

**CÁTEDRA DE
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Internal Displacement and Violence in Ecuador: Tendencies and Needs

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Summary

As Ecuador has become a preferred transit country in transnational cocaine trafficking in recent years, violence, threats, and bribery have augmented. As a result, both emigration rates and internal displacement have also increased significantly. There is very little information on the new phenomenon of internal displacement in Ecuador. This working paper compiles anecdotal evidence shared by humanitarian workers and testimonies by people having fled violent areas in the coastal region of Ecuador. Its purpose is to describe the phenomenon of internal displacement, outline trends, identify the needs of affected families, and advocate for timely and adequate responses to those needs.

Working papers form part of the efforts of the IDRC Research Chair on Migration and Forced Displacement at Universidad del Pacífico (Lima) to enhance discussions on migration studies and policy. The opinions contained in these documents do not necessarily represent those of the IDRC Chair.

Context¹

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ecuador has experienced a rise in violence perpetrated by local gangs involved in transnational drug trafficking. Since 2021, criminal activity has steadily increased in the Esmeraldas Province, which borders Colombia, and since 2022, it has expanded to the rest of the coastal provinces, according to local residents. By 2023, extortion had reached most Ecuadorian cities, and by early 2024, violence had peaked in coastal urban areas.

Cocaine regularly transits through Ecuador, as neighboring Colombia and Peru produce and process the drug. Ecuadorian criminal gangs, acting as proxies for Mexican cartels *Sinaloa* and *Jalisco Nueva Generación*, compete for transport routes leading to the global North,² with preferred maritime options having been developed during the COVID pandemic lockdown.³ In addition, the Albanian mafia operating in Ecuador also seeks traffic routes towards Europe and engages in money laundering.⁴

According to press reports, drugs, arms, and money are smuggled into Ecuador in connection to these operations, and bribes or threats secure access for illegal activities in ports, transportation networks, police, government functionaries —particularly within the judiciary— and prisons.⁵ Gangs engage in conflicts with each other for control of drug sale territories or trafficking routes. The homicide rate in Ecuador escalated from 13.7 to 44.5 per 100,000 people between 2021 and 2023, placing it at the top of the violence rankings in the region, surpassing Venezuela and Honduras.⁶

Criminal gangs generate additional earnings through kidnapping and extortion. Targeting urban businesses of all sizes,⁷ extortion from 2021 to 2023 forced closures and layoffs in cities like Esmeraldas in the coastal region, gradually extending to commercial areas throughout the country. Between 2023 and 2024, extortion was also reported to affect individuals, with daily ransoms of US\$2 being demanded for residents to reach their homes after working hours in high-risk areas of Guayaquil. Homeowners in neighborhoods targeted by gangs are threatened or forced to flee.

¹ This working paper was prepared by Gabriela Malo for the IDRC Research Chair on Migration and Forced Displacement at Universidad del Pacífico (Lima, Perú).

² Charles, M. 2022. Ecuador y su batalla contra el tráfico internacional de drogas. Observatorio Colombiano del Crimen Organizado. October 2022. Available at: <https://repository.urosario.edu.co/server/api/core/bitstreams/eebe5de4-f036-478c-b741-33ae590e939b/content> (Accessed 7 may 2024)

³ UNODC. 2021. World Drug Report 2021. Vienna: June 2021. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21_Booklet_5.pdf (Accessed 05.06.24)

⁴ Primicias. 2024. Estos son los inicios de la mafia albanesa en Ecuador. Quito: *Primicias*, 7 February 2024. Available at: <https://www.primicias.ec/noticias/seguridad/mafia-albanesa-ecuador-inicios-droga/> (Accessed 5.03.24); El Universo. 2024. Mafia albanesa lava activos en Ecuador. Guayaquil: *El Universo*, 19 April 2024

⁵ France 24. 2024. Las cárceles de Ecuador, en el corazón de la crisis de seguridad. *France 24*, 18 January 2024. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmKw-if28Gc> (Accessed 08.05.24)

⁶ Human Rights Watch. 2024. World Report 2024. Ecuador Chapter: Events of 2023. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/ecuador> (Accessed 25.04.24) and Insight Crime cited by Cevallos Tejada, F. 2024. Protección de niñas, niños y adolescentes en el contexto de la violencia delincuencia: Un breve análisis de la situación. ChildFund, Quito, June 2024.

