UNHCR IN ECUADOR

We have a DUTY to <u>protect</u> – We have a RESPONSIBILITY to <u>solve</u>



Since 2000, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees works in Ecuador supporting the State to protect the biggest refugee population in Latin America. 98% of them are Colombian refugees fleeing the internal conflict that affected the country for decades.

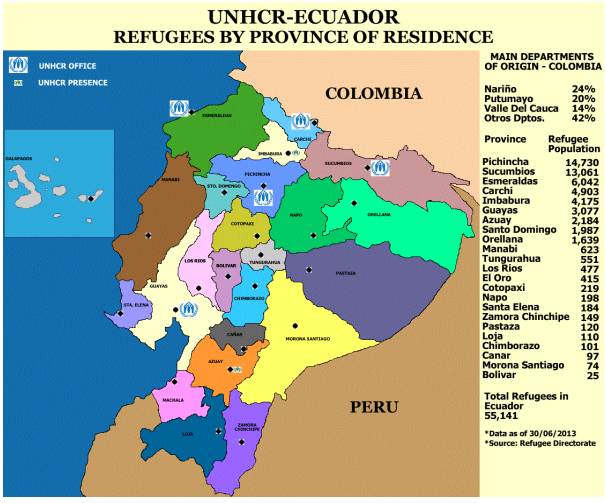
- Until December 2012, the Ecuadorian State recognized 55,141 refugees
- Since 2000, when there were 390 refugees, 168,525 people claimed asylum in the country.
- 23% of them are children.

UNHCR, supporting State institutions, and in consequence to our mandate and the constitutional guarantees of Ecuador, will:

- **We will protect refugees as our fundamental duty**, expanding the protection space through promotion of public policies, draft legislation, enhanced administrative practices and protection interventions where appropriate.

- We are committed to peace in Colombia**, assuming our responsibility to seek durable solutions**, including future prospects of voluntary repatriation, and reasserting the strategic use of resettlement as a protection tool and an instrument of international solidarity.

- **We will promote the rights of refugees in the National Development Plan of Ecuador (*El Plan del Buen Vivir*),** encouraging a public policy environment conducive to local integration and naturalization of recognized refugees in Ecuador.
- **We will fight xenophobia and discrimination**, together with civil society organizations and government agencies, through public information campaigns designed to promote solidarity and mutual coexistence.



60% of refugees live in urban areas while most of the remaining 40% stay near the border, in remote areas, with scarce development, limited basic services and little infrastructure. Ecuador shares a long border (585 km) with Colombia, stretching from the Pacific coast to the Amazon basin.

In order to broaden our outreach capacity, UNHCR has presence in Quito, Guayaquil, Esmeraldas, Tulcán, Lago Agrio, Ibarra, and in Santo Domingo y Cuenca.

Legal framework

The 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution recognizes the principles of human mobility and universal citizenship, along with the right to seek asylum. UNHCR is particularly interested in the chapter on Human Mobility, which deals mainly with the refugee issue and the assurances for their international protection.

The 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution recognizes the principles of human mobility and universal citizenship, along with the right to seek asylum (art. 41).

Ecuador ratified the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees in 1958 and its 1967 Protocol in 1969. These instruments have been conditioned by the recently passed **Presidential Decree, No. 1182, of 30 May 2012**, which eliminated the definition of refugee contained in the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. Said definition was included in the previous Presidential Decree, No. 3301, which has now been revoked.

There are still challenges posed by the discrepancies between the legislation and the application of some key constitutional rights, which limit access to rights for the refugee population. Many refugees do not manage to integrate and have limited access to rights such as housing, health, education and employment.

Over the last few years, discrimination towards people of other nationalities, including the refugee population, has risen in Ecuador. The latent insecurity on the northern border, as well as the growing presence of refugees and asylum seekers, and the overflowing of the conflict into Ecuador, has spawned anti-Colombian sentiment among certain population groups. Some media channels have also fomented discrimination in their messages. While such sentiment is not generalized, it is a cause of concern for UNHCR as the situation could deteriorate and thus hinder true integration between host communities and refugees.

Cross-cutting issues



- **Special attention to children and adolescents.** This population group is directly affected by the conflict, commonly suffering enforce recruitment and lacking access to education.
- **Fighting gender-based violence**. In the country, 6 out of 10 women suffer violence. Female refugees live in extreme hardship, especially those who are heads of family, also are victims of violence suffered in country of origin. UNHCR supports a National Network of Safe Houses (*Red Nacional de Casas de Acogida*) for victims of gender based violence
- **Special attention to the ethnic and cultural diversity** of the beneficiary population

What is UNHCR and what is its mandate? UNHCR is the United Nations agency whose mandate is to protect refugees. Using the 1951 Convention as its primary tool, UNHCR's main mandate is to safeguard the protection of approximately 43 million uprooted people the world over. It started its operations in Ecuador in 2000 at the request of the Ecuadorian Government in view of the growing number of refugees arriving from Colombia in the wake of the internal conflict there.

Who is a refugee? Refugees are people who, due to war, internal conflict or founded fear of persecution, have had to leave their country of origin and cross a border in search of protection. Refugees are people who flee from their country of origin due to a founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or belonging to a social group, and who cannot or, due to said fears, do not wish to seek the protection of their country, or who, lacking nationality and finding themselves, as a result of such events, outside their usual country of residence, cannot or, due to said fears, do not wish to return to it. They are also people who flee from their country because their life, safety or freedom has been threatened by widespread violence, foreign aggression, internal conflict, a mass violation of human rights or other circumstances that have seriously disrupted public order.

To learn more about UNHCR in the world and Ecuador: www.acnur.org or www.unhcr.org,
Facebook: Acnur/Unhcr Américas, Twitter: @ACNURAmericas
In our premises in Quito Quito: Av. Amazonas 2889 y la Granja, edificio de Naciones Unidas.
Sonia Aguilar AGUILARS@unhcr.org, Andrea Escalante ESCALANT@unhcr.org,
tel: + (593 2) 2 460 330 Ext. 1363,1364

With the support of the European Union