

# Ecuador

## Operational Update

N.2 | January 2024

### Figures at a glance

#### Population figures

**76,265**

Historical figure of refugees recognized by Ecuador<sup>1</sup>

**63,146**

refugees with active cases registered in ProGres<sup>1</sup>

**95%** from neighbouring Colombia



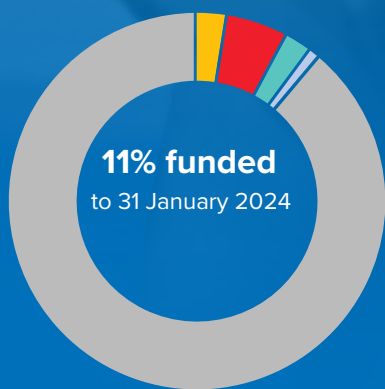
*María now can pursue her dreams in Ecuador. She creates content for different brands and has her own business to support her four children with her husband.  
Photo: UNHCR/Diego Ayala*

#### Our 2024 response in figures

**5,613**

refugees and other displaced people supported as of the end of January 2024\*

\* Partial figures reported by partners. Full figures will be updated in the next report.



**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](https://reporting.unhcr.org/ecuador)

**1,970** 

people received legal guidance & assistance

**966** 

people assisted with cash for basic needs & protection

**836** 

people supported with collective emergency shelter

**597** 

people supported with mental health and psychosocial support

**48** 

people linked with a decent employment opportunity

**565** 

GBV survivors supported

## Operational context

Ecuador started the year with turmoil, with several episodes of violence during the first weeks of January, which led the Government to install a state of emergency and to declare the existence of an internal armed conflict in the country to fight against organized crime. For several weeks, many schools remained closed, and the military and police were ordered to carry out operatives to apprehend members of over 22 criminal gangs. The Ministry of the Interior issued a Ministerial Agreement requiring foreign citizens entering through the borders with Peru and Colombia to present the Certificate of Criminal Record of the country of origin or residence during the last five years, duly apostilled, with exceptions made for certain profiles, including asylum seekers.

This upsurge in violence and insecurity in the country, increasing for the past years but exacerbated in January, has had an impact in the entire population, with reports of extortions, attacks and recruitment affecting both Ecuadorians and refugees. In January, Ecuadorians continued to be within the top 5 nationalities transiting through the Darien jungle.

In the meantime, Ecuador continued to receive people in need of international protection, including Colombians who have continued to seek asylum in an increasing trend since 2022. With ongoing violence in neighbouring Colombia, UNHCR expects the number of people forced to flee Colombia to continue rising during the year.

UNHCR, the Agency with the largest presence in the field across Ecuador, continues to work with local and national authorities, community-based organizations, partners, people forced to flee and Ecuadorians to respond to needs of all, particularly in the current context of violence. This includes engaging in community-based protection and integration initiatives, safeguarding international protection standards and facilitating access to basic services, to ensure everyone has the possibility of contributing to build resilient communities.

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

### Venezuelans

Venezuelans continue to lead in numbers of arrivals in Ecuador. 10,265 people entered Ecuador in January 2024, with a daily entry average of 342 Venezuelans, compared to exit figures registering 13,800 and 460 daily exits on average. This represents a 46% decrease in entries and a 35% increase in exits as compared to the same period in 2023.

**474,945** Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador<sup>2</sup>

**45%** estimated to be between 18 and 45 years old<sup>3</sup>

**25%** estimated to have a higher education degree<sup>3</sup>

### Main needs

**82%** access to food<sup>3</sup>

**67%** access to housing or shelter<sup>3</sup>

**57%** access to livelihoods or employment<sup>3</sup>

### Colombians

Colombians continue to flee their country in search of safety in Ecuador. 464 Colombians were registered in need of international protection so far in 2024, 75% of whom were families with children. This accounts for a 27% increase as compared to the same period in 2023.

