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VENEZUELAN MIGRATION IN ECUADOR: A LOOK AT BEFORE AND AFTER THE PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Since 2015, the departure of Venezuelan citizens to Latin American countries has reshaped the region's migratory landscape. Ecuador has become one of the principal destinations, both for transit and reception. The country introduced a series of changes to its migration policies, culminating in a radical shift around 2018. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened the vulnerability of the Venezuelan population within Ecuador while reinforcing the effects of inefficient state management. Accordingly, this article examines the Ecuadorian State's response to the Venezuelan migratory wave before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It analyzes previously collected data on economic activity, housing conditions, and education among Venezuelans living in Quito. The findings show that Ecuadorian legislation establishes guarantees that are not fulfilled in practice. The article therefore concludes that Ecuadorian institutions must be rethought so that the guarantees established by law are effectively implemented.

Keywords Ecuador; Migration; Venezuelan population; Vulnerability; Legislation; Pandemic; COVID-19.

Introduction

"A line of people, their whole life packed into a suitcase, walking along the Pan-American Highway..." Phrases like this are often used to narrate the Venezuelan exodus, a phenomenon triggered by economic mismanagement that persisted throughout the 2000s and that saw, in 2014, the onset of a severe economic crisis. This came together with a decline in the Venezuelan population's quality of life, owing to failed attempts at economic recovery compounded by international sanctions, inflation, shortages of goods and services, and countless protests over living conditions and electoral manipulation, all of which reflected widespread discontent with the country's government. As the crisis wore on, rates of violence and insecurity climbed, along with medical and food shortages. Migration thus presented itself less as an alternative than as an escape.^{1, 2, 3}

Consequently, the departure of Venezuelan citizens toward Latin American countries reshaped the region's migratory landscape. Within this context, Ecuador proved to be one of the main destinations, both for transit and reception, for the Venezuelan population. This can be explained by Ecuador's progressive reputation for constitutionally recognizing the right to migrate. In addition, dollarization, the cost of living, and geographic proximity to other countries make it attractive to Venezuelan migrants. The country, however, has made a series of changes to its migration policies, culminating in 2018 in a radical

shift that established restrictions on flow and residency policies; these conditions have continued to intensify since then, as border control mechanisms and regional alliances for managing the migration crisis have been reinforced.^{4, 5, 6, 7}

The issue lies in the fact that the reforms put in place and the response of the state apparatus have not been sufficient to meet the needs of Venezuelan migrants on Ecuadorian territory. The vulnerability of the Venezuelan population is, in fact, increasing, since existing policies offer them no real guarantees and, moreover, they encounter in Ecuadorian society a mix of discrimination and rights violations. The xenophobia reproduced through social media and news outlets tends to blame migrants for rising violence and insecurity, worsening their living conditions in countries such as Ecuador.^{8, 9}

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic only worsened the aforementioned vulnerability of the Venezuelan migrant, while compounding the effects of the state's inefficient response, such as the lack of service coverage and the emergence of hiring arrangements that undermine workers' rights. To analyze this issue, the present document is divided into four parts. The first sets out Ecuador's official position on migration and the legal basis the country relies on. The situation of the Venezuelan migrant population before and after the pandemic is then explored, in two separate sections. Finally, the findings concerning the Ecuadorian state's response to the migratory wave are discussed.

Ecuador's Official Position on the Venezuelan Migratory Flow and Existing Legislation

Migration has been a matter of concern within Ecuadorian territory since the late nineteenth century; the drafting of and reforms to migration laws are therefore not a purely contemporary issue. Even so, Ecuador was recognized as a migrant-receiving country from the second half of the twentieth century onward, an image that was reinforced in that century's final decade. The country was no stranger to migration: it received considerable migratory flows from Colombia, as a result of that country's internal conflict, and from Cuba, as an exit route from the local regime. It even served as a transit nation for Haitian citizens after the 2010 earthquake. Much of this was a consequence of former President Rafael Correa's rise to power, whose government marked a significant turning point in the country's migration policy.^{10, 11}

