


## VENEZUELAN UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONALS WHO HAVE EMIGRATED AND THE LOSS OF INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL FOR THE COUNTRY

## PROFESIONALES UNIVERSITARIOS VENEZOLANOS QUE HAN EMIGRADO Y LA PÉRDIDA DEL CAPITAL INTELECTUAL PARA EL PAÍS

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### ABSTRACT

The central problem of this study is the analysis of the massive migration process of university professionals to other territories of the world, and with it, the loss of intellectual capital; as well as the impact that this generates on the economic and social development of Venezuela. The paradigms addressed were qualitative and quantitative, with a mixed methodology, under a type of documentary, field, and explanatory study, being the interview with informant experts, the analysis of documents, and the online questionnaire (in a non-probabilistic way, through the snowball effect), the data collection techniques useful for the study. Among the most relevant conclusions, it stands out that uncertainty in its three dimensions (political, economic, and social) has been the fundamental cause that motivates Venezuelan professionals to emigrate; that, if the political, economic, and social circumstances of Venezuela change, 70.2% of the sample consulted would be willing to return to their country. It also shows that it has academic training from higher technical to post-doctorate and is located in 30 countries on four continents. On the other hand, there is a manifest lack of interest on the part of the government in trying to agree with the productive sectors of the country and the academies, to address positions aimed at reducing the causes that could be influencing migration and being able to articulate mechanisms that make it possible, that that intellectual capital continues to form part of the economic and social development of Venezuela, even if it is outside its country.

**KEYWORDS:** Intellectual capital; Intangible Assets; Knowledge; Migration of Venezuelan university professionals; Diaspora; Public Policies.



## RESUMEN

El problema central del presente estudio, realizado durante el año 2019, es el *análisis del proceso de migración masiva de profesionales universitarios hacia otros territorios del mundo, y con ello, la pérdida de capital intelectual; así como el impacto que esto genera en el desarrollo económico y social de Venezuela*. Los paradigmas abordados fueron el cualitativo y cuantitativo, con una metodología mixta, bajo un tipo de estudio documental, de campo y explicativo, siendo la entrevista a expertos informantes, el análisis de documentos y el cuestionario online (de manera no probabilístico, a través del efecto bola de nieve), las técnicas de recolección de datos de utilidad para el estudio. Entre las conclusiones más relevantes destaca el que la incertidumbre en sus tres dimensiones (política, económica y social), ha sido la causa fundamental que motiva a los profesionales venezolanos a emigrar; que, de cambiar las circunstancias políticas, económicas y sociales de Venezuela, el 70,2% de la muestra consultada estaría dispuesta a regresar a su país. Los encuestados tienen formación académica desde técnico superior hasta postdoctorado y están ubicados en 30 países de cuatro continentes. Por otra parte, se percibe un manifiesto desinterés por parte del gobierno en procurar concertar con los sectores productivos del país y las academias, para abordar posturas encaminadas a reducir las causas que pudieran estar incidiendo en la migración y poder articular mecanismos que hagan posible, que ese capital intelectual, siga formando parte del desarrollo económico y social de Venezuela, aun estando fuera de su país.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Capital intelectual; Activo intangible; Migración de profesionales universitarios venezolanos; Diáspora; Políticas Públicas.

Translation by **Paula González** (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Venezuela)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In these times, knowledge is spoken of as if it were an exclusive categorization of today's world, starting from the so-called Knowledge Society, and later on to the so-called Information Society; when in reality, knowledge has always been present in the historical evolution of men in their transit through the so-called agricultural and industrial eras. The first one, characterized by the land and labor components as the main economic assets, with capital and knowledge in the background. In the case of the industrial era, capital and workers became the indicators of wealth, while the land factor would take a back seat and knowledge pointed to little space (Pérez-Montoro, 2008).

In the age of knowledge, specifically in the knowledge society, the most important asset in the production of the wealth of the nations of the world -even above capital and labor, which diminish their weight by half- becomes the knowledge of people and organizations, translated into learning, either tacitly or explicitly (Pérez-Montoro, 2008).

