

Ecuador

Operational Update

N.1 | January 2024

2023 REVIEW

Figures at a glance

Population figures

76,265

Historical figure of refugees recognized by Ecuador¹

62,841

refugees with active cases registered in ProGres¹

95% from neighbouring Colombia

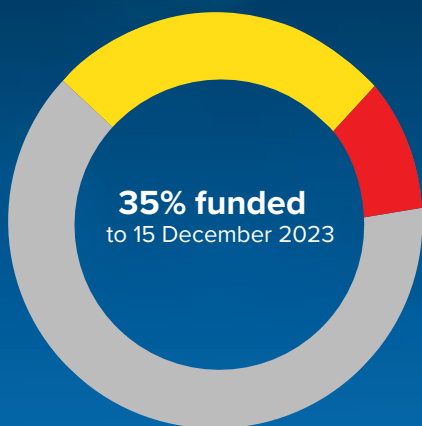


Luna is a natural leader and talented athlete. She trains kayaking with 30 other refugee and Ecuadorian children and adolescents in Guayaquil. Photo: UNHCR/Santiago Arcos

Our 2023 response in figures

169,129

refugees and other displaced people supported in 2023



76M
required in 2023

- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)

For more information on funding, please visit reporting.unhcr.org/ecuador

56,130



people received legal guidance & assistance

22,736



people assisted with cash for basic needs & protection

13,913



people supported with collective emergency shelter

577



people provided with technical or skills certification

764



people linked with a decent employment opportunity

17,228



people supported with mental health and psychosocial support

35,559



people received hygiene kits

3,130



GBV survivors supported

¹ Historical figure registered by the government to the end of November 2023. UNHCR registers active refugee cases in ProGres. Figures to the end of December 2023.

Operational context

In 2023, Ecuador continued to be at the center of multiple and complex population displacements. As a place of transit and destination, the country ended the year with more than 76,000 recognized refugees, one of the highest figures in the region, 95% of whom come from Colombia. Historically, Ecuador is the main country of asylum for Colombian refugees in the world and continues to receive people forced to flee from that country to date. In addition, according to the Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (GTRM), Ecuador hosts the fourth highest number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Latin America with more than 474,000 people currently residing in the country. In all, around 3 percent of the total population in Ecuador are refugees and migrants.

While population movements continued during 2023, there were several changes in profiles and numbers. Colombian arrivals reached 5,244 people in 2023, registering an increase of 22.5 percent as compared to 2022, and almost reaching the highest number registered over the last seven years. Venezuelan arrivals and departures decreased in comparison to 2022. Arrivals dropped 30.3 percent and departures 34 percent. Ecuadorians continued to be one of the main populations registered crossing the Darien, just after Venezuelans, passing from around 29,000 in 2022 to around 56,000 in 2023.

Guillermo Lasso, elected president in 2021, called for the ‘muerte cruzada’ in May, a constitutional mechanism that allows the president to dissolve the National Assembly and call for early elections. In November, Daniel Noboa took office as president amid a political instability, a widening economic crisis and increasing violence. Attacks in prisons, kidnappings, extortions, explosions and murders are reported in several locations. Authorities attributed this violence to power struggles between organized criminal gangs. According to the [Ecuadorian Organized Crime Observatory](#), Ecuador had a violent death rate of over 35 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2023,

making it the most violent country in Latin America.

On the other hand, the United States Government, with the support of the Ecuadorian government, launched the Safe Mobility programme (SMOs), an initiative implemented through UNHCR and IOM, which seeks to help and guide refugees and migrants towards regular pathways from Ecuador. These services are available for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans, and Colombians present in the country before 18 October and who qualify as asylum seekers or have registered with the Ministry of the Interior to obtain a Certificate of Migratory Permanence.

In the midst of an ever-widening poverty gap, refugees and migrants continue to face obstacles to accessing basic rights. According to the Joint Needs Assessment (JNA) published in 2023, the main needs of refugees and migrants include access to food (82%), shelter/housing (67%), and employment/livelihoods (58%).

The regularization process decreed in 2022 by the National Government has continued. By the end of 2023, thousands had already completed their regularization process, while others are in the process of obtaining a VIRTE visa.

In 2023, UNHCR focused on strengthening its response to the needs of refugees with an emphasis on protection, integration, and anti-xenophobia, improving their access to the asylum system, emergency shelter, and financial assistance through multipurpose cash assistance. UNHCR also integrated environmental actions into its planning and preparation for the possible arrival of El Niño phenomenon, to strengthen protection and solutions for refugees and Ecuadorians in risk areas.

