

## 2 「コロナ禍を受けた多文化共生社会の課題」

# COVID-19 in Peru: government policies and an assessment of their outcome

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There is no doubt that the year 2020 will remain in everyone's memory in the years to come, not only because of its memorability as numeral, but also because without exception it has completely changed everyone's life. Regardless of gender, age, nationality, occupation and socioeconomic condition, our world has been turned upside down by the COVID-19. However, depending on the degree of vulnerability before and during the pandemic, this indiscriminating disease has impacted differently on each individual, community, business, economic sector, country and region. Particularly, in Peru the pandemic has

uncovered the frailties of the underprivileged, has worsened their living conditions and has pointed out the inability of the state to cope with one of its primary roles, which is provide Peruvians with the basic public services, such as education and health care, and to offer them economic and logistic support during the state of emergency. Besides, this collapse of the economy and the health system has also dragged Peruvians to a political crisis that has ended up in having three presidents in less than a week, in November 2020.

Table 1 Peru: Basic Data

Population (2019) (INEI)	32,131,400 ( 5 <sup>th</sup> in Latin America)
Surface	1,285,216.2 km <sup>2</sup> ( 4 <sup>th</sup> in Latin America)
Official languages	Spanish, Quechua and Aymara
Religion (2017) (INEI) <sup>1</sup>	Roman catholic 76.0%, evangelical 14.1%
GDP per capita, constant price (PPP 2017) (IMF) <sup>2</sup>	12,786.5 (US\$)
Gini index (2018) (WB) <sup>3</sup>	42.8
Human Development Index (2019) (UNDP) <sup>4</sup>	0.759 (82 <sup>th</sup> in the world)
Unemployment rate (2020) (IMF) <sup>5</sup>	6.6%
Inflation (2020) (IMF) <sup>6</sup>	2.1%

The current paper aims at reporting the cascade of events that followed the announcement of the nation-wide lockdown in March 15<sup>th</sup>. The Peruvian government's strict but also ambivalent policies toward the pandemic were similar to its neighboring countries, as it also imposed a state of emergency and a harsh lockdown period, both of them extended in several occasions, implemented cash transfers to poor households and financial programs to benefit

the private sector. Likewise, the results of these government measures will be reported and assessed. This paper will mainly focus on those measures that were associated with the revitalization of the economy, as the dilemma between economy and health has dominated the narrative and the discussion on COVID-19 and its effects.

Finally, this paper also offers a very personal story of the facts the author witnessed while in Peru,

and explain how those facts affected her personal and professional life, moreover how the different pandemic-control measures from the Japanese and Peruvian governments hindered the possibility of international mobility between these two countries.

### **I. Government's response to COVID-19**

At first, hoping that the COVID-19 outbreak would not have much impact on the region, most Latin American countries disregarded its effects, even while in Asia and Europe the number of infected patients and deaths kept increasing. Surrounded by the largest ocean basins, the Pacific and the Atlantic, Latin Americans felt protected from the widespread disease in the old world, as it had been already proved by the COVID-19 predecessors, SARS-CoV (Severe-acute respiratory syndrome) in 2002 and MERS-CoV (Middle East respiratory syndrome) in 2012, as both diseases originated in remote areas and had almost insignificant effects in Latin America. Other infectious diseases, endemic in the majority of Latin American countries, such as zika, chikungunya and dengue appeared to be more threatening and therefore required the attention of the authorities and the general public.

However, this time the highly contagious COVID-19 crossed oceans and borders, and reached even the deepest areas in every Latin American country. Thanks to the export boom of the 2000s and its trickled-down effects, more Latin Americans are able to travel abroad, which is also possible because international transportation fares have decreased over time due to economies of scale, which are also associated to more flight frequency and new and cheaper airlines strategies. In the last twenty years, the economic exchange between Latin American countries and other areas, such as Europe and Asia, has intensified, sending and receiving tourists, private

entrepreneurs and business partners, as well as public officials. It is not a coincidence that at first, port cities were amongst the more seriously affected, such as Barranquilla in Colombia, Guayaquil in Ecuador and Lima and Callao in Peru.

