



ECUADOR – COVID 19

19 May 2020 – Update 2

Key Figures

69,524 recognized refugees between 1989 and April 2020.

393,439 Venezuelan refugees and migrants living in Ecuador (December 2019).

22% of funding needs received by 15 May 2020.

2,799 deaths due to COVID-19, one of the highest numbers per capita in the region.

Situational Highlights

- President Lenín Moreno announced a plan to distribute food to eight million people in Ecuador in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. The Government introduced a traffic-light system according to which restrictions will be gradually lifted. By mid-May, most of the country is “red”, meaning current restrictions stay in place. On 5 May, President Moreno announced that state of emergency will be extended for 30 more days as of 16 May, until 16 June.
- Groups of Venezuelans are moving from several locations across Ecuador towards the northern border with the objective to cross into Colombia and eventually return to Venezuela, due to challenges in covering their basic needs and their fears of being contaminated by COVID-19. In Carchi, both municipal and provincial authorities are pressing for a “humanitarian corridor” so that Venezuelans can go home. The Ombudsman and local authorities in Ecuador have also suggested on opening a humanitarian corridor for Venezuelans to enter Colombia. Still, Ecuador continues to receive groups of Venezuelans entering the country.

UNHCR’s Response

In the face of COVID-19, UNHCR Ecuador conducted a programme criticality and re-prioritization exercise. Priority will be given to:

- delivery of life-saving assistance (cash-based interventions -CBI- and core relief items -CRI);
- provision of reliable information on preventive measures against COVID-19 and available services;
- border and protection monitoring;
- access to the asylum system;
- protection of persons with specific protection needs; mental and physical health of persons of concern; and
- provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and hygiene equipment for emergency shelters.

Shelter

- Eight shelter partners are providing emergency shelter to women at risk, members of the LGBTI community, children at risk and vulnerable families. UNHCR has been providing non-food items such as hygiene kits, cleaning kits and bedding to shelters. On 15 April, a new shelter opened in Ibarra to support 30 people of all nationalities. The shelter is managed by a local women's association. Their requests for support have been shared with the Working Group of Refugees and Migrants (GTRM) for the Venezuela response and UNHCR is considering support with CRI.
- As part of the response to the health emergency, the 'Patronato San José' (Quito social services) provides shelter for homeless people, and coordinates donations of food kits to families with specific needs. UNHCR has donated hygiene kits and cleaning materials and will donate USD 15,000 worth of food kits to benefit both people on the move and Ecuadorians.
- On 4 May, UNHCR and partners re-opened the *Purki Huasi shelter* in Tulcán, Carchi, receiving five families who had been staying in hotels in Tulcán. The families will stay in the shelter until an exit plan can be developed, probably involving rental accommodation. UNHCR and partners continue with plans to accommodate more families in Refugee Housing Units (RHUs), and work towards installation of additional water and hygiene facilities, tents and floors. On the same day, the *8 de Septiembre SHELTER* was opened in Huaquillas, in El Oro Province, with a limited capacity of 35 people in order to maintain social distancing. On the first day, 18 people (five families) were accommodated. The shelter belongs to the National Secretariat for Risk Management and is managed by the NGO ADRA with the support of UNHCR, IOM and the Jesuit Refugee Service (SJR).



Humanitarian assistance:

- A total of 44 RHUs have been installed to enlarge shelter areas and health services and 5,072 hygiene kits were distributed. In addition, hygiene supplies and PPE have been provided to 40 shelters; the Ministry of Government; Ministry of Public Health (Zone 1 and 7); provincial and cantonal GADs (Decentralized Autonomous Governments) in Imbabura Sucumbíos, El Oro and Azuay provinces; Migration and the Nacional Police in El Oro; and to all partner agencies delivering assistance on the field. Two thousand food kits were donated by La Favorita Corporation and distributed in Quito. UNHCR is currently in the process of purchasing approximately 9,500 food kits through local partners and GADs for delivery to vulnerable people.
- Core Relief Items distribution has been upscaled. UNHCR has 12 partners with the capacity to distribute CRI under current circumstances around the country. UNHCR has mapped local suppliers and the availability of CRI, and has bought blankets, mattresses, sanitizing gel, face masks, hygiene kits, cleaning, disinfection and hygiene supplies, and information materials for shelters for a total amount of USD 291,000.
- UNHCR Ecuador has quickly adapted its cash assistance response to the new circumstances, which allowed the operation to assist 4,610 households in the period between 18 March and 8 May, helping them cover their basic needs. As lockdown measures continue, the number of people in destitute situations is increasing. In response, UNHCR and partner HIAS have expanded assistance criteria to reach more people in need.
- UNHCR Ecuador is one of the twelve operations included in the new "[UNHCR Cash Assistance and COVID-19: Emerging Field Practices II](#)", which captures good practices and innovative examples of cash assistance from operations worldwide.
- UNHCR has also reassessed its livelihoods strategy in view of the new context. The focus is on supporting and stabilizing livelihoods during the emergency through CBI while identifying potential increasing demand in service provision (e.g. home food deliveries). UNHCR and UNDP are designing a joint strategy to support the recovery of small businesses through the programme *#EnMarchaDigital*, while creating new jobs for refugees and vulnerable Ecuadorians through delivery services.

Protection

- The Public Defender's Office has continued providing assistance to persons of concern to UNHCR, assisted by embedded consultants financed by UNHCR. During the emergency, 614 cases have received legal advice, out of which 246 are related to the refugee status determination process and 33 to evictions. All these eviction cases, mostly relating to Venezuelans, have been positively resolved through a mediation process. With technical advice from UNHCR, the Public Defender's Office is developing a protocol to implement virtual mediation processes.
- On 12 May, the Cantonal Protection Board of Guayaquil issued an emergency protection measure prohibiting the eviction of families with children and adolescents that will be in force throughout the emergency. This measure constitutes the first formal measure taken by a protection system in Ecuador. Two days later, four Quito metropolitan protection boards followed suit. UNHCR will share these measures with other cantonal protection boards and provide technical assistance to replicate this good practice.
- UNHCR has trained 194 humanitarian workers on child protection in the context of COVID-19 during the reporting period.

Community-Based Protection

- From 18 March to 15 May, UNHCR assisted 7,436 cases (22,838 people - 79 per cent Venezuelans and 19 per cent Colombians) through UNHCR protection help lines in Cuenca, Esmeraldas, Guayaquil, Huaquillas, Ibarra, Lago Agrio, Quito and Tulcán. The most common concern was food assistance, followed by requests for CBI.
- HELP ACNUR, a WhatsApp information line launched in March which provides standard information to persons of concern about a variety of subjects (e.g. CBI, food, shelter, regularization etc.) had 7,242 people registered, and had sent around 300,000 messages by 30 April. Most of the queries received were about access to food and food cards.
- Due to the increased number of Venezuelans trying to reach the northern border hoping to be able to cross into Colombia and return to Venezuela, UNHCR is strengthening dissemination of information on the restrictive measures currently in place at the borders and the risks of crossing irregularly.
- UNHCR has been closely working with community organizations supporting women engaged with survival sex, LGBTI+ persons at risk, persons living with HIV, persons with disabilities and SGBV survivors to ensure emergency assistance is delivered to these populations.
- Young digital influencers from various nationalities are helping UNHCR to produce and share key information regarding prevention and response measures to COVID-19 and promoting digital safe spaces for youth on self-care and psychological first aid.
- More than 250 humanitarian workers and government authorities have joined awareness raising sessions on protection against sexual exploitation and abuse delivered by UNHCR during the reporting period.

Government and Inter-agency Coordination

- The results of the Rapid Joint Needs Assessment (RJNA) conducted by UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF and WFP in April were disseminated among the government officials and partners. The exercise reached over 1,600 households, including Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Colombian refugees and host communities from 13 provinces across the country. The study showed that refugees and migrants were concerned in priority at: food security (94 per cent of the total households); employment (52 per cent); shelter (43 per cent); and health and medicines (36 per cent). As far as host communities are concerned, the main preoccupation is food security (79 per cent), followed by health and medicines (48 per cent), employment (37 per cent) and shelter (6 per cent).

UNHCR is thankful to the donors who provide funds to Ecuador:

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