In 2024, UNHCR will reinforce its protection response nationally and in the field, where refugees and migrants, alongside Ecuadorians, can create resilient and inclusive communities together.

Main populations forced to flee hosted by Ecuador

Venezuelans

Venezuelans continue to lead in numbers of arrivals in Ecuador. 310,181 people entered Ecuador in 2023, with a daily entry average of 887 Venezuelans. On the other hand, 299,023 Venezuelans left the country WW in the same period.

474,945 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador²

41% estimated to be between 26 and 35 years old³

25% estimated to have a higher education degree³

Main needs

82% access to food³

67% access to housing or shelter³

58% access to livelihoods or employment³

Colombians

5,244 Colombians were registered in need of international protection in 2023, 301 in December, 72% of whom were families with children. This accounts for an 22% increase as compared to the same period in 2022. The current number of total asylum seekers in 2023 has already surpassed those registered in the entire 2017 and 2022.

5,244 Colombians were registered in need of international protection in 2023²

301 were registered in December

Main needs of Colombians in Ecuador

77% access to food, housing, clothing⁴

9% access to employment and services⁴

7% access to documentation⁴

² According to data estimated by the Refugee and Migrant Working Group (GTRM, by its acronym in Spanish). The GTRM is assessing a new methodology with the Government to estimate the new stock figure.

³ Fifth R4V Joint Needs Assessment. www.r4v.info

⁴ 2022 Protection Monitoring available at our [data portal](#)

SPECIAL FOCUS: REGULARIZATION PROCESS

The broad Registration and Regularization exercise has been key in enabling the needs of this population to be met and to advance solutions as part of a broader protection and socioeconomic integration strategy.

As provided by Decree 436/22, the first phase of the Registration and Regularization initiative started in 2022, with the registration of foreigners living in Ecuador with an irregular status, together with the opportunity for them to obtain a temporary stay permit (Certificado de Permanencia Migratoria) that allows for a regular stay in the territory until a regularization option is made available.

The first phase of registration started registering and regularizing all Venezuelans who entered regularly prior to

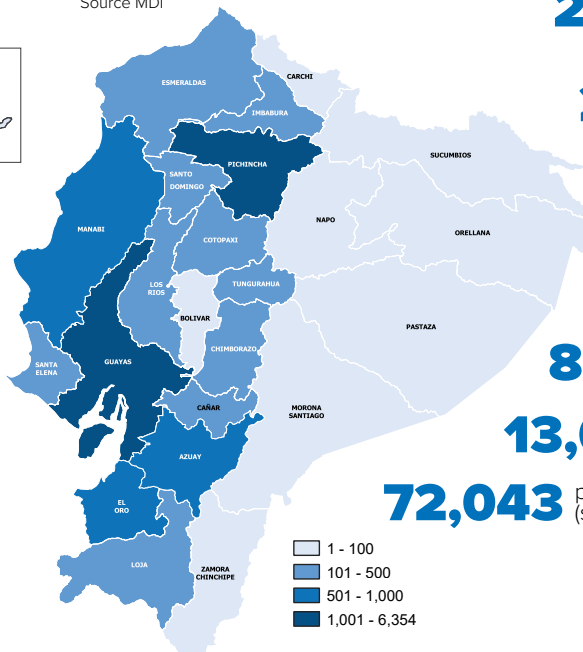
the issuance of the Decree with a VIRTE visa. Registration is also divided in phases: first, Venezuelans who entered regularly beginning on 1 September 2022; second, people of all nationalities as of 16 November 2022; and third, all Venezuelans who entered irregularly beginning on 17 February 2023. The registration phase ended on 15 August.

Regularization of Venezuelans who entered regularly began on 1 October, while the process for other foreigners began on 12 July. By 29 December 2023, 126,934 visa applications had been lodged, 87,971 visas had been granted and 72,043 ID cards had been delivered.

Registration ended on 15 August, with 248,416 people having appointments for their biometric registration and over 201,708 people who have a stay permit, by 29 December.