In other words, that, in the context of a globalized market economy, the differentiating transversal axis between one company and another, one organization and another,

one university and another, one country and another, is currently determined by knowledge. Because, ultimately, as Pérez-Montoro (2008) says:

(...) We are going from conceiving the company as a black box that receives a series of inputs (investment) and that systematically offers an output (a benefit), to delving into the detailed study of its internal functioning, making special emphasis on the analysis of the flow of knowledge that occurs within it and on the consequences that this presents in different levels (p. 22).

Starting, then, from the premise of Pérez-Montoro (2008) - and that this researcher shares - the most important asset in the production of the wealth of the nations of the world today is the knowledge of their people, their companies, and other government institutions, as well as their education centers, public or private (from basic to university level), this knowledge is translated into intellectual capital and is understood as the "set of assets that, although not tangible, are equally capable of producing value to the organization, they are capable of contributing to the organization reaching its objectives" (p. 76).

We can speak of three different types of intellectual capital that converge at the same time in an organization (Pérez-Montoro, 2008):

- a. Human capital centered on people: the attitude of an employee, the talent of the members of the organization, their adaptability, degree of motivation, institutional commitment, level of leadership, ability to work as a team.
- b. Structural capital, elements attributable to the organization: organizational structure, corporate culture, business philosophy, information and communication technology, structured knowledge (reports, balance sheets).
- c. Relational capital associated with the organization's relationships with its environment: client portfolio, trade associations, alliances with other organizations, social responsibility actions involving other entities (p.77).

Following the above, for the Intangible Research Center of New York University (n.d), cp. Pérez-Montoro (2008), intellectual capital is also:

That set of non-physical sources of probable future benefit for an entity, which meet the following characteristics: they have been acquired in an exchange or have been internally developed from an identifiable cost, have a finite life, have a market value independent of the organization, belong to the organization, and are controlled by it (p. 76).

Contextualizing, then, the concept of knowledge as intellectual capital and the added value that it represents for a nation -from the point of view of its economic, cultural, and social development-, it is worth highlighting the knowledge that is produced in educational centers, especially in the universities of a country, not only through the teaching-learning processes between professors and students, but also through the knowledge that is generated through the research centers (which make life in the study houses), through the management of internal operations, management of organizational culture, and communication processes.

In short, for all that implies carrying out strategic objectives to achieve the reason for being of a university, which in the end translates into training, with excellence, professionals in the different disciplines of knowledge, so that they are inserted in the productive market and become part of their own growth and the development of their country (as a final step), from the moment that their knowledge, put into practice, will contribute to the economic competitiveness of the nation to which they belong. But also, what knowledge represents for the creation of the value chain in the different industrial, commercial, and service productive sectors that make life in a country and that contribute to its economic, scientific, cultural, and social development.

Hence the relevance of this researcher when analyzing the process of the massive migration of Venezuelan university professionals to other territories of the world, and with it, the loss of intellectual capital; as well as the impact that this generates in the economic and social development of Venezuela; to contribute to the formulation of Public Policies to counteract the effect of this phenomenon for the nation.

Based on the five criteria of Berganza and Ruiz (2005) "convenience, social projection, practical implications, theoretical contribution, the methodological contribution" (p.47), this study from the point of view of convenience was relevant for the country (Venezuela ) since its main intangible asset (the intellectual capital made up of the knowledge of its people) has been lost because professionals from the different disciplines trained in local universities and other educational institutions have left the country. Hence, the results could be of interest to the Venezuelan State to formulate public policies on the matter, as well as to the academies and the private productive sector to articulate with public authorities and with part of that professional emigrated population, to generate actions that link it with the country -even when it is abroad- and, in some way, be useful to Venezuela.

The Social Projection is justified, from the moment in which the diaspora of professionals could be generating an impact on the economic and social development of Venezuela with the increase in more and more recurrent migrations, from the moment in which these professionals have been abandoning their jobs (whether in the public or private sector, or academia), failing to contribute their knowledge, expertise, and experience in the country where they were trained. Furthermore, because this migration of compatriots could be generating a social problem in the destination countries. As theoretical contributions, the researcher generated some theories that are mentioned later in the epigraph of the discussion.

