

A FRAGILE WELCOME

ECUADOR'S RESPONSE TO THE INFLUX OF VENEZUELAN
REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

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FIELD REPORT | JUNE 2019



Cover Photo: Venezuelans wait in line at the binational border attention centre in Huaquillas, Southern Ecuador in the border with Peru. Photo by Cris Bouroncle/AFP/Getty Images.

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SUMMARY

The outpouring of Venezuelans driven by the country's internal crisis has created the second-largest displacement crisis in the world—an estimated 3.7 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide.¹ About 3 million have left the country since 2015, and recent estimates predict that the number of Venezuelans abroad will reach 5 million by the end of 2019.² Indeed, this exodus is “unprecedented [...] in magnitude and speed” in this region.³

Almost 1.2 million Venezuelans have entered Ecuador since 2015, most of whom have traveled onward to Peru or other third countries.⁴ However, there are now some 221,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants remaining in Ecuador, and increasing numbers are choosing to stay.⁵ The arrival of so many in a short period of time has strained Ecuador's institutional capacity. Many Venezuelans lack access to social services, including health, education, housing, and livelihoods. Some have also been victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), discrimination, and xenophobia. As more Venezuelans with increasingly acute needs arrive and choose to stay, Ecuador is struggling to respond.

Ecuador's response has been inconsistent, reflecting the complex political tensions and institutional challenges it faces. On the one hand, Ecuador has historically been a refugee-hosting country and technically has maintained paths to regularization for Venezuelans. Indeed, the country has some of the most progressive human rights, migration, and asylum laws in the region. These laws include its 2017 Human Mobility Law, which enshrines a strongly principled approach to regularizing the status of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. The law also commits Ecuador to the principle of non-refoulement, non-discrimination, and integration.

However, some policies have undermined the intent of the law, preventing Venezuelans from accessing their rights in practice. These policy changes appear politically motivated, coming in response to surges in arrivals, shifts in public opinion, or a spike in xenophobia. As a result, the UN recently warned that, despite the country's legal framework, access to regular status is now one of the primary challenges facing Venezuelans in Ecuador.⁶

The consequences for Venezuelans have been devastating. For example, new entry requirements imposed in late 2018 and early 2019 effectively closed the border to many Venezuelans, sometimes separating families. This policy drove many to take irregular routes into the country, sometimes via smugglers and traffickers, thus exposing them to greater risks and denying them the protections that regular status affords. These measures also prevent many Venezue-

1. UNHCR, “R4V, Latin America and the Caribbean: Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in the Region as of March 2019,” Map, Response for Venezuelans (R4V), Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, April 11, 2019, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/68961>.

2. *UN News*, “Venezuela's Needs ‘Significant and Growing’ UN Humanitarian Chief Warns Security Council, as ‘Unparalleled’ Exodus Continues,” April 10, 2019, accessed June 4, 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/04/1036441>.

3. World Bank Group, “Beyond Borders: A Look at the Venezuelan Exodus,” April 1, 2019, accessed June 4, 2019, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/864341554879205879/pdf/Beyond-Borders-A-Look-at-the-Venezuelan-Exodus.pdf>.

4. UNHCR, “Global Focus: 2019 Planning Summary—Operation: Ecuador,” February 14, 2019, accessed April 28, 2019, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2543>.

5. UNHCR, “Latin America and the Caribbean: Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants.”

6. R4V, Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, “Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, January–December 2019,” accessed June 4, 2019, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2019%20RMRP%20Venezuela%20%28December%202018%29.pdf>.

lans from accessing the labor market—a particularly harmful outcome, given that Venezuelans fleeing today have more acute needs than earlier arrivals. Some groups—including women and children, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals—are particularly vulnerable.

Ecuador’s policy reversals also have undermined its credibility as a regional leader. Even as it abdicates its role as host of the Quito Process—a regional forum to address the humanitarian response to Venezuelan displacement—it must remain fully engaged and fulfill its Quito commitments. Ecuador must maintain open borders in policy and practice, guarantee protections to those seeking refuge, and continue to foster migrants’ access to social services and livelihoods opportunities.

