



Belgium
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THE STATE OF GIRLS' RIGHTS IN ECUADOR

March 2022



GIRLS' RIGHTS AT A GLANCE¹

Ecuador has ratified the main international conventions and treaties protecting girls' and women's rights and ranks 86th on the Human Development Index thanks to important efforts to alleviate poverty since the 2016's recession. Nevertheless, girls and women continue to be subjected severe discrimination in the day-to-day practice and are **constrained in the realization of their human rights by deeply entrenched harmful social and gender norms.**

Girls and women are **confined to the private sphere and are raised with the expectation of becoming good wives and mothers.** This translates early on in a clear gender-based division of labour: **eight girls and adolescents out of ten are the ones exclusively in charge of domestic chores and water fetching.** In the Manabi region where Plan International conducted a Gender Analysis, girls and women dedicate more than 24 hours per week to household tasks, compared to only seven hours per week for boys and men. In addition to not being seen, treated or considered equal to men, **girls and women are expected to accept "protection" and control by their caregivers and then by their partner.** As their empowerment is less valued overall, girls enjoy less freedom across all aspects of their life, including on sports, leisure and relationships' participation and decisions. As an illustration of this double standard: **"boys are taught that they have to be free, girls are taught that they have to be good"**, affirmed a government official.

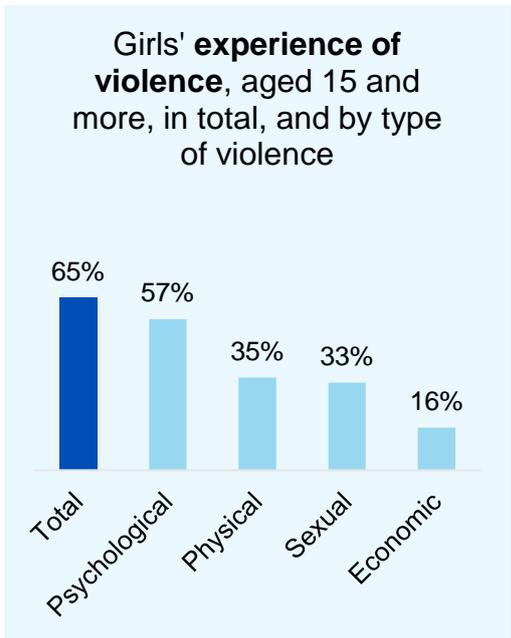
Gender-based violence remains prevalent in Ecuador: **seven girls and women in ten have experienced at least one type of violence, and one in four has ever experienced sexual violence.** Young women, between 16 and 20 years old, married, forced to union, or having left their home are the most vulnerable (seven in ten). Violence is normalized and justified, especially when committed by husbands or partners, by the social expectations for women and girls to be obedient and for men and boys to assert their dominance as household heads. **Despite marriage under 18 being forbidden in Ecuador since 2015 without any exception, four girls in ten are married or in union before 18,** but the number is likely to be higher as most of the unions are informal.

Regarding education, parity in schools has been achieved, with girls even outperforming boys. Yet, girls' education is less valued and their school experience contrasts with boys', with girls enduring limited decision-making participation, harassment and sexual violence in schools. **Adolescent pregnancy and lack of adequate sanitation infrastructures and quality care and support services addressing the specific needs of girls are barriers** to the continuity of their education, especially for girls from indigenous communities. As they grow up, girls continue to have **limited agency and economic autonomy.** When they enter the labour force, young women face disparities in salary wages. In addition to not having a leading role at home, especially when it comes to family decisions, women lack decision-making power in public sphere and community spaces. Less than one woman in ten claims ever having participated in community spaces.

Girls, boys, women, indigenous people and people living in rural areas are the most at risk of experiencing poverty. They are also the most vulnerable to external shocks, such as extreme climate events and migration crisis. Disasters, such as flooding and droughts, as well as earthquakes like in 2016, worsen girls' rights violations and increase their exposure to gender-based violence. With the Venezuelan refugee crisis and the Colombian conflict, the presence of traffickers and non-state armed groups has worsened in some areas, increasing the risk for girls and boys to be recruited as child soldiers or to be engaged in sex trafficking or forced labour. The economic and sanitary impacts of COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the obstacles to girls' rights' realization. Girls were also locked up with perpetrators during the pandemic, were isolated, lost their support network, therefore, had less or no opportunities to look for help in case of violence.

