

Ecuador

Operational Update

N.12 | 2024 in Review

"I feel very happy because when I arrived, I didn't have the opportunity to have a job. Now, I give opportunities to my people and the people of Ecuador to have a job."
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Figures at a glance

Population figures

78,629

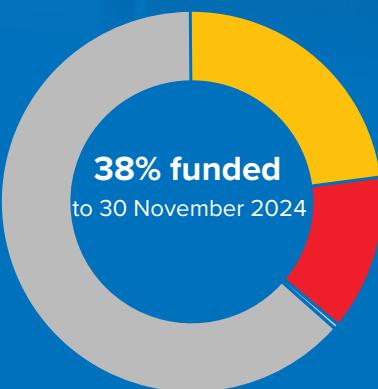
Historical figure of refugees recognized by Ecuador¹

66,062

refugees with active cases registered in ProGres¹

95%

from neighbouring Colombia



 **73.3M**
required in 2024

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

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

Our 2024 response in figures

149,315*

refugees and other displaced people supported and registered in proGres as of the end of December 2024

*Figure includes people support through other services beyond those described below

64,166 

people received legal guidance & assistance

20,453 

people assisted with cash for basic needs and protection

29,551 

people supported with collective emergency shelter

12,891 

people supported with mental health and psychosocial support

1,411 

people linked with a decent employment opportunity

2,903 

GBV survivors supported

473 

people provided with technical or skills certification

11,920 

people received hygiene kits

336 

people supported with child protection services

11,204 

people supported with community - based protection services

Operational context

In 2024, Ecuador faced significant challenges due to escalating violence, climate change impacts, and a growing influx of displaced people. As the government continued its internal conflict response, including a declared state of emergency and military operations, the country grappled with the increased presence of criminal groups. This violence affected not only Ecuadorians but also the growing number of refugees and migrants, particularly Colombians and Venezuelans. Despite efforts to reduce crime and offer some stability, displaced people and their hosts reported continued insecurity, with many suffering from disrupted livelihoods and limited access to community structures and education.

Displacement trends in Ecuador have surged, with the number of Colombian asylum seekers rising dramatically. In the first quarter of 2024 alone, Colombian asylum requests doubled compared to 2023, driven by the intensification of violence in Colombia, registering the highest number of claims on record since 2014. Ecuador remains a critical safer haven for those fleeing the Colombian conflict, as well as for thousands of Venezuelans hoping to rebuild their lives abroad. Asylum applications of Venezuelans continued to be significant, underscoring the country's role as one of the primary destinations for refugees in the region. The ongoing international protection needs prompted the government to extend and refine its regularization process, allowing for better documentation and protection for migrants and refugees.

The impact of climate change also exacerbated displacement and humanitarian challenges in Ecuador. Heavy rainfall and severe flooding affected thousands of people, particularly in

the provinces of Esmeraldas and Guayas, where thousands of homes and hectares of crops were destroyed. Additionally, an intense heatwave and drought affected agricultural production and energy supply, leading to power outages and disruptions in basic services in the second half of the year. These environmental shocks intensified the vulnerability of displaced populations and their hosts and strained the country's capacity to respond effectively to both human and environmental crises.

In response, UNHCR, in collaboration with Ecuadorian authorities and partners, worked tirelessly to provide protection and support to those affected. Emergency assistance, including shelter, food, and medical care, was delivered to the most vulnerable, while efforts to improve asylum systems and regularize people in human mobility continued. However, the persistent insecurity, environmental challenges, and political uncertainties highlight the need for sustained international support to ensure that the rights and needs of displaced people are met.

Looking ahead, the combination of security challenges, the climate crisis, and increasing displacement underscores the urgency of a coordinated international response. As Ecuador prepares for its 2025 elections, the situation remains fluid, with continued displacements, violence, and climate impacts shaping the future for refugees and migrants. UNHCR remains committed to assisting the government and local communities, ensuring that displaced populations can find safety, stability, and solutions in the face of these ongoing challenges.

Main populations forced to flee hosted by Ecuador and others of concern

Venezuelans

Venezuelans continue to lead in numbers of arrivals in Ecuador. 18,238 people entered Ecuador in December 2024 (11% less than the previous month), with a daily entry average of 588 Venezuelans, compared to exit figures registering 21,620 and 697 daily exits on average (5% more than the previous month). This represents a 37% decrease in entries and a 30% decrease in exits as compared to the same period in 2023.

