UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Ecuador
Operational Update

N.3 I February 2024

Gloria Fernández, 18, was attending lessons in Guayaquil, Ecuador, in late 2023 before her school was temporarily closed due to rampant criminal violence that swept the country earlier this year. Photo: UNHCR/Jeoffrey Guillemard*

Figures at a glance

Population figures

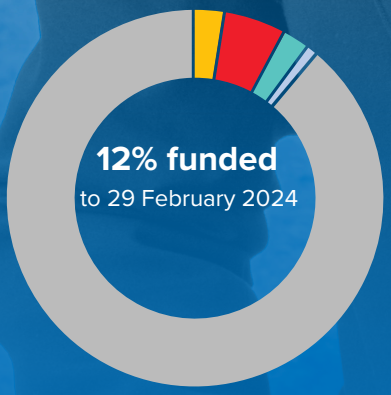
76,265

Historical figure of refugees recognized by Ecuador[1]

94% from neighbouring Colombia

63,298

refugees with active cases registered in ProGres[1]



73.3M
required in 2024

- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)

For more information on funding, please visit reporting.unhcr.org/ecuador

Our 2024 response in figures

11,360

refugees and other displaced people supported as of the end of February 2024*

**Partial figures reported by partners. People reported may have benefitted from one or several services.*

4,157
people received legal guidance & assistance

2,843
people assisted with cash for basic needs & protection

1,726
people supported with collective emergency shelter

1,293
people supported with mental health and psychosocial support

48
people linked with a decent employment opportunity

954
GBV survivors supported

269
people received hygiene kits

1 Historical figure registered by the government to the end of November 2023. UNHCR registers active refugee cases in ProGres. Figures to the end of January 2024.

Operational context

With weeks to go before the end of the regularization process in Ecuador, hundreds of people continue to request their visa and documentation to regularize their status in the country (see page 3 for more details).

In February, Ecuador started its second month in a context of internal armed conflict declared by the Government to curb criminal groups in the country. Since then, several actions have been implemented, including thousands of police and military operatives, the establishment of a new tax payment to fund the response, the request of criminal record certificates to foreigners entering through land borders, as well as the continuation of state of emergency restrictions. In addition, the government formally submitted the request for the temporary protection status to be decreed in the U.S. to help Ecuadorians currently in an irregular status to provide better protection mechanisms for Ecuadorians afraid of returning.

While the current state of emergency has continued to decrease levels of overall violence, refugees and migrants continue to face the same fears as Ecuadorians do in the framework of this violence exerted by criminal groups. According to a UNHCR participatory assessment done with refugees and migrants in 2023, increasing violence has meant many have seen their livelihoods and access to education affected.

On the other hand, heavy rains on caused floods in several provinces. According to authorities, there would be at least 22,000 affected people. The government has delivered more than 11,000 humanitarian assistance kits, since January 29, in the provinces of Esmeraldas, Guayas, Los Ríos, Manabí, Santa Elena, Santo Domingo, Bolívar, Carchi, Chimborazo, Cotopaxi, Imbabura, Morona Santiago, and Napo. In Esmeraldas Province alone, 7 cantons were flooded, particularly in Esmeraldas, Quinindé, and Muisne. Over 6,450 individuals, 234 homes, 3 main roads, 56 schools, and 2,062 hectares of crops have been affected. Municipalities are providing humanitarian assistance to affected individuals through the Risk Management Secretariat. UNHCR and its partners are monitoring the situation and collaborating in the emergency response.

Main populations forced to flee hosted by Ecuador and others of concern

Venezuelans

Venezuelans continue to lead in numbers of arrivals in Ecuador. 26,708 people entered Ecuador in February 2024, with a daily entry average of 921 Venezuelans, compared to exit figures registering 36,403 and 1,255 daily exits on average. This represents a 7% decrease in entries and a 106% increase in exits as compared to the same period in 2023.

474,945 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador[2]

- **45%** estimated to be between 18 and 45 years old[3]
- **25%** estimated to have a higher education degree[3]

Main needs

- **82%** access to food[3]
- **67%** access to housing or shelter[3]
- **57%** access to livelihoods or employment[3]

See: ***76 organizations present response plan to help refugees and migrants and their host communities in Ecuador***

The Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (GTRM) presented the 2024 Response Plan that prioritizes supporting the government to achieve socioeconomic integration, food security and protection of refugees and migrants, and their host communities. Read more here.

Colombians

Colombians continue to flee their country in search of safety in Ecuador. 1,130 Colombians were registered in need of international protection so far in 2024, 666 in February alone. Of the latter, 43% were children, 130% more than the same period in 2023.

