UNHCR Country Strategy Evaluation: Ecuador 2019 - 2022

July 2023

(Original version in Spanish)

UNHCR Evaluation Office

UNHCR's Evaluation Policy confirms UNHCR's commitment to supporting accountability, learning and continual improvement through the systematic examination and analysis of organizational strategies, policies and programmes. Evaluations are guided by the principles of independence, impartiality, credibility and utility, and they are undertaken to enhance the organization's performance in addressing the protection, assistance and solution needs of refugees, stateless people and other persons of concern.

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Acknowledgements

Evaluation information at a glance	
Title of the evaluation:	UNHCR Country Strategy Evaluation: Ecuador
Timeframe covered:	2019-2022 (June)
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Type of evaluation:	Country Strategy Evaluation
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Evaluation Manager	Susan Bird
Support Staff	N/A

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READING NOTES

- The original version of the report has been written in Spanish. The translation into English has been made by the evaluation team. The translation has not undergone professional review or proof editing.
- The report has adopted the term "forcibly displaced and stateless persons" as suggested alternative term to "persons of concern" (see: Note on selected terminology alternatives to "Persons of Concern (POC)" [to UNHCR], Division of International Protection, March 2023).
- In general, the reference to UNHCR in the text also includes partner organisations that play a crucial role in the deployment of most programmes and actions in the country. The use of the term UNHCR and partners has been avoided to facilitate the readability of the text.

Acronyms

AAP	Accountability to affected populations		NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
AGD	Age, gender and diversity		OAS	Organisation of American States
BO	Branch Office		OLHM	Organic Law on Human Mobility
CBI	Cash Based Interventions		OL	Operating Level
CO	Country Office		OP	Operating Planning
COP	Country Operations Plan		PA	Partnership Agreement
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework		PPE	Personal protective equipment
CSO	Civil Society Organisations		PSEA	Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
EU	European Union		QAI	Quality Assurance Initiative
FO	Field Office		RMS	Results Monitoring Survey
FU	Field Unit		RSD	Refugee status determination procedure
GAD	Autonomous Decentralised Governments		SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
GBV	Gender-Based Violence		SO	Sub-office
GoE	Government of Ecuador		SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees		UN	United Nations
GCM	Global Compact on Migration		UNCCS	UN Common Cash Statement
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team		UNCT	United Nations Country Team
HIAS	Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society		UNDAF	United Nations Assistance Development Framework
IACHR	Inter American Court of Human Rights		UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre		UNODOC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
IFI	International financial institutions		UNSDCF	UN Framework for Sustainable Dev. Cooperation
IM	Information Management		UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
IOM	International Organisation for Migration		UNV	United Nations Volunteers programme
IPD	International Protection Directorate		USA	United States of America
LLH	Livelihoods		WFP	World Food Programme
MESI	Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion		WGRM	Working Group for Refugees and Migrants
MoE	Ministry of Education			
MERHM	Ministry of External Relations and Human Mobility			
MPG	Multi-Purpose Cash Grants			
MPH	Ministry of Public Health			
MYMP	Multi-Year, Multi-Partner Strategy			

Executive Summary

Background and objectives

UNHCR's Evaluation Office commissioned the Evaluation of the Country Strategy for Ecuador at the request of the Representative in Ecuador to assess the effectiveness and results of UNHCR's interventions during the period 2019 - 2022. The three main objectives of the evaluation are to: i) assess the strategic relevance, contribution to national objectives and effectiveness of UNHCR's performance during the period 2019-2022 (June); ii) determine the extent to which UNHCR Ecuador's own capacity, structures and processes are aligned and adequate; iii) document lessons learned and recommendations.

Methodology

The evaluation aimed to provide an assessment of UNHCR's work in Ecuador, including the vision, strategic objectives and priorities defined in the planning and monitoring documents elaborated during the evaluated period. The evaluation adopted the principles of participation and a utilisation-focused approach and was summative and formative in nature. As such, it employed a theory-based approach as the evaluative framework to generate both an understanding of what has worked and an understanding of why it worked. The evaluation framework integrated three areas of inquiry, grouping the focus themes and the evaluation questions agreed between UNHCR and the evaluation team. The evaluation matrix was structured around three areas of inquiry and included 10 main evaluation questions related to the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

The data collection adopted a constructive approach using "light footprint" and "appreciative enquiry " methods aimed at recognising the efforts made to reinforce change-oriented learning. The evaluation has been conducted mainly in a face-to-face format, with some activities done remotely. The following data collection methods were used:

- Documentary review: approximately 90 documents were consulted (40% external and 60% UNHCR)
- Key actors and informants: 181 external key actors were initially identified, grouped into seven categories or groups of informants, of which 168 contacts responded (62% female, 38% male). Internally, 108 interviews have been conducted with UNHCR staff.
- Observations: It has been possible to visit all 11 locations where UNHCR is present.

Data and findings have been aggregated and reviewed by evaluation question, area of inquiry and triangulated by data type, method, data source and evaluator. A first validation of findings workshop was held for UNHCR and two additional workshops to co-create the recommendations (UNHCR and partners) were organised.

Quality control (QA) has been based on UNHCR's evaluation quality guide, UNEG standards and ALNAP and OECD/DAC good practices. QA has been carried out internally by the evaluation team and externally by UNHCR. The evaluation followed the guidance on integrating gender equality and human rights principles set out in the UNEG Handbook, (2011). Observation sessions involving adolescents were conducted in accordance with the legal authority of the partner organization and with the explicit informed consent of the participants.

One difficulty the evaluation faced was the analysis of the Ecuador country operation's effectiveness over a four-year period, based on annual UHNCR planning but with the introduction of UNHCR's new global monitoring system in 2022. The operational and budgetary impact of COVID-19 during 2020 has also distorted the trend analysis. Mitigation measures have been agreed with UNHCR throughout the process.

Findings

How strategic were UNHCR's actions and partnerships and how did UNHCR's support and leadership contribute to local protection and integration?

There is clear recognition of the centrality of UNHCR's work, together with agencies and partners, in the articulation and scope of the response to the Venezuelan exodus, as well as in the visibility of international protection on the public agenda. UNHCR's contributions reached the highest institutional level and cross-border relevance (Quito Process). UNHCR promoted the creation of an "ecosystem" integrating public administrations, civil society, community organisations, private sector, international organisations and donors which facilitated (depending on the resources available) a comprehensive approach to the multiple challenges faced by forcibly displaced and stateless persons during their transit or settlement process in Ecuador.

How relevant have UNHCR's protection and solutions initiatives been?

UNHCR responded to the needs arising from the intense and varied cross-border and population movements at three distinct but complementary levels. First, UNHCR responded to the protection needs of individuals, providing protection, assistance, and inclusion, with a special focus on vulnerable profiles. Second, it responded to GoE demands to support public policies and programmes in response to the massive Venezuelan exodus (and overlapping COVID-19 pandemic), which overwhelmed state response capacities. Third, it responded to the need to document, analyse and understand the multidimensionality and complexity of international protection in a context of mixed movements to influence and mobilise key stakeholders.

How effective was UNHCR's engagement with the Government of Ecuador (GoE), the WGRM, the UNSDCF and other humanitarian and development actors?

The co-leadership and effective work of UNHCR and IOM to achieve a functional Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (WGRM) appears to be a widely recognised achievement and has allowed for a relevant and reasonably coordinated emergency response to a large-scale dual humanitarian crisis (human mobility and COVID-19 pandemic).

UNHCR's joint work with the GoE, through strategic litigation and technical assistance, has contributed to notable progress in international protection standards and improvements in the national asylum system. Nevertheless, challenges persist due to the complex and limited implementation of the Cartagena Declaration, difficult access to international protection mechanisms for the Venezuelan population, and dependence on UNHCR resources.

The work of partners, in particular local organisations with a long tradition and experience of community activism, has been essential to reinforce the community-based approach of UNHCR's actions, including community-based protection and peaceful coexistence. The territorial presence of partners has allowed broadening the reach of programmes and was instrumental in expanding the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaborations with the private sector and other stakeholders have been crucial in promoting favourable conditions and livelihood opportunities for the socio-economic integration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons since 2021.

UNHCR's work within the UNCT (and HCT in 2021), including the coordination of several working groups on both the Venezuelan exodus and the pandemic response, has "mainstreamed" international protection and human mobility in the UNSDCF. This effort has also facilitated consensus building around joint programmes, approaches, and tools (generating exceptional good practices with interesting potential for replication).

How effective is UNHCR's allocation of resources to short-term assistance measures as opposed to medium/long-term capacity building and durable solutions?

UNHCR's role has been effective in mobilising resources, articulating an effective humanitarian response and supporting access to public services (e.g. health and education) during critical years of the Venezuelan exodus. Humanitarian assistance had to be scaled up due to the pandemic, absorbing much of the resources, and it enabled mitigation of short-term critical needs of Venezuelan and Colombian populations through generalised use of CBIs. Budget data clearly shows the concentration of resources in Basic needs and essential services and the challenges faced by UNHCR in allocating (and mobilising) resources for livelihoods interventions and durable solutions-based initiatives until 2021.

Despite limited resource allocation, UNHCR's support for livelihoods and socio-economic integration has laid the foundations, generated good practices and opened spaces for access to employment and entrepreneurship, so far incipiently. Evidence on LLH has been limited and LLH interventions have not always linked to the logic of protection, due to compartmentalisation between the processes of registration and those of economic integration.

UNHCR allocated financial, human and material resources annually to MERHM / IPD to develop the capacity of the national asylum system, which led to notable improvements. However, given the difficulties to access international protection for Venezuelans, UNHCR supported regularisation as a migratory alternative and an opportunity to promote integration (as a durable solution). Although regularisation provided an opportunity for integration, it reduced the possibility of accessing specific international protection mechanisms for the Venezuelan population. UNHCR provided technical expertise and material and human resources to reinforce protection capabilities and tools among public offices, partners and other organisations, but difficulties have been identified in maintaining the centrality of protection.

In terms of access and inclusion, UNHCR's allocation of resources to support social services in selected localities (e.g. health centres, schools, pandemic response, connectivity) strengthened UNHCR's visibility with local public administrations and host communities. In addition, UNHCR investments at community level (e.g. community protection, communication with communities) have facilitated coexistence between communities (Venezuelan, Colombian and host populations) and social integration in critical neighbourhoods. These community-based interventions are at an early stage and show potential for replication but need to be consolidated. On the other hand, budgetary constraints have not allowed UNHCR to allocate resources to address the needs of GBV survivors and mental health conditions, that required both short-term actions and medium-term accompaniment. Budgetary constraints and contextual factors also explain the persistent difficulties of access to the national social protection scheme and to housing for the Venezuelan and Colombian populations, as key facilitating factors of social and economic integration.

In 2022, the increased urban violence generated new protection risks for which UNHCR operation and communities were unprepared in terms of resources, tools and procedures.

As part of durable solutions, UNHCR carried out one of the most successful resettlement operations in the region, expanding protection possibilities for particularly vulnerable Colombian and Venezuelan populations.

To what extent has UNHCR's support for short-term assistance facilitated the transition to longer-term solutions?

The use of CBIs has been the short-term intervention with the clearest contribution to medium-term social and economic integration processes (despite some limitations). Multifunctional and coordinated work on CBI (both between UNHCR units and with WFP, UNICEF and other organisations) has appeared as a good practice. The expansion of CBI as a humanitarian response mechanism has been relevant and effective in addressing short-term needs (exacerbated by the pandemic), but it has diluted the use of CBI as a protection mechanism. UNHCR's transition towards a multi-purpose and prolonged CBI, complemented by WFP and UNICEF support within the UNCCS framework, has proven successful in facilitating the settlement procedures of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. The recent reduction in funding may make it difficult to continue a unique inter-agency CBI response.

Working through a network of partners has facilitated extensive coverage across different geographic areas and populations, enabling the creation of care pathways that have predominantly addressed pressing international protection needs (including "mobile protection" actions). The care pathways and mechanisms employed for the identification and management of critical cases functioned reasonably well. However, some gaps in protection (in shelters, other key spaces and referrals), have been identified as a result of misinformation and the complexities of referrals among a large number of humanitarian and development organisations.

To what extent has UNHCR's support for the empowerment of communities - migrant/refugee and host - been relevant and effective in strengthening self-management and ensuring access to services?

Public administrations have implemented effective measures to provide access to education, health and some social programmes for forcibly displaced and stateless persons. UNHCR supported several public policies and programmes, helping to mitigate "informal" barriers, reduce gaps, and manage particularly vulnerable cases. However, there were critical deficits in the capacity and expertise of public services to address GBV survivors, child and adolescents, and forcibly displaced and stateless persons with mental health conditions.

From 2021 onwards, UNHCR expanded partnerships with the private sector and established agreements with the public sector and local governments; these actions helped lay good foundations for connecting labour supply and demand and support entrepreneurship initiatives (under an innovative agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank), adapted to local markets and economic models. UNHCR supported good hiring practices by private companies and the launch of viable ventures that serve as a reference to raise awareness among the private sector and inspire other potential refugees and asylum seekers.

However, formal access to livelihoods opportunities has been hampered by lack of documentation, low economic growth rates, and high rates of informal employment. Bureaucracy, scarcity of start-up funds and lack of information or training of forcibly displaced and stateless persons have also limited the reach of UNHCR's support to income generating activities. Although the ongoing migratory regularisation is expected to address some of these barriers, the economic climate has adversely affected (and may continue to affect) formal access to livelihoods. From a monitoring point of view, the metrics available in relation to the socio-economic integration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons have been limited.

To what extent is UNHCR's current organisational model in Ecuador relevant, appropriate and sustainable, given the dynamic and changing national context?

UNHCR's organisational model and presence in a dozen locations has been relevant and was recognised as a strength and a clear comparative advantage. However, the growth of installed capacity (including offices) and the development of the socio-economic integration strategy were essentially based on emergency funding and US funds. In the current context of reduced funding, this generates budgetary tensions, programmatic difficulties, and uncertainty for the financial stability (and sustainability) of the operation, especially considering its focus on medium-term integration and national capacity development actions.

The support provided by the Bureau and headquarters has fluctuated over the four years. Initially, there was intense support to establish the emergency response in Ecuador, with regular support from Panama. Subsequently, regional bureau support appears to show less regularity and variations between programme and functional areas; with gaps in protection, LLH and administrative issues.

The operation has been innovative and a pioneer in the adoption and development of new tools, data and information management, as well as in external communication. The evidence-based approach has been key to driving decision-making and intervention strategies. External communication efforts have been challenged by the predominant human mobility narrative (of which UNHCR is a part), which hindered international protection visibility.

How have changes in UNHCR's data and information management tools affected UNHCR's organisational model and its ability to fulfil its mandate?

The adoption of rigorous and innovative information management tools, shared with other key actors (partners, national authorities, WGRM), provided essential evidence for structuring large-scale humanitarian interventions, helped build local capacity and aligned humanitarian analysis with national statistics. UNHCR's external communication has been confronted with a dominant human mobility narrative (of which UNHCR is a part) and persistent xenophobia, that have made it difficult to make UNHCR's mandate and international protection visible. Even so, thanks to the use of innovative communication tools and partnerships, UNHCR achieved positive results, especially through social media. The coordination between external and internal communication and operational units was effective in enhancing community work and amplifying the voices of refugees and communities.

How effective is UNHCR's positioning with bilateral, multilateral, and private donors to increase collaboration and fundraising?

UNHCR has been effective in mobilising emergency funds for both the Venezuelan exodus and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the WGRM has been a successful platform for attracting international funding. UNHCR's funding structure in Ecuador has been (and remains) highly dependent on US bilateral funding, which poses a risk to the financial sustainability of the operation. The participation of multilateral and private funding presents modest levels in the funding structure. In this sense, UNHCR recently implemented relevant actions to diversify the funding structure, but it is still too early to assess progress.

Conclusions

Strategic level

C1) Protection leadership - UNHCR has been in a leadership position and provided an adapted, comprehensive, effective and "protection-sensitive" response to the Venezuelan exodus. UNHCR succeeded in strengthening the functioning and quality of the national asylum system, although reliance on UNHCR resources poses a challenge of continuity and sustainability. UNHCR's actions were coherent with national circumstances (human mobility, regularisations) and the organisation's global orientations ("legal migration options"). It should be noted that UNHCR faced a paradox: on one side, recourse to migration alternatives as an option for local integration, in line with the GoE policy. On the other side, the challenging task of raising the visibility of international protection within the prevailing migration narrative, resulting in a diluted recourse to international protection for the Venezuelan population. Differentiating the roles of UNHCR and IOM has become increasingly complex, leading to the emergence of "grey zones" in their respective mandates.

C2) WGRM Platform - The WGRM was launched with a humanitarian logic that has allowed it to respond to urgent needs, to advocate for human mobility and to mobilise resources. Currently, the humanitarian logic and structure of the WGRM has only partially adapted to the evolution of public policy on human mobility and changes in mixed movements. In some areas, this logic and structure has led to dependence on external support.

Operational level

C3) Protection focus - UNHCR's expanded involvement in direct implementation and case management since 2022 has strengthened the organization's focus on protection. In earlier years, there were challenges in maintaining a consistent protection lens due to various factors such as high humanitarian needs, staff turnover, varying protection skills among personnel, the complexity of aligning protection approaches across organizations, gaps in referrals, and differing protection visions and backgrounds among partner organizations. Additionally, strengthening the protection component has become essential in a context of emerging criminal violence.

C4) Livelihoods - UNHCR's interventions in local livelihoods and housing (LLH) have been aligned with the national context. The organization's advocacy efforts with the private sector and local governments have been remarkable in creating opportunities for forcibly displaced and stateless persons. Moreover, UNHCR and its partners have effectively leveraged past experiences and utilized tools developed in collaboration with specialized actors. Despite efforts and good practices, UNHCR's resources directed at socio-economic integration have been modest in relation to the challenges, and both access to employment and entrepreneurship have faced critical barriers (e.g. irregular migratory status, bureaucracy and administrative obstacles) and an unfavourable socio-economic environment. Available data shows moderate reach considering the broad challenge of fostering integration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons into the formal employment market (considering that informality also affects the Ecuadorian population) and limited levels of innovation or integration in value chains.

C5) Relations with partners - Partner organisations have played a central role in enhancing the capacity for action and the scope of UNHCR's response, reinforcing the "localisation" of UNHCR's strategy, the adaptation to local contexts across various regions. They have been crucial in reaching individuals facing access barriers or experiencing exclusion. While UNHCR's collaboration with partners has generally been positive and constructive, there were gaps and challenges that could hinder the consolidation and continuity of certain programs and achievements, particularly given current budgetary constraints.

Organisational level

C6) Decentralisation and registration - The operational reorganisation in two critical areas (decentralisation of administrative Branch Office functions to field offices and the recovery of registration by UNHCR) has been an ambitious and coherent effort aimed at increasing efficiency in field operations and strengthening the protection and case management focus. However, the changes have taken place in a short period of time and in a context of reduced resources for the operation, which has generated imbalances and internal functional tensions.

C7) Funding model - Emergency funds have allowed for significant territorial and programmatic expansion essential in providing comprehensive coverage for forcibly displaced and stateless persons during crises. At present, however, funds do not appear adequate to ensure the stability (and sustainability) of UNHCR's territorial presence (one of the added values of the operation) and recovery of the registration function. From a programmatic perspective, the current funding structure does not adequately align with the sustained support needed for the national asylum system (IPD) and socio-economic integration and livelihoods actions. These areas require continuous efforts with a developmental perspective, yet the funding structure does not provide sufficient resources for medium-term support.

Key recommendations

Strategic level

R1 - Articulating the response to changing regional mixed movements: Enhance regional analysis of human mobility and international protection needs to support comprehensive, evidence-based, multi-agency responses that are tailored to evolving mixed movements across multiple countries and involve governmental and non-governmental actors.

R2 - Evolution of the role and WGRM set-up: Update the role of the WGRM considering changes in human mobility, the transformation of needs arising from the Venezuelan exodus and national public policy. This shift should outline how the WGRM would move from a large-scale humanitarian logic and set-up to development of managerial and governance capacities of national institutions.

R3 - Consolidation and stabilisation of the national asylum system: Build consensus on a strategic plan for the national asylum system (taking advantage of a favourable institutional environment) as a 'roadmap' to reach political and institutional agreement on the management of international protection and mitigate the effects of rotation and political cycles.

Operational level

R4 - Protection capacities: Strengthen the capacities and articulation of UNHCR and partner teams to provide protection services in a cross-cutting and consistent manner in all phases of assistance and in "safe spaces" (e.g. shelters, WASH and care points).

R5 - Emerging criminal violence in urban areas: Update the protection strategy, programmes and security protocols in neighbourhoods with increasing criminality based on new risks to communities, UNHCR and partner teams.

R6 - Multipurpose cash transfers (CBI) as a protection tool: Strengthen the articulation of the CBI response with the identification of risks and vulnerabilities (as part of the analysis of protection needs), taking advantage of direct implementation of registration.

R7 - Economic integration and livelihoods: Strengthen and expand partnerships with specialised livelihoods organisations to develop innovative models or interventions.

R8 - Relations with partners: Review the current portfolio of partners considering the added value of established agreements considering UNHCR's new multi-year strategy and identify opportunities for collaboration at the local level.

Organisational level

R9 - Alignment of the organisational chart with the multiannual strategy and emerging needs: Conduct an external assessment (with the support of the Regional Bureau) of the operation's organisational chart, job profiles, workloads, levels of responsibility, etc., to determine the needs and adequacy of resources in line with the new UNHCR Ecuador multiannual strategy.

R10 - Financing structure of the operation: Increase efforts to diversify funding sources by prioritizing donors that emphasize national capacity development, public policies, and sub-regional funding for cross-border interventions.

1 Introduction

UNHCR's Evaluation Office commissioned the Evaluation of the Country Strategy of Ecuador at the request of the Representative in Ecuador to assess the results of UNHCR's interventions during the period 2019 - 2022. This evaluation is part of a series of Country Strategy Evaluations (CSEs) designed to contribute to the organisation's learning and planning processes. The CSEs aim to generate evidence to strengthen improvements in protection, solutions and assistance to forcibly displaced and stateless persons and host communities. The CSEs focus on UNHCR's strategic positioning, comparative advantage and organisational and programmatic performance.

While CSEs support organisational learning and accountability for past performance, they are forward-looking. By highlighting lessons learned, strengths and operational challenges at country level, evaluation recommendations help inform UNHCR's future directions for operational planning, resource mobilisation and implementation at country level. The three main objectives of the UNHCR's Country Strategy Evaluation of Ecuador were as follows:

1. Assess the strategic relevance, contribution to national objectives and effectiveness of UNHCR's performance during the period 2019-2022 (as of June, or latest available data).
2. Determine the extent to which UNHCR Ecuador's own capacity, structures and processes are aligned and adequate to carry out the strategy.
3. Document lessons learned and recommendations for improving UNHCR Ecuador's actions.

2 Methodology

2.1 Evaluation Framework

The evaluation aimed to provide an assessment of UNHCR's work in Ecuador, including the vision, strategic objectives and priorities defined in the planning and monitoring documents elaborated during the evaluated period (Multi-year, Multi-partner protection and solutions strategy 2018-2019, Country operational plans 2019, 2020 and 2021, and UNHCR Ecuador interim strategy 2022). The evaluation adopted the principles of participation[1] and a utilisation-focused[2] approach and was summative and formative in nature[3]. As such, it employed a theory-based approach as evaluative framework to generate both an understanding of what worked and an understanding of why it worked[4]. The evaluation framework was composed of three areas of inquiry, grouping the focus themes and the evaluation questions agreed between UNHCR and the evaluation team, as follows:

- UNHCR's strategic contribution to the national asylum system and the consistency of actions and partnerships to respond to protection challenges and solutions for forcibly displaced and stateless persons.
- UNHCR's programmatic response in terms of coherence, effectiveness, and sustainability.
- UNHCR's organisational development of the country office (CO) in Ecuador, based on three areas: i) The evolution of the funding model. ii) The expansion of the network of field offices and human resources. iii) The adoption of new tools for planning and information management (internal and external).

The evaluation matrix was structured around the three areas of inquiry and included 10 main evaluation questions related to the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability[5].

The temporal scope of the evaluation foreseen in the ToR from 2019 to 2021 has been extended to September 2022 (according to data made available to the evaluation team). The cut-off date for the data collection and analysis was September 2022, so the level of analysis for the year 2022 is not as consistent as it is for previous years.

2.2 Data Collection, Analysis and Validation

The data collection adopted a constructive approach using "light footprint" and "appreciative enquiry[6]" methods aimed at recognising the efforts made in order to reinforce change-oriented learning. The evaluation has been conducted mainly in a face-to-face format, with some activities[7] done remotely. The evaluation team worked in accordance with UNHCR and public health authority guidelines to safeguard the team and the interlocutors against possible risks, in line with the do-no-harm approach. The evaluation has used a mixed methods approach, drawing on both primary and secondary sources. The evaluation has used the following data collection methods:

- Documentary review: The documentary review included about 90 documents, of which approximately 40% are external and 60% are from UNHCR.
- Key actors and informants interviewed: 181 external key actors were initially identified and grouped into seven categories of informants, of which 168 contacts responded. At the time of the interviews, many informants were accompanied by one or more people. In addition, some informants were present in several forums (interviews and observations). These factors led to an increase in participation. The participation in terms of gender balance was 62% female and 38% male.

