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Bogotá, Colombia

## **Migration in the Peru/Ecuador boundary region**

Vanessa Gil, Huston J. Gibson  
and C. W. Minkel\*

**RESUMEN.** *El 26 de octubre de 1998 se firmó un tratado de paz entre Perú y Ecuador, con el cual terminó una de las disputas limítrofes más largas y volátiles en la historia de América Latina. El reto mayor que ahora subsiste es la integración y desarrollo de la región fronteriza. Entre los obstáculos sustanciales para la integración y el desarrollo se encuentra la emigración masiva. El objeto de esta investigación fue identificar la naturaleza de esta migración, sus causas y consecuencias, y ofrecer una mejor comprensión de la región fronteriza. Se buscaron las respuestas a interrogantes tales como los siguientes, relativos a las “cabezas de familia”, término que se refiere a las personas a cargo de la unidad familiar, o a solteros sin hijos y económicamente independientes: edad, sexo, lugar de nacimiento, estado civil, número de hijos, nivel de educación, profesión u ocupación, razones para migrar, probabilidad de migrar otra vez, y visitas a otros países.*

**Epígrafes:** Perú, Ecuador, límites, migración

On 26 October 1998, a treaty of peace was signed between the Presidents of Peru and Ecuador, ending one of the longest and most volatile boundary disputes in the history of Latin America. Now, a major challenge facing the two countries is integration and development of the boundary region. Most of the conflict occurred over almost empty territory in the Amazon Basin, but development will most readily occur to the south and west where some settlement and infrastructure already exist. Therefore, for purposes of this research, the boundary region is defined as the three northern departments of Peru (Tumbes, Piura and northern Catamarca) and the three southern provinces of Ecuador (El Oro, Loja and Zamora-Chinchipec) (Map 1)<sup>1</sup>

### **Objectives**

Among the substantial obstacles to integration and development of the boundary region is a massive out-migration from the poor, rural Andean areas to the major urban centers on the periphery and to foreign destinations, such as Spain and the United States. This research has sought to identify the nature of this migration, its causes and consequences and to provide a better understanding of the boundary region. Within the region, three primary cities (Piura, Sullana and Loja) have been studied, as well as two secondary cities, Ayabaca and Macará. Answers were sought to questions such as the following relative to “heads of household,” that term referring to persons who are in charge of the family unit or are single, without children, and economically independent:

- Age
- Sex
- Level of education
- Profession or occupation

- Place of birth
- Civil status
- Number of children
- Reasons for move
- Likelihood of moving again
- Visits to other countries



## Methodology

The methodology employed for this study involved the prior development of a detailed questionnaire to be used in personal interviews with selected heads of household.

These interviews were conducted, by carefully trained teams of personnel, at residences stratified randomly in urban sectors according to the estimated population of each. By interviewing the number of heads of household indicated in Table 1, a minimum 95% level of confidence (+/- 5%) was obtained.

Table 1. Population: Selected Cities

City	Population (2000)	Interviews
Piura	326,632	397
Sullana	157,710	396
Loja	127,200	365
Macará	11,463	323
Ayabaca	7,742	288
<b>Total</b>	<b>630,747</b>	<b>1,769</b>

