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# Child Labour Within the Ecuadorian Cities of Guayaquil and Quito

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## Executive Summary

Child labour is one of the worst labour issues facing our world, impacting millions of children worldwide. While many of the “Sustainable Development Goals” set forth by the *United Nations* have direct and indirect impacts on child labour, there has yet to be an identifiable and definitive solution. Rather, it is the complexity and multidimensionality of issues contributing to the perpetuation of child labour that enables the practice to continue. This document will address child labour within Ecuador in an effort to raise awareness within the general public. Urban centers in Ecuador are plagued with increasing numbers of migrant children being forced into the worst forms of child labour. This is most evident in the cities of Quito and Guayaquil, where migrant children are thought to be engaged in the worst forms of child labour. Typical forms of child labour include informal agriculture, domestic/street work. Most recent figures indicate that approximately 4.9% of migrant children are forced to work in these conditions, which removes them from school and learning environments (International Labour Organization). The recent economic crises facing Ecuador, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, are contributing factors to a rise in child labour, despite projects instituted by the government, churches, and nongovernmental organizations. In addition, the Ecuadorian government has committed the country to abide by Convention 182 introduced by the *International Labour Organization*, which focuses on abolishing child labour (International Labour Organization). This is of importance to migrant children, especially refugees from neighboring countries that seek asylum in Ecuador. Once within Ecuador, these families suffer from child labour due to lack of documentation, increased discrimination, and blockades to entering school.

Given the severity and critical need for change, new programs should be utilized to help mediate the rise of child labour in these areas. We hope to provide innovative and actionable

measures to help local communities eradicate child labour. Examples include a Youth Impulse Program and disseminate awareness materials for public consumption.

### **Policy Challenge**

Child labour is an interwoven, complex subject that impacts the economic, educational, and societal wellbeing of children, families, and communities. Because of this complexity, reducing instances of child labour requires a multidimensional solution that incorporates education, job growth, and awareness. Child labour, as defined by the *International Labour Organization*, is “work that deprives children of their childhood and work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous.” This includes any type of work that “interferes with schooling by depriving them the opportunity to attend, leave school prematurely, or requiring the combination of school attendance with excessively long and heavy work” (International Labour Organization).

While many countries and international agencies take these challenges into account, countries such as Ecuador have seen alarming increases in the prevalence of child labour in two of their largest urban centers, Quito and Guayaquil, most significantly in migrant children populations. With any of the Sustainable Development Goals (e.g., quality education for all), the recommendations and steps set forth in this policy recommendation will be one of many that promotes general suggestions to support a world where no child has to sacrifice school for work or their future. Recommendations set forth will provide insight into the underlying conditions allowing child labor to continue, with recommendations to support sustainable opportunities for measurable local impact programs within the urban centers of Quito and Guayaquil.

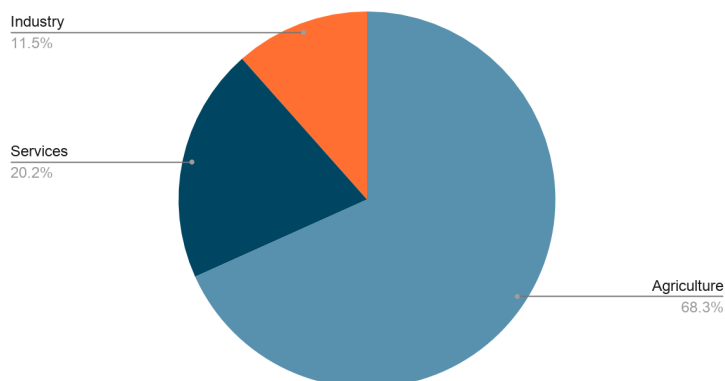
In addition, issues related to the impact of COVID-19, including increased financial hardships for many families and forced school closures, is reversing years of educational

progress in Quito and Guayaquil. The swift and brutal financial devastation caused by the pandemic have forced families into poverty, which is a significant predictor of increased child labour (ILO & UNICEF). On a global scale, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated previous economic and social crises leading to an estimated 42-66 million children falling into extreme poverty and increasing rates of child labour (International Labour Organization 2020). As of date of publication, the Ecuadorian government has yet to institute any social welfare programs that support families in crisis as a result of COVID-19.

### Description of the Ecuadorian Situation

Approximately 37% of the population in Ecuador are under the age of 18. Among those, “18% of these children were born in a family that survives on less than \$1 US per day” (Morsolin). Driven by poverty, discrimination, and many other social factors, children in Ecuador are forced into child labour instead of education. Table 1 identifies the types of child labour in Ecuador, with agriculture (e.g., farming, raising livestock, fishing), services (e.g., street vending, forced begging, domestic work, unpaid housework), and industry (e.g., mining, construction work)(UNICEF Data Warehouse). [Table 1. Pie chart showing the distribution of

Child Labor in Ecuador by Job Sectors



child workers in Ecuador.]

