

The Deaf of Ecuador

The Ecuadorian Sign Language Community



Deaf Ecuadorians are working hard to have Lengua de Señas de Ecuador (LSEC), Ecuadorian Sign Language, recognized as a legitimate language. In 2010, there were approximately 213,000 Ecuadorian deaf people according to Consejo Nacional de Discapacidades (CONADIS), the national disability organization. The largest deaf population lives in Quito with the next largest populations living in Guayaquil and Cuenca.

The Federación Nacional de Sordos del Ecuador (FENASEC) began 25 years ago and strives to encourage sign language use and self development among deaf Ecuadorians and to implement a sign language development plan. FENASEC is working to create a LSEC dictionary and distribute it to schools, interpreters, and the general deaf population by 2012. Lenín Moreno Garcés, the current Vice President of Ecuador, has advocated for disabled Ecuadorians, including deaf people, increasing their voice in society.

Deaf people frequently meet together for soccer, association meetings, and other social events. All adults are required to work by law but higher-paying positions are difficult for deaf people to obtain. Deaf people indicate that many can work their way to higher-paid positions after proving their skill level.

Most deaf students attend deaf-only or mixed-disability schools. The largest deaf school that offers both primary and secondary education is located in Quito: Instituto Nacional de Audición y Lenguaje (INAL). Most of the deaf schools use Total Communication as their method of communication in teaching; very few schools are bilingual. Some deaf students are integrated into the regular school system which use little sign.

Very few interpreters are available in Ecuador, and there are almost no opportunities for people to get professional training as interpreters. If deaf people had increased access to interpreters, advanced educational opportunities and communication access to everyday life events would become available. The deaf community indicates that their greatest needs are for educational materials of all kinds, religious and health materials, teacher training, and sign language classes for families with deaf children.

Primary Religion:

Christianity

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

Almost none

Churches:

None

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

None

Population (date):

213,000 (2010)



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Have They Heard the Gospel?

Hindrances to Scripture Use

No Ecuadorian Sign Language Bible exists. Many churches have services every week but do not offer interpretation for deaf congregants. The only deaf congregations that we know of exist in the capital city, Quito. The deaf population of Ecuador in general has a lower literacy rate than the hearing population.

Response to the Gospel

Church growth in Ecuador is slow for the deaf community. Deaf groups have difficulty finding materials to teach. The existing deaf church groups desire more materials in Ecuadorian Sign Language (LSEC) so they can learn more about the Bible. Many deaf people seem indifferent to church because most church services are provided in Spanish with no interpreter present.

Bilingualism

The signing deaf population uses LSEC and Spanish every day. A small percentage of the deaf population also knows other signed languages such as American Sign Language and Spanish Sign Language.

Are Cross-Cultural Missionaries Needed?

Cross-cultural missionaries are needed to train a deaf Ecuadorian team in Bible translation methods as well as to work together with the community in church planting and increasing social justice for deaf people in Ecuador. Many deaf schools would benefit from bilingual-bicultural educational materials and instruction in how to use them effectively in the classroom.

Number of Christian Congregations Serving Group

5

Number of Congregation Using Primarily Local Language

4

Language of Outside Communication or Trade

Spanish

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Group Description

Geographical/Environmental

Location	Western South America, bordering the Pacific Ocean at the Equator, between Colombia and Peru
Altitude	lowest point: Pacific Ocean 0 m highest point: Chimborazo 6,267 m
Climate	Along coast, becoming cooler inland at higher elevations; tropical in Amazonian jungle lowlands

Language/Linguistics

Primary Language	Lengua De Señas De Ecuador (LSEC); Ecuadorian Sign Language
Attitude towards mother tongue:	very receptive
Second Languages:	Spanish (spa); American Sign Language (ase); Spanish Sign Language (ssp)
Other people groups speaking this language as their mother tongue:	none
Linguistically related:	Peruvian Sign Language (prl), American Sign Language (ase), Spanish Sign Language (ssp)
Neighbor Languages:	Spanish (spa), Quechua (macro language) (que) , Peruvian Sign Language (prl), Columbian Sign Language (csn)

Literacy

Adult Literacy	91%
Literacy Attitude:	very receptive
Active Program:	Instituto Nacional de Audición y Lenguaje (INAL) holds literacy classes for adults at the school. The children are taught to read and write Spanish as part of the school program.
Publications in MT:	The Federación Nacional de Sordos del Ecuador (FENASEC) is currently working on a dictionary.
Comments:	The CIA World Factbook claims that 91% of the total Ecuadorian population over 15 can read and write. This number is probably much lower for the deaf population who usually do not learn Spanish as their first language. The deaf population as a whole has a positive attitude towards Spanish literacy and feel it is very beneficial. They also have a very positive attitude toward the FENASEC dictionary project. They believe it will help unify the deaf people by standardizing Ecuadorian Sign Language.