It should be noted that Venezuela, after having been a recipient of immigrants from different nations of the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has become a country with recurring emigrations to different destinations on almost all continents. In fact, after the Second World War, the nation became the seat of Europeans who came looking for a land and a space to start a new life, because their homelands (Spain, France, Italy, among others) did not have much to offer them then, and many of them found a place in the construction of infrastructure works that were carried out in the 50s. In the 70s, during the Venezuela of the oil bonanza and the development of large works in the iron and steel industry, and the creation of technological and polytechnic institutes and experimental and private universities, the doors were opened to qualified professionals from abroad, especially from Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay,

forced by the repression of the dictatorships of those nations, and it is estimated that between 1974 and 1981, 43,269 people arrived from those nations who joined the Venezuelan labor market (De la Vega, 2010).

For just one example, and according to figures issued by the Colombian Migration Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019), in that country, there are more than 1,200,000 Venezuelans (<https://urlzs.com/N2zaN>).

In an interview with De la Vega (as an expert informant, 22-03-2019) and the researcher, it was learned that the migration of Venezuelans abroad was 5,800,000 people.

As the main cause of the massive migration of Venezuelan professionals to other latitudes, there is uncertainty in three dimensions (political uncertainty, economic uncertainty, and social uncertainty).

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

In formulating the problem of the phenomenon under study, 5 objectives were set, namely the general and 4 specific ones:

Analyze the process of the massive migration of university professionals to other territories of the world, and with it, the loss of intellectual capital; as well as the impact that this generates in the economic and social development of Venezuela; to contribute to the formulation of Public Policies to counteract the effect of this phenomenon for the nation.

- a. Characterize the composition of the migration phenomenon of Venezuelan university professionals, in terms of disciplines of knowledge, academic profile, and destination countries.
- b. Examine the causes that generate the decision-making of university professionals to emigrate from Venezuela.
- c. Generate knowledge about the consequences and impact that the phenomenon of the diaspora of university professionals implies for the country -in economic and social matters.
- d. Explain the consequences that would be generated for the country in terms of an organization that loses its intellectual capital.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The study carried out, during 2019, is inserted within Documentary Research, Field Research, and Explanatory Research, adapting to the classification made by Ramírez (1997), Hernández and collaborators (1991), and Hurtado de Barrera (2007), cp. Hernández Díaz (2016). In this sense, a series of documents were analyzed, the information of which is directly related to the social phenomenon under study, which is none other than the migration of Venezuelan professionals, its causes, consequences, and the impact on the country. Regarding the field part, interviews were conducted with informants (from the qualitative point of view); besides an online questionnaire in a non-probabilistic way, through the snowball

effect, using an app available on the internet (in this case, Google Forms) with a sample of university professionals who have left the country (from the quantitative point of view). And finally, the research was explanatory, to associate the causes, consequences, and the impact for Venezuela -in economic and social matters- of the massive migration of university professionals who go to other countries and take away their intellectual capital.

The methodological approach was the mixed one to achieve a simultaneous quantitative and qualitative approach, both in the design and data collection, analysis and interpretation of data, and its corresponding preparation of the final report. Because as Creswell et al (2008), cp. Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista point out (2010):

In the mixed perspective, quantitative and qualitative data are used within the same research and since all forms of data collection have their limitations, the use of a mixed design can minimize and even neutralize some of the disadvantages of certain methods (p.550).

#### **4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

When analyzing the data found as findings of the phenomenon under study and the problem in question, which in this case refers to the migration of Venezuelan university professionals: loss of the nation's intellectual capital, and, taking into account the results obtained through interviews with experts, documents, and the application of the online questionnaire to 513 Venezuelan professionals who have emigrated, the discussion allows us to reflect some aspects such as:

It is appreciated that the emigrants of this sample are represented by very young people. With which it can be inferred that it is a Venezuelan professional population at a very productive and useful age for the country and that in the future it could be part of the replacement human capital that is required for the sustained development of Venezuela from the economic, political, and social point of view, and not of the countries to which they have emigrated. In fact, the age ranges are between **31 and 40 years** with 160 people (31.2%), which added to the 111 people (21.6%) of the range between 20 and 30 years, represent 52.8 % of the total sample (513).

