UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Ecuador

Operational Update

N.1 | January 2025

Dariela made her dream of becoming a musician come true thanks to the regularization process. "Since I was a child I've been playingi music, I don't see myself doing anything else."
© UNHCR/Mireya Murgueytio

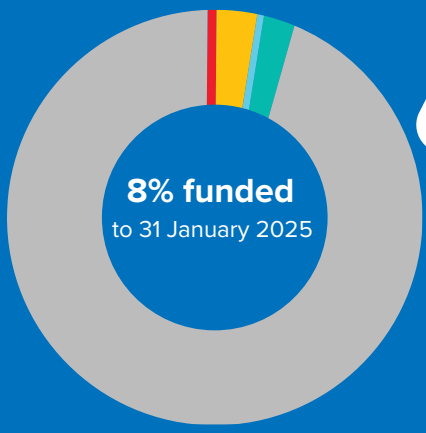
Figures at a glance

Population figures

78,629
Historical figure of refugees recognized by Ecuador[1]

95%
from neighbouring Colombia

66,429
refugees with active cases registered in ProGres[1]



73.3M
required in 2025

- 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 2025 response in figures

5,045*
refugees and other displaced people supported and registered in proGres as of the end of January 2025

2,346
people received legal guidance & assistance

777
people supported with collective emergency shelter

135
people supported with child protection services

10
people supported with community - based protection services

327
GBV survivors supported

923
people assisted with cash for basic needs and protection

958
people supported with mental health and psychosocial support

463
people received hygiene kits

10
people provided with technical or skills certification

13
people linked with a decent employment opportunity

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

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

Operational context

In January 2025, Ecuador's political landscape was dominated by preparations for the general elections scheduled for February 9, amid issues related to insecurity, public services, and a stagnated economic growth. Notably, several candidates emphasized the importance of combatting crime, of regularizing individuals in human mobility, highlighting the need for an inclusive system that safeguards human rights and promotes labour integration.

Amidst this political backdrop, Ecuador continues to host for a substantial number of displaced people, hosting nearly 500,000 refugees, asylum seekers, and others in need of international protection. This includes one of the largest recognized refugee populations in Latin America, primarily comprising people who have fled violence in neighbouring Colombia.

Between 2023 and 2024, the country experienced an influx of approximately 1,000 refugees and migrants daily from Venezuela, alongside Colombian asylum seekers. In 2024, in particular, Ecuador registered the largest number of Colombian asylum seekers on record in the past 10 years, with claims continuing to be lodged in January, generally consistent with the previous years. With deteriorating conditions in several parts of that country, UNHCR expects this number to grow in 2025, with asylum seekers arriving with dire humanitarian and protection needs.

These mixed movements often involve individuals vulnerable to sexual abuse, trafficking, and with limited access to essential services such as food, healthcare, and shelter, and take place amid increasing violence in the country. Notably, according to Government data, this first month recorded the highest number of violent deaths than in other years.

In response to these challenges, UNHCR's 2025 strategy in Ecuador focuses on saving lives by consolidating protection space through enhanced asylum capacities and bolstered government responses to specific protection needs. This includes supporting the implementation of regularization processes for people in irregular situations, predominantly Venezuelans who continue to face barriers in accessing the most basic services. Moreover, UNHCR continues to stay and deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance, offering basic aid to new arrivals and individuals with specific needs, primarily through direct cash assistance, in collaboration with partners. To ensure displaced people can stabilize their situation and rebuild their lives, UNHCR implements an area based strategy that ensures people access services and opportunities where they are. This includes facilitating durable solutions like local integration and economic inclusion to ensure sustainable livelihoods for displaced people and their hosts.

However, the continuation of these initiatives is heavily reliant on sustained donor support throughout 2025 to effectively provide protection and uphold the rights of refugees and displaced people in Ecuador.

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

Venezuelans

Venezuelans continue to lead in numbers of arrivals in Ecuador, though in declining numbers. 17,951 people entered Ecuador in January 2025 (1.5% less than the previous month), with a daily entry average of 579 Venezuelans. However, the most compelling trend is the exit figures which had a 36% drop as compared to the previous month (from 21,620 in December 2024 to 13,721 in January 2025), leaving a balance of just over 4,000 people who entered the country during the reporting period.

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, 347 Colombians sought asylum in Ecuador in January 2025, similar to the same month in 2023 (365) and 25% less than in 2024 (465). With 2024 registering the highest number of asylum claims filed by Colombians in Ecuador since 2014 and conditions worsening in the country of origin, UNHCR expects asylum claims to remain high in 2025.

347 Colombians who have sought asylum in Ecuador in 2025[2]

- **347** were registered in January

Main needs of Colombians in Ecuador

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

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

Ecuadorians

Trends in Ecuadorian displacements have shifted, with this nationality dropping to the fifth to cross the Darien Jungle, according to Panamanian authorities. 103,000 Ecuadorian asylum-seekers were pending a decision on their claims by mid-2024.

SPECIAL FOCUS: REGULARIZATION PROCESS

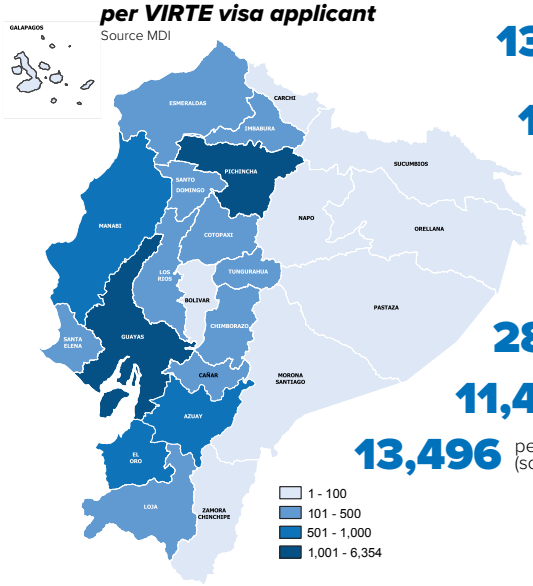
The Registration and Regularization process has been key to enabling refugees and migrants to meet their needs and promote solutions as part of a broader strategy of protection and socioeconomic integration.

