UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Ecuador

Operational Update

N.9 | September 2024

Obada, Sara and their children are now fully Ecuadorian and dream of a brighter future.
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Figures at a glance

Population figures

77,950
Historical figure of refugees recognized by Ecuador[1]

95% from neighbouring Colombia

65,142
refugees with active cases registered in ProGres[1]

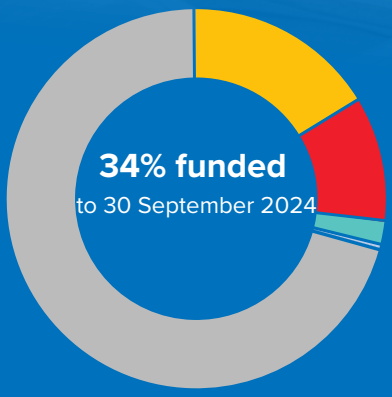
Our 2024 response in figures

110,836*
refugees and other displaced people supported and registered in proGres as of the end of September 2024

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

46,734
people received legal guidance & assistance

13,222
people assisted with cash for basic needs and protection



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

22,590
people supported with collective emergency shelter

9,170
people supported with mental health and psychosocial support

1,288
people linked with a decent employment opportunity

2,100
GBV survivors supported

266
people provided with technical or skills certification

9,238
people received hygiene kits

264
people supported with child protection services

7,291
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 September 2024.

Operational context

In September 2024, Ecuador continued to bear witness to forced displacements to and through the country, particularly in regions along the northern border and urban centers. In particular, ongoing violence in neighbouring Colombia has exacerbated the vulnerability of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and those in transit, continuing to increase the number of asylum seekers from that country in Ecuador. According to Government figures, over 5,300 Colombians had sought asylum by the end of the month – the highest number since 2017. In by the end of September 2024, out of the 38,910 individuals registered by UNHCR and partners, around 25% corresponds to Colombians (already more than the 21% registered in the entire 2023).

This increase in asylum claims takes place amid the continuous displacement of Venezuelans with estimated 753 daily entries and 723 exits in the month of September. These numbers are now comparable to those registered prior to the elections in Venezuela, and a reflection of the ongoing downward trend of Venezuelan movements to the country observed last year.

Compounding these issues, Ecuador has faced an ongoing deterioration of security conditions with several murders, including of prison staff, reported across the country. On top of this, the highland region has faced numerous forest fires amid rainfall and water shortages, which has had a toll on air quality and fear among communities. These issues have triggered water and electricity rationing as well as state of emergency declarations.

The combination of increased violence, the continued influx of refugees, and climate-related challenges underscores the need for ongoing international support and cooperation to ensure the safety and dignity of affected populations.

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

Venezuelans

Venezuelans continue to lead in numbers of arrivals in Ecuador. 22,585 people entered Ecuador in September 2024 (42% more than the previous month), with a daily entry average of 753 Venezuelans, compared to exit figures registering 21,704 and 723 daily exits on average (30% more than the previous month). This represents a 28% decrease in entries and a 30% decrease in exits as compared to the same period in 2023. Worthy to note, movement figures this month are now similar to the numbers registered prior to the elections in Venezuela.

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, 5,383 Colombians haves sought asylum so far in 2024, 577 in September, a 5% increase as compared to the same month in 2023. In 2024, the number of asylum claims made by Colombians has already surpassed the number registered in 2022 (4,269) and in 2023 (5,244). With an average of 598 new asylum claims per month this year (with the highest numbers surpassing 884), UNHCR foresees the total number of asylum-seekers will be the highest on record since 2017.

5,383 Colombians who have sought asylum in Ecuador in 2024[2]

577 were registered in September

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 100.000 having crossed the Darien jungle between 2022 and September 2024 and remaining among the top three nationalities to have crossed, behind Venezuelans and Colombians. By end of September 2024, 15,304 Ecuadorians had used this route. Over 83,000 Ecuadorians had arrived irregularly to Mexico at the end of July 2024. Moreover, 66,000 Ecuadorian asylum-seekers were pending a decision on their claims by 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. 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

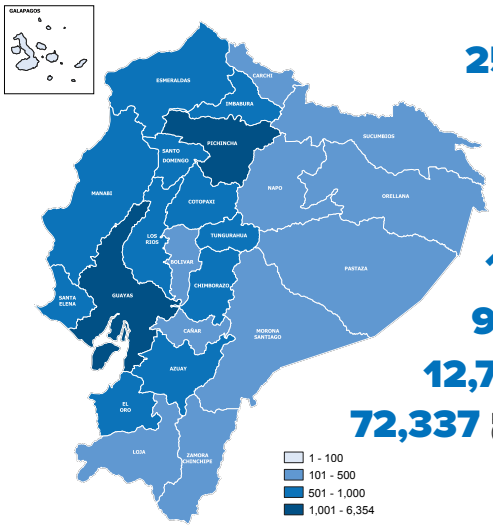
The Registration and Regularization process has been key to enabling refugees and migrants to meet their needs and promote solutions as part of a broader strategy of protection and socioeconomic integration.