Regarding gender, 325 people (63.4%) of the total sample correspond to the female sex; while 188 people (36.5%) correspond to the male sex, for a total of 513 people who answered the survey. In other words, most of the surveyed migrants are female, perhaps because women take more risks, are more willing to change their lifestyle and share spaces, have greater social adaptability skills (outside their home, their family, their country) due to their own feminine condition, raised and trained to know how to do a little of everything, in a country with a matrix-centered family tradition, in which "the child lives, experiences, and learns a matrix-centric bond. The children of the plot are in the hands of the mother who firmly controls her own extreme" (Moreno Olmedo, 2015, p.11).

That the surveyed Venezuelan professionals state that they have completed master's or doctorate studies in 85 different careers, with the largest number of people being,

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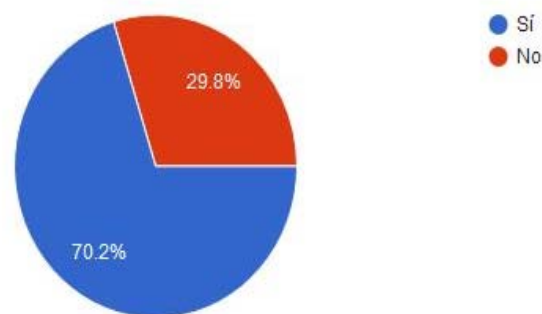
in the order of appearance, in Engineering (75), Medicine (73), Social Communication (66), Administration (53), Advertising and Marketing (29), Economics (21), Law (17), Psychology (16), Higher Education (15), Art (13), Architecture (10). See table N°1.

**Table 1.** Master's or doctorate degrees academic training areas with the highest number of people and percentages

TOTAL RESPONDENTS	N° OF PEOPLE	PERCENTAGE %	ACADEMIC TRAINING AREA
513	388	Total 75.5	
	75	14.6	Engineering
	73	14.2	Medicine
	66	12.9	Social communication
	53	10.3	Administration
	29	5.7	Advertising and marketing
	21	4.1	Economics
	17	3.3	Law
	16	3.1	Psychology
	15	2.9	Higher education
	13	2.5	Art
	10	1.9	Architecture

Source: self-made (2019)

That if the political, economic, and social circumstances of Venezuela radically change, university professionals who have emigrated according to the researcher's sample of 513 people, would be willing to return in 70.2% (360 people). See chart 1.



**Chart 1.** If the political, economic, and social circumstances of the country change, would you be willing to return to the country and be part of the intellectual capital required to rescue the productive development of Venezuela?

However, they would only do so based on the following variables: a change in the political-partisan leadership, a new economic proposal that guarantees the

development of the country's public and private productive apparatus, new rules that guarantee economic legal security to national and international private entities, rules that guarantee personal and family social security to citizens, recognition of professional meritocracy in public entities, the State's recognition of the private productive sector and the voice of Venezuelan academies, separation of the Public Powers, and respect for dissent.

However, it is necessary to highlight relevant information from both the informant experts and the academic representatives, according to which, even with the country's situation improving in the aforementioned aspects, those university professionals who have emigrated and who are located in stable and good level jobs, that have even formed a family abroad and have a good status and quality of life, will surely not return to the country. De la Vega (expert informant of this study) estimates that according to surveys that he has been conducting, around 2,000,000 Venezuelans could be returning. Likewise, the Consultores 21 report highlights that, if the panorama in Venezuela changes, the return of compatriots would be around 45% of emigrants.