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[1] Engaging a large variety of stakeholders and adopting a co-creation approach to define the recommendations, agreed with CO and partners.
[2] Developing actionable recommendations for UNHCR's positioning in Ecuador and operations, which take account of the regional and national evolving environments in which the CO operates.
[3] Looking back to evaluate UNHCR's past performance and forward to make proposals for how UNHCR can reinforce country positioning, operations and organizational structure at country level.
[4] See annex Theory of Change
[5] See annex Evaluation matrix
[6] Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to organisational change which focuses on strengths rather than on weaknesses - quite different to many approaches to evaluation which focus on deficits and problems (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005, p.3)
[7] Interviews with key informants who were not visited during the stay in Ecuador and two workshops with UNHCR partners and staff.

Table 1 Participants in interviews and observations

Category	Individuals		Pairs		Groups		Observations		Total
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	
Public administration	10	6	8	10	26	15	0	0	75
Partners	15	7	11	9	26	23	3	3	97
Civil society	2	3	3	5	22	7	3	7	52
Private sector	2	0	0	0	6	4	0	0	12
UN	4	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	8
Donors	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Person of interest	2	1	6	0	29	11	27	10	86
Total	36	21	30	24	109	60	33	20	333

At the level of internal informants, a total of 108 interviews were conducted with UNHCR staff. Group meetings with UNHCR staff included analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis).

▪ Observations: The evaluation team visited 11 locations with UNHCR presence, including the Country office (Quito), Sub-office (SO) Sierra Centro, SO Norte and SO Sur. Forty-two observations were made, including visits to reception points, enterprises, shelters, and border crossings points.

Data and findings were aggregated and reviewed by evaluation question, area of inquiry and triangulated by data type, method, data source and evaluator. Qualitative data was organised into an evidence matrix (based on the evaluation questions) to support the findings. A first validation of findings workshop was held for UNHCR and two additional workshops to co-create the recommendations (UNHCR and partners) were organised. The first two workshops were attended by around 30 UNHCR professionals from all UNHCR field offices and the partners' workshop was attended by 20 organisations. A matrix linking the main findings of the evaluation to the structure of the new multi-year planning was developed as input to the discussion on UNHCR Ecuador's planning session in March 2023. Evaluators discussed the recommendations with the senior management team in March 2023.

2.3 Participation and Monitoring

The evaluation team has maintained fluid communication with the Senior Evaluation Officer at UNHCR's Regional Bureau in Panama, with the Country Office in Ecuador and with partner organisations. The objectives and scope of the evaluation have been presented to all organisations and individuals interviewed, and several workshops have been organised to discuss preliminary findings and recommendations with UNHCR and partners.

2.4 Quality Control and Limitations

Quality control is based on UNHCR's evaluation quality guide, UNEG standards and the good practices of the evaluation community (ALNAP, OECD/DAC). Quality control has been carried out throughout the process at two levels; internally, by the evaluation team through self-assessments and use of a tool for checking the consistency of reports produced. Externally, by UNHCR services, in particular by the country office in Ecuador and the UNHCR Senior Evaluation Officer in Panama. UNHCR and the evaluation team have jointly defined and agreed on mitigation measures to address the constraints encountered throughout the process[8].

2.5 Ethical issues

The evaluation was based on the ALNAP Humanitarian Action Evaluation Guide (2016) and the UNEG Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct (2008). The evaluation followed the guidance on integrating gender equality and human rights principles set out in the UNEG Handbook, Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation (2011). Interaction with groups of adolescents during two observations was covered by the legal authority of the partner organization and informed consent.

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[8] See annex Limitations and mitigation measures

3 Context and UNHCR country strategy

3.1 Regional context

The forced displacement of Venezuelans to other countries in Latin America is a major humanitarian crisis that requires urgent protection and care for this population. As of December 2022, it is estimated that there are more than 7 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the world. From these, just over 6 million are in Latin America and the Caribbean[9] . The Venezuelan exodus has been the largest global exodus of people displaced outside its borders since 2015. It surpasses other cases in recent decades such as Syria (2012), Afghanistan (1977), South Sudan (2014), Ethiopia (1980) and Iraq (1988 and 2004), as illustrated in the Figure 1 below.

FIGURE 1 Comparison of the Venezuelan migration episode with other relevant episodes
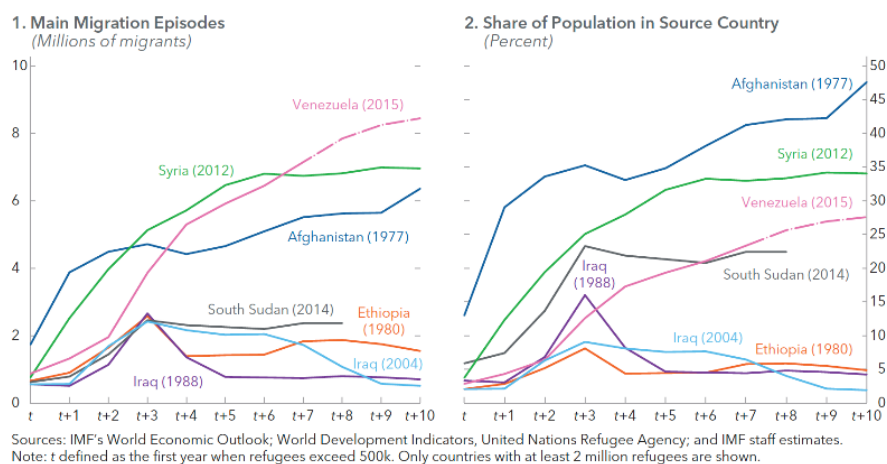
Source: Alvarez, Jorge A., Arena, Marco, Brousseau, Alain, et al (2022) Regional spillovers from the Venezuelan crisis: migration flows and their impact on Latin America and the Caribbean. International Monetary Fund. Washington, DC.
Note: the terminology of the original document ("migration episode") is respected.

After Colombia and Peru, Ecuador hosts the third largest number of Venezuelans displaced abroad. They entered mainly from Colombian territory, often through unofficial border crossings. According to estimates of the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), the number of Venezuelans in Ecuador practically doubled from 250,862 people in 2018 to 502,214 by the end of 2022. As shown in Figure 2 below, this sustained rate of growth in the presence of Venezuelan people in the country has apparently stopped and started to decrease slightly, falling back from its highest accumulated peak of 508,935 people in 2021, to 502,214 in 2022.[10]

Ecuador has also been a transit country for flows of Venezuelans moving southwards to other countries such as Peru and Chile. The 1.52 million Venezuelans who remain in Peru and the 444,000 who are in Chile have mainly arrived in these countries after crossing Colombia and Ecuador by land. Ecuador is also a return route for Venezuelans leaving these countries, from south to north, to re-enter their country of origin temporarily or permanently, or to cross Central America and reach the United States.

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[9] R4V Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela. Retrieved from Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean: https://www.r4v.info/es/refugiadosymigrantes

[10] R4V Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela. https://www.r4v.info/es/refugiadosymigrantes
R4V estimates include the total cumulative balance of inflows and outflows of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, as well as an estimated percentage of persons who had entered the country through informal border crossings annually.

FIGURE 2 Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Ecuador 2018 - 2022
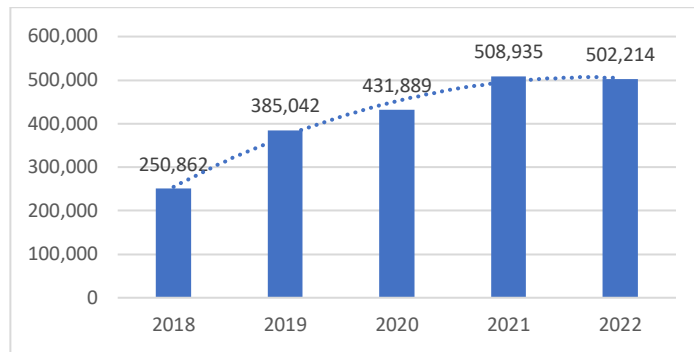
Source: R4V Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela.

FIGURE 3 Refugee and migrant routes in Ecuador

In 2022, recent analyses of population flows by the WGRM and UNHCR seem to indicate changes in mobility trends and motivations. The R4V platform indicates that the number of refugees and migrants from South America and Ecuador (as origin or transit) travelling overland throughout Central America, usually to the United States, increased significantly in 2022. New visa requirements in South and Central American countries for Venezuelans, as well as border closures, have caused this population to transit mainly through irregular routes, controlled by criminal groups, where they are exposed to risks of physical harm and violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation, theft, abuse, shipwrecks, recruitment, etc. Likewise, there are reports of increasing migration flows of Ecuadorians to the United States by land, which usually take similar routes to those used by Venezuelans to cross the border between Colombia and Panama, which involve exposure to the same risks. In 2022, according to the National Migration Service of Panama, Ecuador was the second country from which foreigners irregularly transited the Colombian-Panamanian border (29,356 people), after the Venezuelan population[11] .

3.2. Brief description of the situation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in Ecuador

Ecuador is a destination and transit country for people in need of international protection in the region and hosts the largest recognised refugee population in the region[12]. Figure 4 below shows the evolution of forcibly displaced and stateless persons (UNHCR data) between 2015 and 2023 (estimated) according to nationalities.

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[11] National Migration Service Panama (SNM).
https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2022/PDF/IRREGULARES_POR_DARIEN_DICIEMBRE_2022.pdf
[12] UNHCR Operational Data Portal, Ecuador: www.data2.unhcr.org/en/country/ecu

FIGURE 4 Evolution of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in Ecuador (2015 - 2023)
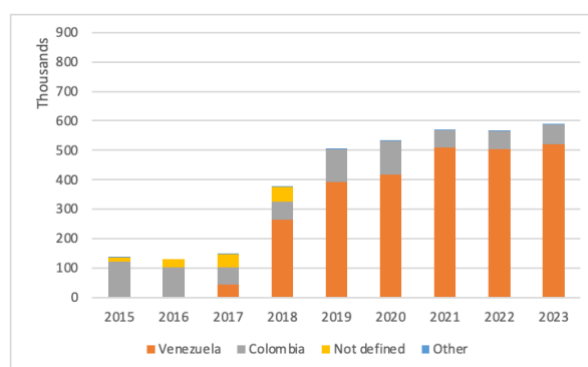
Source: https://reporting.unhcr.org/ecuador?year=2015[13]

The right to refuge and access to the RSD procedure is legally established in Ecuador, and the country has the highest number of recognised refugees on the continent. Between 1989 and 2022[14], the Ecuadorian state has recognised 74,263 refugees (96% Colombian) and of these, 58,862 active cases are reported in its database as of November 2022[15]. Figure 5 below shows the evolution in the number of recognised refugees and asylum seekers between 2010 and 2022 (October), according to GoE official data. Figure 5 shows the differentiated pattern in recognitions between Colombians and Venezuelans.

FIGURE 5 Asylum seekers (by country of origin) and recognised refugees (2010 - 2022 Oct)
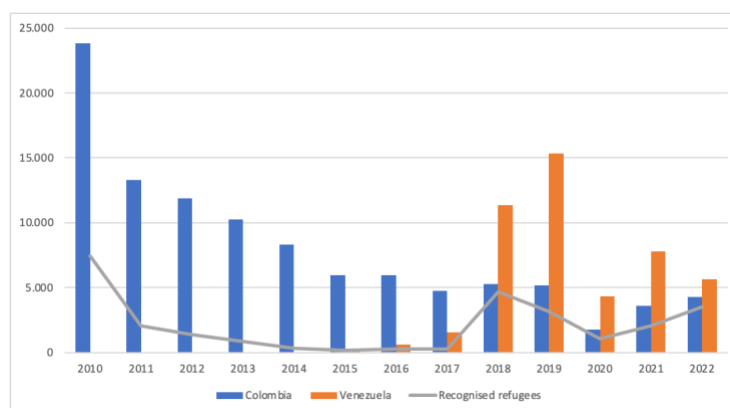
Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility - Official Communiqué October 2022[16]

Almost all recognised refugees are Colombians who have arrived in Ecuador over the decades as a result of armed conflict and violence. Despite the Peace Agreement reached in Colombia in 2016, the situation of violence and criminality persist. The activities of dissident subversive groups and the operations of drug trafficking cartels continue, especially in the southern part of the Colombian territory bordering Ecuador. As of today, the flow of Colombians requesting international protection status in Ecuador continues.

However, as a result of the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, it is now the second flow in number of people. In 2019, due to the intense flow of Venezuelans arriving at its borders, the GoE established a visa requirement for the Venezuelan population due to irregular arrivals (Executive Decree No. 826 and Ministerial Resolution 00103/2019). In 2020, despite the border closure at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the irregular entry of Venezuelans continued and security conditions through the border areas declined. The government took measures allowing the regularisation of Venezuelans living in Ecuador. In 2020 (Executive Decree No. 1020), the GoE extended the deadline

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[13] Other: groups or persons of concern refers to individuals who do not necessarily fall directly into any of these groups above but to whom UNHCR has extended its protection and/or assistance services, based on humanitarian or other special grounds

[14] September 2022

[15] UNHCR, Monthly Report, No. 8 November 2022

[16] https://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Infograf%C2%B0a-de-hist%C2%A2rico-de-solicitantes-de-refugio-colombianos-venezolanos-y-otros-pa%C2%B0ses-Oct-2022.pdf

for the migration registration process for Venezuelan nationals from March to August 2020. However, it was estimated that a large part of the Venezuelan population was unable to regularise their status in 2020 and, in 2022, the GoE launched a second process[17] for the regularisation of Venezuelan nationals[18].

In terms of statelessness, the Human Mobility Law approved in 2017 contains a specific chapter on the recognition and protection of stateless persons. Although the number of stateless persons in Ecuador is extremely low, UNHCR has provided technical assistance for the implementation of the statelessness status determination procedure and the simplification of naturalization procedures to ensure stateless persons with a durable solution. In addition, UNHCR has put particular attention to the situation of border and isolated communities to ensure that children born to refugee parents are registered and the risks of statelessness are reduced.

In terms of internal displacement, the issue has not been documented and formally recognised. There are reported suggestions of population movements (urban, domestic, and international) due to threats and an increase in criminal activity.

Brief overview of key socio-economic conditions of the migrant and refugee population in Ecuador

The migrant and refugee population in Ecuador is living in a socio-economic context affected by persistent poverty, difficulties to access employment, and for the most vulnerable profiles, challenges to cover their basic needs. In November 2022, only 35.6% of the economically active population had adequate employment and 22.9% were underemployed. In 2022, the "basic salary" was 425 USD, while the cost of the family basket of essential goods reached 763.44 US with an annual inflationary rate of 3.74% (in US dollars). Poverty by income of the Ecuadorian population reached 25% in June 2022, and the multidimensional poverty rate was 39.2% in December 2021[19]. On the economic front, the COVID-19 pandemic increased difficulties Ecuador was facing due to falling oil prices, fiscal crisis and limited access to international financial resources[20]. These dynamics reduced the economy and employment opportunities and affected activities in which many refugees and migrants are engaged, such as the informal sector, sales and tourism.[21]

Criminal violence has emerged as a socio-political challenge of increasing intensity and security problems have worsened. In Ecuador, the homicide rate increased faster in 2021 than in any other country in Latin America and the Caribbean; the rate of violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants increased from 5.8 in 2008 to 15.48 by November 2022, and an upward trend continued in 2022. However, there are notable differences between localities and, for example, the homicide rate in Esmeraldas reached 49 per 100,000 inhabitants, approaching the levels of some of the most violent cities on the continent[22], [23]. In several UNHCR interventions (e.g. Esmeraldas, Guayaquil), diverse forms of violence are generating new protection risks within local neighbourhoods. These developments have further compounded the operational challenges faced by UNHCR teams and frontline organisations.

In terms of rights and inclusion, the Ecuadorian Constitution and legal framework are an international reference but there are still gaps in policy implementation. In terms of education of migrant and refugee children, 73.5% of children and adolescents between 5 and 17 years of age attended school and this percentage increased by 5.5% compared to 2021[24]. However, there are still difficulties in accessing school places (e.g: documentation for enrolment, school

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[17] 1st June 2022, Executive Decree 436

[18] Up to the 16 of December 2022, 134,590 people registered on the official website, 41,182 applied to obtain the VIRTE, of which 28,888 obtained it.

[19] National Institute of Statistics and Census. Available at: https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec

[20] World Bank Group, Retos y Oportunidades de la migración venezolana en Ecuador, http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/es/340561592543577847/pdf/Resumen-Ejecutivo.pdf

[21] Refworld Organization, RMRP 2020: Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, https://www.refworld.org.es/country,,,,ECU,,5e7c2c3d4,0.html

[22] For example, San Pedro Sula (Honduras) had a rate of 50 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2022.

[23] See for example:
Bradley, M. (2020). From armed conflict to urban violence: transformations in the International Committee of the Red Cross, international humanitarianism, and the laws of war. European Journal of International Relations, 26(4), 1061-1083. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066120908637
ACAPS (2014) Other Situations of Violence in the Central American Northern Triangle; Humanitarian Impact (available at: https://iecah.org/otras-situaciones-de-violencia-en-el-triangulo-del-norte-centroamericano-impacto-humanitario-mayo-2014/)
Apraxine, P. et al (2012). Urban violence and humanitarian challenges. Joint Report. EU Institute for Security Studies. ICRC. EUISS-ICRC Colloquium Brussels, 19 January 2012.

[24] WGRM, R4V (2022), Joint Needs Assessment.

supplies[25]). In health, 84.1% of migrant and refugee families with health problems had effective access to health services in 2022, and this percentage also improved compared to the previous year, but 15.9% of this population faced barriers to access services (e.g: lack of medicines and appointments, suspension of care during the pandemic). The migrant and refugee population is also affected by situations of xenophobia, discrimination and gender-based violence that expose them, especially displaced women, to situations of sexual exploitation and abuse, sex for survival and practices of harassment and rejection[26].

Protection needs and risks

Analysis of the reasons for leaving the country of origin shows two different patterns between the situation in Colombia and Venezuela. In Colombia, the reasons for leaving have been caused by the various dynamics of violence and persecution that have affected the south of the country in recent decades. These circumstances have been encompassed within the scope of the 1951 Convention. In the case of Venezuela, the intense population exodus of 2017 has been driven by a broader range of factors. These include economic, social and political factors that interact with varying degrees of intensity and complexity depending on personal circumstances. These specificities play a role in determining which situations are included within the framework of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration[27], [28].

The risks in the event of return, declared by forcibly displaced and stateless persons to UNHCR29, also reflect the different dynamics between the two countries, although there are common aspects. The Colombian population mostly reports risks associated with armed groups, insecurity, threats, violence, persecution, forced recruitment and extortion. The Venezuelan population mainly reports subsistence risks, lack of food, lack of access to medical services, although insecurity in the country is also mentioned.

The protection and needs assessments carried out in recent years have identified the health needs, access to documentation, coping mechanisms, violence, abuse and GBV and irregular border crossing as the most prominent problems of forcibly displaced and stateless persons[30].

National institutional framework

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility (MERHM) is the national public authority in terms of human migration and international protection (mainly through the Vice-Ministry of Human Mobility, the Department of International Protection and the International Protection Directorate- IPD). The MERHM has been UNHCR's main interlocutor and has worked with UNHCR to strengthen national capacities on asylum and international protection. In 2017, the Organic Law on Human Mobility (OLHM) incorporated constitutional provisions and international standards on migration, refuge and asylum into national legislation and set a precedent in key areas of international protection[31] (e.g. comprehensive protection for children and adolescents, acquisition of nationality for stateless

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[25] World Bank Group, Challenges and opportunities for the venezuelan migrants in Ecuador
http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/es/340561592543577847/pdf/Resumen-Ejecutivo.pdf

[26] UNDP; Reinventing On the Move: Women refugees and migrants from Venezuela. A study of their conditions and access to livelihoods in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

[27] See UNHCR guidance notes on the Venezuelan population and analyses by other human rights organisations (e.g. Human Rights Watch (2018) Venezuelan exodus urges regional response to unprecedented migration crisis).

[28] The reasons for the exodus in Venezuela from 2017 onwards included a severe economic crisis (the world's highest hyperinflation), widespread shortages of food and basic necessities, the deterioration of essential public services (including health), increasing rates of criminal violence, government and security forces abuse, and the erosion of fundamental rights, especially against protesters, critics and opponents of the government (The Venezuelan crisis: https://www.hrw.org/es/blog-feed/la-crisis-venezolana / Amnesty International, Human rights crisis in Venezuela: https://www.es.amnesty.org/en-que-estamos/blog/historia/articulo/crisis-de-derechos-humanos-en-venezuela/)

[29] UNHCR (2021) Protection Monitoring, Outcome Report, March 2021
UNHCR (2022) Protection Monitoring, Quito, 2022

[30] UNHCR (2018) Protection Monitoring-12-16 November 2018 -Tulcán/Rumichaca
UNHCR, MIES (2019) Protection monitoring (May - August 2019)
UNHCR (2020) Protection Monitoring, Outcome Report, Oct - Dec 2020
UNHCR (2022) Monitoring the protection situation of refugees and others in human mobility in Ecuador, Quito, Ecuador.
GTRM, R4V (2018) Operational Response Report #1 (as of November 2018)
GTRM, R4V (2021) Joint Needs Assessment, May 2021

[31] "The Organic Law on Human Mobility respected the Constitutional Court's decision to consider the Cartagena Declaration when defining who are refugees, which is positive. But the law also used the Constitutional Court's ruling to validate the existence of maximum time limits for the submission of applications for refugee status (albeit with greater flexibility); to reject applications for refugee status that it considers illegitimate, unfounded or abusive; and to expand the grounds for terminating refugee status beyond the exhaustive clauses contained in the

persons[32]). The normative progress has facilitated the implementation of public services to effectively address the needs of individuals seeking international protection. This comprehensive response is a collaborative effort involving the state, civil society and international organisations. The efforts made by Ecuador in this regard have been recognised by regional and international bodies[33], including UNHCR.

Despite progress, various analyses identify regression in certain aspects of international protection[34], [35] and there are still gaps both in rights guarantees and in the practical application of the normative framework. The IACHR expressed concerns regarding certain aspects of the OLHM in relation to international protection[36] and recommended the establishment of objective and non-discretionary criteria for the application of the OLHM in accordance with Inter-American norms and standards[37].

Other public institutions that played a central role in social inclusion and local integration are the Ministry of Interior, (Department of Migration) for migration registers, and the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MESI) for access to social services, assistance and protection for children. The Public Defender's Office, the Ombudsman's Office, sectoral ministries (e.g. Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health), and decentralised autonomous governments, especially through their rights protection councils, have also played key roles in ensuring access to public programmes and services for people on the move, as do judicial bodies for access to justice and rights.

3.3 Main components of UNHCR's country strategy and presence

The formulation of UNHCR's country strategy in Ecuador between 2019 and 2022 has been reflected in several multi-year and annual planning documents. The starting point of the evaluation is the Multi-year, multi-partner protection and solutions strategy 2018-2019 (although 2018 is outside the temporal scope of the evaluation). Subsequently, UNHCR formulated annual operational plans in 2019, 2020 and 2021 (COPs). In 2022, adoption of the new multi-year planning and results framework at the corporate level marked a turning point in the planning approach; UNHCR Ecuador developed a first interim strategy under the new model of four impact areas[38], outcomes and outputs. Although the new corporate planning model is multi-year in nature, UNHCR Ecuador drafted a first interim document on an annual basis, until it could be adjusted to the new multi-year corporate model.

The planning documents were aligned with the Brazil Plan of Action, UNHCR's regional and global agenda (CRRF, Global Compact on Refugees), the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs and its Global Strategic Priorities. In 2021, UNHCR planning reflects the coherence with the UNDAF planning.

The various planning documents between 2018 and 2021 present a high level of annual continuity in the vision of the operation and in the strategic objectives[39]. The main change introduced in the 2020 planning is the integration

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1951 Convention. However, the Organic Law on Human Mobility also contains worrying provisions that were not included in the Decree and therefore were not analysed by the Constitutional Court. For example, in the new law, the "threat or risk to internal security" constitutes a ground for inadmissibility to the territory (art. 137.6) as well as for not recognising a person as a refugee (art. 104.4). The new law also allows for the inadmissibility to the territory of asylum seekers who seek to enter with false or adulterated documentation (art. 137.1), violating the principle of non-punishment for illegal entry contained in the 1951 Convention. This new legislation also allows for the revocation of international protection for refugees who have been "sentenced for the commission of a crime" (art. 108), dangerously extending clauses that allow for the termination of refugee protection. Finally, according to the new law, asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected are obliged to leave the country, and if they do not comply with this obligation they are deported (art. 103) without being offered any other opportunity to regularise their migratory status" (Salazar, 2017).

[32] In line with the 2014 Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action

[33] Inter-American Court of Human Rights,

[34] Salazar, D. (2017) La protección jurídica de los refugiados en Ecuador: retrocesos normativos y su convalidación jurisprudencial. Journal of the Centre for Constitutional Studies. Year III, n° 4, January - June 2017. Mexico City.

[35] Suárez, V. et al (2020) Situación de Derechos Humanos de migrantes de Venezuela en el Ecuador. CARE, Fundación Alas de Colibrí and Diálogo Diverso.

[36] Thus, for example, in the case of the rejection of a refugee application (Article 103) or a deportation order (Article 144), the only way to appeal the decision is through administrative channels, which means that the law does not contemplate the possibility of judicial control. Furthermore, the legally open-ended wording of some articles opens the door to possible abusive interpretations (crimes against the structure of the constitutional state, threat or risk to internal security).

