



KEY FIGURES

+502,200

VENEZUELAN REFUGEES
AND MIGRANTS IN
ECUADOR

86%

LACK INCOME
TO COVER BASIC
NEEDS

FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

UN agencies
(IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP)

R4V
which coordinates
Venezuela's Refugee
and Migrant Response Plan
across 17 Latin American
countries, including Ecuador

INGO and NNGO
programmes

**73% of the financial
requirements** for Ecuador
UNHCR operations are
missing as at August 2023

CRISIS OVERVIEW

Since 2015, Ecuador has been serving as a transit and destination country for Venezuelan refugees and migrants (ACAPS accessed 07/09/2023; WB 01/06/2020). As at July 2023, there were at least 502,200 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador (R4V 30/08/2023). Around 70% of this population is concentrated in the western provinces of Guayas, Manabí, and Pichincha (IFRC 14/08/2023). Children and adolescents comprise an estimated 43% of the refugee and migrant communities in the country (UNHCR 31/05/2023).

Since 2022, Ecuador has seen increasing outflows and decreasing inflows of Venezuelans. This trend is partly attributable to its escalating insecurity and political instability and Venezuelans' lack of access to economic opportunities (WVI 24/03/2023; R4V 17/08/2023). These political and economic factors may aggravate the needs of remaining Venezuelan refugees and migrants, constraining response capacity and increasing protection risks. The volatile political and security situation has also prompted an increase in Ecuadorians fleeing the country (IFRC 14/08/2023).

As at February 2023, the top three priority needs of Venezuelans in Ecuador were access to food, shelter, and livelihoods or employment (UNCHR 28/02/2023). The irregular status of many Venezuelan refugees and migrants complicates the fulfilment of these needs, preventing them from obtaining formal employment, shelter, and services (WFP 21/04/2023). In September 2022, the Government of Ecuador began a three-step process of regularisation in the country (ACAPS accessed 07/09/2023; UNCHR 28/02/2023). As at 30 July 2023, the Refugees and Migrants Working Group (GTRM) reported that around 252,000 people (approximately half of the estimated 502,200 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the country) had completed the first step and around 53,000 had completed the final stage (R4V 30/08/2023). Venezuelans who still seek to initiate and complete the regularisation process face potential barriers, such as finding information on this process, including regularisation costs and legal fees (R4V 12/10/2022). Political unrest surrounding the upcoming elections may also cause delays.

Anticipated scope and scale

Political and criminal violence in Ecuador has increased rapidly in the last three to four years before 2023 (Wilson Center 02/06/2023). This insecurity has contributed to recent political instability, which is likely to continue through the presidential election run-off scheduled for 15 October (CEIP 30/08/2023). The escalating insecurity and instability may worsen humanitarian needs for Venezuelans in Ecuador in the coming months, creating protection risks and limiting government and humanitarian response capacity. The deteriorating political and security situation may also increase the humanitarian needs of host communities, which face protection concerns and economic hardship from gang-imposed taxes and extortion (TNH 16/08/2023). More Ecuadorians are joining mixed-migration flows moving northwards through the Darién Gap (UNCHR 28/02/2023; IFRC 14/08/2023).

Ecuador experienced a large outflow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants throughout 2022 because of widespread gang violence, a lack of employment opportunities, the high cost of regularisation, and xenophobia (WVI 24/03/2023). The number of estimated arrivals in the first quarter of 2023 was lower than during the same period in 2022. The GTRM attributed this decrease partly to a January 2023 landslide on the migration route from Colombia to Ecuador and partly to increasing criminal and political violence in Ecuador (R4V 17/08/2023). The insecurity and instability will likely cause further outflows and decreasing inflows, reducing the scale of the crisis in Ecuador but increasing pressures in neighbouring countries.

