Defensoría del Pueblo
ECUADOR

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN ECUADOR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Establishing a Baseline on the Impact of Violence and Internal Displacement in Ecuador (2022–2024)

UNHCR/Diana Díaz Rodríguez

With support of

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

Ecuador
#UnMundoPosible

Foreword

As the Ombudsman of Ecuador, it is both an honour and a duty to present this executive summary of the study on internal forced displacement in Ecuador. Forced displacement has reached alarming proportions in recent years. The data gathered in this study allow us to quantify this stark reality, which constitutes an urgent call to action for all state institutions, civil society, and the international community.

Internal forced displacement due to violence underscores the need to address public security in Ecuador in a comprehensive manner. In recent years, we have witnessed an exponential rise in crime rates, including homicides, extortion, clashes between organised criminal groups, and territorial control exerted by these criminal structures—some of which have transnational links. These issues have fractured the social fabric and forced thousands of people to abandon their homes in search of safety, leaving behind their roots, livelihoods, and, in many cases, loved ones.

This report, developed with the technical support of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, through the consultancy firm NeoPlan, establishes a baseline on internal displacement in Ecuador. It employs a rigorous methodology combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, with data particularly focused on areas with high crime rates.

A Growing Phenomenon

The data presented in this report are striking: more than 248,000 people aged 15 and over changed residence due to violence, and it is estimated that around 316,000 people in 156,614 households were forcibly displaced between 2022 and 2024. Given the sustained increase in criminal activity, this information may represent only the tip of the iceberg, as many cases go unreported due to fear or lack of access to a registration system.

The profiles of those forcibly displaced are diverse, but particularly vulnerable groups stand out: women, children, adolescents, older adults, among others. Many have fled extreme situations such as death threats, extortion, recruitment, or the loss of family members to violence. However, their ordeal does not end upon leaving their homes. The lack of employment, housing, and access to basic services in host communities exacerbates their vulnerability and limits their chances of integration.

The data show that 46% of displacements were triggered by violent robberies, kidnappings, or murders, while 15% were due to direct threats from criminal groups. Extortion has become a systematic mechanism of control, affecting businesses, families, and even educational institutions. Schools, which should be safe spaces for children's development, have become sites of various crimes, reflecting the depth of the social crisis we face.

One of the most concerning findings is the phenomenon of confinement, where many people do not relocate due to a lack of financial resources or support networks, forcing them to remain in dangerous environments. This "forced confinement" is another form of violence that must be recognised, made visible, and addressed by each state institution within its remit.

Ecuador lacks a comprehensive system to register, assist, and protect victims of internal forced displacement. While the state has taken steps in security, these efforts must be strengthened. Forced displacement requires a multisectoral response that addresses both its causes and consequences, with a focus on human rights and the protection of those most vulnerable and at risk.

Key Recommendations

This report includes essential recommendations to move in that direction, including:

- Differentiated public policies: It is crucial to design programmes that respond to the specific needs of displaced people, using an intersectional approach and ensuring rights such as education, health, employment, and housing.

- Gender-sensitive approach: Displaced women face additional risks, such as sexual violence or exploitation. Their protection and economic empowerment must be prioritised.

- Child protection: Urgent mechanisms are needed to ensure access to safe education, prevent recruitment, and provide psychosocial support.

- Inter-institutional coordination: Effective responses require coordination between central and local governments, civil society, academia, and international organisations.

- Support for host communities: Areas receiving displaced people also need support to prevent social tensions and ensure dignified living conditions.

A Call to Action

The issue of internal forced displacement is a call to action and solidarity. It is a problem that affects the entire population and must be addressed comprehensively to ensure effective public safety.

Finally, as Ombudsman, I reaffirm our institutional commitment to continue monitoring this situation and advocating for policies that guarantee the rights of victims. We hope this document serves as a foundation for building a safer, fairer, and more compassionate Ecuador—where no one is forced to flee their home to save their life.

César Córdova
Ombudsman of Ecuador

UNHCR/Omar Ganchala

Credits and acknowledgements

This report is part of the Ombudsperson's Office Investigation on Forced Displacement, an initiative developed within the framework of the constitutional and legal powers of the Ombudsman's Office of Ecuador, as the national human rights institution.

This study was made possible thanks to the support of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and the contribution of the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). It also benefited from the technical advice of the consultancy firm NeoPlan.

The Ombudsperson's Office expresses its deepest gratitude to the displaced persons who took part in the process, sharing their experiences, reflections, and life stories. The data and testimonies they provided form the central core of this report and help make visible realities that have so far been ignored.

