

ECUADOR – COVID 19

17 September 2020

Update 5

Key Figures

121,525
confirmed cases
and **10,996**
deaths due to
COVID-19
by 16 September
(7,206 confirmed
and 3,790
probable).

41%
of funding
needs received
by 14
September
2020.

362,862
Venezuelan
refugees and
migrants living
in Ecuador
(August 2020).

Situational Highlights

- Pichincha is the province with most confirmed COVID-19 cases in Ecuador. By 16 September, there were 30,693 cases, followed by Guayas, with 20,049. The state of emergency ended on 12 September and from 13 September it is possible to circulate freely throughout the Ecuadorian territory; there is also freedom of assembly or association. However, in Guayas Province, up to now considered low risk after the initial peak, experts have not excluded the possibility of a new outbreak. People of concern to UNHCR are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 given their engagement in street trading as their main source of income.
- On 18 August the Representative and senior members of UNHCR met the new Minister of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, Luis Gallegos Chiriboga. Minister Gallegos praised the continuous work UNHCR has done in Ecuador along the years and the constructive bilateral cooperation between the organization and the GoE. He warned of the dire economic conditions the country is in and requested UNHCR to continue helping the country. He also pledged to continue working in the context of the Quito Process and with the UN system.

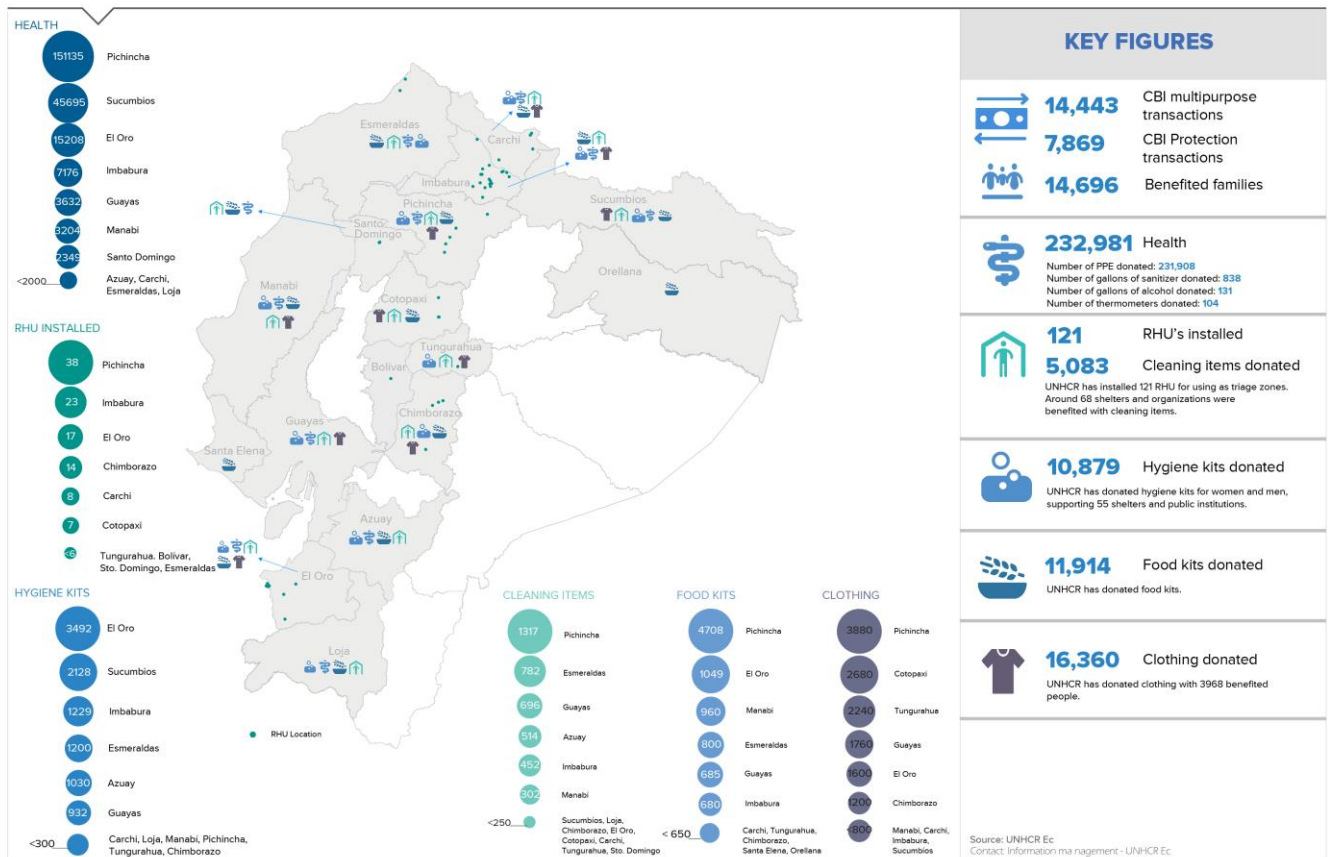
UNHCR's Response

In accordance with its programme criticality and re-prioritization exercise in the face of COVID-19, UNHCR is giving priority to:

- delivery of life-saving assistance (cash-based interventions and core relief items);
- provision of reliable information on preventing measures against COVID-19 and available services;
- border and protection monitoring;
- access to the asylum system;
- protection of people with specific protection needs and mental and physical health of people of concern;
- support to health infrastructure and shelter; and
- provision and equipment (for COVID-19) for emergency shelters and health structures.

UNHCR ECUADOR COVID-19 RESPONSE

18 March - 16 September 2020



Shelter

- Forty-three shelters supported by UNHCR continue to be active under this pandemic and provide emergency shelter to women and children at risk, members of the LGBTI community, and vulnerable families. Since the onset of the COVID-19 emergency, UNHCR has installed 121 refugee housing units (RHU) in 45 health centres, 16 hospitals and three temporary accommodation centres to be used as resting, triage and isolation areas according to protocols for COVID-19. In addition, the Office has supported 55 shelters and public institutions with hygiene kits, personal protection equipment, rehabilitation, management support and training.
- Several hospitals and health units from different regions in Ecuador have requested RHUs from UNHCR to expand their capacity to provide health care to a greater number of patients. On 27 August, UNHCR approved the installation of 41 RHUs in the coming weeks (15 in Esmeraldas, 10 in Lago Agrio, and 16 in Cuenca).

Humanitarian Assistance

- UNHCR has increased the distribution of core relief items to respond to increased needs. Twelve UNHCR partners are distributing the items throughout the country. UNHCR has also provided equipment, disinfectant materials and improvement to infrastructure of shelters, partners, hospitals and other actors worth USD 188,100. It has acquired some USD 163,773 worth of personal protective equipment (facemasks, gloves, thermometers, disposable gowns, protective glasses, protective gowns and hand-sanitizer) to be provided to UNHCR staff, partners and other actors on the first line of response.
- UNHCR and partner FUDELA continue delivering assistance to the northern border area of Ecuador, including to the Awá indigenous community, who has been historically vulnerable to conflict dynamics in the context of the situation in Colombia. During the reporting period, assistance delivered included biosecurity items (gel, masks, alcohol) for community epidemiological workers, with additional purchases of equipment underway. The community health workers support some 12 remote health posts, provide education and surveillance to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the communities.
- UNHCR assisted 14,696 households with cash-based interventions (CBI) between 18 March and 12 September through a remote system and along expanded criteria, to help them cover their basic needs.
- From 18 March to 16 September, UNHCR assisted 18,180 cases (78 per cent Venezuelans and 20 per cent Colombians) through UNHCR Protection lines in Cuenca, Esmeraldas, Guayaquil, Huaquillas, Ibarra, Lago Agrio, Quito, Ambato and Tulcán. Fifty-four per cent of the calls were requests for CBI. The second most common request was for legal assistance, including refugee status determination (RSD) and regularization.



UNHCR delivered 400 hygiene kits to refugee and Ecuadorian families in situation of vulnerability in Esmeraldas. The kits contain, among other items, soap donated by Unilever. Photo: UNHCR / Hugo León

Protection

- Evictions due to lack of rent payment continue to rise. From 17 March until 31 August, 987 cases received advice from the Office of the Ombudsman. Of those, 427, mostly of Venezuelans, have been positively resolved and 560 received counselling. In the same period, 247 cases have received legal advice by the Public Defender's Office.
- The Ministry of Government has drafted a directive to regulate the actions of the National Police in the prevention of forced evictions. The directive, which is expected to come into force in the coming days, was developed with technical support of UNHCR.
- On 31 August, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility reported that 74,473 applications for "humanitarian" visas (VERHU) had been received since the beginning of the regularization process and 40,500 had been issued so far. Some 26,000 applications are pending and expected to be dealt with by the end of September. Around 200,000 Venezuelans have acquired legal status in Ecuador through different types of visas, including those issued between August 2019 and August 2020.
- The Undersecretary for Migration informed that 165,761 Venezuelans had completed the two phases of the registration process. Seventy-seven per cent of the registered population met the requirements to obtain the VERHU. Most of the registered Venezuelans reside in Pichincha (44.3 per cent) and Guayas (23 per cent) Provinces. Eighty-nine per cent of the registered population intend to remain in Ecuador for more than two years.
- On 21 August, UNHCR talked to the chairperson of the Junta Parroquial of Mataje, Esmeraldas Province. During the meeting it was agreed that the Junta Parroquial would support the Civil Registry in organizing registration and identification of virtual brigades supported by the Peace Building Fund, which will mainly benefit Chachi, Awá, Épera and Afro-descendant communities that have not been able to access to their national identity documents at northern border due to distances, costs, administrative procedures and even legal barriers.