Between September 2022 and April 2024, the Ecuadorian Government undertook a registration and regularization process that benefited thousands of refugees and migrants of all nationalities with a Certificate of Migratory Permanence that regularized their stay in the territory until they could obtain a VIRTE visa. By the end of April, 140,277 visa applications had been submitted, 95,809 visas had been granted, and 72,337 identity cards had been issued. More than 199,930 people had been granted a residence permit.

Following the signing of Executive Decree Number 370 of August 23, 2024, which established an amnesty process for Venezuelans who are in an irregular situation in the country, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility issued ministerial agreements that give way to the processes for the renewal of the Certificate of Migratory Permanence and the renewal of the VIRTE visa respectively. UNHCR, in collaboration with IOM, created content on these processes which have been disseminated on UNHCR's social networks and shared with GTRM partners to reach the target population. UNHCR's engagement in this new process is possible thanks to the support of PRM.

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

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

CUENCA

Weaving protection networks for refugee women

In Cuenca, UNHCR, together with Fundación María Amor, launched the 'Bordando Vínculos' workshops, a space where local women and women in human mobility come together to create embroidery while discussing the importance of preventing gender-based violence in their communities. These workshops strengthen support networks, especially for survivors. Although participants came from different backgrounds, they have faced similar challenges, which allows them to share their stories and enhance their ability to recognize, prevent, and respond to situations of violence.

PIMAMPIRO

Facilitating access to information for people in human mobility

In Pimampiro, UNHCR carried out a mobile assistance day during which several families were able to update their biometric data and receive information on regularization, refugee status determination, and access to rights and documentation. These initiatives, supported by donors like ECHO, not only facilitate access to the necessary documentation upon arrival in the host country, but also strengthens safe integration into communities by enabling access to rights such as education, healthcare, and employment.

NATIONAL

Providing protection through sports

In Ibarra and Guayaquil, UNHCR conducted workshops on international protection and the prevention of exploitation, abuse, and sexual harassment for 22 instructors from the Actívate and Vamos a la Cancha initiatives of the Ministry of Sports. These professionals play a key role in creating safe environments for refugees and host communities. Resources were provided to enable the trainers to replicate this knowledge in their daily work and to handle sensitive situations that may arise in sports spaces.

PROMOTING ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

LAGO AGRIO

Building inclusive healthcare environments

In Lago Agrio, UNHCR conducted a workshop on inclusive health and international protection for staff at the Dayuma Health Centre. Key topics such as human mobility, inclusion, justice, and human rights in healthcare were addressed. The training aimed to enhance staff skills and promote safe, inclusive environments that guarantee adequate and respectful care for all.

MANTA

Creating a welcoming space for learning and integration

In Manta, UNHCR and the Autonomous Decentralized Government are carrying out improvements at the El Palmar Community Development Centre. With support from PRM, a room has been adapted for workshops and a covered area with an open common space has been built, designed for community use. This place offers a meeting spot where refugees, other forcibly displaced people, and members of the host community who frequent the centre can participate in training on crafts, livelihoods, English classes for girls, boys and adolescents, dance therapy, among other activities.

PROMOTING SOCIOECONOMIC INCLUSION

AMBATO

Strengthening the dreams and entrepreneurship of refugees

Thanks to the support from KOICA and in collaboration with CorpoAmbato, 47 refugees, migrants and Ecuadorians participated in a pastry workshop at the Continuous Entrepreneurship School in Ambato. The workshop was led by Dessire, a Venezuelan entrepreneur and owner of Home Bites. Participants exchanged experiences, and she shared her knowledge to inspire people to turn their dreams into reality and to view entrepreneurship as a powerful tool for integration and community growth.

ESMERALDAS

Youth creativity for future entrepreneurship

With the support of AECID and IRCC/Canada, private sector partners have joined in opening their doors and provide job opportunities through internships for refugee and migrant youth who graduated from the hospitality and tourism course in Esmeraldas. The course consisted of 250 hours of training, focusing on both soft skills and practical experience. The training sessions were part of the A Ganar programme, developed in collaboration with FUDELA. The modules taught were designed to strengthen participants' skills, enabling them to access opportunities to generate sustainable livelihoods.

