

"I close my eyes and see a place where people welcome and support each other."
-Steven.

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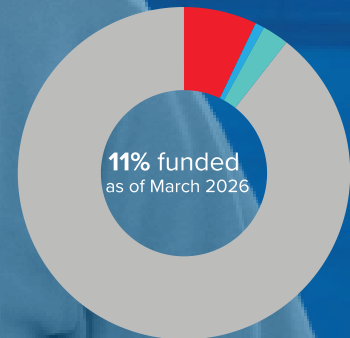
Ecuador

Operational Update
March 2026
No.3

Figures at a glance

Population figures

81,351 **94%**
Historical figure of refugees recognized by Ecuador ² 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

15,097 refugees and other displaced people supported and registered in proGRES as of the end of March 2026



1802

people supported with community - based protection services



2381

people supported with collective emergency shelter



34

people assisted to cover their basic needs and protection



633

people received hygiene kits



1988

people supported with mental health and psychosocial support



109

people linked with a decent employment opportunity



2272

people received legal orientation & assistance



10

people provided with technical or skills certification

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

Operational context

In March, rising insecurity, environmental shocks, and cross-border disruptions deepened displacement and humanitarian needs. Despite these challenges, ongoing efforts to provide protection and solutions continue to help displaced populations navigate risks and sustain access to support across the country.

Displacement risks are driven by insecurity, environmental shocks, and mobility restrictions. In Eloy Alfaro, Esmeraldas, approximately 400 members of the Chachi community were forcibly displaced following threats from armed groups. Individuals relocated to nearby rural communities and other provinces, with urgent humanitarian needs identified. UNHCR convened the local GTRM and shared information with the National Secretariat for Risk Management to support activation of state response mechanisms.

Escalating trade restrictions and tensions between Ecuador and Colombia continue to affect mobility and cross-border livelihoods where people have been left stranded and exposed to irregular corridors and smuggling networks. This situation has affected northern economies, prompting calls for peaceful mobilizations along the border. Also, in northern Ecuador, migration control operations have resulted in deportations of foreign nationals and ongoing raids. UNHCR, in collaboration with the Public Defender’s Office, continues to support with legal assistance to those requiring international protection.

At the same time, the security environment remained volatile, marked by renewed exceptional measures under a national strategy, including a 30-day state of exception across nine provinces, curfews, and intensified operations targeting criminal economies, affecting mobility, access to services, and livelihoods. United Nations human rights mechanisms reiterated the need to ensure civilian protection and respect for human rights during operations.

Severe rains, flooding, river overflows, and landslides deteriorated humanitarian conditions nationwide, generating displacement and repeated evacuations, leading to a 60-day state of emergency. According to the National Secretariat for Risk Management, more than 47,000 people were affected nationwide, with 11 fatalities and damage to homes, schools, and hospitals. For example, in Guayas, 20 of 24 cantons reported impacts, with 62 emergencies and more than 7,000 families affected, while in Esmeraldas, flooding and landslides affected at least 3,107 people and displaced around 2,500 people. No disaggregated data is available for people in human mobility. However, displaced populations faced loss of their houses, assets, and increased protection risks. UNHCR coordinated with the National Secretariat for Risk Management and provided emergency support, including eight tents to the Ministry of Human Development, and remains ready to expand assistance. Additionally, environmental impacts in Esmeraldas included a diesel spill that led to a 48-hour suspension of water services and a second refinery fire in 2026, raising concerns about contamination, public health, and maintenance of oil infrastructure.

UNHCR continues working with government institutions, local authorities, and partners to support affected communities, strengthening resilience and expanding access to protection and solutions so people can live safely and meet urgent needs. In this context, UNHCR remains present in high risk areas, staying close to communities as they face risks and rebuilding safer, more stable lives.

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

Colombians

According to government data, 330 Colombians sought asylum in Ecuador in March 2026 (686 in 2025), an approximate 43% 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 face multiple protection needs, particularly children at risk (28.2%), followed by gender-based violence (9.5%), disability (9.3%), and women at risk (7.9%), reflecting overlapping vulnerabilities and multiple needs within the same families. 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 asylum claims in 2026.

330 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, 18,500 people entered the country in March 2026 (0.8% more than the previous month), with a daily entry average of 616 Venezuelans. 17,630 people left the country, a 0.8% increase as compared to the previous month, leaving a balance of 870 people who entered and remained in the country during the reporting period.

