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## THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON LABOR MIGRANTS IN ARGENTINA

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*The paper presents some data of a sociological survey of migrants in Argentina after the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic. It is noted that after the introduction of restrictive measures, the situation of migrants has worsened significantly. Migrants indicated cramped living conditions, limited access to medical care, job loss, and a significant reduction of income as the main problems they have faced. One of the biggest challenges for Argentina is the informal employment of migrants. The complication of bureaucratic procedures has led to the fact that many migrants cannot complete the necessary documents on time. During the pandemic such migrants are at risk because many of them lost their jobs and are unable to pay for housing, to receive medical care, to buy food, while those who continue to work are at risk of infection. The Government of Argentina attempts to support people during the pandemic, including some categories of migrants. However, some migrants find themselves in a position of social exclusion, as the state support measures do not apply to them, and they also cannot return to their home country due to border closures. The article also observes a significant decline in migrant remittance flows.*

**Keywords:** the COVID-19 Pandemic, Argentina, economic inequality, international labor migration, migrants' status, informal employment, change in employment during isolation, state support measures, social exclusion.

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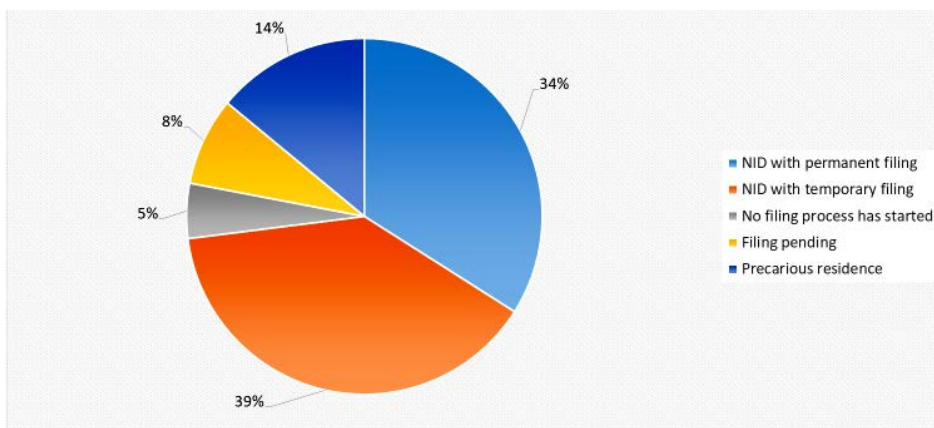
Nowadays it is a truism truth that the COVID-19 Pandemic is showing, more than ever, the big inequalities of human societies. These inequalities are intersectional constructs that traverse people's lives, their social practices and institutions, affecting the access to rights and opportunities. Class, gender, generation, phenotype, nationality, migration status cross and (re)configure the field of (in)equalities.

In Argentina, the pandemic has mostly affected elder people, inhabitants of popular and precarious neighborhoods, informal workers, and African and Latin-American immigrants. Migrant population not only share labor and housing deficiencies with poor natives, but their documentary situation

limit their access to food and economic aids that the Argentine State is providing (Fig. 1).

Argentina's population was 44,5 million in 2018. According to official data, until May 25<sup>th</sup> the number of people that got COVID-19 was 12076 and the number of deaths was 452. We are now in an upward curve that may arrive to the top in mid-June.

Migrants are approximately 5% of the population. Not all of them have a regular migration status. There are many migrants that have problems with the document proceedings because during the last 4 years the previous government made it extremely difficult (cybernetic system, expensive fees, long periods of time).



Source: Survey about the "Situation of the migrant/foreign population in Argentina vis a vis the advance of CORONAVIRUS"

Fig. 1. Documentary situation of the migrant population

The results of the survey included in this paper vary slightly from the final ones because the survey finished one day after the analysis of these proviso-

