

# Covid-19 and (Im)mobility in the Americas

## BOLIVIA

1. **Poverty rate:** 33,2% out of the total population as for 2018.<sup>1</sup>
2. **Migration data:**
  - a. Sending country: Around 878.000 Bolivians or 7.8% of the total population reside abroad mainly in Argentina (48.5%), Spain (17.2%), the US (47.4%) and Chile (9.2%).
  - b. Destination country: Around 156.000 immigrants or 1.4% out of the total population live in Bolivia. The main countries of origin are Argentina (29.8%), Brazil (17.9%), Spain (8.5%); and in recent years Bolivia has also received people from Venezuela (more than 2.000 people in 2019).
  - c. Transit country: Venezuelan migrants crossing Bolivia en route to Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.
  - d. Host country for refugees: There are 700 refugees or asylum seekers of more than 20 different nationalities (Peruvians, Colombians, Cubans, Iraqis, and Russians) residing in Bolivia.
3. **Impact by COVID-19s (as of July 14, 2020)**
  - a. Registered cases: 49,250
  - b. % of cases out of the total population: 0,42%
  - c. Number of deaths: 1,866
4. **States Measures**
  - The Supreme Decree No. 4196 of March 17, 2020 that declares a health emergency and quarantine throughout the country, establishes that the border closure will continue until Tuesday, March 31. However, in the article 8, it clarifies that: "it does not include Bolivian citizens and residents who return to Bolivia, who must comply with the protocol and procedures of the Ministry of Health".
  - By presidential decision and as a consequence of the overflow of incoming migrant returnees, the borders was completely closed as of March 26, with a greater participation of the military and police in control tasks.
  - The Ombudsman's Office ordered that Bolivia admit Bolivians stranded at the border with Chile.
  - The April 8 Supreme Decree regulates the entry of Bolivians stranded at different borders and makes them comply with health protocols.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44969/5/S1901133\\_es.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44969/5/S1901133_es.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/emigracion/bolivia>  
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<sup>3</sup> John Hopkins University (2020). "Coronavirus Resource Centre". <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

- The Bolivian government reached an agreement with the Chilean government for the repatriation of migrants who were camping outside the Bolivian consulate in Santiago de Chile.
- There were bilateral agreements managing the return of immigrants in Bolivia (quarantines are carried out on both sides of the border).
- Flights called humanitarian were used to repatriate Bolivians who can afford the basic cost of the ticket.
- The police and the General Directorate of Migration launch the Plan against foreign criminals. In this context, returnees who evaded the quarantine were criminalized and prosecuted for an attack on health.
- There was a political use of the issue by political parties towards the upcoming presidential elections.

## 5. At risk populations

- *Bolivian migrants stranded in Chile (seasonal migrants, mainly linked to agricultural work, socioeconomically precarious)* (This population is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19)
  - Before the pandemic:
    - Bolivian migrants in Chile had access to health services, public education, and social protection.
    - They are exploited, suffered from abuse by employers, deception by recruitment agencies, and lack of access to a path to permanent residence.
    - The majority live in overcrowding in places that prevent conditions for good health.
    - **The situations for Bolivians in Chile have NOT changed during the pandemic. Risks possibly have been exacerbated, directly affecting the lives of irregularized migrants in Chile.**
  - During the pandemic:
    - Seasonal Bolivian migrants going to Chile who have decided to return to Bolivia are stranded at the border because Bolivia does not admit them into the country. They are mainly in Huara and Colchane. Certain groups have been admitted and quarantined in a situation of overcrowding with limited access to basic services, such as the Pisiga case.
    - Migrants who have been admitted to Bolivia are rejected by Bolivian communities for fear of contagion. This is the case of Cochabamba.
    - The Bolivian State has refused to let people in with the argument that those groups only want to destabilize the government and disrespect the quarantine.
- *Bolivian migrants in Argentina (seasonal migrants who live in the poverty belts of the most important cities)* (this population is vulnerable to COVID-19).

- During the pandemic:
  - Bolivian migrants in Argentina are not returning as much as their compatriots in Chile. However, their situation in the slums is precarious, so they have opted for solidarity strategies to quarantine more "collectively" like sharing common pots.
  - The border between Bolivia and Argentina (like the one between Bolivia and Brazil) are inhabited spaces, and therefore the return problem seems less critical than the return from Chile. The borders with Chile are completely deserted and inhospitable. Even in those conditions, a strong persecution by the police from both states against migrants who want to cross the border is registered.
- *Bolivian migrants in Europe and in the US* (this population is vulnerable to COVID-19).
  - During the pandemic:
    - The vast majority of Bolivians in Italy that live in the Lombardy area which is most affected by the pandemic, have suffered from job loss and limited access to social services. These are mainly women dedicated to caring work. Likewise, due to the type of occupation, they are more likely to be infected with Covid-19.
    - There are about 100 Bolivian migrants in Miami, mainly students, who have not been repatriated and who do not have the resources to stay in the US.
    - Bolivians with Spanish citizenship requested to be authorize o travel to recover their jobs in Spain.
- *Venezuelan irregularized migrants, particularly people in transit* (this population is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19).
  - Before the pandemic:
    - Venezuelans have been living in very precarious life and suffering discrimination and criminalization.
    - **The situations have NOT changed during the pandemic. Risks possibly have been exacerbated, directly affecting the lives of Venezuelan irregularized migrants crossing or living in Bolivia.**
  - During the pandemic:
    - As has happened in the entire region, Venezuelan migrants have lost their main source of income, which is the informal trade as a result of the pandemic.
    - Thus, Venezuelans are now in a street situation, without access to health services.

## 6. Social responses

- *Migrant struggle:*
  - Bolivian migrants are struggling to return from Chile. They are making protests in front of the consulate in Santiago, setting up camps in border areas and in major cities as a mechanism of pressure but also as a form of survival.
  - The Bolivian migrant community in Argentina maintains mutual aid networks to face quarantine in slums.
- *Solidarity networks:*
  - Caritas support Venezuelans in Cochabamba providing accommodation until the end of the state of emergency.
  - In La Paz, the Catholic Church offered shelter to around 700 Venezuelan migrants. The mayor's office gave shelter to an additional 100 people.
  - The feminist collective Mujeres Creando have facilitated their collective space so that women and children can be quarantined there.
- Xenophobia
  - There are various blocks to stop the entry of return migrants, as well as different forms of union control and isolation of returnees in communities.

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\*For more detail go to the digital achieve that we created:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/li6QQjrLIAN1rw-UiKjE4TLjsFEZaWtTs>

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