

# Haitian migration in the Andean region and Ecuador: policies, careers, and profiles

## La migración haitiana en la región andina y Ecuador: políticas, trayectorias y perfiles

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the main transformations of state policies in the Andean region in the face of Haitian migration during the period 2010 to 2019. In addition, in the case of Ecuador, the profiles are analyzed quantitatively, specifically for the population settled in the province of Pichincha, where most Haitians live. We argue that the reconfiguration of migration projects, based on what is observed in Ecuador, allows us to think of Haitian migration within a migratory continuum in which states and society, by action and omission, produce and sustain practices and relationships. That keep migrant lives on the sidelines; thus generating the discomfort, violence and discrimination necessary to keep Haitians on the move, as a mechanism of control and exclusion.

**Keywords:** migratory continuum, Haitian migration, Andean region, migration in Ecuador.

### Resumen

En este artículo se analizan las principales transformaciones de las políticas estatales en la región andina frente a la migración haitiana durante el periodo 2010 a 2019. Además, para el caso de Ecuador se analizan cuantitativamente los perfiles, específicamente sobre la población asentada en la provincia de Pichincha donde radican la mayoría de haitianos. Se plantea que la reconfiguración de los proyectos migratorios permite pensar la migración haitiana dentro de un *continuum* migratorio en la que los Estados y la sociedad, por acción y omisión, producen y sostienen prácticas y relaciones que mantienen las vidas migrantes al margen; lo que genera la incomodidad, violencia y discriminación necesaria para mantener a los haitianos en movimiento, como un mecanismo de control y exclusión.

**Palabras clave:** *continuum* migratorio, migración haitiana, región andina, migración en Ecuador.

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## Introduction

Studying Haitian migration in its transits and permanence through the Andean region, particularly through Ecuador, implies a series of challenges for migration studies. First, it is necessary to consider the limits of certain classic categories of migration studies, such as the very notion of the migrant (Stefoni, 2017). The above is important given the different movements, temporal factors, and violence experienced (of capital, natural disasters, forced displacement, racism, political, military and humanitarian interventionism) and how economic, political, and ecological inequalities and violence intersect in different places. Audebert (2017) calls the above multidimensional vulnerability. Second, during the 2010s, flows and destinations have been continuously transformed, along with mobility and migration control policies toward this population, which makes it difficult to think of them having unilateral origins and destinations, and in the face of new state policies that were ambiguous at first—in a mix of policies of hospitality and hostility—to a second openly restrictive phase, as part of the proliferation of borders and reconfiguration of control practices in the continent (Domenech & Dias, 2020). The humanitarian rhetoric involved in the creation of *ad hoc* visas, limited regularization processes, various governmental decrees, and regional agreements (explicit or implicit), as well as discourses on compassion and the suffering of migrants (Fassin, 2016), has clouded the critical view on the practices of control, securitization, and migrant precarization.

Moreover, migration projects (Ma Mung, 2009) are being transformed in response to changing circumstances, in movements that are often impossible to label under traditional categories such as transits, destinations, and even origins;<sup>1</sup> even more so if one considers that a significant percentage of the Haitian population in South America had resided in the Dominican Republic and that during the 2010s the same person may have resided in different countries in the region. It is argued that Haitian migration in South America can be thought of within a migration *continuum*, in which States and society, by action and omission, produce and sustain practices and relationships that keep migrant lives on the margins. This generates the discomfort, violence, and discrimination necessary to keep Haitians on the move as a mechanism of control and exclusion. In this *continuum*, the Andean region and Ecuador take on different meanings at different times, either as an entry or exit to South America, as a flexible and clandestine transit space, or as a region of permanence. Within this *continuum*,<sup>2</sup> Haitian men and women construct and reconstruct migration projects with a certain degree of autonomy and capacity to create, organize and project the future, even if only precariously.

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<sup>1</sup> “The migration project is a projection into the future, a way of organizing and, above all, of imagining the future” (Ma Mung, 2009, p. 35). This author proposes an understanding of migration that dilutes the polarization between agency and structure that has predominated in international migration studies. It takes into consideration both the external conditions and the migrants’ own capacities to constitute and maintain worlds, make decisions, build individual and collective relations of otherness, and project their future, based on the concepts of autonomy and migration project.

<sup>2</sup> The proposed concept of migration *continuum* is in line with other notions that make it possible to better grasp Haitian migration. For example, the concept from anthropology of circulatory territories (Tarrus, 2000), which demonstrates how movement is a constant resource for identities, which is activated in the nomadism/sedentarism duality; or that of migration circularity (Gildas, 1981) which emphasizes itineraries, transportation, and effective and affective practices in space.

Finally, the processes of racialization—in already racialized territories—, in the face of a population read as black, mulatto, or Afro-descendant (the term varies among South American countries), tend to homogenize heterogeneous people with different capitals and strategies of mobility and integration, and in permanent tension in the face of policies of migration restriction, racialized control (Trabalón, 2020), and state production of migration irregularity (De Genova, 2002).

The main objective of this article is to analyze the transformations of state policies in the Andean region concerning Haitian migration in the 2010 to 2019 period and, thus, the adjustment of the migration projects of this population in Ecuador. Additionally, it looks quantitatively at the profiles of those who settled (with different temporal factors) in the province of Pichincha, Ecuador, where most of this migration is concentrated. The objective is not to seek to establish a direct causal connection between the transformation of state policies and the sociodemographic profile. Rather, in an attempt to contribute to the discussion on the Haitian phenomenon in the Andean region and Ecuador, the existing data on this population is made visible, particularly in the province of Pichincha, where more information has been collected and where the largest Haitian population in Ecuador is concentrated. This makes it possible to contrast a look at the political responses with the diverse profiles, career histories, and the different challenges faced by those who are or were in Ecuador.

Methodologically, this text draws on different sources. First, from preliminary studies that have worked on Haitian migration in the Andean region and Ecuador (Alvarado Alvear, 2018; Berganza, 2017; Bernal Carrera, 2014; Burbano, 2017; Ceja Cárdenas, 2014, 2015; Fernandes & Gomes de Castro, 2014; López Rivera & Wessel, 2017; Nieto, 2014; Vásquez et al., 2015; Ortiz Pinos, 2016; Peraza-Breedy & Lussi, 2014). On the other hand, it analyzes the legal framework, migration policies (laws, decrees, and visas, among others), and official data on migration flows during the 2010-2019 decade. In addition, it draws on the records of assistance given to the Haitian population of the Government of the Province of Pichincha in Ecuador. A total of 135 Haitian population files were collected, the first record from January 2014 and the last from April 2018. This source provided information on age, gender, education level, residence, year of arrival, ethnic group, place of origin, and occupation, among other items.