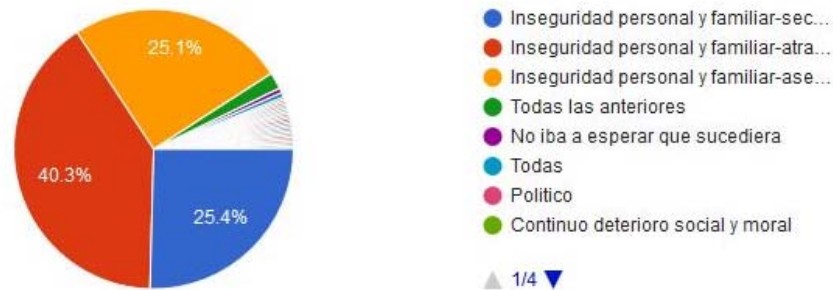
Of the 513 respondents, 301 (58.7%) consider that in Venezuela there should be State Public Policies -with interference in the definition of national development- to prevent the loss of the nation's intellectual capital and, with it, the flight of knowledge. While 212 people (41.3%) indicated that they did not, since there seems to be a manifest lack of interest on the part of the government in trying to reach an agreement with the productive sectors of the country and the academies, to address positions aimed at reducing the causes that could be influencing in migration and, on the other hand, articulate mechanisms to make it possible for that intellectual capital, translated into knowledge of professionals, to continue to form part of the economic and social development of Venezuela even when it is outside its country, and to that extent, articulate actions to reduce inequalities or gaps that may be developing in the country in economic, social, and cultural matters.

Venezuela, after being above countries such as Colombia, Peru, Chile, and Argentina in terms of research, number of papers, number of patents, investment in science and technology, and qualified personnel, is currently below all those countries. This represents what De la Vega (informant expert in this research) has called Venezuela Collapse, in a comparative study of the countries mentioned with ours, from 1990 to now. Regarding publications of a scientific nature, the highest production peak was in 2009 (when the Science and Technology Law-Locti was still active) with 1,539 articles, and at the time of this study, it was barely about 700; while the number of patents is 0. All of this translates into the loss of scientific and technological intellectual capital scattered around the world, with what has been called the technical closure of universities and institutions such as IVIC and Intevep (De La Vega).

When breaking down, in turn, the Social Insecurity dimension into three categories (as a cause to emigrate from the country), it is observed that 146 people (40.3%) indicated that it was the option **Personal and family insecurity-robberies**; 92 people (25.4%) indicated that **personal and family insecurity-kidnapping**; 91 people (25.1) indicated that **personal and family insecurity-murders**. It is worth



commenting that the majority response given to the option **Personal and family insecurity-robberies**, is consistent with the information provided by the criminal lawyer Fermín Mármol García (personal interview, given to the researcher, 30-05-2019) since robberies in Venezuela are over half a million a year. While kidnappings are around 3,000 per year and homicides around 30,000 per year. See chart 2.



**Chart 2.** If the cause that most weighed in your decision to emigrate from the country was Social Uncertainty, mark which of the following options was more decisive.

Regarding **Political Uncertainty** (as a cause of the migration of Venezuelans), the category **Aspiration of a change of government that did not arrive** was the option marked by the largest number of people in the sample and, therefore, the one with the highest percentage: **170 people (53.1%)**. This result acquires greater relevance since it represents 33% of the total sample of the survey (513 people) and, especially, when it is analyzed that in the near horizon, Venezuelan university professionals do not foresee a change in government authorities.

Based on the different assessments made by the participants of the study sample and the considerations given by the interviewed informant experts, as well as the review of the theoretical bases and the country situation itself, the researcher generated her own theory about what is understood by the Intellectual Capital of a country, as well as about Venezuelan migration. In this sense, both definitions are transcribed, respectively, below:

**Intellectual capital.** A strategic intangible asset that a country has, based on the knowledge and experience of academically trained professionals who contribute to the creation of added value in educational and production processes and, which, in turn, make possible the sustained growth of a country by generating a social, scientific, or economic impact thanks to its capacity for innovation.

**Venezuelan migration.** The forced departure of Venezuelan university professionals of different ages, trained in universities in the country in many disciplines (and in which time and resources were invested), who have left fleeing the (economic, social, and political) crisis and a hostile environment that Venezuela experiences; to search in different nations of the world for better employment opportunities and corresponding remuneration, quality of life for them and their families, security, economic and legal stability, and a democratic political context that guarantees their human rights in all senses and values their knowledge.