Community-Based Protection

- According to data from a survey conducted by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education of 4,600 children and adolescents (378 of them from Venezuela and Colombia), since the beginning of the pandemic, 10.8 per cent of the students were unable to continue their studies due to lack of resources, equipment or access to Internet. In the rural areas, the percentage increased to 43.3 per cent. Sixty-one per cent of refugee and migrant students have

access to the Internet, compared to 67 per cent of Ecuadorians. Furthermore, 63 per cent of refugee and migrant students indicate that teachers have contacted them every day. This could be evaluated as a positive impact of “Respiramos Inclusión”, an award-winning training methodology that promotes inclusive school environments through teacher training and participation of students and parents.

- On 25 August, UNHCR donated 200 traditional radio devices to 12 Afro-descendant, Chachi, Awá and Épera communities in northern border communities in Esmeraldas Province, and in coordination with community promoters and Ministry of Public Health. Due to the health emergency caused by COVID-19, many students in these rural areas are taking up tele-education classes through the Ministry of Education printed modules guided by educational radio programmes.
- On 22 August, with the support of Fundación Lunita Lunera, UNHCR and partner HIAS, a new group of “non-violent masculinities” was established in Esmeraldas with 15 male humanitarian workers and local male public authorities. The group focuses on preventing SGBV by educating the male population.
- An inter-institutional agreement was signed between partner ADRA and the decentralized autonomous government (GAD) of Huaquillas, El Oro Province, to support the construction of a section of the sewer system which will benefit some 1,200 Ecuadorians from the community of September 8th Citadel, where the temporary shelter for people on the move is located. This project is supported by UNHCR and aims to strengthen ties between the host community and people of concern to UNHCR.
- On 14 August, “PYDLOS”, a project supported by UNHCR and implemented by the University of Cuenca in coordination with the University of the Basque Country to counteract misinformation and rumours that contribute to xenophobia and discrimination against refugees and migrants, was launched. It is expected that the methodology used will be reproduced in other parts of the country.
- UNHCR Ecuador is developing a network of community communicators in Ecuador. Through a public call, people of concern to UNHCR and from host communities were able to join the process, which consist on three phases. The first phase is currently being implemented and comprises a series of capacity development activities on community communication and UNHCR mandate. The second phase, expected to start in October, focuses on technical training on community journalism. The third phase, to be implemented in 2021, will support participants to implement local activities in their communities to increase access to reliable information at community level.
- UNHCR and Fundación Aldhea have launched the second edition of Fondearte, a community development funding to support activities promoting pacific coexistence between young refugees and host communities in Ecuador. In this edition, a panel comprising representatives from UNHCR, Aldhea and the refugee community will select five initiatives that will receive a non-reimbursable fund of USD 5,000. Additional information can be found [here](#).

Government and Inter-agency Coordination

- On 8 September, a [Joint Needs Assessment](#) organized by UNHCR and IOM on Venezuelan refugees and migrants was published on the R4V website. Some 3,613 households were interviewed, of which 77 per cent were women and 22 per cent men. Around 47 per cent of the respondents claimed to reside in Ecuador for more than a year, while 27 per cent have been in the country less than six months. Approximately 36 per cent of the Venezuelan refugees and migrants interviewed admitted that they do not have any documentation. The lack of a passport and the loss of economic means are the main barriers to access to regularization processes. Regarding housing, 82.6 per cent responded that they live in a rented accommodation, while 10.6 per cent claimed that they live in shared accommodations with other families. When asked if families had to move to other places since the beginning of the COVID-19 emergency, 30 per cent confirmed changing home; of these, 44 per cent were evicted, while 36 per cent moved to a cheaper solution.

Funding

- UNHCR is appealing for USD 74 million to provide international protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, their host communities and others of concern in Ecuador. Only 41 per cent has been funded by 14 September. We would also appreciate it if contributions were to be softly earmarked. Such flexible funding will be key in allowing a timely response to the evolving needs as required.

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

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