Economics

Avg. Annual Income	\$8,000 (2010 est.)
Unemployment Rate:	5%
Occupation: c	arpenters, secretaries, mechanics, janitors, teachers, and factory workers
Modernization/Utilities:	TV, Electricity, running water, phones (texting), computer use (although many do not own one)

Community Development

Clothing:	men: Jeans or dress pants, polo shirt; women: jeans, dress pants, dress or skirt with modest shirt or blouse
Transportation:	walking, bus, taxi, motorcycle, bicycle
Infant Mortality Rate:	total: 19.65 deaths/1,000 live births

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Life Expectancy
Comments

Total population:75 years
The infant mortality rate and life expectancy are based on the total population of Ecuador not just the deaf population.

Society

Family Structures
Social Habits/Groupings

Patrilineal
Deaf groups get together for association meetings, to play soccer, other clubs, or just social time. They interact socially based on proximity.

Identification with Nat'l Culture

Distinct Culture when it comes to deafness, but they are well integrated into the Ecuadorian culture.

Self Image
Attitude to Outsiders
Attitude to Change
Cultural Change Pace
Local Lang Broadcasting

Depressed
Somewhat receptive to very receptive
Somewhat receptive
Slow
The state news channel provides interpretation as well as some Sunday Mass broadcasts. One channel offers captioning for their viewers. (Tecnosord 2010)

Education/Youth

Primary Schools
Primary School Enrollment
Secondary Schools
Secondary School Enrollment
Language of Instruction
Language of Textbooks

15
At least 520 students but probably more.
1
At least 100 students
Ecuadorian Sign Language and Spanish
Spanish and in INAL there 200+ students overall.

Unmixed Schools
Problems/Needs

15
Need more education to increase opportunities for higher paying jobs.

Comments

The number of students attending the various schools is based on information gathered in country. There is an estimated 30-50 students in each of the primary schools and in INAL there 200 plus students overall.

Religion

Number of Adherents

Catholic 95%; Other 5%

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Status of Christianity

Church Growth

Reached Status	Verified
Total Believers	Almost none
Pastors	4
Churches	There are 3 small deaf congregations in Quito, 1 in Puyo, and 1 in Guayaquil.
Comments	The deaf congregations tend to meet in buildings owned by hearing congregations.

History of Christianity in Group

Year Began	1500's
By Whom	Spanish Explorers

Scripture/Literature/Media

Translation Status	Definite need
Available Scripture	None
Scripture Published When	Still needed
Available Form	Visual
Use of Translation/Scripture	Currently the Spanish Bible is used.
Hindrances to Scripture Distribution	Lack of funds to purchase a copy, little if no access to the internet.
Reason for Urgent Need Explained	The small Christian deaf community relies on others to tell them about the Bible and cannot read it or understand it fully for themselves. They have no access to the scripture in Ecuadorian Sign Language.
Other Literature/Video Materials	A few video materials have been produced based on topics.

Missions/Churches Working Among People Group

Organization #1	International Mission Board (IMB)
Main Ministry	Evangelism/church planting
Adherents	Unknown
Number of Congregations	1
Total expatriate missionaries	4
Total national missionaries	Unknown
Total local workers	Unknown

Responsiveness

Attitude to Christianity	Somewhat receptive
Attitude to Religious Change	Somewhat indifferent
Spiritual Climate and Openness	They do not realize their need for God.
Ways to Approach the Group	If distribution of materials could be promoted or backed by FENASEC. Acceptance of the product by the deaf community would be high.

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Current Needs

Professional guidance/direction with the dictionary project, access to educational and health materials in sign language, and the Bible in Ecuadorian Sign Language.

Items for Prayers

Pray that God will work in the hearts of the Ecuadorian deaf Christians that they would share their faith in God with others.
Pray for God to raise up a team of deaf Ecuadorians to work on a Bible Translation for their people group.