We also acknowledge the work and commitment of the technical team that made this study possible:

Ombudsperson's Office of Ecuador:
César Córdova. Ombudsman
Pablo Pérez – National Director of the Human Mobility Mechanism

Human Mobility Mechanism Team:
Gabriela Villa
Alba Vaca
Paula Enríquez

UNHCR:
Juan Rivadeneira – Assistant Protection Officer
Tamia Brito – Senior Protection Assistant
Gabriela Urgilés – Information Management Associate

Neoplan:
David Alomía – General Coordinator
Luis Castro – Technical Coordinator
Karina Ramírez – Quantitative Analysis Expert
Miguel Torres – Field Team Leader
Carla Burbano – Social Research Expert
Grace Llerena – Public Policy Expert

With the support of

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Cofinanciado por
la Unión Europea
Ayuda Humanitaria

Content

1. Introduction

2. Objectives and structure

3. Methodology

4. Context of violence in Ecuador

5. Key findings: Internal displacement due to violence

    5.1 Scale and demographic profile

    5.2 Geographic distribution

    5.3 Perception of security and incidents

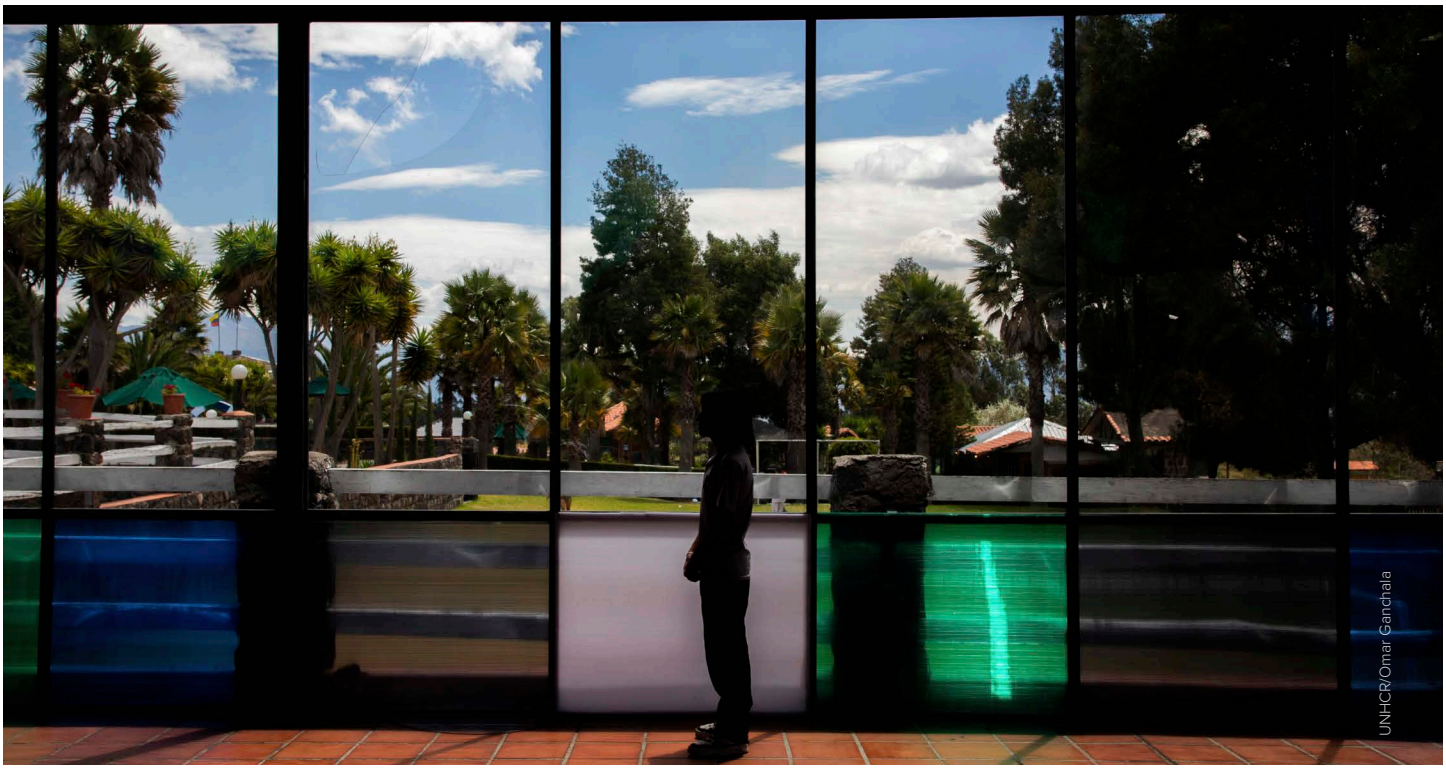
    5.4 Causes and underlying factors

6. Recommendations

To access the full report, scan the QR code or visit the following link:

UNHCR/Billy Navarrete

1. Introduction



Entre 2022 y 2025, Ecuador ha experimentado un acelerado y significativo deterioro de la seguridad pública. El crecimiento Between 2022 and 2025, Ecuador has witnessed a rapid and significant deterioration in public safety. The rise of organised crime, clashes between criminal groups, increasingly violent extortions, homicides, and territorial control by criminal structures have marked a turning point in the lives of thousands of Ecuadorians and people in human mobility within the country.

According to official figures from the Ministry of the Interior, intentional homicides rose by 45.7% between 2021 and 2022, reaching a rate of 47 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2023—considered the most violent year in the country's history. Although 2024 saw a slight improvement, data from the first four months of 2025 show a renewed surge in violence, surpassing even the levels recorded in 2023.