The situation for Venezuelans in Ecuador has reached a critical juncture. As the government faces growing strains on its institutional capacity, it must choose to stand by its constitution, which protects the rights of migrants and refugees. For its part, the international community must increase funding and operations to enable Ecuador to fulfill these obligations. Indeed, the Ecuador component of the UN funding appeal for the regional Venezuela crisis is only 17 percent funded. As the crisis continues, the need will grow for additional support to provide both humanitarian assistance and longer-term integration and development aid. Ecuador’s fragile welcome must be made stronger.



In March 2019, a Refugees International team traveled to Quito, Guayaquil, Ibarra, and the Rumichaca Bridge, which serves as the principal crossing point between Ecuador and Colombia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Ecuadorian Government:

- Maintain open borders for Venezuelans and remove financial and bureaucratic barriers to regular entry. This includes increasing capacity for immigration processing and reducing fees for obtaining or overstaying visas. It also means upholding Ecuador's commitment to non-refoulement, non-discrimination, integration, and non-criminalization of irregular migration.
- Expedite refugee status determinations to ensure that Venezuelans with a credible claim to asylum under the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the 1951 Convention) can secure the international protections they are due and those eligible for international protection under the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (the Cartagena Declaration) can access it.
- Integrate displaced Venezuelans into Ecuador's economy by creating opportunities for livelihoods and access to the labor market. Work visas should be made more affordable and mechanisms to transfer professional certificates made accessible to displaced Venezuelans.
- Continue to support the tenets of the Quito Process, including harmonized entry requirements, shared standards for residence and work permits, a coordinated system to combat trafficking and smuggling, and family reunification across borders.
- Invest in anti-xenophobia campaigns to combat discrimination and anti-migrant rhetoric—an urgent priority, especially in light of the massive public backlash triggered by an isolated act of violence that occurred in the town of Ibarra in early 2019.

To the International Donor Community:

- Fund the UN's request for \$738 million for the Venezuela response—including \$117 million for Ecuador—as presented in the regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) for 2019.
- Support services and invest in host communities for displaced Venezuelans. This includes bolstering health, education, and other social services, which increasingly are strained in Ecuador. It also includes expanding livelihoods programs and other longer-term interventions as Ecuador shifts from a transit country to a final destination for an increasing number of Venezuelans.
- Increase support for vulnerable groups of Venezuelans. Promote programs to combat trafficking and exploitation of women and minimize the risk of SGBV; provide targeted services for LGBTQ individuals; and provide busing and shelters for *caminantes* (“walkers”) undertaking their journeys on foot.

To the United Nations:

- Increase support for the Quito Process. This support could include technical assistance channeled through the joint UNHCR-IOM (the United Nations Refugee Agency-International Organization for Migration) Regional Platform to encourage Quito participants to meet their respective commitments to developing a more harmonized regional approach to the crisis.

- Increase programs and resources for expanding livelihoods opportunities as increasing numbers of Venezuelans choose to remain in Ecuador. This includes deepening engagement with development actors and the private sector to help finance sustainable solutions for those staying in Ecuador.
- Provide financial and technical support to the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility to improve migration and asylum processing, including by positioning more staff at official border crossings and adopting new technology.

BACKGROUND

Origins and Evolution of Venezuelan Displacement

As of March 2019, Venezuela ranks as the second-largest displacement crisis in the world, with an estimated 3.7 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide.⁷ About 3 million have left the country since 2015, and the outflow continues at a rate of 5,000 per day.⁸ Recent estimates predict that the number of Venezuelans abroad will reach 5 million by the end of 2019—a scale comparable to the Syrian refugee crisis.⁹ Indeed, this exodus is “unprecedented [...] in magnitude and speed” in this region.¹⁰

The devastating impacts of policies President Nicolás Maduro’s authoritarian regime has imposed since 2013 are driving Venezuelans to flee. Once the wealthiest country in Latin America, Venezuela has suffered complete economic and institutional collapse. Hyperinflation of 1 million percent has effectively rendered the currency worthless—and is predicted to reach 10 million percent in 2019.¹¹ A dramatic decline of social services and the failure of state institutions have generated severe shortages of basic goods, including food, medicine, and vaccines, while political repression, rampant corruption, and widespread violence have created fear and desperation.

