Migration Profile

ECUADOR

A. Executive Summary

Ecuador is a South American country, naturally very diversified since its territory includes the Andean Mountains, the Amazonian Forest, some islands, and coastal areas[i]. Its geographical location and economic development make it a host country for many migrants and refugees in the region[ii].

In 2020, Ecuador went into a deep recession due to the Covid-19 health crisis. It also has structural problems such as high informality levels, sizeable public service access gaps, and a poorly organised healthcare system[iii]. The nation is substantially dependent on its petroleum resources. The main economic activity is in the services sector, which accounted for 60.4% of its GDP in 2017, and industry is also consistent, representing 32.9% of the GDP[iv].

Ecuador has traditionally been an emigrant country, with two main flows in the 1960s and in the first decade of 2000. However, after 2001 it has also experienced an increase in immigration, mostly arriving from Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela[v], due to its dollar currency and labour opportunities in the country[vi].

Ecuador also hosts one of the biggest Latin American refugee communities (comprised of 72,229 recognised refugees)[vii], and most of them come from Venezuela[viii]. Despite the growing number of people seeking protection and the many challenges faced (pandemic, climate change and lack of basic needs), the country has become an example of solidarity in welcoming refugees[ix].

In 2021 its GDP was $106,165,866,000[x], experiencing an annual growth rate of 4.2% compared to the one in the previous year, which had decreased 7.8%[xi]. Foreign Direct Investment net inflows amounted 1.1% of its GDP in 2020[xii]. Its Human Development Index is 0.759, placing Ecuador as number 86 out of 189 countries and territories[xiii].

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

The Republic of Ecuador is located in South America and is bordered by Colombia, Peru, and the Pacific Ocean[xiv]. Its territory also includes the Galapagos Islands, expands for 283,561 square kilometres[xv], is divided into 24 provinces, and its capital is Quito[xvi]. Ecuador has

diverse environmental conditions due to its four natural regions: Coast, Highlands, Amazonia, and Island[xvii].

In 2021, its population was 17,888,474 people[xviii]. Among its three mainland regions, there are 15 indigenous groups with different cultural traditions[xix]. The most famous ones are the Huaorani, Achuan, Shuar, Cofán, Siona-Secoya, Shiwiar, and Záparo[xx].

The official language is Spanish, although Quechua and Shuar are also used as official languages in intercultural relations. There are 14 other official ancestral languages used by indigenous people in their areas[xxi].

Regarding religion, 80.4% of the population is Catholic, 11.3% Evangelical, 1.29% are Jehovah's Witnesses, and 6.96% belong to other religious groups[xxii].

II. International and Internal Migration

According to the United Nations, in 2019 there were 381,507 immigrants recorded in Ecuador[xxiii], representing 2.21% of its population[xxiv]. Immigrants mostly come from Colombia (63.34%), the United States (8.73%), Peru (4.46%), Chile (3.69%), and Venezuela (2.90%)[xxv]. Male immigration is slightly higher (51.67%) than the female one (48.32%)[xxvi], and its biggest age group is between 18 and 60 years old[xxvii]. As far as their education, 27% have a higher education, 4.9% a postgraduate degree, and 22.7% a secondary education[xxviii].

The urbanisation process in Ecuador has played a vital role for internal migration[xxix]. The concentration of industry and infrastructure in the most dynamic provinces, together with the colonisation of the Amazon, the oil extraction activities, and tourism in the Galapagos Islands, has produced an economic and demographic growth[xxx]. Pichincha and Guayas are the provinces with more internal migrants[xxxi]. Internal migration flows are often connected to unemployment and regional development[xxxii]. The provinces with the highest percentage of female migrants are the Amazonian provinces: Morona Santiago, Orellana, and Zamora Chinchipe[xxxiii].

At the international level, the most common factors pushing people to migrate from their countries to Ecuador are violence, poverty, war, and religious or political conflicts[xxxiv]. The main entry points into the country are San Lorenzo, Tulcán, Lago Agrio, Huaquillas, Zapotillo, and Macará[xxxv]. Likewise, the main places where the immigrant population is concentrated are Carchi, Sucumbíos, Esmeraldas and Pichincha, Guayas, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, El Oro, Loja, and Cañar[xxxvi].