This context has profoundly altered daily life in various provinces, with particularly severe impacts in the coastal region, where some of the cities most affected by crime and insecurity are located. Homicide rates per 100,000 inhabitants rose from 13.7 in 2021 to 43 in 2023. Extortion cases also increased dramatically, from 3,647 in 2022 to 12,251 in 2024.

The provinces of Guayas, Manabí, Los Ríos, El Oro, Pichincha, Esmeraldas, Santa Elena, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, and Sucumbíos report the highest levels of violence.

One of the most alarming consequences of this situation has been forced displacement due to violence, particularly within the country's borders. In previous decades, Ecuadorian displacement was primarily international, driven by economic factors or family reunification.

However, since 2022—coinciding with the sharp decline in security—there has been a notable increase in Ecuadorians leaving the country and not returning, often citing violence as the reason[1]. Additionally, the number of Ecuadorians with pending asylum applications globally nearly doubled between 2023 and 2024[2].

Por otro lado, hasta hace poco, el desplazamiento dentro de las fronteras no había sido visibilizado ni registrado de forma Until recently, internal displacement had not been systematically recorded or recognised in Ecuador. In 2024, a study by 3iSolution revealed for the first time the scale of the issue: over 248,000 people aged 15 and older with internet access changed residence between January and October of that year, with at least 80,747 doing so due to violence and crime. This figure suggests a national rate of 449 displaced persons per 100,000 inhabitants, indicating that internal displacement is no

1 Portection Monitoring Reports,UNHCR, Available at https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/110752
2 Refugee data finder, UNHCR, Available at https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics

longer exceptional or sporadic, but a growing self-protection response to fear, threats, and violence[3].

Through this ombudsman-led investigation and its accompanying study, the aim is to establish a technical and contextual baseline on internal displacement caused by violence. The dual purpose is to generate evidence to better understand the dynamics and causes of internal displacement, and to provide the Ecuadorian state with a tool for designing public policies, care protocols, and institutional responses for victims of violence and displacement within the country.

While data from the 2022 Population and Housing Census (CPV 2022) offer some insights into internal mobility during the study period, Ecuador still lacks administrative records or systems to systematically identify and monitor displacement caused by insecurity or violence. In the absence of official records, the Ombudsman's Office is promoting this investigation as a pioneering effort to highlight the issue and generate technical and contextual evidence. The study provides data, and an analysis aimed at guiding the development of protection, prevention, and assistance pathways, using an intersectoral and human rights-based approach, thereby contributing to more effective and person-centred public policies.

Ultimately, internal displacement must be understood not only as a direct consequence of rising violence but also as an early warning sign of a social phenomenon that demands urgent attention and response. Timely and appropriate responses—coordinated among various levels of government, humanitarian agencies, and local actors—are essential to ensure the protection of those who have been, or may be, forced to leave their homes within the national territory.

3 3iSolution. Following this report, other studies were carried out, including those by the NRC and IDMC, which revealed that 101,000 people were affected in 2024.

2. Objectives and structure

This executive summary presents the key findings, approaches, and recommendations derived from a broader ombudsman-led investigation, spearheaded by the Ombudsman's Office of Ecuador. The investigation aims to generate useful, validated, and contextualised evidence on internal displacement caused by violence, to inform the design of public policies, care protocols, and protection mechanisms for affected people.

Specifically, the study set out to:

1. Identify the areas and communities most impacted by violence and its relationship with displacement;

2. Estimate the scale and territorial reach of the internal displacement;

3. Characterise displaced individuals—considering sociodemographic variables, living conditions, levels of integration, and access to rights; and

4. Understand the protection needs linked to forced displacement, including its causes, consequences, and future intentions.

The process was carried out in coordination with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and with technical support from NeoPlan. Additionally, an inter-institutional working group was formed, comprising representatives from key state entities—such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Women and Human Rights, the Attorney General's Office, the Ministry of Education, and the Association of Ecuadorian Municipalities (AME), among others. These actors actively participated in the methodological design and validation of the results.

This collaborative approach enabled the integration of both quantitative and qualitative sources, as well as the collection of inputs directly from the most affected territories. As a result, a rigorous technical framework was developed, contributing to a deeper and more contextualised understanding of internal displacement, while also strengthening institutional response capacities at both local and national levels.

3. Methodology

To better understand internal displacement caused by violence in Ecuador, this study began with an analysis of general data from the Population and Housing Census regarding internal mobility between 2020 and 2022. During this period, approximately 4 out of every 100 Ecuadorians changed their place of residence within the national territory. Of these, 40% moved within the same province, while 60% relocated to a different one. The provinces of Guayas, Manabí, and Pichincha accounted for more than half of these internal movements, either as places of origin or destination. Specifically, Guayas, Manabí, Pichincha, Azuay, Los Ríos, and Cotopaxi emerged as the main receiving provinces, while Guayas, Pichincha, Manabí, Los Ríos, and Esmeraldas recorded the highest rates of expulsions.