In Peru, the first COVID-19 case was confirmed on March 6<sup>th</sup>. It was an airline pilot who came back by the end of February from his vacation trip in Europe<sup>7</sup>. February and March are months with high international mobility between and within the Americas and Europe. In catholic countries, the celebrations of carnival and Easter, in February and March or April, respectively, attract and send in-bound and out-bound tourists, and homeland returnees who live abroad. Summer vacation in the southern hemisphere and spring break in the northern hemisphere trigger an inflow and outflow of entire families, individual travelers, private groups, university and school students and volunteers, from whom many unknowingly in 2020 were the main carriers of the disease.

#### **1. Early and strict lockdown**

After the first patient was confirmed, other cases of infected travelers were also immediately reported, mainly in the capital city, Lima, and in other two regions. Ten days later in March 16<sup>th</sup>, by Supreme Decree No 044-2020-PCM<sup>8</sup> the state of emergency was declared in the entire country, even when the cases of COVID-19 were focused on a few geographical areas. As the government gave 48 hours for the people to return to their cities of residence, the next two days after the lockdown imposition were chaotic. Being March the tail end of the summer season in the southern hemisphere, on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> after a beach day in many of the seaside cities and ports in the Pacific coast, many Peruvians were surprised by the severity of the President's measures.

Hurriedly everybody try to return home and replenish their pantries. The few Peruvians who own a second house by the beach, stayed put and placed several food and essential goods orders that later were directly delivered, and continued sitting at the beach for sun tanning in the following days. One week before, the academic year had just started for private school students, while for university students was about to start. Confusion was ubiquitous. From small to corporate businesses, no one was sure whether they were allowed to operate, also some thought that those severe measures were just meant to be written in the recently enacted law, but not to be complied with.

However, the state of emergency became apparent when the military were deployed in every city and town, and starting patrolling during and after the curfew. The lack of information from the authorities of the central and local governments misguided the citizens, who were already panicking and expecting the worse, such as the shortage of medicines, food and essential goods. On weekdays during the few hours Peruvians were able to leave home, they flocked to the open stores and tried to buy any available item. Saturdays and Sundays were designated as days of total quarantine. At first, there was a general but temporary shortage of essential supplies, due to the fear of scarcity that prompted Peruvians to buy products and to stockpile them at home.

Supermarkets, convenience stores, grocery stores, pharmacies, open-air markets, gas stations and financial institutions became the sole places with economic dynamism, as endless long queues in front of their facades became part of the urban landscape. Unfortunately, very soon funeral services and cemeteries joined this selective economic vigor. Everything else was closed.

The borders were shut down and domestic mobility banned, any kind of gathering was

forbidden and the early curfew only allow Peruvians to leave home during daytime. In spite of some who resisted to follow the government measures, most Peruvians fearing the imminent spread of the COVID-19 followed the new rules. Several charters repatriated Peruvians who were abroad, and sent foreign residents to their homelands, as well. The first lockdown was scheduled to end in two weeks, until the last days of March, but it was prolonged. Easter came and the pseudo social scientists managed to convince the president and his ministries, that Peru could be a petri dish for social experiments.

## **2. Trial and error in an attempt to learn how Peruvian society works**

Most Peruvians' plans for Easter, either religious rituals or family trips, had to be cancelled. Facing an increasing number of infected people and deaths, and the precarious Peruvian public health system, the government decided to listen to apparently innovative proposals that could help prevent the COVID-19 propagation, alleviate the already burdened sanitary professionals and decongest public hospitals. Fearing that Peruvians could take lightly the first COVID-19 casualties and then decide to embark on a Easter vacation, the Peruvian President announced in a television address on Monday, April 6<sup>th</sup> that all Peruvians will be quarantined from Holy Thursday, April 9<sup>th</sup> to Resurrection Sunday, April 12<sup>th</sup>. The reaction of most Peruvians was flocking to supermarkets and open-air markets to stock up on groceries and basic items before Thursday, increasing the probability for virus contraction, as avid shoppers disregarded the basic guidelines to keep them safe in public spaces.

