UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Ecuador

#WithRefugees

CLIMATE CHANGE PLAN OF ACTION (2023-2025)

UNHCR Ecuador

Background

The Americas region faces unprecedented levels of forced displacement, largely because of the deteriorating situation in Venezuela, the increasing violence, insecurity, and instability in several parts of Central America and the continued effects of conflict and violence in many regions of Colombia (mostly in border areas with Venezuela and Ecuador). The impact of climate change has aggravated the situation of displaced populations and communities at risk of displacement, further deteriorating their vulnerabilities and increasing mobility. There are opportunities for UNHCR to engage with other actors including the IFIs to address the causes, impact and responses of climate change and displacement.

Ecuador is party to the UN Convention on Climate Change and has subsequently developed its national strategy on climate change (2021-2025). The strategy provides for concerted and coordinated actions to adapt and mitigate climate change. According to the UN Country Common Assessment (CCA), the situation related to climate change in Ecuador is concerning. Ecuador is very vulnerable to the effects of climate variation and climate change. Climate change affects all segments of the population, especially the ones living in poverty and extreme poverty which includes most people of concern to UNHCR. Ecuador is currently in the process of developing a national plan for adaptation to climate change that will allow for territorial planning as well as reduction of climate vulnerabilities in six prioritized areas; many of them are relevant to PoCs such as: health, human settlements (housing), productive and strategic sectors, food security, agriculture, cattle industry, and fishery. According to the source, the populations which will be mostly affected by climate change are those located in the coast, the Amazon area as well as those in the Andean region where most people of concern are located.

Climate change within the 2023-2025 country strategy

Ecuador is mainstreaming climate change within its operation, to reduce UNHCR's environmental footprint, as well to support initiatives and programmes that mitigate the impact of climate change. In its 2023-2025 country strategy, the operation is focusing on the objectives of the UNHCR Strategic Framework for Climate Action as follows:

A- Improving the impact of our operational footprint

1) Operational management: improving climate change actions in Office management

- Monitor electricity consumption
- Gradual shifting to electric cars (where feasible)
- Distribute reusable water bottles and cups with UNHCR logo
- Switch to 100% recycled paper for printing
- Remove individual printers and deploy central printers
- Ensure generator capacity (Lago Agrio) corresponds to office power needs and guarantee regular maintenance, and consider switching to solar through the Green Fund

2) Supply: Apply a circular procurement lens in procurement planning (4 R's: Reducing, Reusing, Repairing & Refurbishing and Recycling), considering aspects such as durability, reparability, resource efficiency, etc.

- Integrate sustainability in procurement processes, especially in TORs and evaluation criteria where feasible, i.e., referring to international standards (i.e. ISO 14001 for environmental management systems); using criteria from eco-labels and social labels; specifying more sustainable production and process methods, such as the use of renewable energy sources, plastic-free, recycled/recyclable or biodegradable materials, and plastic-free or recycled packaging (i.e. requiring the use of 70% recycled cardboard); requiring safety and disposal procedures for chemicals; requiring ground or ship transportation of goods over air, etc.
- Source responsible suppliers, including commitment to sustainability of the suppliers as part of the evaluation criteria and ensuring they have the necessary technical capacity, i.e., environmental management systems, etc.
- Assist vendors in becoming sustainable by offering guidance and training, i.e., by encouraging the compilation of a documented environmental management system, the use of 3rd party certifications for eco-labels, using renewable energy sources, monitoring carbon emissions to set reductions targets, complying to the environmental legislation, sourcing from sustainably managed sources, etc.

B- Mainstreaming climate in our protection and solutions interventions

Preserve and rehabilitate the natural environment and mitigate environmental degradation in displacement settings

Cash-based interventions

- Implementation of Cash Based Intervention is per se an action that reduces the impact in the environment, mainly because of the reduced logistic needs/costs of meeting the immediate needs of PoC. This is reflected in Ecuador operation with the provision of multipurpose cash grants through cash transfers which would otherwise require a significative logistical effort (procurement of food and NFI; warehouse and distribution) with connected environmental costs.