Even though the immigration phenomenon in Ecuador started out in 2001, it widely increased in 2008[xxxvii], when the Ecuadorian government allowed people from any nationality to enter the country without visa, thus making migration policies more flexible[xxxviii]. The country's economy has also been a significant pull factor for immigrants due to its job opportunities[xxxix] and to the adoption of the dollar currency since 2000[xl]. However, because of the immigration growth, since 2010 the Ecuadorian government established more restrictive visa policies in order to control and reduce the number of immigrants[xli] [xlii].

Regarding migrants' conditions in Ecuador, the country provides some access to health, education and other essential services[xliii]. However, due to the economic and social crisis that Ecuador has been experiencing since 2014, immigrants' economic, social and cultural rights have been considerably limited[xliv], sparking discrimination, especially in workplaces and on the street[xlv]. They also face difficulties to rent houses and integrate into local neighbourhoods[xlvi]. This situation has worsened because of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the working conditions of the immigrant population have further deteriorated, and access to fundamental rights such as health and education has been limited[xlvii].

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

In 2019 Ecuador registered 1,183,685 emigrants, representing 6.85% of the Ecuadorian population[xlviii]. Female emigration is higher (52.88%) than male's (47.11%)[xlix], because of the new requirements of the receiving countries, where women can have better opportunities to find work[l]. Ecuadorians have been mostly migrating to the United States (43.61%), Spain (35.09%), and Italy (7.20%)[li], and most of them are within the 18-30 age group[lii]. Their educational level is above the national average; they belong to the lower-middle and middle class, and mainly come from urban areas[liii].

In Ecuador, there have been two main emigration flows[liv]: the first one started out in the 1960s, when many people who worked in the production of hats relocated in the USA[lv]. The second migration process came about after the year 2000[lvi], when the political and economic crisis further increased the gap between the most significant part of the population and the upper class, and poverty spread even more[lvii]. At this time, Spain and Italy were targeted as the leading destination countries[lviii]. Ecuadorians abroad were employed as unskilled workers (25.3%) and in the service and commerce sectors (19.7%)[lix]. Most of unskilled workers were female migrants (36.6%), compared to 15.3% of the male population[lx].

In 2007-2008, the Ecuadorian economy started to improve, causing the return of many Ecuadorians. However, in 2014, due to the fall in oil prices, the economy once again experienced a significant drop and reached unprecedented challenging levels during the COVID-19 pandemic[lxi]. As a matter of fact, at that time the economic and social issues increased[lxii], and by 2021 56,390 Ecuadorians had already left the country[lxiii] and have not returned since. 85% of them emigrated to Mexico and to the United States[lxiv].

IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)

According to UNHCR, in 2021 there were 113,175 refugees in Ecuador and 2,306 asylum seekers[lxv], making it the host country with the highest number of recognised refugees in Latin America, especially from Venezuela, and of migrants worldwide[lxvi] (with a historical number of 72,229 recognised refugees)[lxvii].

Among the refugee population in Ecuador, 55% are women and 45% are men; and 57% are young people within the 18-59 age group[lxviii]. They are mainly arriving from Venezuela (88% as of May 2022), but also from Colombia (9%), and other countries, like Cuba, Yemen, or Syria

(3%)[lxix]. Before 2018, however, 73% of the refugee population present in the country had come from Colombia[lxx].

Regarding the refugees' conditions, only 19% were able to open a bank account, and 62% of the children regularly attend school. Moreover, 44% of the working refugee population are employed in the commerce sector[lxxi]. When it comes to the distribution of Colombian and Venezuelan refugee communities in the state, it greatly varies: Colombians are mainly located in Quito and in the northern borders (Sucumbios, Esmeraldas or Carchí), while Venezuelans live in Quito and in the big southern cities, such as Guayaquil, Machala, Manta and Cuenca[lxxii]. As of May 2022, the UNHCR attested that 508,935 Venezuelans were living in Ecuador, and 62% of them were in an irregular condition[lxxiii].

The primary route to enter Ecuador is the northern border, where many refugees and asylum seekers cross using irregular channels (there are approximately 1,000 daily entries)[lxxiv]. For instance, the number of Colombians that arrived in Ecuador in 2021 ranged between 150 to 444 people each month, with higher peaks registered between the months of July through October[lxxv].