This long and strict quarantine during Easter was followed by a very bold move of one of the government advisors, who in order to prevent

COVID-19 from spreading suggested a restriction of movement by gender. In some neighboring countries, such as Colombia, mobility was restricted by dividing the population into two under other criteria, for instance even and odd numbers of the last digit of the national identification card or the vehicle number plate. However, the Peruvian government in a display of sensitivity toward gender issues and LGBT communities opted for limiting mobility by gender: men can leave home on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, while women can do it on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. On Sundays, everyone, regardless of gender, has to stay put at home. However, the military in charge of patrolling the streets was misinformed of the central government order or it was unaware of the difference between sex and gender, as the members of the armed forces detained many passersby and asked for their identification cards to verify if their appearance matched their biological sex. Also, the President in a very unfortunate interview declared that this restriction of movement by gender was convenient and was chosen over others because it was easy to identify men or women by their looks, which contradicts the measure in its essence as it was planned to be inclusive and sensitive toward LGBT communities. Fortunately, this absurd restriction lasted only one week. Complaints and confusion were the main reasons for this measure's early and abrupt stop. Through this short-live order, Peruvians were able to clearly see the gender bias pertaining to housekeeping and grocery shopping, as supermarkets and markets were awfully crowded on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, precisely the weekdays women were allow to leave home, creating new foci of infection in cities and towns.

During the quarantine, those who did not follow the immobilization orders were arrested and fined

with very hefty monetary penalties for Peruvian standards<sup>9</sup>. Also, there were monetary punishments for those who disregarded the new guidelines of keeping social distance and wearing protective masks in public areas. For instance, a person walking on the streets without wearing a mask can be fined little less than US \$100 (PEN 344 Peruvian nuevos soles). If that person fails to pay the fine, he or she will not be allowed to use his or her national identification card, which means being deprived of using public goods and services, such as hospitals and banks, and had limited access to civil procedures and documentation.

As a new pandemic, COVID-19 has challenged all, developed and developing countries, the poor and the rich. The governments' responses, being them either prompt or belated, timid or bold, had to be adjusted to the changing circumstances and be adopted on a learning-by-doing basis. Hence, governments should be allowed a reasonable margin for error, as result of new implemented measures. However, it is clear to me that the Peruvian President took advantage of gender-sensitive issues among certain segments of the voting population, who will be deciding the direction of their ballots in April 2021. Rushing into a poorly-thought-out measures such as this new gender-based specific order, added concern to the already disconcerted Peruvians, whose primary focus was to be able to replenish their pantries every week, during the narrow slot of time they were allowed to go out. Moreover, a series of short-live orders also led to increase the expectations for further and stricter measures, which only made people more anxious. In Lima, the capital city, approximately 60% of the population still purchase produce and essential items in traditional open-air markets<sup>10</sup>, which means that the remaining 40% does it in supermarkets and small grocery stores, which are usually family-run businesses. According to the same

source, the percentage of traditional-market shoppers can increase if we consider only lower income strata and definitively increase even more if we move from Lima to other main urban areas, and further, if we consider only rural areas. Most Peruvians live day-to-day and struggle to make ends meet, even before the pandemic. Many Peruvians live in areas without access to electricity, so they cannot make weekly shopping as President Vizcarra suggested, there is no unemployment insurance benefits, e-commerce is not widely spread as most of them do not have access to the financial system, therefore, many Peruvians could not follow the stay-home orders, even if they agreed and understood the importance of quarantine's efficacy in preventing COVID-19. Leaving their homes and disobeying quarantine measures was not an irresponsible act, it was a matter of survival. On top, those whose economic condition forced them to go out were punished with onerous fines that in most cases were impossible to pay by the offenders, adding more burden to their already precarious and vulnerable circumstances. The instituted efforts of the Peruvian government to prevent coronavirus from spreading, ended up in a sequence of trials and errors, showing how little the President, his ministers and advisors knew and understood Peruvians and Peruvian society.