⁷ An interviewed victim reported that a bakery would have to pay 1000 US dollars per month and a fashion boutique was asked for USD 5000 and the owner was killed when he refused to pay. “Even the lady selling sweets at the corner of the street has to pay 2 dollars a day”. In the port city of Manta, a bank clerk casually mentioned that the amount of the monthly “vaccine” imposed by mafias is now included in the bank’s budget.

Threats to the lives of local officers, rights defenders, and community leaders—including leaders of the Venezuelan migrant communities—have forced many to either move internally or to migrate internationally. Indeed, several candidates for local or national elections, including one presidential candidate, and elected local authorities have been assassinated since January 2023.⁸

On the one hand, outmigration from Ecuador has increased significantly. The number of Ecuadorians migrants in the period from January-June 2024 grew by 58.9% compared to the same period in 2023.⁹ After the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown caused layoffs and increased poverty levels, large numbers of Ecuadorians and Venezuelan migrants in Ecuador sought to reach the US-Mexico border.¹⁰ Ecuadorians have turned into the second largest national group crossing the deadly Darien route¹¹ to reach the US via Colombia and Central America. In 2023, 57,250 Ecuadorians took this route (11% of total crossings),¹² doubling the 2022 figure of 29,356,¹³ after Mexico imposed a visa in 2021. While the most commonly cited reason for international outmigration is the quest for jobs, categories like violence/insecurity and conflict/persecution are increasingly being named as reasons for emigration too.¹⁴

In parallel, internal displacement within Ecuador has also increased in recent years. In the coastal areas, drug routes and violence instigated by groups acting as proxies for Mexican cartels force individuals and families to flee from extortion, general violence, or out of fear of child recruitment (often occurring in schools).¹⁵ Common destinations include rural areas on the coast perceived as safer or cities in Ecuador's highland region. The presence of relatives usually guides the choice of destination, as they can provide shelter and assistance upon arrival.

⁸ Expreso. 2024. La democracia, otra víctima más del crimen organizado. Guayaquil: *Expreso*, 16 April 2024, p.5

⁹ Departures (no re-entry) in the first half of 2024: 88,876 people; 55,911 in 2023. See: Ministerio del Interior. 2024. Estadística Migratoria. Flujo migratorio de ecuatorianos. Available at: <https://www.migracion.gob.ec/> (Accessed 18.07.24)

¹⁰ Ecuador is the third country in the region in terms of the number of Venezuelan migrants. According to information provided by the US Embassy in Ecuador, 18,000 migrants residing in Ecuador have registered in Safe Mobility offices in Ecuador, most of them Venezuelan.

¹¹ Dangerous forest area in the Colombia-Panama border, with presence of mafias. Venezuelans are the largest national group to cross this region.

¹² Fernández Collado, María. 2024. Venezolanos y ecuatorianos son quienes más han migrado por el Tapón del Darién en 2024. *Newtral Data*, 17 January 2024. Available at: <https://www.newtral.es/migraciones-tapon-darien/20240117/> (Accessed 26.02.24)

¹³ IOM. 2023. 2022 duplica el número de migrantes en la peligrosa ruta del Tapón del Darién. Office of the Special Envoy for Regional Response to the Venezuela Situation. 17 January 2023. Available at: <https://respuestavenezolanos.iom.int/es/news/2022-duplica-el-numero-de-migrantes-en-la-peligrosa-ruta-del-tapon-del-darien> (Accessed 8 may 2024)

¹⁴ IOM. 2024. DTM Pilot Round, Mixed movement monitoring survey. 20 November to 1 December 2023. Available at: <https://ecuador.iom.int/es/dtm-flujos-mixtos-ronda-piloto> (Accessed 14.03.24)