**464** Colombians were registered in need of international protection in 2024<sup>2</sup>

**464** were registered in January

### Main needs of Colombians in Ecuador

**81%** access to food, housing, clothing<sup>4</sup>

**12%** access to employment and services<sup>4</sup>

**5%** access to documentation<sup>4</sup>

### Ecuadorians

The number of Ecuadorians on the run has increased in the past years, with over 80.000 having crossed the Darien jungle since 2022, 2,208 in January 2024<sup>5</sup>. Nearly **70.000 Ecuadorians exited** through the land borders in 2023 and have not returned. Moreover, 46.000 Ecuadorians have lodged **asylum claims** in the world by the end of 2023.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Fifth R4V Joint Needs Assessment. [www.r4v.info](http://www.r4v.info)

<sup>4</sup> 2022 Protection Monitoring available at our [data portal](#)

<sup>5</sup> Figures issued by [Migration Authorities in Panama](#) by end of January 2024

# SPECIAL FOCUS: REGULARIZATION PROCESS

The broad Registration and Regularization exercise has been key in enabling the needs of this population to be met and to advance solutions as part of a broader protection and socioeconomic integration strategy.

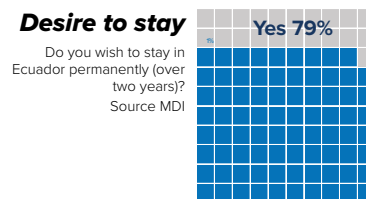
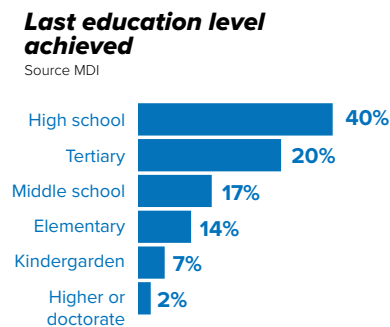
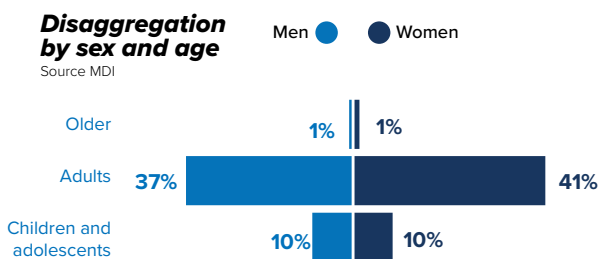
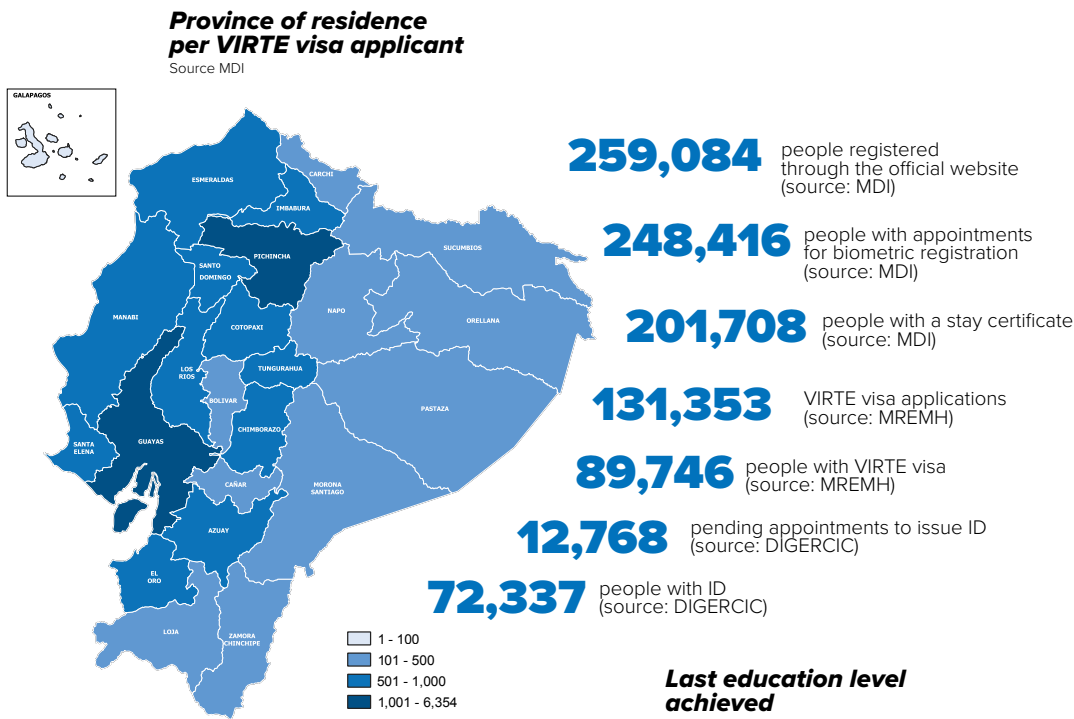
As provided by Decree 436/22, the first phase of the Registration and Regularization initiative started in 2022, with the registration of foreigners living in Ecuador with an irregular status, together with the opportunity for them to obtain a temporary stay permit (Certificado de Permanencia Migratoria) that allows for a regular stay in the territory until a regularization option is made available.