[37] https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/022.asp
https://www.movimientoporlainfancia.org/tag/corte-interamericana-de-derechos-humanos/

[38] Protect, assist, empower, solve

[39] See annex Theory of Change

of host communities as a new component of the vision statement. The strategic objectives included the following areas of action:

- Consolidate the legal protection framework (technical assistance, Human Mobility Law, enrolment and documentation of refugees, civil registry).
- Strengthen Ecuador's RSD system (technical assistance, Quality of Asylum Initiative, presence of DPIN offices)
- Strengthen protection mechanisms, including emergency assistance and border monitoring to guarantee access to the territory (protection monitoring and profiling, information sharing, orientation services and identification of cases with special needs)
- Access to government-run programmes on the same footing as nationals
- Emergency shelter and CBIs
- Local integration (sustainable livelihoods' opportunities)
- Resettlement (mainly for Colombians at risk)

In addition to the national strategy, UNHCR has developed different sectoral and programmatic plans, mainly in various areas of protection (community-based protection, communication with communities, GBV), livelihoods and economic integration (differentiating employment and income generating activities), education, and health. In some cases, field offices adapted programmatic and sectoral strategies to the local context in which they operated (e.g: protection in border areas, or urban settings).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic required modification of all strategies and plans, including the Partnership agreements and budget commitments established with partners.

UNHCR Ecuador has integrated the Age, Gender and Diversity approach (AGD), the development of partnerships (public and private organisations), and the social cohesion between refugees and host communities, as cross-cutting elements of its country strategy.

UNHCR's strategy and plans have included its role as initiator and co-leader of the Working Group on Refugees and Migrants (WGRM) and has therefore been an area included in the scope of the evaluation. The evaluation has not focused on an evaluation of the WGRM but on an analysis of UNHCR's contribution to some key aspects of the WGRM's functioning and results.

UNHCR's strategy in Ecuador has focused on asylum seekers, refugees, people in need of protection in a context of mixed movements and host communities. UNHCR's strategy has not considered IDPs (given that there has been no internal displacement in Ecuador during the period under evaluation) and attention to the very few cases of statelessness has been ad hoc.

Country presence and resources

In 2018, UNHCR Ecuador had a branch office in Quito, with five field offices: Pichincha, Guayaquil, Esmeraldas, Lago Agrio and Ibarra (which in turn had a field unit in Tulcán). In recent years, the presence in the country has evolved in line with the evolution in the flows of persons with international protection needs, sub-regional and national events and UNHCR's capacity to mobilise human, financial and material resources.

In 2022, UNHCR operates in Ecuador through the Representation Office in Quito, the sub-office in Ibarra (covering the northern border with field offices in Esmeraldas, Tulcán and Sucumbíos), the sub-office in Guayaquil (covering the coastal and southern part of the country, with a field office in Huaquillas and field units in the cities of Cuenca and Manta) and the Pichincha sub-office, located in Solanda (covering a field unit in Ambato and operations through partners in the provinces of Santo Domingo, Cotopaxi and Chimborazo).

In terms of human resources, UNHCR Ecuador has gone from 245 professionals hired at the end of 2019 (including affiliated workforce) to 221 professionals (including UNOPS and other types of contracts) in 2022.

The budget initially foreseen in the multi-year strategy 2018 - 2019 (MYMP) totalled about USD 11.3 million. UNHCR's operational budget in Ecuador in 2019 has been USD 74.6 million and amounts to USD 76 million in 2022. Considering the evolution in the operational budget since 2017, the growth has been of 249%. Comparison between the OP

budget and the OL budget shows a growing gap between the estimated needs to (reflected in OP) and the budgetary availability (reflected in OL). This has meant a constant reprioritisation exercise for the operation and, therefore, the impossibility of reaching certain populations or meeting certain needs. The gap between the operational level (OL) budget and the planning budget (OP) has increased significantly over the period.

FIGURE 6 OP & OL budget (USD million) and OL/OP gap (%) (2019-August 2022)

Source: UNHCR ECU-Historical Budget 2019-2022 - 04.Jul.2022
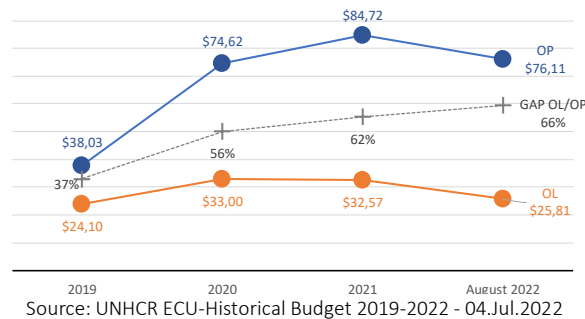
The total operating level (OL) budget increased in 2020 (+37%) and then decreased in 2022 (July) by 20%, reflecting the impact of pandemic response funds on the overall structure of the operation. In 2022, the OL budget returned to similar levels of 2019. Data shows that programmatic growth and territorial deployment have been financed essentially through emergency funds to respond to the Venezuelan exodus and the pandemic.

Between 2019 and 2021, the OL regular programme budget remains at a constant level (around $10 million per year). However, the "Vensit Programme" and the "COVID -19 Programme" (in 2020 and 2021) allowed for a significant increase in the operation's funds, representing 54% and 67% of the OL budget in 2019 and 2021 respectively.

FIGURE 7 OL Budget by programme - (2019-July 2022)	FIGURE 8 OL Budget by line item (USD million) - (2019-August 2022)
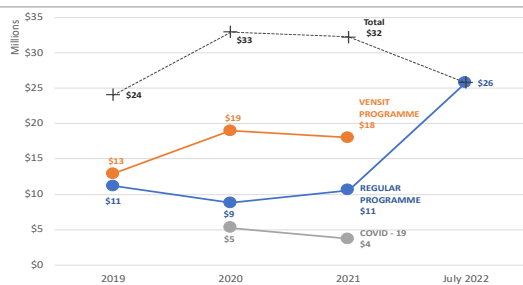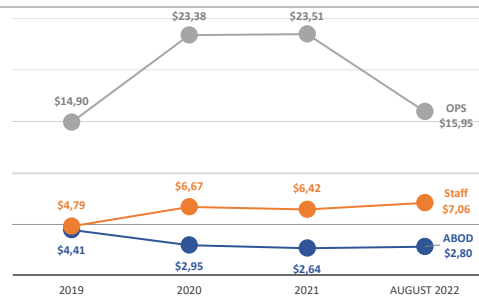
Source: UNHCR ECU-Historical Budget 2019-2022 - 04.Jul.2022 / UNHCR ECU-Historical Budget 2019-2022 - 04 Jul.2022 and Budget Analysis 19-20-21-22 ("FOCUS")

Overall, the OL budget for 2022[40] is 21% lower than in 2021 and is almost at the same level as in 2019 (+7%). In absolute values, the STAFF and ABOD items remain at around $9 million per year for the four years. In relative terms, the weight of these two items is 38% of the overall budget in 2022, identical to what it represented in 2019. At OPS level, after an increase in 2020 (+57%) and stability in 2021, OPS budget level fell sharply in 2022 (-32%) to reach that of 2019 (+7%). In relative terms, after having represented more than 70% of the overall budget in 2020 and 2021 (71% and 72% respectively), the weight of OPS in 2022 represent 62% of the budget.

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[40] UNHCR may have adjusted or revised the OL in the last few months of 2022. According to reporting.unhcr.org contributions for 2022 have risen to $27,841,952, 8% more than used here.

4 Findings

4.1 How strategic were UNHCR's actions in 2019-2022 to strengthen the protection and local integration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, and how did UNHCR's support and leadership of strategic partnerships contribute to this?

There is clear recognition of the relevance of UNHCR's work, together with agencies and partners, in the articulation and the scope of the response to the Venezuelan exodus, as well as in the visibility of international protection on the public agenda. UNHCR's contributions have reached the highest institutional level and have cross-border relevance (reflected in the support for the Quito Process). They have permeated key public administrations in charge of international protection, human mobility and social policies from the central to the municipal level and made it possible to accompany integration processes of Venezuelan and Colombian populations locally (essentially in neighbourhoods, as the social and territorial unit where coexistence between communities is build). As part of the country strategy, UNHCR has promoted the formation of an "ecosystem" integrating relevant public administrations, civil society and community organisations, the private sector, international organisations and donors. All of them well distributed throughout the territory, which has allowed (depending on the resources available) to provide a comprehensive approach to the multiple challenges faced by forcibly displaced and stateless persons during their transit or settlement process in the country.

UNHCR's joint work with the GoE, mainly through the Ministry of External Relations and Human Mobility (MERHM) and the International Protection Directorate (IPD), with the judiciary (through strategic litigation and technical assistance) and the legislative power, has achieved notable progress in international protection standards and improvements in the national asylum system. Nevertheless, challenges persist due to the complex and limited implementation of the Cartagena Declaration, difficult access to international protection mechanisms for the Venezuelan population, and dependence on UNHCR resources.

The co-leadership and effective work of UNHCR and IOM to achieve a functional Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (WGRM) appears to be a widely recognised outstanding achievement and has allowed for a relevant and reasonably coordinated emergency response to a large-scale dual crisis, although some inefficiencies have been identified.

4.1.1 To what extent have the initiatives led by UNHCR been consistent with national objectives?

UNHCR's strategy in Ecuador is aligned with the national objectives of the key public policies and contributes to consolidate a legal and governance framework that guarantees the quality of protection and the asylum system, as well as the integration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons both socially and economically. UNHCR's support for Ecuador's role in the Quito Process has contributed to strengthening the regional perspective needed to address a migratory exodus with numerous cross-border implications.

UNHCR's initiatives are fully consistent with the regulations and instruments used by the Ecuadorian State to formulate public policies on human mobility. In this regard, UNHCR's operation is in line with the provisions established in the Constitution, which recognises the right to migrate and establishes that no human being shall be considered or identified as illegal because of their migratory status; it also recognises the rights to asylum and guarantees the principle of non-refoulement, humanitarian assistance and due process. Free mobility and the progressive end of the status of foreigner are constitutional principles that govern Ecuador's international relations.

UNHCR's priorities are consistent with the Organic Law on Human Mobility which, in line with the 1951 Geneva Convention about the Status of Refugees and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, develops the concept of refugee and stateless person in the national legislation, and regulates the procedure for the recognition of refugee status. Likewise, UNHCR's strategic objectives are consistent with the principles in this law referring to free mobility, the prohibition of criminalisation of migration, pro-person approach in human mobility, non-refoulement and regional integration in accordance with the Constitution and human rights treaties.

UNHCR's lines of work, which have been deployed under the guidance of planning tools such as the Multi-Year Multi-Partner Protection and Solutions Strategy and the Interim Strategy 2022, are also in line with the principles and objectives of the National Agenda for Equal Human Mobility 2017 - 2021, the National Human Mobility Plan issued in 2018, and the Comprehensive Plan for the Assistance and Protection of the Venezuelan Population in Human Mobility in Ecuador 2020 - 2021.

UNHCR's priorities are aligned with national policies as they promote three fundamental objectives of the Ecuadorian State's planning in terms of human mobility: i) protection and safe mobility; ii) strengthening the asylum system and access to migration alternatives; and iii) promoting durable solutions, especially local integration and the livelihoods of the forcibly displaced and stateless persons. Each of the objectives contained in UNHCR's planning, as well as the orientations in the above-mentioned national policy instruments, are aiming to advance these three areas of concerns (see Annex 4).

UNHCR has supported Ecuador's role in the Quito Process and other regional initiatives (e.g. Summit of the Americas), considering the importance of regional analysis and coordination to facilitate human mobility, human rights and integration efforts for the Venezuelan population. Support for the Quito Process has enabled coordination of Ecuador's national policy on human mobility with neighbouring countries.

4.1.2 How relevant have the initiatives on protection and solutions led by UNHCR been?

UNHCR has responded to the needs arising from the intense and varied cross-border and population movements at three distinct but complementary levels. First, UNHCR has responded to the protection needs of individuals (Venezuelan, Colombian and host communities), providing protection, assistance, and inclusion, with a special focus on vulnerable profiles. Second, it has responded to GoE demands to support public policies and programmes in response to the massive Venezuelan exodus (and overlapping COVID-19 pandemic), which have overwhelmed organisational and state response capacities. Third, it has responded to the need to document, analyse and understand the multidimensionality and complexity of international protection in a context of mixed movements to influence and mobilise public administrations, policy makers, technical managers, international and regional agencies, civil society and donors.

UNHCR has been able to adapt its strategy regularly to respond to sudden and intense changes in the international protection needs, humanitarian assistance and, subsequently, socio-economic integration needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. The magnitude of the exodus of Venezuelans (and their needs) was the reason for United Nations (UN) Secretary-General (SG) to mandate UNHCR and IOM to coordinate the operational response to the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis in 2018. This was an exceptional decision within the usual humanitarian intervention system used to respond to major crises.

In just two years (2017 to 2019), UNHCR went from being in the process of significantly reducing its presence ("responsible disengagement") and capacity in the country[41] , to co-leading (together with IOM), a large-scale humanitarian response to the largest population exodus in the history of the continent and one of the most pressing crises worldwide. UNHCR's interventions have evolved in line with changing population flows and migratory behaviour, contextual changes (COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated pre-existing needs and conditions), and national public policy priorities and decisions. Broadly speaking, the evolution and adaptations of UNHCR's interventions between 2018 and 2022 can be summarised in three major periods.

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[41] It was estimated that the signing of the peace accords in Colombia in 2016 could reduce the "historic" flow of Colombian asylum seekers generated by decades of internal conflict and, consequently, UNHCR's operational capacities in Ecuador could be reduced.

Period I: response to sub-regional crisis in context of a national political and social crisis

To implement the SG's mandate, the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) was designed at the end of 2018 and the Regional Interagency Coordination Platform (R4V; Response to Venezuelans; Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela) was launched. The year 2019 is, therefore, the first year of a large-scale and coordinated sub-regional humanitarian response, although UNHCR had been adapting its strategy and resources in Ecuador to respond to the growing flow of Venezuelan people (both in transit or staying in the country) since 2017.

At the initiative of the GoE and due to the magnitude of Venezuelan population movements in the region, the Quito Process was launched (supported by UNHCR and IOM), with the participation of 13 countries of the continent. The Quito Process was intended to promote coordinated solutions and exchange of good practices at the regional level to find common responses to the human mobility situation of the millions of refugees and migrants from Venezuela in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as for host communities.

At the national level, the GoE declared a state of emergency in 2018 in three northern provinces to respond to inflows reaching 6,000 people per day[42] . In 2019, a year of peak in human mobility flows, UNHCR (and other humanitarian organisations) supported the GoE response, which took place in a context of strong political, economic and social instability with ongoing social protests across the country, as well as the rejection of the Venezuelan population due to a serious but isolated incident and inaccurate reporting.

Period II: humanitarian assistance to overlapping crises and migratory regularisation

Between 2019 and 2022, UNHCR deployed a wide range of programmes and significantly increased its presence in different locations across the country[43] to respond to both short-term needs (e.g. physical and legal protection, shelter, food, hygiene) and growing needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons as they were staying in the country (e.g. housing, training, financial inclusion, livelihoods). The work of UNHCR and partners to expand the protection space, access to social services and inclusion has been done through support, technical assistance and capacity building to national institutions.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 added an unexpected and acute crisis to the Venezuelan exodus, requiring UNHCR to prioritise emergency responses over other possible interventions. Likewise, UNHCR's response had to adapt to changes in the flows of Venezuelans entering, transiting and leaving the country through the northern and southern borders, as well as to the growing processes of installation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in locations with better prospects of access to services and livelihoods (e.g. Quito, Guayaquil, Cuenca). UNHCR continued to provide assistance and protection to the Colombian population fleeing from risks and violence in their country.

In addition, the GoE promoted two migratory amnesty and regularisation processes for the Venezuelan population in irregular situations in a short period of time (October 2019 and September 2022). Those processes were supported by UNHCR, IOM and other international organisations as an opportunity for the socio-economic integration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

Period III: humanitarian deceleration and, defunding, criminal violence and local integration

In 2022, UNHCR faced a context of significant changes in the flows of migrant populations and a perception of lesser intensity to the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis. On the one hand, South-North flows[44]intensified with a dominant presence of Venezuelan populations returning to their country of origin (although there is no information on

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[42] UNHCR, 2018 end-year report

[43] See section on budget and staff

[44] For the first time in years, the outflow of Venezuelan population from Ecuador exceeds the inflow. R4V, Consolidated inflows and outflows of refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the third quarter of 2022. www.r4v.info/sites/default/files/2022-12/Monitoring%20of%20Movements%20Q3_ESP_0.pdf

R4V, Rapid Interagency Assessment South-North Flows, October 2022. https://www.r4v.info/es/document/gtrm-ecuador-resumen-ejecutivo-evaluacion-rapida-interagencial-flujos-sur-norte

whether these returns are permanent or not), heading to the USA[45] or taking part in sub-regional secondary movements. Additionally, the number of Colombians seeking asylum in Ecuador was rising again, while the Ecuadorian population's emigration abroad (mainly to the US) was increasing due to the economic crisis and, apparently, growing violence in the country[46] . On the other hand, donors'[47] and key actors' interest decreased due to the global economic deterioration and challenges following the pandemic, the changes in regional geopolitics[48], some stabilisation in Venezuela[49], and the intensity of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. Funds were, therefore, less available to respond to the needs derived from the Venezuelan exodus. This diversion of donors' attention to other crises aggravated the 'chronic' underfunding[50] of the Venezuelan crisis response[51] .

Since 2021, UNHCR significantly strengthened its integration strategy as an effective protection option and generated new opportunities for forcibly displaced and stateless persons in host communities. From 2021 and throughout 2022, UNHCR provided technical, human and financial support to the second regularisation process of the GoE[52] as a strategic "window of opportunity" to overcome the lack of migratory documentation or residence permits. In 2022, socio-economic integration interventions, primarily focused on livelihoods and community protection, were confronted with increased criminal violence. It affected neighbourhoods where Ecuadorian, Venezuelan and Colombian families live together, bringing new programmatic and organisational challenges.

4.1.3 How effective was UNHCR's engagement with the Government of Ecuador (GoE), the WGRM, the UNSDCF and other humanitarian and development actors?

The co-leadership and effective work of UNHCR and IOM to achieve a functional Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (WGRM) appears to be a widely recognised achievement and has allowed for a relevant and reasonably coordinated emergency response to a large-scale dual humanitarian crisis (human mobility and COVID-19 pandemic). The WGRM has been effective in generating evidence and promoting joint work, although it has been at

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[45] In October 2022, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the implementation of joint measures with Mexico to reduce the number of people arriving at the southwest border and to create a more orderly and secure process for those fleeing the humanitarian and economic crisis in Venezuela. The US government's decision appears to have acted as a driver for new migration projects among the Venezuelan population in the region ("pull factor"). https://www.state.gov/translations/spanish/el-dhs-anuncia-un-nuevo-proceso-de-control-migratorio-para-ciudadanos-venezolanos/

[46] Ministry of Government. Comparative of migratory movements of Ecuadorians; Variation January to July 2017-2021.
Primicias (26 August 2021) The number of Ecuadorians who travel abroad and do not return is growing.
https://www.primicias.ec/noticias/sociedad/crece-ecuatorianos-regresan-extranjero/

[47] Gramer, R (September 1, 2022) Venezuela's Forgotten Refugee Crisis Rivals Ukraine's. Foreign Policy. Foreign Policy.
https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/09/01/venezuela-refugee-crisis-rivals-ukraine-humanitarian-response/
Alexander, J. Rozzelle, J (24 March 2022) Is Ukraine's aid bonanza coming at the expense of other crises? The New Humanitarian, Aid and Policy Analysis. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2022/03/24/ukraine-aid-funding-media-other-crises
Redfern, R. (7 July 2022) How the focus on Ukraine is hurting other humanitarian responses. The New Humanitarian, Aid and Policy News feature. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2022/07/07/Ukraine-aid-Russia-invasion-funding-donors

[48] FRANCE 24 (02/01/2023) Venezuela leader says willing to work at normalizing US ties https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230102-venezuela-leader-says-willing-to-work-at-normalizing-us-ties

[49] On 26 November 2022, representatives of Nicolás Maduro's regime and members of the United Platform signed the humanitarian agreement "Mesa Social", in which both parties committed to promote joint initiatives that benefit the Venezuelan people and to allocate the Venezuelan government's frozen funds to address humanitarian needs in Venezuela. Regional Crisis in Venezuela - Complex Emergency - Fact Sheet No. 1 Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, 13 December 2022. https://reliefweb.int/report/venezuela-bolivarian-republic/crisis-regional-por-la-situacion-de-venezuela-emergencia-compleja-hoja-informativa-no-1-ano-fiscal-af-2023-13-de-diciembre-del-2022
Economic opportunities bring diplomacy back to Caracas https://elpais.com/internacional/2022-12-11/las-oportunidades-economicas-llevan-de-vuelta-la-diplomacia-a-caracas.html

[50] In response to the Syrian crisis, for example, the international community mobilised large capital flows, spending a total of $7.4 billion on refugee response efforts in the first four years. Funding for the Venezuelan crisis has not kept pace. Four years into the crisis, the international community has spent only $580 million. On a per capita basis, this translates into $1,500 per Syrian refugee and $125 per Venezuelan refugee.
Dany Bahar, Meagan Dooley (2019) Venezuela's refugee crisis will soon be the largest and most underfunded in modern history. Brookings Institute. Washington DC. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2019/12/09/la-crisis-de-refugiados-en-venezuela-pronto-sera-la-mas-grande-y-con-menos-fondos-en-la-historia-moderna/
Bahar, D. [@dany_bahar] (26 February 2021). *The international community has given *10 times* more resources to a Syrian refugee than to a Venezuelan*. [Tweet] [Image attached]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/dany_bahar/status/1365354544675315713

[51] According to R4V, only 27.45 per cent (USD 490.38 million) of the funds deemed necessary to assist the Venezuelan migrant and refugee crisis were received in 2022.

[52] Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (31 August 2022). The regularisation process for Venezuelan citizens in Ecuador will start on 1 September 2022. https://www.inclusion.gob.ec/el-proceso-de-regularizacion-de-ciudadanos-venezolanos-en-ecuador-iniciara-este-1-de-septiembre-del-2022

the cost of additional efforts by professionals taking on dual or triple roles. Some duplicities and inefficiencies have been identified.

UNHCR's joint work with the GoE, through strategic litigation and technical assistance, has contributed to notable progress in international protection standards and improvements in the national asylum system. Nevertheless, challenges persist due to the complex and limited implementation of the Cartagena Declaration, difficult access to international protection mechanisms for the Venezuelan population, and dependence on UNHCR resources.

The work of partners, in particular local organisations with a long tradition and experience of community activism, has been essential precisely to reinforce the community-based approach of UNHCR's actions, including community-based protection and peaceful coexistence. The territorial presence of partners has helped broaden the reach of programmes and was instrumental in expanding the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaborations with the private sector and other stakeholders have been crucial in promoting favourable conditions and livelihood opportunities for the socio-economic integration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons since 2021.

UNHCR's work within the UNCT (and HCT in 2021), including the coordination of several working groups on both the Venezuelan exodus and the pandemic response, has "mainstreamed" international protection and human mobility in the UNSDCF. This effort has also facilitated consensus building around joint programmes, approaches, and tools (generating exceptional good practices with interesting potential for replication).

Key partnerships to promote the protection and integration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons and the transition from humanitarian aid to self-reliance.

Government of Ecuador (GoE)

The two decades of support to the GoE in the areas of international protection, asylum and, more recently, human mobility, have generated a space of trust and institutional stability between UNHCR and the national authorities that goes beyond national political cycles and their ups and downs. Moreover, in a context of regional crisis of human mobility, UNHCR has contributed to Ecuador's role and projection within the framework of the Quito Process.

In addition to the constant work on asylum and international protection, UNHCR's proactive response to the 2016 earthquake crisis, the extensive Venezuelan exodus since 2017, the COVID-19 pandemic, and its support of amnesty and migration regularisation processes have fostered collaboration with governmental entities and acknowledged UNHCR's role in Ecuador. These examples illustrate how UNHCR's support at public institutions at key moments has consolidated its position as a reference agency in response to international protection needs, humanitarian assistance and the strengthening of public policy on human mobility.

In particular, the joint work with the IPD through the Quality Assurance Asylum Initiative (QAI) has been essential in providing the national asylum system with the tools, procedures, technologies and expertise to address the growing international protection needs of Colombians and Venezuelans. UNHCR has provided human resources support (between 26 - 28 professionals since 2019[53]), expertise and technical teams to enhance information collection on admissibility, eligibility, and country of origin, as well as to strengthen other legal and administrative functions since 2019. The mobilisation of resources directed to the IPD has enabled notable progress[54] but, in a context of reduced public budgets, staff rotations and overstretched national capacities in the face of increased Venezuelan exodus, it has generated a strong dependence on UNHCR in an upper-middle-income country with high human development[55].

With the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020, contingency measures were put in place to allow the IPD to continue operating in a context of overlapping crises. Pilot projects have been launched in 2021 to reduce the backlog, to

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[53] Through consultant and UNOPS contracts, which account for about 50% of the IPD staff.
[54] Pe: access to territory, non-refoulement, translators, unaccompanied minors, statelessness, civil documentation
[55] According to the World Bank, Ecuador is an upper middle-income country (per capita income in 2019 of approximately USD 6,400, below the Latin American average). In the Human Development Index, Ecuador ranked 86th in 2019 with a score of 0.759 (high human development, according to UNDP). Using the Gini coefficient, Ecuador has a high inequality coefficient (45.4 in 2018), although it is not among the highest in Latin America.

review and clean up statistics and to digitise forcibly displaced and stateless persons files in the IPD[56] . The transition from proGres v2 to proGres v4 as a shared registration and case management tool between UNHCR and IPD has been considered as an exceptional good practice and possible reference for other operations[57] . With the arrival of a new government administration in 2021, opportunities have emerged for enhanced collaboration between the GoE and the IPD. The new administration showed more openness and willingness to collaborate with UNHCR with the aim to strengthen the national asylum system, respond to the intensity of human mobility flows and the increase in asylum applications, as well as to prepare the migration regularisation processes. Reflecting the more favourable institutional environment, the MERHM/IPD and UNHCR developed a comprehensive "IPD-UNHCR 2022 Strategic Work Plan".

