associated with economic progress and

negative perceptions related to family distancing and the loss of daily ties.

In the local context, Latacunga presents characteristics that justify the study of social perceptions of internal and external migration. The city is an important economic, commercial and administrative center of the province of Cotopaxi, where rural-urban mobility processes, national and international migration converge.

Many families maintain direct ties with people who have migrated to other cities in the country or to international destinations, especially the United States and Spain. However, there is little recent scientific evidence that allows us to understand how Latacungueño families perceive these migratory processes, which they consider their main benefits and effects, and how these perceptions influence their family and community relationships. Consequently, it is pertinent to develop research that provides knowledge about the social representations that families construct around migration and its effects on daily life. Internal and external migration is an increasingly present reality in Ecuadorian households and, particularly, in families in the Andean region.

Although this phenomenon is usually associated with better job opportunities, increased income and access to new living conditions, it also implies profound transformations in the family structure, in daily coexistence and in affective relationships. The persistence of negative migratory balances in Ecuador, the increase in emigration and the growing dependence

on remittances show that thousands of families continue to experience family separation processes linked to human mobility (INEC, 2024; Banco Central del Ecuador, 2024). Despite the social importance of the phenomenon, the Ecuadorian scientific literature has paid more attention to the economic and demographic aspects of migration than to the social perceptions constructed by the families who live these experiences.

This situation generates a knowledge gap regarding how families interpret migration, what their opinions are about the changes it produces in family and community dynamics, and what meaning they attribute to the departure or arrival of household members. In the specific case of Latacunga, the limited evidence available makes it difficult to understand how migratory experiences influence the values, expectations, and social representations of families, which justifies the need to develop research aimed at analyzing these perceptions from a local perspective.

In view of the above, the following research question is posed: What are the social perceptions of internal and external migration in Latacungueño families and how do they influence the interpretation of family, social and economic changes associated with human mobility?

This research has social relevance because it will allow us to understand how Latacungueño families perceive internal and external migration, identifying the values, expectations, benefits and concerns that are generated around this

phenomenon. The results will contribute to making visible the family experiences linked to human mobility and will provide useful evidence for public institutions, social organizations and educational entities interested in strengthening support strategies for families facing migratory processes.

From the academic field, the study will contribute to expanding scientific knowledge about the social perceptions of migration in Ecuadorian local contexts, a topic that still presents limited recent research in the province of Cotopaxi. Likewise, the findings can serve as a basis for future research related to migration, family dynamics, social cohesion and community development, providing contextualized information that facilitates the formulation of policies and programs aimed at promoting the well-being of families linked to migratory processes.

Social perceptions. – Social perceptions are cognitive and cultural processes through which people interpret, value and give meaning to the phenomena that occur in their social environment. These perceptions are constructed from personal experiences, social interactions, shared beliefs, information disseminated by the media, and specific cultural contexts. In the field of migration, social perceptions influence the way in which communities interpret the arrival, departure or stay of migrants, conditioning attitudes of acceptance, rejection, solidarity or discrimination. Jaimes-Márquez et al. (2023) They argue that social perceptions of migration are

shaped by collective representations that allow individuals to interpret the social, economic, and cultural consequences of migratory movements. Similarly, Goubin y Ruelens (2024) show that social attitudes towards migration are determined by economic, cultural and political factors that influence the construction of favourable or unfavourable opinions towards migrants. In this research, social perceptions constitute the central category of analysis, since they will allow us to understand how Latacungueño families interpret internal and external migration, identifying the meanings, valuations and expectations that they build around this phenomenon.

Internal migration. – Internal migration refers to the movement of people within the territorial boundaries of the same country, involving a permanent or temporary change of residence between regions, provinces, cantons or cities. This type of mobility is usually motivated by the search for better work, educational, economic opportunities or access to basic services. According to Asprilla-Córdoba y Montenegro-Martínez (2022), Internal migration is a mechanism through which people seek to improve their living conditions and well-being, although it can also generate challenges related to social integration and access to public services. On the other hand, Fernández-Sastre y Yanza (2026) They highlight that internal migration is closely related to territorial disparities, because people tend to move to areas that offer greater opportunities for economic development and quality of life. Internal migration is

relevant for this research because many Latacungueña families experience mobility processes to other cities in Ecuador, generating changes in family, economic and community dynamics that influence social perceptions of human mobility.