For ease of comprehension, this text is divided into three parts: the first part analyzes the configuration of the Andean region, and particularly Ecuador, as a region of transit and permanence; the second part presents the exacerbation of restrictive measures, corresponding to a global migration regime that continues to strengthen and make transit more precarious, especially since the introduction of the Tourist Validation System; finally, the third section describes the Haitian population in the province of Pichincha, Ecuador.

## The Andean region in migration trajectories

With the consolidation of Brazil as a preferential destination for Haitian flows, starting in 2010, the Andean region took on central importance in the trajectories of these migrants to become part of a new Haitian regional migration system (Audebert, 2017). In this context, Ecuador has become a hub of Haitian migration for those going south-north and south-south (Ramírez Gallegos, 2021).

Although the Haitian presence in South America, particularly in Ecuador, predates the 2010 earthquake—hence the importance of remembering the long-standing relationships—this migration attained a different magnitude after that date, which generated state responses and created networks that did not exist before.<sup>3</sup> After a decade of permanent reconfigurations of Haitian migration, it is proposed to think of it as a migration *continuum* where disputes, struggles, desires, and quests, as well as policies of exclusion, lack of regularization, and state invisibility, are sustained over time and space.

The diversity of experiences, social, economic, cultural and symbolic capitals, educational levels, and expectations of those who have arrived in the region since 2010 and over time are impossible to capture in a single migrant profile; as previous research (Berganza, 2017; Ceja Cárdenas, 2014, 2015; Metzner, 2014; Montinard, 2020; Nieto, 2014; Silva & Miranda, 2020; Trabalón et al., 2021; Vásquez et al., 2015) and the last section of this article will demonstrate. Handerson (2015) mentions two native Haitian categories that account for the heterogeneity and hierarchies established among migrants. These are *kongo*, the newcomers and those coming from the countryside, and *vyewo*, who generally come from the cities or have managed to take root and empower themselves in the new localities. As the author points out, among these categories, there are no differences in class, ethnicity or nationality, yet they are strong markers of inequality.

That is, a large percentage of those who arrived in the region had previous migration experiences, both internal—from the countryside to the city—and international, those who had resided in the Dominican Republic. The above represents a migrant capital that Haitian men and women possessed in the face of uprooting (Bourdieu & Sayad, 2017); the mastery of several languages, the experience of control and exclusion policies, the development of strategies against these, as well as the development and maintenance of transnational networks; but simultaneously this is evidence of frustrated migration experiences in which precariousness is not solved (Ceja Cárdenas, 2015). To these previous experiences will be added a decade of movements, experiences, and exclusions for many people who continue to transit, search, and struggle in the continent. Trabalón (2021b) argues that the generalized experience of *disappointment* of Haitian migrants, as a result of racialization and control, is a central driver for understanding their transit in the countries of the South and the dynamics of movement to the north.

The arrivals and movements of Haitian migrants through the Andean region can be thought of, initially, in terms of two typologies. The first includes air transfers, the circumvention of discretionary frameworks, and entry through checkpoints. The second process is carried out by land, generally bypassing checkpoints. Thus, from 2010 onwards, arrival in the region began in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, or Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic, and by air to Quito or Guayaquil, in Ecuador. Not being direct, these flights involved a stopover in Panama or Bogota, as seen in Figure 1. The preferred route was Panama due to restrictive and harassing practices by Colombian authorities at the Bogota airport. For those who managed to avoid Colombia upon arrival and decided to continue north after a few years, Colombia became an obligatory

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<sup>3</sup> This does not mean that Haitian migration can be explained only through this event; on the contrary, one must insist on the need to be critical of the humanitarian narrative that racializes and controls migrants as *victims* of the earthquake, a topic that would be worth further research.

passage, as they also had to face a dangerous transit through the Darien jungle between that country and Panama. Once in Ecuador, the journey is undertaken by land to Brazil, avoiding the migration checkpoints on the border of Ecuador and Peru. In some cases, the transit included Bolivia.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1. Routes to and from Ecuador and their passage through Ecuador**



Source: created by the authors

## Routes and transit policies and residence in Ecuador

After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the governments in power in Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela<sup>5</sup> and Chile promoted some migration regularization policies through amnesties and humanitarian visas based on a humanitarian discourse. Over time, however, the tendency has been to implement openly restrictive policies toward the Haitian population. Thus, the Haitian case makes it possible to see how humanitarian government is consolidating through the links between a discourse of care and

<sup>4</sup> Migration projects in and through Bolivia have been smaller than in Ecuador and Peru. A study conducted in that country did not detect “significant flows” (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM), 2014), and the transit recorded ceased following the tightening of migration controls in 2014 (Peraza-Breedy & Lussi, 2014). However, Bolivia remains a question in many ways.

<sup>5</sup> Following the earthquake, members of the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA) held an extraordinary meeting in Caracas, Venezuela on January 25, 2010, in order to help Haiti. Subsequently, President Hugo Chavez issued a decree to regularize the Haitian population already in Venezuela.

protection for the “victims” of the earthquake and the practices of control, present from the very start, as a way of activating mechanisms of differential inclusion/exclusion, reaffirming the role of the State in the production of irregular migration (Trabalón, 2018).

In Ecuador, with Rafael Correa in the presidency, visas were issued for five years with an exemption of payment for those who had entered the country before January 31, 2010. As stated in Decree 248/2010:

... the catastrophe of January 12, 2010, substantially affected Haitian society in its territory and abroad. Therefore, the Republic of Ecuador—a member of the international community—must promote and develop policies that guarantee human rights and the protection of our Haitian brothers and sisters in Ecuador.

This measure was designed to regularize the Haitian population already residing in Ecuador and make family reunification possible, but it simultaneously sought to discourage the arrival of more Haitians by regularizing only those who entered before January 31 of that year, that is, up to 19 days after the earthquake occurred. As seen in Table 1, the number of beneficiaries of this measure was only 392 people, and given the date of the resolution, it is possible that many of these people were already living in Ecuador, particularly concentrated in the capital. On the other hand, it was a special visa granted for five years and not a permanent residency.