### 3. Government's economic assistance

According to different opinion polls, right after the general shutdown of the country an overwhelming 4 / 5 of the population supported President Vizcarra's decision and prompt action in slowing the spread of COVID-19. However, as the lockdown was protracted, it became clear that the cost of draconian quarantine restrictions were placed on Peruvians, and that situation called for government economic support to vulnerable individuals, to those Peruvians

whose economic situation worsened during the pandemic, and to the corporate private sector, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and large firms.

#### 3.1 Individuals and households

Regarding economic support to individuals, besides the postponement of electricity and water bills, the subsidy for electricity payments, the withdrawal of funds from the Private Pension System and from a fund that protects the employees when they are unemployed and the distribution of foodstuff of the basic consumption basket to vulnerable families, the Peruvian government has approved four exceptional cash transfers: 'I stay home' (*Yo me quedo en casa*), 'Temporary Bonus'<sup>11</sup> (*Bono Independiente*), 'Universal Family Bonus' (*Bono Familiar Universal*) and 'Second Universal Family Bonus' (*Segundo Bono Familiar Universal*). The first two, 'I-stay-home'<sup>12</sup> cash transfer and 'Temporary Bonus'<sup>13</sup> were aimed at delivering slightly more than US \$100 (PEN 380) to 2.7 million poor and non-extreme poor households, and 780 thousand households with self-employed workers, during the first two weeks after the shutdown. The main challenges for this first direct delivery of cash were the identification of the target groups, via the use of an outdated national household register, the coverage of that national household register and the poor population's lack of access to the banking system. In the news some honest and honorable citizens returned the money they received after being considered to be beneficiaries of the program, particularly young professionals who in the past were part of the population in need but who over the years through education were able to overcome economic difficulties. As many Peruvians who fall within the category of poor and extreme poor do not have bank accounts, the government made the arrangements for them to receive the cash in hand (over the counter), which made people crammed

into banks despite restrictions introduced since the nation-wide shutdown. Some of these shortcomings were overcome in the 'Universal Family Bonus'<sup>14</sup> and 'Second Universal Family Bonus'<sup>15</sup>, which were distributed later in the second half of 2020 in a different fashion. Beneficiaries of these programs were encouraged to open bank accounts or mobile wallets and more financial institutions participated in cash transfer operations, so the depositary of the grants could have safe access to the financial system by withdrawing not only from bank counters, but also from ATM machines and bank agents, which are ubiquitous in Peruvian cities and towns. The 'Universal Family Bonus' is covering a larger national household register, while the first was directed to 6.8 million households, the second will cover 2.5 more families, with scheduled disbursements of more than US\$ 200 (PEN 760).

### 3.2 SMEs and firms

Without neglecting the importance of the former economic aid and its impact on the household economy of the most vulnerable segments of the population, the pillar of this economic assistance program is 'Reactivating Peru'<sup>16</sup> (*Reactiva Peru*), which provides government-back loans for companies affected by the pandemic. This program, with amounts that range from more than US\$ 8 thousand (PEN 30,000) up to US \$2.9 million (PEN 10,000,000), targets small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and large companies, mainly for financing their working capital needs by providing liquidity to companies whose current operations have been hindered by the draconian lockdown. Initially for this program the government destined a budget of more than US \$8.5 billion (PEN 30 billion) and doubled its size in a second stage<sup>17</sup>, which is an amount equaling more than 10% of the GDP. Nearly half a million SMEs and 10 thousand large scale

firms<sup>18</sup> have benefited from 'Reactivating Peru' and its low interest rates in Peruvian nuevos soles. Also, the Peruvian government approved the extension of income tax declaration for SMEs, and a new wage subsidy of 35 to 55% of the payroll value<sup>19</sup> for companies that reported a shrinkage in their sales of at least 30% during the first months of the lockdown, and despite that recalled furloughed workers or created new job positions. 350 thousand workers are expected to benefit from this measure.