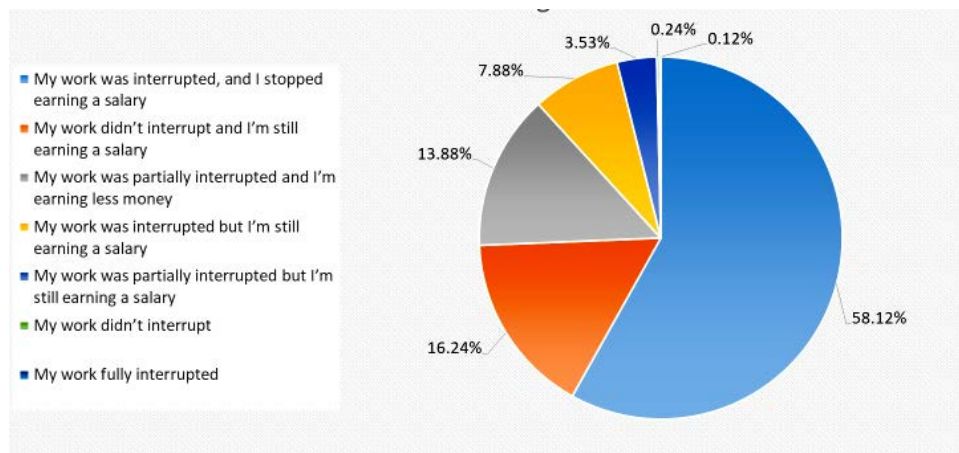
ry results was done. Many migrants are informal workers whose economic activities (construction, sweatshops,

informal commerce, street vending, care services) have been interrupted:

- 28% had a formal work before the quarantine;
- 26.5% had an informal work;

- 28.3% worked sporadically;
- 17.2% did not have a job.

Fig. 2 shows labor situation during the COVID-19 Pandemic insulation.



Source: Survey about the "Situation of the migrant/foreign population in Argentina vis a vis the advance of CORONAVIRUS"

Fig. 2. Labor situation during the insulation

As the figure shows, 58% of the migrants have lost their jobs and stopped receiving a salary. Those who worked informally in construction or care services, stopped perceiving their salaries and do not have any money to pay their bills nor their rent, and to buy any food. There are some migrants that keep on working in precarious activities that imply a high exposure to contagion.

Many migrants have difficulties with their housing. 81% must pay a rent and 28% declared that they have had problems since the quarantine began. They specially remarked that they

are not allowed to pay after the deadline, there have been increases in the rent, evictions (in spite the Government has prohibited them) and non-renew of hiring contracts. There are other problems such as overcrowding and the lack of basic conditions to sustain the isolation (since they live in rooms, social housing, family hotels, cabins).

Poverty index among recently arrived migrants is remarkably higher than those who arrived previously and could settle down and find better jobs. The situation gets worse because many migrants lack of social networks and information.



Source: Survey about the "Situation of the migrant/foreign population in Argentina vis a vis the advance of CORONAVIRUS"

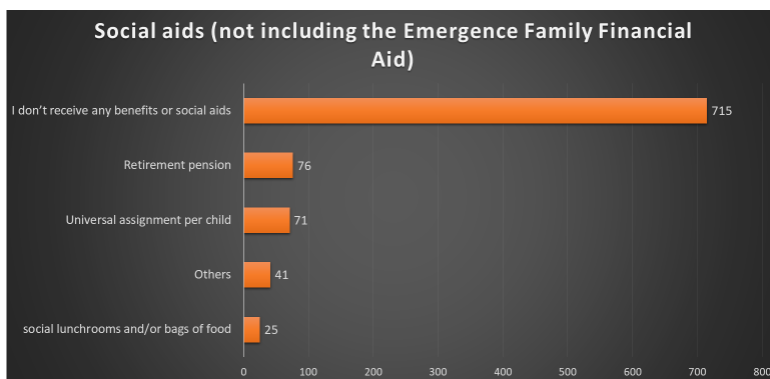
Fig. 3.

Contemporary Argentine government is progressive and protective. It cares more about health and life than about economy. It has established a mandatory quarantine since March 20<sup>th</sup> and passed some social policies for the most vulnerable citizens.

Beside pre-existing social policies, it is implementing some compensatory ones:

- Emergence family income destined to informal workers;
- Prevention of evictions;
- Social lunchrooms and free food delivery.

Nevertheless, many migrants cannot benefit of these policies. Therefore, COVID-19 pandemic has a different impact according to the migrant status of some people.