Once the data obtained had been analyzed and interpreted -through the different collection techniques-, they were compared through 3 of the 4 triangulation mechanisms proposed by Denzin (1970) and which are indicated below:

- a. Data triangulation: consists of comparing data from different sources that refer to the same event.
- b. Researcher triangulation: use different observers in the analysis of the same situation.
- c. Theories triangulation: it is the triangulation that indicates that different theoretical models must be combined in the analysis of the fact.
- d. Methodological triangulation: in this case, we talk about the triangulation between methods, for example, comparing the data obtained by the researcher with those indicated by other actors.

Indeed, options 1, 2, and 4 were selected, as follows:

In triangulation type 1, results from the Questionnaire, Interviews of Informant Experts (Tomás Páez Bravo and Iván De la Vega), Representatives of the Academies (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Universidad Metropolitana, and Universidad Central de Venezuela), and interviews of live sources (John Magdaleno, Henkel García, and Fermín Mármol García) were compared.

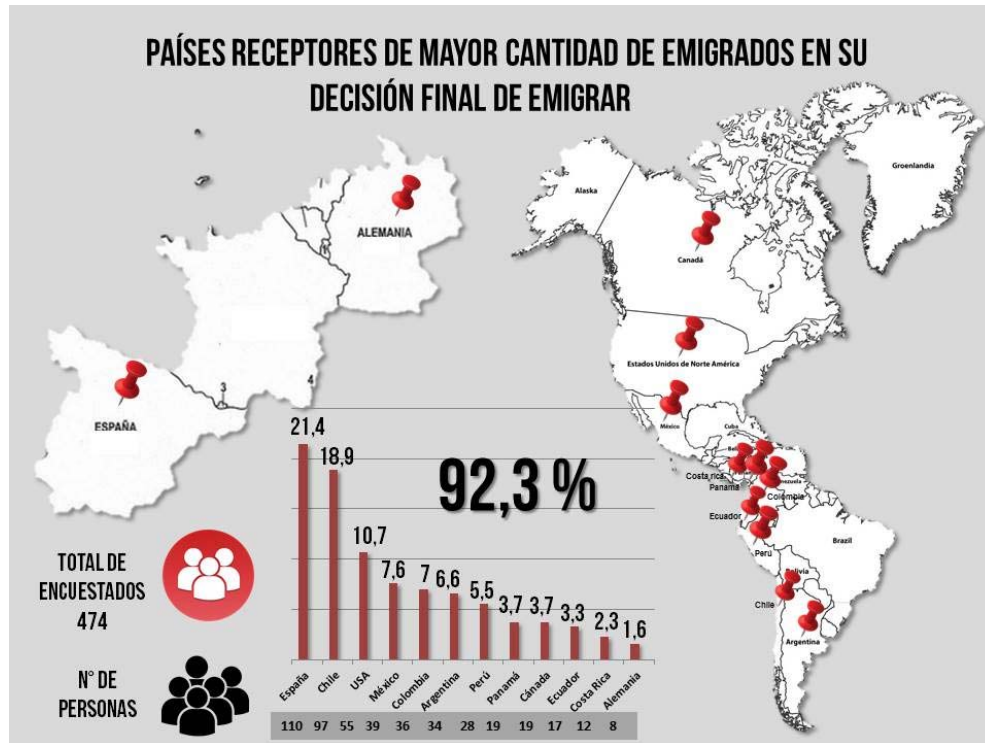
In triangulation type 2, the data provided by the two expert informants (Tomás Páez Bravo and Iván De la Vega) were compared.