There are persisting gaps in the legal and institutional framework that hinder the achievement of girls' rights and gender equality: girls remain invisible in policies, and there is limited capacity to respond to violence with survivors being blamed, and insufficient resources are consecrated to justice.

¹ The executive summary contains references that are made available across the report



59%

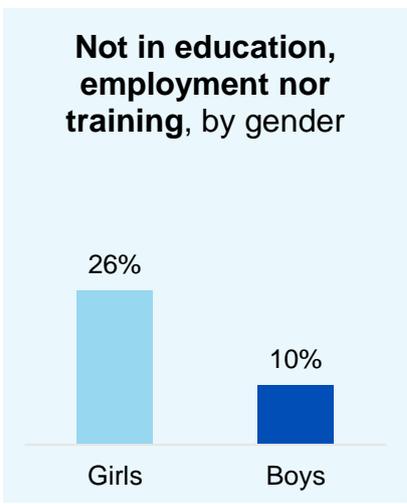
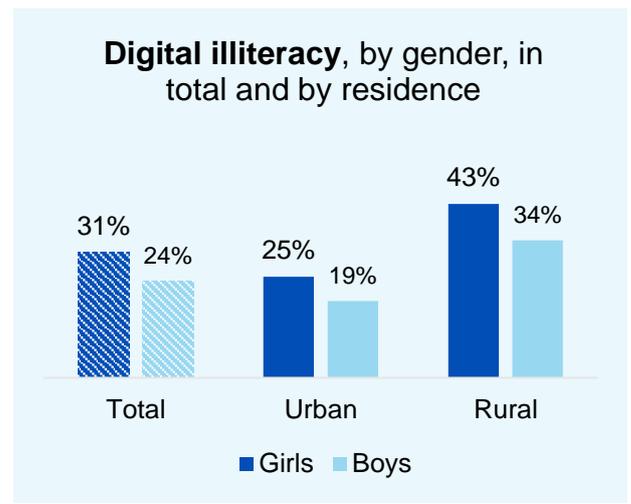


OF WOMEN FROM VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES THINK THAT A GOOD WIFE MUST OBEY TO HER HUSBAND IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

42%



OF YOUNG WOMEN, AGED 20 TO 24, ARE MARRIED OR IN UNION BEFORE 18



18



IS THE NUMBER OF EXTRA HOURS GIRLS AND WOMEN SPEND ON DOMESTIC CHORES COMPARED TO BOYS AND MEN

HOW GIRLS SHOULD BEHAVE – GENDER NORMS AT WORK IN ECUADOR

In the communities where Plan International works in Ecuador, **the situation of girls remains shaped by rigid harmful social and gender norms that set different expectations for girls and women and boys and men.** Specific roles and powers are attributed to each, with men dominating both public and private spaces, and women belonging mainly to the private sphere while exerting less power than men in it. A participant to a study conducted by Plan International in 2021 exploring the social and gender norms **highlight how clear gender roles are, how strongly people should comply with these expectations, and how bad the social sanctions could be in case they do not comply – social exclusion, gossiping, harassment.**

Globally, social norms around early marriage, son preference, domestic and unpaid care work, and women in the workforce and politics limit girls and young women's opportunities based on their gender.

Clear expectations of what boys and girls should do: “you have to know how to cook, wash, iron, sweep”

In Ecuador, gender norms are easily identified in the community, as participants confirm: “*This machismo dominates, the erroneous idea that because a man is a man, he can be in the street, and a woman in the house*”². Likewise, women are considered as housekeepers and wives, and girls are raised in accordance. “*My grandmother always told me that when I had a husband, I had to cook for him because if I didn't, he would leave me. These stereotypes are very traditional in my community. From childhood, we are taught that it doesn't matter if you have studied or not, but you have to know how to cook, wash, iron, sweep, that has to be the law. This doesn't happen with men, they are the ones who oversee taking care of the household, they work, the women don't*”³, reported an adolescent during focus group discussions.

