

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

### BOLIVIA

October - December 2020

1. **Poverty Rate (defined by unsatisfied basic needs):** 33.2% of the total population in 2018.<sup>1</sup>

#### 2. Migration Facts <sup>2</sup>

- a. Emigration: Around 878.000 Bolivians or 7.8% of the total population reside abroad mainly in Argentina (48.5%), Spain (17.2%), the US (47.4%) and Chile (9.2%).
- b. Immigration: Around 156.000 immigrants or 1.4% out of the total population live in Bolivia. The main countries of origin are Argentina (29.8%), Brazil (17.9%), Spain (8.5%); and in recent years Bolivia has also received people from Venezuela (more than 2.000 people in 2019).
- c. Transit: Venezuelan migrants crossing Bolivia en route to Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.
- d. Refugees: 700 refugees from more than 20 nations (Peruvians, Colombians, Cubans, Iraqis, and Russians) reside in Bolivia.

#### 3. State Measures

- The government decrees [the total reopening of its land borders and the full normalization of activities](#), including tourism as of December 1<sup>st</sup>. The decree approved by President Luis Arce includes cultural, social, sport activities and even religious festivities. Those activities had remained closed despite a partial lifting of restrictions decreed in August.
- On the 8th of October, [Chile decided to keep closed the border with Bolivia](#), due to the outbreak in that country. This measure is expected to last through 2020.
- Presidential elections seem to have impacted the displacement of Venezuelan migrants moving into Chile, between the months of September and October, [migrants congregated in the area of Colchane. Many entered without documentation across the plateau.](#)
- A inicios del mes de octubre la Dirección General de Migración determinó [reforzar el control migratorio en la frontera con Argentina](#), ante el rebrote del COVID-19 en ese

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

<sup>2</sup> <https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/emigracion/bolivia>

<https://www.notimerica.com/sociedad/noticia-bolivia-migrantes-venezolanos-bolivia-viven-miedo-crisis-politica-pais-andino-20191204151329.html>

<https://www.acnur.org/bolivia.html>

país. Se dispuso la aplicación inmediata de medidas de contención y bioseguridad en las oficinas desplegadas en las zonas fronterizas de Bermejo, Yacuiba y Villazón.

- In early October, the Dirección General de Migración [committed to re-assert migration control at the Argentine border](#) due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in that country. The immediate deployment of containment and biosafety measures was ordered at offices in the border areas of Bermejo, Yacuiba and Villazón.
- By mid-October, Mario Castillo Noguera, national deputy for the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), asserted that the legislators opposed to the Socialist Movement [Movimiento Al Socialismo] (MAS) [have not been informed about the bilateral meetings held between the president of the Brigade Parliamentarian of Tarija, Henry Chávez, with Argentine Migration authorities](#), who intend to “open the borders” to normalize the migratory flow of Bolivian citizens to our country.
- Because of the October 12 elections, [Interpol carried out a series of foreign operations](#). They occur in areas most frequented by the Venezuelan population. Colonel Pablo García pointed out that undocumented persons have one month to resolve their migration status or face deportation. At the same time, migration controls at the borders are being reinforced.
- Before the month of November, the Argentine government [partially allowed border transit between Salvador Mazza and Yacuiba](#), it will be open between 8am and 4pm, with an allowance of up to 500 people per day.
- Eidy Roca, Minister of Health, recommended that authorities of the Foreign Ministry and the General Directorate of Migration realize stricter controls on the border with Argentina to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections in the department of Tarija.

#### 4. Migrant Situation Alerts

##### *Bolivian migrants abroad*

- Bolivian migrants in Argentina, whose migration is cyclical, cannot count on information or attention from Bolivian consulates in that country. The new government, through early January this year, [still has not assigned consular staff](#). There are large lines with little biosafety measures in the Buenos Aires consulate. Some Bolivians have been sent back from Jujuy to Buenos Aires, while others have decided to cross clandestinely.

##### *Undocumented Venezuelan immigrants and other people in transit*

- Venezuelan migrants stranded on the border with Chile are at the center of political tensions over the presidential elections. [From the Bolivian side, many fear that a new fraud is brewing, so they ask the government authorities to be vigilant](#). From the Chilean side, people also ask the Iquique authorities for explanations.

- Toward the middle of October, the Director General of Migration, Marcel Rivas, reported a massive departure of Venezuelan migrants from Bolivia to Chile and Peru due to the pandemic, lack of job opportunities and family reunification.
- [A Venezuelan woman died](#) trying to cross the border near Colchane.
- Truck drivers denounced that Venezuelan citizens, who travel on foot the highway between Bolivia and Chile, in the Colchane, Huara section, [are being forced to transport migrants to Iquique](#). Chilean regulations explicitly prohibit the drivers from transporting passengers in this way.
- In a preventive operation at the El Alto terminal, the Special Force to Fight Crime (FELCC) [intercepted 32 migrants](#) of Ecuadorian, Venezuelan, and Colombian nationality who entered through the border with Peru.

#### *Migrant children and adolescents*

- [A 13-year-old Bolivian child was gravely injured](#) by a shot to the neck at the border between Bolivia and Chile. It is not clear if the minor was injured in Chilean or Bolivian territory. In any case, the event highlights tensions at the border.

#### **5. Social Responses**

- *Migrant resistance*
  - o Permanent Bolivian migrants and in-transit Bolivian migrants in Argentina [protested at the Bolivian consulate in Buenos Aires](#), speaking out against the lack of attention and information around their potential return to Bolivia.