Statistics on child labour in Ecuador have shown an increase in child labour in recent years, with less than one hundred thousand children engaged in child labour in 2014 and more than double that

number five years later (El Universo 2019). Quito and Guayaquil, the two largest urban areas in

Ecuador, hold the largest relevant percentages of child labour. This is due to large populations and informal commercial businesses and the large percentage of migrant families concentrated in the areas. For example, recent statistics indicate that Guayaquil holds 2.8% of child labour cases in the country, which has been directly affected by the 2013 economic crisis in Ecuador (Adriano 2015, El Comercio 2014).

While efforts have been made by local public officials to eradicate child labour economic programs (e.g., Human Development Bonus) as well as policy initiatives (e.g., Project for the Eradication of Child Labour [PETI]), that was meant to reduce half of the statistics of child labour by 2021 (El Universo 2019). In addition, nongovernmental organizations (NGO) have made efforts to promote educational opportunities for migrant children, yet struggle to receive national support and governmental adoptions of such initiatives (e.g., CARE International). Despite public officials and NGO support, there remains significant obstacles and barriers to the implementation and widespread efficacy of these programs, arguably due to the complexity of issues surrounding the causing child labour.

### **Child Labour During COVID-19**

The economic crisis of 2013 and the persistent inattention from the government to protected populations in Ecuador have been major determinants for the current resurgence of child labour in the country (International Labour Organization 2020). In addition to the increases in poverty and child labour due to COVID-19, the economic crisis in Ecuador resulted in a fall of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to 1.8%. The brutal financial devastation caused by the pandemic have forced families into poverty, and as mentioned previously can increase the amount of children forced to work. Since the onset of COVID-19 an estimated 62.8% of school-age children and adolescents have fallen victim to the digital divide due to lack of

resources and opportunity to attend school online. Contributing factors include the lack of access to cell phones, computers at home, internet access, and economic instability (Ministerio de Educación 2020).

The pandemic continues to be a threat to migrant populations in Ecuador, most significantly due to lack of legal documentation, marginalization, and high prevalence of child labour in migrant communities. Less than 15% of Venezuelan people living in Ecuador have a regular migratory status that would allow them to work in the formal sector. In fact, an estimated 56% of migrant children and adolescents living in Ecuador are not included in the education system because of the lack of legal identification documents and the costs involved including transportation, meals, and school materials (World Bank 2020).

### **Solution**

The Ecuadorian government has taken several actions to eliminate child labour in Ecuador by establishing social programs, such as the Youth Impulse and the *Less Poverty, More Development* programs. The government has struggled to implement these programs because national programs are not as effective as city programs, indicating that differentiation in programming and implementation is necessary. The national government must focus on addressing educational development and migration policies, as both are of the utmost importance and have significant impacts on child labour.

The *US Bureau of International Labour Affairs* solutions proposed in 2019 regarding social service actions provides us with a blueprint for the solutions proposed for Quito and Guayaquil. We suggest the creation of a Youth Impulse Program that helps children and families to learn more about how they can get legal identification documents so that they can have access to the formal labour sector and the education system in Ecuador. The proposed three month

program consists of peer-to-peer educational sessions led by previously trained college students and social workers geared towards children and their families. In order to achieve a high rate of attendance and interest, we suggest involving churches, migrant community leaders, and health centers. Through these engagements, fundraising programs can be implemented to help purchase school materials for children. To gauge the efficacy of the program, pre and post-surveys will be administered in order to assess program outcomes, including the use and/or applicability of the program in other communities around the country.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Child labour is a longstanding global concern, one that has influenced the livelihood of millions of children, their families, and communities. By recognizing many of the underlying causes of child labour such as poverty, lack of educational access, and discrimination, programs such as the Youth Impulse Program, have the opportunity to raise awareness and encourage people to keep children focused on education. Given the significant increases in child labour due to COVID-19, programs such as this are critical to addressing the increased social and economic issues in Quito and Guayaquil, while potentially mediating some of the continued effects of COVID-19 on the major determinants of child labour in Ecuador. We recognize that child labour is important to eradicate to ensure the prosperity of vulnerable migrant children and their families. Child labour deprives children of the opportunity to receive education, strips them of their dignity, and creates a vicious cycle. There must be awareness, understanding, and a desire to change if any actionable solution is to be permanent.

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