

Agapito is a Colombian refugee that lives with Vilma, his Ecuadorian wife, in Ricaurte, Esmeraldas. The pandemic has severely impacted their access to basic needs. Read the story at page 4.

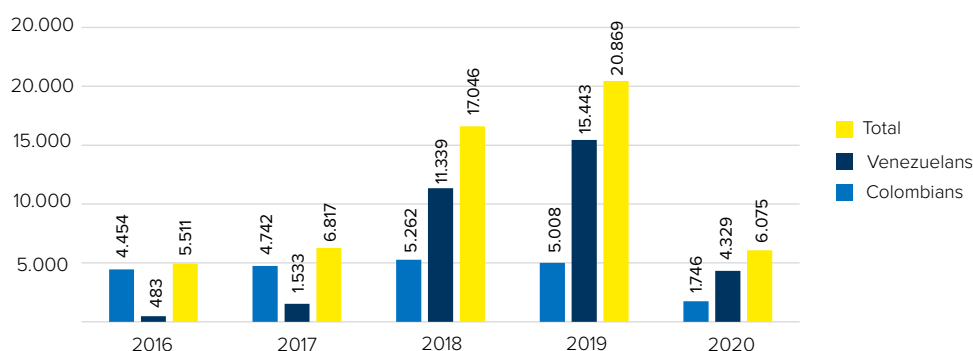


Figures at a glance

70.452

people have been recognized as refugees

Asylum applications in the past five years:



The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted access to asylum. Main causes include border closure and lack of access to internet, as the process was adapted to receive only online applications.

431.207

Venezuelans are currently living in Ecuador, 50% in an irregular migratory situation.

10%

of UNHCR's financial requirements have been funded, as of 20 April.

Requirements for 2021:
\$84.5 million

Operational context

COVID-19: Confirmed cases have surpassed 350.000 nationwide, and hospitals are working at full capacity. Phase 1 of the vaccination plan began to vaccinate older persons, health staff, people with disabilities, and catastrophic diseases. However, refugees and migrants without an Ecuadorian identity card are facing problems registering online in the plan. UNHCR is working together with the Government to solve this technical issue and continues to monitor the vaccination process nationwide to ensure the inclusion of the refugees and migrants, line with the rights enshrined in the constitution.

POPULATION MOVEMENTS: UNHCR and partners identify 450-500 Venezuelan caminantes entering daily through visible paths during working hours. Additionally, 400 Venezuelans return to Colombia every day due to lack of livelihoods and because they have exhausted all sources of humanitarian assistance in Ecuador. Additionally, around 400

Venezuelans cross into Colombia everyday, as a result of the difficult economic situation in Peru and Ecuador.

PROTECTION CONCERNS: Tensions between Venezuelans and locals continue to increase. In Montserrat, after a violent fight occurred on 4 April where an Ecuadorian youth died, 200 people from the community participated in a protest, demanding justice for the victim and the eviction of Venezuelans from their neighborhoods. UNHCR and partners had to relocate several families for security reasons and continues collaborating with the Municipality of Otavalo and human rights bodies to promote peaceful co-existence with neighborhoods and communities in this city.

Moreover, rural communities close to the northern border continue to report increasing visits from irregular armed groups from Colombia to buy food and alcohol. Some of the visits may also be related to recruitment activities.

UNHCR and ILO launch an investigation on the labor

inclusion of Venezuelans



On 25 March, the International Labour Organization (ILO), with UNHCR's technical support, launched the study on the *Labor and Economic Inclusion of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Manta, Cuenca, and Santo Domingo*. The study was built through market-driven approaches and revealed detailed information about the Venezuelan population's skills and professional experience. Additionally, the study proposes sectors and value chains with the potential to expand and diversify the market opportunities available to the target group and the host community.

Along with the first edition of the study, UNHCR and ILO are working to implement local workshops with the private sector, academia and Municipalities, where the study can be presented to build participatory local roadmaps on moving forward the economic inclusion of refugees.

UNHCR expands the capacity of a soup

kitchen by installing RHUs



From 29 to 31 March, UNHCR installed 12 RHUs at the Municipal Dining Hall in Ibarra. The RHUs will provide additional capacity for 96 individuals and reduce waiting times while complying with the biosecurity measures. Additionally, UNHCR purchased furniture and equipment to support the expansion.

After the RHUs were installed, WFP increased its support for an additional 50 meals per day. The soup kitchen now serves 200 breakfasts and 200 lunches daily to Colombian and Venezuelan refugees and migrants, and Ecuadorians, especially older persons.

