UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

"I live the present with intensity and with the motivation to seek justice and rights for everyone."
-Katy.

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Ecuador

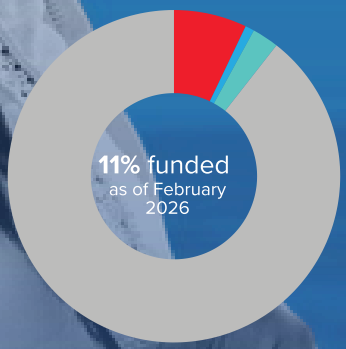
Operational Update
February 2026
No.2

Figures at a glance

Population figures

81,351
Historical figure of refugees recognized by Ecuador [2]

94%
from neighbouring Colombia



65.1 M
required in 2026

- 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 2026 response in figures
Only assistance provided by partner organizations is included in the present reporting period.

5,227 refugees and other displaced people supported and registered in proGres as of the end of February 2026

298 people supported with community - based protection services

1,384 people supported with collective emergency shelter

32 people assisted to cover their basic needs and protection

83 people received hygiene kits

1230 people supported with mental health and psychosocial support

60 people linked with a decent employment opportunity

1. Historical figure registered by the government since 1978 to the end of February 2026.
2. UNHCR registers active refugee cases in ProGres. Figures to the end of February 2026

Operational context

The operational context in February has been marked by weather-related events and ongoing security concerns, which have affected forcibly displaced people and the communities hosting them.

Severe rains have triggered a nationwide emergency in Ecuador, significantly affecting several provinces across the Coast and Highlands. The National Risk Management Secretariat (SNGR) declared a 90-day regional emergency covering provinces including Guayas, Esmeraldas, El Oro, Los Ríos, Manabí, Santa Elena, Loja, and Chimborazo due to floods, landslides, and damage to public and private infrastructure. According to SNGR reports, in February more than 28.853 were affected nationwide, with eight fatalities and over 1,200 impacts on roads, schools, and health facilities. Rising river levels and flooding have been reported across coastal provinces, with 17 rivers currently at risk of overflowing, further straining local response capacities and increasing the risk of displacement, service disruptions, and growing humanitarian needs in vulnerable communities. So far, there have been over 47,000 people affected nationwide, especially in provinces hosting large number of forcibly displaced people and where UNHCR has offices.

At the same time, Ecuador continues to face a deteriorating security situation. The state of emergency has been renewed in nine provinces, reflecting persistent levels of violence and concerns related to organized crime across the country. In the northern border province of Sucumbíos, sustained military operations against criminal groups are restricting mobility and affecting access to services in border communities.

The closure of official border crossings has pushed many people to use informal routes, increasing exposure to smuggling networks and risks of exploitation, abuse, and family separation. Communities also report rising incidents of extortion, micro-trafficking, harassment, recruitment attempts, and mobility constraints, which have reduced participation in community activities and weakened local protection mechanisms.

In parallel, bilateral tensions between Ecuador and Colombia continue following the imposition of mutual tariffs, disrupting trade flows and affecting border economies. Transport unions and productive sector organizations from both countries have protested at the border. These dynamics are raising concerns about the livelihoods of border communities and the potential increase of smuggling and related crimes.

In this evolving context, UNHCR continues to work alongside the Government of Ecuador, local authorities, civil society, and community-based organizations to deliver a comprehensive response addressing both protection needs and solutions for affected populations. By strengthening local services and systems, UNHCR seeks to expand access to international protection, essential services, and socioeconomic inclusion opportunities for forcibly displaced people and host communities across the country, helping those forced to flee rebuild their lives with dignity, stability, and renewed hope for the future.

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

Colombians

According to government data, 159 Colombians sought asylum in Ecuador in February 2026, an approximate 58% decrease compared to the same period in 2025. Ecuador continues to host a large refugee population, mainly from Colombia. In 2025, Colombians represented 40% of asylum seekers, a 33% decrease from the previous year, linked to reduced registration capacity following humanitarian funding cuts. Colombian households continue face barriers to meeting basic needs, particularly housing (84%) and education, with lack of financial resources the main reason for not attending school (97%). Many report threats, persecution, intimidation, or direct violence, confirming that violence and armed conflict in Colombia remain key drivers of displacement. UNHCR projects an important number of asylums claims in 2026.