In triangulation type 4, results from the Questionnaire, Interviews of Informant Experts (Tomás Páez Bravo and Iván De la Vega), Representatives of the Academies (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Universidad Metropolitana, and Universidad Central de Venezuela), interviews of live sources (John Magdaleno, Henkel García, and Fermín Mármol García), and data from Consultores 21 research documents, the ENCOVI survey, and Datincorp were compared.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Taking into account the proposed objectives, a series of conclusions to take into consideration arise:

- a. The Venezuelan university professionals in the sample of 513 people have initial academic training in six (6) disciplines of knowledge according to the OPSU classification (Humanities; Literature and Art; Engineering; Architecture and Technology; Health Sciences; Basic Sciences; Educational Sciences; Agricultural and Marine Sciences, and Military Sciences and Arts) and in 35 different careers. While the academic profiles range from higher-technician (3.9%), bachelor's degree (45%), master's degree (39.2%), doctorate (7.6%), and postdoctoral degree (4.3%). And when it comes to location, professionals are divided into 30 countries in four (4) of the five (5) continents of planet Earth. See the single infographic.



**Infographic:** Countries receiving the highest number of emigrants

**Source:** Self-made (2019)

- b. The **uncertainty** of the country in the three dimensions characterized by the researcher (political uncertainty, economic uncertainty, and social uncertainty), has been the cause that has motivated the Venezuelan university professionals of the sample of 513, to decide to leave the country. Being the most prominent indicators in the respective political, economic, and social order: *Aspiration of a change of government that never came* (53%); *Continuous growth of inflation* (35.4%); *Personal and family insecurity-robberies* (40.3%); besides other indicators specified by the respondents in each of the three dimensions. On the other hand, the information from the other consulted sources (Informant Experts, Representatives of the Academies, and even reports of fieldwork from polling companies) associates the phenomenon of the migration of Venezuelan professionals with the political issue, the high cost of life, product shortages, absolute unemployment, inflation, low wages, personal insecurity, and extreme violence.
- c. The migration of professionals generates consequences and impacts on the economic and social development of the country. Economically due to: *low levels of productivity, loss of competitiveness, economic decline, and decrease in GDP*, from the moment in which there are fewer and fewer professionals who add value to the Venezuelan economy, either working in the public or private sector, and even with their own businesses, and so on.
- d. Due to the migration of university professionals, the country -understood as an organization- has lost a large part of that intellectual capital essential to carry out production processes in all orders and add economic and social value.

That is to say, that intangible made up not only of human capital, structural capital, and relational capital that -according to Pérez-Montoro (2008)- comes to be a “set of assets that, although not tangible, are equally capable of producing value for the organization, they are capable of helping the organization achieve its objectives” (p.76).

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the migration of Venezuelan university professionals represents a social phenomenon of interest, not only for the country -in terms of political, economic, and, if you will, academic implications- but also for the countries of massive reception of compatriots around the world, the researcher considers that it is a subject of study that should continue to be relevant and convenient for other local and international researchers and, therefore, the following recommendations are allowed:

- a. The carrying out of research from the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, the support of some international organizations such as the World Bank, the International Organization for Migration (Venezuela office), and Unesco, aimed at obtaining more precise figures about the Venezuelan university professionals who have emigrated.
- b. Research aimed at finding out how many of those Venezuelan university professionals who have left the country are working in the academic disciplines for which they were trained in Venezuela.
- c. Carry out a study that seeks to identify the activities that Venezuelan university professionals have been doing, for the benefit of their country, beyond sending remittances, food, and meals. That is, to know what contributions they would be making to contribute to the productive development of the country. And to that extent, to know if any contribution is generated to the GDP of Venezuela.
- d. A research work, whose purpose is to identify which are the areas of knowledge most affected in Venezuela by the migration of university professionals, taking as an example Health Sciences and disciplines related to engineering, just to name two of them.
- e. Finally, starting with a new democratic government in Venezuela and within the framework of the Plan País, it would be interesting to research public policies in the short, medium, and long term oriented, on the one hand, to reach an agreement between the State, the productive sectors of the country (public and private), and academies, to address positions aimed at reducing the causes that could be influencing migration. And, on the other hand, articulate mechanisms to make it possible for that intellectual capital - translated into the knowledge of professionals- to begin to return to the country and reinsert itself in the labor field; and in the case of those who are not going to return due to personal decisions, they can continue to be part of the economic and social development of Venezuela, even if they are outside their country.

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