444,778	Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador ²
45%	estimated to be between 18 and 45 years old ³
25%	estimated to have a higher education degree ³

Main needs

82%	access to food ³
67%	access to housing or shelter ³
57%	access to livelihoods or employment ³

Colombians

According to Government data, 6,875 new asylum applications from Colombian nationals were registered in Ecuador in 2024, 421 in December, a 41% increase as compared to the same month in 2023. In 2024, the number of asylum claims made by Colombians surpassed the number registered in 2022 (4,263) and in 2023 (5,235). With an average of 573 new asylum claims per month this year (with the highest numbers reaching 880), this is the highest number of asylum claims filed by Colombians in Ecuador since 2014 – underscoring the critical needs faced by Colombians in their country of origin and the increasing needs for international protection.

6,875	Colombians who have sought asylum in Ecuador in 2024 ²
421	were registered in December

Main needs of Colombians in Ecuador

77%	access to food, housing, clothing ⁴
10%	access to rights and services (job, education) ⁴
7%	access to documentation ⁴

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. Figures of asylum claims from the Government.

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

⁴ 2023 Protection Monitoring Report available at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/ecu>

Ecuadorians

2024 ended with Ecuadorians standing as the third nationality to cross the Darien jungle, with 16,576 registered in 2024, just after Colombians and Venezuelans. While 2022 saw a spike in Ecuadorians using this route, the numbers have dropped by 85% since January 2024 (2,208) as compared to the figure in December (321), [according to Panamanian authorities](#). However, according to Ecuadorian authorities, over 94,000 citizens did not return to the country in 2024 and 103,000 Ecuadorian asylum-seekers were pending a decision on their claims by mid- 2024. Major routes changes in 2024, with Central America, namely El Salvador, becoming the largest transit country on the way north.

SPECIAL FOCUS: REGULARIZATION PROCESS

The Registration and Regularization process has been key to enabling refugees and migrants to meet their needs and promote solutions as part of a broader strategy of protection and socioeconomic integration.

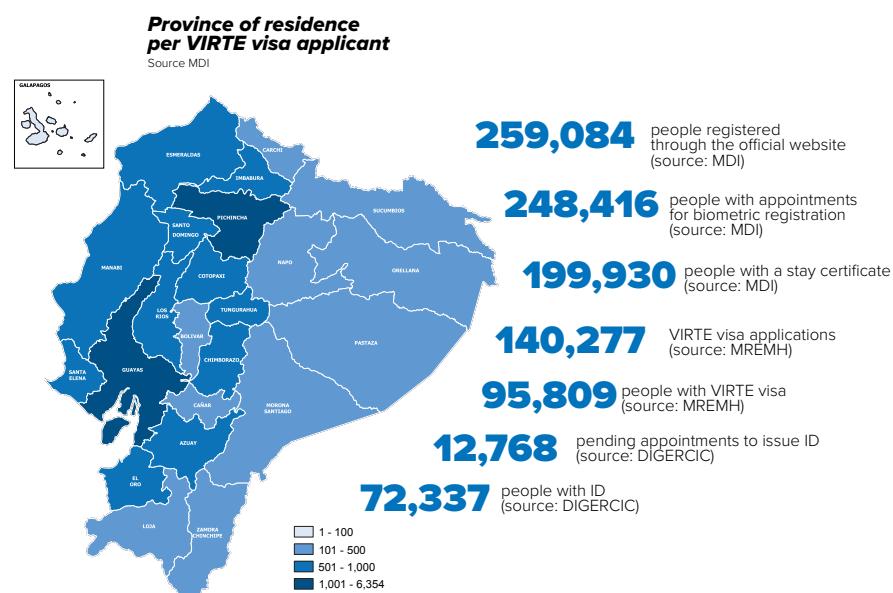
Between September 2022 and April 2024, the Ecuadorian Government undertook a registration and regularization process that benefited thousands of refugees and migrants of all nationalities with a Certificate of Migratory Permanence that regularized their stay in the territory until they could obtain a VIRTE visa. By the end of April, 140,277 visa applications had been submitted, 95,809 visas had been granted, and 72,337 identity cards had been issued. More than 199,930 people had been granted a residence permit.