Consequently, **a gender-based division of labour persists, with girls and women being the main responsible for domestic chores, care, and pleasing their husbands, sons and daughters.** 78% of respondents to the study conducted by Plan International stated that girls, adolescents and women were exclusively in charge of domestic tasks, while only 4% reported that women were the main breadwinners.⁴ In Manabi, for instance, women dedicate more than 24 hours per week to household tasks, while men dedicate only 7 hours.⁵

Girls are also responsible for carrying water from wells, rivers and springs, for which they must walk long distances, posing additional risks for their health, safety and access to education. While physical weakness is often used as a justification for things girls cannot do, it is worth noting that long distance and heavy loads do not prevent them from carrying this responsibility. A girl surveyed in the study reported: “*There is an inequality in the distribution of household tasks, women do almost everything. I have a friend who cannot leave the house until she makes the bed for her siblings. She lives with her grandmother and many siblings, but the grandmother makes her do everything, and nothing for her siblings*”⁶.

“Boys are taught that they have to be free, girls are taught that they have to be good”, and all associated consequences

On the other hand, men continue to be considered **the main providers and protectors of the family, and exercise public and private power.** “*That is what we are here for, to take care and protect our children, to prevent them from hanging out with bad friends, to prevent them from wearing indecent clothes so that they are not raped or abuse*”⁷, stated a father during focus group discussions. In addition to not being seen, treated or considered equal to men, **girls and women are expected to**

² Plan International, *Gender Analysis*, Ecuador, 2020.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, *National Survey on the Use of Time*, Ecuador, 2012.

⁶ Plan International, *Gender Analysis*, *op. cit.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

be complacent about the controlling behaviours displayed by men, the very same behaviours limit their agency and hampers their empowerment.

Girls are less valued than boys, which leads to a wide range of harmful practices. For example, parents prefer to **invest in boys' education** and it is a common practice to feed boys more than girls because it is believed that they need it more to grow strong to work in the fields. Boys and young men also enjoy more freedoms than girls and young women in all aspects of their life, including on clothes, sports and leisure. *"In my community, men can play soccer, girls must, out of obligation, wear skirts, while boys do not. In addition, men have a greater preference for education. They have more possibilities to get ahead"*⁸, testified an adolescent from Chimborazo. As a result, girls are less encouraged to enjoy leisure time, that would make them thrive, develop friendships and relationships, but also critical non-cognitive skills, such as self-esteem, agency, cooperation, negotiation and teamwork.

Similarly, another adolescent revealed how there are two sets of rules for romantic and sexual relationships: *"boys are more accepted by their parents and the community if they have a girlfriend, while women are even beaten if they are found with a boyfriend"*⁹. This clearly illustrates the double standards obstructing girls' opportunities to thrive in Ecuador: *"Boys are taught that they have to be free, girls are taught that they have to be good"* (Director of Women's Affairs for the Municipality of Gayaquil).¹⁰

Having equal decision-making regarding household expenses is not common. However, two women indicated the following: *"In my house, the economic contribution is from my husband, but the decision-making is from both, we have to divide the expenses in food, education, rent, and we both decide"*¹¹, said one of the participants to the focus group discussions held by Plan International in Cotopaxi and Chimborazo. Another respondent indicated: *"In my house, we have sacrificed both as a father and as a mother, and we have tried to manage money together, to pay debts, to set aside for the education of our children, for food. My husband comes and gives me what he has earned during the week, and I am the one who manages the most because he trusts me and I know what is needed most in the house"*¹².

In the public sphere, including community spaces, men exert more power and dominance compared to women. Only 6% of women report having ever participated in community spaces. Moreover, women make up 8% only of mayoral positions at the sub-national level and 39% of legislative positions at the national level.¹³

Justified violence, limited agency: at age 24, the majority of young women have experienced physical or sexual violence

Gender-based violence endured by girls and women remains significant in Ecuador. 65% of women have experienced at least one type of violence, with one woman in four having faced sexual violence at some point in their life, and one in ten before turning 18.¹⁴ The prevalence of physical violence varies depending on women's ethnicity: violence is much higher for women from indigenous (64%), afro-descendent (72%) and Mestizo (65%) communities¹⁵, compared to the white women (33%); and so is psychological and sexual violence.¹⁶ The level of education is also correlated

Women experience of sexual violence, at some point in their life and before 18, in Ecuador



FIGURE 1: INEC, ENVIGMU, 2019

⁸ Plan International, *Gender Analysis*, op. cit.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Women's Refugee Commission, IOM, *Baseline Report – Ecuador, Women's Participation Pilot Project*, Ecuador, 2016.

