

# Ecuador

**69,897 recognized refugees** between 1989 and July 2020, representing the largest population of recognized refugees in Latin America.<sup>1</sup>

Asylum claims pending decision at the end of 2019: **25,025**. New asylum claims (made between 1 January and 31 July 2020): **4,402**.<sup>2</sup>

**41% of funding needs** received by 8 September 2020.

## NORTH

1. Esmeraldas (FO)
2. San Lorenzo (FU)
3. Tulcán (FU)
4. Ibarra (FO)
5. Lago Agrio (FO)

## CENTRE

6. Quito (BO + FO)

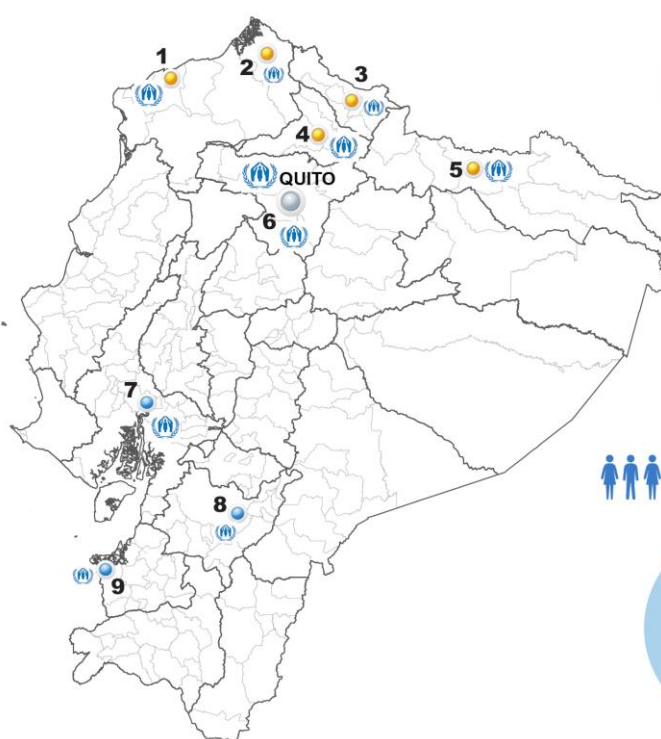
## SOUTH

7. Guayaquil (FO)
8. Cuenca (FU)
9. Huaquillas (FU)

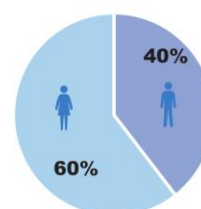
 UNHCR Branch Office (BO)

 UNHCR Field Office (FO)

 UNHCR Field Unit (FU)



 UNHCR STAFF **190**



## Operational context

Since 2000, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, works in Ecuador to protect and assist the largest population of recognized refugees (mainly Colombians) in Latin America and the Caribbean. Since 2016, more than five million Venezuelans have left their country. Of them, 2.2 million have entered Ecuador, of whom almost 400,000 are estimated to be staying in the country. At the time of writing, Venezuelans continue to cross the Ecuadorian-Colombian border.

### Venezuela Situation

Refugees and migrants, particularly those with specific at heightened risk, such as women, children, people with disabilities or those affected by chronic illnesses before the pandemic, are among the worst affected by the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. The vast majority work in the informal sector and lack a social safety net. They continue to struggle or are unable to cover their basic needs, such as rent and food. Many had already managed to emerge from poverty and run their own businesses, or held employment, but lockdown measures and a contracted economy have resulted in loss of income. Because of their inability to pay rent, many have been evicted from their homes and have ended up in the streets, where they are exposed to further risks and subject to xenophobia and discrimination.

### Colombia Situation

For several decades, the Colombian internal conflict forced many to leave their homes and search for security and peace in Ecuador. Despite the peace agreement signed between the Colombian Government and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2016, the number of people searching international protection in Ecuador has continued to grow, as violence takes other forms and new armed groups emerge. Those most vulnerable include children and adolescents, at risk of forced recruitment, human rights defenders, community leaders, and those who oppose the activities of the new groups. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a deep impact on their livelihoods and has significantly increased their vulnerabilities.