Following the signing of Executive Decree Number 370 of August 23, 2024, which established a migration amnesty process for Venezuelan persons in an irregular situation in the country, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility issued the ministerial agreements that give way to the processes for the renewal of the Migratory Permanence Certificate and the renewal of the VIRTE visa respectively. In addition, on November 19, 2024, Ministerial Agreement 115 was issued, which initiated

the process of obtaining the VIRTE II visa, a process through which people would be regularizing their migratory status in the country.

UNHCR, in collaboration with IOM Ecuador, created and disseminated explanatory videos with community leaders on the renewal processes of the Certificate of Migratory Permanence and the VIRTE visa and cards for social networks with key information on each process, advice and clarifications on specific doubts of the population. These materials have been disseminated on UNHCR's social networks and shared with GTRM partners to reach the population in a timely manner. Through coordinated actions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility and the Ministry of Interior, information is constantly validated to generate other types of information materials and answers to the population's doubts and questions.

In the last few days, UNHCR has disseminated two animated video tutorials on the renewal of the Certificate of Migratory Permanence and the renewal of the VIRTE visa. These videos present a step-by-step process, useful tips and contact details of government institutions for help and support.



WORLD REFUGEE DAY

NATIONAL

Advocating for protection and solutions



On World Refugee Day, commemorated every year on June 20, UNHCR and its partners held a series of events across Ecuador to highlight the inclusion and valuable contributions of refugees. In Quito, the Estereo Arepa Festival at the Aucas Sports Club Stadium brought together refugee and local communities with music, gastronomy, and sports. Tulcan hosted the first “Un Mundo Posible” cycling event and the “RefugiArte” exhibition, while Huaquillas featured a vibrant sports and cultural gathering that included boxing and football. In Lago Agrio, the “Embracing Borders” festival combined art, gastronomy, and music to foster community coexistence.

Cities like Cuenca and Manta stood out with recreational activities, including a 4-kilometer solidarity race in support of forcibly displaced people. In Guayaquil, the Estereo Arepa Festival and the 5-kilometre race “Ponte en mi lugar (stand in my place)” brought together many participants in support of the cause, while culinary workshops showcased the region’s cultural fusion. Ibarra hosted art festivals and choral music performances, and San Lorenzo featured artistic presentations celebrating oral traditions and the experiences of young refugees. Each activity demonstrated the power of solidarity and support for those who have rebuilt their lives in Ecuador.

DELIVERING PROTECTION

NATIONAL

Partnerships and agreements to promote refugee protection



In 2024, UNHCR, thanks to the support from donors like Canada, ECHO, AECID, Japan and KOICA strengthened strategic partnerships with various institutions in Ecuador to enhance the protection of refugees, asylum seekers, and forcibly displaced people. In collaboration with Ombudsperson’s Office, priority was given to training initiatives for public servants and the pursuit of durable solutions to international protection challenges. Alongside the Ministry of Women and Human Rights, strategies were implemented in the northern border to prevent gender-based violence and promote sexual and reproductive health, with symbolic agreements established with women-led community organizations. Additionally, a partnership with the Pichincha Provincial Government ensured displaced people access essential services like education, healthcare, and humanitarian aid. In collaboration with the Constitutional Court, training sessions were conducted for officials and civil society on human rights standards, promoting the implementation of legal frameworks and practical measures for comprehensive protection.

ESMERALDAS

Building responsible masculinities to prevent gender-based violence



Through the Safe from the Start initiative, UNHCR implemented the EMAP methodology in the “26 de Febrero” community in Esmeraldas. This programme created safe spaces for dialogue where women and men debated about gender roles, stereotypes, and power dynamics, enhancing equitable and responsible behaviours.

Over the course of 16 sessions, 22 Ecuadorian women and women in human mobility gained tools to identify types of violence, access protection pathways, and promote self-care. Meanwhile, 23 men focused on developing responsible masculinities, assertive communication, and their role as allies in preventing gender-based violence.