¹⁴ INEC, *Encuesta Nacional sobre Relaciones Familiares y Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres – ENVIGMU*, 2019.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, *National Survey on Family Interactions and Violence Against Women*, 2012.

with the occurrence of intimate partner violence, with women with the least education experiencing the highest prevalence of violence.

Violence is normalized by deeply rooted social and gender norms, that condone and justify the fact that men can and should exercise dominance over girls and women. For men, the exercise of violence can be a mechanism to fulfil the gender roles imposed on them, such as maintaining prestige, protection, support, and family leadership.

It is even more justified inside the private sphere, where all the rights, without any limit, are given to husbands on their wife: “people see men attacking their partners and say ‘even if he hits and kills, he is a husband’”¹⁷, reported 15-year-old young men interviewed by Plan International. Similarly, “in my community, you see men every day yelling at them or hitting their partners and people say: in a husband-and-wife fight, no one should get involved, so this normalizes the violence that is experienced every day”¹⁸, outlined an adolescent during focus group discussions. As a result, out of the total of women who have experienced physical violence, 87% have been perpetrated by their regular partner.¹⁹

A significant proportion of survivors of this violence are girls, as child, early and forced marriage and union (CEFMU) continue to be a daily reality in Ecuador, despite the legislation prohibiting it, without any exception, since 2015. **42% of girls, aged 20-24, were married or in union before they turn 18, and 7% before the age of 15.**²⁰ In practice, the numbers may be even higher as many unions are informal. Girls who got married or started a union between the age of 10 and 15 are **twice more likely to experience physical intimate partner violence** (40%) compared to women who did between age 26 and 30 (20%).²¹ The government raised the minimum legal age for marriage in 2015 to 18 years old for everyone, from 12 and 14 for girls and boys respectively.²²

However, **cultural believes and socio-economic vulnerabilities remain a driving factor for CEFMU,** as a way to control adolescent girls’ sexuality and ensure a longer period of fertility within marriage. In some indigenous communities, girls are traditionally forced to union at age 12 or 13 and these unions are arranged sometimes two generations in advance.²³ Additionally, many families experiencing economic difficulties, particularly those living in rural areas with limited educational and economic opportunities, marry off their daughter in return for economic payments.

Girls’ access to inclusive and quality education is still constrained

With **gender parity attained in youth literacy among the population aged 15 to 24 years, there are no significant gender gap in access to education.** Girls even tend to go to school more than boys: 93% of boys were enrolled in primary school, compared to 96% of girls (2008); 83% of boys were enrolled in secondary level, in contrast to 86% of girls (2018).²⁴

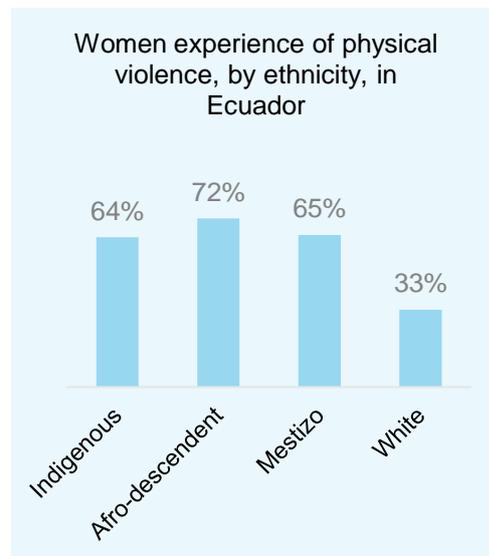


FIGURE 2: INEC, ENVIGMU, 2019

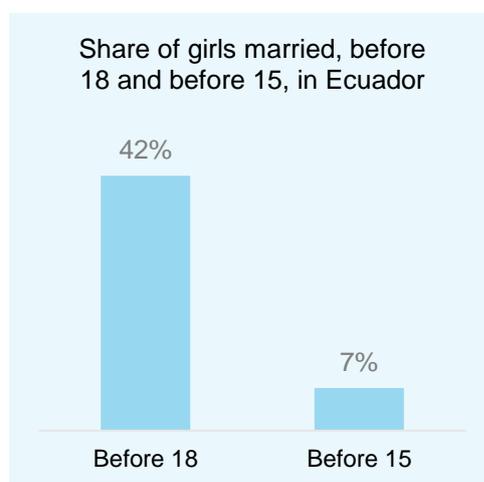


FIGURE 3: GIRLS NOT BRIDES, ATLAS, ECUADOR, 2021

¹⁷ Plan International, *Gender Analysis*, op. cit.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ National Institute on Statistics and Censuses, *National Survey on Family Interactions and Violence Against Women*, op. cit.

