Operational context

The province of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, home to approximately 500,000 people, has historically been a hub for internal human mobility and a reception point for individuals from other countries, including refugees and migrants. Its capital city, Santo Domingo de los Colorados with more than 300.000 inhabitants (4th city in Ecuador), hosts around 15,000 of people in human mobility, making it one of the most significant areas in Ecuador for integration opportunities and community-based protection initiatives. Its strategic location as a commercial and administrative center continues to attract those seeking safety and economic opportunities.

The province faces mounting challenges due to an increasingly deteriorating security context, marked by high levels of violence, extortion, and discrimination. Refugees and migrants are particularly vulnerable to evictions, unemployment, xenophobia, and limited access to basic services. While many families have relocated to Santo Domingo from other provinces, such as Esmeraldas, Guayas, and Lago Agrio, seeking safety from threats like child recruitment, persecution, and attacks on life and personal integrity, there have also been movements from Santo Domingo to other localities, primarily in the Sierra region, driven by security-related challenges.

To address these issues, UNHCR works alongside partners to strengthen protection networks, promote peaceful coexistence, and improve access to essential services. Efforts include fostering collaboration with local governments to develop coordinated strategies for the protection and integration of refugees and people in human mobility. Additionally, UNHCR has equipped the Augusto Egas Hospital to enhance healthcare services for displaced populations and host communities, ensuring better access to critical medical care.

Key figures:

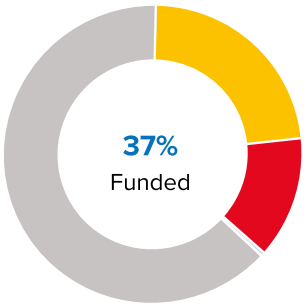
Venezuelans and others in human mobility living in area of coverage
15,000
**Estimated by GTRM*

32,160 People assisted through the health centre

337 People engaged in livelihoods initiatives

359 people assisted through community-based protection initiatives

389 people assisted through mobile protection brigades



73.3M
required for the operation in Ecuador in 2024

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

UNHCR Ecuador is grateful for the critical and generous support provided by private and public donors who contributed with earmarked and unearmarked funding so far in 2024.

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

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Working with partners

In Santo Domingo, UNHCR collaborates with a range of partners and stakeholders to deliver comprehensive protection and integration services. These partnerships aim to empower local governments, enabling them to create coordinated strategies that address the needs of people in human mobility while strengthening community resilience.

Key partners include HIAS, which provides case management and psychosocial support, and NRC, which offers legal assistance for asylum and other forms of migratory regularization. FUDELA leads community-based protection initiatives, using sports as a tool for resilience-building and protection. Mision Scalabriniana manages a temporary shelter that offers safe spaces for families.

UNHCR also supports grassroots organizations such as ASOVEC and AIMME by providing technical training and strengthening their organizational capacity. These efforts ensure refugees have a voice in public policy development and access to tailored solutions that foster inclusion protection.

Key activities

Protection

- UNHCR and its partners implement a comprehensive array of protection activities aimed at addressing the diverse needs of refugees, migrants, and host communities. These efforts include the provision of legal assistance to facilitate access to documentation, asylum processes, and migratory regularization. Survivors of gender-based violence and unaccompanied children receive specialized support tailored to their circumstances, ensuring their safety and well-being.
- To strengthen institutional capacity, UNHCR delivers technical training to local authorities on international protection standards, child protection, and GBV prevention. Community-based protection networks are actively reinforced, focusing on the inclusion and empowerment of women, youth, and LGBTIQ+ individuals. These networks play a critical role in identifying protection needs and advocating for solutions.
- As part of its strategy, UNHCR has implemented a community-based protection approach in one of the most critical sectors for security and with the highest population of people in a situation of human mobility, the Santa Martha neighborhood. This strategy includes the strengthening of community networks and the use of sports with a protection focus, fostering a sense of community and resilience among participants.
- UNHCR further facilitates referrals to essential services such as healthcare and shelter, ensuring immediate and effective responses to urgent cases. Additionally, efforts to enhance the capacities of local organizations and governments have been instrumental in improving the management and delivery of protection responses. This multifaceted approach ensures that refugees, migrants, and their host communities receive the support needed to rebuild their lives and promote social cohesion.

Livelihoods and economic inclusion

- UNHCR prioritizes the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and migrants as a pathway to durable solutions. By offering training in entrepreneurship, financial education, and vocational skills, refugees and migrants are better equipped to access sustainable income-generating opportunities. Partnerships with development agencies and local governments further facilitate formal employment and market integration access.
- In Santo Domingo, UNHCR has collaborated with the Prefecture to strengthen economic opportunities through a dedicated commercialization center named Tierra Tsáchila. This center supports the distribution and promotion of products from both refugee and local entrepreneurs, fostering sustainable livelihoods and integration within the community.
- UNHCR has also promoted financial inclusion by working with local savings and credit cooperatives to facilitate access to financial services. These efforts include providing guidance for refugees and migrants to open bank accounts, enabling greater economic stability and autonomy.
- However, the deteriorating security situation in Santo Domingo has significantly impacted local entrepreneurs. Many have faced extortion, theft, and other security-related challenges, leading some to close their businesses. UNHCR continues to support entrepreneurs in adapting to these challenges through tailored training and advocacy for safer economic environments.

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