- UNHCR's plan for direct implementation of CBI will include the use of prepaid cards, which will reduce the impact as PoC won't need to move to distribution sites to collect the money. In addition, the operation is planning to ensure the presence of specific collection points for expired cards, which will be recycled.

- The operation will start the internal consultation to include the Cash and Environmental checklist to be used as reference for the operative response plan.

Enhance the resilience of displaced people and host communities to climate-related and other environmental risks

Shelter and infrastructure

All new shelter and infrastructure projects will be made with environmental sustainability in mind, building on our ongoing initiatives with Bamboo, alwaus aiming to strengthen community response to mitigate climate change.

Livelihoods

Promoting engagement of PoCs in green and circular economy, i.e., urban agriculture, sustainable food security initiatives; waste transformation, training to access green jobs.

The engagement of persons of concern in circular economies, access green jobs and the promotion of green entrepreneurship is part of the multiyear UNCHR results framework, which demands new thinking and approaches, as well as building new alliances with expert organizations.

During the past years in Ecuador, the government, the private sector and ONG sector, have stepped up a dialogue on climate action, especially regarding the reduction carbon emissions, mitigating climate change, and promoting economic responsible growth. For example, enterprises implement circular economy approaches in line with existing laws and the government is pushing forward the regulation about competency standards on green jobs. This enabling environment is an opportunity to boost UNHCR initiatives and enhance partnership with the private sector and specialized development actors.

Engaging with communities

Community based protection: raising climate change awareness among refugee´s and host communities, disaster risk reduction and inclusion of PoC´s in local plans and national frameworks.

- Involvement of PoC in the community contingency plans and preparedness initiatives regarding the potential disasters related to climate change (earthquakes, floods).

- Through CwC channels and other AAP instruments, raise community awareness about the impact of climate change, developing an environmental awareness and integrating it in education spaces.

- Through leadership empowerment of PoC and hosting communities, promote and support the engagement of PoCs in the mitigation of the impact of climate change (development of waste management community groups, recuperation of public green space initiatives, urban orchard, etc) as there are initiatives creating opportunities for social cohesion.

- Mainstreaming of climate change through the systematic prioritization of operational modalities that have a reduced environmental footprint, such as digital and virtual information instead of physical paper leaflets, the use of environmental materials in the construction of community structures, etc.

- Development of leaderships in the communities hosting PoCs, to promote self-management structures and social cohesion, CwC and AAP, with a reinforced focus to connectivity, digital alphabetization and environmental awareness and education

- Adequate the capacity of livelihoods team, partners and other stakeholders to promote green entrepreneurship and jobs, and to include circular economy principles into new and existing programs and activities. Rather than creating new systems, it is key to focus on designing solutions for existing ones, and to achieve this, implementing parties must have the knowledge and skills, as well as the sensibility to

identify opportunities for eco-innovation. Our initial exploration has already been able to identify key areas to focus our capacity building, and strategies to leverage existing capacities in our teams.

Strengthen preparedness, anticipatory action and response to support protection and solutions for people displaced and their hosts in disaster situations

Natural disaster response

Preparedness:

As mentioned above, the operation in Ecuador is already working to mitigate the impact of climate change on POCs and host communities, supporting their resilience to risks by promoting, with key stakeholders, the preservation and rehabilitation of natural environment and minimizing the environmental footprint. The operation will ensure its participation, bilaterally at national level and with the support of the GTRM (Grupo de Trabajo Migrantes y Refugiados) co-led by UNHCR and OIM at local level, in close interaction with the GADs (autonomous decentralized governments) in mechanisms led by the Risk Management Secretary (Secretaria de Gestion de Riesgos) to analyze risks and advocate for the inclusion of persons of concern in preparedness plans. Also, UNHCR will contribute with its protection, shelter, data and information management expertise. Within the Ecuador UN Country Humanitarian Team (EHP), UNHCR operation will comply with its cluster role to ensure that protection related concerns are addressed within the national and local disaster risk reduction measures. Additionally, UNHCR will continue to build the capacity to quickly mobilize the required assistance in response to emergencies.