Province of residence per VIRTE visa applicant

Source MDI



259,084 people registered through the official website (source: MDI)

248,416 people with appointments for biometric registration (source: MDI)

201,708 people with a stay certificate (source: MDI)

126,934 VIRTE visa applications (source: MREMH)

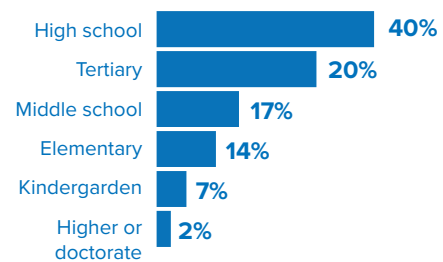
87,971 people with VIRTE visa (source: MREMH)

13,062 people with appointments to issue ID (source: DIGERCIC)

72,043 people with ID (source: DIGERCIC)

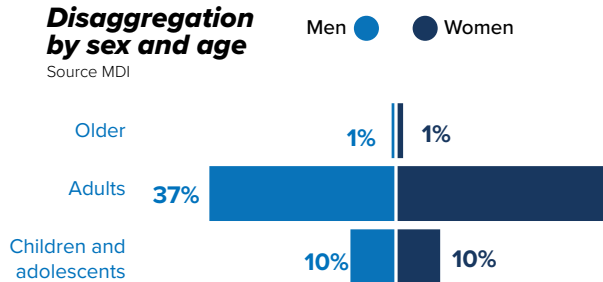
Last education level achieved

Source MDI



Disaggregation by sex and age

Source MDI



Support staff financed by UNHCR and IOM for the regularization process

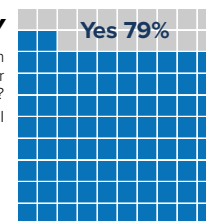
Source MDI



Desire to stay

Do you wish to stay in Ecuador permanently (over two years)?

Source MDI



NATIONAL

How UNHCR has supported the regularization process



UNHCR and partners continue providing support to the regularization process with counselling and guidance, communications with communities, cash for documentation, as well as key staff in government institutions and brigades to support registration and any other related procedure. So far in 2023, 91,763 people have been supported in the process.

DELIVERING PROTECTION

NATIONAL

UNHCR creates spaces for integration and free of violence through sport



In 2023, UNHCR and its partners promoted sport as a tool of protection and inclusion, especially for children and youth.

In **Guayaquil**, an initiative from DELFI Foundation and the Permanent Committee for the Defense of Human Rights, has facilitated the creation of community networks so that children and adolescents can practice Kayak while staying away from the violence present in their communities.



In **Quito**, the alliance with Aucas promotes the rights of people forced to flee, through soccer matches between refugees, their host communities and soccer players. Through this initiative, refugees have improved their integration process, as well as their sense of belonging to the community. The sports strategy for protection is a transversal axis in UNHCR's response and includes sports such as softball, kickingball, baseball, etc.

NATIONAL

Spaces full of color and life for refugees



UNHCR and its partners empower refugee voices through art, giving them a platform to express their stories and talents on murals across community spaces. Through quotes and drawings, families narrate their experiences of arriving in a new country and navigating the path to integration. In Tulcán, UNHCR collaborated with HIAS and FUDELA to organize a community “minga”, to paint murals and to restore a soccer field. This initiative not only promotes art and storytelling but also fosters integration and a sense of ownership within the community through the shared goal of reviving a recreational space.

NATIONAL

Information brigades and access to services for the refugee population



UNHCR with the Public Defender's Office undertook several brigades since February 2023 through the “Route of Rights” to promote access to basic services for refugees in 14 provinces across the country. UNHCR also provided training on human rights and protection systems to members of different public service organizations to reduce acts of discrimination and strengthen technical knowledge on issues related to human mobility. On the other hand, UNHCR and DPIN undertook documentation brigades, visa renewal and admissibility interviews for asylum seekers to ensure the protection of over 1,400 people in human mobility and a total of 16,418 cases were to attend, of which, 7,160 correspond to cases for refugee applications and 8,999 cases regarding alternative regularization processes.



PROMOTING ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

NATIONAL

Breathing Inclusion had a positive impact on raising awareness of childhood education

UNHCR and partners trained teachers, directors and staff of student guidance departments on the “Breathing Inclusion” methodology, reaching a total of 335 students in 2023. During the year, this methodology helped install capacities in local communities and schools so that they can replicate them further. It is important to mention that Breathing Inclusion was implemented with a gender perspective and with a special focus on violent situations that put girls and adolescents at particular risk. Complementary techniques have also been incorporated to work on skills at a sensory level, as well as language, reflexes, motor skills, laterality, hygiene, among others.



NATIONAL

Creating safe and integration spaces

During 2023, UNHCR and partners continued to provide temporary accommodation for refugees, through direct support to nine emergency shelters in eight cities, supporting a total of 13,890 people. On the other hand, UNHCR and partners made improvements to infrastructure and equipment to nine additional shelters, thus enhancing their services. 10 childcare spaces and community centers were also remodeled and equipped, and an additional 105 community spaces nationwide received furniture and equipment.