Yusleidy and her sons Axel and Ángel are currently eating in the diner. One year ago, they fled Venezuela because Axel suffers from a heart condition that was putting his life at risk due to lack of access to treatment. His health conditions were worsening because he was also suffering from malnutrition. In Ecuador, Axel is accessing appropriate treatment. However, it has been difficult for Yusleidy, a paramedic and karate instructor, to find a job. Eating at the diner has become a relief for the family.



Our response in 2021 in figures

Up to 31 March

Basic needs:



21.602

people received cash-based assistance for protection or emergent needs



1.928

people were supported with emergency shelter



3.969

people received hygiene kits

Protection:



8.566

people received legal assistance



953

identity documents issued to people of interest.

86

border monitoring visits conducted

Socio-economic integration:



10

refugees received scholarships for higher education



329

pacific coexistence projects implemented nationwide



589

adolescents participating in specific programmes

Monthly focus: Esmeraldas

UNHCR inaugurates a Center for the Germination of Plants and Seeds



Together with Esmeraldas Municipality and FEPP, UNHCR inaugurated a Community Center for the Germination of Plants and Seeds. This center will provide seedling kits for families participating in the food sovereignty project “Siembra Tu Comida” (Plant Your Food). Some 100 refugee and Ecuadorian families from 19 neighborhoods.

Moreover, the project seeks to address emotional relief needs and contribute to conscious agro-ecological tourism. It is expected to build a circuit to show Esmeraldas rural ecological routes and countryside products in the coming months.

UNHCR visits rural communities near the border to identify refugees' needs



UNHCR navigated the Cayapas mangrove to visit Palma Real and Limones, host communities for Colombian refugees, especially those fleeing Nariño. In Palma Real, UNHCR met with local authorities, who highlighted that several individuals are not registered in the civil registry system because the procedure requires travel to other locations, and they do not have economic resources.

In Limones, UNHCR visited places that have served as temporary shelters for mass displacements from Colombian refugees and met with the refugee community to know their specific protection needs and integration challenges.

UNHCR inaugurates a recreational center for refugees and locals



Esmeraldas Municipality inaugurated the recreational center of La Propicia 1, built with the support of UNHCR and its partner FEPP. UNHCR Protection Officers officially handed over this space during the inauguration ceremony. The Mayor's Office insisted on the importance of having open and green spaces in the city to integrate refugee and Ecuadorian families, children, and adolescents.

This space was recovered as a nature trail for outdoor recreational activities, thus preventing it from being used for illicit activities.

The Family Coaching Service helps

Colombian refugees to start their business



Lorena is an expert nail technician who owns a small beauty salon in Esmeraldas. She arrived in Ecuador with her family after fleeing violence in Colombia in 2018. She enrolled in the Family Coaching Service, a UNHCR, HIAS and Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion joined initiative that improves access to social services, provides entrepreneurship and vocational training, seed money and mentoring to refugees in Ecuador. Thanks to it, Lorena consolidated her business, generated income, and continues her studies to hone her skills as a beautician. She is one of the 513 families who have participated to the programme in Esmeraldas.



Stories from the field

Older adult and refugee: surviving in times of pandemics

Every morning, Agapito wakes up not knowing how many times he will be able to eat. When he goes to sleep, he does so by candlelight, as the electricity in his house has been cut off due to lack of payment. About to turn 65, this Colombian refugee does not have a job or a pension that provides him with a stable income, so often he is unable to eat three meals a day. He lives with his wife Vilma, a 79-year-old Ecuadorian midwife, in Ricaurte, Esmeraldas Province, very close to the border between Ecuador and Colombia.

Agapito has been living in Ecuador for 17 years after fleeing violence from armed groups in his country. In Colombia, he used to sell fruit in a market. In Ecuador, together with Vilma, whom he met more than a decade ago, he made bread to sell to his neighbors, but the oven broke, and they had no money to fix it. Since then, they only rely on Vilma's pension and what she earns by helping the women in their community to give birth.

Like many older refugees, Agapito has been unable to find formal employment in his host country, something that has

become even more difficult during the Covid-19 pandemic. Desperation due to the lack of economic opportunities led him to look for gold on riverbanks, an activity that, in addition to being risky, is not profitable because it requires a physical condition that Agapito no longer has.

The difficulty in covering their food or housing expenses and the desire to enjoy their free time together led a group of retirees in the community to form an association. In this space, in which Agapito and Vilma participate, the elderly used to have fun playing cards, singing, and dancing before the pandemic. The association received support from UNHCR through the purchase of materials so that they can make handicrafts, which they will sell to generate income to help them buy, among other things, medicines.

Agapito hopes that money will help older people enjoy their free time once the pandemic, which has challenged their mental health as well, is over. "We need more attention, to live quietly, to go out and have fun and de-stress. And we need to eat well so that our stomachs don't weaken. That's what we need," Agapito concludes.

We thank the contributions of our donors

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