Even as Venezuelans flee, millions more continue to suffer within Venezuela. The

average Venezuelan has lost 11 kilograms (24 pounds),¹² and around 90 percent of the population lives in poverty.¹³ Since March 2019, nationwide power outages have further limited social services and exacerbated the humanitarian situation in the country.¹⁴

Meanwhile, the political situation inside the country is becoming increasingly tense. In early 2019, Venezuela’s opposition rejected President Maduro’s claim to a second term, citing electoral irregularities. Juan Guaidó, the head of the opposition-led National Assembly, claimed constitutional authority to assume the role of interim president. He has been recognized as such by the Organization of American States (OAS), most governments in the region, and the United States. Guaidó’s supporters have repeatedly clashed with counter-protesters during street protests.

As international attention fixates on this turmoil, the millions of Venezuelans who have managed to escape to other countries are increasingly desperate. Their numbers and their needs only grow, making it clear that this dire situation is likely to become another protracted crisis.

This report provides an overview of Venezuelan displacement in the region—and to Ecuador in particular—and offers an analysis of Ecuador’s response. Although Ecuador has shown leadership and openness to Venezuelan migrants in some ways, it has also struggled to keep up with new arrivals, adapt services and assist host communities, offer protection against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and exploitation, and

7. UNHCR, “Latin America and the Caribbean.”

8. UNHCR, “UNHCR Americas Monthly Report—March 2019,” April 9, 2019, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/68917>.

9. *UN News*, “Venezuela’s Needs.”

10. World Bank Group, “Beyond Borders.”

11. *Reuters*, “IMF sees Venezuela inflation at 10 million percent in 2019,” October 9, 2019, <https://in.reuters.com/article/venezuela-economy/imf-sees-venezuela-inflation-at-10-million-percent-in-2019-idINKCN1MJ1YX>

12. Caritas, “Restoring Children’s Health in Venezuela,” April 2018, <https://www.caritas.org/2018/04/restoring-childrens-health-in-venezuela/>.

13. World Bank Group, “Beyond Borders.”

14. UNHCR, “UNHCR Americas Monthly Report—March 2019.”

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

In March 2019, a team from Refugees International traveled to Ecuador to better understand the country's response to the influx of displaced Venezuelans there. The team traveled to Quito, the capital and largest city in Ecuador; Guayaquil, a port city in the west and the second-largest city; Ibarra, in the northern Imbabura Province; and the Rumichaca Bridge near Tulcán, which serves as the principal crossing point between Ecuador and Colombia. The team met with displaced Venezuelans; representatives of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), local NGOs, and civil society groups; multiple UN agencies; and officials of the governments of Ecuador and the United States. Data throughout the report was last updated in May 2019.

curtail xenophobic acts among some parts of the population. The report also discusses the international response and provides recommendations to all stakeholders.

Regional Response to Date

The outflow of Venezuelans since 2015 has been staggering, marking Latin America's worst displacement crisis in recent history.¹⁵ Of the 3.7 million Venezuelans estimated to be living abroad, about 3 million—more than 80 percent—are in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁶

In September 2018, nearly a dozen governments in the region met in Quito, Ecuador,

to exchange information and best practices for responding to the growing number of displaced Venezuelans.¹⁷ Known as the “Quito Process,” the meeting was designed to address the humanitarian consequences of Venezuela's internal turmoil, rather than political matters regarding that country's future. The meeting led to the adoption of the Declaration of Quito on Human Mobility of Venezuelan Citizens in the Region (“Quito I”), which laid the foundations for a more coordinated response.¹⁸ A subsequent meeting in November 2018 (“Quito II”) produced a Plan of Action whereby some participating host states committed to facilitating the social and economic integration of Venezuelans.¹⁹

15. Teresa Welsh, “Venezuela Crisis Is ‘On the Scale of Syria,’ UNHCR says,” Devex, September 19, 2018, <https://www.devex.com/news/venezuela-crisis-is-on-the-scale-of-syria-unhcr-says-93465>.