NATIONAL

Trainings empowered by commitment and action



In 2024, UNHCR conducted a series of training sessions and workshops aimed at enhancing the protection and wellbeing of people on human mobility in their host country, with support from donors like ECHO, Canada, AECID, Japan and KOICA. These training courses addressed key topics such as international protection, refugee rights, prevention of gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive health. They were specifically designed for front-line workers, including local authorities, security forces, healthcare professionals, educators, and social workers. The primary objective was to equip these actors with the tools necessary to identify and appropriately address situations related to human mobility and violence, ensuring effective responses and safe spaces. Additionally, efforts focused on raising awareness among these stakeholders about the importance of promoting social integration and peaceful coexistence, fostering inclusive and equitable communities for all.

PROMOTING ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

CUENCA

Renewing safe spaces for forcibly displaced women

In Cuenca, UNHCR carried out an intervention to improve the infrastructure of the Hogar de la Madre y el Niño (Home of the Mother and Child), a safe space that provides shelter for refugee women, asylum seekers, and vulnerable individuals. The improvements included repairs to the electrical system and lighting; a complete renovation of the kitchen and dining room, incorporating furniture adapted to the needs of children; and the renovation of bathrooms with new sanitary fixtures, pipes, and water heaters for greater comfort. Additionally, individual and family rooms were equipped with beds and bunk beds, while specific storage areas and a luggage zone were designed. As part of the security measures, evacuation signage was implemented following established protocols.



MANTA

Expanding access to essential services

In 2024, thanks to the collaboration with the Manta Municipality, UNHCR inaugurated the Community Development Centre in El Palmar. This space is designed to promote integration and community strengthening by offering training for women, older adults, and community leaders. It also provides a safe and enriching environment for children and adolescents, fostering their holistic development and protection. Since its inauguration, which included the installation of solar panels, the centre has served as a key hub to enhance access to sustainable livelihoods, build capacities, encourage leadership, and promote social cohesion for the benefit of refugees, displaced people, and host communities.



NATIONAL

Creating safe spaces free from discrimination and xenophobia

UNHCR trained over 1,000 people in the "Respiramos Inclusión" methodology through 2024. Through self-reflection workshops and practical activities, participants received tools to create safe spaces free from discrimination and xenophobia, promoting the inclusion of forcibly displaced people. With the support of KOICA, students from various educational levels participated, along with teachers who were equipped with tools to integrate inclusion into their teaching practices. Additionally, officials from educational institutions, such as DECE (Educational Support Centers), and personnel from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Sports, were involved to enhance their ability to protect and support students in human mobility. Community leaders, including members of human rights organizations and youth groups also participated in seven localities in Ecuador: Guayaquil, Huaquillas, Manta, Ibarra, Otavalo, Tulcán, Pimampiro, and Cayambe.



📍 SANTO DOMINGO

Strengthening the quality of medical care for people in human mobility

In 2024, UNHCR completed infrastructure improvements at the Augusto Egas Health Centre in Santo Domingo, which serves an average of 10,000 people annually, including those in human mobility. With support from KOICA, the centre received essential medical equipment and key areas such as emergency, vaccination, and triage were remodelled. The intervention included floor renovations, modernization of electrical and data networks, and the installation of mechanical ventilation and air conditioning systems. Accessible bathrooms and showers for people with reduced mobility were also constructed, and plumbing and piping infrastructure was improved. These actions have significantly enhanced the quality and accessibility of health services for the entire community.



PROMOTING SOCIOECONOMIC INCLUSION

📍 NATIONAL

Simplification of requirements for access to financial rights



Ecuador has made significant progress in advancing socioeconomic inclusion for forcibly displaced people. Through UNHCR advocacy efforts, resolutions have been adopted to adapt documentation requirements to be more inclusive of refugees and asylum seekers. This allows them to open basic and savings accounts using documents such as passports, humanitarian visas or Ecuadorian ID cards. With this barrier removed, forcibly displaced people can now exercise their financial rights, participate in the economy as active contributors to their host communities.

These recent resolutions improved access particularly for Venezuelans, who can now use expired passports (up to five years) or their national ID cards to open basic accounts. These measures uphold the rights of displaced people, fostering economic independence and strengthening their ability to rebuild their lives while contributing meaningfully to their new home. UNHCR thanks the contributions from donors like Canada and Japan, which make this initiative possible.