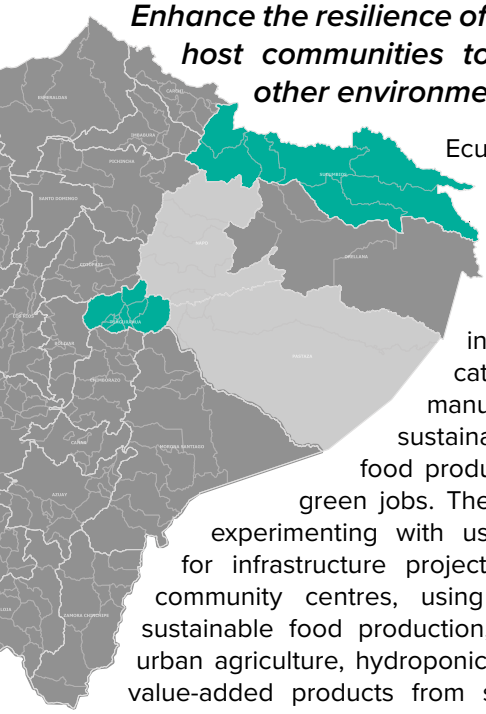
Response:

UNHCR Ecuador's response will take place within the EHP (Country Humanitarian Team), which is the inter-agency coordination response mechanisms for emergencies in Ecuador by leading the protection cluster. The response will be also supported at the local level by the GTRM. UNHCR will participate in developing and updating contingency plans including the prepositioning of resources and supply chain processes. Within the EHP, UNHCR will also play a strong advocacy role with national and local governments and development actors to promote and advocate, as early as possible, working and achieving sustainable solutions.

Current initiatives and good practices

A. Green Livelihoods

Enhance the resilience of displaced people and host communities to climate-related and other environmental risks



Ecuador's operation has already been supporting green livelihood's interventions in the past few years. Currently, most projects and activities fall into one of the following categories: production and manufacturing with recycled or sustainable materials; sustainable food production; and dignification of green jobs. The operation has also been experimenting with using sustainable materials for infrastructure projects such as shelters, and community centres, using bamboo for Regarding sustainable food production, projects revolve around urban agriculture, hydroponics, organic agriculture, and value-added products from sustainable farms. Finally, regarding green jobs, activities currently focus on improving skills, tools and labor conditions of recyclers. Efforts have been sporadic so far and moving forward will require deeper coordination of these programs, to ensure their sustainability and replicability beyond UNHCR interventions.

1. Recycling projects

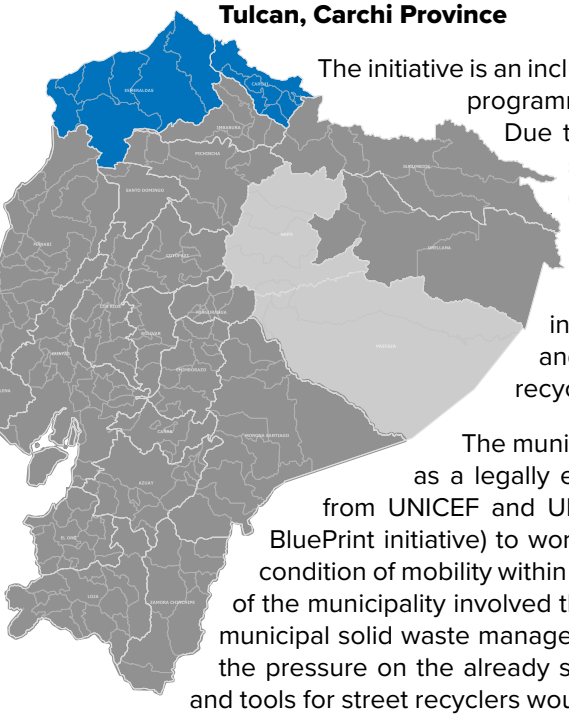
Sucumbíos, Nueva Loja Province

In Sucumbíos, Nueva Loja Province UNHCR is supporting the recovery of hydro sources and enhancing community work in Rio Orienco. The Project has community protection and livelihoods components by working with an association of recyclers planting trees, cleaning river basins and the construction of an infrastructure that will allow community integration. This initiative is being coordinated with the decentralized local government (GAD).