### 3.3 Macroeconomic indicators

Due to the draconian and protracted confinement, Peru's year-on-year GDP in April sank by more than 40%, and according to the Central Reserve Bank of Peru<sup>20</sup> the growth rate is forecast to register a fall of 12.5% in 2020. Being 7.7% the average expected contraction of the product in the Latin American region in 2020<sup>21</sup>, comparatively Peru's GDP is forecast to register a deeper plunge. For Peruvians 2020 has meant a year of unprecedented economic downturn in the last and current centuries, only comparable to the postbellum economic collapse of the nineteenth century. Peru, one of the world's largest metal-exporters of gold, silver and copper, was negatively affected by the staggering drop of the prices of the main commodities<sup>22</sup>. Traditionally a mining export economy, Peru's metal exports represent more than half of total export revenues. On the contrary, the agricultural sector, traditional and export-oriented, reported moderate growth rates, which were the exception during the confinement. The agricultural sector kept its upward trend that dates back more than a decade, led by the dynamism of agricultural exports, such as blueberries, mangos, cocoa, avocados and olives. Other sectors that significantly contribute to the GDP, such as construction, industry, commerce and electricity and water, plunged in different degrees<sup>23</sup>. Regarding

employment, only in Lima during the first half of 2020, the employed population shrank by half, which equals the loss of 2.3 million jobs, which led to a similar percentage of the wage mass contraction in Lima<sup>24</sup>. On the contrary, other economic indicators, such as inflation, showed a more promising trend due to sound fiscal and monetary policies, whose success is based on maintaining positive results in the balance of payments and tax collection as main source for fiscal spending. To what extent 'Reactivate Peru' has played a key role in ameliorating the sunk of the Peruvian economy in 2020, is still early to say. However, this program has funneled funds from the government to the private sector, SMEs and large firms, so they could continue their productive activities, and therefore, providing employment to many household heads.

## II. The outcome of the government policies

Initially the tight lockdown in Peru seemed to bear fruit and Peruvians were pleased with the government measures. However, the long way to go before a vaccine was released, the lack of proper information on the disease and its mechanism of transmission, the scarcity of sanitary material and professionals, and the economic pressure of being unemployed or inoperative, made Peruvians realized that the pandemic would stay longer, then anxiety and despair replaced the positive attitudes they had before. Unfortunately, the early confinement was not followed by other proper measures, such as increase the COVID-19 testing capacity with more accurate methods, tracking the infected population and therefore eliminating possible focus of infection, improvement of the decapitalized health system or publicizing in the media the triple rule to prevent the virus: wash your hands, keep social distance and wear a mask. Even this simple rule was not

sufficiently widely disseminated among the general public, who was not neither provided with masks, nor with potable water. Absurd restrictions of mobility led Peruvians to cram in public spaces repeatedly, so they could not even keep the recommended distance to prevent contagion and the spread of the pandemic.

While the Peruvian government has left aside many tasks and actions it was expected to carry on during the pandemic, particularly those related to sanitary and economic measures, the government has used the COVID-19 as an excuse to restrict the Peruvians' freedom, to keep each and all confined in their houses, immobilized and threatened with monetary and judicial penalties. It was not enough to fight against a microscopic and almost invisible enemy, but also against an omnipresent and visible state, led by a central government whose main goal was to manipulate the direction of the voting intention of the constituents in the 2021 presidential and congressional elections.

Being one of the most ethnically and geographically diverse countries in the region, in the last two decades Peruvians finally seemed to have found general agreement in what made them feel united as a nation-state. The recent worldwide popularity of their beloved and incomparable Peruvian cuisine, and the uninterrupted economic expansion, thanks to favorable commodity prices and the entrepreneurial efforts for widening the export frontier with new products. This economic dynamism that dates back to the turn of this millennium has come to a halt in early 2020 due to the pandemic and has been worsened by the erratic and groping-in-the-dark government policies. Peruvians have not only seen the debacle of their economy, but also have lost their still weak sense of togetherness and national identity as economic agents.



Table 2 Peru: COVID-19 Related Data

Confirmed cases	1,000,000
Deaths	35,879
Recovered	893,061
Peak new cases per day	21358
Peak deaths per day	4143

Source: John Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center<sup>25</sup>.

Regrettably, in terms of outcome, as in many other countries the COVID-19 has left unquantifiable losses. Comparatively, the COVID-19 impact has been devastating in Peru (Table 2). The number of confirmed cases and deaths due to coronavirus ranks third in Latin America, following Brazil and Mexico, which have larger populations by far. On the other hand, the figures above rank among the world-wide top 15<sup>th</sup>. During the first months of the shutdown, occasionally Peru registered the highest deaths per capita and it climbed up to the ranking top positions.