16. UNHCR, “Latin America and the Caribbean.”

17. “Quito Process” refers to a meeting of the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay; representatives of these governments met on September 3–4, 2018, to discuss the situation in Venezuela and the region's responses. “Declaration of Quito on Human Mobility of Venezuelan Citizens in the Region,” accessed June 4, 2019, https://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/declaracion_de_quito_en.pdf.

18. Ministry of Foreign Relations and Human Mobility, “Noticias: Declaración de Quito sobre Movilidad Humana de ciudadanos venezolanos en la Región,” September 4, 2018, accessed June 4, 2019, <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/declaracion-de-quito-sobre-movilidad-humana-de-ciudadanos-venezolanos-en-la-region/>.

19. Of those countries participating in Quito II (November 22–23, 2018), the following adopted the Plan of Action: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.

Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana, el Gobierno de Ecuador, “The II International Meeting of Quito concludes with the signing of the Action Plan on Human Mobility of Venezuelan citizens in the region,” November 23, 2018, <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/en/the-ii-international-meeting-of-quito-concludes-with-the-signing-of-the-action-plan-on-human-mobility-of-venezuelan-citizens-in-the-region/>.

The importance of these meetings should not be understated—they made early progress as states discussed the need to maintain open borders to those fleeing Venezuela and processes for granting legal status to Venezuelans in host countries, including through special temporary residence permits. However, despite their promises, some states have introduced new restrictions that undermine the Quito commitments. As discussed below, Ecuador implemented more restrictive policies toward Venezuelans in 2018 and 2019, even as it once again hosted the third such regional meeting from April 8–9, 2019 (“Quito III”). Unfortunately, that meeting did not yield new commitments; it only reaffirmed the same collective strategy and principles from earlier meetings, and called for more international funding. Participating states plan to meet again in July 2019 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Trends in Venezuelan Displacement to Ecuador

Since 2015, about 1.15 million Venezuelans have arrived in Ecuador, with more than half entering in 2018.²⁰ A February 2019 UNHCR report stated that the country saw about 2,000 daily arrivals on average, with peaks sometimes topping 5,000.²¹ Although most individuals transited through to other countries, approximately 221,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants were living in Ecuador as of March 2019.²² The arrival of so many in a short period of time has strained Ecuador’s institutional capacity. In fact, historically the country has been a refugee-receiving country—it is host to the largest number of refugees in Latin America, the vast majority of whom are Colombians.²³ However, the inflow of Colombians has been gradual, with the

population growing “drop by drop,” as one government official described it, over decades of internal conflict.²⁴ The distinctively rapid influx of a staggering number of Venezuelans has thus created an unprecedented challenge.

In addition, Ecuador is now shifting from being a transit to a destination country. Previously, the majority of Venezuelans entering Ecuador were en route to Peru, where they believed they would have a better chance of finding work. However, as life for Venezuelans has proven increasingly difficult in Peru, more are choosing to stay in or return to Ecuador. The percentage remaining in Ecuador had risen to about 26 percent in recent months, up from 17 percent at the end of 2018.²⁵

This challenge is compounded by the fact that Venezuelans fleeing today have more acute needs than earlier arrivals. Those who first fled from Venezuela were typically wealthier, more highly educated, and often had relatives or established networks in their destination countries. Many were men who went alone to find work to send money back to relatives in Venezuela or settle down before bringing their families to join them. As the situation inside Venezuela has deteriorated further, however, more people who are poorer and less educated have begun to flee. Many have chronic illnesses or disabilities, and a growing number are elderly. In addition, there are more unaccompanied minors, pregnant women, and large families traveling together. These individuals present particular humanitarian and protection needs when they arrive.