**Table 1. 12XI Visa for Haitian nationals, 2010**

| Quito | Guayaquil | Manta | Cuenca | Total |
|-------|-----------|-------|--------|-------|
| 380   | 9         | 3     | 0      | 392   |

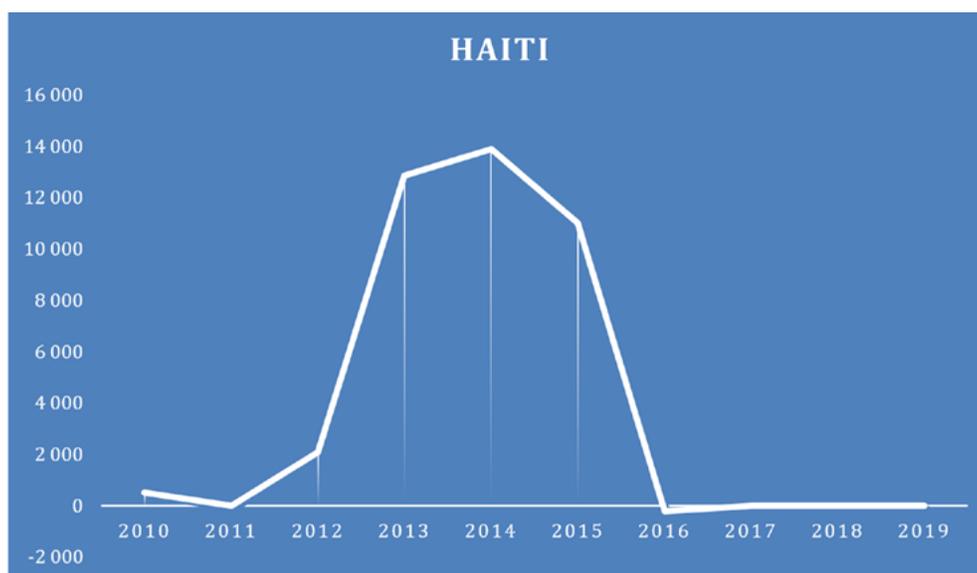
Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ecuador, in Ortiz Pinos, 2016

Haitians continued to enter due to the change in Ecuadorian immigration policies implemented in 2008, which enabled the entry of people of any nationality without the need for a visa as tourists.<sup>6</sup> From 2012 to 2013, there was an exponential increase in the entry of Haitians, with a growth rate of 515%. In March 2013, the Ecuadorian government decided to require Haitian nationals to have a *letter of invitation*. This measure, suspended before being approved, was the first attempt to selectively close borders and discourage and impede free transit through the country (Ceja Cárdenas, 2015). However, in practice, as observed in previous work (Ceja Cárdenas, 2014), selective closure was already being applied by immigration agents at the airports of Quito and Guayaquil. On the principle of discretion, these agents had the power to prevent entry, alleging that those arriving were “false tourists” or victims of trafficking.

<sup>6</sup> Two years after the policy of eliminating entry visas was implemented, in September 2010, visas requirements were imposed for citizens from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Somalia, in order to enter Ecuador, on the grounds of an “unusual migration flow”. To the above were later added three more: Senegal, Cuba, and Haiti (tourist registration). In 2019 the government of Lenin Moreno required visas of 11 countries and in 2020 of five more; in total 34 nationalities are currently required to present entry visas.

Arrivals of Haitian migrants continued in 2014 and 2015 (in 2014, the net migration rate reached its highest peak, registering approximately 14 000 Haitians). However, starting in August 2015, the government implemented a *Tourist Validation System for the Haitian population*, a procedure that had to be carried out from abroad and that did not guarantee a positive response from the Ecuadorian government; on the contrary, it rejected a large number of applications from Haitians who could not prove they were *tourists*. This measure, as will be seen below, was the effect of a multilateral meeting requested by Brazil and was an externalization of migration control that considerably reduced entries to the country from 2016 onwards, as presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Net Haitian migration rate in Ecuador 2010-2019



Source: created by the authors based on data from the Ministry of Government

These restrictions were applied not only in Ecuador but also in other countries in the region. One of them is Peru, a country that must be analyzed to understand Haitian mobility through Ecuador. On January 25, 2012, the government of Peru implemented a tourist visa for Haitian nationals. This did not stop transit but simply made it more precarious by making it irregular outside the border posts. For this reason, it is impossible to know how many people who entered Ecuador remained in the country and how many continued their transit through Peru. If in the case of Ecuador, it is difficult to obtain this information from what is known as “net migration rates”, in the case of Peru, it is even more complicated since both entries and exits were carried out to a greater extent in an irregular manner (Ceja Cárdenas, 2015).

However, thanks to other research, it is possible to recognize dissimilar trends in the two Andean countries (Burbano, 2017; Ceja Cárdenas, 2014; Ortiz Pinos, 2016; Vásquez et al., 2015). Unlike the changing role of Ecuador, Peru has always had a predominantly transitory character for Haitian men and women (Vásquez et al., 2015). Waiting in some cities was generally to receive remittances sent by relatives abroad, as a protection strategy against robbery and extortion; or with the intention of working for

short periods to raise money and to pay the *coyotes*, *raketè* or *ajans* (Handerson, 2015) who would take them to Brazil. In Madre de Dios, the presence of migrants working in construction, logging, and irregular gold mining became more evident, as well as some people who stayed and formed families (Vásquez et al., 2015).

As of 2012, the Brazilian government enabled the possibility of granting visas through its consulates, which can also be understood as a practice of migration and border control (Trabalón, 2018) and de-territorialized migration management. This new policy, which made it possible to apply from the Caribbean, meant that applicants could avoid the journey through the Andean region. However, at first, it did not radically change the transits, “less than 20% of those whose final destination was Brazil flew from Haiti to Brazilian territory” (Ceja Cárdenas, 2015).

The above can have different explanations. Rumors (Ceja Cárdenas, 2022), misinformation, contradictory discourses among state agents, facilitators, and migrants, or unclear or negative previous experiences, as part of migration precariousness, are also central to the decisions or paths chosen. Thus, while misinformation about policy change plays an important role, it is not the only factor. To the above should be added the migrants’ distrust of state bureaucracies—first in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Brazil, but also in Ecuador and Peru—where some legal practices coexist with processes of restriction and discretion, in addition to inefficiency, which generated a feeling of ambiguity and uncertainty among migrants when they had contact with the agents of the different States. Faced with this, the information provided by their networks, agencies and *raketè* is often more reliable and effective.