The livelihoods component includes producing textiles and sewing buttons (among other products) with recycled material. The initiative also includes organic gardens having products traded in Tiendas Amigas. There is also production of reusable ecologic sanitary and baby napkins, (WAMAK) that consist of bamboo construction and handcrafts, eco-friendly cosmetology products based on medicinal plants as well as use of local plants to generate super-foods such as Guayusa, Camucamu, etc).

Ambato, Tungurahua Province

With CorpoAmbato (institution attached to the Municipality working with economic development) the UNHCR field office is promoting a project called 360 Leather Conscious Cycles aiming at improving the living conditions of both producers and traders developing their capacities together with activities to use recycled materials in the leather industry. The project plans to set up ten (10) entrepreneurships focusing on producing and trade materials made of residual recycled leather.



Tulcan, Carchi Province

The initiative is an inclusive solid waste management and recycling programme in the border municipality of Tulcan. Due to the increasing migration from Venezuela since 2018 in Tulcán border municipality (north of Ecuador, border with Colombia), several refugees and migrants started to use recyclable solid waste as a source of income for subsistence. This created initially a source of conflict with the local and formally established organization of local recyclers of Tulcán.

The municipality, entity which has waste management as a legally established competency, requested support from UNICEF and UNHCR (who workd together as part of the BluePrint initiative) to work towards an integration of the recyclers in condition of mobility within the association of local recyclers. The vision of the municipality involved the integration of recyclers as well within the municipal solid waste management strategy, as recycling would decrease the pressure on the already saturated landfill. Better working conditions and tools for street recyclers would also increase efficiency and market value of the recycled waste and decrease the sources of conflict as there is still a very high potential to significantly increase the daily recuperation of recyclable waste in Tulcán municipality, as well as in the protected reserve areas, forest and rivers nearby.

UNICEF and UNHCR maintained strong local coordination to provide support to the municipality of Tulcán and the association of recyclers for this project, which resulted in improved peaceful coexistence among the refugee, migrant, and host community population. Financial resources, technical assistance, and the provision of essential supplies were the key strategies used in a complementary manner by UNICEF and UNHCR for this project, which resulted in a strong sense of innovation, sustainability, social and environmental responsibility within a context of humanitarian and development response for persons of concern and host community.

Esmeraldas Province

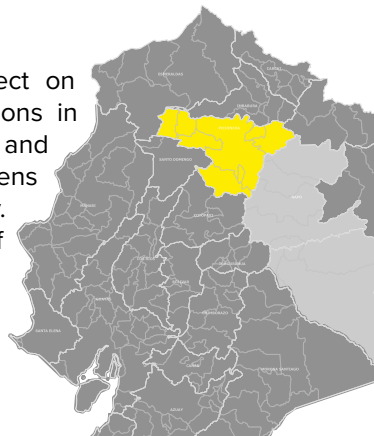
In 2022 in Esmeraldas, UNHCR set up an ecology point in Puerto Pesquero to support oil recycling to avoid spill of oil on soil and/or the sea. UNHCR donated materials to the merchant associations to implement brigades to maintain beaches clean. These associations are at the same time receiving training on classification of residual materials and combat the negative impact of micro-plastic in marine ecosystems. Besides the above-named associations, this initiative includes the GAD, Ministry of Tourism, OCEAN CLEAN and other local actors.

2. Reaching sustainable food security

Since 2020 in the cities of Esmeraldas, San Lorenzo and Pedernales UNHCR has been promoting initiatives to mitigate the impact of climate change together with local authorities, population of concern and host communities. These initiatives aim at promoting, together with local authorities in Esmeraldas and partner FEPP, food security (Proyecto Siembra tu comida) in a sustainable manner. Products are traded in food fairs called “from agro to your community” which also supports the livelihoods for both populations and peaceful coexistence as a mean of improving community-based protection.