Furthermore, in January 2021, there were approximately 5,700 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Ecuador[lxxvi]. 3,900 of them were forced to move because of floods, 1,599 due to mass movement, 119 to storms, and 4 to wildfire[lxxvii]. Winter rains heavily affected the country's population and highways were closed. In addition, they experienced mobility restrictions due to the pandemic[lxxviii].

The refugee population in Ecuador faces considerable hardships, especially related to lack of food, work, shelter, and medical services[lxxix]. Visa requirements established in 2019 by Decree 826, in addition to the closure of borders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, limited the regular access to the territory, increasing irregular movements and associated protection risks[lxxx]. The porosity of the walls and the free movement among the Andean Community even prevented a specific control over migration flows[lxxxi].

Refugees and asylum seekers are also exposed to dangerous situations and ongoing rights violations at the border. The level of violence at the Ecuadorian borders has greatly increased, because of robberies, assaults, trafficking networks, sexual exploitation, and precarious social and economic conditions[lxxxii]. As of January 2022, the Institute for Development and Peace Studies recognised over a dozen social leaders murdered, 13 massacres, and 17 forced disappearances[lxxxiii]. More homeless people were detected in 2021 from the refugee and migrant community, mainly in areas near the borders of Ibarra, Tulcán, Huaquillas, and Machala[lxxxiv].

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Ecuador is listed as a tier 2 country in the US Trafficking in Persons Report, since it does not meet the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking, although it is making significant efforts. Human traffickers exploit Ecuadorian adults and children in sex trafficking and forced labour within the country, including domestic service, begging, plantations, floriculture, farming, fishing, street vending, mining, and other activities in the informal economy and

illegal acts, such as drug trafficking and robbery. They also use Ecuador as a transit route for trafficking victims arriving from Colombia, Venezuela and the Caribbean to bring them to other South American countries and Europe[lxxxv].

Human trafficking is most relevant in coastal (El Oro, Guayas, Manabi, and Los Rios) and northern border provinces (Carchi, Esmeraldas, Loja, and Sucumbíos), and especially in the latter area Colombian illegal armed groups often recruit their new gang members. The main destination countries for Ecuadorian trafficking victims are the United States, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and to a lesser degree, Argentina, Spain, and Suriname[lxxxvi].

Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians, Colombian refugees, and Venezuelan and Chinese migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to trafficking in Ecuador, as well as Haitians migrating through Brazil into Ecuador looking for jobs in banana plantations. Children from impoverished indigenous families are recruited through false promises of employment and then exploited. Traffickers confiscate migrants' documents, impose debts and threaten or force them into prostitution upon their arrival in Ecuador. They increasingly use social media networks to recruit and groom individuals and later exploit them[lxxxvii].

In 2020, the country made a significant progress: it increased funding for victim protection and assistance ($1.450 million in 2020 compared to $422,700 in 2019), developed assistance protocols to provide victims' care in specialised and non-specialized shelters and amended the penal code to align it with international law, and it established three provincial anti-trafficking committees. In 2020 it also initiated 126 investigations into alleged trafficking cases, conducted 18 anti-trafficking operations and arrested 22 suspect traffickers. Moreover, it prosecuted 7 trafficking cases involving 8 individuals. It convicted and sentenced 8 traffickers and reported 13 ongoing appeals for convictions. Finally, it identified 140 victims and assisted 126 of them, even testing them for the COVID-19 virus and providing them with the appropriate medical care[lxxxviii].

In partnership with NGOs, local authorities provided victims with medical, legal, psychological, and educational services. Moreover, Ecuador began implementing a database to track human trafficking and smuggling cases, and conducted 21 awareness-raising events targeting local people. It further set up a hotline for the public to report a crime, resulting in an arrest of a trafficker and the identification of 3 victims[lxxxix].

Nevertheless, there are fundamental issues in the country concerning lack of resources and official training, insufficient efforts addressing forced labour and a considerable lack of services outside the capital. There are also high levels of officials' complicity and corruption. In 2020, Ecuador did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees. This fosters a lack of confidence in the police force and reluctance to report potential cases. Furthermore, the country did not make any efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex, and victims like individuals and girls younger than 12 do not have any protection[xc].