Thus, Ecuador continued to be a hub for transits to the South, as many Haitians applied for Brazilian visas at the consulate in the Ecuadorian capital intending to take a flight from there to Brazil. However, this also turned out to be complex. The appointments that the Brazilian consulate gave to Haitians to apply for the visa often exceeded the three-month period in which they were allowed to stay in Ecuador. Paradoxically, and as part of a policy of waiting (Ceja Cárdenas, 2022; Ceja Cárdenas & Miranda, 2022; Silva & Miranda, 2020), those who wanted to enter Brazil through regular channels suffered deregulation in Ecuador. However, this also increased the costs of maintenance in the Andean country. As a result, many people ended up “buying turns”, shortening the waiting time, or continued the journey to Brazil by land, crossing Peru, without the necessary visa.

In this first phase of transits to the South, there were different migration projects in Ecuador, those who sought to remain in the country due to the support networks they had, those who arrived in Ecuador intending to continue to Brazil and ended up staying, and those who intended to stay in the Andean country—with a dollarized economy that made it attractive—but did not find the living conditions to stay (for example, to regularize their status, be able to study, get a job) and continued on.

On the other hand, seeking refuge, which could be considered a way to protect people affected by the earthquake, was not a possibility enabled by the Ecuadorian State. Table 2 shows that between 2010 and 2016, 762 people of Haitian nationality requested refuge in response to the need for international protection; however, only 6 of these requests were granted—equivalent to 0.78%.

**Table 2. Refuge seekers and recognized refugees of Haitian nationality, 2010 to 2016**

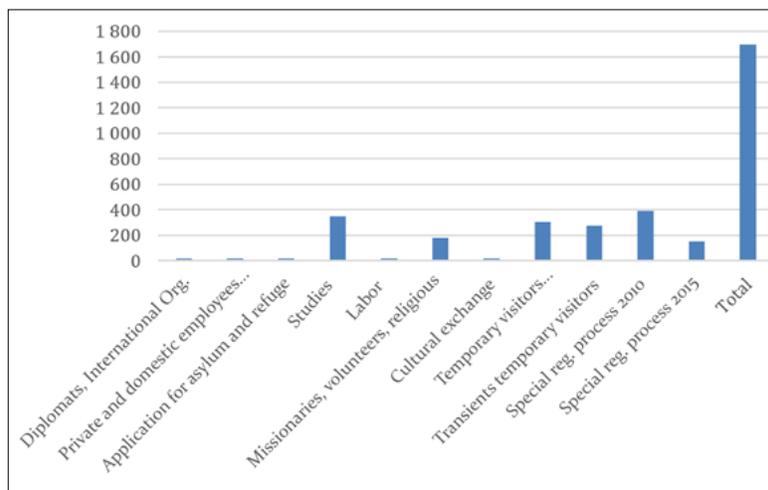
| Year                | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | Total |
|---------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Refuge seekers      | 374  | 173  | 37   | 35   | 39   | 60   | 44   | 762   |
| Recognized refugees | 2    | 3    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 6     |

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana), in Ortiz Pinos, 2016

These figures help to question the static conceptions that States, in this case, Ecuador, have of refuge, where populations such as Haitians are not granted this protection. In this sense, Haitian migration has meant an important questioning of categories such as migrant and refugee and of the protection system itself in Latin America. The decrease in the number of applications and recognition as refugees over time results from a hardening of policies and the migrants learning to seek new ways of regularization.

Analyzing the number and type of visas granted between 2010 and March 2016, it is observed first that 349 student visas were granted and only 11 work visas. There were 180 visas for missionaries and religious volunteers and 301 for temporary visitors for specific purposes (sports, health, science, art, commerce). Only 277 were for transients and temporary visitors. Finally, as already commented, 392 were issued as part of the 2010 regularization process and 153 as part of the 2015 special regularization process, which, as will be seen below, accompanied the imposition of the tourist visa requirement for Haitians, which in euphemistic and legal terms was called the *tourist validation system*. As seen in Figure 3, the total number of visas issued to Haitian nationals during the period analyzed was 1 695, a rather small number for the number of people who remained in the country, which speaks of a strong deregulation process.

**Figure 3. Non-immigrant visas issued to Haitian nationals in Ecuador, 2010-2016 (March)**



Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana), in Ortiz Pinos, 2016

At the beginning of 2013, the embassy and consulate of Haiti were inaugurated in the capital, which generated many expectations concerning a diplomatic representation that could exert pressure on the Ecuadorian State to enable migration regularization channels. This space facilitated the bureaucratic experience of the population to the extent that it offered services for the renewal of passports, birth certificates, and legal documents. The above procedures previously could not be carried out in Ecuador, preventing various bureaucratic procedures. However, this did not have a major impact on the response of the Ecuadorian State to facilitating regularization mechanisms; instead, restrictive measures continued to increase.

### *The tourism validation system and the transformation of migration projects*

Since 2012, Brazil had been pressuring the governments of Peru and Ecuador to contain Haitian “flows.” This pressure was one of the reasons why the Peruvian government of Ollanta Humala implemented the visa requirement. However, these measures had not been complied with in Ecuador, which caused some diplomatic friction between the two countries. Nevertheless, as of 2015, and with greater force in 2016, the conditions that had made it possible for the Haitian population to move through South American territory, pass through the Andean region, and settle in Brazil changed.

The economic crisis in Brazil and the increasingly evident restrictive policies in South America, particularly in the Andean region, made Haitians rethink their migration projects and reconsider long-standing destinations such as the United States or Canada. At the same time, they increased their journeys to places that were already frequent but not central, such as Chile and, to a lesser extent Argentina, the Guianas, or Mexico.

In July 2015, a multilateral meeting was held in Brasilia, convened by Brazil, with government representatives from Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia, to discuss irregular Haitian migration arriving in Brazil and to create measures that, in the institutional phrase, “strengthen safe and orderly migration” (Pécoud, 2018). In that meeting, Brazil recognized the measures of control and restriction of Haitian mobility carried out by Peru and Bolivia and invited Ecuador to create measures to reduce the passage by land from that country under the pretext of combating trafficking networks and the protection of human rights.