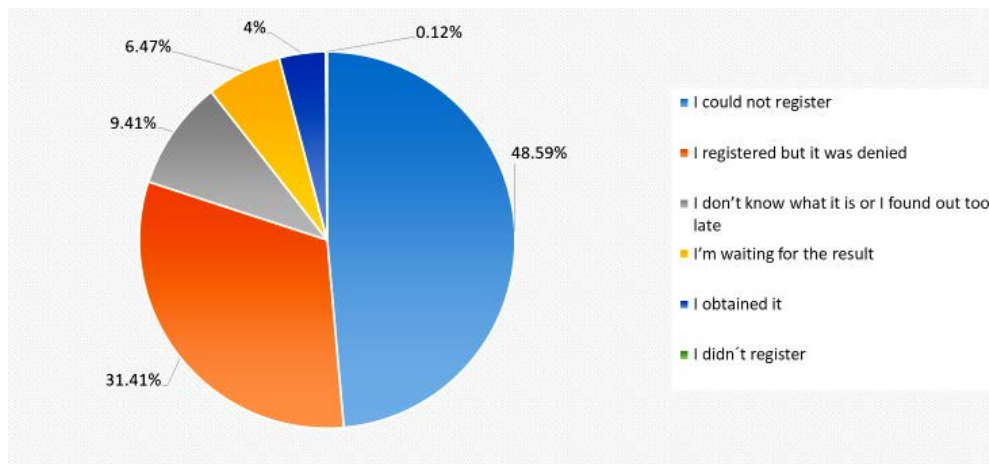


Source: Survey about the "Situation of the migrant/foreign population in Argentina vis a vis the advance of CORONAVIRUS"

Fig. 4.

The emergence family income consists in \$100 and is destined to natives and migrants whose legal residence in the country is not minus 2 years. Recipients are informal workers that don't have any pensions or state social aids. Nearly 80% of the migrants

couldn't access to the emergence family income because they haven't been living in Argentina for more than two years or because the benefit was simply denied. The official number of denials regarding the time of residence is almost 200.000 (Fig. 4).



Source: Survey about the "Situation of the migrant/foreign population in Argentina vis a vis the advance of CORONAVIRUS"

Fig. 4. Situation regarding the Emergence Family Financial Aid

Migrants and refugees are more vulnerable than poor citizens because they live in very precarious and overcrowded places, mainly in the cities that are more affected by COVID-19. This vulnerability exposes them to contagion.

Many migrants lack of health care insurance, so in case of illness they must go to public hospitals, which generally produces xenophobic reactions (Fig. 5).

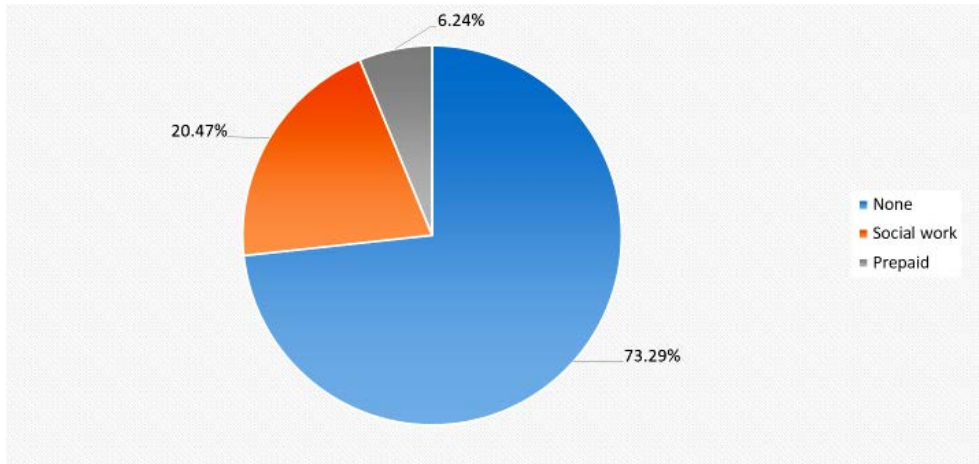
Many of them also a fear to go out of their homes because the police may ask them to show their documents.

Together with less incomes is the fact that sending remittances has considerably reduced.

Therefore, migrants are distressed because of their situation in Argentina and that of their relatives in their homeland.