UNHCR's technical assistance has been accompanied by intense institutional advocacy work to expand the space for international protection in Ecuador and promote the application of the Cartagena Declaration (reflected in the national normative framework) to the Venezuelan population. Advocacy work and technical assistance to the GoE on international protection and asylum has been extended to other key state institutions. Actions promoted by the UNHCR were particularly important for the judiciary power (such as the Public Defender's Office), the Constitutional Court[58] and the legislative power (National Assembly). UNHCR's support to national institutions was relevant as national institutions had limited experience and expertise in the field of international protection at a time of massive population flows and exponential increase in needs. UNHCR's (and IOM's) support to the GoE has been relevant in facilitating the organisation and management of the two migratory regularisation processes (for the first time in the country's recent history).

UNHCR's work on international protection, asylum and migration options has required coordination with numerous GoE bodies, both at central and local levels. In addition to the Ministry of Government[59] (key instance for migration registration and border control[60]) and the MESI (access to social protection and attention to particularly vulnerable cases, including children and adolescents), public policies and programmes have been supported with other sectoral ministries.

Local public administration

During the period of 2019 -2022, UNHCR has expanded collaboration with local authorities, mainly with municipalities, ("cantonal councils for the protection of rights") and other decentralised autonomous governments (GAD)[61]. UNHCR provided technical and material support for development of municipal ordinances on human mobility and the implementation of inclusive municipal programmes for forcibly displaced and stateless persons. UNHCR support to municipalities has contributed to raising the visibility of key issues on human mobility and international protection at the local level and facilitated inclusion in municipal services. However, despite UNHCR's support, local authorities' action in the field of human mobility has been limited by two systemic barriers: first, local public administrations lacked knowledge and clarity regarding the distinction and interrelationship between human mobility and international protection (except in the northern border) and, second, in some municipalities, human mobility was perceived as a national policy for which local authorities have limited competencies and very few resources[62].

Partners and community-based organisations

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[56] See section Access to RSD procedure

[57] UNHCR and external informant interviews

[58] Although the Constitutional Court has the function of administering justice in the field of constitutional rights and guarantees, in the Ecuadorian constitutional design, it does not form part of the judicial function or power but is a supreme body that is above the different functions of the State.

[59] In Spanish: Ministerio de Gobierno

[60] Migration Control Units

[61] The GADs are crucial instances for the guarantee of rights. Decentralised autonomous governments are mandated by the Organic Code of Territorial Organisation, Autonomy and Decentralisation to promote sustainable development and people's dignity through the implementation of public policies for equity and social inclusion, as well as citizen participation for the exercise of rights and democratic management of municipal action; and, in relation to the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents, they must ensure their rights. In Ecuador, the Decentralisation Law established the functions and attributions of each of the decentralised autonomous governments (Regional GADs, Provincial GADs, Cantonal GADs, Parochial GADs, Special Regimes, Metropolitan District GADs, Territorial Circumscriptions of Communes, Communities, Indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubian Peoples and Nationalities).

[62] Interviews with external informants.

The country strategy was mainly deployed through agreements with partner organisations including international NGOs and national civil society or community-based organisations. The agreements with Ecuadorian organisations combined organisations with national reach and other organisations operating only locally, in selected cities or neighbourhoods. All the Ecuadorian organisations with whom UNHCR established agreements had a recognised track record in their respective fields of action and reinforced the "localisation"[63] of UNHCR strategy. The selection of partners was coherent with the needs derived from the different population flows and UNHCR's strategy (combining short-term humanitarian actions on both borders, with accompaniment to people in transit through the country and support to settlement processes in large and intermediate cities that required a medium-term perspective).

Overall, the portfolio of partners allowed UNHCR to cover a large variety of programmatic sectors and expand the territorial presence. While some partners brought in a comprehensive protection approach and had a presence in different locations, others were specialised in a single sector and had local (but no less relevant) presence. In all cases, UNHCR invested in reinforcing organizational capacities (with varying intensities) and trained on protection-related topics, as human mobility and international protection were new programmatic areas for several the partner organisations.

Between 2018 and 2019, there was a notable rise in the implementation of initiatives through partner organisations, as the number of partner agreements increased from ten to twenty. Following that, between 2019 and 2022, the number of partner agreements remained stable, with some partners discontinuing their involvement and new partners joining, mainly in 2022. In 2020 and 2021, partners have played a central role in scaling up the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The changes in the portfolio of partner organisations in 2022 responded appropriately to UNHCR's interest in strengthening livelihoods interventions and socio-economic inclusion.

The year 2022 also reflects UNHCR's decision to regain registration through direct implementation (rather than through partners). This decision significantly changed the budget distribution between direct implementation and implementation through partners. The funds allocated to partners increased significantly in 2020 (+76%), reaching a budgetary weight of 73% of the OPS and more than half of the overall OL budget. After a slight decrease in 2021 (-12%), the contribution to partners decreases by 31% in 2022, representing a budgetary weight of 41% of the OPS and 67% of the overall OL budget, as shown in the figures 9 and 10 below. In summary, the capacity to implement actions through partners was significantly reduced, largely due to the reduction of funds to HIAS[64] (lead partner for all four years) and the reorientation of resources to direct implementation.

FIGURE 9 UNHCR and partners OL budget (million USD) and weight (%) of partner's budget in OL - 2019-August 2022
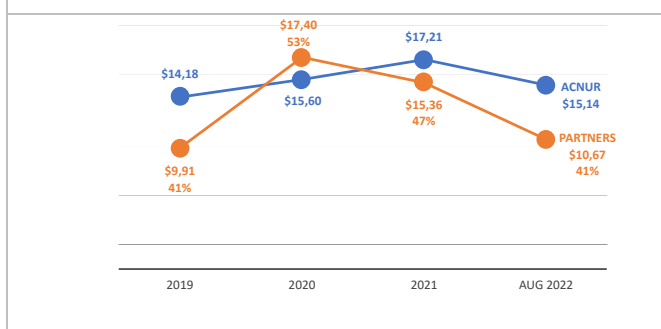
FIGURE 10 UNHCR OPS and partners budget (USD million) and weight (%) of partner's budget in OPS - 2019-August 2022
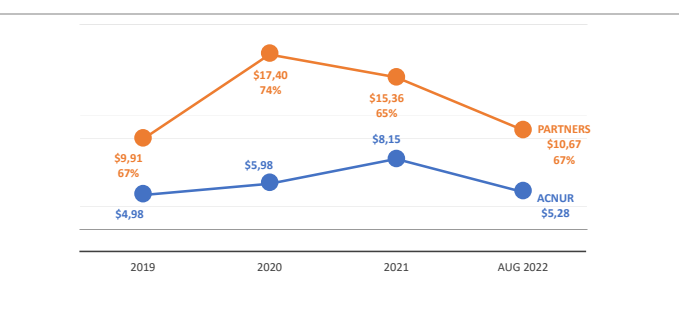
Source: UNHCR ECU- Budget Analysis 2019-2022 - 04 Jul.2022 and Budget Analysis 19-20-21-22 ("FOCUS")

Alongside the advantages and strengths that the establishment of partner agreements has brought to UNHCR's strategy, some challenges have been identified, as follows.

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[63] The term localisation, as used in the humanitarian sector, refers to the process of better engaging local and national actors in all phases of humanitarian action, including greater support for locally-led action.
[64] See graphs below

In some cases, there were difficulties in harmonising programmatic approaches between UNHCR and the partner organisation in medium-term interventions. Visions and objectives were not aligned and the planning, budget management and implementation tools of UNHCR and the partner organisation were not easy to reconcile (UNHCR annual perspective and tools versus partner's long-term approach and multiannual planning).

The variety of partner organisations has meant that at certain times the protection component was not systematic and homogenous in all interventions and in all areas (borders, urban and rural interventions).

The analysis of UNHCR's portfolio of partners in Ecuador shows the key role of HIAS in the implementation of numerous programmatic activities, especially for the registration of asylum applications and protection issues (HIAS has received 37% of the OPS budget allocated to partners), as shown in the figure 11 below. In 2022, UNHCR decided to recover the registry to reinforce the protection approach as a cross-cutting theme for all programmes, intensify its proximity to the Venezuelan and Colombian populations (bearing in mind that the weight of implementation through partners had generated a certain distance from operations) and optimise the available budget (at a time of reduced resources).

FIGURE 11 Distribution of the OPS budget (% and USD million) by actor (2019-August 2022)
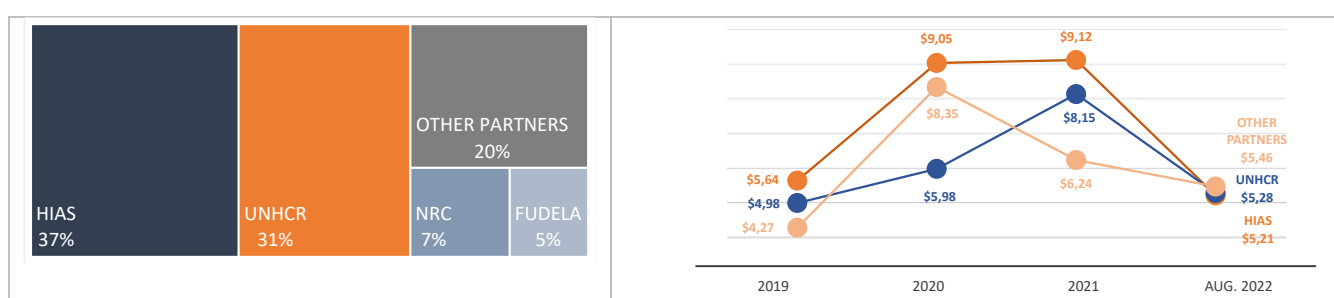
Source: UNHCR ECU- Budget Analysis 2019-2022 - 04 Jul.2022 and Budget Analysis 19-20-21-22 ("FOCUS")

The breakdown of OPS cumulative budget over the period 2019-2021 shows that it has been implemented mainly through HIAS (37%) and UNHCR (31%) and, to a lesser extent, NRC and FUDELA (12%). 20% of the budget is distributed among the other partners.

Private sector

The deployment of UNHCR socio-economic integration strategy, especially from 2021 onwards, has been accompanied by agreements with private sector organisations and local development agencies. The involvement of the private sector was essential for the implementation of UNHCR's livelihoods strategy and economic inclusion. Signing agreements with companies (covering different sectors of economic activity), business corporations, and local authorities was preceded by UNHCR's efforts to raise awareness among private actors of the economic and social potential and contribution of people on the move. In 2022, different types of agreements were signed with business partners (CORPEI, CONQUITO, CORPOAMBATO, EPICO, CRISFE, EDEC, Manabí Produce), with the aim of strengthening employability and the implementation of income-generating activities for forcibly displaced and stateless persons (in some cases, also for Ecuadorian citizens).

UNHCR's economic inclusion strategy required the establishment of agreements with educational institutions (technical and university) to strengthen vocational training and the expansion of agreements with companies operating in different economic sectors to generate employment opportunities adapted to local labour markets and economic context[65]. In 2021 the initiative "Companies with Refugees" was launched, followed by the "Inclusive Company Seal" in 2022. Additionally, the "Programme Without Borders"[66] was introduced in 2019 to raise awareness and recognize the talent of forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (WGRM)

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[65] See section Socio-economic integration

[66] https://www.sin-fronteras.ec/

In Ecuador, and since the end of 2018, the Regional Interagency Platform for Refugees and Migrants in Venezuela (R4V) has been translated into the Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (WGRM)[67]. The composition of the WGRM has evolved from 24 members in 2019 to over 50 in 2022, which has meant greater representativeness of multiple sectors and actors but has added complexity to the coordination[68]. There is a broad consensus among international aid and civil society organisations as well as GoE bodies on the usefulness of the WGRM in analysing and coordinating the response to the Venezuelan exodus. The WGRM is seen as a success story in the country in terms of complementarity and a comprehensive approach to respond to a large-scale regional crisis affection Ecuador. At the local level, the WGRM acted as an umbrella for different human mobility initiatives in localities where there were no previous specialised bodies. In other municipalities, the WGRM has been established in a complementary fashion alongside pre-existing bodies (e.g. RMH in Guayaquil), hence, capitalising on local experiences.

In parallel to the recognition of the achievements and role played by the WGRM, concerns have arisen about a certain bureaucratisation and distancing between national coordination and the different local realities. Institutions have also shown interest in implementing WGRM's expertise and lessons learned into the mechanisms for managing their public policy on human mobility.

UN system and inter-agency programmes

In addition to the co-lead of the WGRM, UNHCR participates in different working groups under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) in Ecuador. During the pandemic, UNHCR has coordinated the protection and shelter sectors of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) which was activated to reinforce the emergency response.

UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP have collaborated in Ecuador on a pilot initiative (involving 7 countries worldwide[69]), under the UN Common Cash Statement (UNCCS). The aim was to harmonise the policy, criteria and tools for "multipurpose cash transfers" (CBI[70]). The collaboration has been recognised as an exceptional effort of consensus, efficiency and synergy and one of its significant outcomes is the agreement to use proGres as a shared tool for the registration and delivery of CBI[71] to individuals through the same partner. This tool included biometric registration, which has facilitated consistency in management and reduced the risk of overlaps or errors. However, the continuity of this joint initiative may be questioned due to current budgetary difficulties affecting UN agencies.

UNHCR, IOM, UN-Habitat, and the European Union implemented "Inclusive Cities, Supportive Communities"[72], a regional inter-agency initiative aimed at reducing the vulnerabilities of refugees and migrants and increasing the resilience of host communities in six countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although detailed programmatic data are not available, opportunities for strengthening approaches, joint tools and synergies have been reported on neighbourhood-based habitability, social housing, rights-based urban planning and human mobility, or comprehensive neighbourhood upgrading.

UNHCR and UNICEF implement actions for the protection of children in situations of mobility and in host communities under the framework of the BLUEPRINT global initiative. Other joint programmes with UNHCR participation include "Education Cannot Wait"[73] (with UNICEF, IOM and NGO partners), "Peace Building Fund" (with UNICEF and UN Women), and the EU Instrument for Stability and Peace (with UNFPA, IOM and UNODC).

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[67] The WGRM is composed of 53 members including UN agencies, international and national non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, the International Red Cross Movement, in collaboration with relevant governmental actors. The WGRM functions as a space for the coordination of activities related to the response to the situation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador. The WGRM has a presence throughout the national territory, and also includes ten coordination groups known as local WGRM. To fulfil its objectives, the WGRM also relies on a technical coordination structure at the national level through six thematic Working Groups and three cross-cutting Working Groups, led by different partner organisations.

[68] Internal and external interviews.

[69] Afghanistan, Bangladesh, CAR, DRC, Ecuador, Niger, Yemen

[70] Cash Based Interventions; although other acronyms exist, the English acronym commonly used has been used to refer to cash transfers.

[71] See section on CBI for more details

[72] https://ciudadesincluyentes.org/

[73] See section on Education for more details

4.2 How effective is UNHCR's allocation of resources to short-term assistance measures as opposed to medium/long-term capacity building and durable solutions-based initiatives?

UNHCR's role has been effective in mobilising resources, articulating an effective humanitarian response and supporting access to public services (e.g. health and education) during critical years of the Venezuelan exodus. Humanitarian assistance had to be scaled up due to the pandemic, absorbing much of the resources, and mitigating short-term critical needs of Venezuelan and Colombian populations through generalised use of CBIs. Budget data clearly shows the concentration of resources in Basic needs and essential services (47% of the OPS budget - OL) and the challenges faced by UNHCR in allocating (and mobilising) resources for livelihoods interventions and durable solutions-based initiatives until 2021. Despite limited resource allocation, UNHCR's support for livelihoods and socio-economic integration has laid the foundations, generated good practices and opened spaces for access to employment and entrepreneurship, so far incipiently. Evidence on LLH has been limited and LLH interventions have not always linked to the logic of protection, due to compartmentalisation between the processes of registration and those of economic integration.

UNHCR has allocated financial, human and material resources annually to MERHM / IPD to develop the capacity of the national asylum system, which has led to notable improvements. However, given the difficulties to access international protection for Venezuelans, UNHCR has supported regularisation as a migratory alternative and an opportunity to promote integration (as durable solution) in a context of mixed movements. Although regularisation has provided an opportunity for integration, it has reduced the possibility of accessing specific international protection mechanisms for the Venezuelan population. UNHCR has provided technical expertise and material and human resources to reinforce protection capabilities and tools among public administrations, partners and other organisations, but difficulties have been identified in maintaining the centrality of protection throughout all phases of accompaniment to forcibly displaced and stateless persons (from short-term protection and service delivery, referrals and case management to medium-term integration).

In terms of access and inclusion, UNHCR's allocation of resources to support social services in selected localities (e.g. health centres, schools, pandemic response, connectivity) has strengthened UNHCR's visibility with local public administrations and host communities. In addition, UNHCR investments at community level (e.g. community protection, communication with communities) have facilitated coexistence between communities (Venezuelan, Colombian and host populations) and social integration in critical neighbourhoods. These community-based interventions are at an early stage and show potential for replication but need to be consolidated. Budgetary constraints have not allowed UNHCR to allocate resources to address the needs of GBV survivors. Likewise for mental health conditions that required both short-term actions and medium-term accompaniment. The scarce resources allocated to these issues have contributed to mitigating some needs but to a limited extent, in a context lacking specialised public services. Budgetary constraints and contextual factors also explain the persistent difficulties of access to the national social protection scheme and to housing for the Venezuelan and Colombian populations, as key facilitating factors of social and economic integration.

In 2022, the increased urban violence generated new protection risks for which UNHCR operation and communities were unprepared in terms of resources, tools and procedures.

As part of durable solutions, UNHCR has been one of the most successful resettlement operations in the region, expanding protection possibilities for particularly vulnerable Colombian and Venezuelan populations.

4.2.1 To what extent has UNHCR's support for short-term assistance, such as cash grants (MPGs), shelter and emergency protection services, facilitated the transition to longer-term solutions?

UNHCR had to expand (temporarily, programmatically and in terms of budget) humanitarian assistance and develop the "humanitarian architecture (mainly through the WGRM)" to provide emergency response to overlapping crises. The use of CBIs has been the short-term intervention with the clearest contribution to medium-

term social and economic integration processes (despite some limitations). Multifunctional and coordinated work in CBI (both between UNHCR units and with WFP, UNICEF and other organisations) has appeared as a good practice that has allowed for a common approach and standards as well as comprehensive care for people. The expansion of CBI as a humanitarian response mechanism has been relevant and effective in addressing short-term needs (exacerbated by the pandemic), but it has diluted the use of CBI as a protection mechanism. Revisions to CBI eligibility criteria, while justified on budgetary grounds, seem to have generated moments of confusion among partners and individuals receiving assistance. Nevertheless, UNHCR's transition towards a multi-purpose and prolonged CBI, complemented by WFP and UNICEF support within the UNCCS framework, has proven successful in facilitating the settlement procedures of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. The recent reduction in funding may make it difficult to continue a unique inter-agency CBI set-up.

Working through a network of partners has facilitated extensive coverage across different geographic areas and populations, enabling the creation of care pathways that have predominantly addressed pressing international protection needs (including "mobile protection" actions). The care pathways and mechanisms employed for the identification and management of critical cases functioned reasonably well. However, some gaps in protection (in shelters, other key spaces and referrals), have been identified as a result of misinformation and the complexities of referrals among a large number of humanitarian and development organisations.

These referrals and care pathways have been implemented at border crossing points, transit points and in host communities. The complementarity in expertise and programmes among partners (e.g: covering immediate assistance, registration and legal assistance, access to services and socio-economic integration) has been effective in accompanying people deciding to settle in the country (depending on eligibility criteria and available resources). Other the humanitarian interventions (e.g: shelter, WASH, canteens, information and assistance points) have responded to essential needs but it has not been possible to document their contribution to durable solutions.

4.2.1.a. Overview of UNHCR's allocation of resources in Ecuador (2019 – 2022)

UNHCR Ecuador's allocation of financial resources has been heavily concentrated on humanitarian assistance interventions throughout the evaluation period. The budget allocated to "Basic needs and essential services" accounted for 47% of the total OPS budget (OL) between 2019 and 2021. The concentration of budget in this Rights Groups is explained by the intensity of humanitarian needs during the critical years of the Venezuelan exodus and the worsening of living conditions due to the pandemic. In fact, the emergence of the pandemic led to a relaxation of the eligibility criteria for CBIs, which exponentially increased UNHCR's spending on Basic needs[74]. During the two years of the pandemic, CBI has been intended to mitigate the impact on the living conditions of the Venezuelan and Colombian populations and, therefore, it could not be used as a mechanism to facilitate the transition to self-reliance and socio-economic inclusion.

Despite UNHCR's growing attention to interventions aimed at improving economic inclusion, the allocation of resources to livelihoods and related interventions remained at very low levels throughout the period ("Community empowerment and self-reliance" accounted for 14% and "Durable solutions" for 5% of the OPS budget (OL) for the entire period), as shown in the figure 12 below. In some ways, the intensity of short-term needs has limited the drive to the inclusion strategy, which required medium-term vision and funding.

FIGURE 12 Evolution of the OPS (OL) budget by Rights Groups (USD million and %) - 2019-2021

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[74] CBI accounted for 43% of the RG "Basic Needs and Essential Services" budget; See specific section on CBI.
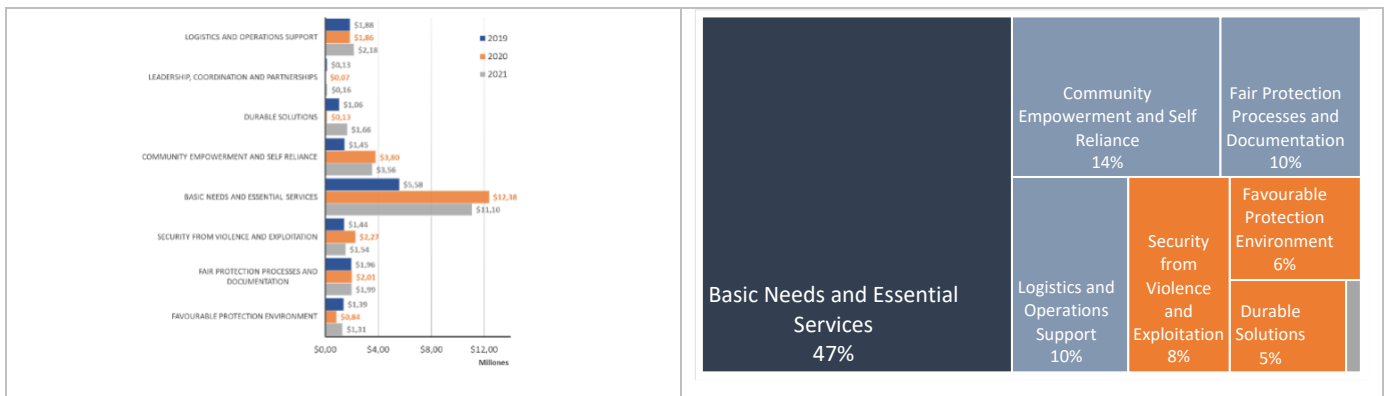
Source: UNHCR ECU-Budget Analysis 19-20-21 ("FOCUS")

4.2.1.b. Protection of fundamental rights (focus on reception, admission, registration and processing) and response to essential short-term needs

Legal and political environment favourable to international protection and asylum

To advance the national legal and regulatory framework[75], UNHCR submitted observations to the National Assembly's proposal to reform the Human Mobility Law in 2019, as well as two technical opinions to the Constitutional Court (criminal record requirement for Venezuelans; case of collective expulsion of Venezuelans from Rumichaca).

More recently, the Ombudsman's Office submitted the Draft Law Reforming the Organic Law on Human Mobility to the National Assembly, in compliance with Constitutional Court ruling 1214-18-EP/22. The Reformatory Bill is the result of a technical roundtable with the participation of several national and international organisations, including UNHCR[76] .

Protection Case Identification, Registration and Triage (ProGres)

UNHCR successfully implemented an identification, registration and triage system using ProGres and biometric recognition[77]technology. This system has been developed in collaboration with the IPD, partner organisations[78] and UN agencies[79]. The approach adopted by the UNHCR stands out as an exceptional model when compared to other operations, serving as a benchmark of success[80]. ProGres, as a platform shared with the IPD, has facilitated joint work and analysis of registration and refugee status determination, homogenising criteria and statistics. In addition to registration, ProGres has been essential for profiling forcibly displaced and stateless persons, identifying specific protection needs, analysing vulnerabilities and resettlement potential, monitoring the assistance provided (including CBI) and establishing a joint care pathway for case management. Attaining consensus and successful coordination around ProGres among various organisations has been recognised as a noteworthy achievement. This collaborative effort has successfully helped prevent duplication and fraud, fostered complementarity between organisations, strengthened comprehensive care, and addressed the exponential growth in the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons[81], as highlighted by multiple actors[82].

