

# Protection network of women's organizations and safe houses for SGBV survivors

## *SGBV – Shelter – Access to Justice*

*UNHCR supports a national network of women's organizations and safe houses for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, with the aim of improving their self-reliance and their access to justice and offer them psychosocial support.*



UNHCR/V. Rodas

## Background

Violence against women in Ecuador is a widespread phenomenon. According to CONAMU – the National Women's Committee – eight out of ten women are survivors of SGBV and impunity prevails in 90% of the cases. Refugee women – who together with children constitute 88% of the refugee population – lack livelihoods opportunities, which further increases their risk of being subject to SGBV.

In Ecuador, the first safe house was opened 25 years ago. Today, there is a network of five safe houses located in five Ecuadorian regions.

**Location** Quito, Lago Agrio, Cuenca, Guayaquil, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas - Ecuador

**Time & Duration** 2006 - present

**Population Groups** Refugees and asylum seekers

**Actors** UNHCR, National Safe Houses Network, Sucumbios Women's Federation, Tarabita Foundation, Hebrews Immigrant Aid Society, Ombudsperson - Government



## Description

UNHCR support is focused on strengthening the capacity of safe houses so they can welcome refugee women. Through the improvement of infrastructure and capacity building, UNHCR seeks to help refugee women develop skills and acquire knowledge concerning SGBV prevention and response.

- Approximately 3,073 persons received legal assistance in Quito, Cuenca, Tulcán, and Guayaquil.
- 6,512 persons of concern were provided with shelter support and 2,261 persons of concern received rent allowance.

## Steps to Implementation

- Awareness-raising for persons of concern on SGBV prevention and response, and on availability and access to services.
- Training of all key actors, including persons of concern, on women's and human rights, refugees and national legislation.
- Strengthening the safe house network and their intake capacity.
- Supporting the establishment of standard operating procedures.
- Extending the provision of psychosocial support services to refugee women.

## Impact and Results

- UNHCR has been able to provide targeted assistance through its network of safety houses, protecting those at risk of SGBV.
- Safe houses for SGBV survivors/victims and unaccompanied children were provided with equipment, material and staff support in Cuenca, Lago Agrio and Quito.
- Coordination mechanisms with different public and private institutions were strengthened. This allowed UNHCR to provide a better response to persons with specific needs, especially unaccompanied and separated children and SGBV survivors.
- 533 persons with specific protection needs (survivors of torture, survivors of SGBV, minors, persons with disabilities and the elderly) received specialized assistance and psychological counseling.
- Legal Clinics were included in the protection network to provide free legal aid and counseling for refugees and asylum-seekers as well as vulnerable Ecuadorian communities.

## Constraints

The operation's budget is overburdened due to the increase in the number of new arrivals. This limits UNHCR's capacity to continue investing in its protection network of safe houses and women's organizations, ultimately affecting the level of protection for survivors, unaccompanied minors and people at risk of SGBV.

## Lessons Learned/Keys to Success

- Safe houses are a response to the need expressed by local communities, religious institutions and women's groups. UNHCR has built on the existing capacity and expertise of local actors. This increases the effectiveness and inclusiveness of UNHCR's intervention.
- Locating safe houses in different parts of the country increases the level of protection offered to persons at risk of SGBV.