<sup>1</sup> and <sup>2</sup> Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility



## UNHCR Response

At the very beginning of the health emergency declaration (16 March), the Office prepared a business continuity plan and reconfigured its programme so as to continue providing protection and assistance and to ensure presence in the field, with all due health safeguards, and in full compliance with the measures imposed by the Government. Refugees continue to receive multi-purpose humanitarian assistance through remote cash-based interventions. Teams in the field are monitoring borders, distributing food and hygiene kits and protective equipment, supporting shelters around the country and strengthening health infrastructure. They are also progressively resuming interventions at community level, especially through a new epidemiological surveillance system to identify and refer vulnerable cases, including people of concern to UNHCR. UNHCR provides direct assistance in coordination with partners and disseminating information on access to the asylum system and services. Alongside host governments (at national and local levels), partner organizations, civil society, development actors and UN Agencies, UNHCR undertakes the following activities:

### Protection

- Through protection monitoring, UNHCR is systematically retrieving information on protection gaps and risks at the borders and other locations with high presence of people of concern. UNHCR and partners also assess protection needs and risks of people of concern through diverse means, including rapid needs and participatory assessments, and information collected from hotlines and call centres.
- UNHCR works with the Government and partners in the development of public policies, standard operating procedures and training in several areas such as refugee status determination, access to justice, access to education, sexual and gender-based violence, work with LGBTI and other vulnerable populations and child protection.
- UNHCR continues to provide technical and financial support to strengthen the asylum system with regard to registration, case management and the application of protection standards, and works in close collaboration with the Public Defender's Office and the Ombudsman's Office to ensure that people of concern have access to justice. UNHCR has provided the Ministry of Government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility with technical advice and material and staff support for the registration and regularization processes.
- UNHCR has strengthened partners' capacity to implement alternative care modalities for children and adolescents, with special focus on autonomy processes for unaccompanied adolescents. This is done in coordination with key actors from the national child protection system, which allows UNHCR to advocate for the establishment of a legal framework to regularize and standardize alternative care modalities in Ecuador. UNHCR addresses the risk of sexual and gender-based violence through survivor-centred procedures ensuring that survivors are provided with material

and psycho-social assistance. The Office strengthens local protection networks for the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence, especially through the Protection coordination group.

- Other protection interventions also aim at ensuring that people at higher risk of violence and exploitation - including unaccompanied and separated children, women and girls survivors of sexual violence, LGBTI+ individuals, people engaging in survival sex and people with disabilities- are properly identified and referred to specialized partners.
- In the context of the pandemic, UNHCR has increased its multi-purpose cash assistance to help cover the basic needs of refugees and migrants. In 2020, UNHCR has supported 13,902 refugee and migrant families through the delivery of multi-purpose cash grants that will act as an emergency safety net against loss of income related to COVID-19.

### Community Engagement

- UNHCR works closely with refugee and host communities, supporting refugee-led organizations and community-based organizations working with people at higher risk. UNHCR also works with communities and local governments to increase connectivity by expanding public Wi-Fi services in key localities, providing data packages for community leaders and people at higher risk to ensure they can communicate, and are able to access education.
- Together with our partner ALDHEA, UNHCR has developed safe digital spaces for adolescents and youth who engaged on the development of media content to keep their peers and communities informed during the COVID-19 lockdown. UNHCR and ALDHEA have also supported six initiatives through community funds to promote peaceful coexistence.

### Shelter and Core-relief Items

- UNHCR is actively engaging with the National Emergency Operations Committee (COE) and ensures that the delivery of humanitarian assistance is in line with national and local emergency response strategies. UNHCR co-leads the coordination mechanism for shelter and is advocating for the inclusion of people of concern in national shelter responses. UNHCR's shelter team is providing technical support to national emergency teams around the country.
- Forty-three shelters supported by UNHCR continue to be active under this pandemic and provide emergency shelter to women and children at risk, members of the LGBTI community, and vulnerable families.
- Since the onset of the COVID-19 emergency, UNHCR has installed 121 refugee housing units (RHUs) in 45 health centres, 16 hospitals and three temporary accommodation centres to be used as resting, triage and isolation areas according to protocols for COVID-19. In addition, the Office has supported 55 shelters and public institutions with hygiene kits, personal protection equipment, rehabilitation, management support and training. UNHCR has mapped local suppliers and the availability of local items at national and local levels. Twelve UNHCR partners are distributing core relief items throughout the country to respond to increased needs.



