

The Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Occupational Health in Ecuador

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**Mount
Sinai**

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Occupational Health*



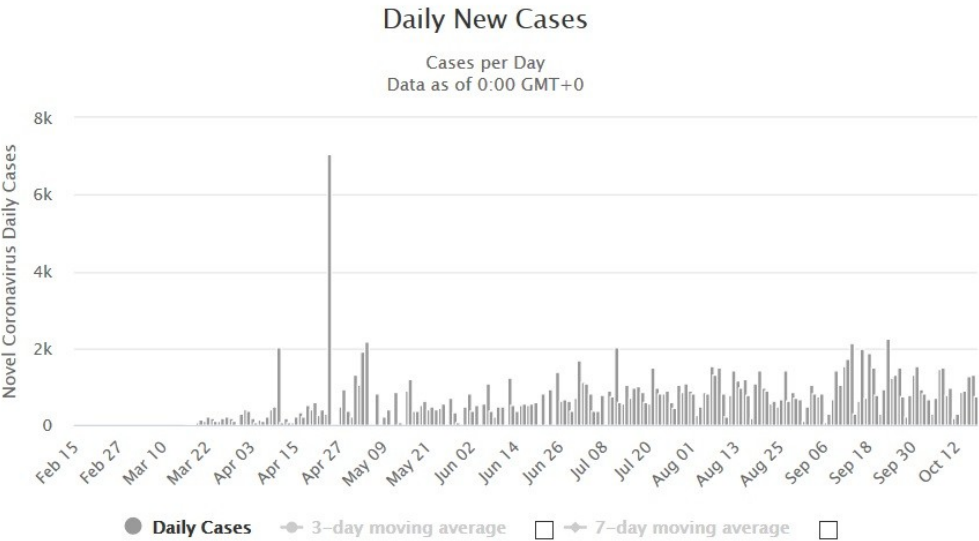
Corporación
para el Desarrollo
de la Producción
y el Medio
Ambiente Laboral



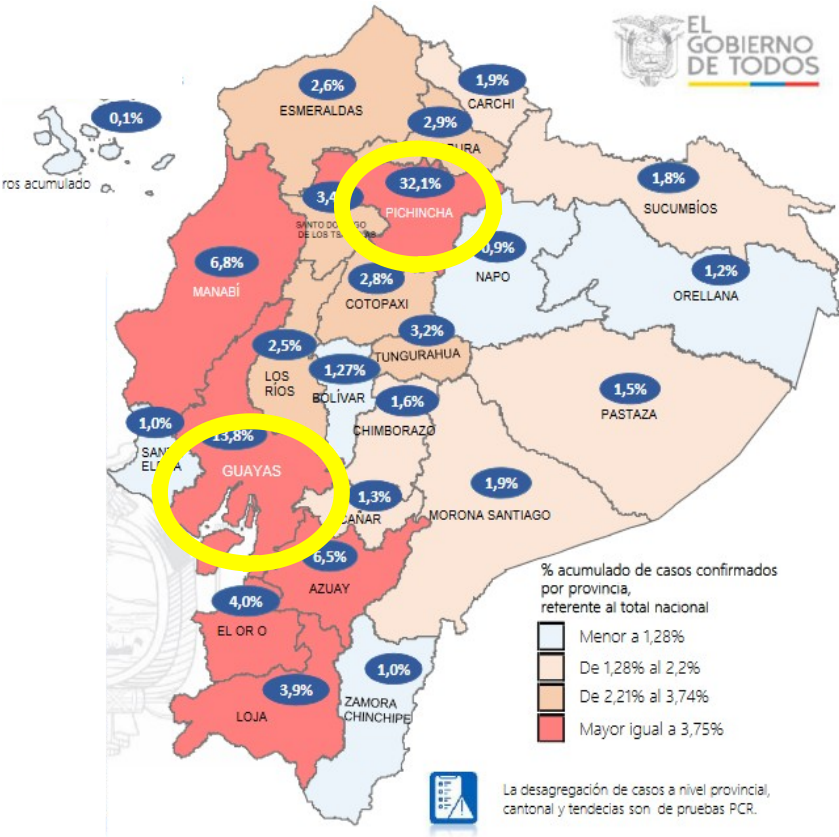
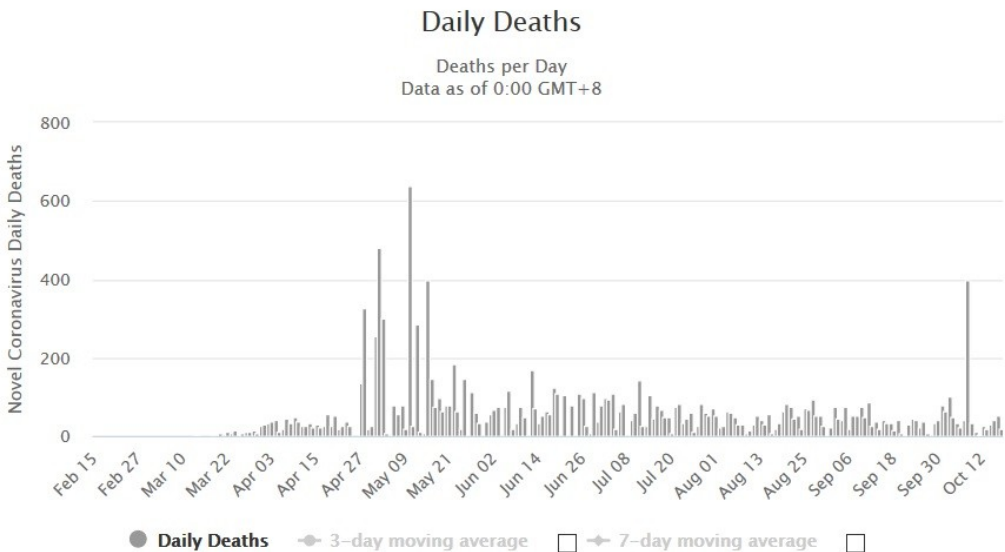
UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Number of Infections and Deaths in Ecuador