External migration. – External or international migration refers to the movement of people who cross the borders of their country of origin to settle temporarily or permanently in another State. This phenomenon responds to multiple factors, including job opportunities, family reunification, education, political conflicts, insecurity and economic inequalities. Tsegay (2023) It defines international migration as the movement of individuals between countries with the purpose of improving their living

METHODOLOGY

The research will be developed under a quantitative approach, because it will allow the collection of objective information on the social perceptions of Latacungueño families regarding internal and external migration through the application of structured instruments and the statistical analysis of the data obtained. According to, Hernández-Sampieri y Mendoza (2023), The quantitative approach is characterized by the measurement of variables, the systematic collection of data, and the use of statistical procedures to describe and explain social phenomena. The study will be descriptive, since it seeks to identify and characterize the social perceptions that

conditions, accessing new opportunities or responding to situations of social and economic vulnerability. Likewise, Armijos-Orellana et al. (2022) They point out that contemporary international migrations are multidimensional processes driven by economic, social, political and family factors that affect both the societies of origin and those of destination.

External migration is a frequent reality in many families in Latacunga, especially due to the migratory processes to the United States and Spain. Its analysis will allow us to understand how families value the economic benefits derived from international migration and, simultaneously, how they perceive the emotional and social consequences associated with family separation.

Latacungueño families have about internal and external migration, describing their opinions, evaluations and experiences without manipulating the study variables. This type of research allows us to know the characteristics and behaviors of a population at a given time. The research will have a field character, because the information will be obtained directly from the participating families through the application of data collection instruments in the context where the phenomenon studied occurs. This will allow for the collection of real and current information on social perceptions related to migration. A non-experimental and cross-sectional design

will be used. It will be non-experimental because the variables will not be manipulated by the researcher, limiting himself to observing and analyzing the existing perceptions in the population under study. Likewise, it will be transversal because the information will be collected in a single time moment, allowing the current situation of Latacungueño families with respect to internal and external migration to be described. The main technique for collecting information will be the survey, since it allows data to be obtained from a significant number of participants in a standardized and efficient manner. This technique will facilitate the collection of opinions, experiences and assessments related to migration and its effects on families. A structured questionnaire will be used as an instrument, elaborated from the dimensions of social perceptions, internal migration and external migration. The questions will be formulated using a Likert-type scale with five levels of response (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree), allowing the quantification of the perceptions of the participants and

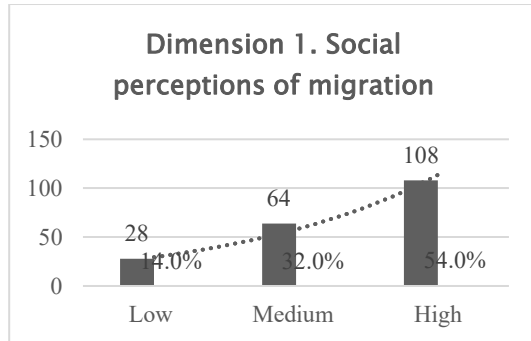
RESULTS

The results show that 54.0% of the families surveyed have a high level of social perception regarding migration, while 32.0% are at a medium level and only 14.0% show a low level. These findings indicate that most Latacungueño families have a broad understanding of migration

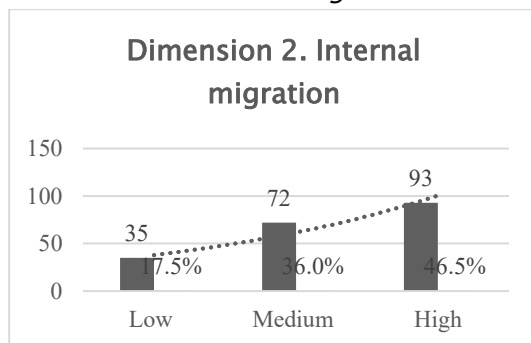
descriptive statistical analyses. The data obtained will be tabulated and processed using statistical software such as SPSS or Jamovi. Descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, will be used in order to identify the main trends and characteristics of social perceptions about internal and external migration in Latacunga families.