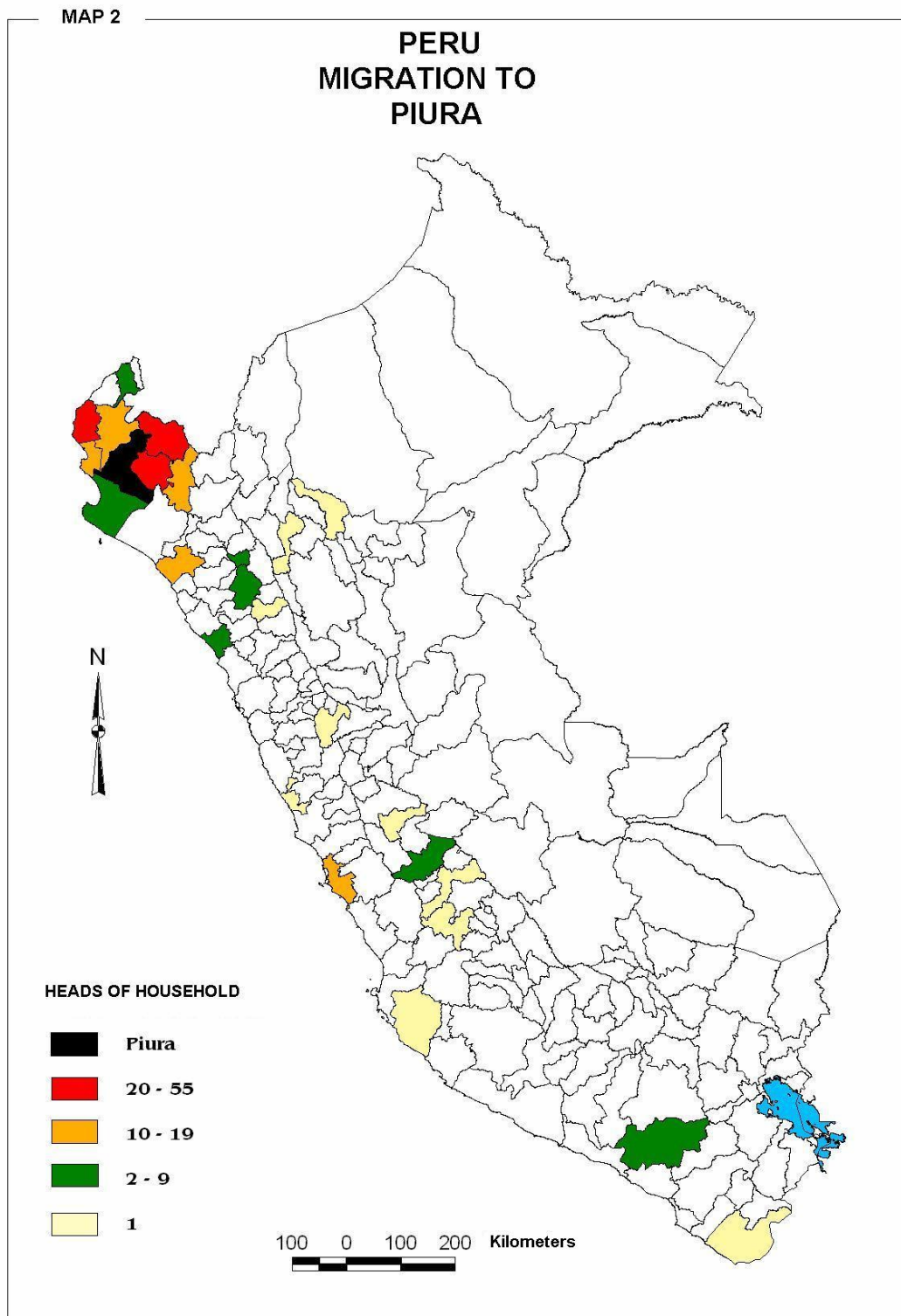
### The Five Cities

Each of the five cities has a special character, depending on its history, size and geographic location. All are involved in the migration process and in efforts to provide for the welfare of their population. Understanding of their mutual problems and cooperation among them are essential for boundary integration and development.

#### Piura

Piura is the fifth largest city of Peru and the largest in the Peru/Ecuador boundary region. It is on the northern coastal plain and was the first Spanish settlement founded in Peru (1532). It is a desert oasis with a long history of cotton cultivation and textile production but is not a major industrial center. Rather, it is the capital of the Province and the Department of Piura, with some offices of regional government and the national government, as well. It is also an important educational center, including two major universities, and the focus of regional trade and commerce. The adjacent community of Castilla is separated by the Río Piura but is fully integrated within the Piura metropolitan area and therefore included in the study. Piura/Castilla has been the destination of nearly 10,000 persons per year since 1993. This migration is reflected in the widespread expansion of inferior housing in zones known as “pueblos jóvenes,” plus extensive unemployment and underemployment, and a lack of adequate public services such as water, sewerage, paved streets and health facilities.

Only 38% of the heads of household were born in the Districts of Piura or Castilla, but 45% were born in the Province of Piura and 87% in the Department of Piura. Hence, while migration to Piura has been extensive, it has not involved moves of great distance.



Within the Department of Piura, there has been a particularly strong wave of migration from the impoverished Andean provinces of Ayabaca, Morropón and Huancabamba and lesser flows from the coastal lowland provinces of Talara and Sullana (Map 2).

Since Ayabaca has been the leading source of migrants, it was deemed worthy of separate analysis.

### **Sullana**

Sullana and its adjacent community of Bellavista are located 24 miles (39 kilometers) northwest of Piura via the Pan Americana Highway. Sullana is the capital of Sullana Province, one of seven provinces within the Department of Piura. It is located on the Río Chira, which has a larger and more dependable flow than does the Río Piura. Therefore, agricultural crops, particularly rice, cotton and variety of tropical fruits, are grown in abundance and are processed locally. Migration to Sullana has been intensive, but “pueblos jóvenes” are neither as widespread nor conspicuous as in Piura.

Of the heads of household interviewed, more than 60% are native to the Province of Sullana, and 93% were born within the Department of Piura. Talara is the leading source of in-migration, followed closely by the provinces of Piura and Ayabaca (Map 3). The movement of people from Talara appears to be due largely to a decline of petroleum production in the area and privatization of the industry, leading to extensive unemployment. In Sullana more than 40% of the heads of household are unemployed or have only occasional employment. Of those who are employed, more than 70% lack a specific profession and, therefore, have quite limited incomes. Opportunities for post-secondary or professional education are also limited.