²⁰ INEC, *Encuesta Nacional de Salud y Nutrición – ENSANUT*, 2018.

²¹ National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, *National Survey on Family Interactions and Violence Against Women*, op. cit.

²² *Girls Not Brides, Atlas*, op. cit.

²³ CARE, *Prácticas Nocivas: Estudio Sobre el Matrimonio Infantil y las Uniones Precoces en Ecuador*, Ecuador, 2016.

²⁴ World Bank, *Ecuador*, 2008 and 2018.

Disparities lie more in the different value given to boys and girls within the education system.

Girls have fewer opportunities to participate in decision-making spaces in schools and they experience sexual and gender-based violence by teachers and peers, including harassment. They also have less time to dedicate to their studies due to domestic work, which is a competing priority with which they have to constantly balance.

In secondary schools, new factors come into play to drive adolescent girls, especially from indigenous communities, out of schools. **The lack of water, sanitation, and hygiene services in schools is an additional barrier to girls' education as it prevents their access to safe spaces that meet their needs, including for the management of their menstrual hygiene.** Consequently, adolescent girls miss more days of school, especially during their period, which deprive them of getting quality education. Teenage pregnancy, CEFMU and the lack of income to cover education costs are also important drivers of secondary school dropouts. Furthermore, girls and women have fewer opportunities to access quality care and support services, with trained personnel and comprehensive prevention, protection, and reparation measures against violence.²⁵

The barriers to economic empowerment

Harmful stereotypes and gender norms also **negatively impact girls' agency and autonomy as they grow up**²⁶. Women end up having less skills and time to dedicate to paid work. As a result, women tend to perform paid domestic work as an income-generating activity (57% answers from the study conducted by Plan International in 2020 in targeted communities), or to engage in small and medium enterprises (13% of the same study).²⁷

Women' salaries are 13% to 26% lower than those of their male counterparts.²⁸ Women from rural areas also face a double sentence, with rural women earning on average \$215 monthly, compared to \$293 for men, and women in urban areas earning on average \$421 monthly, in contrast to \$524 for men.²⁹ Similarly, while, nationally, women worked an average of 15 hours and 47 minutes more than men in a week, in rural areas, the number goes up to a total of 23 hours more than men.³⁰

Economic empowerment and limiting gender norms are strongly intertwined. Literature reviews regarding women's agency and empowerment highlight that gender norms surrounding women's agency moderate the impacts of many interventions that aim at alleviating material constraints. Access to financial resources alone, without addressing gender-specific constraints, is not a mechanism that consistently improves young women's agency. However, giving young women more direct control over resources, often by employing design or program features such as privacy or digital payment systems, appears to be a mechanism that consistently leads to improvements in women's agency.

Yet, working with girls and young women as early as possible is a unique opportunity to strengthen their agency

Based on the literature review, programs show a greater impact when aiming to support young women in delaying marriage and childbearing, compared to programs that aimed to change household decision-making dynamics within a marriage, perhaps because women did not have good outside options.

Adolescence is a crucial time in the transition from childhood to adulthood, a time at which the expectations, opportunities, risks and needs for girls and boys diverge considerably.

²⁵ Plan International, *Gender Analysis*, *op. cit.*

²⁶ Wei Chang, Eleonora Guarnieri, Seema Jayachandran, Lucia Diaz-Martin, Akshara Gopalan, Claire Walsh. *Enhancing Women's Agency: Cross-Cutting Lessons From Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Studies in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, July 2020. J-Pal Working Paper

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, *National Survey on the Use of Time*, Ecuador, 2012.

²⁹ UN Women, *Ecuador*.