VI. National Legal Framework

The "Law on Human Mobility" from 2017 regulates migrants' rights and obligations in the country and abroad. It is the most important political and administrative guideline established for the design and application of public policies in Ecuador[xci]. In addition, there are three normative instruments in the field of migration: the 2021-2025 National Development Plan, which embodies all public policies, programmes, and projects regarding human mobility[xcii], the 2021-2025 Foreign Policy Plan, where the Sustainable Development Objectives are developed[xciii], and the National Plan on Human Mobility, that states four central policies: free movement, protection of human rights, ordered, safe and regular migration and integration in the country[xciv].

The right to asylum is recognised in art. 9 of the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution[xcv]. Moreover, the conditions, requirements and institutions responsible for its recognition are stated in the Law on Human Mobility[xcvi]. Regarding human trafficking, articles 91 and 92 of the 2014 Criminal Code penalised all forms of labour trafficking and some forms of sex trafficking[xcvii].

At the international level, in 1978 Ecuador ratified the 1949 ILO Migration for Employment Convention[xcviii]. Since 2002, it is also a party to the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families[xcix]. Furthermore, in 1966 Ecuador acceded to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, although it has not ratified it yet[c].

Moreover, Ecuador is a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol[ci]. In 2009 it ratified the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance[cii], and in 1970 the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. In 2002, it acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Stateless[ciii]. Likewise, in 2002 the government ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime[civ] and the Palermo Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons[cv].

VII. Main actors

The State

As stated by the Law on Human Mobility from 2017[cvi], the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the primary institution in Ecuador responsible for designing and implementing the national plans and programs on migration, coordinating, and controlling human mobility[cvii]. It further exercises authority over the issuance of travel documents, visas, and residencies, and ensures due process in deportation procedures[cviii].

Likewise, the Ministry of Government (formerly Ministry of Interior) controls the entry and exit of nationals and foreigners, as well as their registration in the migration information system[cix]. It has several Undersecretariats and Directorates: the Undersecretary of Migration is in charge of directing, proposing and executing the management of human mobility policy in immigration service and control matters[cx]. This organism is subdivided between the Directorate of Migratory Services and the Directorate of Migratory Control[cxi]. Moreover, the Working Group of Social and Economic integration has been established to coordinate efforts

to formulate plans, proposals and programs promoting the economic and social integration of migrants and refugees[cxii].

Regarding refugees, the "Commission to determine Refugee Status in Ecuador" evaluates asylum applications. It includes two representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and one of the Ministry of Government[cxiii]. Furthermore, the governamental action against human trafficking is under the responsibility of the Institutional Commission for preventing, controlling, and sanctioning the crimes of Trafficking in Persons and Illicit Smuggling of Migrants (under the direction of the Ministry of Interior)[cxiv].

International Organisations

UNHCR's work in Ecuador provides information to migrants and refugees regarding their rights, humanitarian assistance, legal advice, and access to services[cxv]. It helps them find jobs, open bank accounts and request credits; it also provides integration programmes, monetary support, and psychological assistance[cxvi]. In 2021, the agency reached out to support 90 communities and 351 organisations, identified more than 97,000 people with specific needs[cxvii] and helped in 2,925 cases of children and adolescents protection[cxviii]. The initiative "Enterprises with Refugees" aims to sensitise about good inclusion practices by the private sector in Ecuador and operates in 10 provinces in the country, mainly in Quito, Guayaquil, and Ibarra[cxix].

UNICEF works using two strategies. Firstly, *Equity for children* aims to ensure that children and adolescents have equal opportunities. Secondly, *Childhood growing up without violence* seeks to end violence, abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation, and neglect[cxx].

The United Nations and IOM, through the 2021 Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (*Grupo de Trabajo Integración Socioeconómica* in Spanish), reached 130 cantons nationwide and helped a total number of 216,000 migrants and refugees. They received food and medical assistance, accommodation, and protection (access to asylum and legal advice, migratory services and attention for specific needs). Moreover, they were provided with socioeconomic integration services and access to education[cxxi].