Reported COVID-19 infections in Ecuador by October 18th 2020: **153,289**



Reported Deaths due to COVID-19 in Ecuador by October 18th 2020: **12,387**
(both confirmed and probable)



| | Infections (%) | Deaths (%) |
|-----------|----------------|------------|
| Guayas | 13.8 | 27.3 |
| Pichincha | 32.1 | 15.7 |
| Combined | 45.9 | 43.1 |

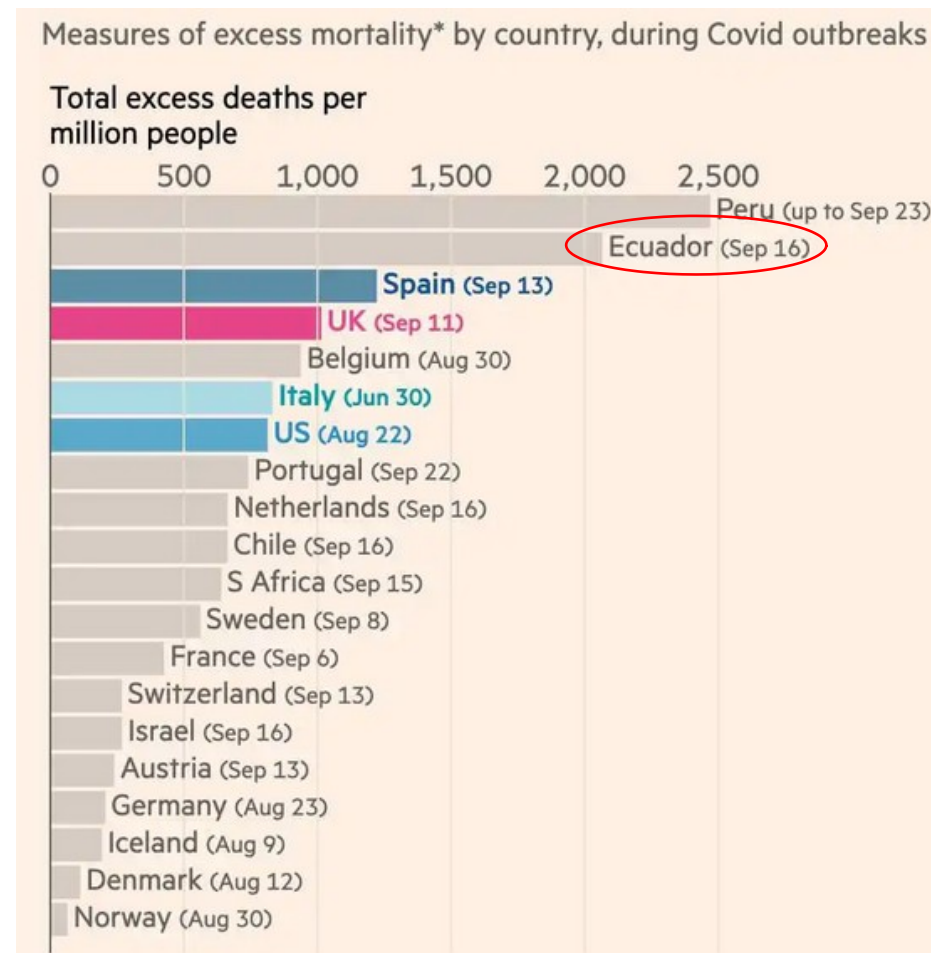
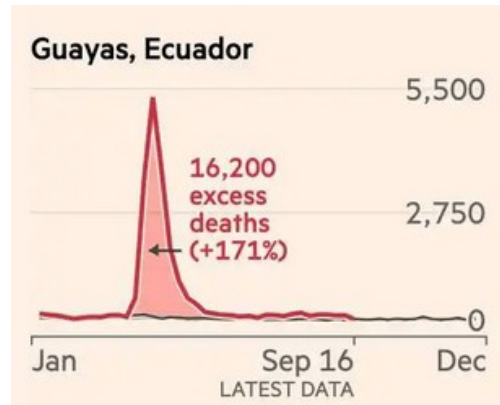
Source:
Ecuador’s Emergency Committee (COE)
<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/ecuador/>

Excess Mortality in Ecuador by province – Comparison January/June 2019-2020

| 2019-2020 Province | Difference %(+/-) | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------|
| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Total (%) |
| Bolivar | -13 | 14 | -22 | 111 | 41 | 34 | 52 |
| Canar | 16 | -18 | -2 | 129 | 15 | -8 | 25 |
| Chimborazo | 9 | -4 | -8 | 92 | 41 | 63 | 111 |