### **Ayabaca**

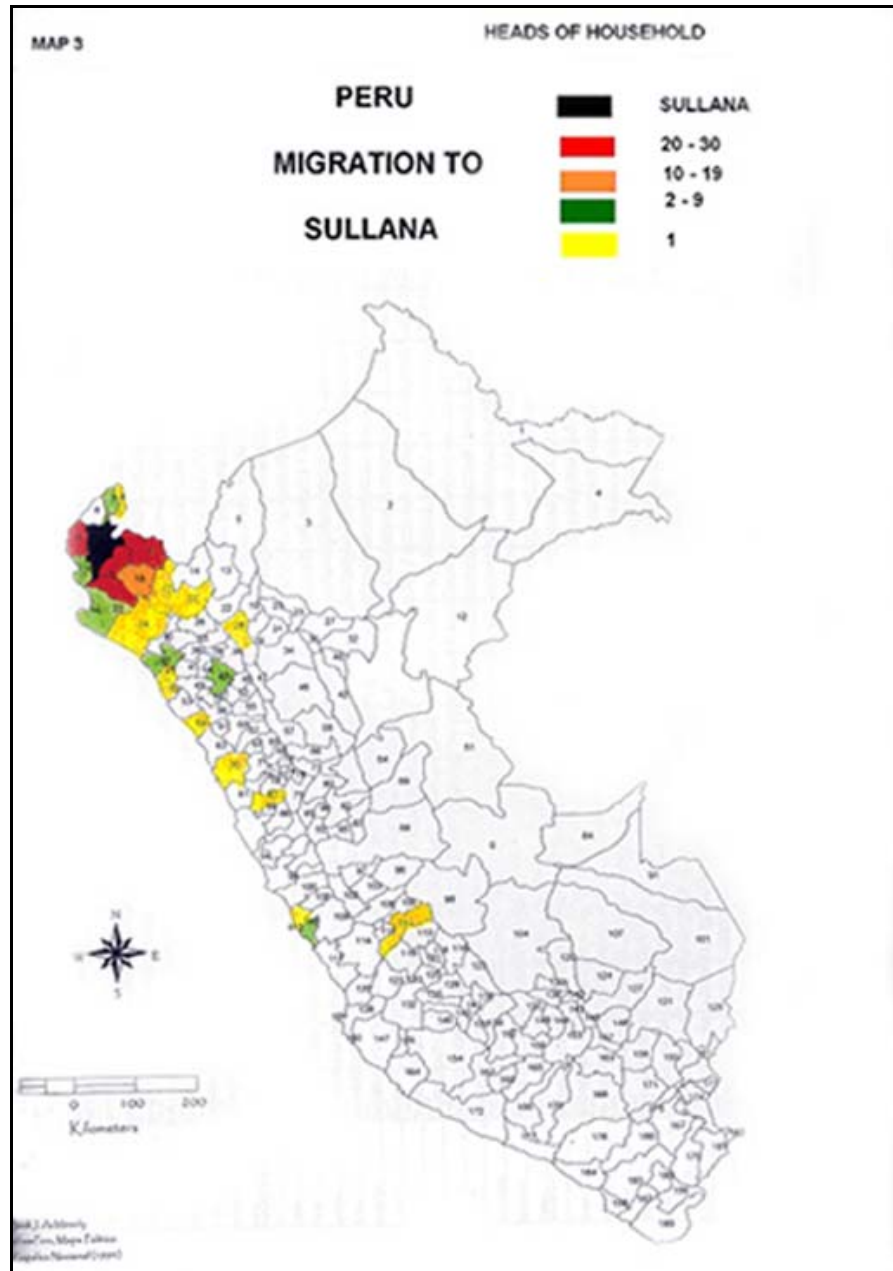
The Province of Ayabaca is located in the mountainous region of the Department of Piura, bordering on southern Ecuador. It has a wide range of elevation, temperature and crops. Sugarcane, bananas and other tropical fruits are raised in the lowlands; yucca, corn and potatoes are raised at progressively higher elevations; and there is livestock grazing throughout. The total population is 138,000, of which 90% is rural, living mostly on small farms or is landless, and poverty is widespread. There is little surplus produced for sale outside of the province, a situation compounded by primitive roads, hardly any of which are paved. Other forms of communication are similarly deficient.

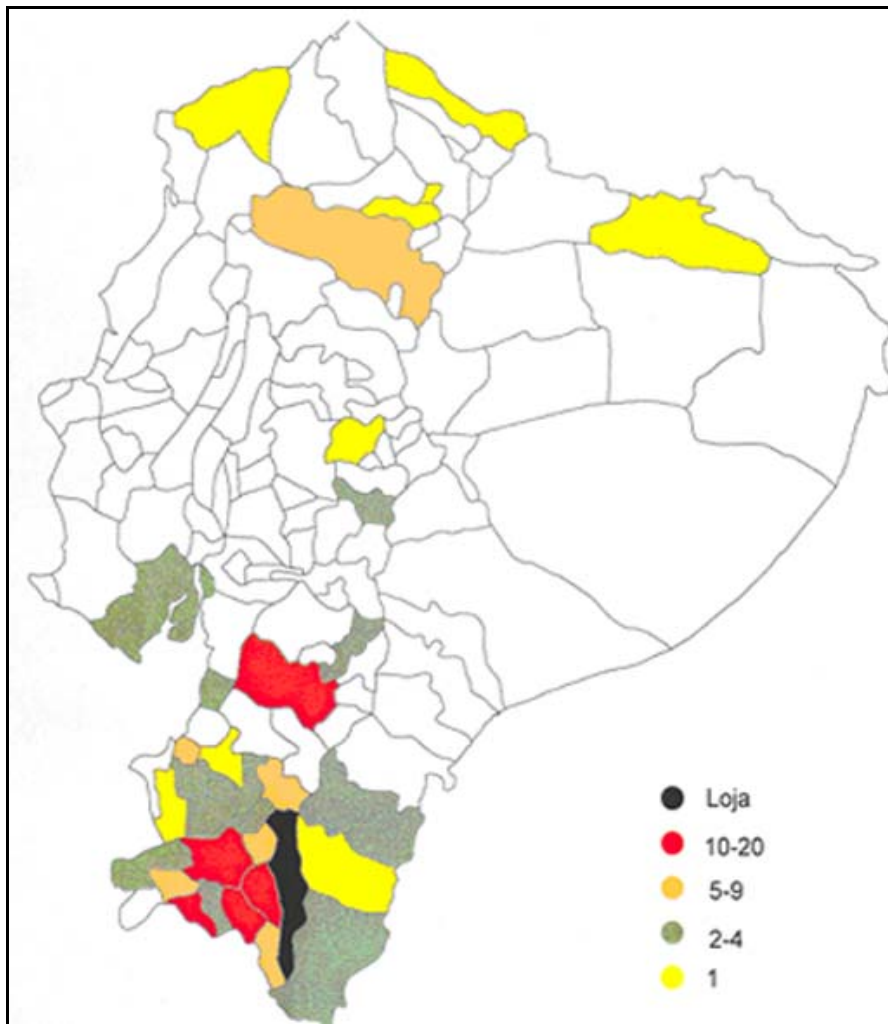
The city of Ayabaca, capital of the province, lies at an elevation of about 8,900 feet (2,715 meters) and is 140 miles (225 kilometers) from Piura, the departmental capital. It is primarily the commercial and governmental center for the province, but is famous throughout the region as home of “Señor Cautivo,” an image of Christ in the local cathedral that is the object of a major pilgrimage during each October. Slightly more than half of the heads of household were born in the city, while 43% were born in rural areas of the province. Thus, Ayabaca illustrates a typical stage, or step-wise, migration from countryside to city, then to larger urban centers and, eventually, perhaps to national capital or abroad.