📍 NATIONAL

UNHCR awarded the Inclusive Company Seal to 102 Ecuadorian companies



In 2024, UNHCR recognized 102 companies in Ecuador with the Inclusive Company Seal. For the third consecutive year, the award highlights the efforts of the private sector to integrate refugees and migrants. The evaluation committee, composed of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Embassy of Canada in Ecuador, and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), evaluated 122 applications, of which 102 received the award. 68 organizations received this recognition for the first time and 34 renewed their commitment. The recognized companies and chambers of commerce will have access to technical advice on socio-economic inclusion issues, practical hiring guides, product and service catalogues, among other benefits. This was possible thanks to the contributions from donors like Canada, Japan and AECID.

📍 GUAYAQUIL

Socioeconomic integration opportunities for refugees



UNHCR signed the letter of Understanding with the Municipal Public Company for the Management of Innovation and Competitiveness (ÉPICO) in Guayaquil, which will allow refugees and migrants to be included in their process to strengthen entrepreneurship. This strategic collaboration will help refugees have key skills for managing businesses and promoting innovative, transformative and competitive projects to create sustainable societies.



Building Bridges for Socioeconomic Inclusion with “Compra con Propósito”



The “Compra con Propósito” initiative took a significant step forward on October 2024, in Quito, with its third PYMES Ecuador event. UNHCR In partnership with MPCEIP, ACNUR, IOM, UNDP, UN Women, FUDELA, and IMPAQTO, the event aimed to strengthen local entrepreneurship with a focus on innovation, market opportunities, financing, and knowledge.

Through a hands-on Design Thinking workshop, participants enhanced their strategic and practical skills, empowering them to address real-world business challenges. A business roundtable and showroom showcased artisan food and beverage products, connecting 23 entrepreneurs (60% Ecuadorians, 40% forcibly displaced people) with 21 socially responsible companies. This initiative facilitated 89 business meetings, resulting in over 30 closed deals and 69 ongoing negotiations, fostering a sustainable and inclusive commercial ecosystem.

Thanks to contributions from donors like Canada, Japan, and AECID, UNHCR has made this initiative possible, showcasing the power of collaboration while strengthening community-driven economic growth and paving the way for a resilient, inclusive, and impactful local economy.

PROMOTING PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE



We continue building A World of Possibilities in 2024



UNHCR's umbrella initiative, Un Mundo Posible (A World of Possibilities), implemented since 2022, continued this year with some milestones thanks to the contribution of our donors. On social media, A World of Possibilities showcased the testimonies of two forcibly displaced people who shared their experiences and how they have contributed to their community. As part of the initiative, two Ecuadorians also shared how, from their leadership positions, they work to welcome people in human mobility and promote their inclusion in communities. Within the same initiative, at the end of the year, UNHCR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility launched the [‘Allies for A World of Possibilities Toolbox’](#), an educational resource that will enable the implementation of initiatives to promote rights and integration in all spaces and at all levels. During 2025, the dissemination of the toolbox will continue in all territories.



Sports for protection set the pace for UNHCR's work with communities



In 2024, UNHCR focused many of its efforts on implementing and promoting sports activities, from community to professional levels, in all community spaces with people across the country to reinforce protection and inclusion. At the institutional level, UNHCR and AUCAS renewed their commitment to the protection and inclusion of people and extended their agreement for another year, which meant that the UNHCR logo continued to be present on the jersey of this professional football team during 2024. Additionally, UNHCR partnered with the sports club Universidad Católica, as well as basketball, rugby, karate teams, and high-level athletes who assumed commitments to promote messages of solidarity and empathy towards refugees. At the community level, refugees and locals continued to go to the stadiums to cheer for AUCAS and Universidad Católica and participated in various football, karate, rugby, and other sports training sessions that took place in their communities. Promoting sports in the communities of Ecuador is possible thanks to the generous contributions of donors like LivGolf.

NATIONAL

Community spaces are essential for promoting the integration of refugees



During 2024, several community development centres were enhanced to continue being training and protection spaces for refugees and local communities. In Manta, for example, within the framework of the 'Inclusive Cities, Communities of Solidarity' programme, UNHCR handed over the community development centre to the San Mateo community. The programme, also implemented with IOM and UN-Habitat, aims for these spaces to be the cradle for the emergence of new leadership and the learning of best practices that can be replicated in other territories. But the response goes further. Other community spaces that have become learning spaces are health centres. Here, UNHCR provided training to health personnel on rights and improving care for all people, including those displaced as refugees.