1,130 Colombians were registered in need of international protection in 2024[2]

- **666** were registered in February

Main needs of Colombians in Ecuador

- **87%** access to food, housing, clothing[4]
- **24%** child at risk of not attending school[4]
- **64%** access to documentation[4]

Ecuadorians

The number of Ecuadorians on the run has increased in the past years, with over 85.000 having crossed the Darien jungle since 2022. By the end of February 2024, Ecuadorians continue to be the second nationality to have crossed the Darien, with just over 5,600 people who are part of the over 73,000 people registered during the first two months of the year. Moreover, 46.000 Ecuadorians have lodged asylum claims in the world by the end of 2023.

2 According to data estimated by the Refugee and Migrant Working Group (GTRM, by its acronym in Spanish). The GTRM is assessing a new methodology with the Government to estimate the new stock figure.
3 Fifth R4V Joint Needs Assessment. www.r4v.info
4 February 2024, data obtained through proGres.

SPECIAL FOCUS: REGULARIZATION PROCESS

The broad Registration and Regularization exercise has been key in enabling the needs of this population to be met and to advance solutions as part of a broader protection and socioeconomic integration strategy.

As provided by Decree 436/22, the first phase of the Registration and Regularization initiative started in 2022, with the registration of foreigners living in Ecuador with an irregular status, together with the opportunity for them to obtain a temporary stay permit (Certificado de Permanencia Migratoria) that allows for a regular stay in the territory until a regularization option is made available.

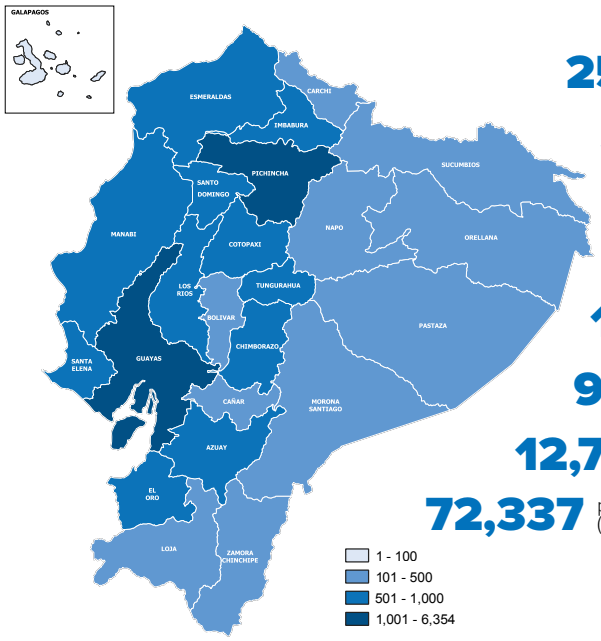
The first phase of registration started registering and regularizing all Venezuelans who entered regularly prior to the issuance of the Decree with a VIRTE visa. Registration is also divided in phases: first, Venezuelans who entered regularly beginning on 1 September 2022; second, people of all nationalities as of 16 November 2022; and third, all Venezuelans who entered irregularly beginning on 17 February 2023. The registration phase ended on 15 August.

Regularization of Venezuelans who entered regularly began on 1 October, while the process for other foreigners began on 12 July. By 22 March 2024, 135,764 visa applications had been lodged, 92,446 visas had been granted and 72,337 ID cards had been delivered.

Registration ended on 15 August, with 248,416 people having appointments for their biometric registration and over 201,708 people who have a stay permit, by 22 March 2024. With the regularization process ending in April 2024, UNHCR and its partners are increasing communication efforts to people who applied finish their requests for visa and documentation.

Province of residence per VIRTE visa applicant

Source MDI



259,084 people registered through the official website (source: MDI)

248,416 people with appointments for biometric registration (source: MDI)

201,708 people with a stay certificate (source: MDI)

135,764 VIRTE visa applications (source: MREMH)

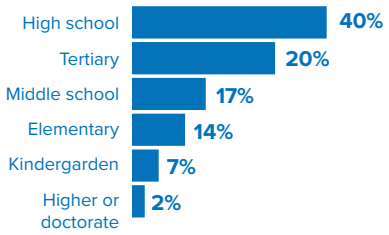
92,446 people with VIRTE visa (source: MREMH)

12,768 pending appointments to issue ID (source: DIGERCIC)

72,337 people with ID (source: DIGERCIC)

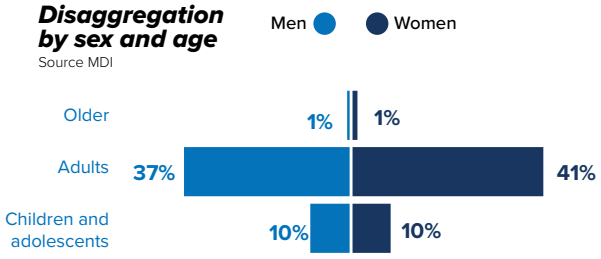
Last education level achieved

Source MDI



Disaggregation by sex and age

Source MDI



Support staff financed by UNHCR and IOM for the regularization process

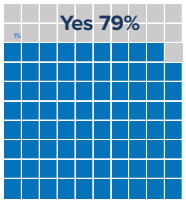
Source MDI

24 MIES **70** MREMH **79** MDI

Desire to stay

Do you wish to stay in Ecuador permanently (over two years)?