For the rest of 2023, El Niño-related rainfall is expected to increase in Ecuador. Rainfall will particularly affect coastal provinces, including El Oro, Esmeraldas, Guayas, Los Ríos, and Manabí, all of which host high numbers of Venezuelan refugees and migrants (IFRC 23/08/2023; La Hora 03/07/2023; R4V 09/12/2021). The Secretariat of Risk Management, with support from the Armed Forces of Ecuador, has developed a contingency plan for El Niño, but increasing political turmoil and the upcoming October elections may undermine the government response.

Humanitarian constraints

According to the UNHCR, migration flows in Ecuador are becoming increasingly complex because of internal movements, southward migration to Peru and Chile, and the pendular movement of migrants between Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. This complexity makes it difficult for the UNHCR to identify and meet humanitarian needs (SWI 08/02/2023).

Increasing criminal and political violence in Ecuador may restrict the access of humanitarian organisations. For example, in November 2022 and July 2023, WFP suspended operations in several provinces in western Ecuador, where large numbers of refugees and migrants are located, after the Government declared states of emergency in response to violent incidents (WFP 2022 and 01/09/2023). The increasing criminal and political violence throughout the country may constrain future humanitarian access.

CRISIS IMPACTS

Livelihoods and employment

Venezuelans in Ecuador have insufficient access to well-paid formal employment that matches their skills and experiences (Infobae 22/11/2022; R4V 12/10/2022; WFP 21/04/2023). The May 2022 Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants of Venezuela (R4V) Joint Needs Assessment (JNA), which surveyed over 8,500 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in 23 of Ecuador's 24 provinces, found that 34% of respondents were unemployed, compared with 6.3% of the host population (R4V 12/10/2022). A WFP study from June–August 2022 found that most migrants were employed in industries with low wages, such as informal commerce and personal services. 84% of employed respondents held a job that did not match their skills, experience, or qualifications (WFP 21/04/2023).

A lack of access to adequate income prevents Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador from meeting their basic needs. In mid-2022, their average monthly income was less than USD 326, which falls below the estimated vital and basic food basket costs of USD 540 and USD 765, respectively (WFP 21/04/2023). According to the R4V JNA, 73% of Venezuelan refugee and migrant households in Ecuador reported an average monthly per capita income of only USD 85.60. As at October 2022, 86% of Venezuelans in Ecuador indicated that their income was not sufficient to cover their basic needs (UNHCR 12/10/2022).

A lack of well-paid formal employment exposes Venezuelans to varied protection risks. According to the R4V JNA, 86% of surveyed Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador relied on negative coping mechanisms to meet their basic needs. These mechanisms included working more hours (58%) and begging on the streets (16%), which may entail health and

protection risks. A May 2023 study of Venezuelan refugee and migrant populations in the five Ecuadorian cities that hosted the biggest numbers of this demographic found that the monthly income of male respondents was 20% higher than that of female respondents (USAID/WOCCU 08/2023). This may force more women to resort to negative coping mechanisms. A 2021 Plan International survey of Venezuelan refugee and migrant women in Quito also found that 41% of respondents considered sexual harassment in the workplace as the most common form of gender-based violence (GBV) that they faced (Plan International et al. 16/05/2022). Informal work likely exposes female Venezuelan refugees and migrants to a higher risk of GBV and leaves them with less recourse to redress and support.

For many Venezuelan refugees and migrants, a primary barrier to accessing formal employment in Ecuador is their irregular status (WB 25/06/2020). 17 Ecuadorian businesses interviewed for a May 2023 study identified the lack of regularisation documentation as the main impediment to the hiring of Venezuelan and other foreign candidates (USAID/WOCCU 08/2023). According to the WFP's mid-2022 survey of Venezuelan migrants, 38% of respondents working in jobs that did not match their skills highlighted regularised immigration documents as a key requirement for improving their working conditions or getting a new job. The Government's current regularisation programme will likely improve access to formal employment by assisting Venezuelan refugees and migrants in acquiring required immigration documentation. Increased regularisation will also improve livelihoods; the WFP found that those with regularised immigration documentation and those with legalised training documentation earned an average of USD 87 and USD 70 more per month, respectively, than those without (WFP 21/04/2023). This indicates the need for programmes focused on training, education, and the transfer of prior qualifications.