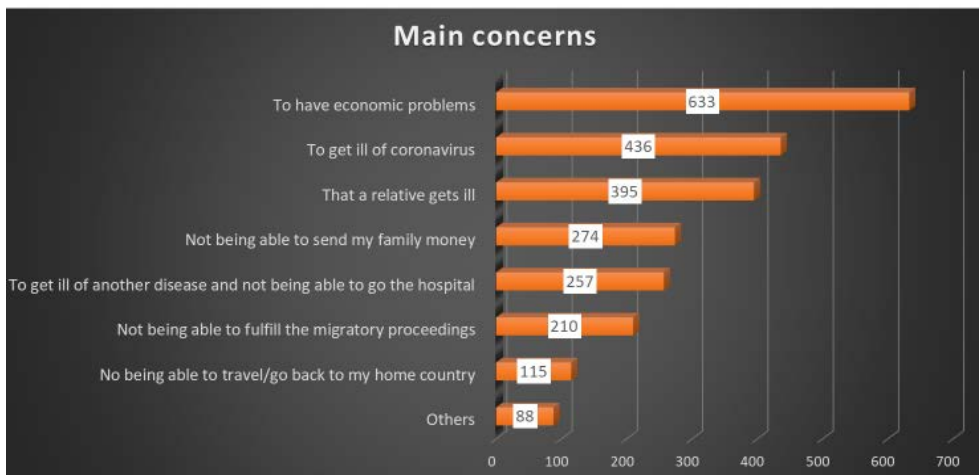
Due to the quarantine, migrants can't go back home. The borders are closed so no people, no goods can trespass them.

Migrants fear more losing their jobs and not being able to eat than getting infected with COVID-19 (Fig. 6).



Source: Survey about the "Situation of the migrant/foreign population in Argentina vis a vis the advance of CORONAVIRUS"

Fig. 4. Medical coverage situation



Source: Survey about the "Situation of the migrant/foreign population in Argentina vis a vis the advance of CORONAVIRUS"

Fig. 6. Main concerns

There has been an upsurge of xenophobia and racism. Citizens fear that migrants (Chinese, Italians, Spanish) may infect them. Nationalism has increased.

Briefly, Argentine state policies for people that lack an income because of the pandemic have not considered the special characteristics of migration condition. In this scenery organizations

of migrants and of human rights ask the government to change the Emergence family income program and to include all migrants, without regard to the time of residence. The NGOs claim that the Government should include all the migrant population in the social programs (specially regarding food and housing) and demand for an easier and quicker regularization mechanism. They also propose to use the concept “inhabitant” as the basis to access to social and economic benefits. In this way, the status of exclusion that rules the foreign presence in the national order could be avoided.

The only way to overcome this world crisis, of unprecedented magnitude and proportions, is to avoid the rupture of the chain of solidarity within social frameworks. The State should guarantee equality of access to social protection mechanisms and to humanitarian aids in order to face the mandatory isolation. This responsibility for non-native population that is living in the Argentine territory is even more indeclinable because of the fact that international borders have been closed, so there is not option to migrate, nor to go back to the countries of origin.

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## **ВЛИЯНИЕ ПАНДЕМИИ COVID-19 НА ТРУДОВЫХ МИГРАНТОВ В АРГЕНТИНЕ**

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**Аннотация.** В статье приводятся некоторые данные социологического опроса мигрантов в Аргентине после начала пандемии COVID-19. Отмечается, что после введения ограничительных мер положение трудовых мигрантов существенно ухудшилось. Стесненные условия проживания, ограниченный доступ к получению медицинской помощи, потеря работы и существенное снижение заработка — основные проблемы, на которые указывают мигранты. Одной из сложнейших проблем для Аргентины является неформальная занятость мигрантов. Усложнение бюрократических процедур привело к тому, что многие мигранты не могут вовремя оформить необходимые документы. В период пандемии такие мигранты составляют группу риска, поскольку многие из них лишились работы и не могут более платить за жилье, не имеют возможности получать медицинскую помощь, не имеют средств на покупку еды, а те, кто продолжает работать, подвергаются риску заражения. Аргентинское правительство предпринимает определенные шаги по поддержке населения в период пандемии, в том числе, для некоторых категорий мигрантов. Однако часть мигрантов оказываются в положении социальной эксклюзии, поскольку на них меры поддержки не распространяются, и они также не могут вернуться на родину из-за закрытия границ. В статье также отмечается значительное падение объемов денежных переводов трудовых мигрантов на родину.

**Ключевые слова:** пандемия COVID-19, Аргентина, экономическое неравенство, международная трудовая миграция, положение мигрантов, неформальная занятость, изменение занятости в период изоляции, государственные меры поддержки, социальная эксклюзия.

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