By contrast, emigrating is not a practice foreign to Ecuadorians, who see it as a valid option for improving their quality of life. Between 1997 and 2007, for instance, more than 950,000 Ecuadorian citizens emigrated. Remittances from abroad came to represent 7.19% of GDP in the year 2000, when the Ecuadorian economy was devastated by the so-called *Feriado Bancario*, the major financial crisis of 1999 that affected and forced thousands of families to relocate, mainly to the United States, Spain, and Italy. At the same time, the decision was made to dollarize the economy, a move that opened the door for the Ecuadorian market to become more attractive to migrants looking to send their own remittances back to their countries.^{12, 13}

In time, once the economy regained stable footing, the steady influx of foreign citizens led Ecuadorian territory to become one of the countries hosting the most refugees in the world. By 2018, some 60,524 refugees had been recorded, most of them from Colombia, displaced by that nation's decades-long internal

conflict. Despite its small size, Ecuador became home to thousands of Colombian families who, through hard work, gradually integrated into society and normalized their participation within it.^{14, 15}

All of this responds, in part, to the legislation that developed within the country over time. The 2008 Constitution recognizes free movement and universal citizenship, as well as the right of individuals to migrate. According to Peralta, the country's political stance and its conception of universal citizenship aim to do away with the very notion of "foreigner," so that inequalities between countries dissolve. With that, the prejudices associated with being a foreigner would also disappear. These reforms went hand in hand with a policy of recognizing and welcoming displaced populations and migrants in general, implemented during the early days of Rafael Correa's government. The 2008 Constitution accordingly states:^{16, 17}

Art. 9.— Foreign persons present within Ecuadorian territory shall have the same rights and duties as Ecuadorians, in accordance with the Constitution [...].

Art. 40.— The right of persons to migrate is recognized. No human being shall be identified or considered illegal on account of their migratory status [...].

Art. 41.— [...] Persons in a situation of asylum or refuge shall enjoy special protection guaranteeing the full exercise of their rights. The State shall respect and guarantee the principle of non-refoulement, in addition to emergency humanitarian and legal assistance.¹⁸

The Ecuadorian Constitution further stipulates that foreign persons may not be expelled or returned to countries where their life or that of their families would be endangered. The collective expulsion of foreign groups is prohibited, and migratory processes must be handled on an individual basis. It likewise states that the country shall assist transnational families and shall provide comprehensive protection and advisory services so that they may freely exercise their rights.^{19, 20}

Shortly after these regulations, Ecuador gradually became a receiving ground for Cuban citizens who took advantage of the liberalization of migration policy from 2008 onward. The same held true for Haitian nationals, not long after the earthquake that devastated their country in 2010. By 2012, 3,029 Haitians had entered the country. And although many used Ecuador as a transit zone, a portion chose to reside there permanently. In fact, during the 2010-2016 period, 40,301 Haitian migrants decided to remain within Ecuadorian territory. This generated some tension in the collective imagination of certain sectors of the country that, leaning toward nationalism, whether from the left or the right, voiced rejection and discomfort regarding the presence of these new residents.^{21, 22}

Added to these factors was one of the first exceptional control measures, one that clashed directly with the principles of free movement and universal citizenship. Starting in 2015, additional steps were implemented for the entry of Haitians through the Virtual Tourist Registration System, through which Ecuador would go on to further strengthen the use of technology in migratory control. This measure appealed to the strengthening of safe migration and the elimination of possible human trafficking. As a result, by 2018, Haitian citizens had dropped off the list of countries with the highest entry numbers into Ecuador.^{23, 24}

