

Therefore, it is to be expected that there will be large imbalances in access to ICTs and e-Government services between cities.

Within such a diverse socio-economic landscape, some areas of concern at national level emerge in the domains of security and justice, with specific regard to areas that would require a strong coordination and information exchange in real time among the different government institutions in charge of security, justice and social policies.

In recent years, Ecuador's socio-economic situation has deteriorated considerably, in particular, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected vulnerable groups. In this context, the quality of public administration is ever more relevant when it comes to finding solutions for social welfare, economic recovery and inclusion. However, Ecuador's institutions remain fragile, situation which was exacerbated during the pandemic, due to corruption scandals in institutions at both national and local level and the lack of an adequate response for the population during the crisis. This fragile institutional scenario continues today, despite the taking office of a new administration in 2021, which has seen been generally unable to maintain programmatic and sustained agreements with the legislature. These governance problems have led to citizens' dissatisfaction with the National Assembly, which 83% of Ecuadorians see as badly or very badly managed (March 2022).

The last two years were also marked by an exponential increase in numbers, and the perception of insecurity and violence. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Organized Crime (UNODC), the rate of violent deaths of Ecuador in 2021 was of 13.13 homicides per 100,000 people, a rate that despite is still below the average rate of 17 cases for Latin America (the most violent region in the world), it is much above the global average.

In this context, the **prison crisis** is one of the most serious problems faced in 2021 and that has continued in violent deaths in 2022. From December 2020 to May 2022, there have been at least 390 murders in the country's prisons. This situation has meant for the country a reordering of priorities, while citizen security and social rehabilitation came to the fore in several public institutions, affecting the speed of the actions initially proposed by the new government to eradicate violence against women and femicide.

A specific concern regards the **violence against women and girls/Gender-based-Violence**, the Integrated Emergency Service 911 records continued increases in the number of calls for help due to domestic violence : 2020 (102,799), 2021 (117,411), until June 2022, 58,000 calls. In 2021, 55% of calls related to psychological aggressions, 31% to domestic violence, 13% to physical violence and 0.1% correspond to sexual violence. In terms of deaths, according to data from the Special Commission on Statistics on Security, Justice, Crime and Transparency, from 2014 until July 2022, 570 femicides were officially recorded in the country, although unofficially the figure doubles. The figure has been growing in recent years. The low criminalisation of violent deaths of women as femicide is closely linked to judicial decisions that lead cases to other types of crimes.

At the same time, considering that violence and crime are strictly connected to disadvantaged socio-economic conditions and vulnerable groups in society are impacted by multiple risks, the Government of Ecuador has identified **Chronic Childhood Undernutrition (Desnutrición Crónica Infantil - DCI)** as one of the most serious social problems affecting Ecuador. In the country, 1 in 3 children under 2 years of age suffers from this condition. According to ENSANUT figures, in 2018, 27.2% of infants suffered from this condition, which places Ecuador as the second country in Latin America with the second worst rate, where the average rate of DCI is around 9%. This phenomenon has devastating effects, preventing the correct development of an infant's brain, increasing the probability of facing cognitive limitations, being more prone to contracting more diseases, becoming adults with low-height and being exposed to the circles of inequality and poverty. It can be specified that around 300 thousand infants are born every year in the country and, of these, around 180 thousand under 2 years of age are affected.¹

¹ Source: Informe de Gestión Institucional a la Ciudadanía, 2022, Secretaría Técnica Ecuador Crece Sin Desnutrición Infantil. <https://www.infancia.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/INFORME-RC-1.pdf>