Food security and nutrition

A study examining the economic inclusion of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador found that almost 60% of respondents were food-insecure in 2022, compared with only 13% of Ecuadorians (WFP 21/04/2023). 83% of Venezuelan refugees and migrants surveyed for the 2022 R4V JNA reported that the primary humanitarian issue they were facing was food insecurity, with people in transit at particularly high risk (R4V 12/10/2022).

Because of the high levels of food insecurity in 2022, 75% of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador reduced the quality and quantity of their meals. This will likely have future negative health consequences, particularly for children and pregnant or nursing women. Chronic childhood malnutrition is one of the most significant public health challenges among the general population in Ecuador, attributed to factors including food insecurity, poor access to health services, and insufficient WASH facilities. These needs are generally higher among Venezuelan refugees and migrants, indicating an even greater risk for chronic malnutrition and associated developmental and health impacts (R4V 12/10/2022).

Shelter and WASH

Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Ecuador identified adequate shelter as the second-highest priority need in the 2022 R4V JNA. This included related issues, such as the poor condition of housing, insufficient furniture, and insecure housing (R4V 12/10/2022). Projected heavy rainfall because of El Niño may worsen these conditions in the coming months, creating poor WASH environments, further health risks for refugees and migrants in poor shelters, and additional damage to dwellings.

While 98% of Venezuelan migrants and refugees living in Ecuador have access to running water in or near their place of residence, many residences lack water meters, exposing them to frequent disruptions in water service. 7% of Venezuelan refugee and migrant households share hygiene facilities with another family, double the rate of the host population, and 25% share toilet facilities. This situation may expose female Venezuelan refugees and migrants to an increased risk of GBV (R4V 12/10/2022).

Venezuelans transiting Ecuador face particularly acute shelter and WASH needs, including the lack of a safe place to sleep, clean drinking water, and personal hygiene items (R4V 09/12/2021).

Health

Although healthcare in Ecuador is free and universal, Venezuelan refugees and migrants face various barriers to accessing it. These barriers include economic challenges, long wait times, and the xenophobic attitudes of some healthcare professionals. In a 2021 needs assessment by the International Rescue Committee, 58% of Venezuelan refugee and migrant respondents reported that doctors in Ecuador had refused to treat them at least once, and 24% reported that they could not afford medical care (IRC 06/04/2022). The 2022 R4V JNA found that 27% of Venezuelan refugees and migrant respondents in Ecuador reported access to health services as their main need. 7% specifically reported insufficient access to sexual and reproductive health services (R4V 12/10/2022).

In recent years, dengue and chikungunya outbreaks have affected Ecuadorian provinces with high numbers of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, including El Oro, Esmeraldas, and Guayas (Logistics Cluster accessed 11/9/2023). Increased rainfall associated with El Niño, combined with the poor WASH conditions in some refugee and migrant communities, may lead to further outbreaks (R4V 12/10/2022; WFP 01/09/2023).

Education

In 2022, 27% of school-age Venezuelan refugee and migrant children and adolescents did not attend school in Ecuador (R4V 12/10/2022). This exposes them to multiple protection risks, including child labour and recruitment into criminal gangs (R4V 12/10/2022; WVI 24/03/2023). School enrolment for primary-school-age Venezuelan refugee and migrant children in Ecuador was 75% of the eligible population, compared to 26% of eligible secondary-school-age children and adolescents (R4V 12/10/2022). There is no available evidence on the long-term developmental impacts of missing school for Venezuelan migrant and refugee children in Ecuador, but these are important considerations. While education is free in Ecuador, frequently cited barriers to school enrolment for this demographic include education-related costs, such as uniforms and transport, along with a lack of required enrolment documentation and limited school capacity to accommodate more students (Plan International et al. 01/03/2023; R4V 12/10/2022). WFP reported that one-third of Venezuelan migrant households surveyed in mid-2022 reduced their spending on education and healthcare to buy sufficient food (WFP 21/04/2023).

