

Sub-Office Lago Agrio UNHCR Ecuador

FACTSHEET/April 2010

Context

UNHCR Sub Office Lago Agrio (in the Amazonian Sucumbíos province) was opened in 2000. For the past decade, the Colombian conflict has worsened significantly making this border province the main recipient of thousands of people that fled Colombia seeking protection. As of today, it is estimated that around 30,000 people in need of international protection live in this province.

Between 2000 and 2008, the Ecuadorian State received more than 15,000 asylum applications in this area; however, only 4,462 were recognized as refugees, the rest of the claims remained pending.

Sucumbíos Province borders the Colombian Department of Putumayo. Less than half of its 129,000 inhabitants live in urban areas. Official reports estimate that 60% of the population lives under the poverty line, well above the national average of 37%. Oil exploitation in the area, which started in the early 1970s, has produced serious damage to the environment and communities throughout the province.

In 2009, the Ecuadorian Government, with the financial and technical support of UNHCR, implemented the *Enhanced Registration Project*. This project offered an effective, quick and individual mechanism to provide thousands of people in need of protection with access to the asylum system; most people receiving an answer to their asylum claim on the same day. In the lapse of six months, around 11,000 people were granted refugee status and obtained a refugee identification card (visa 12-IV) in Sucumbíos.

Sub Office Lago Agrio priorities

Border communities: UNHCR works in more than 40 communities located on the banks of the San Miguel and Putumayo rivers, where 60% of the population are refugees or persons in need of international protection. This remote and inaccessible area (mostly accessed by river) suffers from a historical lack of State presence and reduced socioeconomic development. Access to public services, such as health, education and water/sanitation, is very limited, and the continuous presence of armed actors puts at risk the integrity of these communities.

According to the local government, 24% of the population living in the Municipality of Lago Agrio are refugees. To promote integration and peaceful co-existence, UNHCR works in cooperation with local authorities and includes Ecuadorian nationals and host communities within their beneficiaries in all community projects.

Urban settings: Through strong collaboration with Municipalities and other local governments, UNHCR is continuously identifying the needs of refugees living in the main urban centers of the province. Through participatory processes, UNHCR seeks to engage refugees and local authorities in policy making and development plans.

Institutional capacity building and strengthening of public institutions: UNHCR works together with local institutions, such as the Refugee General Directorate's Office, the Ombudsman's office, the Public Prosecutor Office, the Police and the Armed Forces to guarantee that refugees have effective access to their rights. UNHCR also provides support to civil society organizations, such as the *Women's Federation* of Sucumbíos and the Church of Sucumbíos, thus enhancing local protection networks.

Main activities

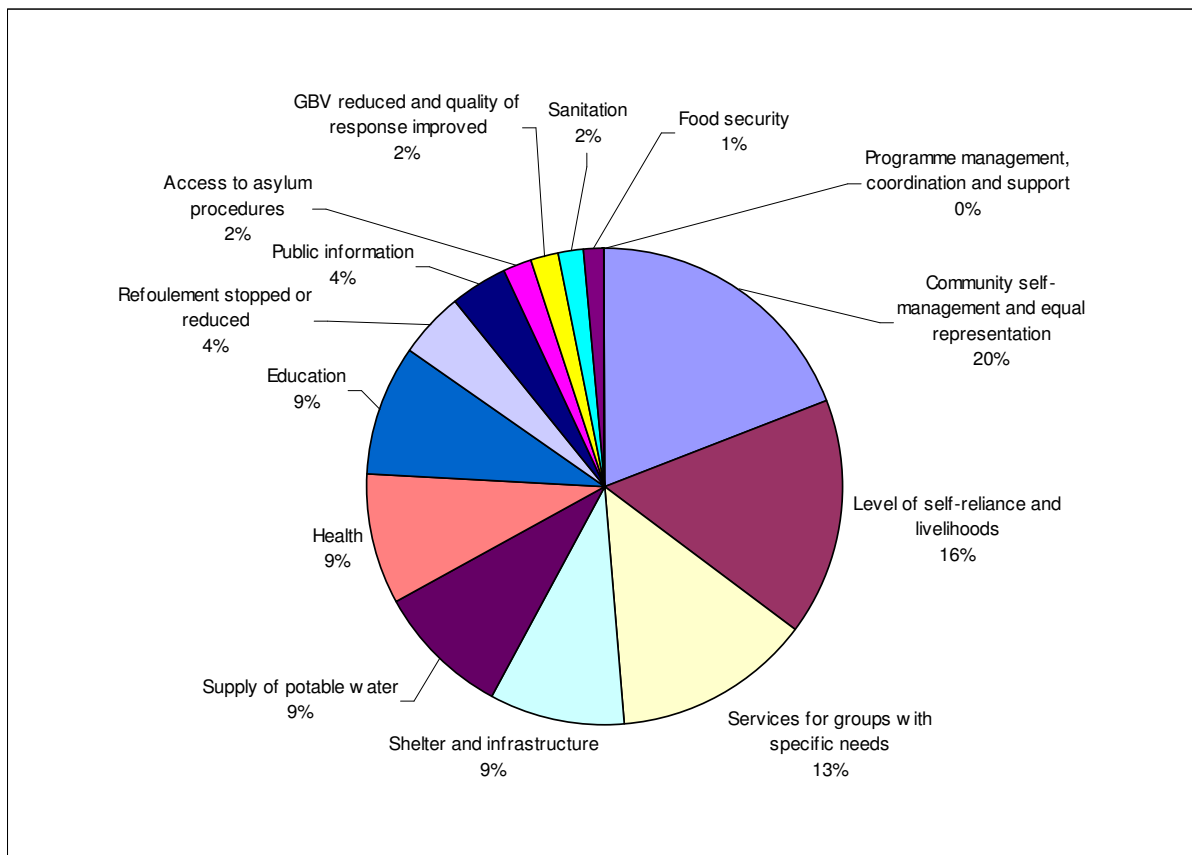
- Strengthen local and provincial public institutions to provide our population of concern with access to rights and basic services.
- Implementation of community based projects such as water/sanitation infrastructures, agricultural support, and health and education facilities.
- Protection by presence along borderline communities.
- Identification and follow-up of cases with specific protection needs.
- Humanitarian assistance.



Refugee Statistics as of 2009

	ASYLUM CLAIMS	RECOGNIZED REFUGEES	PENDING CASES	PERCENTAGE OF RECOGNIZED REFUGEES
SUCUMBIOS-ORELLANA 2009	28.592	19.528	8.041	68,30%
ECUADOR 2009	102.105	43.121	50.627	42,23%

UNHCR Lago Agrio – Areas of Intervention



For further information visit: www.unhcr.org / www.acnur.org

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International Child Day in Lago Agrio



Participatory Assessment in Putumayo River community



Safe water system in El Litoral, Putumayo River.



Legal assistance is also provided in communities.



Ecuadorian actor Roberto Manrique offered a circus show in several borderline communities



Medical ship allows accessing a public health service in far-off areas



Opening of a health center in San Miguel River.



El Río habla, weekly broadcasting in Radio Sucumbios, allows frontier population explaining their concerns.



Implementing partners and authorities join participatory assessments.



UNHCR holds regular workshops with public and private institutions on refugee issues.



New primary school in Villahermosa, Río San Miguel



Farming workshops help borderline communities to improve food safety and production.