From this meeting, on August 15, 2015, Ecuador began implementing the Tourist Validation System for Haitian citizens who want to enter the national territory. This procedure must be carried out online through the portal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ecuador, where a personal information form must be filled out, downloaded, signed, and scanned. A passport copy, valid for six months, must be attached to this form. The same page states that “Haitian citizens who wish to travel to Ecuador may only purchase tickets in person through the airline or a travel agency” if approved. Moreover, they will receive an alphanumeric code that must be given to the airline to purchase the air ticket and then to the immigration agent upon arrival in Ecuador.

If in 2015, 14 658 Haitian people entered the country, in 2016, the figure dropped drastically to 467. The figures clearly demonstrate how, since the implementation of this measure, the entry of the Haitian population into Ecuador was radically prevented.

From August 2015 to March 2016, 3 588 Haitians applied for tourist validation, and only 722 were approved, i.e., only 20.12% obtained permission to enter the country, while 79.88% were denied (Ortiz Pinos, 2016).

The Tourist Validation System hides a legal and factual reality, in addition to trying to legitimize systems of control (Ceriani Cernadas, 2016), and constitutes a clear example of the externalization of control and increase of migration requirements as part of a global migration regime that permits entry (or causes rejection) differentiated by nationality, ethnic group, or class.

The transformation of migration projects and the flow of the Haitian population that left Brazil and started heading to the United States has increased since 2015 and has continued over the last five years with ups and downs. However, in 2021, a significant increase of Haitian migrants in transit through the Andean region to the north was observed. This route was already frequented from Ecuador to the United States by Cubans and other nationalities and, in 2015, had been interrupted by the untimely closure of the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan borders for Cubans heading to the United States (Correa Álvarez, 2019; Moreno Rodríguez, 2019). It is important to note that before 2016, this route through the Andean region as a transit to reach destinations historically valued by the Haitian diaspora, such as the United States and Canada, was already busy. The increase in migration controls in transit countries has caused Haitians to be returned to the first point where they began their journey (Constante, 2016).

The other route from Brazil to the north of the continent was to enter Colombia directly through its border in the Amazon jungle, in the city of Leticia. In 2016, the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs detected the transit of close to 34 000 irregular migrants on their passage to the north, mostly of Haitian nationality (20 366), followed by people from Cuba (8 167), India (874), Congo (570), and Nepal (553) (Migración. Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2017).

However, the flow of the Haitian population to the United States decreased considerably due to the constant rejections and deportations in the United States since the Barack Obama administration, and with the decision of the Donald Trump administration to end the temporary protected status for Haitians in November 2017.<sup>7</sup> The number of Haitians that were not admissible to the United States at its border with Mexico increased from 334 in 2015 to 6 424 in 2016 and 9 163 from January to September 2017 (Mejía, 2018).

As indicated in previous paragraphs, there is currently a reactivation of migration journeys in a south-north direction, especially in the Darien area (Colombian-Panamanian border), where a greater increase has been detected, reaching 45 150 migrants in transit (from January to mid-August 2021). Of these, Haitians are the largest group crossing the dangerous jungle (Gordón Guerrel, 2021). According to this author, Haitians represent 38%, Cubans 32%, and Nepalese 5% of all migrants in transit who have crossed the Darien during the last 12 years. Chileans and Brazilians also appear among the main nationalities; most of them are children of Haitians who obtained nationality. In recent months detentions and deportations from Mexico have also increased (Campos-Delgado, 2021; Paris Pombo, 2018; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021).

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<sup>7</sup> As noted by Montinard (2019), and according to a study by Garbey Burey (2017), the use of ICT, particularly WhatsApp, was central to the Haitian population heading to the United States as a means of updating the safest, least monitored routes and keeping family in the loop.

Thus, new mobility is being witnessed at the beginning of the 2020s. Haitian journeys on the continent that have remained in a south-south direction, particularly to Chile and to a lesser extent Brazil, are now being redirected to the United States and Canada. In these transits to the South and within the South, the Andean region has lost its central importance for many Haitian migrants. It is noted that the entries between 2015 and 2019 to Chile, Argentina, and Brazil have been by air or land between these three countries (*Diagnóstico regional sobre migración haitiana*, 2017; Thayer Correa & Tijoux Merino, 2022; Trabalón, 2021a).

Selective border closure policies, either gradual in countries that were once progressive (such as Ecuador) or much more reactive (such as Peru and Colombia), as well as particular circumstances, have limited transit and circulation through the Andean region and made them very precarious. Those who remain in the Andean territory are people who have settled indefinitely and perhaps more permanently—most of them not regularized or regularized through the protection visa for those with Ecuadorian children. There are no plans for a regularization policy for the Haitian population settled in the country,<sup>8</sup> nor has there been any initiative or decree as in 2010, following the recent earthquake of August 2021 suffered in Haiti.

What has been seen in general, and particularly in this second phase, is the creation of reactive and selective policies in the face of particular situations, especially for extracontinental migrations that have been irregularized and racialized. The Andean region, within the framework of the migration control regime, has reproduced practices such as the selective closing of borders, the detention and expulsion of migrants, the permanent production of migration irregularity, the rhetoric of the fight against smuggling and people trafficking, as well as the militarization and partial and total closure of borders, as was seen in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia. On the other hand, the Haitian migrant population in the Andean region, which at one time was an important focus of media and political discussion, has become invisible in the face of the increase in the number of Venezuelan migrants.

It seems necessary to question the State and institutional view in the fight against trafficking, which makes invisible the role of states as central actors in the construction of policies (from visas and tourist validation systems to walls) that not only cause irregular migration but also the emergence of a whole legal, illegal, and extralegal system around human mobility (Ramírez Gallegos, 2017). Other categories outside the institutional ones are more appropriate for understanding the *rezò* (“networks” in Creole), that is, the practices and relationships that Haitian men and women activate to communicate, obtain documents, send and receive money, and mobilize in different territories and borders. Figures such as the *raketè and ajans*<sup>9</sup> (Handerson, 2015; Montinard, 2019) are central to breaking the dichotomies between victim and

<sup>8</sup> Not so for other immigrant groups, such as Venezuelans, for whom the government of Ecuador did implement migration amnesty and the granting of a temporary residence visa for humanitarian reasons, as did several countries in the region (Ramírez, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> The study by Ortiz Pinos (2016) conducted in the city of Cuenca (southern Ecuador) presents a group of young Haitians pursuing university studies, through the assistance of an Anglican religious leader who arranged for the students' placement. This example “is far from the common characteristics of a traditional network that profits from human trafficking” (Ortiz Pinos, 2016, p. 159). It is closer to the ambiguous figure of the *coyote*, *raketè* or *ajans*, who in most cases is a subject who establishes bonds of trust with migrants and charges for his services.