IOM has supported Ecuador in combating human trafficking, through workshops to sensitise local authorities and NGOs within the National Protocol for Integrated Protection and Assistance of Victims of Trafficking. Since 2006, IOM has provided direct assistance to 154 victims of trafficking in returning to their countries of origin and reuniting with their family members. It has also offered technical assistance and training to police and prosecutors investigating cases of human trafficking[cxxii].

MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market) and UNASUR (Union of South American Nations) promote regional cooperation on migration and provide visas and protection. The OAS (Organisation of American States), which has a permanent mission in Ecuador, investigate the situation of migration and refuge in the region[cxxiii].

NGOs and Other Organisations

Alas de Colibrí's work focuses on protection for victims of human trafficking, migrants and refugees through psychological and legal care, and social work. It further cooperates with GTRM (Working Group for Refugees and Migrants)[cxxiv].

The CARE organisation also cooperates with GTRM[cxxv]. It has focused on responding to the needs of migrants and refugees from Venezuela with a gender-sensitive approach. In that sense, CARE looks after some of the most vulnerable members of the host and forcibly displaced community, especially women, adolescents and girls[cxxvi].

Moreover, Action Aid supports Venezuelan migrants and refugees with protection, labour integration, and socioeconomic integration in Ecuador[cxxvii]. The Ecuadorian Red Cross works in areas related to risk management in emergencies and disasters, community health, youth, and fundamental principles and humanitarian values[cxxviii].

Save the Children provides the community with a shopping basket of essential and nutrient-dense foods. It also offers a kit with basic school supplies to families of the neighbourhood (it must be pointed out that 17% of the children of official school age in Ecuador do not attend classes at any time during the academic year)[cxxix].

The Catholic Church

Many Episcopal Conferences in South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela, and Uruguay) have carried out the project *Puentes de Solidaridad* to promote the process of integration and inclusion of the migrant population, especially Venezuelans, by providing places to access services, spiritual assistance and visibility of the problem with an impact on public policies.

Furthermore, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) focuses more on international human mobility, involving people in situations of refuge, displacement and migration, especially those most vulnerable[cxxx]. It provides direct assistance to the population, labour integration, legal, psychological and medical care, accommodation, support for mobilisation, food, education, entrepreneurship, and socio-cultural integration[cxxxi]. JRS Ecuador develops participatory community programmes, aiming at encouraging refugees' inclusion and integration into host communities.

Hogar de Cristo is also involved with migrants living in Ecuador[cxxxii]. The "*Casa un Techo para el Camino*" (A roof for the road) aims at welcoming, protecting, and integrating migrants, refugees and victims of human trafficking, providing them with accommodation, food, legal, medical, psychological and spiritual assistance, job placement, support for mobilisation and advice on documentation issues[cxxxiii].

Many other organisations assist migrants and refugees with their documentation, legal, medical, psychological, and spiritual aid, accommodation, food, entrepreneurship, job placement and education. Among them, we must remember the work being done by the Religious Congregation of the Sacred Hearts, the Oblate Sisters, Cáritas Ecuador (through the Good Samaritan shelter in Quito), as well as the Congregation of the Marist Sisters (at the shelter "Sharing the Journey" in Quito), the Scalabrinian Missionaries, the Capuchin Tertiary

Sisters (through the Solidarity Group project), and the Company of the Daughters of Charity[cxxxiv].

As far as Caritas is concerned, this organisation also works at the service of migrants in other areas of the country, and is present in cities like Lago Agrio, Machala, Manta, Ibarra, Cuenca, Coca, Tulcán, and Loja[cxxxv].

It is also important to recall the work being carried out jointly by the Oblate Sisters congregation and Caritas Ecuador in support of the migrant and refugee population, as well as those displaced by violence, giving priority to the most vulnerable cases[cxxxvi]. For this purpose, they have the Good Samaritan Shelter in Quito, where they provide accommodation, food, clothing, legal, documentary, psychological, spiritual, medical and socio-cultural assistance[cxxxvii].

Likewise, due to hostilities from a part of society towards the arrival of refugees, some organisations such as the Scalabrinian Mission, the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Pastoral Social Caritas Ecuador, the Ecuadorian Conference of Religious Men and Women, and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Ecuadorian Episcopal Conference have pointed out the existence of a structural problem in need of an immediate attention and response, so that Ecuadorians and migrants and refugees can live together in peace[cxxxviii].

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