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[75] See Context – National institutional framework

[76] The technical roundtable aimed to establish an analysis for the inclusion of international standards on due process in the framework of the Organic Law on Human Mobility and, in particular, in relation to administrative processes for migration control such as deportation and inadmissibility; the recognition of refugee status and the limitation of rights such as the suspension of nationality granted by naturalisation to individuals.
https://prensa.ec/2022/09/03/la-defensoria-del-pueblo-propone-reformas-a-ley-organica-de-movilidad-humana/

[77] BIMS

[78] NRC, HIAS, Plan International

[79] UNICEF, WFP, IOM

[80] In the Americas, Ecuador is the largest registration operation, in terms of the number of individuals registered. Ecuador has been innovative in terms of techniques, and security aspects have been improved.

[81] Between November 2019 and 2022, progress has grown from 7,000 registrations to more than 500,000.

[82] Interviews with external and internal informants.

Between 2019 and 2021, UNHCR's method for the identification, registration and triage of protection cases for assistance has been based on agreements with three partner organisations that already had relevant protection expertise. All three organisations installed ProGres; of the three active modules, GBV and child protection were managed by the partners while legal and physical protection was managed by UNHCR. In 2021, UNHCR decided to partially recover the registration of cases and in 2022 a pilot experience was launched with HIAS in Ibarra to assess its viability and extract useful lessons for recovering registers through UNHCR in other locations.

The recovery of ProGres has been motivated by the need to strengthen the protection lens and referrals, ensure a unified approach to protection, increase proximity with populations, reinforce precision in case management and is ongoing at the time of the evaluation. UNHCR's partial recovery of registration is a major change for the operation that has programmatic and operational effects (e.g. strengthening direct implementation, protection management, evidence for programmes, in particular livelihoods opportunities, changes in relationships and agreements with partners) as well as organisational effects (e.g. re-adaptation of equipment, offices, procedures).

In addition, a "mobile protection" strategy, including registration, has been deployed to reach communities with access barriers. It has been implemented in close coordination with partners, Autonomous Decentralised Governments (GAD[83], in Spanish), the health system and host communities. This strategy has strengthened the comprehensiveness of the community-based protection approach.

In parallel to the achievements made with ProGres, difficulties and challenges have been identified in several areas; limitations in ProGres to record protection parameters, the inadequacy of ProGres to respond to sexual diversity and differences between the protection interview format and the format available in ProGres. Additionally, finding the right balance between increasing registration and availability of data and strengthening the quality of the protection approach was reported to be difficult by UNHCR teams. This has increased operational workload and logistical pressure on field offices with limited staff in a context of budget constraints and increasing insecurity.

Access to the territory

To reduce barriers of access to the territory, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Public Defender's Office, the Ombudsman and other organisations, obtained temporary suspension of the requirement to present a criminal record certificate for the Venezuelan population, derived from Executive Decree 826. Likewise, UNHCR has positively influenced reforms of the OLHM before the National Assembly to reinforce the protection of minors, non-refoulement, and due process for deportations. UNHCR has also collaborated with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility to ensure that the secondary norms derived from the OLHM are in line with international standards.

From a protection and humanitarian response point of view, UNHCR implemented contingency plans, reinforced and maintained monitoring at the northern and southern borders, extending it to irregular crossing points, and deployed a mechanism to identify and refer protection needs from the first moment of entry into the country.

Access to the RSD procedure

In the context of the Venezuelan exodus, UNHCR issued in 2018[84] the first guidance note on the approach to be adopted for the Venezuelan population, later updated in 2019[85] . Considering the deteriorating humanitarian and security conditions in Venezuela, UNHCR called on states to allow access to territory, asylum procedures or group recognition mechanisms with adequate guarantees, and that regardless of their legal status. Venezuelans should not be deported or forced to return. UNHCR established that, for some profiles, international protection considerations may exist under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. UNHCR also considered that most Venezuelan nationals, or stateless persons residing in Venezuela, were in need of international protection under the Cartagena Declaration. It should be noted that the guidance note was criticised by some organisations as being "open to ambiguity and evasion of responsibility by receiving states"[86] .

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[83] Gobiernos Autónomos Descentralizados
[84] UNHCR, Guidance note on the outflow of Venezuelans, March 2018
[85] UNHCR, Guidance note on international protection considerations for Venezuelans - Update I, May 2019
[86] Suárez, V. et al (2020) Situación de Derechos Humanos de migrantes de Venezuela en el Ecuador. CARE, Fundación Alas de Colibrí and Diálogo Diverso.

Despite UNHCR (and other organisation's) efforts, the contrast between the recognition rate for the Colombian population (96%) and 2% for the Venezuelan population (2%) persisted in 2022[87]. While the national asylum system has traditionally been accommodating and effective in managing the Colombian situation, it has faced challenges in addressing the influx of Venezuelan refugees. The explanatory factors include challenges associated with the practical application of the Cartagena Declaration to the Venezuelan population, the exponential increase in the number of Venezuelan forcibly displaced and stateless persons (+492% in 2017, +158% in 2018 and +34% in 2019[88]) and operational pressure to respond to the intense demand for humanitarian assistance. Even for UNHCR experienced teams in the northern region of the country, it has been difficult to balance the generalisation of humanitarian assistance to massive population flows during the pandemic with the application of specific protection mechanisms and actions that could be included under the principles of the Cartagena Declaration. Additionally, the difference in the recognition rate of the refugee status between Columbians and Venezuelans is probably related to sub-regional geopolitical factors and national realities that are beyond UNHCR's capacity to influence.

Under the UNHCR-led QAI, the IPD has been able to reduce decision times, improve case management and increase admissibility rates. It has also been successful in maintaining access to the national asylum system in locations where the government closed the IPD offices (Santo Domingo, San Lorenzo, Lago Agrio) due to austerity measures. In 2021, the backlog reduction was remarkable, from 26,000 cases in 2020 to 7,100 in 2021 (73% reduction)[89]. Despite the progress made, there remain significant difficulties and barriers hindering the complete realisation of the right to asylum, especially for Venezuelan population, as previously mentioned. UNHCR has implemented actions to address the lack of information regarding the RSD process among the Venezuelan population, as a primary reason or individuals not applying for asylum[90]; the effects of UNHCR's interventions were limited because there was a factor of not self-identification with the refugee status, and the presence of more appealing alternatives, which influenced the decision-making process of Venezuelan population. Interviews also reported distrust of institutions, fear of being in an irregular situation[91], or bureaucracy and delays in the RSD process as reasons for not applying.

In these circumstances, UNHCR's involvement in the two processes of amnesty and migratory regularisation has been a strategic choice to facilitate access to documentation and the socio-economic integration of migrants. Nevertheless, the request for migratory regularisation necessitated withdrawal[92] of the application, potentially resulting in the inability to access international protection mechanisms in certain cases.

Legal assistance, access to information and migration regularisation

UNHCR have had to exert significant efforts to swiftly adapt their activities, procedures, and tools to accommodate actions aimed at providing information and legal assistance to sudden contextual and institutional changes (e.g: legal framework, administrative decisions). The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the Peruvian government's decision to militarise its borders in 2021 have added complexity and operational pressure to assist and provide legal and procedural guidance to forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

Since 2019, UNHCR has channelled legal assistance and access to information and guidance on migration issues to forcibly displaced and stateless persons mainly through NRC and, to a lesser extent, through HIAS and other organisations, in coordination with the Public Defender's Office and Cantonal Boards. Even so, networking has been essential to effectively structure case referrals and complementarities between a wide range of organisations[93]. Networking between NRC and other organisations has allowed for a broad territorial deployment, covering the two borders and the main transit and reception locations of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. The provision of information, guidance and legal assistance has been carried out in both fixed and mobile modalities, which allowed organisations to reach people in hard-to-reach locations, or with no presence of state services. In 2020, the adoption

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[87] See section Access to RSD procedure
[88] From 145,300 forced displaced and statelessness persons in 2017 to 503,607 in 2019 (https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics)
[89] UNHCR, Global trends, forced displacement in 2021 (https://www.unrefugees.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Global-Trends-2021.pdf)
[90] UNHCR's Protection Monitor (2021) and other reports
[91] 73% of Venezuelans surveyed reported being in an irregular situation (UNHCR, Protection Monitor, National Report, March 2021).

[92] In case the asylum application has been made previously.
[93] The referrals have involved some 20 civil society organisations (HIAS, FUDELA, Alas de Colibrí, ADRA, RET, IOM, Casa del Migrante, Caritas, Misión Scalabriniana, Fundación ALDHEA, Fundación Tarabita, Lunita Lunera, Fundación Nuevos Horizontes, FASC, Cruz Roja, CARE, CISP, Fundación Quimera, Red de Organizaciones de Movilidad Humana de Loja) and various governmental bodies at both central and local levels (Public Defender's Office, local Human Rights Committees and Cantonal Protection Councils, MESI, Ministry of Public Health).

of remote working modalities and biosecurity measures has been timely and effective in responding to needs exacerbated by the pandemic (e.g. increased difficulties in dealing with public administrations, evictions).

UNHCR combined the provision of legal assistance, information on rights, migration alternatives and accompaniment for migratory regularisation through two complementary intervention modalities: I) the reinforcement of public administration capacities and, II) technical and financial support to civil society organisations to expand outreach in the face of growing needs in entry, transit, exit and destination.

I) **Strengthening of national capacity**

UNHCR has deployed a wide range of actions to strengthen and update the structure and functioning of the national asylum system (Legislative advice, Advocacy and lobbying, Institutional support, Infrastructure and systems, Individual capacity development, Quality assurance), in line with global corporate guidance and asylum capacity development[94]. The injection of resources into the MERHM has made it possible to increase the processing of applications, reduce backlogs and improve the quality of processes. It has also, however, led to a certain level of substitution of state responsibilities and has generated dependence on external resources. UNHCR has advocated at the highest institutional level to delimit the timeframe of the assistance provided by UNHCR and agree on an exit scenario but, to date, it has not been able to establish concrete commitments with the GoE.

I.I Training of civil servants in international law, refugee status and human mobility

The collaboration between UNHCR, the Public Defender's Office, and the Ombudsman's Office has facilitated the training of approximately 14,800 professionals between 2019 and 2021. This training has encompassed officials at various hierarchical levels, personnel from legal clinics, and staff from civil society organizations. Two virtual courses were developed during 2019, which were essential to facilitate the continuity of legal assistance remotely during the critical phase of the pandemic. UNHCR has also recruited professionals to reinforce the operational capacities of key public administrations[95]. While additional staff have strengthened the state's response to increased needs during the critical period of the Venezuelan exodus, it has also generated dependence on UNHCR's financial contributions. The eventual withdrawal or reduction of material, financial and human support provided by UNHCR to the IPD would generate a loss of capacity that would seriously impact the functioning of the national asylum system. As an example, UNHCR has been funding between 26 and 28 support professionals to contribute to improving the quality of asylum and the functioning of the IPD since 2019. UNHCR's efforts to increase financial and personnel resources through general state budgets or public resources have had limited impact due to budgetary constraints. As a complement to human resources support, UNHCR has funded the acquisition of relevant equipment and technology.

The significant investment in capacity building of civil servants and legal professionals has been fundamental to articulate the response of key public administrations to the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. In 2021, the scope of capacity building initiatives was expanded to include four Cantonal Councils for the Protection of Rights[96]. The goal was to empower these councils to effectively carry out their duties in safeguarding and promoting rights at the local level. Additionally, UNHCR has supported a mobile strategy[97] to bring the public services of the Ombudsman's Office, the International Protection Directorate (IPD) and the Civil Registry closer to forcibly displaced and stateless persons and reduce access barriers.

The legal assistance, information and guidance provided to forcibly displaced and stateless persons has covered a broad spectrum of key issues in three main areas: protection (e.g. Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedure, migration alternatives, birth and civil certificates, reunification, gender-based violence), regularisation (e.g. VERHU visa procedures) and socio-economic inclusion (e.g. labour disputes, access to education, health or justice). In 2020,

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[94] UNHCR asylum capacity development evaluation; A guide to international refugee protection and building state asylum systems. Handbook for Parliamentarians N° 27, 2017
[95] Consultants (9 in 2019 and 2020, 10 in 2021) in support of the Public Defender's Office in Tulcán, Lago Agrio, San Lorenzo, Esmeraldas, Ibarra, Manta, Machala, Guayaquil, Cuenca, Quito
Consultants (5 in 2019, 2020 and 2021) in support of the Ombudsman's Office in Quito, Ibarra, Tulcán, Lago Agrio, Machala.
Consultants (4 in 2021) in support of the Cantonal Councils for the Protection of Rights in Guayaquil, Huaquillas, Ibarra, Lago Agrio.
Ecuador - 2019, 2020, 2021 Year-end reports.
[96] Guayaquil, Huaquillas, Ibarra, Lago Agrio
[97] Including care brigades and "mobile desks".

the provision of legal advice proved instrumental in addressing eviction cases arising from challenges in meeting rent payments during the pandemic.

I.II Raising awareness and mainstreaming human mobility

There is a broad consensus[98] on UNHCR's contribution in raising awareness and mainstreaming major issues of human mobility (including asylum and international protection). This has been accomplished by placing these matters prominently on the agendas of various governmental bodies and public services. Until 2017, the institutions concerned with human mobility had limited resources and little specialisation in this area. Today, the Public Defender's Office and the Ombudsman's Office have trained professionals distributed throughout the national territory. Similarly, within academia, 41 legal clinics have been accredited in human mobility (out of a total of 71 clinics nationwide).

UNHCR's collaboration with the Public Defender's Office has been particularly relevant. It has been decisive in strategic litigation at the Constitutional Court level, and in achieving favourable jurisprudence on the rights of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, as well as promoting normative reforms (e.g.: right to nationality and eradication of statelessness[99] , right to asylum and due process[100] , prohibition of collective expulsions and due process for deportations) [101].

I.III Registration and regularisations 2019 and 2022

Between 2019 and 2022, UNHCR supported the government's migration registration and regularisation initiatives aimed primarily at the Venezuelan individuals in undocumented situations. From mid-2019 to August 2020 UNHCR supported the first regularisation process; and, less than a year later (June 2021), deployed a comprehensive technical response to reduce obstacles to the regularisation process (see annex 9).

Support for the government's 2019 regularisation process confronted UNHCR with a paradoxical situation. On one side, regularisation was an opportunity to facilitate access to public services and socio-economic inclusion for thousands of people in an irregular situation. On the other side, access to migration regularisation meant not being able to continue with the RSD procedure due to domestic regulations. For the Venezuelan population, migratory regularisations have been perceived as an option considering the limitations of the RSD procedure[102] , the difficult practical application of the Cartagena Declaration and the reluctance of the Ecuadorian state to recognise the refugee status of the Venezuelan population[103] due to geopolitical issues[104].

As of the time of writing, the VIRTE regularisation process initiated in September 2022 is actively underway. The support of UNHCR (as well as IOM and other organisations) is reflected in the mobilisation of human resources to support the Ministries involved[105], the reorientation of activities and resources of partners to support the process as well as in the acquisition of technological and logistical equipment[106]. Close coordination between UNHCR and IOM in the regularisation process is consistent with the principles and agreements established between the two agencies in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact on Migration (GCM). It is an example of complementarity and alignment with national policies and priorities, recognised by national actors[107] .

Humanitarian Assistance and Multipurpose Cash Interventions (CBI)

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[98] Interviews with external informants

[99] Case 335-13-JP/20

[100] Case 897-11-JP/20

[101] Case 639-19-JP/20

[102] Delay in the RSD process (3-5 years)

[103] The recognition rate for the Venezuelan population has ranged between 1% and 4% during the period under evaluation.

[104] Interviews with external informants

[105] In 2022, in support of the regularisation process, UNHCR and IOM have recruited 24 staff for the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion, 70 staff for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility and 79 staff for the Ministry of Interior. UNHCR has also supported the regularisation process through brigades conducted by the Public Defender's Office.

[106] UNHCR, Ecuador Monthly Report, No. 9 November 2022

[107] Interviews with external informants.

A central component of humanitarian and protection responses has been the provision of multipurpose cash transfers (CBI) to provide asylum seekers with the means to meet basic needs during part of the asylum procedure, when livelihood opportunities or employment are almost non-existent.

The delivery of CBI in 2019, in the wake of the Venezuelan exodus, operated initially as an urgent response to meet shelter and food needs of the newly arrived population for one month. In 2020, the overlapping of the Venezuelan exodus and the pandemic significantly transformed the scope of CBI, resulting in a radical increase in the number of individuals receiving CBI (+143%) and a significant budget increase, as shown in the Table 2 below. During the period 2019-2021, the number of total persons served through the CBI programme is slightly higher than planned[108] .

Table 2 Evolution in the number of individuals receiving CBI in Ecuador between 2019 and 2021

CBIs	# of individuals		
	2019	2020	2021
Multipurpose cash	10 497	21 696	21 723
Other types of cash	269	4 428	2 986
TOTAL	10 766	26 124	24 709

Source: UNHCR ECU- Breakdown of CBI lines 19-20-21

Since 2021, the focus of CBI delivery strategy deployed by UNHCR shifted towards aligning emergency assistance with the promotion of forcibly displaced and stateless persons integration in the country. This evolution has established CBI as a versatile approach, serving multiple purposes in providing protection and addressing the specific needs and heightened vulnerabilities of individuals[109],[110].

FIGURE 13 Weight of CBI in the OPS budget (2019-August 2022)
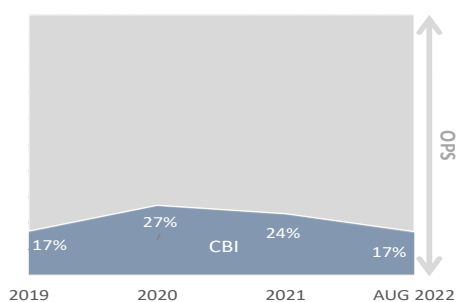
From a budgetary point of view, the funding for the CBI programme has more than doubled in 2020 and remained high in 2021. The weight of CBI in the OPS budget increased by 10% between 2019 and 2020 and then declined. Data for 2022 (July) show a downward trend in both relative and absolute values of the budget.

Source: UNHCR ECU - OPS Budget Analysis (Focus) 19-20-21-Aug 22

FIGURE 14 Evolution of the CBI budget by UNHCR's "situations" (2019 - 2022)
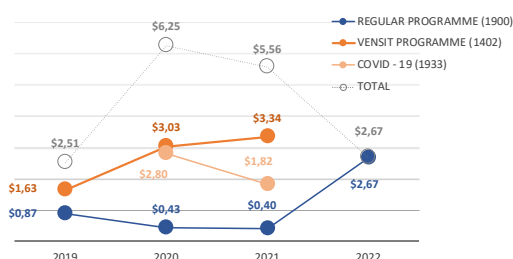
Due to the structure of the operation, the CBI budget has been managed by differentiating the "situations" of Colombia and Venezuela and, between 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, the three situations are unified under one regular programme. The graph shows the evolution of the CBI budget, highlighting the peak in 2020 due to the pandemic and the significant decrease foreseen for 2022.

Source: UNHCR ECU - OPS Budget Analysis (Focus) 19-20-21-Aug 22

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[108] UNHCR ECU - Breakdown of CBI lines 19-20-21
[109] Interviews with internal informants.
[110] Data at a higher level of disaggregation has not been available to analyse, for example, the weight in the distribution of CBI beneficiaries by UNHCR intervention areas in Ecuador, and criteria of gender, age, vulnerability, nationality or other variables.

Partners have played an essential role in the management of CBI and thus in the implementation of the protection approach across all assistance provided to forcibly displaced and stateless persons. Their involvement is crucial in ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid and maintaining a seamless transition between immediate short-term support and access to longer-term LLH. HIAS has implemented 85% of the total budget allocated to CBI in the 4 evaluated years. It is also noteworthy that CBI funds represent relevant percentages of the funds granted to HIAS and SOS Children's Villages. Considering the weight of the CBI budget in the partners' budget allocation, UNHCR's change of strategy with the registration (and delivery of CBI) in 2022 has created some difficulties for these organisations to adapt to relevant budget reductions.

FIGURE 15 Distribution of the CBI budget (%) by Rights Groups (2019-2021)

Source: UNHCR ECU- OPS Budget Analysis (Focus) 19-20-21
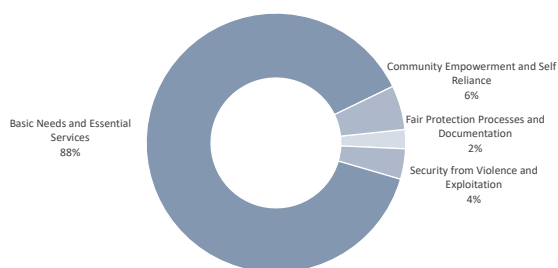
Overall, HIAS's involvement, along with other partners, has significantly contributed to the implementation of a broad range of activities (beyond that of CBI), and has enabled the delivery of large-scale humanitarian assistance. However, this has had an impact on other aspects of UNHCR's work in the country (e.g. protection lens). Analysis of the CBI budget by Rights Groups (RG) clearly shows the weight of CBI used as a humanitarian intervention (and in a much lesser extent as a tool oriented to strengthen self-reliance and durable solution).

According to the Post-Distribution Monitoring Report of the Multipurpose Cash Transfer Programme (June 2021), a total of 36,525 forcibly displaced and stateless persons were assisted with these transfers, for a total value of USD 4,489,301. This monitoring identified that the transfer was effectively directed to the satisfaction of emerging needs, mainly expenses for rent, food, hygiene items, utilities, health, household items, transport, water and basic goods. According to the monitoring results, forcibly displaced and stateless persons assisted with the transfer had an improved access to livelihoods opportunities and reduced the use of negative coping strategies and thus the related risks.[111]

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CBI was distributed through banking and financial services. This innovation in delivery, in addition to providing greater security, contributed to the promotion of financial inclusion and access to banking services for forcibly displaced and stateless persons[112].

The amount of UNHCR CBI was defined to be in line with the cash transfer policies and criteria of the GoE (who provides grants to Ecuadorians living in poverty as part of social inclusion policy). UNHCR harmonised the cash benefits granted to foreign population in need of protection with the cash perceived by Ecuadorian citizens. It was a choice to facilitate the eventual eligibility of Venezuelans and/or Colombians for national cash transfers.

Shelter and accommodation

UNHCR's shelter and temporary accommodation interventions have been instrumental in addressing acute needs of the influx of Venezuelan populations across the northern border. However, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 limited shelter capacity due to biosecurity regulations (e.g. Tulcan), closure of facilities (e.g. Esmeraldas shelter) and prolonged stays due to lockdown measures. UNHCR has provided access to temporary shelter to forcibly displaced and stateless persons, including management of critical protection cases, persons with specific needs[113] and short-term humanitarian assistance (between 17,000 and 34,000 people per year from 2019 to 2021 as per UNHCR monitoring data).

UNHCR has also supported the adaptation of "rest spaces" (e.g. WASH points, canteens, Purik Huasi Municipal Shelter, CEBAF Huaquillas) and has financed accommodation expenses for vulnerable forcibly displaced and

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[111] UNHCR, "Post-Distribution Monitoring Report of the 2021 Multi-Purpose Cash Transfer Programme", UNHCR, "Post-Distribution Monitoring Report of the 2021 Multi-Purpose Cash Transfer Programme".
[112] Interviews with internal and external informants.
[113] See next section

stateless persons who could not be accommodated in shelters, or who were at risk of homelessness. UNHCR has also ensured the provision of safe shelter for resettlement cases. In addition to high levels of demand, some shelters have experienced security problems (especially in the north) leading to temporary suspension or even closure of facilities. There have also been reports of tensions with the neighbourhood and, at times, with local authorities.

UNHCR's shelter approach has adapted to changing mobility flows and emergencies (pandemic). Initially designed to serve mainly individuals in transit, the shelter approach has evolved to incorporate individuals who express a willingness to stay in the country and required sustained accompaniment.

The inclusion of human mobility in the public agenda at the municipal level has led to noteworthy experiences. For instance, the collaborative efforts between NRC and the Municipality of Tulcán in managing the shelter exemplify a local initiative with good practices in joint shelter management and sustainability.

Despite the investments made by UNHCR and other organisations, the demand for shelter has recurrently exceeded the available units and there has been a critical shortfall in shelter capacity that particularly affected forcibly displaced and stateless persons with special needs (e.g. children, survivors of GBV and other violence, mental disorders, chronic illnesses)[114] .

The UNHCR and its partners have sought to ensure that people's departure from shelters was systematically accompanied by "exit plans" (especially for families). While inter-agency referrals and complementarities have provided guidance and "exit plans" in many cases, there have also been reports of individuals and families experiencing critical situations in the absence of exit options.

Support to shelters and rest spaces such as canteens, has been relevant for the identification and management of protection cases with specific needs. While the evaluation lacks quantitative evidence, certain shortcomings have been identified in the identification, monitoring, and management of cases with protection needs. It should be noted that these instances may be exceptions rather than the norm. For instance, there were Colombian asylum seekers who initiated their application in the north but have been unable to resume or clarify their situation after a year of mobility within the country. Additionally, there were individuals with vulnerability factors who faced difficulties accessing support services, as telephone and WhatsApp helplines were not always responsive or provided unclear information. Some shelters or assistance services also struggled to adequately identify and refer cases due to operational limitations and inadequate resources. Some of the reasons include staff rotations in the assistance services, diversity of mandates and approaches of the organisations managing shelters and other care services, professionals with limited experience on international protection issues, the complexity of referrals between organisations, and the suspension or temporary closures of shelters[115].