Cuban migration, on the other hand, carried a significant political charge. Rafael Correa's rise to power was accompanied by a reconfiguration of the Ecuadorian state's relations with nations of a socialist and left-leaning ideological bent, among them the Castro brothers' regime. This opened the door to an increase in Cuban migration to Ecuador, initially through agreements to strengthen human talent, mainly in the health field. This migration also occurred for economic reasons, as Ecuador came to be seen as a possible springboard toward other countries with better opportunities, especially the United States. The tightening of control mechanisms under recent governments and inconsistencies in public policy, however, have reduced, both in proportion and frequency, the flow of Cuban migrants to Ecuador.^{25, 26, 27}

Returning to the legislative sphere, in order to give continuity to the principles of universal citizenship and free movement, the bill for the Organic Law on Human Mobility was introduced in 2015 and approved in 2017, hailed as an "exemplary guide for defending the rights of the migrant community." This law sets out further principles, such as the prohibition of criminalization on the basis of human mobility status, the protection of Ecuadorians abroad, non-discrimination and equality before the law, the pro persona principle in human mobility, the best interests of children and adolescents, non-refoulement, and regional integration.^{28, 29, 30}

The implementation of this law changed the way immigrants were classified. That is, it set aside criteria based on individuals' activity in favor of focusing on their length of stay. It also incorporated categories such as South American citizenship, which made obtaining residency at the regional level easier. This was directly reflected in the statistics. Union of South American Nations visas (UNASUR visas) began to be issued in February 2017, reaching 54,219 by the end of September 2018, or 92% of the visas issued during that period. It is worth mentioning, however, that these visas cost USD 250, and that many Venezuelan migrants from lower social strata could not afford them, which translated into an undocumented population. Ecuador's withdrawal from UNASUR, however, brought back the imposition of requirements and high costs for the regularization process.³¹

In everyday life, the lack of documentation sharpens the vulnerability of Venezuelan migrants. Izurieta notes, in this regard, that the labor rights and social security stipulated by law are only partially fulfilled. Although many Venezuelan migrants hold university degrees, the Venezuelan diplomatic corps does not facilitate the issuance of the documents needed to have them recognized, further limiting their ability to find suitable work. Consequently, they take jobs as waiters, hairdressers, and salespeople and, on the occasions when they do find work tied to their profession, earn less than Ecuadorians. This amounts to the marginalization of migrants.^{32, 33}

Likewise, the validation of academic credentials, the integration of children and adolescents into the school system, and participation in Ecuadorian political life are processes that, in principle, the law might be expected to facilitate. These same processes, however, can become a source of difficulty depending on each migrant's circumstances and, at times, on how smoothly procedures unfold within the country's state institutions. Added to this is a context of rising xenophobia, present even among public officials, who refuse to provide mandatory services or ignore complaints filed by the migrant population.³⁴

By 2018, the arrival of President Lenín Moreno made itself felt through multiple changes at the Foreign Ministry. The migration area was affected; the rights-based approach and the principle of free movement were replaced by a security-oriented stance closed off to migration. One example is Ministerial Agreement No. 244, which stipulates that Venezuelan citizens may enter Ecuador with a national identity card, provided they hold a validity certificate issued by a recognized regional or international body, or a certificate issued by their own country's government entities, duly apostilled. The conflict arose as a consequence of Venezuelan policy making it difficult to obtain identity documents, a strategy for controlling the local population.³⁵

By 2019, the security-oriented stance was further reinforced and took shape in a new ministerial agreement, No. 001. This reasserted the State's authority to record entries and exits and endorsed the inadmission of foreign persons considered a risk or threat to internal security. The agreement came together with stricter controls at the northern border and new measures such as the requirement of an apostilled criminal record certificate, which violated the Constitution, the Human Mobility Law, and regional agreements.^{36, 37}

In addition, starting in July 2019, the government decided to impose a humanitarian visa for Venezuelan migrants through Decree No. 826. This measure proved controversial. On the one hand, the Ombudsman's Office argued that it constituted a violation of existing legislation and an obstacle preventing migrants from reaching a more stable situation. On the other, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintained that this visa was precisely the requirement needed to bypass the obstacles of the migratory process. In short, as has been shown, Ecuador's migration policy faced difficulties even when it was promoting universal citizenship and free movement. The drastic shift proposed by the Moreno government only worsened the situation.

