UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

# Ecuador
## Operational Update

N.8 | August 2024

*Elmimar hopes to be able to benefit from the new regularization process in Ecuador to have more stability and improve the living conditions of her family. © UNHCR/Omar Ganchala*

## Figures at a glance

### Population figures

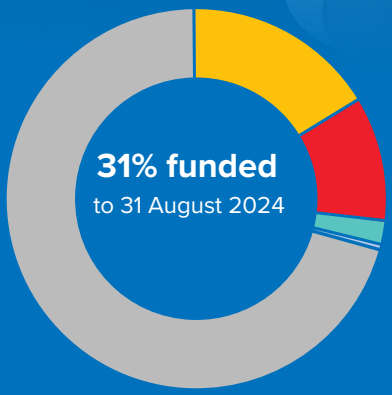
**77,950**

Historical figure of refugees recognized by Ecuador[1]

**95%** from neighbouring Colombia

**64,530**

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

**98,494***

refugees and other displaced people supported and registered in proGres as of the end of August 2024

**Figure includes people support through other services beyond those described below*

**41,860**
people received legal guidance & assistance

**11,468**
people assisted with cash for basic needs and protection

**20,017**
people supported with collective emergency shelter

**7,994**
people supported with mental health and psychosocial support

**1,251**
people linked with a decent employment opportunity

**1,710**
GBV survivors supported

**238**
people provided with technical or skills certification

**8,752**
people received hygiene kits

**249**
people supported with child protection services

**6,970**
people supported with community - based protection services

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

## Operational context

During the month of August, population movements to and through Ecuador continued, mainly of Venezuelans and Colombian asylum seekers - though at a slightly lesser pace than in previous months. In particular, the number of Colombians seeking international protection has now surpassed the one registered in 2022 and accounts for 93% of the total registered in 2023, according to Government figures. UNHCR continues working with the Ecuadorian authorities to continue supporting those requiring access to the asylum system.

In the meantime, President Daniel Noboa issued Decree 370 to grant a migratory amnesty and establish a new regularization process for Venezuelans and their families who registered in the previous process and have an expired certificate of temporary stay but did not obtain a VIRTE visa. UNHCR and IOM are working on communication products to effectively inform communities about how to access this process and what steps to follow. In addition, the Government of Ecuador through its Ecuadorian Higher Education Council (CES), issued the normativity allowing for greater flexibility on the requirements to register academic degrees obtained abroad, including for refugees and migrants. This decision, welcomed by UNHCR, the World Bank and the Economic Inclusion Project USAID-WOCCU which have been advocating for the measure, will remove barriers for many people to access local integration opportunities in the country.

In August, after several incidents concerning electricity, Ecuador had to assess preventive measures against the early signs of drought, which have significantly reduced water flow in major hydrographic basins. Despite efforts in previous months, including acquiring additional electricity from various sources, the country faces a potential energy deficit due to low water levels affecting power generation.

Ecuador is preparing for a new electoral process in 2025, during which the president and vice president of the Republic, members of the National Assembly (15 national, 130 provincial, and 6 from abroad), and Andean parliamentarians will be elected. The country has implemented a curfew in 20 cantons across the country as part of the Government's security strategy to combat violence. Noboa has also declared several cities as special security zones, increasing military and police presence in certain areas affected by crime and drug trafficking.

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

### Venezuelans

Venezuelans continue to lead in numbers of arrivals in Ecuador. 15,946 people entered Ecuador in August 2024 (15% less than the previous month), with a daily entry average of 514 Venezuelans, compared to exit figures registering 16,590 and 535 daily exits on average (6% less than the previous month). This represents a 49% decrease in entries and a 51% decrease in exits as compared to the same period in 2023. While entries have been the lowest on record during the past year and a half, exits have also decreased significantly.