This information, combined with available data on violence—such as homicides, murders, and extortion—enabled a statistical analysis to explore potential correlations between these factors. The results revealed a significant negative correlation between the net population balance of each province (i.e., the difference between the number of people entering and leaving) and the total number of reported crimes. While this does not necessarily imply a direct causal relationship, it does highlight the need for deeper qualitative and territorial analysis of displacement due to violence.

In this context, the research team developed a nationally representative household survey to identify and examine internal displacement driven by insecurity and criminality, focusing on households that had experienced displacement or were at risk of doing so.

The survey's primary variable was the proportion of households expressing an intention to forcibly leave their current place of residence due to violence in their surroundings. The sampling design considered a 95% confidence level, a 3.25% margin of error, and a 5% replacement rate, resulting in a sample size of 922 households. The analysis of results was disaggregated by the sex of the qualified respondent, age group (youth, adults, and older persons), ethnic self-identification, and socioeconomic level (measured by income quintiles per capita).

For the territorial implementation of the survey, a sample of provinces was selected based on crime levels using a four-stage selection algorithm. This process included:

1. Provinces with homicide and murder rates above the national average;
2. Provinces with high extortion indicators;
3. Provinces with a significant volume of crimes such as murders and homicides;
4. Provinces not previously included but with extortion rates above the national average.

Based on these criteria, 12 provinces were selected: Azuay, Cañar, El Oro, Esmeraldas, Guayas, Loja, Los Ríos, Manabí, Pichincha, Santa Elena, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, and Sucumbíos.

Within these provinces, cantons with the highest crime rates between January 2023 and July 2024 were identified, from which 38 census sectors were selected according to INEC's cartography. Each sector was classified by crime concentration level: high (20%), medium (40%), and low (40%). In each sector, households were selected randomly and systematically, following official procedures: from census sector to blocks, and from blocks to households.

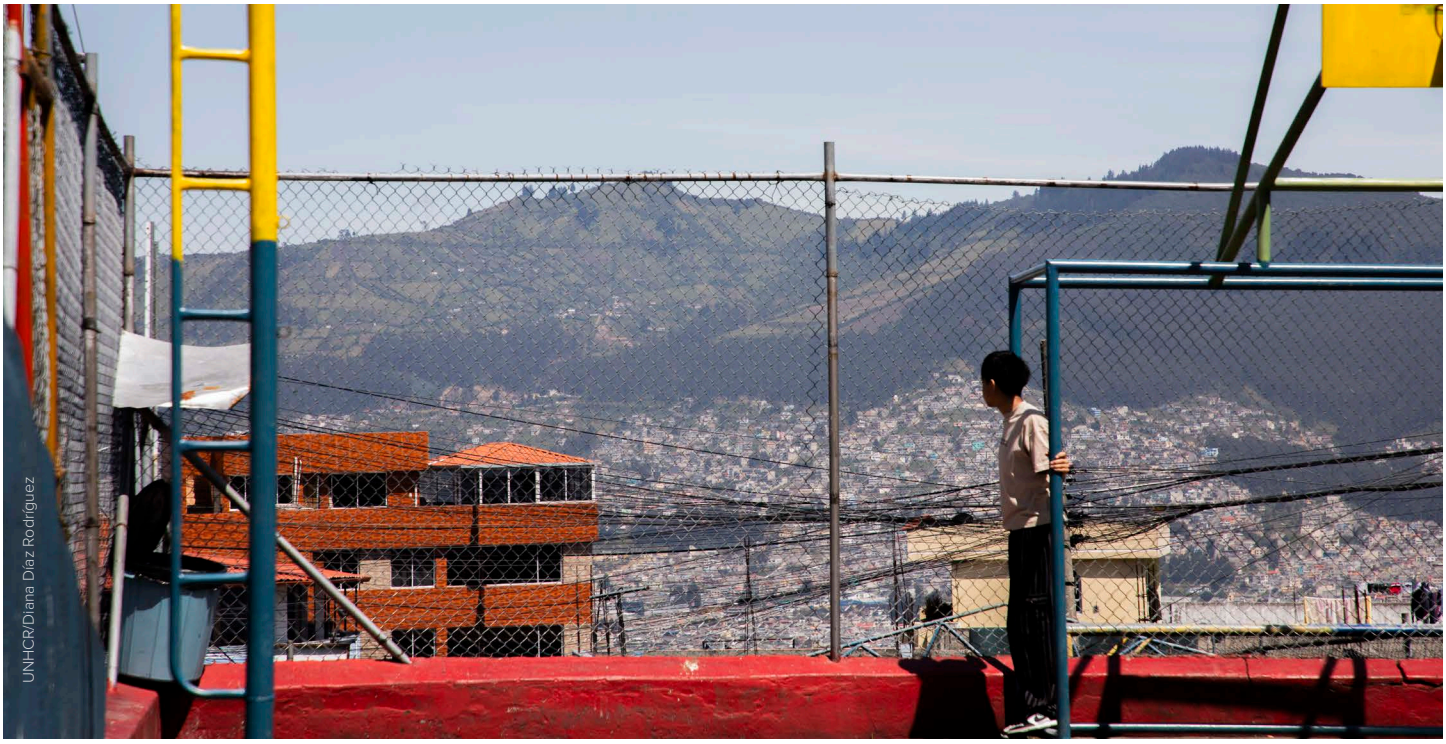
Additionally, to follow a mixed-methods approach, qualitative interviews were conducted using the snowball sampling technique—a method useful for reaching hard-to-access populations, such as people internally displaced by violence. Through referrals and recommendations among participants, key informants with direct displacement experiences were identified.