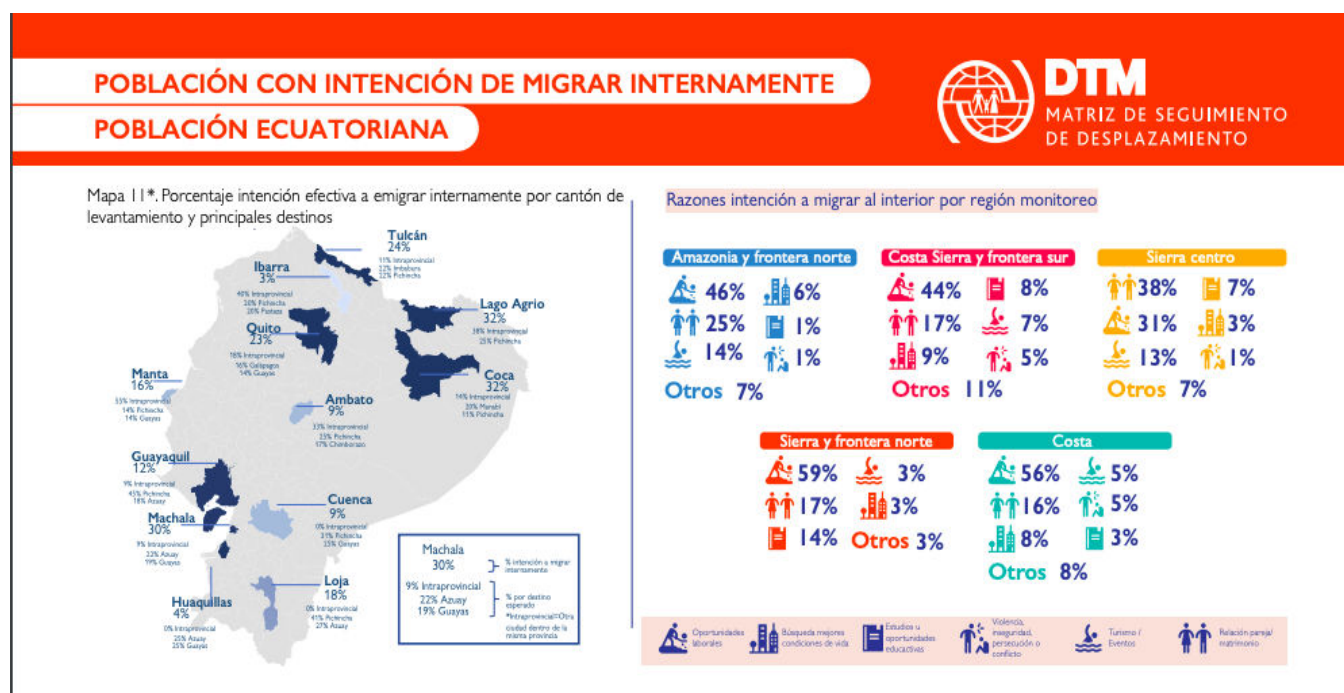
¹⁵ EFE. 2024. Estas son las cifras que explican el impacto del crimen organizado en los niños de Ecuador. Quito: *Primicias*, 15 January 2024. Available at: <https://www.primicias.ec/noticias/sociedad/ninos-violencia-ecuador-unicef-crimen/> (Accessed 25.04.24) and Machado, J. 2024, and Más de 60.000 estudiantes no se matricularon en el último año escolar, en la Costa. Quito: *Primicias*, 19 April 2024. Available at: <https://www.primicias.ec/noticias/sociedad/estudiantes-abandono-escolar-pobreza/> (Accessed 25.04.24)

Forced recruitment of children and adolescents for criminal activities as it occurs in Ecuador nowadays was also a cause for family flight in Colombia, Guatemala and Honduras. See CIDH. 2018. Desplazamiento interno en el Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica Lineamientos para la formulación de políticas públicas. OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 101, 27 July 2018. Available at: <https://repositorio.dpe.gob.ec/handle/39000/3169>

On Colombia, see: Manjarrés, J. 2023. InSight en Cifras: 3 tendencias que marcaron el reclutamiento infantil en el conflicto colombiano. *InSight Crime*, 20 November 2023. Available at: <https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/insight-3-tendencias-marcaron-reclutamiento-infantil-conflicto-colombiano/> (Accessed 25.04.24)