Pichincha Province:

UNHCR Suboffice in Pichincha has been supporting a project on medicinal urban gardens at the City Museum engaging persons in human mobility and host community with a focus on agro-ecology and urban agriculture. The project foresees the redesign of the gardens and a co-management between PoCs and the hosting community. It will also allow for multicultural integration and dissemination of protection information.



B. Shelter and infrastructure

Preserve and rehabilitate the natural environment and mitigate environmental degradation in displacement settings

Since 2020-2021 UNHCR field offices the Esmeraldas and Lago Agrio have been promoting the use of Bamboo as the main material for construction of infrastructure projects such as shelters and community centers. UNHCR supported the construction, with bamboo, of a Multifunctional Beauty Center together with an of civil society organization CAEMBA. In Pedernales, UNHCR supported repairs in a multipurpose community center of an artisan production association called Sembrando Esperanza.

C. Community engagement

Enhance the resilience of displaced people and host communities to climate-related and other environmental risks

For 2020-2022 in the cities of Esmeraldas, Muisne and San Lorenzo, UNHCR in coordination with two UN agencies (UNDP, UNFPA) and two civil society organizations (FEPP and ALTROPICO) together with the Ministry of Environment, has been implementing capacity building to community networks and women groups on climate change. The UNHCR field office in Esmeraldas has been focusing on climate change impact on the social, environmental and economic situation in coastal communities where livelihoods are very much dependent on the use of natural resources.

Preserve and rehabilitate the natural environment and mitigate environmental degradation in displacement settings; and enhance the resilience of displaced people and host communities to climate-related and other environmental risks

D. New opportunities

Innovation Fund proposal on climate change (covering northern Ecuador)

Rural communities of Northern Ecuador, covering two of the world's most biodiverse ecosystems, face geographic and demographic barriers in mitigating and preparing for climate change risks. Physical isolation limited economic opportunities, low government investment, combined with high poverty rates, increase their climate vulnerability. Forced displacement related to the impacts of climate change and disasters is among the greatest global protection issue today. These rural communities have experienced cycles of forced displacement, compounded by long-term loss of community networks, livelihoods,

culture, language, as well as mental and physical health impacts. Most importantly, these areas are home to indigenous nations and small-scale agricultural or fishing communities. These cultures and their traditional knowledge face further risk from climate change, as displacement threatens their cultural survival. Increasingly, Northern Ecuador is also host to Colombian or Venezuelan refugees and migrants, who already face barriers to local integration, compounded by the risk of repeated displacement caused by climate change. UNHCR Ecuador has been working with various displaced communities in the provinces of Esmeraldas, Carchi, and Sucumbíos for more than 20 years. For this challenge UNHCR will work with five communities facing severe impacts of climate-change, risking their livelihoods, homes, communities, and ultimately long-term displacement. These communities are:

1. Pampanal, Esmeraldas – tropical costal monsoon, mangrove islands

2. Santa Rosa de Epera, Esmeraldas - tropical costal monsoon, river delta

3. Tulcan, Carchi – high altitude cold

4. El Chical Awa community, Carchi – cloud forest

5. Rio Orienco, Sucumbíos – tropical humid low-lands

These five communities have raised concern over the impacts of climate change during participatory assessments and ongoing protection monitoring, and have identified potential solutions based on indigenous and community knowledge to:

1. Mitigate the impact of heavy rains and sea-level rise through flood-prevention,

2. Build resilience from within the community through adaptation in livelihoods, housing, and community infrastructure and,

3. Promote sustainability through knowledge exchange and skills transfers grounded in female leadership, youth activism, and grassroots community communication networks.

UNHCR's objective will be to serve as a catalyst for five communities to support indigenous adaptation techniques in a changing climate by contributing to their goals to mitigate the impact of climate change, build resilience, and ensure sustainability.

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