

Covid-19 and (Im)Mobility in the Americas

ECUADOR

October - December 2020

1. **Poverty Rate (defined by unsatisfied basic needs):** 34.2% of total population (December 2019).^[1]

2. Migration Facts ^[2]

- a. Emigration: About 2 million Ecuadorians or 11% of the population, reside abroad mainly in the US (out of the 790,000 that reside there, 150,000 are undocumented), Spain (430,000) and Italy (77,000).²
- b. Immigration: About 510,000 immigrants, representing 3% of the total population, live in Ecuador, mainly from Venezuela (50%), Colombia (25%), other nationalities such as the US, Peru, Cuba and Haiti.
- c. Transit country: Caribbean, South American, Asian, Middle Eastern, and African migrants transit Ecuador en route to the US. This transit is also heading south to Peru to continue en route to the countries of the Southern Cone. They are mainly Venezuelan, Haitian, Cuban and African migrants.
- d. Ecuadorian nationals returning after deportation: This group largely arrives from the US.
- e. Refugees: 68,000 people have been recognized as refugees. 97% out of that total are of Colombian nationality.

4. State Measures

- The Colombian Government declared its decisions regarding [the opening of borders](#). On the one hand, the closure of land and river borders was extended until January 16, 2021. At the same time, the progressive opening of maritime borders and international air operations is sought.
- At the beginning of December, the National Assembly approved an [immigration reform](#) to the Human Mobility Law that included nine grounds for deportation: entering through irregular steps, falsifying documentation, revoked visas without complying with the consequent departure from the country, breaking the law or being considered a threat or risk to public safety. The Executive sent to the Assembly [a veto to the reforms](#), which proposes, among other things, that the deportation process be carried out through administrative and non-judicial channels.

- On December 18, 2020, in the city of Ibarra, the Imbabura Human Mobility Plan was debuted, which has been formulated to manage the many migratory processes in the province. This is a locality where strongly xenophobic events were recorded before and during the pandemic.
- Foreign Minister Luis Gallegos reported on the [repatriation](#) to Ecuador of more than 17 thousand citizens.
- The “Return to the Homeland” plan currently administered by the Venezuelan government [permitted 170 Venezuelans a return to their country of origin](#) on the 20th of November, 2020.

5. Migrant Situation Alerts

Colombian, Peruvian and especially Venezuelan immigrants (the latter number about 400 thousand people), including children and adolescents

- Exchange and trade activities have been affected by months of border closure, which forces border residents to [transport people and merchandise clandestinely](#).
- At the end of December, [an operation](#) was carried out to detain motorcycles that transport people and merchandise on the northern border.
- Venezuelan immigrants, in addition to facing a labor and economic situation that has been complicated by the pandemic, are [concerned about the situation of their families in Venezuela](#). Many try to send aid and remittances to support them.
- The migration of Venezuelan citizens has not stopped despite the closure of borders. The United Nations Refugee Agency highlighted the fact that the measures that immigrants employ in this context are irregular and controlled by illegal trafficking networks and armed groups. Many migrants are exposed to [violence and exploitation](#) on their journey.
- Evading the patrols of the Armed Forces, crossing rivers, defying the low temperatures, enduring hunger, and without money, [hundreds of Venezuelans cross the border every day back to Colombia](#). An estimated 115,000 Venezuelans have returned to their homes since April because of the pandemic. The same occurs on the southern border, where [hundreds of Venezuelans manage to cross into Peru](#), being victims of trafficking networks and police and military persecution.
- [The migration factsheet](#) made by the Colectivo Geografía Crítica de Ecuador regarding the situation of immigrants in the context of a pandemic, shows the enormous difficulties that migrants face in this context. Among the most revealing data is that 86.7% of Venezuelan migrants have no social security affiliation and 89.9% do not have private health insurance.

Migrant children and adolescents

- If before the pandemic access to education for migrant children, especially Venezuelans, was limited, the pandemic has worsened this situation since many do not have devices or the internet. In the schools of Quito, 13,643 Venezuelan girls, boys, and adolescents are [registered](#) for the 2020-2021 cycle according to the database of the Ministry of Education. This figure represents

less than 2% of all students in the capital and does not come close to the number of the boys and girls who live in the city.

- [Children with limited access to regularization and stateless persons](#), who find themselves particularly vulnerable due to the pandemic, lack access to health and education.
- Anyi Morales, representative of Plan Internacional, stated that the situation of migrant Venezuelan children is terrifying. In addition, she emphasized [the condition of girls and adolescents](#) who suffer many types of violence in host countries.

Ecuadorian emmigration

- There is a direct relationship between the large number of passports issued in Azuay and migration to the United States, according to the authorities. With that document they can enter Mexico and, if they are not returned, they will often attempt to cross the border into the United States. [The lack of public policies, employment, and opportunities](#) are the triggers of a migration pattern that has been going strong since before the pandemic, but which is now exacerbated by it.
- [Emigration continues](#) from el Austro and from the South of the province of Chimborazo to the United States. Travel conditions are especially complex due to covid-19.

Deported Ecuadorians

- The pandemic did not reduce irregular migration to the United States. Likewise, [deportations persist](#). Until October 2020, at least 1,686 deportations have taken place, 80% of which are from Azuay, Cañar, and Morona Santiago.

6. Social Responses

Migrant resistance

- In light of the elections and in a virtual press conference, several migrant and refugee organizations in Ecuador asked electoral candidates for [larger and better proposals for the inclusion of migrants within society](#).
- Daniel Regalado, representative of the Venezuelan Civil Association, as well as Freddy Carrión, Defender of the People, [questioned reforms to the human mobility law](#) that criminalize migrants and promote deportation.

Redes de solidaridad

- UNHCR and the GADs initiated projects for the installation of [internet access points](#) so that children and adolescents will have access to education and services that are now provided virtually to refugees as well as Ecuadorians. The areas covered by the program are in Pichincha, Carchi, Imbabura, and Esmeraldas.
- A study by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Guayaquil and Quito, managed to identify [seven potential sectors with potential to generate sources of employment](#) for Venezuelan

migrants and refugees in Ecuador. They are health care, software development, internet of things, electronic commerce, basic education, agriculture, green and healthy transportation.

- The ALDHEA Foundation and UNHCR promote the project “[From Cameras to Comrades](#)” to promote the reception of people in a situation of mobility, based on methodologies of community cinema, arts, and popular education.

Xenophobia

- In Bahía, [Venezuelan merchants clashed with National and Metropolitan Police](#). The merchants demanded the possibility of continuing to work throughout the month of December. The media focused their attention on the presence of Venezuelans, associating them with competition for employment and health indiscipline. [Two Venezuelan merchants were arrested](#).

^[1]https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-inec/POBREZA/2019/Diciembre-2019/Boletin%20tecnico%20de%20pobreza%20diciembre%202019_d.pdf

^[2]<https://datosmacro.expansion.com/paises/ecuador>

https://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/crisis_venezuela_ok.pdf

<https://www.publicafm.ec/noticias/ecuador/1/ecuador-migrantes-especial>

^[3] John Hopkins University (2020). “Corona Virus Resource Centre”.
<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>