³⁰ National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, *National Survey on the Use of Time*, *op. cit.*

POVERTY TRAP, SHOCKS AND RESILIENCE: HOW POVERTY ACTS AS A BARRIER TO EMPOWERMENT IN ECUADOR

Despite economic instability over the past decades and recession in 2016, the government of Ecuador has made efforts to resolve economic issues and **alleviate poverty, ranking the country 86th on the Human Development Index in 2021**.³¹ In 2017, it was still estimated that 22% of the population was living below the poverty line. **Girls, boys, women, indigenous communities and people living in rural areas, remain the most vulnerable to poverty**³². The percentage of children and adolescents living in households in a situation of multidimensional poverty exceeds 55% in 12 of the 24 provinces of the country. The province with the highest rate is Pastaza (77%) and the two with the lowest percentages are Galapagos (11%) and Pichincha (18%).³³

Women in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) on average report less freedom of choice, control over one's life and life satisfaction compared to men in the same countries and women in wealthier countries. Globally, the average rate of respondents agreeing that wife beating is acceptable, that women have no say in decisions on large household purchases, or that agree that men make better business executives than women do, is strongly correlated with wealth of the country – the lower the GDP per capita, the more likely respondents will report negative attitudes towards gender equality and women and girls' empowerment.

Missed opportunities for the empowerment of the poorest girls, especially those from marginalized groups

Ethnic inequalities show that children belonging to indigenous households are more likely to be in a situation of income poverty. Nevertheless, progress has been made, as poverty rates among children from indigenous households have decreased from 70% to 59% over the past decade.³⁴ Yet, one out of two children and adolescents (2.6 million) still do not have water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) supplies in their homes.

The situation is more critical for **indigenous children, with eight in ten of them lacking access to basic WASH services**.³⁵ Food insecurity is still common for the poorest populations. 26% of households face problems in covering food expenses, and geographic differences show that in rural areas, the percentage is of 29%. With regard to ethnicity, 33% of households with children of African descent and 30% of households with children of indigenous descent faced issues in paying for food.³⁶

Complexity of future shocks & resilience

Ecuador is recognized as a 'mega-diverse' country due to its wide variety of climates, microclimates, and terrestrial and maritime biodiversity. Hence, **Ecuador communities are highly vulnerable to extreme events, particularly flooding due to increased rainfall during El Nino phenomenon and increased aridity during La Nina phases**.³⁷ In terms of resilience, the country is extremely vulnerable to natural hazards, as shown by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake in 2016 that left 720,000 in need of humanitarian aid.³⁸ The disaster resulted in important internal displacements, and exacerbated several contributing factors to gender-based violence such as worsening perception of security, dignity and privacy, and lack of adequate shelters.³⁹ Additionally, **as families had limited access to food and basic services, girls' education became a low priority for parents, who sometimes felt compelled to remove their girls from school**. Without significant commitments and investments in climate change adaptation and disaster risk management, scenarios like these are likely to reoccur, further threatening girls' and women's rights.

³¹ UNDP, *Human Development Index, 2021*.

³² Wei Chang et al., op. cit

³³ Observatorio Social del Ecuador, *Situación de la niñez y adolescencia en Ecuador, Una mirada a través de los ODS*, Ecuador, 2019.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ World Bank, *Climate Change Knowledge Portal*, Ecuador, 2021.

³⁸ Women's Refugee Commission, IOM, *Baseline Report – Ecuador, Women's Participation Pilot Project*, Ecuador, 2016.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Over the past years, Ecuador has been affected by the **Venezuelan refugee crisis and has gradually become a host country instead of a transit country**. As of end of May 2021, 430,000 Venezuelans were officially registered as living in the country.⁴⁰ However, this number is thought to be highly underestimated as most of refugees are entering the country informally. This crisis and the restrictive response measures adopted by the government are increasing the presence of illegal groups and human traffickers. Tensions between the host populations and people on the move led to a number of conflicts over scarce resources and limited services. This is creating **additional constraints on the possibilities for girls to evolve in a safe, adequate and protective environment, impeding on their rights**.⁴¹ As a result, families tend to adopt negative coping mechanisms, such as CEFMU with the intention of protecting their daughters from trafficking and conflicts.

How COVID-19 can be a setback for girls' right

Ecuador rapidly became the **epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak**.⁴² Lockdowns and confinement measures taken by the government impacted the entire population, but mostly vulnerable segments of the population, and among them, girls and young women. **Gender-based violence was reported to have increased dramatically**, with several hate crimes and femicides being reported, including of girls under the age of 11. Girls were locked up with perpetrators during the pandemic, were isolated, lost their support network, therefore, had less or no opportunities to look for help in case of violence.