While Ecuadorian emigration, especially to the US via the Darien route, is increasingly well-studied, there is little or no information on contemporary internal displacement within the country, as well as its drivers and effects. According to a pilot survey by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in several Ecuadorian cities, the main reason for internal movement was the search for employment (Graph 1). However, in the case of Ecuadorians migrating from cities on the Ecuadorian coast (Manta, Guayaquil, Machala, Huaquillas), the proportion of respondents who cited violence as a reason to move rose to 5%, up from 1% or less among those who migrated from the highlands and Amazon regions. Furthermore, according to experts, there likely is a link to violence in the economic reasons cited for movement. Economic downturns brought about by violence in sectors such as tourism in coastal regions, businesses that closed due to extortion, or threats directed at family members may be reasons for internal movement respondents are afraid to voice.

Graph 1. IOM-DTM: Ecuadorians who intend to migrate internally, December 2023



Source: IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix Ecuador Pilot Round – Author: IOM DTM¹⁶

*The icons representing reasons cited for migration are (see pink bar, left to right): Labor opportunities; Quest for improved living conditions; Studies or educational opportunities; Violence, insecurity, persecution or conflict; Tourism/events; Couple/marriage

An additional factor worth mentioning is that apart from violence causing increased emigration to North America and internal displacement, climatic effects are expected to cause further human mobility in Ecuador. The El Niño Southwestern Oscillation (ENSO), which periodically affects the Pacific coast of South America, occurred in 2023-2024. However, flooding-related damage was less severe than expected, and many victims remained in local shelters near their damaged homes. Consequently, Ecuadorian and Venezuelan families who relocated in 2023-2024 from the coast to other regions in Ecuador have rarely cited climate change as a reason for their migration. The IDRC recorded 16,000 displacements caused by natural disasters in

¹⁶ IOM. 2024. DTM Pilot Round, Mixed movement monitoring survey. 20 November to 1 December 2023. Available at: <https://ecuador.iom.int/es/dtm-flujos-mixtos-ronda-piloto> (Accessed 14.03.24)

2023 in Ecuador, and 4,900 people are still displaced at year-end.¹⁷ Preparation for climate-related risks and other natural events remains insufficient, and recurrent flooding is likely to affect growing numbers in the future.

Internal Armed Conflict

In response to rising violence and criminal activity, and after the escape from prison of a notorious mafia leader, the government declared a nationwide state of emergency on January 8, 2024. This measure included local curfews and the intervention of the armed forces and national police in prison management and in conducting joint operations against criminal groups.¹⁸ The mafias reacted on January 9 with an armed attack on a public TV station, prompting the declaration of “state of internal armed conflict” by the government of Daniel Noboa.¹⁹ The government declared a state of war against 21 criminal groups, officially designated as “terrorists.”²⁰

Since the declaration of internal conflict, the flow of families from the coast to highland cities (sierra) has increased, as reported by organizations involved in attending to the needs of migrants and asylum seekers.²¹ Fleeing in fear, these—mostly poor—families often remain out of the public eye. No data has been made publicly available yet, and the national government’s position on the issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs)²² remains unclear.

Experts also mentioned internal displacement from the Amazon region, which is less populated than the rest of the country. Here people have also fled violence, often in connection with illegal mining, which is often accompanied by money laundering and the extortion of miners.

¹⁷ IDRC. 2024. Global Report on Internal Displacement 2024. Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, April 2024. Available at: <https://api.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/IDMC-GRID-2024-Global-Report-on-Internal-Displacement.pdf> (Accessed 06.06.24)

¹⁸ Presidencia de la República del Ecuador. 2024. Decreto 110: Se declara el estado de excepción en todo el territorio nacional por grave conmoción interna, incluidos todos los centros de privación de la libertad que integran el Sistema Nacional de Rehabilitación Social sin excepción alguna. 8 January 2024. Available at: https://minka.presidencia.gob.ec/portal/usuarios_externos.jsf (Accessed 05.03.24)

