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Ecuador Loses Control of Border as Venezuelans Flood In

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Almost 500 Venezuelan migrants traveling to Ecuador from Colombia had to halt their journeys on August 18, when they learned they needed a passport to enter the country. A mob numbering in the dozens of desperate Venezuelans, however, ignored the new requirement and simply forced their way into Ecuador without permission.

The Ecuadorian government began asking Venezuelans their passports, rather than their national ID cards, on Saturday. The move came after the daily influx of Venezuelans reached 4,000, which raised concerns among the authorities.

The Ecuadorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained in a statement that ID cards are easy to counterfeit. The officials argued that the change was necessary to increase security and prevent crimes such as human trafficking.

Ecuador is a transit country for most Venezuelan migrants. Their preferred destinations further south are Peru, Chile, and Argentina. The United Nations estimates that around 550,000 Venezuelans have entered Ecuador during 2018, and 72,000 of them have ended up staying.

After Mike Pence's visit to Ecuador in June, the U.S. government gave \$2 million to the Lenin Moreno administration to address the Venezuelan migration crisis. In total, the United States has provided \$31 million in humanitarian and financial assistance to Venezuelan migrants through the U.N. Refugee Agency and to other Latin-American governments.

The number of Venezuelans seeking asylum abroad could reach 3 million by the end of the year. "As for the next step, we're asking the region's countries to unite and seek a comprehensive solution to humanely handle the flux of these people who are desperately in need," said Nancy Izzo Jackson, deputy assistant secretary at the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, during a press conference on July 2.

Many other Latin-American governments are taking similar measures to that of Ecuador to keep Venezuelan migration under control. The United States, which received more than 27,000 asylum requests from Venezuelans in 2017, is a popular but more difficult destination due to the distance and travel costs.

For instance, Peru, the new home to more than 350,000 Venezuelans, will start demanding passports on August 25. Close to 32,000 Venezuelans live in Chile, where the government is stepping up efforts to formalize their migrant status and asking them to pay \$50 for a certificate of criminal record. Further, the Brazilian government has been deploying military troops to enhance security at its border with Venezuela for some months now.

Ecuador Yields to Venezuelan Vulnerability

Just one day after Ecuador began requiring passports, a group of Venezuelans had already bent the rule. They spent the night in tents outside the Ecuadorian migration office waiting for a response of their status. In the morning, when no answer was given to them, they went ahead and walked across, and no law official stopped them.

“We are not moving because we want to. The government is killing us on account of hunger. We are afraid to be denigrated,” said one of the Venezuelan travellers, Carlos Quinteros. He implored the officials to have pity on them: “We would rather die here than return.” *El Comercio*, a Quito-based newspaper, reported that he was able to get into a pickup and move on from the border.

Later, on Sunday at noon, the Ecuadorian government announced four exceptions to the passport requirement, because the ombudsman of the country requested a reassessment of the situation. The exceptions are for: (1) underaged children entering with their parents or guardians—who must have a valid passport and documentation that shows their relationship, (2) married couples when one of them has a valid passport and the other does not, (3) Venezuelans who have been in Ecuador before August 18 and are in family-reunification process, and (4) asylum applicants.

The government also provided a six-month grace period for Venezuelans already in Ecuador to formalize their migration status. Further, to allocate more resources and money to assistance for Venezuelan migrants, three Ecuadorian provinces have declared states of emergency in their territories.

Brazil Struggling with the Same Pain

On August 5, a Brazilian federal judge in the state of Roraima, in the north of the country, ruled in favor of closing the border for Venezuelans until further notice. His idea was to open the borders once Roraima had created ideal conditions to handle the massive Venezuelan influx.

Two days later, however, the order was overturned by the Brazilian central government, since it declared that closing the borders would worsen the humanitarian conditions of Venezuelans. The close border also went against international migration commitments.

Still, the Brazilian government has deployed more security in the area—120 additional men—after the confrontations between locals and Venezuelan squatters on August 18. A local business

owner reported that he had been robbed by a Venezuelan, so a group of Brazilians invaded and confronted a Venezuelan camp in the town Pacaraima. This attack forced around 1,200 migrants to return their country.

The government of Venezuela has asked Brazil to safeguard Venezuelan citizens and take measures to secure their families and belongings. In the meantime, the Brazilian government has reassured its commitment to supporting the Venezuelan diaspora until they arrive at their planned destinations.

More than 30,000 Venezuelans live in the state of Roraima, and more than 77,000 in Brazil. Around 33,000 Venezuelans have requested asylum this year, already more than the total for 2017.

No End in Sight: What to Do?

Intellectuals, political influencers, and governmental authorities have shared their opinions towards the Venezuelan exodus. That includes OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro, who overtly opposes the regime of Nicolás Maduro and has called for opening borders throughout the Americas to Venezuelans.

There is no shortage of pushback, however. Colombian political-science and communications professor at the University of Pamplona Edgar Allan Niño believes “the arrival of plenty of Venezuelans and even Colombians [once residing in] Venezuela multiplies exponentially the social problems that [the Colombian government has] tried to address. These problems now appear to be getting out of control given the exodus’s vast dimensions.”

Ian Vázquez, a Peruvian and policy analyst with the libertarian Cato Institute, encourages governments to offer a legal framework for arrival, and he argues that Venezuelan arrivals would accelerate growth in Latin-American economies: “It is time to promote a regional initiative to formalize the influx of Venezuelans and accept them in a legal manner,” he said. “Not doing this would not change the reality; Venezuelans would keep coming, but the majority would stay in an illegal manner.”