The first phase of registration started registering and regularizing all Venezuelans who entered regularly prior to the issuance of the Decree with a VIRTE visa. Registration is also divided in phases: first, Venezuelans who entered

regularly beginning on 1 September 2022; second, people of all nationalities as of 16 November 2022; and third, all Venezuelans who entered irregularly beginning on 17 February 2023. The registration phase ended on 15 August.

Regularization of Venezuelans who entered regularly began on 1 October, while the process for other foreigners began on 12 July. By 23 February 2024, 131,353 visa applications had been lodged, 89,746 visas had been granted and 72,337 ID cards had been delivered.

Registration ended on 15 August, with 248,416 people having appointments for their biometric registration and over 201,708 people who have a stay permit, by 23 February 2024. With the regularization process ending in April 2024, UNHCR and its partners are increasing communication efforts to people who applied finish their requests for visa and documentation.



# DELIVERING PROTECTION

## NATIONAL

### Access to education in safe spaces facilitates community integration for people fleeing their homes



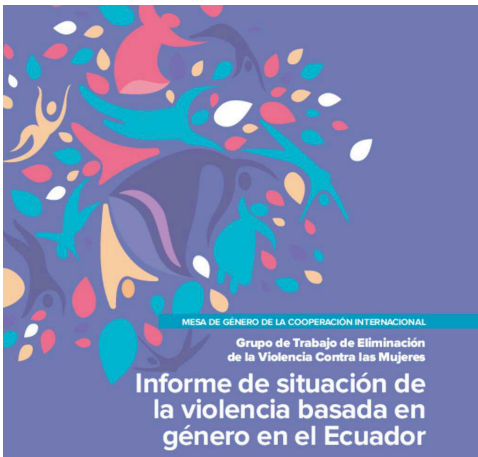
UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, met with the Ministry of Education to discuss issues related to access to the education system for refugee children and adolescents. One of the results of this meeting was an agreement to update the National Education Plan and educational policies to contribute to strengthening inclusion in schools in a protective environment for people in human mobility and the host community.



An agreement was also reached with the technical team of the Ministry of Women and Human Rights to update the 2024 work plan. This will include permanent training, monitoring in the field and technical advice that will contribute to protection in the context of insecurity and risks faced by refugees and Ecuadorians in the country.

## NATIONAL

### Report on the situation of gender-based violence in Ecuador contributes to decision-making for the protection of victims and survivors



The Working Group to Eliminate Violence Against Women of the Gender Table of the International Cooperation (MEGECI in Spanish) co-led by UNHCR issued a report about gender-based violence in Ecuador. This report's objective is to have an advocacy tool that synthesizes different studies and research to develop effective prevention and response strategies for this situation. The data calls for awareness and support for the defense of the rights of women and girls to promote significant changes.