The Situation of the Venezuelan Migrant Population in Ecuador Before the COVID-19 Pandemic

The reality of the Venezuelan migrant population in Ecuador can be measured against the country's laws through data. This data was drawn primarily from the study *The Impact of Transnational Ties in the Wellbeing of Forced Migrants, an Analysis on Venezuelan Refugees Residing in Quito, Ecuador*. The analysis focuses on specific areas such as education, economic activity, labor performance, housing, and social and support networks. This makes it possible to establish the situation prior to the pandemic and to show how the Ecuadorian state's laws either benefited or harmed those who were part of the Venezuelan migratory flow.^{38, 39}

There is a particular connection between the areas of education and economic activity. 57% of respondents reported holding a university degree; however, only 8% earned a monthly income above USD 600. Most migrants (66%) earned less than USD 300 a month, an amount far below half the cost of the basic family food basket (USD 719.88 as of January 2019). Starting in 2020, their economic situation deteriorated even further owing to the aftereffects of the pandemic, tied to unemployment and lack of access to healthcare.^{40,}

^{41, 42}

Along these lines, 82% of respondents reported being economically active. Only 12% said they were unemployed, and just 1% of participants identified themselves as being in a situation of begging. The invitation to participate, however, was extended while the majority of people were selling candy or food on the streets. These percentages are tied to the fact that, in the face of a mass exodus, the pressure on receiving countries manifests across various areas, the labor market being one of them. This situation worsened during the pandemic owing to the rise in informal work and migrants' growing vulnerability.^{43, 44}

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The exponential growth of Venezuelan citizens in the country, especially between 2017 and 2018, revealed the local market's inability to absorb the new population. Highlighting the characteristics of Venezuelan migration makes it possible to identify a development opportunity for Ecuador. Venezuelans are younger than Ecuadorians, their level of education is high, and they include individuals in their prime working years. This could generate economic and cultural enrichment based on the complementarity of skills and knowledge. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate in the first half of 2018 stood at 10.3% for Venezuelan migrants, 2.5 times higher than for Ecuadorians. This implies that unemployment was already a concern before the migratory phenomenon, and that in many cases it has had to be offset through entrepreneurship as an alternative to labor precarity, moving from the strengthening of migrant social networks toward the management of opportunities. Even with a rights-based legislative framework for migrants, then, the material situation exposed Ecuador's structural problems.^{46, 47}

The most frequent reasons given for unemployment were as follows: 34% of respondents said their lack of work stemmed from their lack of documentation; another 34% attributed it to employers' reluctance to hire Venezuelan citizens; and 19% said there was no availability in their field of work. The large majority of those who were working (65%) did so full-time, even though their wages fell below the unified minimum wage. Thus, even with the humanitarian visa implemented since 2019, its high costs and the complexity of the process ran contrary to the measure's stated goals.^{48, 49}

Job security is a rarity: more than half of the participants (54%) lacked a contract regulating their work. This suggests the possibility of labor exploitation. In addition, given high rates of unemployment and underemployment, the lack of social security coverage is another factor to consider. This is tied to informal work, which does not allow for enrollment in social security and translates into health and economic vulnerability for migrants.^{50, 51}

Housing conditions, on the other hand, depend directly on Venezuelan migrants' (un)employment or underemployment situation. This population commonly does not own its own housing, but rather rents a property, again without a contract regulating that relationship. The obstacles Venezuelan citizens face in securing housing in Ecuador are also rooted in discrimination. One in ten Venezuelans has fallen victim to deception by real estate agencies or landlords. Likewise, the financial guarantee required of them poses a problem tied to the labor conditions described above. Fear of deportation is evident, given the frequency of evictions for inability to pay and the low number of complaints filed as a result of the lack of documentation.^{52, 53}