### **Loja**

The city of Loja, capital of both Loja Province and Loja Canton, lies in a high Andean valley at an elevation of 7,300 feet (2,225 meters). It therefore has a cool climate

suitable for the production of grain and livestock, for which it serves as a regional market. It also has two important universities, one national (founded 1943) and the other private (Catholic). Its major problems include isolation and a poorly developed system of transportation.



**MAP 4. Ecuador: Cantons - Heads of Household who have Migrated to Loja**

Loja has been long noted as a center of out-migration, especially during periods of excessive rainfall or severe droughts in the surrounding region. Nevertheless, the city has grown at an average rate of about 3,000 per year, due to both a high natural birth rate and steady in-migration from the rural areas of southern Ecuador (Map 4). With a growth rate less than one-third that of Piura, the city has been able to cope better with the need for expanded housing and urban services. It is, in fact, a conspicuously attractive, well-organized community.

### Macará

Macará, like Ayabaca, has had a modest growth of population in recent decades but is notable as a center of out-migration to other parts of Ecuador. Its elevation is much lower, however (1,475 feet or 450 meters), since it lies in the valley of the Río Macará, which here forms the boundary between Ecuador and Peru. The city is the capital of Macará Canton, an agriculturally productive part of Loja Province. It is on the main route between Piura and Sullana, Peru; and Loja and Quito, Ecuador, and is an increasingly important center of international commerce.

Nearly all heads of household were born in the Province of Loja, and three-fourths were born within Macará Canton. Most have a rural, agricultural background and have



had only limited educational opportunity, hence few have any specialized training. Considering that Macará is in close proximity to the international boundary, remarkably few heads of household report ever having visited Peru. This situation is likely to change soon with the increase of tourism and cross-border commercial opportunities.

### Heads of Household Characteristics

Of all the heads of household surveyed in the five cities, most are male (66-76%); the minority is female (24-34%). Masculine gender is more than double that of feminine, especially in the three Peruvian cities (Figure 1).

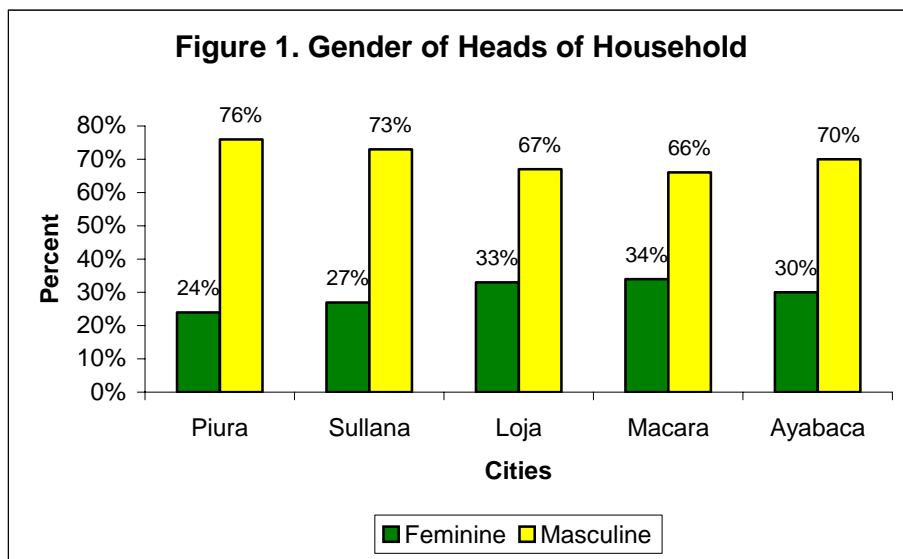
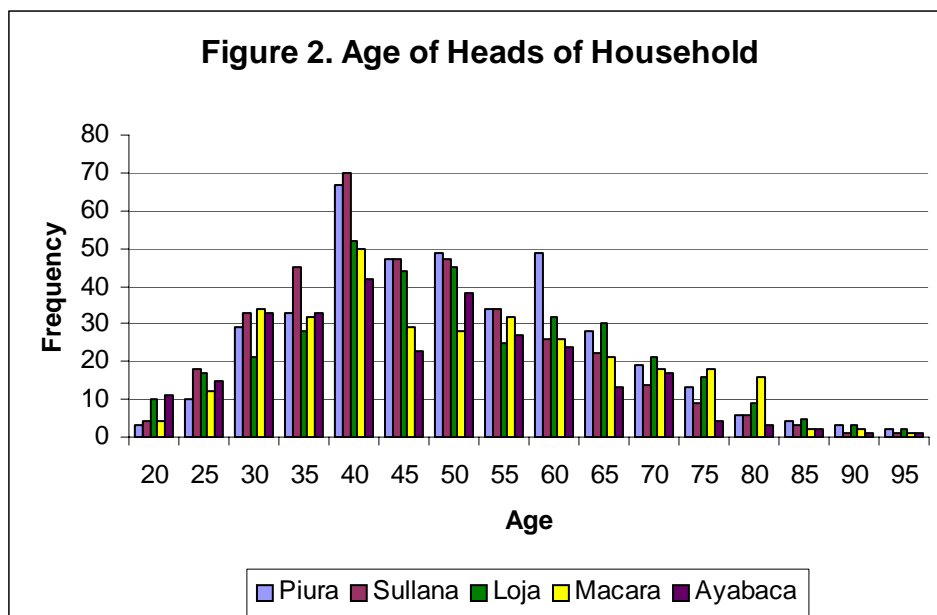
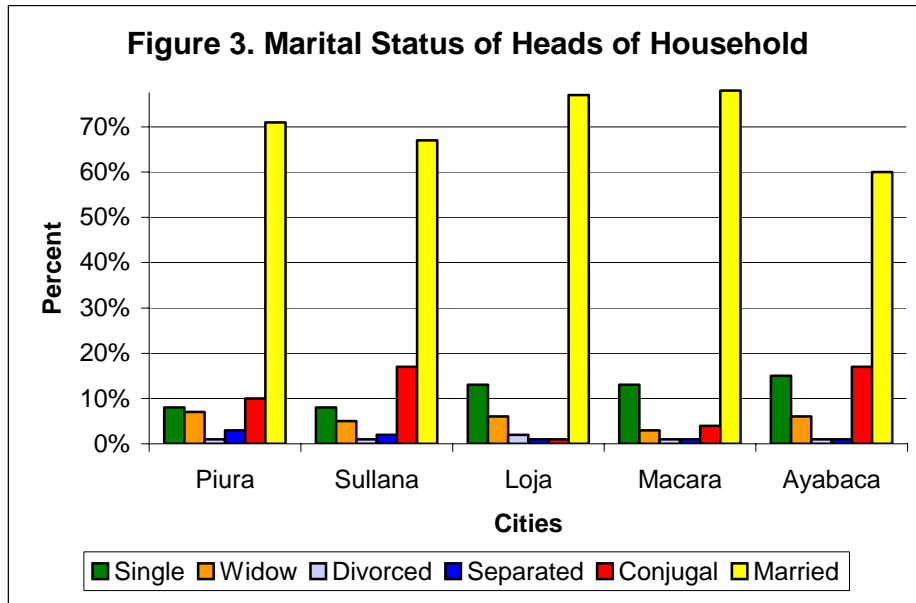