A total of 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted, focusing on the motivations for displacement, the characteristics of those displaced, their routes, needs, and the barriers they face in accessing protection and other services. The process adhered to strict principles of informed consent and confidentiality, with special attention to vulnerable groups.

It is important to note that while this technique provides valuable, humanised, and contextualised evidence, it has limitations such as potential selection bias, underreporting, or response bias, which are inherent to non-probabilistic methods.

Nonetheless, this mixed-methods approach enabled the development of a robust, territorially diverse sample that reflects real and national patterns of violence in the country, providing a reliable quantitative baseline to guide public policy and institutional responses to internal displacement.

4. Context of violence in Ecuador


UNHCR/Diana Diaz Rodriguez

In recent years, Ecuador has experienced a significant deterioration in its security landscape, marked by an unprecedented rise in violence linked to transnational organised crime. Homicide rates have increased alarmingly: from 13.7 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2021, nearly doubling to 25.9 in 2022, and escalating further to 47 in 2023. Although 2024 saw a slight decline, with a rate of 45 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, data from the first quarter of 2025 indicate a renewed and sharp increase, already surpassing figures from the same period in the previous two years.

This surge in violence has been accompanied by a sustained rise in extortion cases, which quadrupled from over 3,600 in 2022 to approximately 12,250 in 2024. Ecuador has also witnessed bomb attacks, targeted killings of public figures—including presidential candidates, prosecutors, and journalists—and violent clashes between groups vying for territorial control. Prison violence has emerged as another critical issue: riots, massacres, and confrontations between criminal groups within detention centres have resulted in hundreds of deaths since 2020.

In response to this situation, the Ecuadorian government declared the existence of an internal armed conflict in January 2024—a decision without precedent in the country's recent history. This was accompanied by the designation of at least 22 criminal groups as terrorist organisations, enabling the Armed Forces to intervene directly in internal security operations. Since then, multiple states of emergency have been declared in various provinces, particularly those with the highest crime rates, such as Guayas, Manabí, Esmeraldas, and Los Ríos.

The escalation of violence has had severe consequences for children and adolescents. Several reports in recent years have raised alarms about the recruitment and use of children by criminal groups, especially in areas with limited state presence. Forms of exploitation have also been identified, including the use of children in extortion schemes, arms transport, and the sale of illicit substances. This situation has forced thousands of people to flee internally or leave the country in search of protection, creating a new dynamic of forced displacement that requires full recognition and registration by the national system.

This complex scenario presents an urgent challenge for Ecuador's public institutions, which bear the primary responsibility for responding to previously unseen phenomena such as internal displacement caused by violence. In this context, having robust, nationwide evidence on the characteristics, needs, and profiles of displaced people is essential for designing appropriate public policies, strengthening protection systems, and ensuring a timely, inter-institutional response grounded in human rights.

5. Key findings: Internal displacement due to violence

UNHCR/Rommel Suntaxi

The results of the internal displacement survey presented below demonstrate that forced displacement due to violence in Ecuador is a significant phenomenon, with multiple underlying causes and serious consequences. This type of displacement affects households across various socioeconomic levels, although those with greater resources tend to relocate more quickly. Direct violence—such as robbery, extortion, and direct threats—emerged as the primary trigger for displacement, particularly impacting women, young adults, and families with children and adolescents.

Beyond the factors driving displacement, the findings reveal that access to employment, adequate housing, and basic services in host locations is limited, exacerbating the vulnerability of displaced households. These conditions underscore the need to strengthen both local and national social protection systems and care mechanisms, with tailored approaches that address the specific characteristics and needs of victims of violence and forced displacement.

5.1 Scale and demographic profile of surveyed people and those affected by internal displacement

Of the total number of households surveyed, 13% reported that at least one member of their family had changed residence within the past two years (between 2022 and 2024). Among these cases, 42% indicated that the displacement was caused, either wholly or partially, by insecurity or criminal activity. Based on these findings, and considering Ecuador's total population, it is possible to project that approximately 5.4% of households nationwide include at least one member who has been displaced due to insecurity or violence. Accordingly, an estimated 316,000 individuals across 156,614 households have been affected by internal forced displacement during the period under analysis[4].

Las principales causas de desplazamiento reportadas incluyen hechos de violencia directa como robos, secuestros, asesinatos The main reported causes of displacement included direct acts of violence such as robbery, kidnapping, murder, and extortion (46%), followed by threats and the presence of criminal groups (15%). Although a small percentage relocated preventively (1%), 38% chose not to disclose their reasons—likely due to fear.