| El Oro | 13 | -10 | 2 | 191 | 164 | 105 | 73 |
| Guayas | 0 | -4 | 178 | 557 | 51 | 9 | 13 |
| Los Rios | -4 | -4 | 2 | 152 | 84 | 44 | 41 |
| Manabi | 3 | -3 | -2 | 199 | 179 | 56 | 49 |
| Orellana | 50 | -31 | -40 | -17 | 26 | 144 | 81 |
| Pastaza | 79 | 18 | -18 | 9 | 9 | 171 | 78 |
| Pichincha | -1 | 15 | 1 | 28 | 47 | 67 | 146 |
| Santa Elena | -3 | 5 | 48 | 940 | 266 | 45 | -16 |
| Santo Domingo | -10 | 29 | -26 | 25 | 56 | 122 | 109 |
| Sucumbios | 7 | -14 | 19 | -15 | 79 | 98 | 248 |
| Tungurahua | 5 | 20 | -16 | 16 | 66 | 141 | 144 |
| Zamora Chinchipe | 4 | 19 | -14 | 35 | 142 | 71 | 81 |
| Total country | 0 | 2 | 49 | 233 | 65 | 50 | 65 |

28,187 deaths in excess compared to 2018 and 2019 in the same Jan/June period

Excess mortality due to COVID-19 in Ecuador compared to other countries (Sept, 2020)



Impacts on the Economy and Employment

GDP: -7.3 and -9.6%* (lowest since 1927)

Exports: -5.2% (versus +5.0 in 2019)