**444,778** 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]

### Colombians

According to Government data, 4,848 Colombians haves sought asylum so far in 2024, 456 in August, a 20% decrease as compared to the same month in 2023. However, the number of Colombian asylum seekers continues to rise, with the figure registered in 2024 accounts for 92% of the number registered in the entire 2023, and a 37% increase as compared to the January-August period in 2023. The total number in 2024 is now higher than that registered in 2022 (4,301).

**4,848** Colombians who have sought asylum in Ecuador in 2024[2]

- **456** were registered in August

Main needs of Colombians in Ecuador

- **77%** access to food, housing, clothing[4]
- **10%** access to rights and services (job, education)[4]
- **7%** access to documentation[4]

### Ecuadorians

The number of Ecuadorians on the run has increased in the past years, with over 98.000 having crossed the Darien jungle between 2022 and August 2024, being now the third nationality to have crossed, behind Venezuelans and Colombians. By end of August 2024, 14,777 Ecuadorians had used this route. Over 83,000 Ecuadorians had arrived irregularly to Mexico at the end of July 2024. By the end of April, over 43,000 Ecuadorians had traveled to El Salvador, 4,000 of whom returned home. According to U.S. authorities, nearly 100,000 encounters are their border were with Ecuadorian nationals during the 2024 fiscal year. Moreover, 66,000 Ecuadorian asylum-seekers were pending a decision on their claims by end of 2023. Check out our latest report.

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. Figures of asylum claims from the Government.
3 Fifth R4V Joint Needs Assessment. www.r4v.info
4 2023 Protection Monitoring Report available at https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/ecu

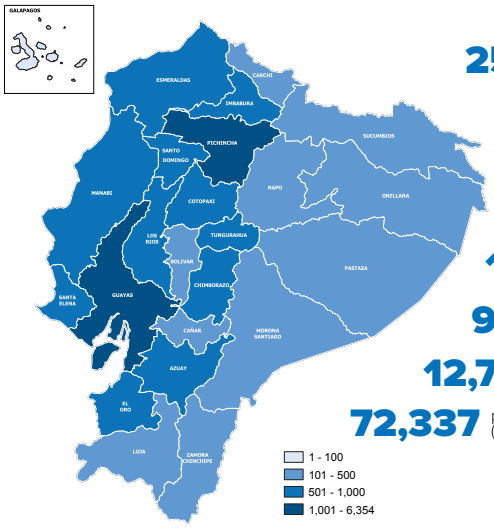
## SPECIAL FOCUS: REGULARIZATION PROCESS

The broad Registration and Regularization exercise has been key in enabling refugees and migrants to meet their needs and to advance solutions as part of a broader protection and socioeconomic integration strategy.

Between 2022 and April 20244, the Ecuadorian government undertook a generous registration and regularization exercise benefitting thousands of refugees and migrants of all nationalities with a temporary stay permit (Certificado de Permanencia Migratoria) that allowed their regular stay in the territory until a regularization option was made available through the VIRTE Visa. By the end of the process in April, 140,277 visa applications had been lodged, 95,809 visas had been granted and 72,337 ID cards had been delivered, while over 199,930 people had a stay permit. Following the announcements of the Ecuadorian Government in the framework of the Los Angeles Declaration this year, UNHCR is working authorities to materialize this regularization process, which aims to support Venezuelans who had obtained the temporary stay permit but had not been able to issue their VIRTE visa during the previous process.

***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)

**199,930** people with a stay certificate (source: MDI)

**140,277** VIRTE visa applications (source: MREMH)

**95,809** people with VIRTE visa (source: MREMH)

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

**72,337** people with ID (source: DIGERCIC)

### SEE UNHCR, IOM commend Ecuador's efforts to regularize Venezuelan refugees and migrants

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) praised Ecuador's new presidential decree introducing an extraordinary regularization process for Venezuelans and their families who currently lack regular status in the country. This initiative is expected to benefit some 100,000 people, according to Government estimates.

Ecuador hosts the fifth largest number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the Americas. The regularization will assist thousands who registered for a previous process in 2022 but were unable to complete the necessary steps to finally obtain their visas. They could not obtain regular status because of practical barriers to meeting the requirements, including providing necessary documentation such as passports or valid national IDs, and covering the costs of additional paperwork.