In terms of demographics, 97% of respondents were Ecuadorian nationals, with small percentages of Colombians (1.6%) and Venezuelans (1.5%). Women made up 54% of respondents, and most were aged between 30 and 64 (62%), followed by young adults aged 18–29 (27%) and older adults (11%). The majority identified as mestizo (74%), with Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubio populations each representing 11%.

Regarding education, 43% held a secondary school qualification, but over half were unemployed (52%), and 88% did not receive social assistance from the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES), indicating high economic vulnerability among respondents.

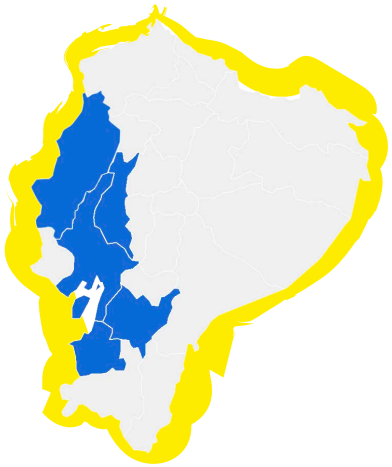
Household structures varied: 27% consisted of five or more members, and 24% had three. Most family members were aged 18–64 (66%), with children and adolescents making up 20%, and children under five accounting for 9%. Housing conditions were diverse: 61% lived in houses or villas, 23% in flats, and 12% in rented rooms. Nearly half rented their homes (44%), and 13% relied on support networks for accommodation. Additionally, 11% of households included at least one person with a disability, highlighting the need for tailored responses.

Among those displaced, 44% remained in the same city (intra-urban), 36% moved to another city (inter-urban), and 20% left the country. Most did not relocate alone: 48% moved with a partner, and 58% with children. Within these displaced households, 76% had children under 18, 12% included older adults, and 12% had pregnant or breastfeeding women.

Upon arrival, 49% accessed rented or owned housing, 39% relied on support networks, and 6% sought refuge in shelters. Integration into host communities has been challenging: 51% did not find employment within the first three months, although 58% of households with children managed to enrol them in school. These findings reflect both resilience and structural barriers that affect the recovery and stability of displaced families.

4 It should be noted as a limitation that, in order to obtain a statistically robust estimate, the sample would need to be expanded to include all provinces and cantons of the country, encompassing both urban and rural areas regardless of their crime rates. As a baseline study, this research focused on provinces and cantons with the highest crime rates, based on the hypothesis that criminal activity may be generating displacement in Ecuador.

5.2 Geographic distribution



TOP 5
PROVINCES OF ORIGIN

Azuay, El Oro, Guayas, Los Ríos and Manabí

TOP 5
HOST PROVINCES

Azuay, Guayas, Pichincha, Santo Domingo, Cotopaxi and Manabí

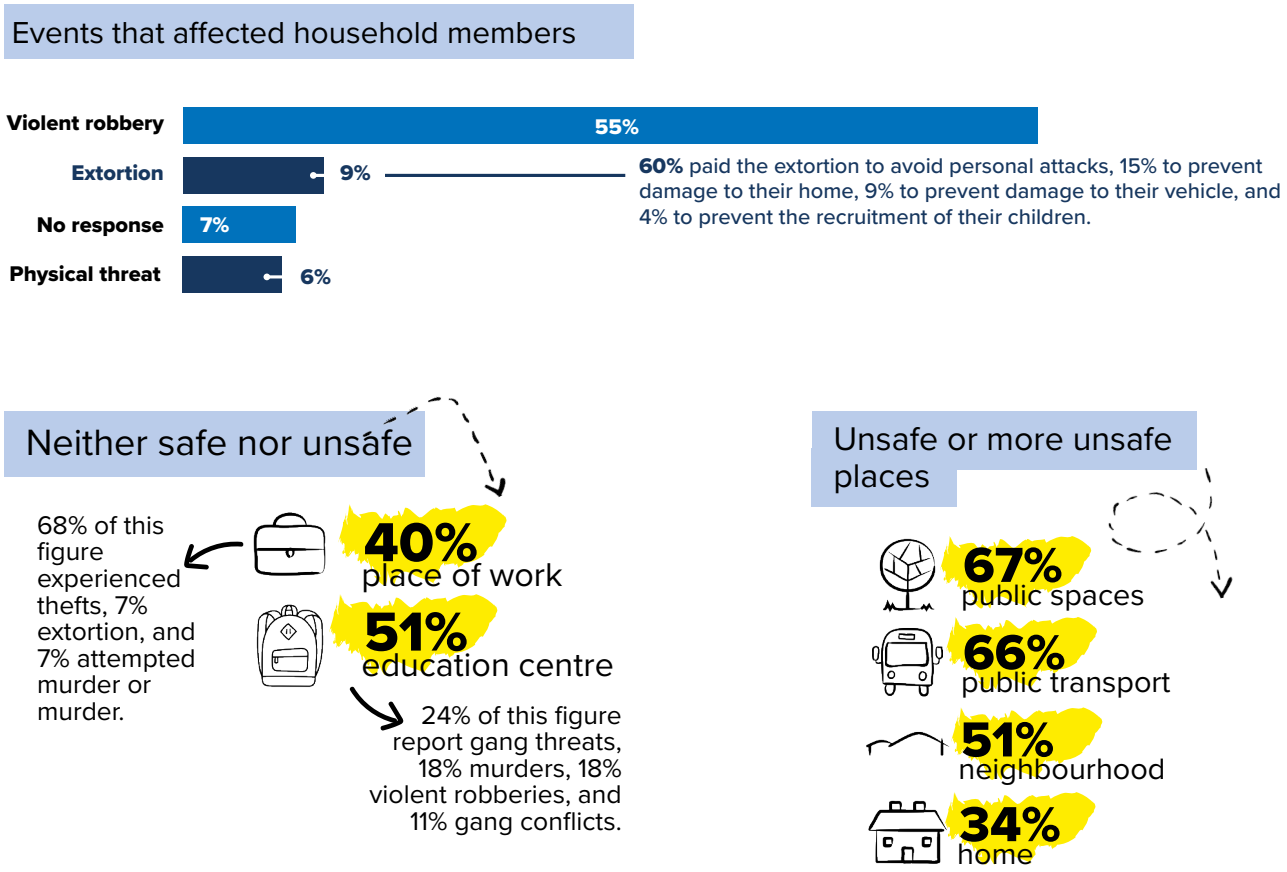
The geographic analysis of Ecuadorian displacement reveals a complex pattern of both internal and cross-border mobility. Of those displaced, 44% relocated within the same city, 36% moved to another city, and 20% left the country. Provinces such as Azuay, El Oro, Guayas, Los Ríos, and Esmeraldas appear both as places of origin and destination, reflecting simultaneous dynamics of expulsion and reception.