According to government data, 778 Venezuelans sought asylum in Ecuador in March 2026 (1,732 in 2025), very similar compared to the same month in 2025. The current number of Venezuelan asylum seekers accounts for 67% 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 Ecuador²
45% estimated to be between 18 and 45 years old
25% estimated to have a higher education degree

Main needs³
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



I AM ANA RUBIELA. I HAVE WORKED WITH UNHCR FOR 20 YEARS, INSPIRED BY MY PERSONAL AND FAMILY JOURNEY. MY COLOMBIAN PARENTS ARRIVED IN ECUADOR THROUGH HARDSHIP AND OPPORTUNITY, AND AT HOME I LEARNED THAT WELCOMING OTHERS CAN CHANGE LIVES. SINCE JOINING UNHCR IN 2006, I HAVE GROWN ALONGSIDE COLLEAGUES AND REFUGEES, LEARNING FROM THEIR RESILIENCE. WORKING WITH PEOPLE HAS BEEN MY GREATEST PAIN AND REBUILDING. FOR THIS REASON, I TRAINED IN EMOTIONAL FIRST AID, TO SUPPORT MY COLLEAGUES IN MOMENTS OF STRESS AND STRENGTHEN THE TEAM. IN TULCÁN, I CARED FOR MY MOTHER DURING HER ILLNESS. TODAY, I HONOR HER BY CARING FOR MYSELF AND SUPPORTING OTHERS.

[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.**

NATIONAL

Supporting emergency response during the winter season

In response to the winter season, UNHCR coordinated closely with the National Secretariat for Risk Management and other government institutions to support emergency response efforts. As part of this coordination, UNHCR provided emergency assistance, including the delivery of eight Refugee Housing Units and over 15 tents, to strengthen local response capacities and support affected populations. Through this joint work, UNHCR contributes to the overall State response, ensuring a timelier and coordinated response for communities impacted by weather-related shocks.



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

TULCÁN, SAN LORENZO, LAGO AGRIO

Expanding access to protection through mobile outreach across the northern border

Across the northern border, bringing services closer to people to strengthen registration, identification, and protection for newly arrived populations remains a core UNHCR priority. These efforts are implemented through coordinated mobile outreach with [DD1] humanitarian actors and public institutions, including NRC and the Public Defender’s Office. In Carchi, UNHCR supported 39 people with visa processes and documentation, while registration services reached 46 people with critical needs and WFP provided food assistance to 17 families. In San Lorenzo, a mobile protection desk facilitated access to asylum and legal orientation. In parallel, UNHCR conducted a registration and protection desk in El Coca and joined missions in Puerto El Carmen, Putumayo, reaching 33 people over two days. These interventions strengthen identification, access to asylum, and protection services in border areas.

[DD1]NRC is no longer our partner



TULCÁN, MONTUFAR AND LAGO AGRIO

Strengthening PSEA and protection capacities across the northern border and Andean Axis

UNHCR engaged in the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and protection standards through multiple capacity-building sessions tailored to local actors across Tulcán, Montúfar, Ibarra, and Lago Agrio. In Tulcán, sessions with shelters CMAIT and CAMUTP addressed mental health, self-care, and PSEA, strengthening protection in shelter services. In Montúfar, technical teams from the Prefecture of Carchi, Fundación Luz y Vida, and the Casa de la Juventud received PSEA training to reinforce risk prevention. In Ibarra, the Protection Group of the GTRM strengthened capacities to respond to protection cases, while in Lago Agrio, PSEA and international protection sessions reached 36 public health servants. These sessions strengthen PSEA awareness across partners and local institutions as a core component of protection, improving service delivery and reinforcing safer, more accountable services for displaced populations and vulnerable host communities.



CARCHI

Promoting safe spaces through sport in Carchi

In San Gabriel, Carchi, UNHCR and partners launches the project Swing de Esperanza, marking an important step in strengthening safe, inclusive spaces through sport. The initiative engaged 50 children and adolescents from communities in human mobility and host communities. With the support of LIV Golf, this effort expands the role of sport and golf as tools for inclusion and protection, helping keep children and youth away from violence and promoting positive development.