4.2.1.c Needs of women, the elderly, unaccompanied minors, LGBTIQ+ persons and other persons with vulnerabilities

UNHCR, in line with the corporate policy of age, gender and diversity (AGD[116]) and accountability to affected populations (AAP[117]), has integrated a focus on specific needs and critical vulnerabilities in its actions. In 2019, with the establishment of the Information Management unit (IM), significant progress was made in disaggregating data, strengthening the recording and decision-making of Programme and Protection teams and the accuracy of monitoring reports. Standard operating procedures for the identification and management of vulnerable cases along with age and gender sensitive tools have been collaboratively developed with partners, including WGRM and other national actors[118].

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[114] External informant interviews, observations in shelters, performance reports
[115] External and internal informant interviews, shelter observations
[116] UNHCR policy on age, gender and diversity 2018
[117] Accountability to Affected People (AAP)
[118] Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on case management with survivors of gender-based violence in the context of human mobility was developed in 2022; WGRM, GBV/trafficking sub-group; June 2022.

Despite the efforts made, specialised assistance to GBV survivors or minors has not been able to meet the extensive needs. This challenge stems from both the operation's limited funding[119], and the critical capacity gaps in specialised public services and programmes that address such profiles in Ecuador. It impacts both nationals and forcibly displaced and stateless persons[120] .

In a context of both national and human mobility marked by high levels of gender inequality (e.g. the majority of Venezuelan women in Ecuador are in an irregular migratory situation) and gender-based violence,[121] [122] UNHCR has implemented specific strategies and actions to protect, assist and accompany the local integration of women and other profiles of victims of violence. Among other risks, the transit in the border areas with Colombia and Peru stand out. In these locations, Venezuelan women are at high risk of being victims of multiple forms of gender-based violence and human trafficking[123]. Additionally, Venezuelan women encounter obstacles in accessing protection mechanisms. Their access is hindered by a lack of information and awareness about existing complaint and protection mechanisms, while institutions generally lack a specific focus on refugee women. This knowledge gap is particularly evident in areas with limited presence of state institutions with a relevant mandate to address cases of gender-based violence, such as the southern border of the country[124] .

As a follow up on the localisation policy, UNHCR has established agreements and supported the work of women's rights and gender equality organisations on the northern border (e.g. Alas de Colibrí, Federación de Mujeres de Sucumbíos) and the southern border (e.g. Movimiento de Mujeres del Oro). UNHCR reports around 5,400 people assisted per year (legal, psychosocial support, and access to safe spaces) and 8 supported shelters. In Cuenca, the programme "Mi casa fuera de casa" (My home away from home) has been supported with comprehensive care for forcibly displaced and stateless persons and survivors of GBV.

The vast experience and knowledge of Ecuadorian organisations (with whom UNHCR established agreements) in key urban areas, has generated synergies with other community and parish groups. It resulted in a kind of "multiplier effect" for the visibility of human mobility and coexistence between communities. Community and social spaces (e.g. community halls, libraries, parishes, parks) and social care points have served as meeting places and also as alert, detection and referral points for risks of violence (e.g. survivors of GBV, abuse or neglect of children and adolescents, criminal activity). In a context characterised by high prevalence rates of GBV, which also affects children and adolescents, there was a critical shortage of specialised services and limited public response. In that regard, the work of local organisations (e.g. Sucumbíos Women's Federation, Movimiento de Mujeres del Oro, Fundación Tarabita) and human rights defenders in raising awareness, preventing incidents, providing assistance to survivors and managing the few existing shelters and care centres, has been of particular value. In this sense, the "Welcoming Community" (Tulcán), "Welcoming Neighbourhoods" (Guayaquil) and "Welcoming Cities and Solidarity Communities" (Quito) initiatives have strengthened the skills of community leaders, installed information points and legal and social advice, established care pathways for case management between partners and public services, boosted socio-cultural activity, renovated facilities and provided training. These community approaches in urban settings also show potential for replicability in other similar contexts.

UNHCR has also strengthened capacities and raised awareness among public officials from different institutions, community organisations and forcibly displaced and stateless persons (community groups professionals from institutions, refugees and asylum seekers). At the community level, groups of advocates have been formed to provide guidance on protection measures, ways to prevent and how to report GBV[125]. In 2022, the Standard

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[119] All UNHCR annual reports make explicit the funding shortfall and, in some years, describe the impossibility of implementing actions in localities particularly affected by trafficking and smuggling of women and girls (2020: Guayaquil, Cuenca, Ambato, Santo Domingo, Manta) or of increasing the coverage of cash transfers for this type of need (2021).

[120] Interviews with external and internal informants; documentary review; national statistics.

[121] According to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), 65 out of every 100 women in Ecuador have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime (National Survey on Family Relations and Gender Violence against Women).

[122] (Amnesty International. Facts and figures: Unprotected in Ecuador; https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2022/11/facts-and-figures-unprotected-in-ecuador/).

[123] Plan International (2021) Study on Gender-based violence against migrant and/or refugee women in the receiving countries of Peru and Ecuador.

[124] In Huaquillas, the Domestic Violence Department (DEVIF) of the National Police has only two officials for several cantons, the Ombudsman's Office does not have permanent staff in the territory and the Public Defender's Office does not have staff specialised in gender-based violence (Amnesty International. Facts and figures: Unprotected in Ecuador; https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2022/11/facts-and-figures-unprotected-in-ecuador/).

[125] UNHCR, UNHCR Informs you, Issue 1, June 2022

Operating Procedure on case management for survivors of gender-based violence in the context of human mobility has been developed in the framework of WGRM. The SOP includes a specific section on children and adolescent survivors of GBV in the context of human mobility.

Sexual and gender diversity

UNHCR has been a pioneer in responding to LGBTIQ+ needs, establishing agreements with several community-based organisations in different localities, supporting the work of Dialogo Diverso and expanding the facilities and capacities of a specialised shelter in Quito (Fundación Equidad). In Cuenca, UNHCR's support to the municipality and Dialogo Diverso has strengthened local capacities to work with the LGBTIQ+ community and provided psychosocial assistance to profiles at risk. It has been recognised as a successful experience in municipal public policy. Work has also been done to strengthen the capacities of public institution officials to provide care to LGBTIQ+ people, and to improve the organisational capacity of LGBTIQ+ community groups.

In terms of LGBTIQ+ assistance and protection, UNHCR has assisted some 1,500 people annually over the past four years. Additionally, UNHCR supported the elaboration of awareness-raising documents on LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants. In coordination with the Ministry of Public Health, UNAIDS and CARE, a project has been implemented to reinforce capacities of LGBTIQ+ people and sex workers organisations and promote HIV prevention. Regionally, several UNHCR country offices have promoted the Regional LGBTQI+ Protection Network which involved conducting a regional assessment on LGBTIQ+ refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

Children

With 38% of children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility[126] , high presence of vulnerability factors (e.g. malnutrition and anaemia, violence, smuggling, trafficking, civil and migratory documentation) and barriers to access services (e.g. migratory regularisation, access to education)[127] [128], UNHCR has worked with national bodies and partners to strengthen the child and adolescent protection approach with a public policy, civil society and community focus.

Support to the GoE has mainly targeted the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion, the National Council for Intergenerational Equality and the Cantonal Boards of Rights[129] . Between 2019 and 2020, advocacy by UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM succeeded in suspending government barriers that prevented the entry and protection of children and adolescents in the country[130] while also facilitating school enrolment. UNHCR and other organisations have contributed to the development of tools to enhance the protection of children and adolescents in situation of mobility[131]. A pilot project promoting deinstitutionalisation and alternative care for unaccompanied minors[132] has been implemented, and the Ministry of Education has adopted the "We breathe inclusion" methodology to combat xenophobia in schools, as part of the multi-agency project "Education Cannot Wait"[133] .

UNHCR established agreements with civil society organisations (SOS Children's Villages, Alas de Colibri, ALDHEA), in addition to strengthening the childhood component with its regular partners[134] and the community protection approach to expand territorial reach and develop community protection mechanisms for children at risk. In conjunction with UNICEF and other organisations, UNHCR has supported the model of "comprehensive support spaces"[135], not only to provide immediate attention but also to strengthening local capacities for comprehensive protection (both for local and mobile children) and inter-institutional coordination through the Cantonal Boards.

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[126] Relative to estimated total forced displaced and statelessness persons
[127] UNICEF ECUADOR, Response to the Venezuelan Human Mobility Crisis Response, December 2020
[128] Forty-six per cent of those registered in PRIMES in 2021 were under 18 years of age. Of the 34,000 school-age children registered in 2021, some 23,000 (68%) were at risk of not attending school (UNHCR reporting 2021).
[129] In 2019, nine consultants have supported the issuance of 233 protection measures.
[130] Non-recognition of birth certificates of Venezuelan Children and adolescents and apostilled criminal record certificates.
[131] Protocol for the Protection of Refugee and Migrant Children / Standard Operating Procedure for Inter-institutional Coordination for the Management of Child Protection Cases in the Context of Human Mobility in Ecuador.
[132] No information on the progress or results of the pilot project has been made available to the evaluation to date.
[133] See section Access to public services
[134] HIAS, FUDELA, ASA
[135] Comprehensive support spaces perform other functions but reference is included here to exemplify their work on children's issues.

Protection and assistance measures implemented in collaboration with public institutions and civil society have led to the identification and referral of about 3,000 separated and unaccompanied children and adolescents between 2019 and 2020. Around 1,000 unaccompanied children and adolescents were attended in alternative care centres and another 700 children and adolescents received in-kind assistance and psychosocial services. Still, existing deficits in national services and the technical and coordination complexity of comprehensive management of children and adolescents appear to result in neglect and persistently high risks and unmet needs.

Training efforts on the best interests of the child and related protection issues have reached officials, partner organisations, civil society and community profiles (some 2,000 people trained between 2020 and 2021). As an example, ASA has provided a specialised accompaniment service to separated and unaccompanied children and adolescents in human mobility in Quito, which included shelter in autonomy houses, accompaniment to apply for asylum, and psychological care, among others.

4.2.2 To what extent has UNHCR's support for the empowerment of migrant/refugee and host communities been relevant and effective in strengthening self-management and ensuring access to services?

In a rights-guaranteeing state, public administrations have implemented effective measures to provide access to education, health and some social programmes for forcibly displaced and stateless persons. UNHCR has supported public polices, helping to mitigate "informal" barriers, reduce gaps, and manage particularly vulnerable cases. However, there have been critical deficits in the capacity and expertise of public services to address GBV survivors, children and adolescents, and forcibly displaced and stateless persons with mental health conditions that UNHCR (and the humanitarian system in general) has contributed to mitigating to a limited extent. UNHCR's support to social services (e.g. health centres, schools, pandemic response, connectivity) increased visibility with municipalities and host communities.

Difficulties in accessing key services were mainly concentrated in social protection and housing. Access to housing was the biggest obstacle to integration in host locations due to high costs, although UNHCR's actions have been innovative and responsive to critical cases. In parallel, UNHCR investments at community level (e.g. community protection, communication with communities) facilitated coexistence between communities (Venezuelan, Colombian and host populations) and social integration in critical neighbourhoods. These community-based interventions are at an early stage and show potential for replication but need to be consolidated.

From 2021 onwards, UNHCR contributed to the financial inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, expanded partnerships with the private sector and established agreements with the public sector and local governments; these actions have laid good foundations for connecting labour supply and demand and supporting entrepreneurship initiatives (under an innovative agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank), adapted to local markets and economic models. UNHCR has supported good hiring practices by private companies and the launching of viable ventures (generally income generating activities of individual or family scale) that serve as a reference to raise awareness among the private sector and inspire other potential refugees and asylum seekers.

However, formal access to livelihoods opportunities has been hampered by lack of documentation, low economic growth rates, and high rates of informal employment. In this context, UNHCR has adopted differentiated strategies for the formal and informal market, as a pragmatic approach to broaden options of income for households. Bureaucracy, scarcity of start-up funds and lack of information or training of forcibly displaced and stateless persons have also limited the reach of UNHCR's support to income generating activities. Although the ongoing migratory regularisation is expected to address some of these barriers, the economic climate has adversely affected (and may continue to affect) formal access to livelihoods and has prevented some forcibly displaced and stateless persons from moving out of informality.

Metrics available in relation to the socio-economic integration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons have been limited, which has made it difficult to assess achievements. Harmonising UNHCR's planning, funding, and budgeting model with durable solutions interventions appears to be challenging; local integration is a multidimensional process, which normally requires a medium-term approach, and involves specialized actors. This complexity is further compounded by the context of mixed movements.

Education and training

The Ministry of Public Health (MPH) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) have implemented strategies to address the needs of the Venezuelan population and have also incorporated measures to address the challenges posed by the pandemic, considering the specific needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. Efforts made by the GoE to include forcibly displaced and stateless persons in public programmes and services are reflected in positive statistics on the use of health[136] or educational facilities[137]. Although the increase of population flows has had an effect on the use of health services and enrolment in education centres (increased demand), the share of forcibly displaced and stateless persons accessing these services remains relatively low in relation to the total population (e.g. in health, outpatient consultations by Venezuelans are estimated to represent 1.3% of the total national consultations. In education, foreign students represent 2% of the total student national register).

The collaboration between UNHCR and the Ministry of Education (MoE) has focused on reducing access barriers and inequalities affecting the Venezuelan and Colombian population. Joint activities aimed at facilitating school enrolment, mitigating school dropout, combating xenophobia, strengthening schools as safe spaces (protection) and providing vocational training opportunities for adolescents. UNHCR has hired a consultant to closely work [138] with the Ministry of Education (both at central level and Education Districts) and develop tools and materials adapted to specific needs of forcibly displaced and stateless children and adolescents. Additionally, UNHCR funded the acquisition of educational kits, monetary transfers to cover schooling expenses (school supplies, transport)[139] and internet connectivity during the pandemic.

Since 2019, the multi-agency project "Education Cannot Wait (ECW)"[140] has been instrumental in supporting the Ministry of Education's efforts to facilitate schooling for children. Due to the pandemic, UNHCR supported access to connectivity and technologies for families and schools (e.g. MOOC), which is still ongoing. Enrolment data seems to show a positive trend, which is seen by the MoE as a sign of the stabilisation of a significant number of foreign families in the country. Between 2021-2022 and 2018-2019 school terms, enrolment of Venezuelan students increased to 458.56%. Moreover, Venezuelan children school dropout (2020-2021) has decreased compared to previous years[141]. The "We breathe inclusion" project has supported the set-up of "inclusive spaces" (with an emphasis on human mobility and fighting xenophobia) in 130 establishments.

UNHCR's support to vocational training[142] has often involved private sector companies, in coordination with the GADs and business corporations, in what appears to be an interesting practice with potential in terms of both social responsibility[143] and labour integration. Vocational training actions tried to match forcibly displaced and stateless persons' skills with the job or business opportunities available in the different regions (e.g. agriculture in the north, cocoa in the highlands, hospitality on the coast). Financial education has been a cross-cutting theme not only as part of key topics in vocational training and entrepreneurship preparation, but also as a mechanism for managing household budget and savings and access to banking products and services (e.g. credit).

In parallel to progress, several gaps and barriers[144] continue to affect access and inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless children in the educational system, due to factors such as lack of migratory documentation, limited understanding of public services functioning, financial constraints, perceived discrimination, and insufficient availability of school placements[145]. These factors contributed to lower education coverage for the Venezuelan

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[136] World Bank (2020). Challenges and opportunities of Venezuelan migration in Ecuador, Quito - Ecuador.
Automated Daily Record of Consultations and Outpatient Care (RDACAA)
Health Care Registry Platform (PRAS).
[137] Ministry of Education; Dirección Nacional de Análisis e Información Educativa; Registro de Matrícula en el Sistema Nacional de Educación (SNE). Data as of September 2022
[138] Including the hiring of consultants for the development of tools specifically targeted at forced displaced and statelessness persons.
[139] World Bank, 2020, "Challenges and Opportunities of Venezuelan Migration in Ecuador".
[140] Including World Vision and HIAS
[141] Ministry of Education; Dirección Nacional de Análisis e Información Educativa; Registro de Matrícula en el Sistema Nacional de Educación (SNE). Data as of September 2022
[142] Pe: "A ganar" programme.
[143] Pe: "Business with Refugees" initiative
[144] Lack of knowledge of where to go or approach the education system, families being identified as forced displaced and statelessness persons without documents, lack of knowledge that they do not need documents. These are behavioural, invisible barriers (external and internal informants).
[145] World Bank (2020). Retos y oportunidades de la migración venezolana en Ecuador, Quito - Ecuador.

population compared to Ecuadorians and limited access to healthcare for Venezuelan women compared to their Ecuadorian counterparts[146].

Also, recent changes in migratory patterns have led to concerns about psychosocial and behavioural challenges, such as an increasing number of children left in the care of neighbours or friends (because parents decided to leave Ecuador), or adolescents dropping out of school to migrate to North America.[147]

Health

In health, available data[148] shows a positive trend in levels of access and satisfaction with public health services. Nonetheless, some access barriers persist[149] (e.g. discrimination, delays in appointments, access to specialised services, medicines for chronic or catastrophic diseases, etc.[150]), as well as gaps in sexual and reproductive health and mental health[151]. These situations were aggravated during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the collapse of health centres and specialised services. In this context, UNHCR, together with the MOH and UNFPA, have supported various sexual and reproductive health actions (e.g. distribution of kits, training of trainers) aimed at profiles with greater vulnerability factors (e.g. people living with HIV, LGTBI+ groups).

In response to the pandemic, UNHCR has mobilised significant resources to strengthen the health system response both during the emergency and during vaccination, and to maintain essential services remotely during the lockdown. In 2020, the rapid deployment of 183 RHU as support for health facilities (in addition to donations of PPE, ventilators, etc.) has been recognised as a positive contribution and has provided visibility and legitimacy with local authorities, other government bodies (Ministry of Public Health) and host communities[152]. During vaccination, UNHCR succeeded in including refugee and asylum seekers in the COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

UNHCR support to the national health system involved strengthening local health services, improving access to both Ecuadorian and foreigners, which contributed to the visibility of UNHCR's role in favour of public services and coexistence between communities (e.g: UNHCR support to the expansion of a local health centre a local in Tulcán, in partnership with the Korea International Cooperation Agency and the Ministry of Health).

In health, one persisting gap is the difficulty in accessing mental health services (aggravated by the scarcity of public and specialised services[153]). Although specific data on prevalence of mental health conditions among forcibly displaced and stateless persons in Ecuador are not available and to partially mitigate the needs, UNHCR has supported psychosocial care[154] through HIAS (in coordination with other services) with a community-based approach.

Social protection

In terms of the incorporation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons into social protection programmes, UNHCR's advocacy has not made notable progress due to national regulations, as well as to budgetary limitations both at the central and local levels. In terms of non-contributory insurance, the state has cash transfer programmes aimed at segments of the local population living in poverty and extreme poverty, the most important of which is the so-called "Bono de Desarrollo Humano" (Human Development Voucher)[155] , which are designed exclusively for the Ecuadorian population. The pilot project between UNHCR, HIAS and the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion in the northern border (started in 2017 and expanded in 2019 to more communities, reaching 513 families) was conceived

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[146] Ibid.
[147] Interviews with external informants
[148] UNHCR monitoring reports, needs analysis R4V, MSP, Bacchus Worldwide
[149] Around 15% of Venezuelans reveal a financial impediment to access health consultations (World Bank, 2020, "Challenges and opportunities of Venezuelan migration in Ecuador").
[150] HIAS, Report on the implementation of the Project "Protection and Humanitarian Assistance for People in Human Mobility in Ecuador", period 1 January 2020 - 28 February 2021.
[151] Ibid.
[152] External informant interviews
[153] UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, September 2019. (https://www.ohchr.org/es/2019/12/country-visit-ecuador-17-26-september-2019-un-special-rapporteur-right-everyone-enjoyment)
[154] Individual mental health counselling, support groups, psychiatric referrals and immediate psychological care, in person as well as through phone calls and online platforms.
[155] Interviews with external and internal informants.

to merge the UNHCR Graduation Model with the one carried out by MIES (Bono de Desarrollo Humano); the aim was to integrate forcibly displaced and stateless persons into this national programme[156]. However, the pilot project failed to be scaled up due to the issuance of Executive Decree No. 804 in June 2019, which established the eligibility of cash transfer programmes exclusively for Ecuadorian citizens. However, UNHCR's advocacy work with the Ministry of Economic Inclusion has helped to ensure that forcibly displaced and stateless persons have access to several social protection services, such as child development programmes (e.g. Child Development Centres), or "Creciendo con Nuestros Hijos" programme.

On the other hand, the "contributive system" (national Social Security) is accessible to all employed individuals. However, barriers persist due to discrimination, limited understanding among civil servants and abuse by employers. In 2019, as a result of UNHCR advocacy, some progress was made in improving access to social security affiliation of refugees and asylum seekers[157].

Housing

Access to housing was one of the pressing needs, highlighted by forcibly displaced and stateless persons, due to both economic barriers and discriminatory behaviours. UNHCR not only provided emergency or temporary shelter for individuals who were newly arrived or at risk of homelessness, but also facilitated access to housing for individuals or families aiming to settle in Ecuador. This approach, in collaboration with AVSI, involved supporting refurbishment of buildings, renegotiating rental conditions, or offering cash transfers for rent payments in exceptional circumstances. During the pandemic, UNHCR supported households in need to prevent evictions for non-payment[158]. Access to housing has grown in importance as part of UNHCR's focus on local integration (from some 300 people supported in 2020 to 1,016 in 2022)[159].

In addition, UNHCR has undertaken initiatives to promote integration and access to rights and urban services for individuals in situations of human mobility. Through the "Inclusive Cities, Caring Communities" project, UNHCR engaged in dialogue and advocacy efforts to empower people who have migrated to urban areas and empower them as new urban actors and agents of development within their host communities.

Economic inclusion

UNHCR's two economic inclusion and livelihoods strategies for the period 2019 - 2022[160] were structured around four main lines of action: i) Promoting access to financial services and productive resources; ii) Strengthening people's capacities and skills needed to perform in the labour market; iii) Advocating to generate entrepreneurship and employability opportunities; iv) Supporting and promoting sustainable entrepreneurship. The LLH strategy established two mechanisms to facilitate the economic inclusion: employment (contractual relationship with a third party) and self-employment (entrepreneurship or income generating activities).

The implementation included the development of numerous alliances with the private sector (e.g.: "Companies with Refugees" in the framework of the United Nations Global Compact - Red Ecuador, the "Sin Fronteras" programme and the "Inclusive Company Seal", the Chamber of Industries and Employment of Cuenca, and agreements with companies[161]. Partnerships have been extended to public administrations (e.g. Ministry of Labour), public-private institutions dedicated to promoting local economic development (e.g. CORPOAMBATO, CORPEI), financial institutions (e.g. savings and credit cooperatives such as Jardin Azuayo, CACMU) and civil society (e.g. CRISFE, HIAS, Girls in Tech). UNHCR has also capitalised on the experience and tools developed by other specialised agencies (e.g. ILO, UNDP).

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[156] UNHCR, "Ecuador - 2019 Year-end report".
[157] By internal memorandum No. IESS-DNSAC-2019-0330-M dated March 2019, the generation of a provisional identification code for foreigners is enabled, which replaces the ten-digit number of the identity card, necessary for employer affiliation. For the issuance of the code, a passport and visa are required, and the only exception is for persons holding an international protection visa, who must present only their passport.
[158] See Legal Assistance section.
[159] UNHCR, end-year reports
[160] Estrategia de Inclusión Económica y Medios de Vida 2019 ACNUR Ecuador / Inclusión económica y medios de vida para personas refugiadas 2022, ACNUR Ecuador
[161] Agriculture, caco, tourism and hotel sector, messaging, digital marketing

International financial institutions (IFIs) have played an important role in supporting employment and entrepreneurship initiatives. For example, the agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) allowed for the implementation of an innovative programme focused on employability and economic inclusion ("Programa Sin Fronteras"). As a more recent approach, UNHCR has advocated for the inclusion of refugees and host communities with the World Bank. They have worked together to encourage the allocation of dedicated funding from the International Development Association (Facility for Host Communities and Refugees)[162]. UNHCR has established innovative partnerships by bringing together a myriad of actors that bring complementarity and comprehensiveness to the processes of accessing LLH.

The actions implemented by UNHCR in LLH (e.g. advocacy, multi-agency agreements, market studies, training and capacity building, mentoring, accreditation of diplomas, seed capital) have been comprehensive and relevant to address the challenges of promoting economic and labour inclusion. UNHCR's support to LLH covered a broad geographical area; it expanded beyond Ecuador's northern border and cities such as Quito, Cuenca and Guayaquil, reaching territories under the coverage of the new field offices such as Ambato and Manta[163].

The actions promoted since 2021 have laid the foundation and opened spaces to promote the labour inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless persons but, for the time being, the indicators on results obtained are limited. On one side, the barriers derived from a delicate national socio-economic situation, or the persistent lack of documentation among Venezuelan population are still difficult to overcome. On the other side, the metrics available in UNHCR's monitoring system in relation to inclusion in the formal labour market, medium-term viability of enterprises, improvement in income levels or purchasing power are limited.

One of the few sound data available comes from the Results Monitoring Survey (RMS) conducted by UNHCR in 2022, which indicates that 68% of respondents (Colombians and Venezuelans) report a reduction in income compared to the previous year and 25% report that it has remained the same.

According to UNHCR indicators, from 2019 to 2021, 1,878 forcibly displaced and stateless persons were enrolled in formal national institutions for training, and a total of 10,409 received orientation on labour market opportunities[164]. UNHCR and ILO have collaborated to promote human mobility as a cross-cutting issue in the Ministry of Labour's public employment service "Encuentra Empleo". In 2021, 233 people joined the "No Borders Programme" (Programa Sin Fronteras) platform and some 50 companies offered vacancies targeted at refugees.