198 Colombians who have sought asylum in Ecuador in 2026

Main needs of Colombians in Ecuador

84% access to basic needs

97% access to education

31% access to employment

Venezuelans

Venezuelans continue to lead in numbers of arrivals in Ecuador although with a slowly increase, 18.350 people entered the country in February 2026 (4% more than the previous month), with a daily entry average of 611 Venezuelans. 17,330 people left the country, similar to the previous month, leaving a balance of 1020 people who entered and remained in the country during the reporting period.

According to government data, 379 Venezuelans sought asylum in Ecuador in February 2026 (952 in 2026), a 24% decrease compared to the same month in 2025, linked to reduced registration capacity following humanitarian funding cuts. The current number of Venezuelan asylum seekers accounts for 66% of the total claims registered in 2026. Since 2022, Venezuela has accounted for approximately 50–60% of the asylum claims processed in Ecuador. This underscores both the continued need for support and the sustained interest in accessing international protection. Moreover, with the conclusion of the second phase of the regularization process, the asylum system has become increasingly relevant for those with protection needs.

Population entry and exit figures have been compiled by the GTRMs in Ecuador's border areas (Tulcán, Lago Agrio, and Huaquillas) with qualitative and quantitative information on mixed movement trends. These figures are not triangulated with neighboring countries.

440.450 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador[2]

45% estimated to be between 18 and 45 years old

25% estimated to have a higher education degree

Main needs[3]

55% access to food

67% access to housing or shelter

53% access to livelihoods or employment

Ecuadorians

By end of 2025, over 103,000 Ecuadorian asylum-seekers were pending a decision on their claims, while around 5,000 had been recognized as refugees – the majority in the United States, Spain, Mexico and Italy (followed by Perú and Canada). The Ombudspersons Office, with support from UNHCR and ECHO, launched a report on internal displacement in 2025 which estimates that over 315,000 Ecuadorians had been internally displaced between 2022 and 2024. See the executive summary here.

HUMANITARIANS AT WORK

My name is Jorge, and I work in the UNHCR office in Manabí. Here, I have understood that humanitarian work is not only a profession, but also a conviction. It means walking alongside communities that, even in the midst of adversity, continue organizing, resisting, and defending their rights. Much of my work has been in rural Manabí, where inequalities and limited access to rights are a daily challenge. Here, I have seen how refugee, migrant, and local women get together to demand protection, prevent violence, and build support networks. In Manta, by creating these safe spaces, we help communities feel protected and foster more welcoming environments.

Read the full story

ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD

DELIVERING PROTECTION

How UNHCR makes a difference:

Seeking asylum is a fundamental human right, and Ecuador has built one of the strongest asylum systems in the region to uphold it. UNHCR supports the Government by safeguarding access to territory and fair asylum procedures, providing legal and community-based protection, and translating international protection standards into real access to rights at the local level. Through its presence on the ground, technical expertise, data-driven analysis and coordination with national and local actors, UNHCR helps address immediate protection risks while strengthening sustainable protection systems, fostering social cohesion and enabling refugees and host communities to live safely, with dignity, and stability. **To learn more, check out protection fact sheet.**

LAGO AGRIO, SUCUMBÍOS

Enhancing Institutional Capacity for Access to Justice through "Un Mundo Posible" Training Kits

On 25 February, UNHCR delivered ten training kits from the "Un Mundo Posible" initiative to the Public Defender's Office in Lago Agrio. The kits are intended to support the implementation of the "Ruta de los Derechos" initiative in Sucumbíos province. These training materials include pedagogical tools designed to facilitate awareness and learning processes on rights, strengthening institutional capacities to accompany people in situations of human mobility and promoting greater protection and access to justice in the territory.