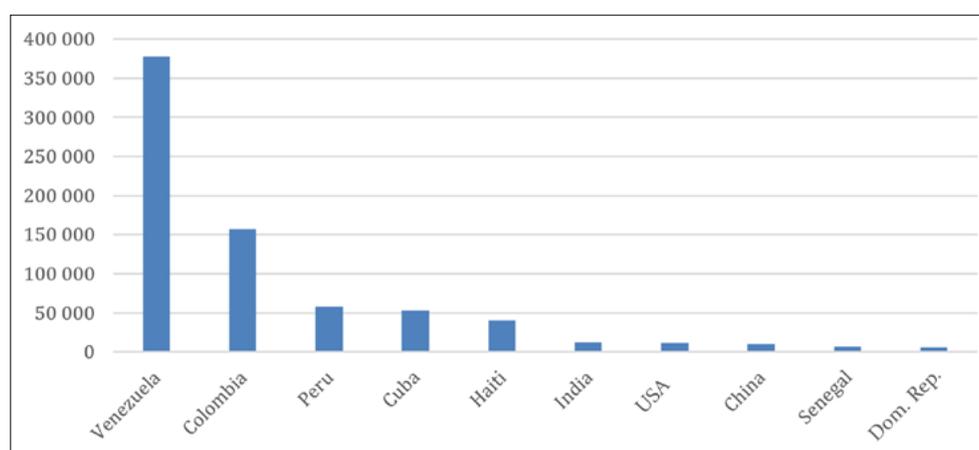
victimizer proposed by the security-based approaches in the fight against people trafficking and smuggling (Viteri et al., 2017) and to understanding the different links that range from solidarity to commercial and that move in the tension between the informal and the illegal, enabling migration transits.

Taking a critical distance from the criminalizing policies of the “fight against trafficking and smuggling” and going beyond institutional categories makes it possible to have a broader understanding of the violence and inequalities in which migrants, state agents, churches, facilitators, transporters, local traders, and also groups that act outside the law interact; where the agency, fears, and desires of Haitians coexist with solidarity, profit, and constant abuses in the experience of migrants.

### Socio-demographic profile in Pichincha, Ecuador

An analysis of the net migration rates of the ten main immigrant groups settled in Ecuador in the last decade reveals geographical variety. The first group of immigrants came from the Andean region (Venezuela, Colombia, and Peru); a second from the Caribbean (Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic); a third from Asia (India and China); and finally, those from North America (the United States) and Africa (Senegal). Such dispersion of origin cannot be understood if it is not due to the openness policies implemented by this country since 2007, which placed Ecuador on the world radar of global migration routes. As seen in Figure 4, the Haitian population occupies the fifth place in net migration rates, with 41 200 people settled in that country. However, these data should be taken with a grain of salt, especially because, as mentioned above, many Haitian immigrants registered their entry but not their exit (which they did through unofficial land border crossings).

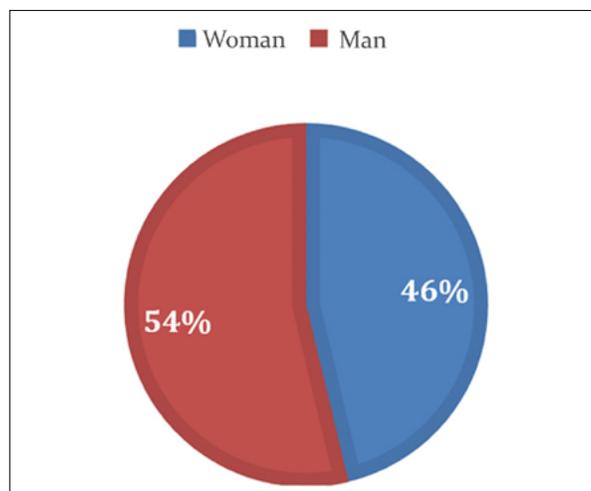
**Figure 4. 2010-2019 net migration rates of the ten main nationalities**



Source: created by the authors based on data from the Ministry of Government (Ministerio de Gobierno)

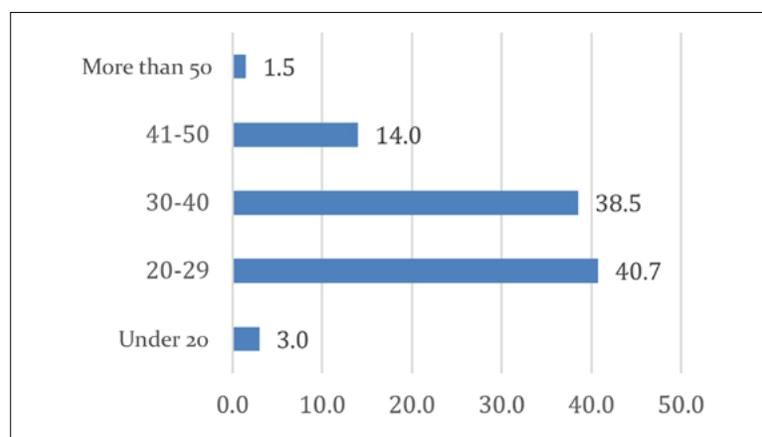
As noted above, it cannot be said that Haitians have a clearly marked migration profile. The data collected in the province of Pichincha, where the capital of Ecuador is located and where the largest number of Haitians is concentrated, display a greater male presence: 54% men and 46% women, as presented in Figure 5. It is a young population whose main age range is between 20 and 29 years old (40.7%) and between 30 and 40 years old (38.5%), as seen in Figure 6.