Note: State of exception declaration and renewal totaled the 90 days allowed by the Constitution (art 164), during which 18,736 people were detained. See: EFE. 2024. El saldo final del estado de excepción deja 20 presuntos “terroristas” abatidos. *Infobae*, 8 April 2024. Available at: <https://www.infobae.com/america/agencias/2024/04/09/el-saldo-final-del-estado-de-excepcion-en-ecuador-deja-20-presuntos-terroristas-abatidos/> (Accessed 11.04.24)

¹⁹ Elected in mid-2023 and in office from November 2023 to May 2025. Noboa will complete the presidential period of Guillermo Lasso, who invoked cross-dissolution of the National Assembly and the Executive (“*muerte cruzada*”). He will reportedly run for re-election (2025-2029).

²⁰ Presidencia de la República del Ecuador. 2024. Executive Decree No. 111. 9 January 2024. Available at: https://www.comunicacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Decreto_Ejecutivo_No._111_20240009145200_20240009145207.pdf (Accessed 05.03.24)

²¹ Seven of the contacted organizations had encountered IDP cases, and most could offer little or no support, as there are no specific programs to assist this population. Assistance projects usually require data as well as leadership from a national authority who may request assistance to approach the issue.

²² According to the 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, “internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.” See: Deng, F. 1998. Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons. Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Economic and Social Council E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, 11 February 1998. Par 2. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g98/104/93/pdf/g9810493.pdf> (Accessed 15.08.24)

There is no clear trend of movement towards urban reception areas, although rural to urban displacement in the Amazon does occur as well.

Routes, Challenges, and Needs of IDPs

The objective of this section is to describe the current patterns of internal displacement in Ecuador. Due to the lack of data, the section relies on the testimonies of humanitarian workers and civil society organizations who shared their recent experiences in cities receiving internal displacement.

Ecuadorians from the coast have their own accent, culture, and distinct idiosyncrasy, differing from the people of the *sierra*, who are influenced by socially more reserved Andean indigenous cultures. Relocating from the warm coast to the highlands represents a cultural shock and exposure to a much colder climate. These challenges speak to the forced nature of the current movements.

Reported trends in 2024 indicate a preference for towns where a relative resides or where there are more (largely informal) job opportunities. According to interviewees who fled with their families, the reputation of a town as “secure” was a central factor in their choice of destination.

Most families on the move are poor and carry very little with them. In many highland cities, they encounter comparatively higher prices for food and housing, and they arrive unprepared for the cold climate. IDPs may find rental space in overcrowded *conventillos*.²³ The breadwinner (usually a man) seeks economic activity, mostly unrelated to previous occupations. Women who are heads of households and in charge of several children face extreme vulnerability, according to civil society organizations.²⁴

Children of internally displaced and or/migrant families, including Venezuelan and Colombian children, account for many of the 119,324 students who failed to return to the public school system in 2023-2024 across Ecuador.²⁵ Students moving with their families to more secure regions are not automatically enrolled in new schools upon arrival, as families seek primarily a place to stay and a source of income. Another contributing factor is a lack of knowledge on how to re-enroll children in the school year in a different geographical region.²⁶

Here, it needs to be noted that the number of Colombian asylum seekers in Ecuador grew by 22.5% in 2023 compared to the previous year and by 86% in January-March 2024 compared to the first quarter of 2023.²⁷ Internally displaced Venezuelan or Colombian families who received humanitarian assistance when they initially settled in city A may face a refusal when

²³ Large rundown houses with several rooms, with lower rent than other accommodations. Two or three families may share a room.

²⁴ Several women arriving in destination cities report that their husbands/partners took the Darien route to the US-Mexico border with unknown results.

²⁵ Machado, J. 2024. Más de 60.000 estudiantes no se matricularon en el último año escolar, en la Costa. Quito: *Primicias*, 19 April 2024. Available at: <https://www.primicias.ec/noticias/sociedad/estudiantes-abandono-escolar-pobreza/> (Accessed 25.04.24)

²⁶ Due to the existence of different rainy seasons in the coast and inland regions, Ecuador has adopted two overlapping school calendars: from April to January in the coast, and from September to June in the *sierra* and Amazon regions.