Source MDI



This infographic was created jointly by UNHCR and IOM, co-leads of the Interagency Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (GTRM) providing technical support to the government in carrying out the regularization process in Ecuador. This infographic was created with information provided by the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility to 22 March 2024.

DELIVERING PROTECTION

NATIONAL

Participatory assessment concludes refugees and migrants face the same fears as Ecuadorians amid increasing violence in the country

Refugees and others in human mobility in Ecuador live in fear in their communities due to growing insecurity and violence, reveals a report from UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

The report, produced from interviews and discussion groups carried out in 2023 with 81 refugees and migrants living in different areas of the country, concludes that the public spaces frequented by this population are no longer completely safe.

Insecurity also affects their access to work and education. Gender-based violence previously present in their day-to-day life has been exacerbated by the current situation.

The country, which maintains its traditional solidarity with those who have been forced to flee violence, remains committed to providing protection to those who need it most, including refugees throughout the national territory. Download the report here.

SANTO DOMINGO

Working with community leaders to address violence

In Santo Domingo, UNHCR held a working session with a group of women community leaders to prevent and address violence in the community of Santa Martha. This group of diverse women address violence in their communities through culture, sports, and creating spaces for coexistence and education.

NATIONAL

Providing access to protection from the start

UNHCR, in collaboration with the Public Defender's Office and HIAS, supported 33 Colombians who recently arrived, to access registration services, legal guidance and social care. With the constant displacement of people from the neighboring country, providing access to protection services is essential.

MANTA

Facilitating regularization for refugees and migrants

UNHCR, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Public Defender's Office held an information session on the regularization process, with the objective of strengthening the capacities of 25 officials from humanitarian organizations and public entities.

PROMOTING ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

IBARRA

Strengthening inclusion spaces for all

Nine Aldeas SOS Ecuador officials have been trained to break down the barriers of discrimination and promote respect for the rights of all people. The Breathing Inclusion methodology allows girls, boys and adolescents to share in educational spaces free of violence and exclusion. The schools and colleges that have embraced this methodology have shown that teachers and students can build good practices for more inclusive societies.

CARCHI

Timely access to information saves lives

UNHCR and FUDELA participated in a services fair dedicated to refugees. Assistance was provided in access to basic services like education and health. Moreover, the importance of family dialogue, gender equality and sexual education was highlighted through the Educational Parcheesi methodology. Education through educational games allows active learning and reinforcement of acquired knowledge.

SAN GABRIEL

Building bridges to facilitate access to health

UNHCR and partners participated in a medical brigade where 35 people in human mobility received general medicine and psychological services. These services promote good quality of health, both physical and mental, for refugees rebuild their lives independently.

PROMOTING SOCIOECONOMIC INCLUSION

MANTA

UNHCR donates computer equipment to support refugee entrepreneurs

UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) held an awareness training for member companies of the Cuenca Chamber of Commerce. The aim of the workshop was to inform companies about the rights and obligations of refugees and migrants in Ecuador, with a special focus on the right to work. 19 representatives from various companies participated in the workshop, where they received information about the legal procedures for hiring refugees and migrants, as well as the benefits of including them in the workforce.

CUENCA

Promoting financial inclusion for refugees and migrants

UNHCR, in collaboration with BanEcuador and HIAS, conducted a basic financial education workshop for 19 refugees and migrants in Cuenca. The workshop was on topics like family budgeting, savings, and credit, and participants had the opportunity to open savings accounts at the Cooperativa Jardín Azuayo.

IBARRA

Promoting Financial Education

UNHCR, HIAS and Banco Visión Fund conducted a playful financial education workshop in Ibarra. In this space, 15 people in human mobility learned about saving techniques, budgeting, and received information on how to open savings accounts and access credit. This initiative seeks to strengthen people's financial skills, allowing them to make better decisions about their income and achieve greater economic independence.

CLIMATE ACTION

NATIONAL

UNHCR supports the response to the El Niño phenomenon in Ecuador

UNHCR donated 115 communication radios to the Risk Management Secretariat in order to strengthen the Government's response capacity to emergencies that may arise due to the impact of the phenomenon of "El Niño" in the country.