2. According to data estimated by the Refugee and Migrant Working Group (GTRM, by its acronym in Spanish).
3. Fifth R4V Joint Needs Assessment. www.r4v.info

SUCUMUBIOS AND ORELLANA

Bringing Protection Services Closer to Communities

In the city of Coca, UNHCR together with NRC organized a mobile registration and protection desk where more than 20 cases were assisted. Similarly, in La Joya de los Sachas, UNHCR participated in a mobile registration and protection desk with the support of the Public Defender's Office, helping people receive legal information and support. The team also visited Cascales, where protection risks were monitored, and registrations were conducted to identify people in pendular mobility and barriers to accessing services. These actions help bring protection services closer to communities that face difficulties accesing them and support people in accessing their rights.

SAN LORENZO, ESMERALDAS

Promoting Protection and Wellbeing for New Arrivals

UNHCR conducted an information session for 25 adults who have been forcibly displaced from Colombia and Venezuela who had recently arrived in San Lorenzo. The session covered key topics including education, health, documentation, access to asylum, humanitarian assistance, local integration, and livelihood opportunities. Through this space, UNHCR aimed to strengthen access to rights and support new arrivals in understanding the protection pathways and assistance available, facilitating their integration and wellbeing within the community.

EL CHICAL, CARCHI

Preventing Health Risks and Promoting Safe Living Conditions

In the parish of El Chical, UNHCR delivered 30 mosquito nets to the local health unit to strengthen the family accompaniment programme that benefits both refugees and members of the host community. This support is particularly important during the rainy season when the risk of mosquito-borne diseases increases. Through this contribution, UNHCR helps prevent illness and strengthen the protection and wellbeing of families, promoting safer living conditions for everyone in the community.

TULCAN, CARCHI

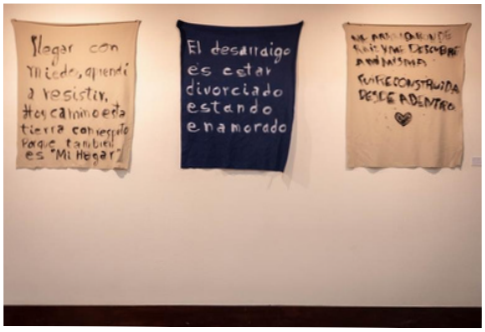
Strengthening Inclusive Education Support by Promoting Mental Health and Self-Care

UNHCR launched the implementation of the "Un Mundo Posible" toolbox together with the District Unit for Inclusion Support team, which supports children and adolescents with specific educational needs associated with disabilities. During the session, a dialogue space was created focusing on mental health and self-care for the staff who accompany these processes. Through this activity, participants reflected on the importance of caring for their own emotional wellbeing, recognizing that supporting others also requires safe personal care.

GUAYAQUIL

Unknown Address: Stories of Displacement and Resilience

At the Nahim Isaías Museum in Guayaquil, the exhibition Unknown Address was presented, a project developed by students from Universidad Casa Grande in collaboration with UNHCR and CDH. The exhibition was built from real testimonies, everyday objects, oral memories, and audiovisual records that portrayed the realities shaping the lives of refugees, deported people, and internally displaced people. Through a museographic approach centered on human experience, the exhibition sought to inform visitors and see the resilience of forcibly displaced people.



GUAYAQUIL

Improving Emergency Response through Digital Tools for Needs Assessment in Affected Communities

In response to the emergency caused by the rainy season, UNHCR lent 16 tablets to the municipality's Environment and Risk Management Department to support the collection of Initial Needs Assessment (EVIN) forms. These devices allow local teams to gather information quickly and efficiently in affected communities, helping speed up the identification of needs and the delivery of humanitarian assistance by the municipal government and the National Risk Management Secretariat. Through this support, the aim is to strengthen local response capacities and ensure that families affected by increased weather-related shocks, including Ecuadorians and forcibly displaced people, receive assistance in a timely manner.