**Figure 5. Gender of the Haitian population in Pichincha-Ecuador (%)**



Source: created by the authors based on data from the Coordination of Human Mobility, Government of Pichincha (Coordinación de Movilidad Humana, Gobierno de Pichincha), 2014-2018 (N = 135)

**Figure 6. Age ranges of the Haitian population in Pichincha-Ecuador (%)**

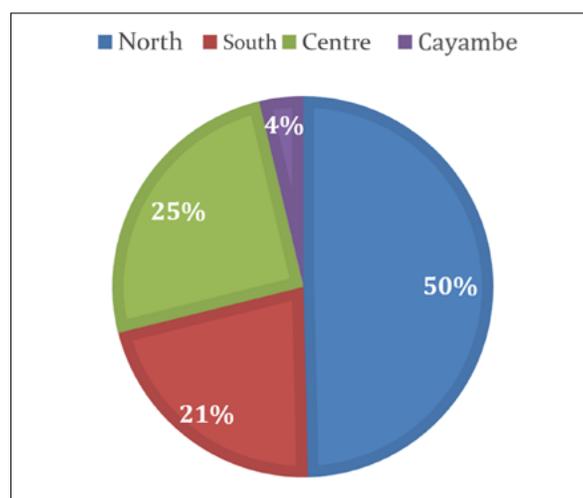


Source: created by the authors based on data from the Coordination of Human Mobility, Government of Pichincha (Coordinación de Movilidad Humana, Gobierno de Pichincha), 2014-2018 (N = 135)

Most of them have settled in Quito, concentrating mainly in the northern part of the city, more precisely in the northwest, in neighborhoods such as Comuna del Pueblo or Colinas del Norte (see Figure 7). As found in the fieldwork in Quito (Ceja Cárdenas, 2014), some Haitian evangelical churches, as part of established networks, have played a significant role in community building, the sense of belonging, and local integration. Such is the case of the Haitian Christian Church and the Nazarene Christian Church of Resurrection, which in addition to being a social and spiritual refuge for many Haitians, is a space where concrete information is provided on the possibilities of local integration. These spaces have helped consolidate the Haitian presence in these areas of the city.

Concerning their educational level, the majority have secondary education (49%). However, a significant percentage have university studies (26%), and a similar percentage only went as far as elementary school (24%), as seen in Figure 8.

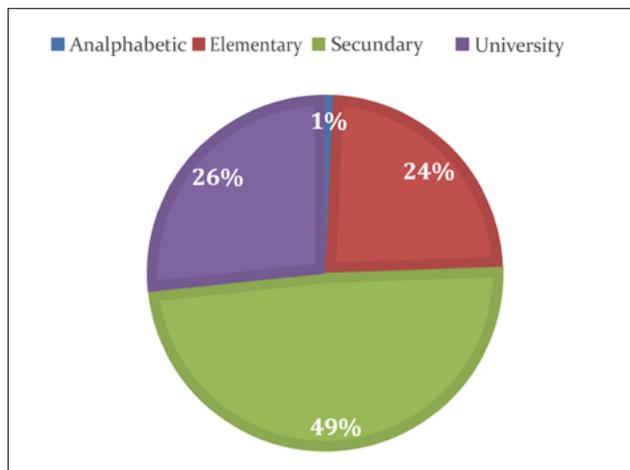
**Figure 7. Location of the Haitian population in the city of Quito, Ecuador**



Source: created by the authors based on data from the Coordination of Human Mobility, Government of Pichincha (Coordinación de Movilidad Humana, Gobierno de Pichincha), 2014-2018 ( $N = 135$ )

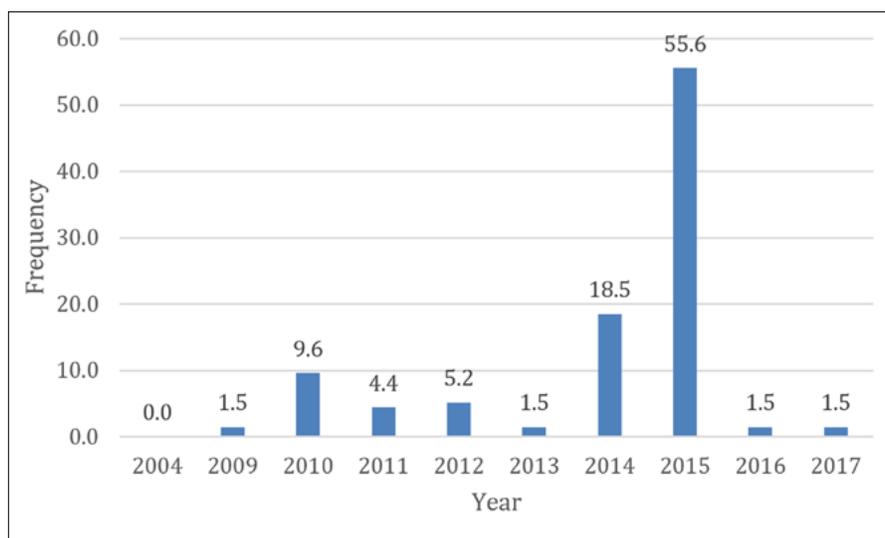
Regarding the year of arrival, this source coincides with the official data, which indicated that it was in the middle of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2015) when the number of arrivals increased and then there was a decrease once the restrictive measures regarding the tourist validation system were implemented (see Figure 9).

**Figure 8. Education level of the Haitian population in Pichincha, Ecuador**



Source: created by the authors based on data from the Coordination of Human Mobility, Government of Pichincha (Coordinación de Movilidad Humana, Gobierno de Pichincha), 2014-2018 (*N* = 135)

