UNHCR Ecuador
Habitability

UNHCR — The UN Refugee Agency

May 2021

Key figures

67.5%

of refugees and migrants skipped paying the rent to meet other needs (HFS, 2020)

33

habitability projects carried out to ensure access to adequate and dignified public and private spaces

$1.8M

urgently needed for meeting the most urgent habitability needs of refugees, migrants, and host communities

Situational Highlights

Even before COVID-19 pandemic began, access to housing for refugees, migrants and host communities in Ecuador was hard. According to official statistics, as of June 2019, 4.4 million Ecuadorians were living in poverty ($85 per month), and 1.6 million in extreme poverty ($48 per month). Considering that, by the end of 2018, 37% of the Ecuadorian population lived in rented housing, plus the gradual increase in poverty in the years 2019-2020, it has been estimated that more than 2 million Ecuadorians do not have access to regular housing. The Ecuadorian Government, aware that the housing deficit in the country reaches 31% of the population, planned to build 220,900 homes by 2021. However, this goal has not been achieved.

Housing context has only been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, access to housing for refugees and migrants has worsened. The increase in economic precariousness and competition for access to affordable housing between refugees and Ecuadorians has led to an increase in xenophobia and abuse against the population on the move and a worsening of their living conditions. Additionally, the cessation of economic activities increased the eviction of families who could not pay their rent, notably affecting the refugee and migrant population.
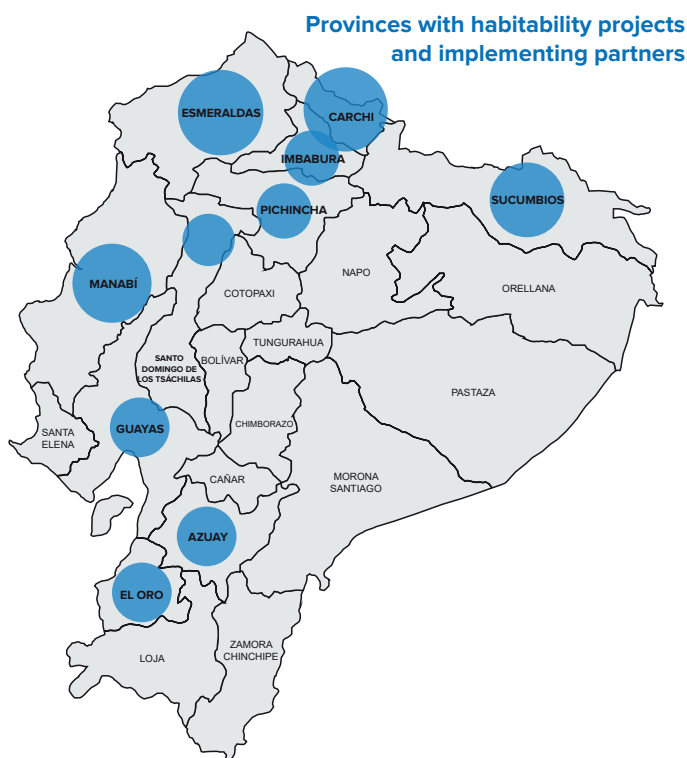
UNHCR's Response

In this context, UNHCR developed a Shelter strategic planning in two lines of action: emergency response and sustainable permanent solutions. The habitability component is aligned with the second line of action. It is focused on the identification and implementation of medium and long-term solutions in order to promote equitable access to housing. It also seeks to improve living conditions, and to promote peaceful coexistence between refugees, migrants and host communities, as part of a broader community based protection response.

In addition, the habitability component aims at improving physical conditions and facilitating a fair and safe living relationship. Therefore, it can be applied to both public and private spaces. Firstly, when implemented in public spaces, the strategy is designed to promote social integration and safe environments through interventions in community centers or parks, among other examples. When relevant, these interventions also address Disaster Risk Reduction issues.

Secondly, the habitability component is also carried out on private spaces. Its goal is to ensure safe, dignified and adequate private housing for refugees, migrants and host communities in Ecuador.

Some of the actions taken within this framework were: physical improvements of private and public spaces, supply of equipment, cash for rent to avoid evictions, land-owner agreements, technical and legal support to partners and people of concern.

Provinces with habitability projects and implementing partners

Best practices

Montecristi Community Center

This project aimed to build a multifunctional physical space, which could be used as a base for parish activities, but also for integration and awareness events organized both by refugees and migrants or hots communities. The project was located next to the "Eloy Alfaro" church in Montecristi, Manabí province.

The construction process was carried out through a building workshop involving residents in Montecristi, regardless of their nationality. The training was managed as capacity building exercise, and participants who completed the process received a certification and a toolbox.

As a result of this project, several participants were part of other construction trainings led by partner AVSI.

Implementing partner: AVSI
Budget: USD $18,927

'La Forestal' playground, Esmeraldas

In the 'Propicia 1' district in Esmeraldas, UNHCR and its parner FEPP built the children's playground 'La Forestal'. Also, FEPP improved two other public spaces in Esmeraldas using the same budget.

This district has a strengthened community organization that lead to a participatory intervention. Residents took part in the construction and planted several trees. Resources and suppliers of the community itself were prioritised.

Implementing partner: FEPP
Budget: USD $12,000

Housing improvement in Tulcán and Huaca

Three multi-family dwellings were chosen in Tulcán and Huaca (Carchi province) to be improved through general maintenance, painting of the façade, construction of kitchen counters and installation of ceramic tiles. Water heaters, laundries, bathrooms, and outdoor clotheslines were also placed.

Additionally, habitability kits were delivered to the tenants.

UNHCR direct implementation
Budget: USD $18.592

Funding needs

With shortage of funds, UNHCR faces challenges in implmenting its habitability strategy. Fresh donorcontributions of USD $1,800,000 are urgently needed for UNHCR to continue its coordination and response efforts to meet the most urgent habitability needs of refugees, migrants and host communities.

We thank the contributions of our donors

Updated to 4 May, 2021

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