At the interprovincial level, Guayas, Pichincha, and Manabí account for the largest population movements. However, while Guayas and Manabí show socioeconomic indicators below the national average, Pichincha stands out for its relatively better conditions, which may explain its greater capacity to receive displaced populations. Meanwhile, provinces such as Los Ríos, Esmeraldas, El Oro, and Santa Elena not only report high levels of violence but also face serious structural social and economic gaps, increasing their vulnerability to forced displacement.

At the cantonal level, the data reveal a clear relationship between violence, socioeconomic conditions, and negative population balances, with some exceptions. Cantons such as Pedernales, Quevedo, Lago Agrio, and Esmeraldas show high homicide rates and precarious social conditions, alongside population decline. In contrast, areas like Camilo Ponce Enríquez, La Troncal, and Nobol, despite facing high levels of violence and poverty, receive displaced populations—suggesting their dual role as transit or reception zones. Cases such as La Libertad and La Concordia show balanced population flows, while cities like Guayaquil and Machala report negative population balances attributed to violence, despite having relatively favourable socioeconomic conditions.

UNHCR/Diana Díaz Rodríguez

5.3 Perception of security and incidents



Among the surveyed population, a widespread perception of insecurity in everyday environments was evident. Two out of every three respondents considered public spaces (67%) and public transport (66%) to be unsafe or very unsafe. More than half (51%) viewed their own neighbourhoods as insecure. Although the home was perceived as a relatively safer space, 34% still considered it unsafe.

Educational institutions and workplaces—including personal businesses—were mostly rated as “neutral” or somewhat unsafe, suggesting a normalisation of violence and risk in these settings.

In terms of direct experiences of violence, over half of the households (55%) reported having been victims of violent robberies. Additionally, 9% experienced extortion, and 6% faced direct physical threats. Among those subjected to extortion, 60% reported paying to avoid personal harm; 15% to prevent damage to their homes; 9% to protect their vehicles; and 4% to avoid the recruitment of adolescents. These figures highlight how extortion has become a systematic tool of control within communities.

Violence has also deeply affected workplaces. Some 67% of households reported robberies or assaults at their jobs or businesses, and 7% mentioned facing extortion or attempted murder. In several cases, respondents chose not to disclose the reasons for paying extortion, likely due to fear of retaliation. However, among those who did respond, reasons included avoiding material damage, protecting themselves from aggression, or ensuring their business could continue operating—demonstrating the direct impact of criminality on economic stability.

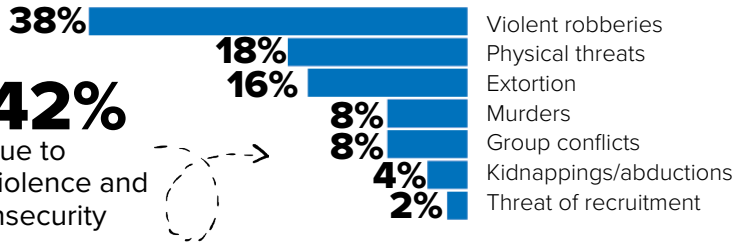
In the education sector, 18% of households with children or adolescents who regularly attend school reported some form of security incident at the institution. These included threats from gangs (24%), murders (18%), and violent robberies (15%), followed by clashes between criminal groups. These findings reveal an alarming level of exposure of children to structural violence, as well as the infiltration of organised crime into spaces previously considered safe for childhood development.