This communication equipment donated by UNHCR features digital technology and voice encryption, ensuring the security and reliability of communications during emergency operations. In addition, they are easy to transport, even in remote areas where there is no cell coverage or internet.

On the other hand, in light of heavy rains across the country, UNHCR has been providing support to local institutions to respond to those who need it most. In Chone, UNHCR donated 50 sleeping kits, 130 kits for women and men, which were delivered in coordination with the Emergency Operators Committee and the Chone mayor's office. Read more here.

PROMOTING PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

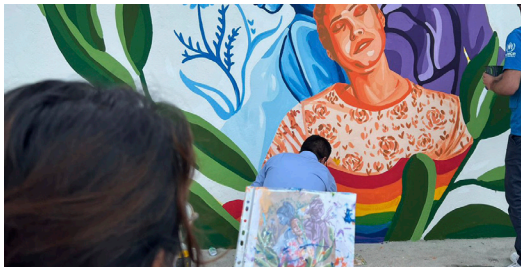
NATIONAL

Goodwill Ambassador Jung Woo-sung visits refugee families in Ecuador

South Korean actor and Goodwill Ambassador Jung Woo-sung visited the Americas to highlight the needs and challenges faced by thousands of refugees when fleeing their homes and arriving in host countries like Ecuador. He crossed the border at the Rumichaca bridge and met displaced people who explained the reasons why they hope to start a second home in Ecuador. Even amid a context of increasing violence, refugees and migrants highlighted that integration by host communities and access to basic services helps them feel protected. He heard first-hand testimonies from refugee children and adolescents who, through art, have managed to adapt to their new life with Ecuadorians. Read more here.

SANTO DOMINGO

Art as an integration tool for refugees



In Santo Domingo, together with 12 officials from the Augusto Egas Health Center, a mural was painted on the walls of the emergency space. This activity, in addition to being significant for its participants, seeks to fill with colors and art the spaces where refugees and migrants and host communities can come together. By painting murals, people tell their stories and reflect on important messages about their situations and experiences when fleeing their homes. Art expressions are therapeutic for those who make them, especially in places where they can access basic services like health.

LAGO AGRIO

Community Leaders in Action

In Lago Agrio, the leaders of the Jesús del Gran Poder neighbourhood met to present their work plans and build agreements based on the needs and proposals of the community, to promote integration between refugee families and the host community. Community leaders provide constant support and empowerment to people in need. They also advocate for the rights of refugees to avoid situations of discrimination and to promote peace and safety for all.

Stories from the field

Violence and xenophobia threaten access to education in Ecuador

Gloria Fernández, 18, was attending lessons in Guayaquil, Ecuador, in late 2023 before her school was temporarily closed due to rampant criminal violence that swept the country earlier this year.*
Photo: UNHCR/Jeoffrey Guillemard

GUAYAQUIL

"We have to rotate so each of us has a turn for all our assignments. We can stay up till 11 p.m. doing our homework now," said Gloria*, who was displaced from Venezuela two years ago with her family, and now lives in Guayaquil, a port city in southern Ecuador.

Gloria and her siblings were studying remotely, but unlike in 2020 when COVID-19 was the reason, the recent school closure was due to increased violence and the declaration of an internal armed conflict in Ecuador earlier this year to combat rampant criminality. Gloria and her classmates were afraid they would not be able to gather for graduation in early March.

"It's hard for them to stay indoors, but I am thankful they are home and safe," said Gertrudis Osorio*, Gloria's mother. She described waiting for her children to make the one-hour walk home from school before classes were suspended, and how minutes would feel like hours as she prayed nothing had happened to them.

For displaced young people like Gloria* and Ernesto* from Venezuela, access to school – a welcome sanctuary from their daily struggles – is threatened by a recent surge in criminal violence.

"There is a lot happening outside and I [was] often afraid walking to and from school, especially when we finished late," said Gloria. "But what has really made a difference for me is the support I've found here and the friendships I have been able to make in school in the past two years."

Although Ecuador has a generous policy enabling children of all nationalities to attend school, the lack of resources for school supplies and uniforms, as well as discrimination and xenophobia, pose additional barriers for them to integrate, flourish and finish their education.

Read the full story here.

*Name changed for protection concerns.

You can help us continue facilitating access to education for refugee children amid increasing violence. Donate now.

We thank the contributions of our donors

29 February 2024

UNHCR Ecuador is grateful for the critical and generous support provided by donors who have contributed with earmarked and unearmarked funding.

UNHCR Ecuador is grateful for the support from private donors.

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