Protection

Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador reported that one of the main protection risks they faced was their irregular status, which limited their access to rights, services, and employment opportunities (R4V 09/12/2021).

It is unclear whether the increasingly powerful criminal gangs in Ecuador are specifically targeting Venezuelan refugees and migrants, who may be particularly vulnerable to gang violence because of their involvement in the informal economy, lack of secure shelter, and, in many cases, irregular status, which may isolate them from local authorities. The cities of Guayaquil and Esmeraldas, which host high numbers of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, have seen particular increases in gang violence in recent months (AI 10/08/2023; R4V 09/12/2021).

In the last quarter of 2022, there was an increase in the involvement of adolescents (from host, refugee, and migrant communities) in criminal gangs, particularly in the outer regions of urban centres (WVI 24/03/2023).

Venezuelan refugees and migrants are also subject to frequent xenophobia and discrimination, preventing them from accessing healthcare and other services (IRC accessed 07/09/2023). 36% of Venezuelan households surveyed by R4V in 2022 reported experiencing an incident of xenophobia or discrimination (R4V 12/10/2022). This xenophobia partly comes from the perception that Venezuelan refugees and migrants are involved in criminal activities (The World 28/07/2023).

Venezuelan refugee and migrant women in Ecuador are subject to specific protection risks, including GBV and trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation (AI 17/11/2022). In a 2021 Plan International study, 72% of Venezuelan women surveyed in Quito reported facing some form of GBV in Ecuador (Plan International et al. 16/05/2022). Cases of GBV, including femicide, are likely significantly underreported because of refugees' and migrants' lack of access to and trust in local authorities (AI 17/11/2022).

Venezuelan refugees and migrants in transit also face heightened protection risks, including sexual violence, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and smuggling (3UNFPA accessed 15/09/2023). People using irregular migration pathways to enter Ecuador are particularly vulnerable to trafficking (R4V 09/12/2021).

DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS

Since 2015, Venezuela has experienced a political and economic crisis that has driven millions of Venezuelans to leave the country (BBC 04/01/2023). As at 5 August 2023, host governments reported over 7.7 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide, but these only recorded regular migrants and underestimated the actual number of refugees (R4V accessed 13/09/2023). About 150,000 returned to Venezuela during the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, reasons for returns include intolerance, a lack of integration in host countries, a perception of improved economic conditions in Venezuela, the desire to reunite with family, and homesickness. Based on a survey conducted between September–October 2022, the last two accounted for the greatest number of returns to Venezuela (81%) (NBC 01/09/2022; UNHCR 03/2023; MMC 16/12/2022).

That said, the number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants fleeing their country has been increasing again since the end of 2022 because of a lack of economic opportunities and access to basic services in the country (NBC 01/09/2022). In 2022, the Venezuelan economy grew between 10–15% following eight years of GDP contraction, spurred by increased oil production, but this growth was distributed unevenly, leading to persistent inequality (BBC 04/02/2023; El País 10/07/2023). While hyperinflation has formally ended in the country, high inflation continues, and purchasing power has decreased for segments of the population, approximately 7.7 million of whom continue to require humanitarian assistance (UNHCR accessed 03/09/2023). A 2022 Mixed Migration Centre study found that only 27% of surveyed returnees intended to remain in Venezuela permanently, 26% intended to stay temporarily, and 47% had not yet decided (MMC 16/12/2022). Outflows may continue to increase in the lead-up to the 2024 Venezuelan elections, which may cause a spike in political instability and undermine recent economic growth (EIU accessed 11/09/2023; El País 10/07/2023).