Capacity building of forcibly displaced and stateless persons for employability has been promoted through multiple interventions. For example, the "Graduation Model" programme implemented through HIAS[165] has provided livelihood support, psychosocial support and guidance in accessing services. Through FUDELA, the "A Ganar" project has been instrumental in enhancing the hard and soft skills of young individuals, equipping them for their future roles in the workforce. Since 2021, with CRISFE, the "CV Clinic" has strengthened the skills to prepare a CV properly, and professional profiles have been validated and addressed for recruitment in the private sector. Simultaneously, UNHCR has engaged in advocacy efforts and collaborated with the Ministry of Labour to ensure the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in the employment exchange program known as "Encuentra Empleo" (Find Employment). Furthermore, UNHCR has partnered with CORPEI, a development agency comprising public entities and productive associations, to publish job profiles specifically tailored for forcibly displaced and stateless persons. To facilitate labour integration, UNHCR has also advocated for the certification of labour competencies and the recognition of diplomas for this population through the relevant authority[166] . [167]

Through the "Companies with Refugees" initiative, 65 companies have been brought together and an "inclusive seal" has been awarded to those that have achieved good practices in terms of hiring forcibly displaced and stateless

[162] https://aif.bancomundial.org/es/replenishments/ida19-replenishment/windows-host-communities-refugees
[163] Interviews with internal informants.
[164] AACNUR, excel files of annual impact and performance indicators 2019, 2020 and 2021.
[165] In 2020, 169 families were reported to have moved from extreme poverty to self-sufficiency after completing the Graduation Model process, and 492 families received cash assistance, protection and livelihood support through financial and skills training, seed capital, education and financial inclusion, as well as frequent visits by social and livelihood workers. UNHCR, "Ecuador - 2020 Year-end report".
In 2019, 830 families completed the graduation process and 107 people received seed capital of USD 500. UNHCR, "Ecuador - 2019 Year-end report".
[166]. National qualification system under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour.
[167] Interview with internal informants.

persons. Together with Global Compact, UNHCR also developed and promoted catalogues so that, through a platform, local companies can purchase products and services offered by Venezuelan entrepreneurs.

HIAS also carried out advocacy and awareness-raising work in the area of corporate social responsibility with private sector entities and civil society (e.g. banks, hotels, educational institutions, productive guilds, foundations, etc.) to promote and facilitate hiring of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, as well as purchase of goods and services produced by refugee entrepreneurs.

The evaluation has documented good recruitment practices in the private sector that serve as a benchmark for generalisability. However, there is limited availability of indicators reflecting the number of forcibly displaced and stateless persons who have successfully obtained employment because of the UNHCR actions. Information regarding the quality and impact of economic integration processes is also limited. Despite some achievements, these initial efforts still constitute a partial and limited support for the integration into the labour market of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, especially of the Venezuelan population.

UNHCR has also promoted entrepreneurship to encourage the self-employment of Venezuelan and Colombian people, which in successful cases has increased their income and improved their capacity to cover their needs[168]. While the UNHCR's indicators do not provide consolidated information, it is worth noting that in 2021, 3,321 forcibly displaced and stateless persons received entrepreneurship and business training. Additionally, in 2020, it was reported that 50% of the forcibly displaced and stateless persons who received support in enhancing their economic initiatives experienced an increase in income compared to the previous year[169].

A case that exemplifies the creation of enterprises in alliance with local development agencies is the work that UNHCR has promoted in the central highlands of Ecuador with CorpoAmbato. Through this alliance, UNHCR and CorpoAmbato have set up an agro-industrial production lab to support local population and forcibly displaced and stateless persons in the creation of businesses. The goal is to achieve innovation and growth in added-value products that have already been tested in the market.[170] Additionally, UNHCR has formed an alliance with ConQuito, UNDP, and UNCTAD since 2019, which has facilitated the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in programs on entrepreneurship and employment in Quito[171]. Similar efforts have been undertaken in collaboration with EPICO in Guayaquil.

It is important to note that the livelihoods strategy was redefined during 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and refocused on the recovery of economic activities developed by forcibly displaced and stateless persons that were affected by the health emergency and lockdown. In that year, livelihoods actions focused on equipment, digital marketing, e-inclusion, development of delivery services, as well as mask and protective textiles[172]

According to UNHCR indicators, 64% of the projects supported during the year 2021 managed to sustain their activity for more than 12 months, which is a positive result considering that 90% of businesses in Ecuador do not last 3 years[173].

In addition to the challenges commonly faced by all small businesses, another constraint experienced by forcibly displaced and stateless persons that have not yet regularised their migratory situation, has been the difficulty in formalising economic activity and in obtaining operating permits, health control permits, etc. In these cases, businesses are forced to remain informal.

The evaluation had the opportunity to document and observe how the accompaniment provided by UNHCR helped generate viable businesses that provided an opportunity to improve living conditions of Venezuelans and Colombians in Ecuador. In some cases, businesses allowed people to reduce vulnerability and break the vicious circle of exclusion and poverty. The success stories have served (and may have potential) as a reference or example to other forcibly displaced and stateless persons, demonstrating that there are viable options to develop livelihoods. However, no data on the scope or coverage of entrepreneurship assistance has been available.

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[168] Interviews with internal and external informants as well as observations during field visits
[169] UNHCR, Excel file of annual 2020 indicators
[170] Interviews with internal and external informants.
[171] UNHCR, "Ecuador - 2019 Year-end report".
[172] UNHCR, "Ecuador - 2020 Year-end report".
[173] National statistics - CEM

Although the evaluation has not carried out an exhaustive review of the supported ventures, the evaluation has observed that they are generally one-person (or family) initiatives in sectors or business with low added value. The evaluation has not succeeded in documenting "success cases" of businesses developed by migrants or refugees with outstanding levels of innovation, productivity, commercialisation, integration into value chains, diversification towards new productive activities and markets, etc.

Resettlement

UNHCR has significantly encouraged resettlement as part of durable solutions, which is especially appropriate for particularly vulnerable protection cases[174] . Over the past four years, the operation was successful in increasing the interest of host countries in Colombian and Venezuelan forcibly displaced and stateless persons and expanding the quota of individuals eligible for resettlement. From 704 eligible persons in 2019, it has increased to 1090 in 2021 and 1,300 in 2022. This increase aligns with the rise in resettlement quotas of major countries, particularly the US. As a result, it has now become the second-largest resettlement quota within UNHCR's operations in the continent. In implementing other complementary alternatives to resettlement, from 2022 the resettlement team uses the data available through registration to improve occupational and professional profiling. This has enabled the launch of a pilot labour mobility initiative with Canada by matching the needs of employers in destination countries with the skills and professional experience of ProGres registered forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

4.2.4 How has COVID-19 affected the implementation of UNHCR's strategy?

In addition to necessary organisational adaptations to be able to continue operating in a pandemic (e.g. remote working, generalised biosecurity measures, etc.), UNHCR had to adjust programmes and budgets to respond to pre-existing needs. The pandemic has had both positive and negative effects on UNHCR's work. On one hand, it has increased the organization's visibility and positioning, especially with the mobilization of specific funds. However, it has also hindered and caused delays in initiatives that were intended to promote the socio-economic integration and livelihoods of forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly changed previous human mobility patterns. Additionally, public health measures, mobility restrictions, border closures had a severe socio-economic impact on the country with both short- and medium-term repercussions in several areas.

In line with UN system and WHO global response plans, UNHCR took measures to prevent and protect its staff and partner staff (including shelter and frontline professionals). In an exceptional context, UNHCR rapidly transitioned (and supported partners and national actors) to remote working modalities in what appears to be an effective adaptation process to maintain protection and assistance services.

To ensure the continuity of the national asylum system, UNHCR assisted the IPD in maintaining the registration and management of asylum procedures remotely. Despite challenges posed by the pandemic, new tools such as online registration and remote processing were utilized to process cases. Because of the pandemic, mobile brigades were organized as a strategy to facilitate registration access. Those brigades continued in subsequent years and mitigated the closure of IPD offices in Lago Agrio and San Lorenzo.

UNHCR's humanitarian expertise and logistics enabled the improvement of health facilities and capacities in prioritised locations to facilitate access to health services for both forcibly displaced and stateless persons and host communities. UNHCR supported the health sector during the pandemic with RHU and health equipment and ensured that forcibly displaced and stateless persons had access to the health system for treatment and vaccination.

In response to the impact of the socio-economic effects of the pandemic, UNHCR expanded the criteria for providing cash transfers (CBI) to forcibly displaced and stateless persons and host communities[175], supported shelter upgrades to align shelters with biosecurity measures, and reinforced humanitarian assistance (e.g. provision of emergency kits). Additionally, the livelihoods strategy introduced digital work tools and promoted income-generating activities to respond to needs arising from the pandemic (e.g. production of masks).

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[174] Survivors of violence, people in need of physical and legal protection, Children and adolescents, LGBTI+ persons
[175] In line with the amount of government emergency aid.

Barriers to accessing social services (e.g. protection, education and health) for forcibly displaced and stateless persons were exacerbated during COVID-19 and the use of internet was a digital gap for those without technological skills or internet access. UNHCR provided connectivity and activated an information line via WhatsApp (linked to the Ecuador.Help.UNHCR platform) to continue informing forcibly displaced and stateless persons in a context of lockdown, curfews and restrictions.

UNHCR secured USD 8.8 million in pandemic-specific emergency funding, representing 16% of the OPS budget for 2020 and 2021. UNHCR's programmatic and budgetary flexibility in agreeing amendments to action plans and funding allocated to partners has been recognised as a critical factor in sustaining the protection and humanitarian response during the pandemic by partners.

4.3 To what extent is UNHCR's current organisational model in Ecuador relevant, appropriate and sustainable, given the dynamic and changing national context?

UNHCR's organisational model and presence in a dozen locations has been relevant and was recognised as a strength and a clear comparative advantage. However, the growth of installed capacity (including offices) and the development of the socio-economic integration strategy were essentially based on emergency funding and US funds. In the current context of reduced funding, this generates budgetary tensions, programmatic difficulties, and uncertainty for the financial stability of the operation.

The support provided by the Bureau and headquarters to the operation has fluctuated over the four years. Initially, there was intense support to establish the emergency response in Ecuador, with regular support from Panama. Subsequently, the regional bureau support appears to show less regularity and variations between programme and functional areas; with gaps in protection, LLH and administrative functions.

The operation has been innovative and a pioneer in the adoption and development of new tools, data and information management, as well as in external communication. The evidence-based approach has been key to driving decision-making and intervention strategies. External communication efforts have been challenged by the predominant human mobility narrative (of which UNHCR is a part), which hindered international protection visibility.

4.3.1 How relevant and effective is the structure of UNHCR's country office, field offices and field units?

UNHCR's deployment in the territory is coherent with population movements as well as the evolution of needs and priorities. It ensures a comprehensive institutional (from central to municipal level) and programmatic (protection, assistance, livelihoods, etc.) approach adapted to local specificities. The decentralisation process initiated, although organisationally and operationally coherent, does not seem to have been accompanied by sufficient reinforcement at the field office level. At present, the south offices capacity in protection and LLH seems limited considering the emerging violence and the opportunities derived from the economic dynamism of Guayaquil. Rapid and sustained staff growth has enabled the response to the Venezuelan exodus (also during the pandemic), although at present budgetary constraints have led to operational stress and labour unrest.

UNHCR's territorial presence (through offices and field units) underwent a complete transformation between 2017 and 2019, moving from a process of progressive office closures to the opening of new offices in several locations in response to the Venezuelan exodus crisis. Over the course of 20 years, UNHCR has transitioned from a primarily northern border-focused presence, addressing Colombian asylum seekers, to an expanded presence in 11 locations across the country. This presence extends beyond the northern border to include the central and southern border regions. In 2019, the Rumichaca unit on the northern border was closed, and attempts to establish an office in Santo

Domingo in the central zone were not successful. Since 2020, the distribution of offices reflects a two-fold operational approach: immediate humanitarian attention at border points and transit sites, as well as efforts towards socio-economic integration in selected neighbourhoods within cities offering greater livelihood opportunities. In 2022, the reconfiguration of the field presence around the North, Centre and South transformed "Field Offices" into "Sub-Offices" (Ibarra, Solanda and Guayaquil). In any case, UNHCR has the largest territorial presence among UN agencies and the greatest institutional, technical and logistical capacity, which is a widely recognised strength.

In 2022, UNHCR initiated a process of decentralization, transferring certain management functions from the Quito office to the field offices (e.g. local budgeting, procurement). During the evaluation, concerns have been identified regarding the capacity and tools of the field offices to assume the new management functions, with limited support from the Quito office (e.g. virtual trainings) and in a context of increasing budgetary constraints of the operation. Additionally, the increase in staff recruitment, heightened accountability to partners, direct implementation activities, and changes in procedures have led to internal functional tensions and some administrative risks.

From an organisational point of view, despite the team's commitment and individual efforts, it seems that it has not been possible to sufficiently reinforce capacities and resources to streamline recruitment processes, consolidate rapid growth and relevant changes in the organisational and management model of the operation.

Programmatic and territorial expansion has been accompanied by a growth in human resources; from around 145 professionals in 2019[176] to around 220 in 2022 (including UNOPS and UNV contracts)[177]. Growth was particularly rapid in 2019, from 145 people at the beginning of the year to 214 people (including affiliated workforce) due to the need to reinforce the Tulcán team and respond to the intense flow of entries through the northern border. Human resources growth has taken place both at the field office level and in the Quito office. Based on available data, the distribution of staff between the Quito office and the field offices has been around 50 per cent constant over the four years, which could indicate a certain imbalance between the human capacities installed in the capital and in the field. The decentralisation process has exacerbated the perception that additional functions and responsibilities are being delegated to the field offices without being accompanied by sufficient resources.

The northern zone has traditionally concentrated larger and more consolidated protection teams due to the work with the Colombian population, the massive arrival of the Venezuelan population, and the risks associated with crossing the northern border. The offices in the south have fewer protection profiles, which could limit UNHCR's protection response capacity, in the context of a southern border with emerging risks and increasing violence in the neighbourhoods (e.g. Guayaquil).

Between 2021 and 2022, UNHCR recruited LLH profiles to promote the socio-economic integration strategy and, at present, all three geographical areas have specialised professionals. However, the LLH profiles in the southern offices seem scarce considering the significant presence of forcibly displaced and stateless persons willing to stay in cities such as Guayaquil and Manta (Guayaquil being also one of the country's economic engines).

At budget level, during the period 2019-August 2022, 46% of the total OL budget is allocated to human resources. The weight of UNHCR staff and partner staff is 22% and 18% respectively of the overall OL budget, representing 85% of the overall personnel cost.

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[176] UNHCR End of year report
[177] UNHCR XLS file "Positions August 2022.xls".

FIGURE 16 Staff costs by type of affiliation and evolution

Distribution of total staff costs by type of affiliation (2019-August 2022)	Evolution of staff cost (USD million) by type of affiliation (2019-August 2022)
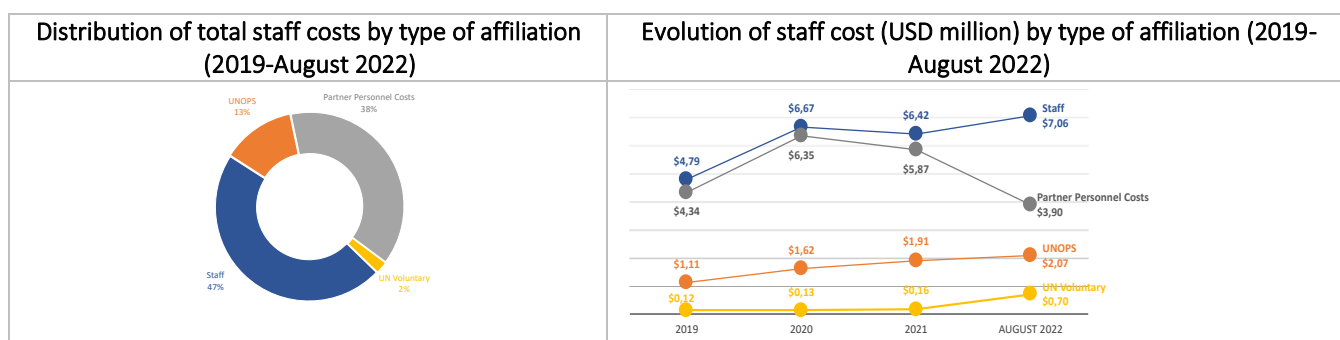
Source UNHCR ECU: Budget (FOCUS 2019-2022)

The "Staff" budget line has shown a steady increase since 2019. During the evaluation period, this budget has increased by 84%, with a weight in the overall OL budget from 20% in 2019 to 27% in 2022. It also highlights a continuous increase in the budget allocated to staff at UNOPS (+86% since 2019) with a weight in the overall OL budget of 8% in 2022.

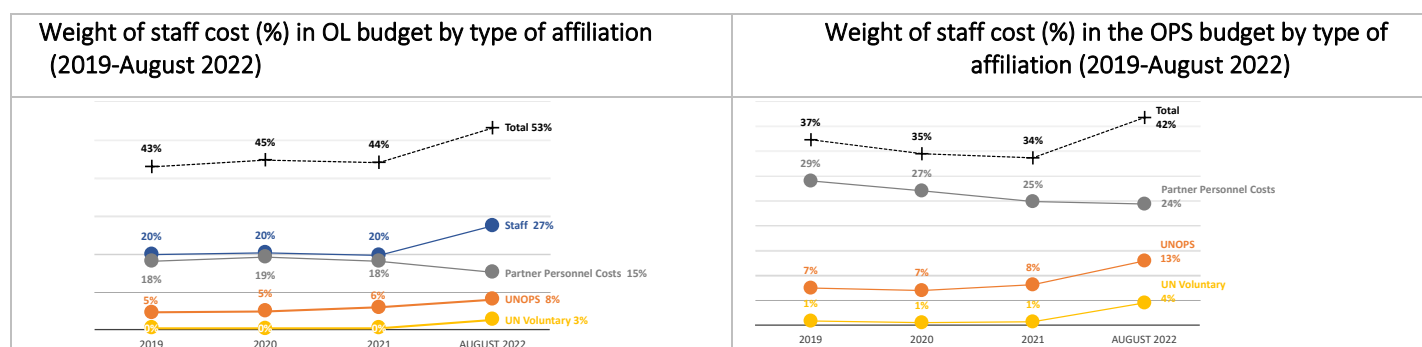During the period 2019-2022, it is observed that after a significant increase in the budget for the item "partners' staff" (+46%) between 2019 and 2020 and a slight decrease (-7%) between 2020 and 2021, there is a sharp decrease in 2022 (-34%) that brings this budget to lower levels (-10%) than in 2019. After having a stable weight in the overall budget of 18%, in 2022 the "partner staff" item reaches 15%, because of UNHCR's decision to strengthen direct implementation.

FIGURE 17 Personnel costs in OL and OPS

Weight of staff cost (%) in OL budget by type of affiliation (2019-August 2022)	Weight of staff cost (%) in the OPS budget by type of affiliation (2019-August 2022)

Source UNHCR ECU: Budget (FOCUS 2019-2022)

4.3.2 What is the relevance and effectiveness of the technical support provided by UNHCR's regional office and HQ units?

The regional bureau and HQ provided effective support in organizing the operation during the humanitarian crisis caused by the Venezuelan exodus in 2018 and 2019. However, except for specific areas (RBM, fundraising, registration, CBI, resettlement), the support seemed to have diminished thereafter. Gaps have been identified between the Bureau and the operation particularly regarding protection issues (with a regional lens) and the livelihoods strategy.

Limited information is available regarding the perception of support from the Panama regional bureau to the operation in Ecuador. However, it is noted that the perception varies depending on the theme or unit, individuals involved, and the timeframe. Nonetheless, during the transition period from a closing operation to a rapidly expanding one in response to the Venezuelan exodus, there was significant support from headquarters and the regional bureau to establish units that were previously non-existent or minimal. Subsequently, the evaluation was able to identify relevant support in terms of monitoring (new RBM and COMPASS), reinforcement of IM, CBI, fundraising and registration. On the other hand, gaps have been identified in providing support to the operation in Ecuador, particularly in protection issues, livelihoods, administration, and risk management. These gaps can be

attributed to staff rotations in Panama (which in the context of the Venezuelan exodus would justify a reinforcement of strategies and regional information).

In the current national context, two emerging themes require an effort of harmonisation and coordination between the operation and the regional bureau: the livelihoods strategy (central element of the current focus on socio-economic integration) and the reinforcement of the response to security issues (considering the growing criminality and violence).

This evaluation has gathered anecdotal information on the role of headquarters in the past four years, revealing a general perception of distance and disconnection between certain global orientations and tools, and the operational reality and national context.

4.3.3 How have changes in UNHCR's data and information management tools and approaches affected UNHCR's organisational model in the country and its ability to fulfil its mandate?

The adoption of rigorous and innovative information management tools, shared with other key actors (partners, national authorities, WGRM), has provided essential evidence for structuring large-scale humanitarian response interventions, has helped building local capacity and has aligned humanitarian analysis with national statistics. UNHCR's external communication has been confronted with a dominant human mobility narrative (of which UNHCR is a part) and persistent xenophobia that have made it difficult to make UNHCR's mandate and international protection visible. Even so, due to the use of innovative communication supports and partnerships, positive results have been achieved, especially through social media. The coordination between external and internal communication and operational units, such as programs and protection, has been effective in enhancing community work and amplifying the voices of refugees and communities.

Information Management

In 2019, the incorporation of an Information Management (IM) Unit in the operation has been crucial for the analysis and understanding of human mobility flows and the protection and assistance needs not only for UNHCR but also for partners, national bodies (e.g. Ombudsman's Office), WGRM/ R4V, donors and other key actors. The relevance and quality of the data generated and the innovation in the use of new tools and products developed (e.g. geo-positioning data, OSMOSYS, real-time visualisation, RMS pilot[178]) have been widely recognised[179]. The operation has been selected to pilot the new UNHCR global survey for outcome monitoring, together with five other operations. The relevance of this work has been accompanied by a significant effort in data generation, including surveys, monitoring, studies, analyses, and evaluations conducted by multiple organizations. However, this extensive data collection has resulted in survey fatigue among the individuals and communities involved[180]. Furthermore, the effort and investment made has not been reflected in a clear "knowledge transfer"[181] on some occasions.

The IM Unit focused on supporting UNHCR's different programmes, teams and partners, as well as the WGRM, to promote an internal and external "culture" of evidence-based analysis and decision-making. It also supported training in the use of tools and data. For example, the border monitoring exercises and needs assessments[182] initially led by UNHCR evolved into joint exercises or exercises conducted by other organisations within the framework of the WGRM. Both exercises, together with protection monitoring, have been essential for assessing cross-border population movements and identifying needs, and have formed the backbone around which multiple strategies and interventions have been developed, not only by UNHCR but also by other organisations and national actors[183]. IM

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[178] RMS: Results Monitoring Survey
[179] Interviews with internal and external informants
[180] Interviews with internal and external informants;
[181] Knowledge translation is a dynamic and interactive process involving the synthesis, dissemination, sharing and ethical application of knowledge. This process takes place within a complex system of interactions between researchers and knowledge users that can vary in intensity, complexity and level of engagement depending on the nature of the research and results, as well as the needs of the particular knowledge user. Although it is a term mainly applied in the life sciences, it is used in this context to conceptualise the application of evidence to practice.
[182] Joint Need Assessments
[183] Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MESI)

has combined aspects of its work with national information systems (e.g. the Information System of the Ministry of Education - SIME), reinforcing the alignment with national policies and data triangulation. Likewise, IM has supported the monitoring of CBI distribution and, eventually, the elaboration of reports to donors (in a context of increasing demand for accountability and disaggregated data).

The use of maps, including risk mapping and tracking incidents, has played a significant role in monitoring population movements and supporting the community protection strategy. It has been particularly valuable at the neighbourhood level, especially during the past year with the rise in violence. However, the lack of interconnection between mobility and flow data among countries in the sub-region has been a limitation in monitoring population movements.

In addition to "traditional" work with quantitative data, new tools for qualitative data collection and analysis have been implemented. The qualitative approach has been relevant for elaborating community diagnostics and as part of the RMS pilot survey, contributing to accountability to the population[184].

UNHCR, together with IOM, has also supported the WGRM's own IM capacities, leading to effective IM tools and products at the multi-sectoral and inter-agency level (e.g. ActivityInfo, Border Monitoring System, Joint Needs Assessment, Rapid Needs Assessments at the local level).

Results-Based Management

During 2022, the operation has adopted UNHCR's new global results-based management (RBM) framework. Although it is too early to make an assessment and no detailed analysis of the implications of the new RBM for the operation in the first months of 2022 has been undertaken, several relevant challenges have been identified:

- Limited adaptability of the new RBM indicators to the reality of the operation.
- Gap between the logic of the new impact and outcome indicators (which require continuity or medium term planning) and UNHCR's annual planning logic, which is still conditioned by the annual availability of funds.
- High costs for monitoring new indicators (and demand for further disaggregation) at a time of limited resources.
- Difficulty in evolving from output monitoring to outcome and impact monitoring, and "grey area" between outcome and impact indicators in the new RBM.

The evaluation has raised concerns about the perceived value of a strategic planning and multi-annual monitoring framework given the annual budgeting system, short-term funding, and unpredictable developments in the changing context. There are questions about how effectively such a framework can be utilized considering these factors.