TULCÁN

Empowering the future of young refugees

With the support of AECID, UNHCR held a pitch event with adolescents in Tulcan, in collaboration with Aldeas SOS. The participants were part of the Entrepreneurship School for two months, during which they developed business ideas to present to a panel of judges. The projects were evaluated by the Zonal Director of the Ministry of Production and a representative from the Tulcan Cooperative. The young participants competed for seed capital to bring their ideas to life, and certificates of graduation from the program were also awarded.

PROMOTING PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

NATIONAL

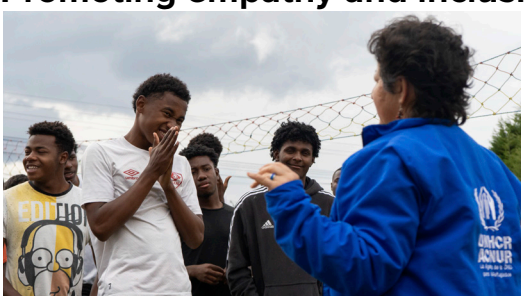
Building a world of possibilities for all

UNHCR has re-launched Un Mundo Posible, an advocacy initiative aimed at combating xenophobia in Ecuador. This year, Un Mundo Posible amplifies the voices of both Ecuadorian and forcibly displaced community leaders, who share personal stories that highlight the valuable contributions refugees make to their host communities. Through their testimonies, these leaders showcase how their skills, talents, and collaborative efforts have enriched the country.

The re-launch includes the unveiling of a dedicated website and a series of video stories. In the videos, community leaders reflect on the importance of creating safe spaces free from violence and xenophobia, encouraging others to build a World of Possibilities for everyone.

NATIONAL

Promoting empathy and inclusion in sports



In collaboration with the training schools and the Aucas and Universidad Católica sports clubs, UNHCR held a workshop for children and adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18, using tools from the "We breath Inclusion" methodology. The workshop used activities designed to build empathy, helping young people put themselves in others' shoes and understand key concepts like the difference between refugees and migrants, and the impact of prejudice. Participants reflected on the importance of respecting and celebrating differences and underscored the vital role that sports play in protecting youth from violence and fostering peaceful coexistence.

Stories from the field

Obada, Sara and their children are now fully Ecuadorian and dream of a brighter future.
© UNHCR/Diana Díaz Rodríguez

Felixble naturalization requirements give renewed hope to Syrian refugee family

QUITO

Obada and Sara,34, had two different reasons that drove them to leave Syria. He left five years before she did, and it was a love story that brought them together in exile. 13 years later, they now dream of bright future as former refugees in Ecuador. They were among the first refugees to have been naturalized as Ecuadorians thanks to the new regulations in the country.

“It was a victory for us. Now I am ‘Ecuatoriana’,” said Sara with a bright smile on her face. “People were very friendly to us here. Doctors and hospitals were very good to us, very supportive,” said Sara. “This feels now like my country, my home,” added Sara.

Young Obada had just finished studying English in Syria but was struggling to find a job. Saudi Arabia seemed like the obvious choice for him, as employment prospects were higher. But for Sara the situation was much more dire. “I was still in Syria when the war started and stayed there for one year,” said Sara. “It was scary and difficult for me. I had never heard explosions before; it was difficult for me to learn a relative had died. It was scary.”

Sara and Obada’s family already knew each other, so he proposed to her and brought her to Saudi Arabia, where they lived for five years and had two of their three children. “Integration in Saudi Arabia was difficult; my daughter is asthmatic. We struggled there, and we could not go back home. We needed to look for another option, so a friend who was already here told me there would be opportunities as an English teacher,” said Obada.

First Sara, already pregnant with their third child, and their two children, and then Obada, they head off to new horizons in Ecuador. “We knew nothing about Ecuador, of the language here or anything, but it was a safe place where our children could have a better life.”

Obada quickly started looking for a job as an English teacher and is now teaching at three institutions to make ends meet. “I dream of continuing my studies, as I did my master’s here and now I want to do a doctorate,” said Obada. But the biggest dream now is to be able to travel and see their family again. “Now that we are Ecuadorian, we can get a passport and reunite with our family.”

Obada and Sara underwent several tests and were among the first refugees who obtained the nationality. This milestone comes after Ecuador included more flexible requirements for refugees to access naturalization. Now, after two years of regular and continuous residence in the country, refugees can apply for naturalization.

“We feel grateful to Ecuador. This is now our home,” added the couple. Read more here.

You can help us continue building a World of Possibilities for thousands of refugee families in Ecuador. **Donate now.**

We thank the contributions of our donors

30 September 2024

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

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