The study sample will be made up of 200 families residing in the Latacunga canton, province of Cotopaxi, considered as units of analysis because they allow us to know the social perceptions about internal and external migration from the family context. For the collection of information, an adult representative for each family will be taken as an informant, who will answer the questionnaire based on the experiences, opinions and perceptions of the household regarding the migratory phenomenon. Non-probabilistic sampling is applied for convenience, since a random statistical calculation of the sample will not be carried out, but families that are available, open and willing to participate in the study will be selected.

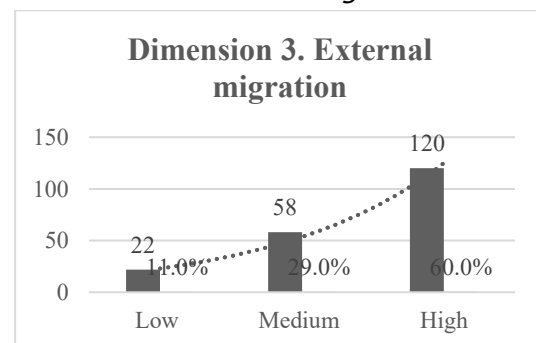
processes and recognize both their benefits and challenges. It is also observed that migration is part of the social reality of many households, influencing their opinions and assessments of this phenomenon.

Figure 1*Dimension 1. Social perceptions of migration**Note.* Own elaboration.

In relation to internal migration, 46.5% of families report a high perception of mobility processes within the national territory, while 36.0% have a medium perception and 17.5% a low perception. These results suggest that a significant part of the families have directly or indirectly experienced displacement to other cities in Ecuador for work, educational, or economic reasons. Internal mobility is mainly perceived as an opportunity to improve living conditions, although challenges related to adaptation and family separation are also recognized.

Figure 2*Dimension 2. Internal migration**Note.* Own elaboration.

Regarding external migration, 60.0% of the families manifest a high perception, constituting the dimension with the highest positive assessment within the study. On the other hand, 29.0% have a medium perception and 11.0% a low perception. These results reflect that international migration maintains a strong presence in the reality of Latacungueño families, who associate this phenomenon with better economic opportunities, access to employment and generation of remittances. However, they also recognize the emotional consequences derived from family separation and the distance between its members.

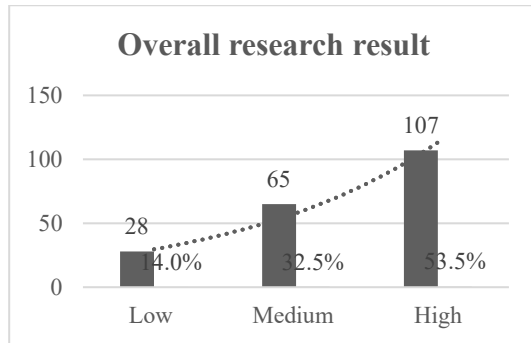
Figure 3*Dimension 3. External migration**Note.* Own elaboration.

Overall, 53.5% of the families surveyed have a high level of social perception of internal and external migration, followed by 32.5% with a medium level and 14.0% with a low level. These results show that migration is a widely recognized phenomenon within the social and family dynamics of Latacunga. Most participants believe that migration generates economic benefits and development opportunities; however, they also identify impacts related to family

reorganization, affective distance and changes in daily coexistence.

Figure 4

Overall research result



Note. Own elaboration.

The Social perceptions dimension reached an average of 2.40 out of 3 possible points, showing that families have a favourable assessment of the migratory phenomenon. The standard deviation of 0.72 indicates a moderate dispersion of responses, reflecting some diversity of opinions among participants.