CLIMATE ACTION

NATIONAL

UNHCR provides immediate responses to the impact of the El Niño phenomenon

Thanks to the support of our donors of flexible funding and the commitment to providing rapid and effective responses to natural emergencies for the El Niño phenomenon in Ecuador, UNHCR donated 115 communication radios to the National Risk Management Secretariat, enhancing the government's emergency response capacity. These devices, equipped with digital technology and voice encryption, ensure secure and reliable communication, even in remote areas without cellular or internet coverage. Additionally, UNHCR supported local institutions in areas affected by heavy rains, such as Chone, where 50 sleeping kits and 130 kits for men and women were distributed in coordination with the Emergency Operators Committee and the local municipality.



AZUAY

Responding to the Azuay wildfires

Thanks to the support of our donors of flexible funding and the commitment to providing rapid and effective responses to natural emergencies. In response to the wildfires in Azuay, UNHCR provided support to the Azuay Fire Department by donating 900 face masks, 200 hydration drinks, and 200 energy bars. This aid was essential to safeguard the health and safety of firefighters working in extreme conditions. The masks offered protection against smoke and toxic particles, while the hydration drinks and energy bars ensured their well-being, providing the necessary hydration and energy for the long and demanding firefighting efforts.



NATIONAL

Solar Panels: a path towards a sustainable future

UNHCR launched the "Guardians of the Ecosystem" initiative, promoting social integration and environmental protection through the joint efforts of refugees, people on the move, and Ecuadorians. Projects such as the installation of solar panels at the El Palmar Community Center, the Kawsarina Huasi shelter, and UNHCR's field offices in Lago Agrio reflect a strong commitment to sustainability by reducing reliance on non-renewable energy sources and fostering sustainable practices within communities. These actions, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, demonstrate that collaboration can have a positive impact on both the environment and social cohesion, paving the way for a more inclusive and sustainable future.



Stories from the field

With a solid customer base, Luisa has not only managed to boost her entrepreneurship but also created jobs for other people in human mobility and Ecuadorians. © UNHCR/Omar Ganchala

A washing machine and a dryer made Luisa's dreams come true in Ecuador

CUENCA

Luisa Amaya and her husband arrived in Ecuador with the hope of rebuilding their lives with their three children. In Venezuela, Luisa worked at a renowned hotel in the Cumaná region. Her days were spent attending to customers, the beach sand, and the sea waves. But suddenly, her life took a radical turn. "The problem wasn't the money; it was the line we had to stand in to get things. And sometimes, even if we spent the whole day in line, we couldn't get food or other basic necessities," says Luisa. That was precisely what forced them to leave their country.

Luisa did some research and concluded that Cuenca should be their destination, as it was shaping up to be a city with many tourists and, consequently, a strong hotel presence. Although she was confident about finding a job quickly due to her experience, the reality was different. She did not find a job, and she also had to face occasional xenophobia against Venezuelans.

But she didn't give up. She started selling desserts and empanadas, and after her husband won a prize in a boxing match, they bought washing and dryer machines and started their laundry business, which she named Wabi. Thanks to the support of UNHCR, Luisa received training in administration, finance, social media, digital advertising, and other important topics for the development of her business. Additionally, she received support to buy more washing machines and dryers to boost her business.

Wabi Laundries is now a thriving business. With a solid customer base, Luisa has not only managed to boost her entrepreneurship but also created jobs for other people in human mobility and Ecuadorians. "I feel very happy because when I arrived, I didn't have the opportunity to have a job. Now, I give opportunities to my people and the people of Ecuador to have a job. Laundry work is not easy; you must love it, be dedicated, and put your heart into it. I hope that in a few years, I can have many laundries all over Ecuador", she said.

You can help us continue building a World of Possibilities for thousands of displaced people and their host communities in Ecuador. [Donate now.](#)

We thank the contributions of our donors

30 November 2024

UNHCR Ecuador is grateful for the critical and generous support provided by donors who have contributed with earmarked and unearmarked funding.



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