Read more here.

*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 13 May 2024.*

# DELIVERING PROTECTION

NATIONAL

## KOICA and UNHCR celebrate end of three-year project

In partnership with KOICA, UNHCR celebrated the end of a three-year project that supported over 300,000 refugees and Ecuadorians across five provinces. This initiative significantly enhanced access to protection, rights, provided livelihood opportunities, and promoted community protection, among other benefits. The collaboration with donors like KOICA is crucial in creating a world where both refugees and Ecuadorians are protected and included, ensuring they have the resources and support needed to thrive. Read more here.

NATIONAL

## Strengthening refugee protection through partnerships

UNHCR partnered with Ecuador's Constitutional Court and its study and dissemination centre to enhance the protection system for people in human mobility. As part of this agreement, UNHCR trained officials and civil society in Tulcán on human rights standards and international protection. This collaboration underscores the importance of engaging authorities at all levels to support refugee protection, ensuring that both legal frameworks and practical measures are in place to safeguard the rights and well-being of people forced to flee. In Guayaquil, together with the Constitutional Court, UNHCR trained public officials and members of civil society on the Toolbox for Human Rights Standards in Human Mobility. In Cuenca, we trained 33 officials and members of civil society on the toolbox for comprehensive care for people in human mobility. We aim to strengthen capacities to ensure their protection and assistance.

ESMERALDAS

## Engaging men and boys in the strategy to combat gender violence

In Esmeraldas, in collaboration with our partner FEPP and with support from BPRM, UNHCR initiated the transfer of the EMAP methodology, which involves men in responsible practices to prevent violence against women and girls. 31 adults, children, and adolescents from Colombia, Venezuela, and the host communities are participating and reflecting on the importance of including men in discussions about gender roles and gender-based violence. This initiative highlights the critical role that men and boys play in combating gender violence, emphasizing that their involvement is essential for fostering safer and more equitable communities in Ecuador.

# PROMOTING ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

CUENCA

## Enhancing refugee access to psychological first aid

In Cuenca, in collaboration with the Maria Amor Foundation, UNHCR trained 25 community promoters in psychological first aid tools to enhance their crisis response capabilities and promote emotional well-being within their communities. This initiative highlights the importance of working with community leaders to ensure refugees have access to immediate psychological support during crises. By equipping these leaders with essential skills, the programme aims to foster a supportive environment that prioritizes mental health and resilience among refugees and their host communities.

LAGO AGRIO

## Empowering youth through information on sexual and reproductive health

In Lago Agrio, in collaboration with COOPI, UNHCR trained 22 youth from the Voces group in a workshop on sexual and reproductive rights. Providing these young individuals with the necessary tools and knowledge is crucial for building a more equitable world. This initiative highlights the importance of ensuring that both refugee and local youth have access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, empowering them to make informed decisions and fostering a healthier, more inclusive community.

## PROMOTING SOCIOECONOMIC INCLUSION

**QUITO**

### Private sector helps refugees obtain skills for their economic inclusion

In Quito, 19 refugees, migrants and Ecuadorians, including 17 women heads of household, enhanced their fine pastry skills under the guidance of Venezuelan chef Joaquín Araque from the Tributo restaurant. This activity is part of the "A Tribute to Inclusive Cocoa" initiative, led by Repúbica del Cacao and Tributo – both companies that had been awarded by UNHCR under the Inclusive Company Seal initiative – and with the support from UNHCR and FUDELA.

**IBARRA**

### Leveraging the power of theoretical and practical learning to empower refugee youth

In Ibarra, UNHCR organized a meeting with 12 local companies participating in the practical training programme with the private sector, some of which are helping enhance youth education and solutions. This collaboration underscores the importance of combining theoretical and practical learning to help refugee and local youth integrate into society, stay protected from violence, and secure livelihoods. By equipping these young individuals with essential skills and knowledge, the programme aims to foster their socioeconomic inclusion and resilience in Ecuador.