The pandemic also had **detrimental effects on the education of girls, in particular those already facing difficulties by living in remote areas**. Political decision makers interviewed by Plan International during its study reported: *"People who live far from services and connectivity, for example, are in a bad way. Girls in rural areas are not accessing education and are caring for their siblings or working in domestic chores, all of which has been exacerbated by the pandemic: we know that access to education is a right of children, but it has been the most difficult thing to ensure in this emergency"*⁴³. An adolescent participating in focus group discussions confirmed, as well, the negative effect of the health crisis on girls: *"with the pandemic, many children stopped studying, however for girls, the impact is much greater because girls have had to dedicate themselves to doing household chores, while boys can dedicate themselves to studying all day long"*⁴⁴.

PROTECTING GIRLS' RIGHTS WITH STRONG LEGAL FRAMEWORKS: OPPORTUNITIES AND GAPS IN ECUADOR

Ecuador has a **protective legislative framework for girls but its implementation is hampered by lack of budget allocation and enforcement**.

The country has ratified the main international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990, its Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography in 2000, the Protocol Against the Traffic of Migrants also in 2000, amongst others. The government has recognized the **prevalence of these international human rights treaties over any other legal norm or act of the public power when the rights conferred by the former are more favourable to those contained in the Constitution**.

Regarding national legislation, Ecuador has adopted, in 2018, the Law to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women, though in 2020, the government cut down the budget to implement the law (84% less). Ecuador has also put in place a National Council for Intergenerational Equality.⁴⁵

Yet, **limits to the effective protection of girls' rights can be identified in the legal environment**. Girls have to be seen as a distinct category of the population, with specific needs sometimes overlapping with those of youth and those of women, but still different. Too often, girls are invisible

⁴⁰ UNHCR, *Operational Factsheet*, Ecuador, 2021.

⁴¹ CARE, *Rapid Gender Analysis*, Ecuador, 2020.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Plan International, *Gender Analysis*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Plan International, *Gender Analysis*, *op. cit.*

and are not included in plans or policies focused on youth or women. Despite its legislative framework, there is no specialized institution for children and adolescents.

The National Protection system is still weak, and the **capacity to respond to violence against children, including sexual violence, is limited**. Women, girls and adolescents are often blamed for the aggressions they face, which hinder survivors' access to justice and services. Finally, resources to implement and execute the regulations in each of the territories, especially in rural areas that are harder to reach for prevention and protection services, are insufficient.⁴⁶

YET, THERE IS HOPE.

Across Plan's areas of intervention, **girls challenge restrictive gender norms and promote gender equality, empowerment, protective environment**. They lead change to ensure that girls from their communities access inclusive quality education, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, and that they live free from violence in their communities. With a strong attention to inclusion, gender-transformative and human-rights based approaches, programmes and influencing work focusing on education, agency, youth economic empowerment, protection from GBV, access to services, have the potential to equip girls with the relevant tools to challenge norms, claim their rights, thrive, empower themselves to be active drivers of change and lift themselves out of poverty.



Girl takes part in workshop to think and talk about harassment and gender-based violence, Ecuador, 2018

Credits: Plan International

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Methodological note

This report was written on the basis of a literature review, of both **Plan International documents and external sources** of information. Most of the statistical data is taken from [the Demographic and Health Surveys](#), [the World Bank Open Data](#), [Girls Not Brides Atlas](#), [UNICEF data](#), [International Labour Organization data](#), [the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys](#).

Information were specifically drawn from gender analysis conducted by Plan International Country Offices in Ecuador in 2020 and 2021 respectively, as well as desk reviews led by Plan International Belgium in 2021. The gender analyses were built on the framework provided by the [Women and Girls Empowerment Index](#) (WGEI) developed by Plan International Canada. The WGEI is a girl and woman centric index that aims to measure changes in the root causes of gender inequality and capture the breadth and scope of gender transformative change.⁴⁷ The consultation and analysis framework were structured around the same domains, subdomains and indicators, and included questions addressing inclusive quality education, protection from violence, youth economic empowerment, and sexual and reproductive health rights.