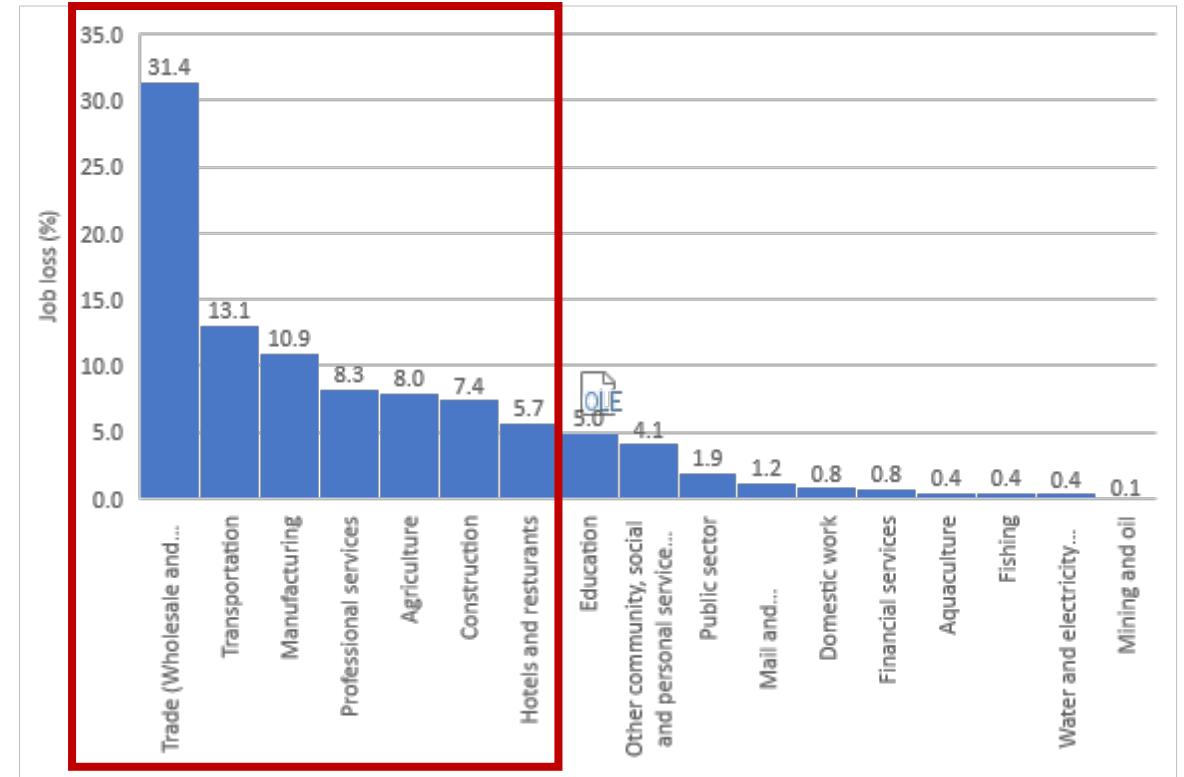
Over 370,000 jobs lost by June, 2020 (10%)

Unemployment June, 2020: 13.3%

Official statistics ONLY reflect job losses in formal employment, Ecuador's subemployment is ~61.5%

Unemployment forecast December 2020: ~20%
(additional ~600,000 jobs lost)

Unemployment impacts directly Social Security System and pensions from current retirees



(*) Lowest GDP since 1927
Great depression (1933) GDP -4.2%
Financial crisis (1999) GDP -4.7%

Impacts Occupational Health and Safety

- Guidelines only apply to workers affiliated (Mandatory affiliation) to the Social Security System (~25%).
- COVID-19 is recognized as a professional disease in Ecuador only for Health Care Workers according to Labor Law (confirmed by testing).
- Very limited availability of PPE and limited COVID testing (current). Data from rapid tests were eliminated from national databases.