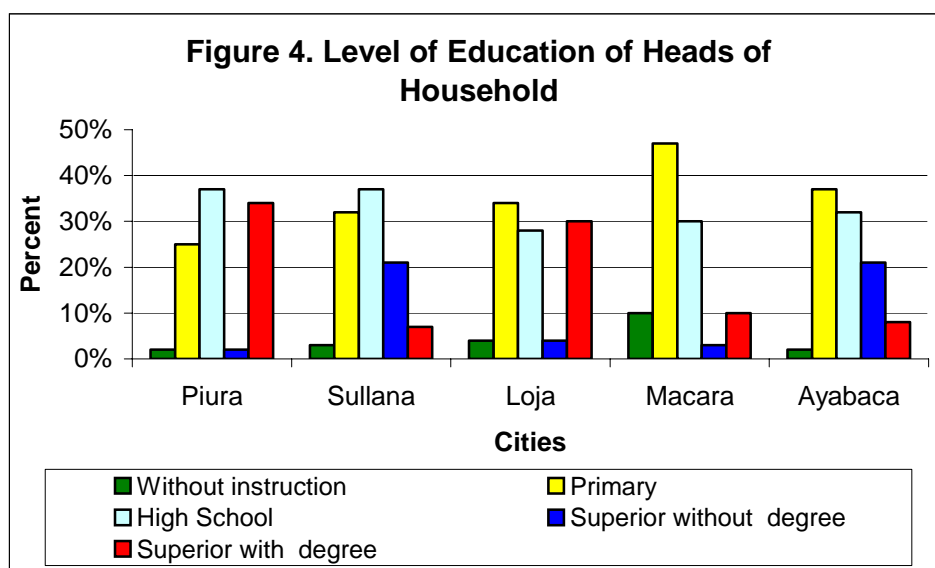
Figure 2 shows that the age of heads of household in the five cities ranges from 20 to 95, the average being 40 years old.



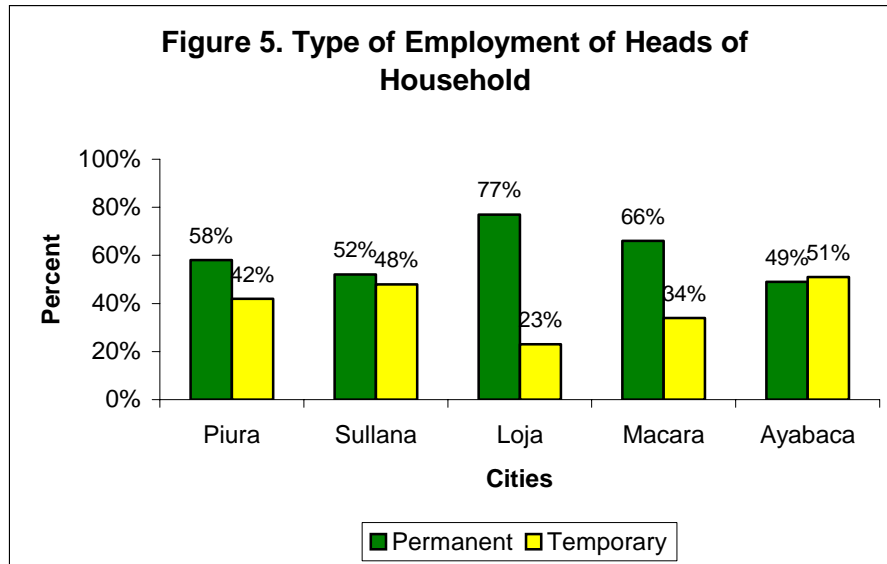
Very noticeable is the high percentage of married and very low rate of divorced and separated heads of household in each of the cities (Figure 3). All cities are predominately Catholic, a religion that condemns divorce.