Download the report [here](#).

## MANTA

### Mental health care for populations fleeing their countries is a basic need



In Manta, UNHCR and HIAS recognized the importance of community mental health promoters. They are now part of the response to reduce the gap in access to this type of medical care, as well as to prevent cases of gender-based violence.

The promoters are a significant contribution to their communities because they contribute to the emotional well-being of refugees and their host communities. They also promote resilience and confidence in the midst of the challenges that the population may face in the process of inclusion in the host country.

## HUACA

### Healthy environments for refugee children in Ecuador



In Huaca, Carchi province, 30 families in human mobility and Ecuadorians learned about early stimulation and the influence of caregivers on the psychological and emotional development of children. These workshops create awareness about responsible motherhood and fatherhood to avoid conflicts in the future mental health of their children and to give them the opportunity to develop in safe spaces with their families.

## PROMOTING ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

### IBARRA

#### Community Kitchen in Ibarra welcomes refugees daily

In Ibarra, UNHCR supports the work of the Community Kitchen which provides food assistance to more than 300 people among refugees, other forcibly displaced, and locals per day. To strengthen the response, UNHCR delivered hygiene supplies and tents to improve the capacity of the place. This community kitchen is a space of inclusion, cooperation, and collaboration for all people who receive food assistance while promoting the right to healthy nutrition and community participation.



### ESMERALDAS

#### Timely access to information saves lives

In Esmeraldas, UNHCR delivered informational material and condoms to strengthen the comprehensive response to HIV and to promote self-care in the community, based on awareness-raising about the risks of the disease and the importance of sexual health care to safeguard the personal well-being. As part of the same project and with the support of the Ministry of Public Health, UNHCR conducted a workshop on HIV-AIDS, aimed at 20 officials from the local protection system of the province.



### TULCÁN

#### 'Community Champions' promotes the integration of refugees

UNHCR and Fudela delivered nutritious food to 35 children and adolescents from the Community Champions programme in Tulcán. The goal is to contribute to the growth and motor development of all participants. These sports spaces are safe, free from violence, and provide new opportunities for personal growth. In addition, they promote the development of skills like teamwork, leadership, discipline, and awareness of the importance of sports for a healthy life.



## PROMOTING SOCIOECONOMIC INCLUSION

### CUENCA

#### Companies in Cuenca receive training on the rights of refugees and migrants



UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) held an awareness training for member companies of the Cuenca Chamber of Commerce. The aim of the workshop was to inform companies about the rights and obligations of refugees and migrants in Ecuador, with a special focus on the right to work. 19 representatives from various companies participated in the workshop, where they received information about the legal procedures for hiring refugees and migrants, as well as the benefits of including them in the workforce.

### SANTO DOMINGO

#### Tierra Tsáchila opens its doors to socioeconomic inclusion of refugees



The Tierra Tsáchila Commercialization Centre has opened its doors in Santo Domingo to offer the community a space where they can purchase products from 50 local entrepreneurs, 8 of whom are refugees or migrants. The initiative has had the support of UNHCR and the Prefecture of Santo Domingo, who collaborated in the formalization process of these businesses, an essential requirement to be part of the centre. UNHCR has also installed an inclusive display for the promotion and sale of products made by refugees and migrants.

### SAN LORENZO

#### Empowering displaced and Ecuadorians women through Entrepreneurship



In San Lorenzo, UNHCR, alongside "Hijas de la Caridad", launched the Entrepreneurship School. This training programme empowered 27 refugee and Ecuadorian women, equipping them with knowledge in entrepreneurship, access to the financial system, and business plan development. Additionally, they received guidance on protection and refugee issues. The graduates received a certificate and will partner in identifying new refugee entrepreneurs for inclusion in local associations and networks.