NATIONAL

Cash assistance for refugee families

In 2023, UNHCR provided cash assistance to 22,736 people in 10,282 households through direct implementation and partners. Through five cash assistance programmes delivered through direct implementation, UNHCR sought to address the multiple needs faced by people forced to flee, including for basic needs, education, livelihoods, child protection, among others. 12,019 people, in 3,301 households, received assistance, contributing to reducing the financial burden on households by 97% and has improved their quality of life by 99%.



PROMOTING SOCIOECONOMIC INCLUSION

NATIONAL

Products made with love and quality have no borders



UNHCR and partners recognized 67 companies from Ecuador with the Inclusive Company Seal, an award that, for the second consecutive year, shines a light on the efforts of the private sector to integrate refugees and migrants and for their initiatives to train and raise awareness among different audiences on international protection and forced displacement. From 2024, recognized companies and chambers of commerce will have access to technical advice on socioeconomic inclusion issues, will have free use of the Sin Fronteras job board, practical hiring guides, catalogs of products and services, among other benefits.

NATIONAL

Inclusive companies and their commitment to refugees



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NATIONAL

Dual training programs provides job opportunities for refugees



In 2023, UNHCR with the support from Difare Group and Humboldt Zentrum conducted the Pharmaceutical Retail Sales programme to improve the socioeconomic opportunities of refugees. This programme was carried out with the objective of providing participants with skills in the development of comprehensive service provision and sales in pharmacies. The trainings were carried out in three cities where 32 apprentices completed all phases of the course for their certification and also carried out business internships. Throughout the process, support was provided to the participants for their connection to classes and monitoring of attendance and workshop practices.

CLIMATE ACTION

NATIONAL

Community recycling promotes empowerment and sustainability in communities



UNHCR and partners across Ecuador have been engaging refugees, migrants and Ecuadorians in initiatives that promote recycling and leadership skills to support integration and protect the environment.

In **Ibarra**, with the support of UNHCR, NRC, Fudela, the Red Cross, and local authorities, a group of refugee, migrant and Ecuadorian recyclers from the Priorato neighborhood received training in recycling, leadership, first aid, financial education, laws, and gender-based violence. Together, they created RECIPRI, the Priorato Recyclers Association. They are now not only formally engaged in their work, but also generating income through this activity.

In **Guayaquil**, UNHCR and its partners brought together a group of refugees and Ecuadorians to form the Association of Refugee Recyclers of Isla Trinitaria (RENOVA). Together, they collected approximately 9,600 pounds of recyclable materials, including plastic, glass, and paper.

In **Lago Agrio**, UNHCR supports a recycling association where 10 refugees, migrants, and members of their host community received uniforms and training. UNHCR also supported their link with the municipality and promoted the installation of large plastic recycling bins in parks, and participated in a recycling marathon.

NATIONAL

UNHCR develops community skills on sustainable agriculture

In Lago Agrio, UNHCR supports Agronegocios, an agricultural circuit that strengthens communities through fair trade. In this initiative, farmers have the opportunity to offer their products in allied stores. In 2023, UNHCR provided 30 scholarships to 20 farmers to learn about the production of plantain flour and the organic control of pests and diseases with the support from ISTEAC. Agronegocios benefited 40 direct farmers and 200 people in total, from the communities of Trampolín del Triunfo and Santa Marianita.



LAGO AGRIO

Sowing the future through school and urban gardens

In Lago Agrio, UNHCR has played a key role in promoting initiatives that strengthen the social and environmental fabric of the community. One of these outstanding projects has been the developing school gardens, where 60 children, 20 caregivers, and 3 teachers from the Amazonas Educational Unit received training. Through this activity, children learned about healthy foods and the care of the environment for a healthy life.

In addition, UNHCR, Fudela and the Crecermas Higher Technological Institute held a training in urban gardens for refugees and Ecuadorians. In the workshops, the community learned about the benefits and tools needed to carry out this activity, the different designs, types of crops, and soil preparation methods to preserve ecosystems. Moreover, they learned to generate autonomy in communities to harvest their own products, maintain a healthy and sustainable diet with the environment.



PROMOTING PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

NATIONAL

UNHCR brought a message of hope and solidarity with the 'Un Mundo Posible' initiative in 2023



UNHCR started the 'Un Mundo Posible' (A World of Possibilities) in 2023 to promote solidarity and the integration of refugees in their host communities, as an umbrella initiative to bring several stakeholders in supporting the refugee cause.

As part of the activities, and in the framework of World Refugee Day, UNHCR launched 'A World of Possibilities through my eyes', an exhibition with 12 illustrations that show forcibly displaced people and the contribution each one makes to their host community in areas of rights, environmental care, art, entrepreneurship, among others. The exhibition was opened to the public at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, as well as at the Portal Shopping mall, in Quito. It can also be seen digitally on its website .