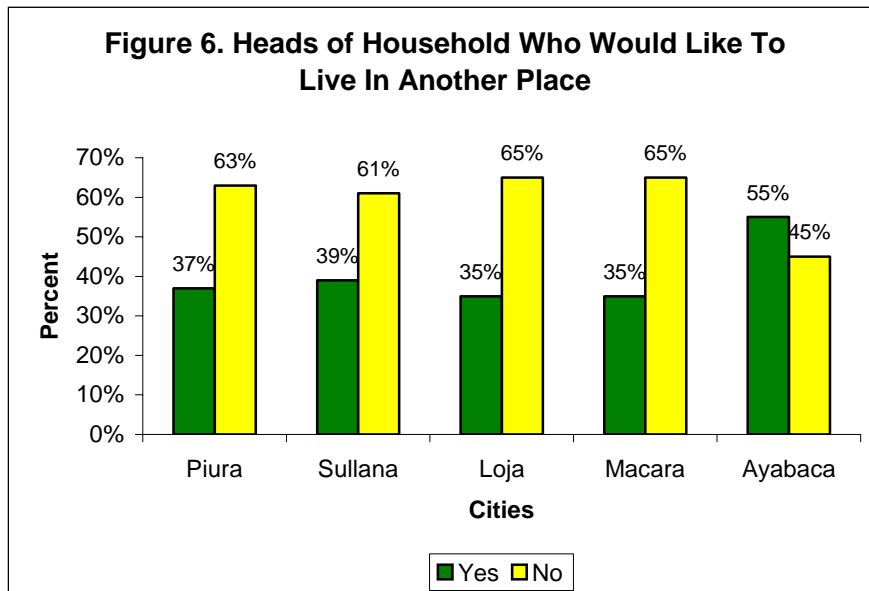
Most heads of household in the five cities have some formal education. Piura and Loja have the highest percentage of superior with college degree, likely reflecting the existence of universities in these cities. Macará and Ayabaca have the highest percentage of heads of household with only primary education, which might be expected since these cities are smaller and more rural in nature. Macará has the highest percentage among all the cities, almost 10% (Figure 4).



The principal type of employment of heads of household is permanent. The cities of Ecuador, particularly Loja, offer more permanent employment (77%), perhaps because economic conditions are currently better in the Ecuadoran sector of the boundary area. The other cities have a relatively high percentage of temporary employment (Figure 5).



Ayabaca notably has the highest percentage (55%) of heads of household who would prefer to live in another place and is the primary source of migrants to Piura and Sullana (Figure 6). Only 35 and 39 percent of those in Piura, Sullana, Loja and Macará would like to live in another place, but even this number reflects a relatively mobile population.



Among heads of household who would like to live in another country, The United States is the first choice of those in Piura, Sullana and Macará; Venezuela, Spain and Ecuador are other choices, where the language is probably an important factor. Resi-

dents of Ayabaca chose Ecuador, perhaps because of proximity and familiarity, but it is notable that it is the only Latin American country in the first-priority list (Table 2).

**Table 2. Places that heads of household would like to live (Foreign)**

	Piura	Sullana	Loja	Macará	Ayabaca
Country	USA/Venezuela	USA	Spain	USA/Spain	Ecuador
Percentage	@ 33%	50%	24%	@ 21%	28%

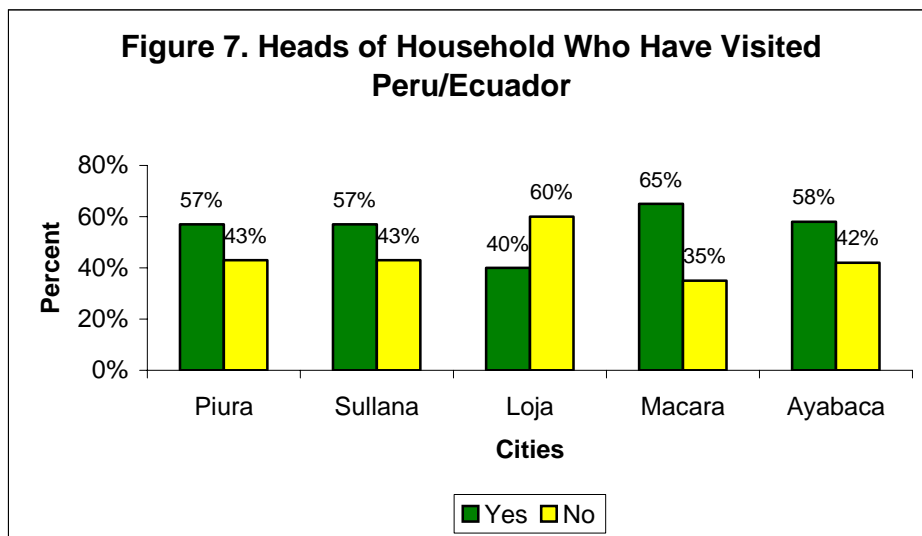
Table 3 shows the places where heads of household would like to live within their respective countries. Trujillo is the city picked by those of Piura and Sullana, and Piura is the city selected by residents of Ayabaca, which also has the highest rate (40%).