**Figure 9. Year of arrival of the Haitian population in Ecuador**



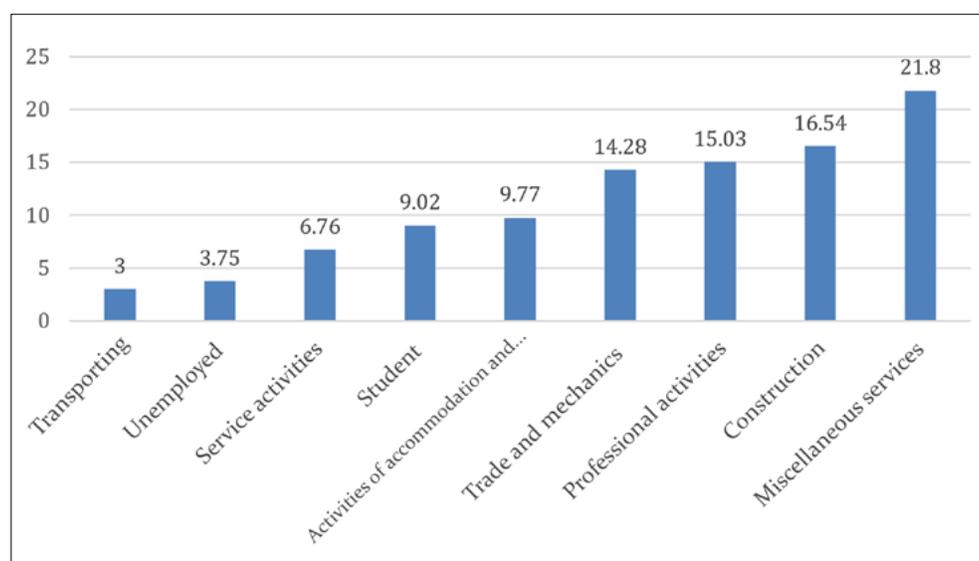
Source: created by the authors based on data from the Coordination of Human Mobility, Government of Pichincha (Coordinación de Movilidad Humana, Gobierno de Pichincha), 2014-2018 (*N* = 135)

Finally, an analysis of the main occupation of Haitians reveals that the most recurrent response was “multifunctional”. That is, they are people who are willing to do any activity to earn a living. Several men answered that they worked as security

guards and guarding cars, and women that they worked in hairdressing or beauty salons. The percentage reaches 22% in the miscellaneous services category (see Figure 10). The next activity is the construction sector (17%), mostly male Haitians who work as masons or laborers. Finally, some entered professional activities (15%), mainly teachers and some doctors.

It is also worth highlighting those linked to commerce (14%), mainly in the informal sector and sale of all types of products; others working in hotels and food halls (10%) either at the reception or as waiters and 9% responded that they were studying, although several of them indicated that they were studying and working.

**Figure 10. Occupations of Haitians in Pichincha, Ecuador (%)**



Source: created by the authors based on data from the Coordination of Human Mobility, Government of Pichincha (Coordinación de Movilidad Humana, Gobierno de Pichincha), 2014-2018 ( $N = 135$ )

These sociodemographic data on Haitian migration in Ecuador, and particularly in Pichincha, present the heterogeneity of profiles—as indicated in the previous section—, people with diverse daily experiences, many of them marked by incidents of exclusion and racism, both in their interactions with migrants of other nationalities and with agents of various state institutions, contractors, and the local Ecuadorian population.

## Conclusions

This article aims to analyze some of the complexities of the Haitian case in the Andean region, particularly in Ecuador. Ecuador is a country that has played a pivotal role in the migration control regime in South America by selectively facilitating, obstructing, and rejecting Haitian migrants at different times. The territories of the Andean region and Ecuador have witnessed the reconfiguration of Haitian migration projects, in their journeys to the South, through the South and to the north; the States of this sub-region have also been key actors in a regime that makes migration transits precarious and sustains their mobility over time as part of a policy of exclusion and control. This work analyzed the transformation of state practices regarding the Haitian population, as well as the sociodemographic composition of those who made the capital of Ecuador part of their migration project and are, or were, settled at some point between 2010 and 2019.

Haitian migration in and through Ecuador, which was later accompanied by other Caribbean (mainly Cuban), African (especially Senegalese), and Asian (particularly Chinese) migration and their transit through Latin America, destabilized a certain model of regional migration circulation in South America. This model, where migration between neighboring populations persisted (Colombians to Ecuador, Bolivians to Argentina, Peruvians to Chile, to name a few), generated a series of regularization policies through bilateral or multilateral agreements that facilitated residence within the Andean Community of Nations (Comunidad Andina de Naciones), the Southern Common Market (Mercado Común del Sur, Mercosur), and the Union of South American Nations (Unión de Naciones Suramericanas, Unasur) (Ramírez & Ceja, 2017). The above made invisible the presence of extra-regional migrations such as Haitian migration and the existence of restrictive policies. In this particular political context, a series of relatively hospitable decisions were taken due to the humanitarian rhetoric about the Haitian population after the 2010 earthquake. However, in the case of Ecuador, these policies were lukewarm and immediately enabled migration restrictions. These restrictions were supported by the discourse of combating migrant trafficking and by international pressures, which led to migration irregularities. In general, and with certain nuances, this has been the pattern in the Andean region, even more so with the arrival of right-wing governments as in Chile and Ecuador, where governmental xenophobia has been observed.

On the other hand, Haitian migration experiences have exceeded any known circulation pattern in the region since they are not south-north journeys, nor a typical south-south migration model, but rather a population that at different times has adjusted its migration projects and traveled thousands of kilometers throughout the American continent, alternating short stays with longer periods and prolonged waits.

Haitian migration makes it necessary to rethink categories such as migration transit, origins and destinations and makes visible a population that has not only been violated in its country of origin but is constantly violated in its transit and waiting periods due to policies and practices that violate its rights and spatialize inequality. They are also the uprooted of whom Jorge Durand spoke:

[...] those who have lost the essential anchors that fixed them in their place of origin... They are inhabitants of large or small cities where they do not feel safe, where night and darkness are a risk, where fear reigns from dawn, and the anguish of finding or losing a job is constant. They are migrants for whom the nation of origin no longer has any meaning; it only brought them sorrow, poor education, limited health services, and precarious jobs... They are migrants who left everything because they actually had nothing. Nothing to lose. Maybe something to gain. (Durand, 2020, pp. 57-58)

The Haitian trajectories in Ecuador, the Andean region, and South America in general, make it possible to look at the origins of a subsequent consolidation of the humanitarian government for migration control—which became much more evident with Venezuelan migration—and which combines humanitarian rhetoric on care and protection, with the construction of victims and vulnerable migrants, with incipient and insufficient regularization measures, with processes of migration selectivity, discretion, detentions and expulsions, as well as migration irregularización.

More than a decade after Haitian migration appeared in the landscapes of Ecuador, the Andean region, South America, and the entire continent, it can be said that it is not simply a matter of processes of migration circularity. It is also a migration *continuum* produced and maintained by State policies and xenophobic and racist practices in the host societies. These practices continue to exclude Haitian men and women, who persist in assembling, disassembling, and reassembling their migration projects in one and the other country of the continent over time.

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