²⁷ UNHCR. 2024. Tendencias nacionales: El desplazamiento forzado en Ecuador 2024. July 2024. Available at: <https://www.acnur.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/tendencias-nacionales-desplazamiento-forzado-ecuador-2024.pdf> (Accessed 16.07.24)

they seek assistance in city B, after fleeing violence. This would obey to efforts by cooperation agencies to prevent duplication of aid. According to a faith-based organization assisting several families who fled Esmeraldas Province, the current situation requires a case-by-case analysis.

Legal Provisions on Internal Displacement

At the regional level, norms and standards regarding internal displacement and the rights of IDPs have been established by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission.²⁸ Paragraph 60 of these standards emphasizes the obligation of the State to protect IDPs whether the State is responsible for their movement or not.

There is no legal doubt about the right of the internally displaced to be protected by the State.²⁹ In Ecuador, besides the general obligation to protect the rights of all those in Ecuadorian territory (art 3), the Ecuadorian Constitution prohibits in art. 42 all arbitrary displacement, and states the right, held by those who “have been displaced”, to protection and emergency humanitarian aid from the authorities, and to voluntary secure and dignified return. This aid includes “access to food, housing, and medical services”. The norm places particular emphasis on children and adolescents, pregnant women, mothers with young children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, granting them the right to “preferential and specialized humanitarian aid”.³⁰

However, in practice, Ecuador is unprepared to deal with rising numbers of IDPs and lacks urban infrastructure for their reception. The State’s protection system is not ready for a surge in demand, and emergency response protocols need to be strengthened. In general, there is little awareness of IDPs’ rights and barriers to inclusion, and overall, awareness of the growing phenomenon of internal displacement is lacking.

Crucially, the question of institutional leadership has yet to be addressed. The Human Mobility Law (*Ley Orgánica de Movilidad Humana*, LOMH) does not mention internal displacement, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility has not assumed any public position regarding the issue. At the moment, no institution is leading on this subject within the Ecuadorian State, and local governments in destinations have not yet adequately responded to the matter either.

²⁸ The document also cites opinions by the Inter American Human Rights Court. CIDH. 2015. “Derechos Humanos de migrantes, refugiados, apátridas, víctimas de trata de personas y desplazados internos: Normas y Estándares del Sistema Interamericano”. OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc.46/15. December 2015. Available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/MovilidadHumana.pdf> (Accessed 11.04.24) See also Chapter 4 on Forced internal displacement in: CIDH. 2013. Verdad, justicia y reparación: Cuarto informe sobre la situación de derechos humanos en Colombia. Available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/pdfs/justicia-verdad-reparacion-es.pdf> (Accessed 17.07.24)

²⁹ Kälin, W. 2021. Internal displacement. In Costello, C., Foster, M. and McAdam, J., ed.: *The Oxford Handbook of International Refugee Law*. Oxford, 3 June 2021.

³⁰ Article 42. *All arbitrary displacement is forbidden. Persons who have been displaced shall have the right to receive protection and emergency humanitarian aid from the authorities, ensuring access to food, shelter, housing, and medical and health services. Children, adolescents, pregnant women, mothers with underage daughters and sons, elderly persons and persons with disabilities shall receive preferential and specialized humanitarian assistance. All displaced persons and groups shall have the right to return to their place of origin voluntarily, with safety and dignity.* In: Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador. 2008. Constitución de la República del Ecuador, art 42. Available in English at: <https://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html> Available in Spanish in its reformed version: <https://biblioteca.defensoria.gob.ec/handle/37000/3390>

The question of leadership in Ecuador relates to another: Who should take the lead in building and adapting public policy regarding IDPs? Will resources be available for public institutions and local governments to provide relevant services to IDPs starting anew in another location?

In Need of a Roadmap

In case of inaction regarding the protection of the rights of Ecuadorians facing vulnerable situations in Ecuadorian territory, the national Ombudsman is mandated to intervene. The Office of Human Rights Ombudsman (*Defensoría del Pueblo*) is charged by the Constitution with "...the protection and guardianship of the rights of the inhabitants of Ecuador..." (art. 215)³¹ As an independent entity, it may investigate "the deeds or omissions of... legal entities that provide public services" (Art. 215, No. 3). The Ombudsman's office has started to collect data on the subject.