Peru was one of the first countries to impose the total lockdown in Latin America, clearly prioritizing the control of the pandemic over the economy. However, it did not bring the expected outcome, and Peru was again in the regional and world news as one of the worst performers in terms of number of infected people and deaths. Peruvians have already paid a heavy toll. The confinement restrictions were gradually lifted, currently the last 4 stage is under implementation. However, the last Christmas and new year celebrations have brought new worries, as the number of infected persons and deaths have increased

again, mainly in Europe and Latin America. Borders are shut down again. Despite this new millennium initially inherited the globalization spirit of the nineties and with it the need for further cooperation at regional and supraregional levels, the outbreak of the COVID-19 has made visible that there is still a long way to go. Countries have self-enclosed within their borders, almost silent and deaf to what was going on outside, eventually they peeked in order to see how their neighbors are doing, so they can calibrate their own actions and outcomes by comparing them. The pandemic could be the wake-up call to understand the necessity for each country to make concerted efforts within their borders, concurrently with further efforts toward building a collective sense of shared purpose with other countries, in a context of regional or global partnerships.

In Box 1, the author offers a personal experience after being caught between the COVID-19 preventive measures of two countries, whose border control policies did not allow her to resume her professional activities, attempting against her livelihood.

**Box 1 : A seven-month standby experience**

The author of this report, as a recipient of an academic financial grant for the summer 2020, traveled to Peru to properly prepare for the field work and material collection in different regional and general archives in Peru. After her arrival in Peru on March 7<sup>th</sup>, Lima was her first destination, and the second, a small port city in the northern part of Peru, in the region of La Libertad, called Pacasmayo. After all the international maritime trade was concentrated in few ports, Pacasmayo lost its relevance as an international port of entry, and therefore



its economic vitality also declined over the years. Once Pacasmayo was a vibrant port, from which sugar and its derivatives were exported to Europe and other Latin American countries, attracting overseas and domestic immigration. The lockdown, imposed on Sunday March 15<sup>th</sup>, caught her in this port city and she moved right away to her hometown, where she found a completely different scenario. The calm and relaxing atmosphere characteristic of seaside towns, was overturned by the noise and crowd found in the few shops open during the first day of the state of emergency. According to the government's first announcement, the lockdown was supposed to last two weeks, until the end of March. However, as the number of infected individuals and deaths increased, the government extended repeatedly the lockdown period.

The Consulate General of Japan in Lima through its homepage released relevant information for Japanese nationals' repatriation and foreign national residents in Japan who intended to return to this country. However, not every foreign national with one of the several residence statuses in Japan was eligible for return. Besides possessing a valid re-entry permit and a valid residence card (*zairyu card*), foreign nationals residing in Japan were able to return to Japan only if they hold one of these visa statuses: 'Permanent Resident,' 'Long Term Resident,' Spouse or Child of Japanese National,' and 'Spouse or Child of Permanent Resident.' Another requirement for returning to Japan was to leave Japan with a re-entry permit issued before April 29<sup>th</sup>, in the case Peru. In April 29<sup>th</sup>, the Japanese government designated Peru as an area subject to denial of permission to enter Japan<sup>26</sup>. The author met all the requirements of the Consulate for her eligibility as returning foreign resident in Japan. However, the Consulate would not support her domestic travel between her hometown and the capital city, Lima. Due to the lockdown, any interprovincial movement was banned and punishable by a fine and arrest, which made impossible for her to board any of those charter flights organized by private travel agencies and commercial airlines. The Consulate of Japan in Lima provided information of two types of flights, one via Mexico City, and the other via Amsterdam or Paris. While the first only secured one segment of the trip, Lima-Mexico City, the second, covered the connection from one of those European cities to a Japanese port of entry. However, both flights had some shortcomings, such as frequent delays and cancellations that forced passengers to stay one or more nights in those cities.