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.

Following the signing of Executive Decree Number 370 of August 23, 2024, which established an amnesty process for Venezuelans in an irregular situation in the country, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility issued the ministerial agreements that give way to the processes for the renewal of the Migratory Permanence Certificate and the renewal of the VIRTE visa respectively. In addition, on November 19, 2024, Ministerial Agreement 115 was issued, which initiated the process of obtaining the VIRTE II visa, a process through which people would be regularizing their migratory status in the country. UNHCR continues to disseminate materials to communicate the continuity of the process which will end in April 2025.

Province of residence per VIRTE visa applicant

Source MDI



134,590 people registered through the official website (source: MDI)

130,726 people with appointments for biometric registration (source: MDI)

95,624 people with a stay certificate (source: MDI)

41,182 VIRTE visa applications (source: MREMH)

28,888 people with VIRTE visa (source: MREMH)

11,444 people with appointments to issue ID (source: DIGERCIC)

13,496 people with ID (source: DIGERCIC)

HUMANITARIANS AT WORK

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

Ecuador takes over regional framework to find solutions to the needs of refugees and migrants in the region

In 2025, Ecuador assumed the Pro-tempore presidency of the Quito Process, a platform of States searching for joint solutions to the needs of forcibly displaced people in Central and South America. In its functions, Ecuador hosted the first meeting to present a Concept Note to address mixed movements, which will guide joint efforts in meeting specific needs of people forced to flee. As a result, Quito Process will prioritize: a) Migration regularization and access to documentation; b) Socioeconomic and cultural integration and the elimination of discrimination and xenophobia; c) Primary care for forcibly displaced people and survivors of violence; d) Strengthening national asylum or refugee systems and international protection.

MANTA

Protecting the Future: A safe haven for children and adolescents

In Manta, alongside the Prefecture of Manabí and Fundación Santa Martha, UNHCR, with the financial contribution from Japan, supported the adaptation and equipping of Casa Madriguera, a temporary shelter that provides protection for displaced children and adolescents, as well as Ecuadorian survivors of violence. This safe space is essential to ensuring their well-being, strengthening their resilience, and fostering integration into their host communities.

TULCÁN

Identity and rights: A key step towards inclusion and belonging

Two people from the Awá indigenous community obtained their citizenship ID in Tulcán. Together with the Public Defender's Office and FUDELA, UNHCR supported this crucial process that enables them to access essential services, exercise their rights, and register their children in Ecuador. This achievement strengthens protection and autonomy for displaced communities and those at risk of statelessness. This was done with the support from Canada and ECHO. Learn more about this story.

PROMOTING ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

MACHALA

Dignified access to basic services for displaced people

UNHCR continues to strengthen safe spaces for those in need. In Machala, UNHCR made improvements to the Cáritas shelter by upgrading rooms, the kitchen, bathrooms, corridors, and common use areas. These enhancements not only expand its capacity but also ensure dignified access to essential and humanitarian services for people forced to flee.

TULCÁN

A safe haven for women and their children

In Tulcán, UNHCR donated mattresses to Casa de Mujeres Manos Unidas, reinforcing this vital space that provides well-being, protection, and a safe shelter for women and their children. This contribution helps ensure dignified conditions and access to essential support services for those facing vulnerabilities.

Stories from the field

Venezuelan musician fulfilled her dream of studying music in Ecuador thanks to regularization process

"Since I was little, I have been making music; I can't see myself doing anything else. I want to learn and teach about music." © UNHCR/Camila Tunjano

QUITO

Dariela Camino, a 22-year-old Venezuelan musician, fulfilled her dream of studying music in Ecuador through the country's regularization process. After living in Peru for three years, she and her family moved to Ecuador, where she found better opportunities for higher education. However, their early years were difficult, as they had only their passports, limiting access to essential services like university admission, medical care, and employment. "Since I was little, I have been making music; I can't see myself doing anything else. I want to learn and teach about music," she shared.

Her life changed in 2022 when Ecuador introduced a regularization process, allowing her to obtain a VIRTE visa and an identity card. This enabled her to meet university admission requirements, and after two attempts, she secured a spot at the Central University of Ecuador to study the cello. "Being regularized allowed me to dream big and say: I want to be a Bachelor of Music," she said. Despite the struggles, she remained determined, knowing that legal status was key to achieving her goals. "Music is truly my thing."

In 2024, as her visa neared expiration, Ecuador launched a new regularization process under Decree 370, allowing those in irregular status to renew their documents. Wanting to avoid last-minute complications, Dariela and her family prepared carefully, relying on official sources to navigate the process smoothly. "It was important for us to access official information from reliable sources because some people try to profit without knowing the full process. Trusting official sources is best," she advised. After submitting the necessary documents and resolving minor issues, she successfully renewed her visa and identity card.

Regularization not only secured Dariela's education but also benefited her family—her father found stable work, and her mother accessed specialized healthcare. Feeling more secure, she now looks to the future with optimism, dreaming of teaching cello in Europe. "Wherever we go, we believe in regularizing our status—it's a way of telling the country and community that we are here and have a voice. It plants the seed for achieving your goals and opens doors," she reflected.

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

31 December 2024

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