Plan International Belgium, in collaboration with the teams in Ecuador, developed a two phased methodology. First, it included a desk review, set to identify the important recent trends in terms of gender equality and the available and missing **secondary data** at national level. Second, it comprised a set of **primary data** collection methods, adapted to the local context and target groups. The methods chosen were **qualitative**: An **online** survey, focus group discussions and key informant interviews; in Senegal, **in person** direct observation, focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

In Ecuador, the data collection targeted four provinces: Chimborazo, Cotopaxi, Guayas and Manabí. It involved 92 adolescent girls (age 15 to 19), 12 adult men, and 13 adult women from the communities participating in Plan International's projects and programs, under the non-probability sampling method for convenience. In addition, there were also six key informants selected from Plan Ecuador's strategic partner institutions.

The work in Ecuador was supported by local consultants involved in different phases of the evaluation. After these gender analyses were completed, both teams took part in an evaluation and capitalisation exercise led by an external consultancy firm, Gender Insights, and supported by Plan International Belgium and the Fonds Qualité (Acodev/NGO federatie). Gender Insights collected and analysed the experience of staff and consultants involved, reviewed the methodology, tools and templates used and reflected with the teams on the process and how it could be improved in the future.

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This report is the result of work conducted by the teams of Plan International Belgium and Plan International Ecuador, as part of the design of Plan International's Programme "*Empoderamiento económico y social de adolescentes y jóvenes, particularmente mujeres (10-24 años)*", funded by the Belgium Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD) for the coming five years. The writing of the report was coordinated by Chloé Collier and Nolwenn Gontard. It is part of a series that intends to provide country-specific and cross-country analysis of the situation of girls' rights in eight partner countries of Plan International Belgium (Benin, Bolivia, Ecuador, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Vietnam).

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Disclaimer: The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the DGD. All remaining errors and opinions expressed in this report are the sole responsibility of the authors.

⁴⁷ [Gender equality and inclusion for girls - Plan International Canada \(plancanada.ca\)](#)

Cover Photo: girls in Ecuador, 2017. Credits: Plan International

Plan International strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 75 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 70 countries.

ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL BELGIUM

Plan Belgium has been committed since 1983 to a fairer and more secure world for all children and young people, by addressing the root causes of challenges and obstacles encountered by girls and vulnerable children. All our projects seek to promote **gender equality, by analysing the root causes of unequal access to opportunities for girls and boys and of gender-based violence.** We are working alongside children, youth, our advocates and partners to address the root causes of the barriers that vulnerable girls and children face. Our programs contribute to Plan's overall ambition, that is by 2025, **100 million girls can learn, lead, decide and thrive.** Currently, Plan Belgium is working in Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Malawi, Bolivia, Ecuador, Vietnam. Plan Belgium implements programs and projects in the impact areas of: i) protection against abuse and violence; ii) youth participation and leadership; iii) inclusive and quality safe education, both formal and non-formal; iv) economic strengthening of young people through employment and entrepreneurship.

In Belgium, Plan is particularly involved in the fight against gender-based violence, in the School of Children's Rights, in order to help teachers and students to be aware of their rights and those of their peers in Belgium and around the world. Finally, Plan as a civil society organization carries the voice of girls in civic and political mobilizations, including within development cooperation.

ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL ECUADOR

Plan International has been present in **Ecuador since 1963.** Since then, we have been working directly with girls, boys, adolescents, families and communities. Plan International works in 9 provinces of the country. We work with children from birth to adulthood. Our projects focus on several areas such as **education, entrepreneurship, sexual and reproductive rights, early childhood, risk management, participation and leadership.** We also support communities to respond to, and overcome, crises and adversity. All our projects use a "Smart Zones" methodology, which focuses on girls learning through games and art about rights, values, leadership and resilience to build an equitable country free of violence. Our work has shown that girls who have the necessary tools become the protagonists of their lives and support their families and communities to develop. We want Ecuador to be a country with zero tolerance for discrimination and inequality towards girls. As a humanitarian organisation, we respond to natural emergencies, displacements and forced migrations that occur in the country. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are reducing the impact of the crisis in coordination with humanitarian actors, the public and the private sector. We are supporting prevention measures and providing direct support to vulnerable communities including displaced people, with a focus on girls and young women. So far, our response to the pandemic has reached over 1.5 million people.

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