In July 15<sup>th</sup>, the ban for domestic mobility in Peru was lifted, making possible to travel to the capital city and then board a charter flight to Japan. However, by late July the Japanese government strengthened its preventive measures, due to an increase of the number and rate of recent COVID-19 positive cases at the airport quarantine. From August 7<sup>th</sup>, these measures applied to certain countries, being one of them Peru<sup>27</sup>. Now, there were two more requirements to fulfill: A letter of confirmation issued by the Japanese Consulate and a certificate of negative test result<sup>28</sup>. The procedure for obtaining these two documents would have been simple if we were in pre-pandemic times, but adding documentation made the return to Japan not only more cumbersome, but also put at risk the safety of foreign nationals, who just wished to return to their families, studies or work in Japan. Once again the author's return was postponed.

First, regarding the letter of confirmation (formally, Letter of Confirmation of Submitting Required Documentation for Re-entry into Japan), it had to be issued by the Japanese Consulate 14 days prior to landing in Japan. In order to obtain that letter, foreign nationals had to make an appointment in the Japanese Consulate which is located in Lima, and submit in person a set of documents (letter of confirmation form,

passport, residence card, etc.) and then wait three to five days until the letter was issued. The letter had also to be collected in person in the Japanese Consulate. For a person who lives in the capital city, this procedure would not pose a problem, but for someone who has to travel from another city and be in standby until the letter is issued, means a totally different situation, which includes safety round-trip travel and safety accommodation. Finding and booking airlines and hotels that have implemented strict protocols for flights and accommodation was not an easy task.

Second, the certification of negative COVID-19 test had to be issued by a Peruvian health institution within 72 hours prior to departure. The Japanese government required one of these three types of tests, either with nasopharyngeal swab or saliva, real time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR), Loop-mediated Isothermal Amplification (LAMP), both of them known as molecular tests, and Chemiluminescent Enzyme Immunoassay (CLEIA), which is an antigen test. Unfortunately, in Peru the government and laboratories have widely used rapid test kits, which are much cheaper than the molecular tests, but have higher probability of false negative cases. Amongst molecular tests, only RT-PCR is available in Peru, which is offered in a limited number of laboratories and public and private health institutions. Considering the dire situation of the health system in Peru, going to be tested in a public hospital was never an option.

The need to test returnees can be understood, particularly to those who come from areas where the COVID-19 is out of control, but adding extra procedures such as that letter of confirmation is not precisely helpful for returnee foreign residents. In this digital era, the confirmation of travelers' documents could have been done online, and did not make them move within the city or from other cities, while the local and central governments were requiring precisely the opposite, to stay put, to stay at home. The inflexibility regarding setting up an appointment date prior to departure, the ambiguity of the number of days between the document submission and collection, the short opening hours and the lack of understanding toward those whose family safety was a priority, came along with this painful and unwieldy procedure.

After seven months and a week, the author was able to fly back to Japan.

<sup>1</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática (INEI) (2018) *Perú: Perfil Sociodemográfico. Informe Nacional. Censos Nacionales 2017: XII de Población, VII de Vivienda y III de Comunidades Indígenas*. [https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones\\_digitales/Est/Lib1539/libro.pdf](https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones_digitales/Est/Lib1539/libro.pdf) (accessed on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

<sup>2</sup> The International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2020) *World Economic Outlook Database* <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2020/October/select-country-group> (accessed on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

<sup>3</sup> The World Bank (2020) <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=PE> (accessed on December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Program (2019) *Human Development Report 2019. Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf> (accessed on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

<sup>5</sup> The International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2020) *World Economic Outlook Database* <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2020/October/select-country-group> (accessed on

- December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020)
- <sup>6</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>7</sup> Gestión, El Diario de Economía y Negocios (2020) March 6<sup>th</sup>. <https://gestion.pe/peru/primer-caso-de-coronavirus-en-peru-los-detalles-del-contagio-del-piloto-noticia/> (accessed on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020)
- <sup>8</sup> The Government of Peru (2020) Digital Platform. Supreme Decree No 044-2020-PCM, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/pcm/normas-legales/460472-044-2020-pcm> (accessed on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020)
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