### Self-Reliance and Durable Solutions

- UNHCR pursues local integration by promoting self-reliance and resilience for people of concern, especially women at risk of sexual and gender-based violence, and by facilitating their access to rights, services and livelihoods. In partnership with the private sector, state institutions, banks, Academia, UN agencies and others relevant partners, UNHCR is supporting access to labour markets, financial services, training and entrepreneurship opportunities for refugees and vulnerable host communities.
- Since 2015 the Graduation Model, a poverty-alleviation programme successful in many low-income countries and implemented with our partner HIAS, has been successful in lifting some 10,750 families out of extreme poverty. The model has been adapted to the Ecuadorian context, by partnering with the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion to connect families accordingly to social protection services. *A Ganar* is a programme carried out by FUDELA that, through sport, encourages self-confidence and facilitates vocational training and job search counselling for young refugees and Ecuadorians.

### Education

- UNHCR supports the Ministry of Education in the development of public policies to remove barriers and facilitate children's access to education. The Office pursues advocacy activities regarding access to tertiary education, promoting simplified mechanisms for the recognition of foreign degrees and academic qualifications.



- UNHCR implements the award-winning “We Breathe Inclusion” methodology to promote inclusive school environments through teacher training and participation of students and parents in 95 schools throughout the country. The methodology has been adapted to the COVID-19 context through online trainings.
- UNHCR Ecuador is part of a multi-country, inter-agency project for education in emergencies funded by [Education Cannot Wait](#). The Office is strengthening the capacities of public officials of the Ministry of Education to ensure access to public and inclusive education and a safe and protective learning environment for Venezuelans. Education Cannot Wait is the global fund to transform the delivery of education in emergencies.

### Health

- UNHCR supports the Ministry of Health to expand or establish additional health structures for triage and to expand hospitalization capacity for mild and moderate COVID-19 cases through RHUs in 16 hospitals and 45 health in eight provinces. UNHCR supports national and local authorities with biomedical equipment and basic supplies. Personal protection equipment is delivered to 32 organizations and public institutions on the front line and people of concern to UNHCR with specific protection needs. Hygiene kits have been distributed in 43 shelters, organizations and public institutions.
- Refugee community networks are helping detect COVID-19 cases in Ecuador, as part of a Community Epidemiological Surveillance System developed by UNHCR. The system is helping ensure the early detection and referral for treatment of COVID-19 cases among refugee population. Since it was launched in July, more than 250 suspected cases have been referred to national health authorities.

## Working with Partners and other Institutions

### State Institutions

UNHCR works to strengthen alliances focused on the promotion of public policies that advance the local integration of refugees in Ecuador. UNHCR works with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Government, National Councils for Equality, the Cantonal Board on Rights Protection, the Civil Registry, the National Assembly and other state institutions such as the Public Defender's Office and the Ombudsman's Office, as well as local governments at different levels. UNHCR is one of the 23 United Nations agencies that signed the United Nations Cooperation Framework with the Ecuadorian Government for the period 2019-2022.

### Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Venezuelan Refugees

UNHCR and IOM co-lead the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for the response to the Venezuelan situation. UNHCR has actively supported the setting-up of a functioning coordination structure in Ecuador through the Working Group on Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (GTRM in its Spanish acronym). In 2020, 42 organizations and UN agencies are involved in the Venezuelan response, reaching up to 16 Ecuadorian provinces and coordinating the operation within nine working groups.

### Other partners

To strengthen its response in different working areas such as humanitarian assistance, livelihoods, child protection, SGBV prevention, LGBTI protection, community empowerment and self-reliance, UNHCR works together with 22 specialized local and national NGOs. In the context of the COVID-19 response, UNHCR also leads the Protection Sector of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), and co-leads, with IOM, the Temporary Shelter Sector, ensuring that the response of the GTRM is also fully coordinated with the HCT. UNHCR also works with the UN Global Compact and other private sector entities.

## Funding UNHCR's response

UNHCR is appealing for USD 74 million to support vulnerable people in need of international protection in Ecuador. The best way to support UNHCR's appeal is through softly earmarked contributions. Such flexible funding at global level will be key in allowing a timely response to the evolving needs wherever required.

### UNHCR is thankful to the donors who provide funds to Ecuador:

Canada | Denmark | European Union | France | Germany | Ireland | Italy | Japan | Netherlands | Norway | Spain | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom | United States of America | CERF | UN Children Fund | UN Peacebuilding Fund | UN Programme on HIV/AIDS | Private donors in Australia | Private donors in China | Private donors in Germany | Private donors in Italy | Private donors in Japan | Private donors in the Republic of Korea | Private donors in Spain | Private donors in the United Kingdom | Private donors in the United States of America