**TULCÁN**

### Unlocking livelihood opportunities through business pitch workshops

UNHCR conducted a business pitch workshop in Tulcán for adolescents from the Assisted Housing programme implemented with Aldeas Infantiles SOS. During this workshop, these young refugees and locals learned how to present their business ideas convincingly, paving the way for their future as potential entrepreneurs. This initiative underscores the importance of supporting displaced youth in accessing livelihood opportunities, equipping them with the skills and confidence needed to build sustainable futures. This vital work is made possible thanks to the support of donors like AECID.

## PROMOTING PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

**NATIONAL**

### UNHCR and Universidad Católica team-up for refugee protection and integration

UNHCR has signed an agreement with the Universidad Católica football team to create spaces where people forced to flee their homes can develop their talents, build friendships, and feel part of their community through sports. This initiative harnesses sports as one of UNHCR's tools to address the protection and integration needs of refugees, particularly children, at both community and national levels. By fostering a sense of belonging and providing opportunities for personal growth, sports play a crucial role in the holistic support and integration of refugees, helping them rebuild their lives in a new environment.

**NATIONAL**

### Leveraging sports for refugee protection and integration in Ecuador

In Cuenca, UNHCR conducted the first international protection training for coaches of the Vamos a la Cancha and Actívate Ecuador programmes led by the Ministry of Sports. Similarly, in Esmeraldas, UNHCR held the first awareness workshop on rights access and human mobility for 15 instructors. This initiative is part of Ecuador's pledges before the Global Refugee Forum and UNHCR's agreement with the Ministry, aiming to harness the power of sports to create protective environments for children, youth, and adults across Ecuador.

*Elmimar is an entrepreneur and wants to access essential services, such as opening a bank account, to continue developing her career.*

*© UNHCR/Omar Ganchala*

# New regularization initiative in Ecuador offers stability for thousands

**QUITO**

When Elmimar Mendoza saw the news in the press, she almost fell out of her chair with happiness. She recalls being in her living room with her friend Deylimar when she heard the shouts. "She started yelling, 'Look Elmimar, hurry,' and when I saw it, I said, 'Thank God,'" said the 28-year-old Venezuelan about the new registration and regularization process decreed by the Ecuadorian government on August 23.

She is one of the nearly 100,000 people estimated by the government who accessed the previous process but failed to meet some of the requirements to obtain a visa. "In the previous process, I had a valid ID and everything, but I couldn't pay for the criminal record in time, and then the deadline to apply passed," she added.

"I arrived around 2018 and managed to enter with an Andean Card and my ID, but I couldn't regularize in any of the processes because in 2019 they required a passport, and I didn't have one. I've been living in fear, in an irregular status, all this time."

Now, Elmimar is once again betting on regularizing her status in Ecuador along with her husband and son. "Now my ID is expired, but hopefully, we can regularize now, as we are part of practically the majority of those who remain irregular in Ecuador," she said.

Since 2019, this is the third time Ecuador has initiated an extraordinary regularization process for Venezuelan refugees and migrants. Joining countries like Colombia, Peru, and Brazil, Ecuador continues to set an example in seeking solutions to the critical needs of millions of people in human mobility in the region, including those living in the shadows of irregularity.

Thanks to previous registration and regularization processes, and with the legal and financial assistance of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and other partners, more than 96,000 people managed to regularize their status in Ecuador between 2022 and 2024.

UNHCR has been able to support these regularization processes thanks to donors like BPRM y Canada, among others.

Read more here.

**You can help us continue building a World of Possibilities for thousands of women survivors of gender-based-violence in Ecuador. Donate now.**

## We thank the contributions of our donors

31 August 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, inculding those in Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Spain.***

**For more information:** Diana Diaz Rodriguez, External Relations Officer *diazdi@unhcr.org* | **For media queries:** *ecuqumedia@unhcr.org*