**PROMOTING PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE**

**NATIONAL**

**Social experiment reveals how Ecuadorians feel about xenophobia**



As part of the “Un Mundo Posible” initiative, UNHCR conducted a social experiment in which three Ecuadorians had to read the comments that a blind refugee (an actor) received on his social media posts. The overall response was rejection toward these comments. One of the participants said, “I would rather not read them and just delete them.” Another urged the refugee to “not pay attention; it is better to ignore this.”

The main idea behind this activity was to highlight how xenophobia in places like schools, jobs, neighbourhoods, internet can be a barrier for the intergration of refugees in their host communities. [Watch the full video.](#)

**NATIONAL**

**The Ministry of Sports joined UNHCR to promote sports and prevent violence in communities**



UNHCR held a meeting with the Ministry of Sports to establish a roadmap to jointly promote sports as a tool for community-based protection. UNHCR and the Ministry of Sports will carry out joint activities to make the sports spaces in communities and neighbourhoods safe places for refugees, other forcibly displaced people as well as Ecuadorians. In addition, the Ministry of Sports will collaborate with UNHCR to expand and establish partnerships with sports clubs and prominent athletes.

**EL ÁNGEL**

**UNHCR promotes diverse and inclusive access to rights**



17 employees from Hospital Básico El Ángel participated in a Repiramos Inclusión workshop where they learned tools to provide health services that are inclusive and non-discriminatory, ensuring appropriate treatment for all patients, regardless of their nationality.

The objective of this and other workshops conducted in various areas of Ecuador’s northern border is to raise awareness among officials so they can advocate for the rights and treat refugees, forcibly displaced people, and Ecuadorians with dignity.

## Stories from the field

# Turning a displacement experience into inspiration to create content for refugees

María is pursuing her dreams in Ecuador. She creates content for different brands and has her own business to support her four children with her husband. Photo: UNHCR / Coralia Proano

## HUAQUILLAS

María was only 17 years old when she was forced to leave her home in Venezuela. She left the country without her parents to leave behind insecurity and a lack of opportunities to continue her education. She arrived in Peru, but only stayed for three months. There, she experienced xenophobia for the first time. She had never experienced any form of discrimination based on her nationality before, but she struggled with job exclusion, document retention, and threats. She needed to find a more peaceful life, so she decided to move to Huaquillas, one of the cities most affected by the wave of violence in Ecuador. The situation of exclusion and vulnerability of her rights was similar there. María always considered herself very committed to her work, but she could not find a job due to discrimination.

“Thanks to a friend, I remembered that my mother knew how to make ice cream and I used to sell it in Venezuela, so she convinced me to call her and ask her how to make it. Without realizing it, my friend had used the little money I had left to buy all the ingredients, so I had no choice but to try my luck in this business,” explains María.

She never imagined the success she would have by selling ice cream. She started “Mari Bolos” in 2018 and her business was very well received by her customers. When she realized that she needed to promote her product, she discovered her passion for creating content and managing social media. People began to

recognize her in the city for her creative and fun way of making videos and engaging her audience with her charisma in front of the camera.

With that characteristic enthusiasm, María decided to join Dale Play, a collective of community influencers supported by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. This group is dedicated to disseminating key information through social media so that refugees in Ecuador can learn about their rights, obligations, and opportunities, to facilitate their integration into the country. Dale Play participants take advantage of these spaces of constant growth to strengthen their content creation skills and generate additional sources of income. For María, it is important to be a young voice that contributes to the knowledge of those seeking a home away from home. “When I arrived in Ecuador, there wasn’t much information available, I felt unprotected, and I realized that information is power. Helping people to better understand their rights is my contribution to the community,” she says.

Dale Play currently has 11 refugees and Ecuadorians, with each member contributing their skills and talent to turn this platform, over time, into a consolidated group that provides confidence and assistance to people who need it. “I have been in this group for 4 years, I feel nostalgia and emotion to see how we grow personally and professionally. More than friends, we are a family that always supports each other,” says María.

**You can help strengthen the work done by community groups like Dale Play.**

**Donate now.**

## We thank the contributions of our donors

31 January 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.**

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