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Political instability and violence

Ecuador has faced an escalating political crisis since May 2023, when former Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso dissolved Parliament in response to widespread protests, an economic downturn, corruption allegations, and his upcoming impeachment trial (CEIP 30/08/2023). Presidential and legislative elections were subsequently scheduled for 20 August (Wilson Center 02/06/2023). On 9 August, presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio was assassinated, currently the most high-profile example of the increasing political violence across the country. In response, the Government declared a 60-day state of emergency, suspending rights such as the freedom of assembly and providing a broader mandate for security forces to carry out search operations (AI 10/08/2023). Following the first-round voting on 30 August, a run-off in the presidential elections has been scheduled for 15 October. The incoming president will have just over one year to implement policies to target economic growth and the deteriorating security situation before the next scheduled elections in 2025 (CEIP 30/08/2023).

The escalation of insecurity and violence is a top priority for many voters. The homicide rate in Ecuador has increased by 400% since 2021 (Wilson Center 02/06/2023). Police and public officials are subject to targeted assassination, car bombs are frequent in major cities, and extortion networks affect businesses of all sizes (CFR 14/06/2023).

Climate and natural hazards

Most of the Ecuadorian population lives in mountain areas and along the coast, which are commonly subject to natural hazards (USAID accessed 11/09/2023). In the first quarter of 2023, multiple concurrent disasters, including floods, landslides, and a magnitude 6.8 earthquake, affected Ecuador (IFRC 13/07/2023). The earthquake hit the southwestern province of Guayas, aggravating the humanitarian needs of its large Venezuelan refugee and migrant population (USAID accessed 11/09/2023; R4V 12/10/2022). In June 2023, heavy rainfall and flooding affected 20,400 people in the northwestern province of Esmeraldas, creating food security, shelter, WASH, and protection needs (OCHA 12/06/2023). While it was not specified whether the affected communities in Esmeraldas included refugees and migrants, this figure provides insight into the scale of needs resulting from the recent flooding.

Similar flooding events will likely characterise the remainder of 2023 given the threat of El Niño. In May 2023, the Ecuadorian Secretariat of Risk Management declared a Yellow Alert because of the likelihood of El Niño conditions in 17 provinces. There is a 96% probability of

El Niño-related rainfall from August–October (IFRC 23/08/2023). As at July, there were already atypically high levels of rainfall in Guayas and Los Ríos, where there are large Venezuelan refugee and migrant communities (La Hora 11/07/2023). Further rainfall, flooding, and landslides will increase the WASH, food security, and shelter needs of this population (WFP 01/09/2023).

Economic downturn

Ecuador continues to experience an economic downturn because of the combined impacts of COVID-19, inflation, and the war in Ukraine on food prices and production (R4V 12/10/2022; WFP 01/09/2023).

FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

There are currently 45 organisations working to address the needs of refugees, migrants, and host communities in Ecuador (36% INGOs, 31% UN, 20% national NGOs, and 13% others). Over half of these organisations (25 total) work on protection, followed by education (21), WASH (18), and food security (17) (OCHA accessed 11/09/2023).

As an upper-middle-income country, Ecuador has increasingly become less of a priority for humanitarian funds (WFP 01/09/2023). As at 31 August 2023, UNHCR had received only 27% of the USD 76 million required to fund humanitarian programmes in the country in 2023 (UNHCR 31/08/2023).

Various government entities are active in the humanitarian response to migration flows and natural disasters. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility is currently overseeing the registration and regularisation process for all migrants and refugees in Ecuador. As at July 2023, the Secretariat of Risk Management and National Emergency Operations Committee had strengthened prevention and mitigation actions in response to the onset of El Niño-related rains in several western provinces (R4V 30/08/2023). The Secretariat of Risk Management collaborated with the armed forces, national police, Ecuadorian Red Cross, Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion, and Ministry of the Environment, Water, and Ecological Transition to provide WASH, shelter, food, NFIs, and psychosocial support to populations affected by the June 2023 flooding (Gov't of Ecuador 08/06/2023).