PROMOTING DURABLE SOLUTIONS

Forcibly displaced people are part of the solution for Ecuador's development. UNHCR works with national and local systems to promote their social and economic integration, supporting regular documentation, access to formal employment, education, entrepreneurship, financial services and ensuring misinformation and xenophobia are addressed at all levels. Advocating for inclusive policies and partnering with businesses, training institutions and local actors, UNHCR helps refugees build sustainable livelihoods, fill labour gaps in key productive sectors, and contribute skills, taxes and innovation to the local economy. These solutions-oriented approaches strengthen social cohesion, reduce protection risks, and generate long-term benefits for both forcibly displaced people and host communities.

CHICAL, IBARRA AND LAGO AGRIO

Strengthening Livelihoods through Business Formalization and Branding

As part of the entrepreneurship formalization efforts, UNHCR delivered product labels to entrepreneurs in Lago Agrio, Chical, and Ibarra to strengthen their businesses and support their access to formal markets. In Lago Agrio, six entrepreneurs received labels after being supported in obtaining sanitary notifications and developing their brand identity. In Chical, labels were delivered to strengthen a granulated panela enterprise and improve its commercialization. Similarly, in Ibarra, entrepreneurs received labels to reinforce their products. Each step toward formalization helps these businesses grow and move closer to new opportunities.

TULCAN, LAGO AGRIO

Promoting Financial Inclusion through Digital Payments

UNHCR continues promoting financial inclusion through the provision of digital payment tools. In Lago Agrio, UNHCR, in coordination with the district office of the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES), delivered 52 QR payment plaques during the "Emprende Digital" entrepreneurship fair, enabling businesses to incorporate digital payments and expand their sales opportunities. Similarly, in Tulcán, QR codes were facilitated for refugees and local entrepreneurs to strengthen their businesses by offering new payment options and increasing trust in transactions. These actions help entrepreneurs become more visible, strengthen their sales, and integrate more safely into the market.

MANTA

Promoting Financial Inclusion to Support Business Growth

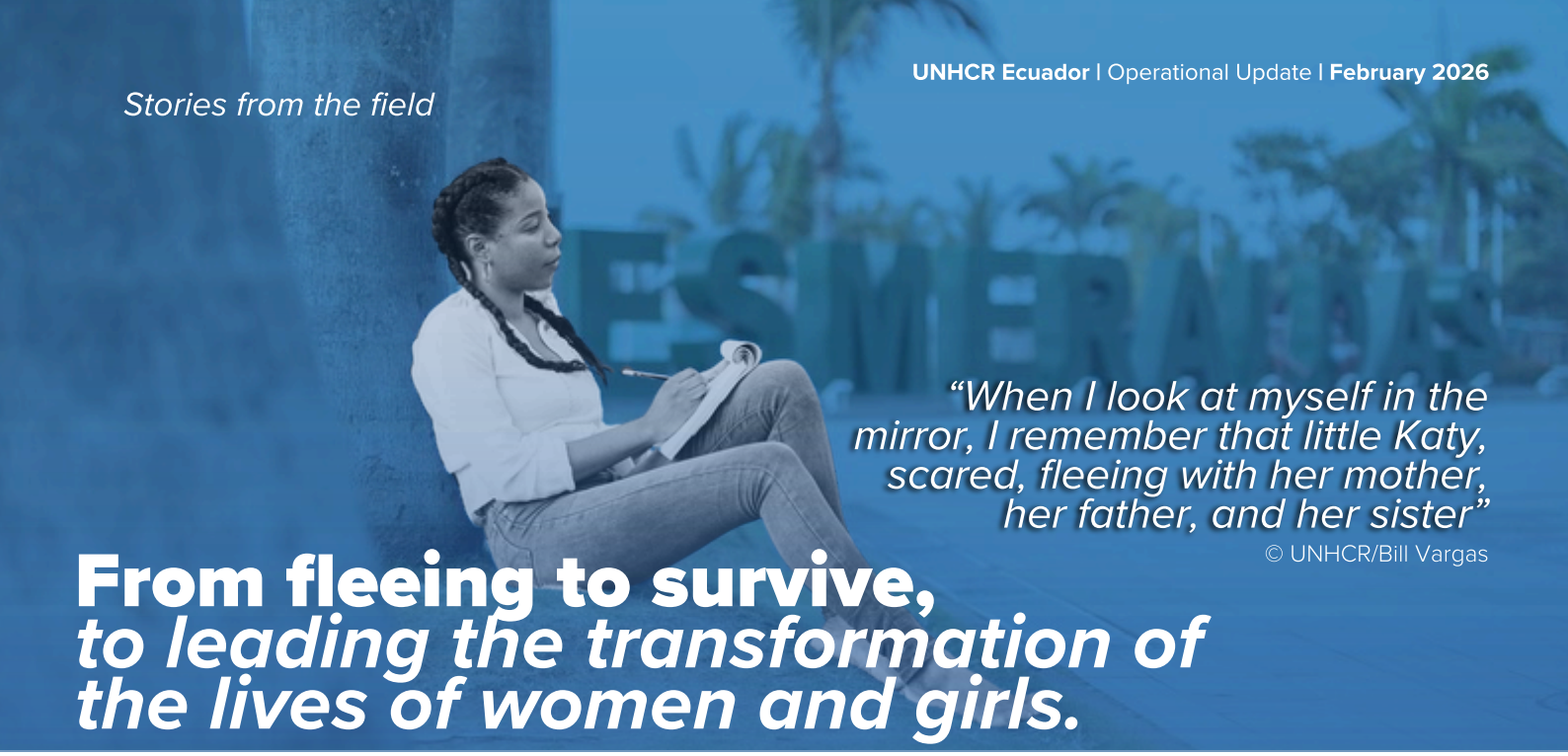
In Manta, 38 entrepreneurs opened savings accounts with local banking institutions, an important step toward financial inclusion. Having access to bank accounts allows them to better manage their business finances, carry out transactions more securely, and access new opportunities to strengthen their enterprises.