In practical terms, 46% of Venezuelans live in a single-room dwelling with no kitchen or bathroom. For families with children, the situation is even more troubling. More than half of Venezuelan households report that their children or adolescents share a bed with adults due to limited space, a reality that clashes with the Human Mobility Law and that heightened the risk of contagion during the pandemic. The principles of non-discrimination, equality, and the best interests of children and adolescents are lost in the face of this lived experience.⁵⁴

Turning to social and support networks, we can begin with the family situation of Venezuelan migrants. 80% of respondents said they live in Ecuador with their partners and children. Meanwhile, 67% have made major efforts to bring their children to the country, and 42% have attempted to bring their partners. Sending remittances to Venezuela is another factor that pushes them to accept jobs that fail to meet legal standards or, in turn, to work informally. Remittances add yet another layer of responsibility to the migrant's already difficult position.⁵⁵

By contrast, building relationships with Ecuadorian citizens runs into xenophobia as a major obstacle. "I had a lot of Facebook friends here from Ecuador, and when I saw them start in with the xenophobia, 'damn Venezuelans,' 'they should leave,' I deleted them," reads one testimony from Venezuelan migrants on the matter. This is more palpable in the Highlands, with an index of 1.86, while xenophobia is lower on the Coast, with an index of 1.49. The data reviewed shows that the guarantees offered under Ecuador's legal framework grow blurred in practice. This is compounded by a discriminatory, and often xenophobic, context.^{56, 57}

The Situation of the Venezuelan Migrant Population in Ecuador After the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Venezuelan population's difficult situation worsened with the arrival of the virus that caused the pandemic. To demonstrate this, data is drawn from the #JuntosContraElCovid19 project, carried out by the organization QUID in early 2020. As in the previous section, this data focuses on family and employment status, housing conditions, access to basic services, and, given the context of instability, the support provided by both civil society and the State.

The arrival of COVID-19 brought a new way of life. Caught up in this shift, Ecuadorians faced a radical recomposition of their reality. Faced with the first outbreak of the virus, and following the pandemic declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Presidency declared a state of emergency on March 16, 2020. This marked the start of a lockdown that exempted only essential sectors. The various restrictions were managed and communicated by the national Emergency Operations Committee, which established a traffic-light system based on the rise in infections. It is necessary to consider, however, whether the lifting of this traffic-light system was enough to guarantee migrants' economic recovery within the country.⁵⁸

The #JuntosContraElCovid19 program ran from the last week of April through June 2020. Faced with a crisis of this magnitude, Ecuador's institutions proved unable to meet the needs of the population's various

sectors. QUID attempted to establish contact with the authorities to improve the distribution of aid, but capacity remained limited. In response to constant calls for help from people the system had failed to reach, the program was born with two main goals: fundraising and the distribution of emergency kits. Over the course of the process, data was gathered from 1,097 families in the city of Quito (QUID 2020).⁵⁹

This data yielded important results that opened up discussion in more than one direction. For the purposes of this document, it should be clarified that 60% of aid applicants held Venezuelan nationality, compared with 38% of Ecuadorian origin. Life for Venezuelan migrants on Ecuadorian territory is not easy, and the pandemic made it worse. A significant lack of channels for this population to access resources was confirmed. As a result, they found themselves unable to cover basic needs, such as food and rent, among others.⁶⁰

The predominance of Venezuelan nationals among applicants reflects their disconnection from economic and employment sources, a consequence of segregation and marginalization on the basis of nationality. Fieldwork confirmed that the context of labor informality intensified during the lockdown. The Venezuelan population lost any option for earning an income: they were the first to lose their jobs and lacked suitable spaces to carry on their trade. In cases where an employment relationship did exist, wage abuses and failures to honor working hours and employer obligations were reported, problems that have persisted even after the transition to the yellow traffic-light level. Public transportation, a habitual site of informal trade, was lost during this period, directly impacting family economies. Even today, difficulties persist in the use of public spaces, owing to recent years' inflation and rising insecurity.⁶¹