The Ministries of Social and Economic Inclusion, Public Health and Education are mandated to offer protection, care, economic opportunities, health, and education. Data from the education sector may be used to fill part of the information gap, and mechanisms such as analysis of location in the use of mobile phone lines could help to shed light on internal mobility trends.³²

Response should be swift and adapted to the particular needs of IDPs within the framework of existing programs for vulnerable groups, including children, the homeless or elderly, people with disabilities, women at risk of gender-based violence, Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian groups, refugees, and migrants. To properly do so, national institutions and local governments in destination cities require technical assistance and training to identify and adequately handle internal displacement. The obligation to respond to the needs of displaced families must consider the necessary confidentiality, as most wish to keep their location unknown to those who menaced them.

Needs regarding internal displacement in Ecuador arise in a context of fiscal duress, where cash-poor local governments should endeavor to respond to arrivals with food and shelter, psychosocial support, employment opportunities, school enrollment, and in community-based safety nets. Considering their recent experiences with violence and resulting feelings of fear, efforts to reach internally displaced people may be challenging.

In the current scenario, the return of displaced families to their homes is not a realistic option for the next few years, according to practitioners. Relocation of rights defendants is an urgent need, as they are increasingly targeted by criminal groups. The importance of timely addressing mental health issues calls for joint efforts by the state and civil society organizations. Special care should be taken to avoid the revictimization and stigmatization of new arrivals by host communities who may associate the displaced with the violence that caused their movement.

³¹ Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador. 2008. Constitución de la República del Ecuador. Art 215.3. Available in English at: <https://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html> Available in Spanish in its reformed version: <https://biblioteca.defensoria.gob.ec/handle/37000/3390>

³² However, some IDPs are reported to discard mobile phone numbers known to pursuers. On the use of mobile phones to track climate-related displacement in Colombia in 2014, see: Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT). 2018. Smartphones used to track migrations caused by climate change. 18 June 2018. Available at: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/06/180628120053.htm> (Accessed 08.08.24)

In Ecuador, faith-based organizations are among the first to be contacted by IDPs through religious communities or shelters, and thus in a position to react early to their needs. In the absence of a clear national directive, organizations working in the defense of migrants and refugees, many of whom face similar challenges, need flexible funding to assist IDPs within their existing projects while developing new ones. Donors should respond by increasing funding that is not earmarked by nationality and by providing additional resources, including for technical assistance.

Conclusion

In a context that has rapidly turned violent and parallel to rising emigration, a growing number of Ecuadorian and non-Ecuadorian families are facing invisibilized internal displacement within Ecuador, leaving behind social safety nets, livelihoods, and schools. Most do not know their rights, and little aid is available to assist them. There is an urgent need to collect data on these trends, define policies and response mechanisms, and act at national and local levels.

Needed action:

- Coordination of interested actors in clusters to share information and optimize resources (local government and state actors, civil society, non-government and international organizations, academia)
- Design (by cluster) of unified surveys on movement: causes, routes, main destinations and selection rationale, differentiated impact, present and expected needs and coping strategies

Information:

- Upon arrival at bus terminals in destination cities, provide a city map with a list of transport options, free internet facilities, schools, healthcare facilities, public daycare centers, protection centers, and other relevant services. Additionally, offer a WhatsApp contact for further information and participation in a survey

State Institutions, Local Governments, International Aid and Civil Society Organizations:

- Train staff on internal displacement issues and trends with gender, intercultural, and intersectional approaches
- Analyze present (national/local government, others) offer of services of interest to displaced people, including housing, psychosocial support, free warm clothing, education, daycare and health services, legal assistance
- Include displaced families in food assistance, integration/livelihood projects, and education
- Support existing emergency shelters operated by civil society organizations
- Conduct differentiated reporting and follow-up of displacement cases
- Adapt service offerings and institutional discourse to prevent discrimination and avoid re-victimization

Donors:

- Update institutional information on displacement features in Ecuador
- Prioritize funding without nationality-linked restrictions for human mobility issues in Ecuador

Community-based action:

- Establish community-based safety nets for the support of displaced families