MANTA

Digital and AI Tools to Strengthen Livelihood Opportunities

In Manta, UNHCR together with Fundación Corazón de Cristal and the programme Emprender para Crecer supported 60 entrepreneurs in strengthening their businesses through the use of artificial intelligence tools. Through these training spaces, participants explored new ways to enhance their ideas and improve the management of their enterprises, integrating technology as an ally to help their projects grow.

Stories from the field



"When I look at myself in the mirror, I remember that little Katy, scared, fleeing with her mother, her father, and her sister"

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From fleeing to survive, *to leading the transformation of the lives of women and girls.*

Katy, is a young Colombian refugee and community leader in Esmeraldas, in northern Ecuador. Violence in her hometown in Colombia disrupted her normal childhood, forcing her family to leave to protect their lives. "I went from playing barefoot to packing our bags to flee from violence, the same violence that took my friend while we were playing that day," she recalled.

The journey to Esmeraldas was by boat, a trip filled with uncertainty and countless questions. Their arrival was also difficult. They kept moving from one neighbourhood to the other because they could not afford stable housing. For her family, the support of UNHCR was key to guaranteeing access to documentation and rights. And over time, she began to feel part of the place that welcomed her. "I already feel like another Ecuadorian, without forgetting my roots." For Katy, accessing protection and opportunities allowed her to rebuild her life and contribute to her community.

Thanks to a scholarship, she was able to graduate with a degree in environmental science.

But the journey was not without pain: her mother passed away during her studies. "I had no motivation or energy for anything. Despite everything I went through, I made it," she says while remembering that difficult moment.

Today, Katy lives in Esmeraldas, a place that continues to receive people seeking protection while facing high levels of violence and urgent needs. From there, she decided to give back what she once received. She is part of the association Mujeres en Movimiento, which works to empower and promote the rights of women, provide a support network, as well as climate action activities, with the support of UNHCR and its partner FEPP. Being part of women's groups helped her cope with the loss of her mother and gave her the motivation to help others like her.

When asked how she sees herself today, she answers clearly: "Perseverant and strong. I live the present with intensity and with the motivation to seek justice and rights for everyone." Katy is an example that it is possible to rebuild lives and open paths so that other women and girls can be agents of change in their communities as well.

You can help us continue building a World of Possibilities for thousands of displaced people and their host communities in Ecuador. **Donate now.**

We thank the contributions of our donors

February 2026

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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