MANTA

Strengthening protection services in Manta

In Manta, UNHCR, together with Casa de la Niñez, HIAS, NRC, RET, and CISP, conducted a capacity-building workshop for new municipal staff, covering services and basic concepts of international protection and asylum to strengthen direct assistance to people in human mobility.



MANTA

Expanding access to health and information services in Manta

A medical outreach was conducted at the CDC Isabel Muentes in San Eloy, in coordination with CISP, where 40 people received consultations, guidance, and medication. Information on access to rights, available services, and regularization processes was also provided, strengthening integrated support to the population.



GUAYAQUIL

Promoting psychosocial wellbeing through sport-based activities in Guayaquil

In Guayaquil, UNHCR partner CDH conducted a vacation activity combining reflection and play, where children expressed their dreams through writing and participated in an improvised golf circuit. The activity provided a safe and engaging space, integrating psychosocial support and sport in an accessible way. UNHCR thanks LIV Golf for supporting this initiative.



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.

LAGO AGRIO, SUCUMBÍOS

Strengthening youth participation and planning in Sucumbíos

UNHCR, together with Sucumbíos Solidario, provided technical support during dialogue and working sessions with the Comité de Juventudes Diversas de Sucumbíos and its 23 youth organizations. During these sessions, young participants contributed to the development of the Strategic Plan of the Provincial Youth Committee and the Guide for the creation of the Provincial Technical Youth Platform.



MANTA

Promoting inclusive markets through business linkages in Manta

In Manta, UNHCR, together with IMPAQTO and the Municipality of Manta, organized the Compra con Propósito business roundtable. 17 representatives of school canteens from public and private institutions learned of products from 20 forcibly displaced and Ecuadorian entrepreneurs, engaging in negotiation sessions to expand their access to local markets.



TULCÁN & IBARRA

Strengthening livelihoods through skills development in northern Ecuador

In Tulcán, HIAS continued the Ideas that Grow project, implemented with UNHCR and the Prefecture of Carchi, with training on social media management and soft skills. A total of 19 people participated, including 12 Venezuelans, 1 Colombian, and 6 Ecuadorians. In parallel, in Ibarra, a CV development workshop was held at the Casa de la Juventud with youth from the Campeones Comunitarios programme, in coordination with FUDELA, UNHCR, GTRM, the GAD Ibarra, and national ministries, reaching 15 young people aged 18 to 23. These complementary activities, implemented with different partners, strengthen employability, promote inclusion, and support sustainable income opportunities for displaced populations and host communities.





A Community that Welcomes: Weaving Hope and Belonging in Sauces 3

Steven's empathy is the driving force behind integration in his community

© UNHCR/Bill Vargas

Sauces 3 has become home to many forcibly displaced people who have found a safe space to rebuild their lives. In this process, Steven's work has been key in strengthening coexistence and social cohesion in the neighborhood.

"At first, people were well received, but as arrivals increased, tensions and mistrust began to grow within the local community," Steven recalls, referring particularly to the arrival of Venezuelans. "I had to tell them that these people are looking for a better life. We should support them and be grateful that we are not living what they are going through." With this message, he began building bridges between neighbors and promoting a more supportive outlook.

Steven began his community work through a neighborhood football team, where he first became involved with youth activities. Over time, he joined the Sauces 3 Neighborhood Committee, where he now serves as president. In this role, he leads initiatives in safe spaces focused on violence prevention, promoting sports, and creating opportunities for inclusion for children, youth, and adults.

The Sauces 3 Community Center has become the heart of these efforts.

There, Ecuadorians, refugees, and displaced people access training courses, develop small businesses, and participate in community activities. It is a vibrant space where everyone is welcome, regardless of where they come from.

Through training with organizations such as UNHCR, Steven and the committee members have strengthened their knowledge of rights and protection pathways in Guayaquil. This allows them to support access to services and rights like asylum, food, housing, and education. His commitment and close connection to the community have made him a trusted leader.

The Community Center has also been a key space for UNHCR and its partners, who have delivered workshops on various topics and made physical improvements to the facility. These efforts have strengthened the conditions for community activities and helped keep the neighborhood active and connected.

Through this leadership, Steven and his team are transforming their community. "I close my eyes and see a place where people welcome and support each other. I see people talking, children and young people playing and sharing," Steven says, envisioning a future built on solidarity.

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

March 2026

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UNHCR Ecuador is grateful for the support from private donors

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