It is understood that the vulnerabilities a person in a situation of human mobility may face also stem from the host society's xenophobia. In Ecuador, this is a daily reality. Certain popular beliefs illustrate it, for example the claim that rising crime in Ecuador is due to the entry of Venezuelan migrants, or that this population group is stealing jobs from Ecuadorians. What is more, recorded complaints of xenophobic acts rose by 70% in 2020 compared with 2019.⁶²

Alongside the lack of job opportunities, breaches of rental agreements were not long in coming. In the midst of quarantine, many Venezuelans who turned to QUID and other organizations reported being evicted without notice; others simply had the locks changed on their lodgings. This, without even accounting for the fact that the rented spaces were often small rooms where as many as five families could end up living together. These experiences show that, although the regulatory framework maintains a conciliatory discourse inviting the reception of migrants, the system, Ecuadorian citizens, and the prevalence of insensitive public officials hinder its fulfillment.

QUID's work revealed that the funding line created by the State through the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion had its limitations. 97% of respondents did not receive the assistance this institution was meant to provide. This figure exposes the fact that the State was already unable to attend to its own nationals, a challenge that grew even larger when it came to foreign citizens. The need to go out and seek income in the informal economy was therefore immediate. 98% of respondents did not have stable work

and, under the crisis, were forced to go out even while the red traffic-light level was in effect within the city of Quito, exposing themselves to the virus and to financial penalties.^{63, 64}

Although labor informality existed before the pandemic, with 60% of Venezuelans working within it, the health measures put them in a bind. With restricted circulation hours and public transportation suspended, people were forced to leave very early and return home at night, in violation of curfew. Travel had to be done on foot, which, together with fewer working hours, further reduced their income. Thus, 61% of the program's participants reported having left their homes during the five days prior to data collection. In a bleak context, the State provided no further protection. Not being Ecuadorian, Venezuelan migrants have no access to the central government's social assistance; for them there were no food baskets or emergency stipends.^{65, 66}

The rise in the infection curve and the many tasks brought on by the pandemic left government institutions overwhelmed with requests. The Venezuelan embassy and consulates provided no assistance to their fellow nationals in any area. Organizations such as Venezuela en Ecuador, Chamos Venezolanos en Ecuador, and Funvex-Ec put together aid plans despite the lack of resources. They received greater collaboration, however, from the decentralized autonomous governments. According to data gathered by QUID, 87% of participants stated they had not received any kind of help from the metropolitan city's municipal government. When asked about assistance from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), churches, or private individuals, fewer than a third of respondents reported having received support: 52% from NGOs, 31% from private individuals, and 16% from churches.^{67, 68}

Turning to children and education, neither Ecuadorian nor Venezuelan children had guaranteed access to the internet; their education therefore hung by a thread. According to #JuntosContraElCovid19 data, 63% of aid applicants said they had internet access; of those, 52% reported having wifi. Digging deeper into this data, however, reveals a more complex reality. The devices the Venezuelan population has are phones that allow them to stay in touch with their country of origin. These devices also frequently serve as work tools. Children did not have computers, tablets, or an internet connection reliable enough to let them join virtual classes. Lacking social connection networks in Ecuador, Venezuelan parents were forced to leave their children with landlords or neighbors, exposing them to circles removed from the family unit in an attempt to maintain the continuity of their schooling.^{69, 70, 71}

Having to go out to work while facing a lack of resources, it was not unusual for families to be forced to choose which of their children would continue attending school. Children could likewise end up in the care of siblings or younger relatives in their caregivers' absence. It can thus be said that the pandemic's impacts were multidimensional, affecting employment, education, and personal life alike. Although this also happened to the Ecuadorian population, the outlook was even bleaker for Venezuelan migrants.