In addition, UNHCR, together with the clothing brand Aéropostale, launched the art contest 'Youth with Refugees' where young and adult refugees and Ecuadorians, between the ages of 10 and 30, drew or illustrated what 'A World of Possibilities and hope away from home' means to them. The 3 winning designs are now printed in 3 Aéropostale shirts available in stores nationwide. A portion of the profits will be donated to UNHCR to foster initiatives that improve the lives of refugees and their host communities in Ecuador.

NATIONAL

UNHCR and AUCAS together for the protection of people through sport



Sociedad Deportiva Aucas became the first football team in the Americas to carry the UNHCR logo on their shirt as a way to show their commitment to the rights of refugees. In addition, UNHCR and Aucas developed different workshops and activities in communities where refugees and soccer team members could exchange experiences, play football, and learn from each other.

On World Refugee Day, the professional Aucas team joined the ‘Hope away home’ campaign. During halftime of an official match, the team’s field became a stage where a group of Venezuelan, Colombian, and Ecuadorian performers danced traditional songs from their countries, as a way of thanking Ecuador for its solidarity. UNHCR and Aucas also held several workshops on international protection and rights, planned visits to the Aucas football stadium, celebrated of Children’s Day, and carried on other initiatives that successfully promoted the integration of refugees through sport.

NATIONAL

UNHCR promotes the rights of LGBTIQ+ people during Pride and everyday



UNHCR joined the Pride 2023 celebrations throughout the country and participated in marches to promote the rights of LGBTIQ+ people, both from the host community and those who have fled their countries. In Quito, UNHCR participated in the OrgUIO march. Staff members, their family, and friends joined the march to raise awareness about the rights of refugees who have fled their countries due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In other parts of the country, UNHCR participated in workshops, marches, talks, and fairs with the aim of promoting the rights of everyone. Likewise, UNHCR held discussions with staff on the importance to address the specific needs of LGBTIQ+ people forced to flee.

DON'T MISS

NATIONAL

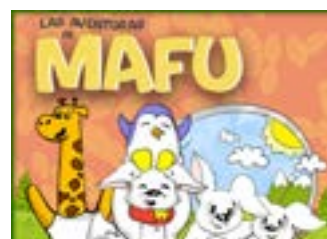
Solidarity initiatives



A world of possibilities through my eyes
[Learn more.](#)



Un Mundo Posible - Nikki Mackliff ft. ACNUR.
[Listen now.](#)



Las aventuras de Mafu
[Learn more.](#)

Kayaking has given Luna an opportunity to achieve her dreams while making new friends in her community
Photo: UNHCR / Santiago Arcos

Young refugees and Ecuadorians achieve their goals thanks to kayaking

GUAYAQUIL

Luna Reascos' smile is her most characteristic feature. The 13-year-old is a natural-born leader and a talented athlete. She is also one of the 30 refugee and Ecuadorian children and adolescents who meet weekly at the Salado estuary to train in kayak in her hometown of Guayaquil.

Although Luna is Ecuadorian, forced displacement is part of her life. Her grandmother had to flee from Colombia due to threats from armed groups and the fear of recruitment that haunted her children, including Luna's mother. They arrived at Isla Trinitaria, a neighbourhood at the south of Guayaquil, to start a new life, far from conflict.

Her family history and the situation in her city make Luna an enthusiastic promoter of community engagement. "I feel good sharing with people from other countries. They are treated just like we treat everyone, as if they were from here," says the young girl, who has seen in kayaking the opportunity to meet more people and bring her community together.

Community Kayaking is an initiative led by the DELFI Foundation and the Permanent Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Guayaquil (CDH), supported by UNHCR. Through this initiative, Luna and her kayak team learned a new sport, weave support networks, and stay away from the violence that invades the streets of their city.

"Sport is a tool with the power to protect and integrate," said Federico Agusti, UNHCR Ecuador representative. "Through kayaking, we promote spaces where boys and girls improve their technique or skills and create a more powerful community."

Ecuador has seen an increase in violence that has caused fears in refugees and host communities of being victims of extortion, recruitment, or attacks by criminal groups. In this context, young people are particularly vulnerable.

Kayaking is a great discovery for Luna and in it she sees the opportunity for young people like her to look forward to their future. "There are people who do not trust themselves, but when they fall, they have to get up again. We can all fulfill our dreams. May we have many medals in our home", she said.

You can help Luna and her friends to make their dreams come true

[Donate now.](#)

We thank the contributions of our donors

15 December 2023

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