**Table 3. Places that heads of household would like to live (Local)**

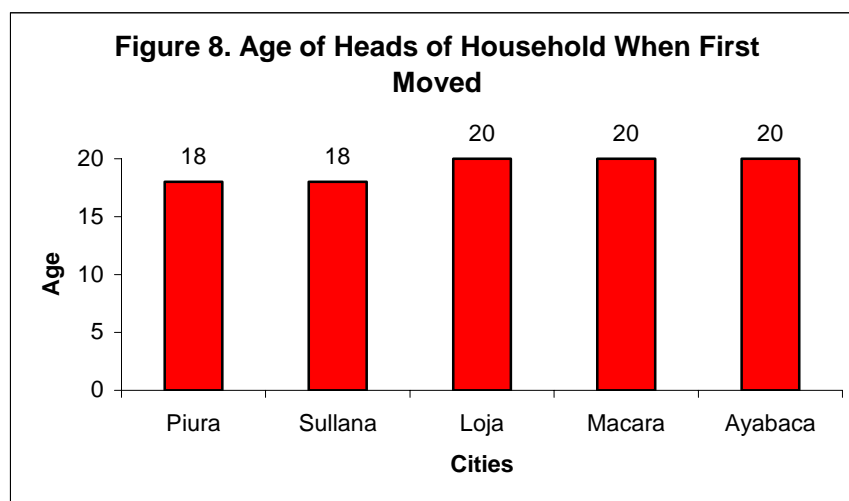
	Piura	Sullana	Loja	Macará	Ayabaca
City	Trujillo	Trujillo	Quito	Loja	Piura
Percentage	12%	30%	34%	34%	40%

Loja is the only city in which the percentage of heads of household reporting that they have not visited the neighboring country is higher than the percentage that have visited it. Macará is the city with the larger number that have visited Peru, likely because that city is very close to the boundary (Río Macará) between the two countries (Figure 7).

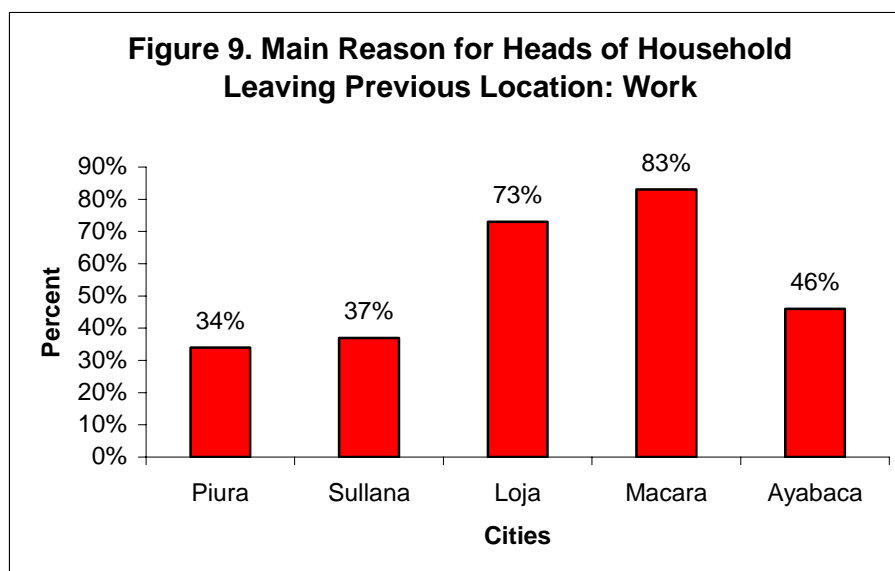
Considering that the lights of Ecuador are visible across the valleys at night from Ayabaca, it is remarkable that the percentage of heads of household in Ayabaca who have visited Ecuador is about the same as for those in Piura or Sullana, many miles away. However, from Ayabaca there is no easy foot passage or public transportation to Ecuador. Rather, one must first make a rough six-hour trip to Piura, then catch the “Ecuador bus” back to Macará and beyond.



The average age of heads of household when they first moved to each city is 20. Piura and Sullana registered the youngest age (18) (Figure 8).



Work is by far the main reason that heads of household in each city left their previous location, but Macará registered the highest percentage (83%) and Piura the lowest with 34% (Figure 9).



Most heads of household have no profession, but teaching is the most common one in Piura, Sullana, Loja and Ayabaca (Table 4). This may be partially due to the presence of universities in Piura and Loja, also to the teacher placement system in Peru. There, after students graduate from college with a teaching degree, they sign a contract with the national government and are placed where needed. Hence, in Ayabaca, for example, there is never a shortage nor surplus of teachers, but they are most likely to come from

Piura or Lima. No such system operates for professions such as engineering or architecture.

**Table 4. Type of Profession**

	Piura	Sullana	Loja	Macará	Ayabaca
None	41%	72%	35%	61%	67%
First Rank	Teacher (19%)	Teacher (9%)	Teacher (17%)	Agriculture (18%)	Teacher (13%)
Second Rank	Professional (11%)	Mechanic (6%)	Engineer (12%)	Teacher (8%)	Engineer (7%)
Third Rank	Business (10%)	Police (4%)	Technician (10%)	Technician (7%)	Professional (4%)

Although the percentage of heads of household with no profession is high, most people are employed, and the predominant type of employment is business. It should be noted, however, that “business” may include selling trinkets or minor household items from tiny in-home stores (“tiendas”), by bicycle, or on foot. Under-employment and unemployment are widespread throughout the region.