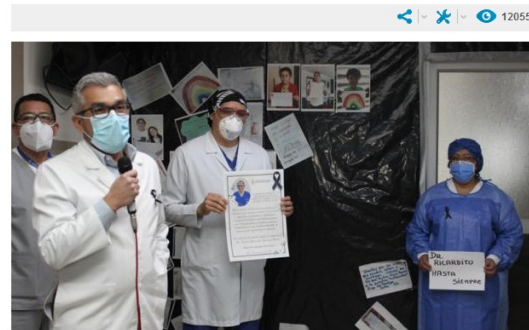
Impacts in Occupational Health and Safety: Health Care Workers



Ecuador: 10 médicos fallecidos y 1600 contagiados por coronavirus en sistema de salud



Actualidad • SOCIEDAD
10 de septiembre de 2020 17:40
Ricardo Arteaga, médico intensivista del Hospital Carlos Andrade Marín de Quito, perdió la pelea contra el covid



Compañeros despidieron con una conmovedora ceremonia al médico intensivista Ricardo Arteaga. Él falleció la madrugada de este 10 de septiembre del 2020. Foto: Cortesía

COVID-19 positive cases in Health Care Workers (HCW)

April 2020: 1,600 cases and 10 death in HCW
(Mainly nurses (34%) and nurse assistants (16%))

August 2020: 5,317 cases (unknown deaths)

Total of public healthcare workers: 16,063

August, 2020: National College of Physicians stated ~120 deaths (among affiliated physicians).

Data on occupation **are no longer collected** and were eliminated from previous records as deemed *inaccurate*.

Response during the pandemic

Government's response

- Lack of a nationwide mitigation strategy, despite declaring quarantine in early March
 - Created an national emergency committee
 - Minister of Health resigned on March 26
 - COVID response was prioritized over other health treatments (chronic diseases, cancer)
- Prioritized payments to IMF as soon as declared quarantine
 - Limited funds available to fund the public health system
 - Public health system collapsed (until September)
- Signed an “stimulus package” on June 22 which included:
 - Deregulation of the job market (validation of precarious work, layoffs and hourly contracts)
 - New loan from IMF
- Limited COVID testing and unlimited data manipulation (change on official count of cases/deaths).
- Passed responsibility to monitor and control the spread to provinces/cities.
- Major efforts to “reactivate the economy” - over 200,000 public sector workers returned to work.
- Economy reactivation has led to new cases nationwide
- Employers use “stimulus package” regulations to lay off workers without compensation.

Response during the pandemic

Unions' response*

- Legal actions to
 - Reinstate workers to workplaces
 - Reverse deregulation of job market
 - Make employers accountable for infections
 - National Campaign for Requesting Free Vaccine for Workers and population in general
 - Improved workers' safety and health

Other stakeholders

- NGO's supported with food distribution, donations of PPE
- International cooperation donated PPE
- Local universities assisted to expand COVID testing
- Churches assisted with food

*~5% percent of unionized workers nationwide

New problems – Widespread use of disinfectants and pressure to authorize chlorine dioxide-based treatment



8:10 PM · Aug 10, 2020

Calls to poison control centers due to:

763 cases of poisoning with Quaternary ammonium compounds and Sodium hypochlorite between March 11th and May 25th.

MUNDO | 7/9/2020 7:16:00 PM



Obispos de Ecuador piden autorizar el dióxido de cloro para tratar covid-19

Por AFP

Sin embargo, no hay pruebas de que esta sustancia cure el coronavirus y, además, algunos advierten que puede ser perjudicial para la salud.

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AGENCIAS

Obispos piden al gobierno de Ecuador que autorice sustancia riesgosa para tratar la covid-19

9 de Julio de 2020

Group of bishops demanded the government to authorize the use of chlorine dioxide as a treatment alternative

Conclusions

- COVID-19 devastated a national economy already in crisis. Economic and health protection visions were confronted during the decision-making process. The economy was prioritized.
- The lack of a clear national strategy led to isolated and reactive measures to stop the spread of the virus. The measures were not coherent, coordinated and lacked of scientific expertise (including in Occupational Health and Safety).
- Population with existing morbidities suffered due to lack of healthcare coverage. The excess mortality is a sad outcome of the mishandling of the coronavirus response.
- The pandemic is ongoing, the economy is “reactivating” but the responsibility to stop the spread has fallen on the population.