5.4 Causes and underlying factors

13%

of the surveyed households, at least one member has changed residence in the past two years

42% due to violence and insecurity



Among those who did not flee**

46% did not flee because that is their home

43% did not have resources to flee

35% had nowhere to go

19% would consider fleeing due to violence, **57% of them internally**

The data gathered through the survey allow for the identification of the main events that trigger forced displacement due to violence in Ecuador. The most frequently reported incidents include violent robberies (38%), physical threats (18%), and extortion (16%). Other cases involved murders (8%), clashes between criminal gangs (8%), kidnappings (4%), and threats of recruitment of children and adolescents (2%). These figures reflect widespread violence that directly threatens the safety and integrity of individuals, forcing them to leave their homes in search of protection.

Despite these circumstances, many people reported remaining in their current places of residence due to structural barriers to relocation. The most common reasons for not having moved include owning their home (46%), lack of financial resources (43%), and the absence of alternative accommodation (35%). Other factors, such as unemployment (18%) and lack of support networks, were also mentioned. This situation points to a form of self-protection through confinement, where remaining in high-risk environments is not a voluntary choice but a consequence of economic limitations.

However, 19% of respondents stated that if the violence worsens, they would consider relocating in the future. Among those contemplating displacement, the majority would prefer to move within the country (57%), while 19% would opt to go abroad—mainly to the United States, Spain, or Colombia, where they may have family members. The reasons given for choosing a destination include employment opportunities (59%), proximity to relatives (44%), and access to basic services (18%). Nevertheless, nearly 90% of households reported not having sufficient resources to relocate, and 65% lacked a safe place to go. This reinforces the high level of vulnerability and the limited capacity of local services to respond.

Internal displacement in Ecuador coincides with a context of structural deficiencies and limited institutional response, which amplifies the impact of criminal violence. While displaced people have diverse profiles, there is a slight overrepresentation of women and most adults over 30 years of age. More than half of the displaced households included children, and many people relocated with their children or partners. In this regard, comprehensive responses that include access to education, livelihoods, and social services are essential.

Although family networks help facilitate reception to some extent, access to shelters or specialised services for displaced people within communities remains limited. The difficulty in finding employment after displacement and the economic fragility of internally displaced households highlight the urgent need to strengthen public policies that effectively address this emerging phenomenon.

UNHCR/Diana Díaz Rodríguez

6. Recommendations

Internal forced displacement in Ecuador, closely linked to violence and criminality, presents urgent and critical challenges for the development and implementation of public policies and institutional responses. In light of this context, it is essential to build a comprehensive protection system that addresses both the root causes of displacement and the immediate and long-term needs of affected people. The following lines of action are proposed:

National Information Systems as Evidence for Public Policy Design

- Encourage the **continuous collection of data** on internal displacement.
- Integrate specific modules into **national surveys and statistical systems.**
- Generate robust and up-to-date evidence to **guide public policy decisions.**
- Identify the **profiles, needs, and trajectories** of displaced individuals.
- Promote the use of data for **prevention, response, and monitoring.**

Tailored and Targeted Programmes that Address the Diversity and Vulnerabilities of Displaced Persons

- Design policies that are adapted to **age, gender, diversity, and socio-economic** context.
- Identify and address the **specific needs** of each displaced group.
- Implement **differentiated and targeted responses.**
- Include **access to education, vocational training, healthcare, child protection, psychosocial support, and housing solutions.**
- Promote inclusion with a **rights-based approach.**

Comprehensive Protection of Displaced Children in Accordance with the Best Interests of the Child

- Adopt **urgent and specific measures** to protect displaced children.
- **Ensure their ongoing safety** in education, health, and nutrition.
- Design mechanisms that:
  - Protect the **right of family unity.**
  - **Prevent child recruitment and use** by armed groups or other forms of violence.
  - Facilitate the **disengagement of recruited children.**
- Apply the **best interest of the child principle** in all interventions.
- Strengthen **child protection systems** with an area-based approach.

Community Participation and Empowerment

- Foster **active community participation** in response processes.
- **Support the empowerment** of host and affected communities.
- Promote **inclusive and representative dialogue** spaces.
- Facilitate the **co-creation of sustainable solutions** adapted to local contexts.
- Strengthen the **social cohesion and coexistence** in impacted territories.

Gender-Sensitive Approach and Differentiated Response to Forced Displacement Based on Risks Faced by Girls and Women

- Integrate a **gender-sensitive approach** across all policies and programmes.
- Address the **specific needs of displaced women** and girls.
- **Recognise and prevent** the multiple forms of violence they face.
- Ensure:
  - Effective **protection and access to justice.**
  - Economic **empowerment.**
  - Participation in **decision-making.**
  - Promotion of **leadership and autonomy** in response and reconstruction processes.

Defensoría del Pueblo
ECUADOR