In the Internal Migration dimension, an average of 2.29 was obtained, being the lowest of the three dimensions analyzed. However, this value continues to be at the high level, which shows that families

DISCUSSION

The results showed that 53.5% of Latacungueño families have a high level of social perception of migration, with an overall average of 2.39 out of 3 possible points. This finding demonstrates that migration is a reality widely recognized and understood by the households surveyed. These results coincide with what was

recognize the importance of displacement within the national territory as a strategy to improve living conditions.

The External Migration dimension presented the highest mean ($M = 2.49$), indicating that Latacungueño families perceive international migration processes more favorably. This result could be related to the economic benefits derived from remittances and the job opportunities offered by other countries. Overall, the study reached an overall mean of 2.39 and a standard deviation of 0.72, which shows a predominantly positive perception of internal and external migration in the families surveyed.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics by dimension

Dimension	Media	High	Nivel predominante
Percepciones sociales	2,40	0,72	High
Migración interna	2,29	0,75	High
Migración externa	2,49	0,69	High
Promedio general	2,39	0,72	High

Note. Own elaboration.

reported by Jaimes-Márquez et al. (2023), who found that social perceptions of migration are built from direct family and community experiences, generating social representations that influence the valuation of the migratory phenomenon. Likewise, Cabieses et al. (2024) concluded that Latin American communities develop

increasingly complex perceptions about migration, simultaneously recognizing its economic contributions and the social challenges associated with it.

External migration had the highest score of all dimensions ($M = 2.49$), with 60% of participants located in the high level. This result shows that families associate international migration with opportunities for economic improvement and family well-being. This finding coincides with the data reported by the International Organization for Migration (2024), which highlights the role of remittances as one of the main benefits perceived by families of origin. Similarly, Armijos–Orellana et al. (2022) point out that contemporary international migrations are often interpreted as mechanisms to improve the quality of life and reduce the economic limitations of households.

However, although the overall assessments were positive, the results also suggest the existence of perceptions related to the social and emotional costs derived from migration. Several recent studies have identified that family separation, affective distance and the modification of roles within the home are some of the main consequences associated with human mobility. In this sense, Pillacela–Chin (2022) found that the migration of

household members can generate significant effects on the emotional and social development of those who remain in the communities of origin. Similarly, Tsegay (2023) points out that migratory experiences produce both positive and negative transformations in family dynamics, depending on the conditions in which the migratory process occurs.

Finally, the moderate standard deviation observed in the three dimensions (between 0.69 and 0.75) indicates that, although there is a general favorable trend towards migration, differences of opinion persist among the surveyed families. This behavior is consistent with what was reported by Goubin and Ruelens (2024), who showed that perceptions of migration tend to vary according to cultural, economic, family, and contextual factors. Likewise, the United Nations report (2025) highlights that social perceptions of migration are not homogeneous, but respond to individual and collective experiences that shape the way people interpret population movements. Consequently, the results of this study confirm that migration is perceived by Latacungueña families as a multifaceted phenomenon, where economic benefits coexist with social and family challenges that influence their overall valuation.

CONCLUSIONS

The results showed that Latacungueño families have a predominantly favorable social perception of internal and external

migration, reflected in a high level of general assessment (53.5%) and an overall mean of 2.39. This shows that migration is

recognized as a relevant phenomenon within the family and social dynamics of the canton, mainly associated with development opportunities, improvement of living conditions and economic strengthening of households.

External migration was the dimension best valued by the participants, reaching an average of 2.49 and 60% of responses at a high level. This finding indicates that families perceive international migration as an alternative to access better job opportunities and generate income through remittances, constituting an important

strategy for family economic well-being and social mobility. Despite the prevailing positive assessment, families also recognize that migration generates social and emotional challenges related to family separation, affective distance, and the reorganization of roles within the home. In this sense, migration is perceived as a complex phenomenon that combines economic benefits with social effects that influence family relationships and the quality of life of those who remain in the communities of origin.

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