**Table 5. Type of Employment**

Rank	Piura	Sullana	Loja	Macará	Ayabaca
1	Business (12%)	Business (21%)	Professional (34%)	Agriculture (25%)	Business (23%)
2	H/keeper (9%)	H/keeper (11%)	Business (24%)	Services (16%)	Professional (19%)
3	Professional (7%)	Teacher (7%)	Technician (17%)	Professional (4%)	Agriculture (19%)

The province or canton of birth of most heads of household in each city is most commonly the one in which they presently live. Ayabaca and Macará have a conspicuously higher percentage of birth in their respective province/canton, being primarily centers of out-migration rather than in-migration (Table 6).

**Table 6. Place of Birth by Province (Perú)-Canton (Ecuador)**

	Piura	Sullana	Loja	Macará	Ayabaca
Province	Piura	Sullana	Loja	Macará	Ayabaca
Percentage	46%	68%	51%	75%	96%

### Observation

Among the 1,769 heads of household interviewed during this study, only one lives on the opposite side of the international boundary from which he was born. This is a male Peruvian born in Piura Department but currently living in Macará. It is apparent that the international border was a significant obstacle to trans-national migration prior to the Treaty of Peace in 1998. A few individuals have been deported from each country for illegal activities, but no major incidents have occurred to mar relationships between the two countries since that date.

## Conclusion

The migration of people from one place to another is not necessarily a bad thing. However, when the influx of migrants vastly exceeds the ability of receiving communities to provide employment and basic services, such as adequate housing, water and sewerage, education and health care, paved streets and personal security, basic problems are created for all concerned. Such are the conditions in much of the boundary region in northern Peru and southern Ecuador. Yet, there are many positive trends to indicate that peace may be permanent and that steady progress will be made toward the resolution of continuing problems.

The mayors of cities of both sides of the boundary meet regularly concerning matters of mutual interest, as do the university rectors, business leaders and military officers. Tourism between the two countries is on the increase. Even school children who were taught for generations that people of the neighboring country were their “natural enemies” now meet for special events in a spirit of friendship and cooperation. Under such conditions, no challenge is too great to overcome.

**ABSTRACT.** *On 26 October 1998, a treaty of peace was signed between Peru and Ecuador, ending one of the longest and most volatile boundary disputes in the history of Latin America. Now, a major challenge is integration and development of the boundary region. Among the substantial obstacles to integration and development is a massive out-migration. This research has sought to identify the nature of this migration, its causes and consequences and to provide a better understanding of the boundary region. Answers were sought to questions such as the following relative to “heads of household,” that term referring to persons who are in charge of the family unit or single, without children, and economically independent: age, sex, place of birth, civil status, number of children, level of education, profession or occupation, reasons for move, likelihood of moving again and visits to other countries.*

**Key words:** Peru, Ecuador, boundary, migration.

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<sup>1</sup> In Peru, the lesser political divisions are known as departments, provinces and districts, whereas in Ecuador the corresponding units are called provinces, cantons and parroquias.



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### Editorial

- A propósito de un bicentenario: El legado de Humboldt  
*Héctor F. Rucinque, y Jairo Durango-Vertel* 105

### Artículos

- Los nuevos mundos de la geografía electrónica  
*Stanley D. Brunn* 108
- Migration in the Peru/Ecuador boundary region  
*Vanessa Gil, Huston John Gibson, and C.W. Minkel* 129

### Opinión

- GeoTrópico*, instrumento de docencia en Chile  
*Oswaldo A. Muñoz Solari* 144

### Documentos

- El Trópico del Amor  
*Enrique Medina Flórez* 145
- Más sobre acceso abierto
- La Declaración de Berlín 152
- ACRL: Cambios sobre la comunicación erudita 155

### Recensiones - *Book Reviews*

- Debates sobre el espacio en la geografía contemporánea 160
- Instrucciones para reseñadores, publicistas y/o autores  
*Guidelines for reviewers, publishers and/or authors* 163

## *Presentación*

GEOTRÓPICO es una revista semestral electrónica del Grupo GEOLAT, dedicada a la difusión de estudios geográficos y afines relacionados con el espacio intertropical, seleccionados mediante evaluación por pares académicos. GEOTRÓPICO se publica gracias a la ayuda de instituciones e individuos interesados en la promoción de la geografía y el desarrollo científico general de la región, en especial del área latinoamericana. A este respecto, GEOLAT debe reconocer el apoyo generoso que ha brindado la Universidad de Córdoba, Montería, Colombia, para la iniciación del proyecto.

GEOTRÓPICO invita a los geógrafos y científicos afines a contribuir con su producción especializada al éxito de este seriado de la Internet. Con preferencia, los editores solicitan artículos sustantivos sobre las regiones tropicales, ensayos metodológicos o teóricos y artículos de revisiones temáticas, lo mismo que serán bienvenidas reseñas bibliográficas y notas de interés para la geografía tropical. Se puede asegurar que estas contribuciones tendrán la más amplia diseminación entre la comunidad académica y científica.

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## *Introduction*

*GEOTRÓPICO is a peer-reviewed semi-annual online journal of the GEOLAT Group. The journal is concerned with the diffusion of geographical studies dealing with the intertropical realm. GeoTrópico is published under the sponsorship of individuals and institutions interested in fostering geography and scientific development in the area, particularly in the Latin American region. In this respect, GEOLAT acknowledges the generous support given by the University of Córdoba, Montería, Colombia in the initial stage of the project.*

*GEOTRÓPICO invites geographers and related scientists to contribute to the success of this new electronic serial. The editors welcome: substantive research papers dealing with any aspect of the region; methodological and theoretical essays; and review articles. Book reviews, and notes of interest on tropical geography are also welcomed. It may be assured that papers published in this journal will have ample dissemination within the academic and scientific communities.*

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