In relation to the guarantees presented earlier, it can be deduced that constitutional norms are breached both in ordinary times and in junctures such as that of COVID-19. It is worth analyzing, then, the structural failings of the country that give rise to this breach. It should be clarified that the experiences described point to basic guarantees a State owes its people. Along these lines, Ecuador should consider

establishing plausible yet comprehensive public plans and policies that do not incur in the regression of rights. As shown throughout this section, the disease did not merely change life itself, but devastated the most vulnerable. Ecuador's progressive discourse remains, for the most part, confined to words and texts that go unimplemented.

Conclusions

The Venezuelan migratory wave is a reality that has reshaped the region's design. In Ecuador's case, it was possible to identify a gap between the guarantees set out in legislation and the reality of the migrants who inhabit its territory. Migration has been a matter of relevance in the country's social, political, and legislative discussion. Ecuadorian citizens view their own migration as an option for improving their quality of life, while at the same time the country has been recognized as a migrant-receiving nation. The 2008 Constitution marks Ecuador's stance toward foreign citizens, migration, and its apparent welcome, shielded by the principles of free movement and universal citizenship. The failure to apply these principles, however, both in the common imagination and in government action, exposes a disconnect between the legal framework and its implementation in practice.

Likewise, the Organic Law on Human Mobility sets out novel approaches to understanding migration as a human right, with principles that, in theory, guarantee non-discrimination and equality before the law, as well as non-criminalization on the basis of human mobility status. Even so, 2018 marked a significant shift, as a security-oriented approach gained ground within Ecuadorian politics. As noted, greater migratory controls, increased requirements, new measures, and the imposition of a humanitarian visa were among the factors that characterized this change. As a result, the daily life of the Venezuelan migrant population, independent of the pandemic, reveals these people's vulnerability and the failure to keep the promises that Ecuadorian laws carry with them.

The data presented helps bring visibility to the difficulties affecting migrants. Among the points worth highlighting is that this population's level of education does not correspond with their typical levels of employment. Informal work is a constant, as is the abuse of working hours and the lack of social security and employment contracts. This translates into a waste of human capital, one that both the migrant community and the host community stand to lose from.

Housing conditions, directly tied to employment status, show that migrants live in rented spaces. Within this scenario, abuses in rental agreements, where they occur, come to the fore. In both areas, what emerges is not only the State's inability to regulate these phenomena, but also the discrimination reproduced by Ecuadorian citizens toward foreigners. Despite the promotion of a rights-based and even socially inclusive discourse, material realities point to abuses in matters as basic as the right to dignified housing.

This already complicated situation worsened with the arrival of the pandemic, as evidenced by the data and experience gathered by QUID and other organizations. Informal work was hit hard, and Venezuelan migrants lost their sources of income. Where employment did exist, the vast majority lost it almost

immediately, and those who managed to keep it reported abuses regarding working hours, wages, and employer obligations. Elements such as the "Humanitarian Law" also had a direct influence on this reality, making it, without question, a piece of legislation that requires monitoring and evaluation.

The State's channels of assistance had their limitations. The migrant population did not feel supported, and outright cases of xenophobic discrimination by public officials were even reported. Another issue still pending discussion concerns the degree of neglect the State has shown toward children of Venezuelan parents born in Ecuador, a neglect that grows more pronounced in rural areas. This is a segment of the population with acquired rights, meaning the State must look after their wellbeing, even if their parents do not hold Ecuadorian nationality. Inefficient management of the pandemic left government institutions unable to keep up, compounded by the fact that Venezuela's embassy and consulates in Ecuador continued their policy of neglecting their own citizens.

Ultimately, Ecuador needs to rethink how its institutions function, in order to fulfill the guarantees set out in its legislation. The issues addressed throughout this document concern housing, employment status, education, and access to basic services; what the Ecuadorian State has committed to, then, amounts to nothing more than basic guarantees for its population. It is also time to move beyond the discourse of being a migrant-receptive country and to actually become one. This work must come from the State, but it will also be necessary to reshape Ecuadorian mindsets so that the principle of universal citizenship becomes a reality. Finally, it will be important to revisit the analysis of the migrant population's situation and vulnerability within the context of the insecurity the country is experiencing and under the effects of climate change.

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