Public information strategy

UNHCR's efforts in public communication have faced a paradox. On one hand, the prevailing discourse on human mobility and migration has made it challenging to highlight the unique aspects of international protection and the refugee population, making it difficult to differentiate UNHCR's mandate from other agencies. (see UNHCR Ecuador 2026 communication strategy)[185]. On the other hand, UNHCR has significantly supported the use of migration alternatives as part of the strategy for the integration of people and an opportunity for regularisation and stabilisation in the host country, which somehow involves UNHCR in the predominant narrative.

Public communication efforts have faced challenges in a context of xenophobic discourse and worsening crises (human mobility, COVID-19, economic crisis, security) where Venezuelans were often stigmatized. Furthermore, there has been a decrease in regional and international attention to the Venezuelan exodus, donor fatigue, and the redirection of international aid to other crises, adding complexity to media and fundraising efforts. Despite the contextual difficulties, the progressive reinforcement of the PI team has allowed to develop complementary lines of work between external and internal communication, to innovate in the use of new media (e.g. immersive film "Del otro lado"[186]), to diversify communication channels (e.g. traditional media, social networks, chatbot,

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[184] UNHCR's AAP framework, framed in UNHCR's Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD, 2018).
[185] UNHCR Ecuador, Communication strategy 2022 - 2026
[186] https://ontheotherside360.org/es/

microinfluencers, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter) and establish agreements with new partners (e.g. football team Independiente del Valle).

In terms of external communication, PI launched the Dale Play Community Communication Initiative in 2019 which, after difficulties arising from the pandemic and positioning on YouTube, seems to have been consolidated in 2022 on Instagram and, above all, TikTok[187]. Audiovisual production in different formats, giving voice to forcibly displaced and stateless persons, has been one of the strengths of the operation. Recently, PI has supported the campaign to disseminate and raise awareness about the 2022 regularisation process. UNHCR's presence in the media (mainly online) shows positive indicators[188] (e.g. tone of the news or Ad Value). PI, together with External Relations, has contributed to donor reporting and visibility, a sensitive area where opportunities for improvement have been identified.

Internally, there has been an increased interaction and support to other units and field offices (e.g. communication with communities, community-based protection, protection, livelihoods), an expanded production of materials (e.g. videos, press releases, life stories) and new tools have been developed (e.g. factsheets, weekly reports, bi-monthly reports, quick information bites). PI's support to other units has been particularly relevant in the framework of community strategies (e.g. welcoming neighbourhoods, giving voice to forcibly displaced and stateless persons and host communities, combating xenophobia), in livelihood strategies (e.g. enabling and expanding partnerships with the private sector), and in positioning issues based on evidence provided by IM. Finally, as part of the work of the UNS, UNHCR co-leads the communication group of the WGRM and drives joint actions (PI has contributed to several inter-agency communication campaigns). UNHCR's new communication strategy 2022 - 2026 sets out a coherent and ambitious approach to respond to the current challenges of the operation, although the volatile context may require regular adjustments.

4.3.4 How effective is UNHCR's positioning with bilateral, multilateral, and private donors to increase collaboration and fundraising?

UNHCR has been effective in mobilising emergency funds for both the Venezuelan exodus and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the WGRM has been a successful platform for attracting international funding. UNHCR's funding structure in Ecuador has been (and remains) highly dependent on US bilateral funding, which poses a risk to the financial sustainability of the operation. The participation of multilateral and private funding presents modest levels in the funding structure. In this sense, UNHCR has recently implemented relevant actions to diversify the funding structure, but it is still too early to assess progress.

During the period 2019-2022, the main financial contributions came from public bilateral aid funds at 95%, with the US as the main donor (70% in the whole period) despite the efforts to diversify, as shown in the figure 18 below. The establishment of the WGRM (in the framework of the R4V) as a coordination and communication platform for the response to the Venezuelan exodus has facilitated the mobilization of international funding. Participating in the WGRM has been a requirement set by several donors to access emergency response funds.

FIGURE 18 Contributions by type and donor (2019-2022)
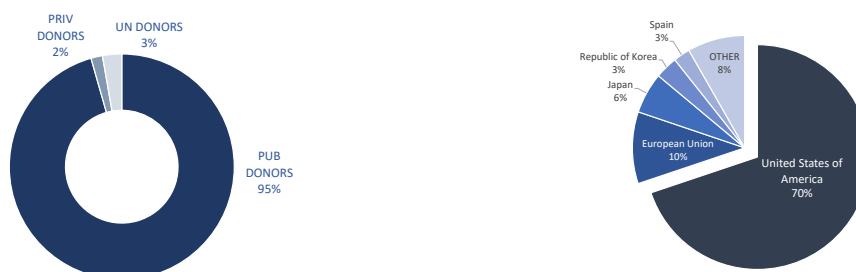
Source: reporting.unhcr.org - Contributions

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[187] Compilation of metrics Dale Play 2020 - 2022
[188] Indicators available for 2021 and 2022

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In addition, the funding structure has been strongly marked by emergency funds (both for the critical phase of the Venezuelan exodus and for the pandemic). The operation's budget reached its highest point in 2020 (USD 33 million, representing an 83% increase compared to the previous year) This surge in funding was driven by the combined mobilization of resources for the Venezuela situation and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The reduction in emergency funds in 2022 has created an imbalance in the operation, showing the importance of identifying stable and multi-year funding alternatives. This is crucial for sustaining the operation's presence in various locations throughout the country and supporting initiatives for the socio-economic integration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

In 2022, the operation's budget totalled USD 28 million. During this year, UNHCR focused on enhancing its resource mobilization efforts by establishing two dedicated positions, implementing a fundraising strategy, and adopting a proactive approach to address considerable funding challenges, including:

- Dependence on the WGRM as the main platform for fund mobilisation in a chronically underfunded regional humanitarian crisis.
- Declining donor interest in the Venezuelan crisis and persistence of violence in Colombia, in an environment of "competition" with other regional and global crises.
- UNHCR positioning as an attractive organisation in socio-economic integration, with a country strategy geared towards migration regularisation and the stabilisation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in Ecuador, both relatively new areas of operation in the country.
- Mobilisation of local and private sector funding in a difficult economic situation with shrinking fiscal space due to public finance deficits exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Until 2022, partial dedication of the team responsible for donor relations, limited specialisation in fundraising (e.g. private sector) and partial coverage of some roles relevant to resource mobilisation work (e.g. reporting officer).

4.3.5 Lessons Learned

The following table presents lessons learned from the evaluation through documentary review and interviews with internal and external informants.

STRATEGIC LEVEL	▪ Joint work (inter-agency, and in coordination with national actors) multiplies the advocacy capacity to promote systemic and public policy changes that lead to advances in the protection of rights and inclusion. Examples of advocacy aimed at different levels of public administration include the strategic litigation with the Public Defender's Office, UNHCR and IOM co-leadership of the WGRM and support for regularisation, technical standards for Children and adolescents in alternative care modalities in coordination with UNICEF - blueprint initiative -, technical standards for the "Inclusive Cities, Solidarity Communities" Programme with IOM; UN Habitat, local WGRM and coordination with the GADs and municipalities.
OPERATIONAL LEVEL	▪ Implementation of the UNCCS (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF) enables a comprehensive approach to the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, resulting in improved effectiveness, efficiency, consistency of analysis through a shared database and registry, and enhanced quality of assistance. Unifying the interview and registration process for individuals eligible for cash assistance under HIAS has reduced time and duplication, ensuring better quality through comprehensive case assessments and improved control.
	▪ UNHCR's interventions aimed at strengthening public services (with a systemic approach: health, education, emergencies, internet provision), improving quality and expanding coverage in disadvantaged neighbourhoods where host communities and forcibly displaced and stateless persons coexist, reinforce the organisation's positioning with local authorities and citizens.

60	▪ The implementation of ProGres V4 avoids duplication in service delivery and makes it possible to obtain a single record of data that facilitates better monitoring and understanding of the forcibly displaced and stateless persons' needs.
	▪ Application of the scorecard for CBI should be supplemented with additional criteria and assessment tools to ensure consistent response to protection needs and vulnerability factors. Furthermore, the variability in the scorecard score driven by budgetary considerations rather than protection needs and circumstances leads to confusion and inconsistencies between partners and forcibly displaced and stateless persons.
	▪ The utilisation of new technologies and communication tools, such as chatbots and web help, developed in collaboration with forcibly displaced and stateless persons, facilitates effective outreach and dissemination with commendable results achieved at a reasonable investment.
	▪ Efforts to enhance neighbourhood spaces and organisations in prioritised communities with a high concentration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons enable the identification of protection risks and community issues, fostering a sense of unity among the population and facilitating local integration.
ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL	▪ UNHCR's programmatic and budgetary flexibility (in direct implementation and through partners) is a key factor in allowing for a rapid response to the pandemic or to intervening contextual and operational changes.
	▪ Simplification of certain administrative processes (e.g. elimination of "UNHCR situations" for budgeting, reduction of annexes in PAs) streamlines resource management and reduces administrative burdens that add little value.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Strategic level

C1) Protection leadership - UNHCR has demonstrated widely recognized leadership in protection, providing an adaptive, comprehensive, and effective response to the changing humanitarian situation caused by the evolving Venezuelan population flows. UNHCR has succeeded in strengthening the functioning and quality of the national asylum system, although reliance on UNHCR resources poses a **challenge of continuity and sustainability**. UNHCR's work **has been coherent with national policies and priorities (human mobility, regularisations) and the organisation's global orientations ("legal migration options"). However, it has been confronted with a paradox: on one side, recourse to migration alternatives has been an option for local integration and has optimised the advocacy capacity and resources** of an inter-agency effort to support the GoE. **On the other, the visibility of international protection within the prevailing migration narrative has been challenging, resulting in a diluted recourse to international protection for the Venezuelan population.** Differentiating the roles of UNHCR and IOM has become increasingly complex, leading to the emergence of "grey zones" in their respective mandates.

C2) **WGRM Platform** - The WGRM was launched in the critical phase of the Venezuelan exodus with a **humanitarian logic that made it possible to respond to urgent needs, advocate for human mobility and mobilise international resources.** Despite the persistence of critical needs, the humanitarian logic and structure of the **WGRM is** currently only **partially adapted to the evolution of public policy on human mobility, to national and regional changes in mixed movements and, in some areas, has generated dependence** on external support. The humanitarian mandate and role of the WGRM should include a component that strengthen public policy and institutions governing human mobility at central and local levels, particularly in a state with a favourable legal framework and structured public administrations.

5.2 Operational level

C3) Protection focus - **UNHCR's expanded involvement in direct implementation and case management since 2022 has strengthened the organization's focus on protection. In earlier years, there were challenges in maintaining a consistent protection lens** due to various factors such as high humanitarian needs, staff turnover, varying protection skills among personnel, the complexity of aligning protection approaches across organizations, gaps in referrals, and differing protection visions and backgrounds among partner organizations. **Additionally, strengthening the protection component has become essential in a context of emerging criminal violence affecting forcibly displaced and stateless persons and host communities ("urban protection") and persistent border crossings with exposure to risks.**

C4) Livelihoods - Support to the economic integration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons has focused on facilitating opportunities for entrepreneurship and employment, taking advantage of regularisations. **UNHCR's interventions in local livelihoods and housing (LLH) have been aligned with the national context. The organization's advocacy efforts with the private sector and local governments have been instrumental in creating opportunities for forcibly displaced and stateless persons. Moreover, UNHCR and its partners have effectively leveraged past experiences and utilized tools developed in collaboration with specialized actors (e.g. ILO).** Despite efforts and good practices, UNHCR's resources specifically targeted at socio-economic integration have been modest in relation to the challenges at hands. The barriers to accessing employment and entrepreneurship (e.g. irregular migration status, bureaucracy and administrative obstacles) and an unfavourable socio-economic environment, have posed significant obstacles and hampered the attainment of more comprehensive outcomes. From a quantitative point of view, the available data seem to point to a moderate extent in terms of integration of forcibly displaced and stateless persons into the formal labour market (bearing in mind that informality also affects the Ecuadorian population). From a qualitative point of view, the levels of innovation, commercialisation, or integration into value chains of the supported refugee ventures are still limited.

C5) Relations with partners - Partner organisations have played a central role in enhancing the capacity for action and the scope of UNHCR's response, reinforcing the "localisation" of UNHCR's strategy, the adaptation to local contexts across various regions. They have been crucial in reaching individuals facing access barriers or experiencing exclusion. While UNHCR's collaboration with partners has generally been positive and constructive, there have been gaps and challenges that could hinder the consolidation and continuity of certain programs and achievements, particularly given current budgetary constraints. Reductions in funding or the termination of agreements have affected planned multi-year processes and support for forcibly displaced and stateless persons. Additionally, the lack of regular feedback and joint analysis with partners in response to UNHCR's information requests has been noted, and there is a perception of insufficient capacity building for partner organizations, especially in the face of increased funding difficulties.

5.3 Organisational level

C6) Decentralisation and registration - The operational reorganisation in two critical areas (decentralisation of administrative Branch Office functions to field offices and the recovery of registration by UNHCR) has been an ambitious and coherent effort aimed at increasing efficiency in field operations and strengthening the protection and case management focus. However, the changes have taken place in a short period of time and in a context of reduced resources, which has generated imbalance and internal functional tensions. On one side, accompaniment and reinforcement of field offices to assume new functions has been somewhat limited, despite the commitment of teams at all levels. This has resulted in additional responsibilities and tasks being assigned to profiles already under high operational pressure, including some profiles with limited experience within UNHCR. On the other side, there is consensus that the recovery of registration has been aligned with the reinforcement of the protection lens. However, field offices have expressed concerns about the lack of human and logistical resources to adequately manage registration, particularly in the context of increased operational pressure and risks due to urban violence in neighbourhoods.

C7) Funding model - Emergency funds have allowed for significant territorial and programmatic expansion essential to providing comprehensive coverage for forcibly displaced and stateless persons during crises. At present, funds do not appear adequate to ensure the stability (and sustainability) of UNHCR's territorial presence (one of the added values of the operation) and recovery of the registration function. From a programmatic perspective, the current funding structure does not adequately align with the sustained support needed for the national asylum system (IPD) and socio-economic integration and livelihoods actions. These areas require continuous efforts with a developmental perspective, yet the funding structure does not provide sufficient resources for medium-term support.

6 Recommendations

The recommendations presented below reflect the results of workshops with UNHCR and partners as well as data analysis and systematisation. The report includes a dedicated section for the intended audience of the recommendations.

Articulating the response to changing regional mixed movements	
R1	Enhance regional analysis of human mobility dynamics and international protection needs to support comprehensive, evidence-based, multi-agency responses that are tailored to evolving mixed movements across multiple countries and involve governmental and non-governmental actors.
Key actions	- Update the data on the Venezuelan population in Ecuador using new available sources, such as the ongoing migration register, and conduct a comprehensive analysis of their situation and needs, with a particular focus on actions and initiatives aimed at achieving solutions for the regularized population resulting from changing dynamics of human mobility. - Explore possibilities for data interoperability and coordination within the proGres system between UNHCR country offices in the sub-region. This would facilitate the registration and support of forcibly displaced persons along migratory routes and at their destinations, ensuring a consistent and harmonized approach to protection and assistance. - Assess the appropriateness of updating UNHCR's Guidance Notes on Protection of the Venezuelan Population (2019) considering the evolution in population movements and international protection needs arising from the Venezuelan exodus. - Use the new data available and the regional analysis of mixed movements and international protection needs as a tool for fundraising and resource mobilisation, as well as for institutional advocacy in regional fora (e.g. Quito Process, OAS, Solidarity Conference) and national instances.
Audience	Regional Bureau, UNHCR Ecuador, WGRM, MERHM

Evolution of the role and WGRM set-up	
R2	Update the role of the WGRM considering changes in human mobility, the transformation of needs arising from the Venezuelan exodus and national public policy, moving from a large-scale humanitarian logic and set-up to the development of managerial and governance capacities of national institutions.
Key actions	- Enhance the collaboration between the WGRM (Working Group on Regional Response for the Venezuelan Situation) and public institutions by providing support for the effective implementation of the provisions outlined in the Organic Law on Human Mobility and related legal frameworks. This can be achieved through active engagement with National, Intersectoral, and Zonal Human Mobility Roundtables, the National Council for Equality in Human Mobility, and Municipal Advisory Councils. - Promote municipal normative on human mobility at cantonal level, as well as awareness-raising and advocacy work for the integration of a human mobility approach in the policies of decentralised autonomous governments through their associative entities (e.g. CONGOPE[189] , AME[190] , CONAGOPARE[191]). - Consider the possibility of forming a partnership with Banco del Estado to incorporate the focus on mobility and integration of the population on the move into projects and public

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[189] Consortium of Autonomous Provincial Governments of Ecuador
[190] Association of Municipalities of Ecuador
[191] National Council of Rural Parochial Governments of Ecuador

	services. This could involve exploring the inclusion of evaluation criteria related to mobility and integration when granting funds to decentralised autonomous governments. ■ Strengthen the resources and work of the Social and Economic Integration Working Group (GISE) of the WGRM, in consultation with public institutions, prioritising key areas (e.g. housing, education, health, employment and livelihoods).
Audience	UNHCR Ecuador, WGRM, partners, MERHM, other relevant public administrations

Consolidation and stabilisation of the national asylum system in Ecuador	
R3	Agree on a strategic plan for the national asylum system (taking advantage of a favourable institutional environment) as a 'roadmap' to reach political and institutional consensus on the management of international protection and mitigate the effects of rotations and political cycles.
Key actions	■ Transition from the current approach of working with the Quality Assurance Initiative (QAI) and the Annual Action Plan with the National Asylum Agency (IPD) to a multi-year strategy that focuses on enhancing the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Human Mobility, and Humanitarian Affairs (MREMH) and the IPD. This strategy should prioritize strengthening national asylum capacities within a defined and stable timeframe, with clear commitments, targets, and effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms. ■ Raise awareness and advocate for public budgets on asylum and international protection among different bodies (MREMH, Ministry of Government, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Council of the Judiciary, Public Defender's Office) and levels of public administration (central and cantonal). ■ Strengthen capacities and opportunities for "strategic litigation" through the Ombudsman's Office, legal clinics (in consultation with Cantonal Councils) as an essential national mechanism with systemic impact on rights and international protection standards.
Audience	UNHCR Ecuador, MERHM, other relevant public administrations

6.2 Operational level

Protection capacities and articulation	
R4	Strengthen the capacities and coordination of UNHCR and partner teams to provide protection services in a cross-cutting and consistent manner in all phases of assistance and in "safe spaces" (e.g. shelters, WASH and care points).
Key actions	■ Strengthen the registration process managed directly by UNHCR to identify protection needs and solutions from the outset and to articulate referrals between programmes and partners (strengthening the approach, protection pathway and case management). The registration process could give more accurate details about livelihood support as wells as economic and productive characteristics, deepening the analysis and joint approach with the LLH teams. ■ Update and reinforce UNHCR's case management procedures with a comprehensive approach that ensures adequate accompaniment from initial assistance to local integration. ■ Design and implement an annual protection training and capacity building programme for UNHCR staff and partners. ■ Expand proGres implementation with partner organizations and in hosting/service locations. ■ Broaden the disaggregation of data incorporated into proGres to improve people profiling (including sexual diversity) and facilitate better targeting of socio-economic integration.

	• Strengthen the coordination between different services or programmes with a territorial perspective to ensure a protection response adapted to the specificities and capacities of each local context. • Conduct an analysis of the protection capacities of field offices as well as the emerging challenges arising from urban violence. Specialised protection resources can then be adjusted or reallocated according to local needs.
Audience	UNHCR Ecuador (senior management, protection, registration, programmes), partners, WFP, UNICEF, IOM, relevant public administrations

Emerging criminal violence in urban areas

R5	Update the protection strategy, programmes and security protocols in neighbourhoods with increasing criminality, based on new risks and threats to both communities, UNHCR and partner teams.
Key actions	• Organise exchange mechanisms or forums on methodology and experiences of working in contexts of urban violence ("other situations of violence", creation of humanitarian spaces in the face of non-state armed actors and criminal gangs) with other UNHCR operations in the region and other humanitarian actors. • Document and analyse the secondary population movements (between neighbourhoods, between cities and fleeing the country) caused by increasing criminal violence in the cities with the highest rates. • Strengthen protection by presence and community protection actions in close collaboration with community-based organisations (parish, neighbourhood), promoting community alert mechanisms and local support networks.
Audience	UNHCR Ecuador (senior management, protection, programmes), partners, forcibly displaced and stateless persons, relevant public administrations (municipalities, law enforcement)

Multi-purpose cash transfers (CBI) as a protection tool

R6	Strengthen the articulation of the CBI response with the identification of risks and vulnerabilities (as part of the analysis of protection needs), taking advantage of direct implementation of registration.
Key actions	• Build on UNHCR's implementation of registration with CBI targeting and selection of protection cases to manage, reinforcing qualitative risk and vulnerability analysis (moving from an emergency-driven humanitarian assistance approach to a protection approach). • Stabilise UNHCR's annual budget allocation for CBI to avoid swings in scores (causing inconsistencies among individuals receiving assistance and difficulties for partners) and significant changes in CBI eligibility that are driven more by funding than by need. • Develop the analysis of disaggregated data available from 2021 onwards in relation to registration and eligibility for CBI in order to allow a more accurate monitoring of variables and vulnerability criteria (e.g. gender, age, nationality, disability, locality, others).
Audience	UNHCR Ecuador (programmes, CBI, livelihoods, protection), partners

Economic integration and livelihoods

R7	Strengthen and expand partnerships with livelihoods organisations to develop innovative models or interventions.

Key actions	- Coordinate joint work between the protection unit and the LLH unit, developing economic profiling in the registry to improve the protection perspective from the initial moment to the inclusion processes. - Expand the identification and strengthening of partnerships with specialised organisations at both national and regional level that provide expertise and potential to develop livelihoods actions in themes and sectors of greater innovation and added value. - Strengthen livelihoods programming based on specific market analysis of local economic context and value chains of larger companies. - Identify niches of opportunity in the field of solidarity and popular economy at national (e.g. in collaboration with the Superintendence of Popular and Solidarity Economy) and regional level. - Strengthen financial inclusion actions by taking advantage of the ongoing migration regularisation, reinforcing both financial education for individuals and households and advocacy with banks. - Strengthen monitoring and evaluation metrics for livelihoods and economic integration interventions to demonstrate UNHCR's achievements and added value (qualitative). - Analyse regional public policy and legal frameworks on informal trade and economic activity to assess their adaptability to local economic contexts in collaboration with local governments.
Audience	UNHCR Ecuador (senior management, livelihoods, programmes), partners, private sector, relevant public administrations, organisations specialised in microcredit and social economy (national and regional level)

Relations with partners	
R8	Review the current portfolio of partners considering the added value of established agreements in light of UNHCR's new multi-year strategy and identify collaboration opportunities at the local level.
Priority actions	- Conduct regular feedback and joint data analysis exercises between UNHCR and partners, reinforcing the protection perspective in all organisations, interventions, and service delivery. - Consult and inform partners in advance on plans for budget adjustments and programme prioritisation, enhancing complementarities between partners and better use of resources. - Strengthen the monitoring and verification of the indicators quality under the new UNHCR results monitoring framework.
Addressees	UNHCR Ecuador (senior management, programmes), partners

6.3 Organisational level

Alignment of the organisational chart with the multiannual strategy and emerging needs	
R9	Conduct an external assessment (with the support of the Regional Bureau) of the operation's organisational chart, job profiles, workloads, levels of responsibility, etc., to determine the needs and adequacy of resources in line with the new UNHCR Ecuador multi-year strategy.
Key actions	Consider an eventual redeployment of staff (both from the Quito office to field offices and between field offices), depending on the analysis of the context, flows, multi-year strategy, organisational chart and needs of the offices, in order to balance and strengthen operational capacities and expertise (especially in protection in the south).

	- Reinforce support to the field offices for the development and monitoring of the new functions assumed, especially in administrative and financial management. - Encourage the exchange of experiences and tools, promoting the transfer of knowledge and learning between field offices.
Audience	Regional Bureau, UNHCR Ecuador (senior management, administration, protection, programmes)

Financing structure of the operation	
R10	Increase efforts to diversify funding sources by prioritizing donors that emphasize national capacity development, public policies, and sub-regional funding for cross-border interventions.
Key actions	- Reach agreements with the Inter-American Development Bank (capitalizing on previous experience between UNHCR and the World Bank) as possible funding mechanisms (or leveraging of funds) aimed at strengthening public policy. - Explore funding for cross-border initiatives with the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) aimed at protection and needs arising from changing mixed movements in the sub-region. - Establish a full-time permanent position specifically dedicated to fundraising, working closely with the Public Information (PI) unit. - Identify a mechanism to stabilise the operation's administrative budget (ABOD) to achieve a better balance between operating costs and staff costs charged to the ABOD budget.
Audience	Regional bureau, UNHCR Ecuador (senior management, external relations and fundraising), donors

ANNEXES

Annex 1 - Note on the UNHCR monitoring system

Annex 2 - Budgets (OL and OP) 2019 - 2022

Annex 3 - Outcome and impact indicators by programme (2019 - 2021) - scopes

Annex 4 - Consistency of UNHCR priorities with national objectives

Annex 5 - Elements for reflection drawn from the assessment of relevance for the MYMP Strategy Ecuador

Annex 6 - Organisations interviewed

Annex 7 - Main documents consulted

Annex 8 - Terms of reference

Annex 9 - Summary of UNHCR's response to reduce obstacles to the regularisation process (2019)

Annex 10 - Approach to programmatic performance (performance indicators, impact and budgets of OP and OL)

Annex 11 - Limitations and Mitigation Measures

Annex 12 – Theory of Change

Annex 13 – Evaluation matrix