20. UNHCR, “Global Focus.”

21. Ibid.

22. UNHCR, “Latin America and the Caribbean.”

23. UNHCR, “Ecuador,” accessed June 4, 2019, <https://www.acnur.org/ecuador.html>.

24. Refugees International meeting at the Embassy of Ecuador to the United States in Washington, D.C., on April 10, 2019.

25. UNHCR, “Global Focus.”



Ecuador-Colombia border. Photo by Refugees International.

National and International Legal Framework

Ecuador has strong human rights, migration, and asylum laws. Its 2008 constitution recognizes individuals' rights to seek asylum, as well as the principle of universal citizenship, by which foreigners in Ecuador are accorded the same rights and duties as citizens.²⁶ As such, refugees and migrants with regular status have the right to free basic health care and education.

Ecuador ratified the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the 1951 Convention) in 1958 and its 1967 Protocol in 1969.²⁷ It is also a signatory of the

regional 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (Cartagena Declaration), which more broadly defines refugees as “persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order.”²⁸ That definition was incorporated into Ecuador’s national legal framework and remains present in the Organic Law on Human Mobility (the Human Mobility Law), passed under President Lenín Moreno in 2017.²⁹

The Human Mobility Law has been widely praised for the concrete and principled

26. Article 41 of the Human Mobility chapter of the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution, https://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/RefugiadosAmericas/Ecuador/2013/UNHCR_in_Ecuador.pdf.

27. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person with a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” UNHCR, “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,” <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html>.

28. “Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, Colloquium on the International Protection of Refugees in Central America, Mexico and Panama,” adopted November 22, 1984, https://www.oas.org/dil/1984_cartagena_declaration_on_refugees.pdf.

29. Section III—Refugee Status, Art. 98. *Organic Law on Human Mobility* [Ecuador], Supplement Official Registry 938 dated February 6, 2017, January 28, 2017, accessed April 30, 2019, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bc70a384.html>.

approach it takes to regularizing the status of refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, migrants, and victims of human trafficking and smuggling. It lays out a commitment to non-refoulement,³⁰ the non-criminalization of irregular migration, non-discrimination, and integration. Under the law, individuals with refugee or stateless status receive an Ecuadorian national ID and temporary resident status, granting them the right to work and study, and the option to renew their temporary residency or request permanent residency after two years.³¹

The law also establishes less restrictive immigration procedures for citizens of member states of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).³² Venezuelans thus can enter Ecuador with just a Venezuelan national ID card and obtain a tourist visa valid for up to 180 days.³³ Once inside the country, they can apply for a UNASUR visa, which grants them the right to stay and work for up to two years.

On March 13, 2019, Ecuador announced that it would follow other member states in suspending its participation in UNASUR, long criticized for its dysfunction. Some in the government affirmed that this decision would not affect Venezuelans' ability to enter Ecuador and regularize their migratory status. President Moreno recently said that amendments

to the Human Mobility Law resulting from the UNASUR withdrawal could include a new humanitarian visa for Venezuelans.³⁴ If this does occur, the government must ensure a smooth transition to any such visa scheme to guarantee that visas are immediately available to both Venezuelans newly applying for visas, and current holders of UNASUR visas. They should provide the same rights as UNASUR visas and requirements for obtaining them should be minimal, in line with the original policy for UNASUR citizens in the Law and in recognition of the challenges Venezuelans face. These requirements are essential for Ecuador to responsibly manage its incoming migrant and refugee population, and to uphold its obligations to its own laws.³⁵

ECUADOR'S RESPONSE: CRISIS AND POLICY PIVOTS

Early Response: From Denial to Acknowledgement

Ecuador's response to the Venezuelan exodus over the last five years has been inconsistent, shifting between generous and

30. Article 33(1) of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees provides that, "No Contracting State shall expel or return ("refouler") a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."

31. Organization of American States (OAS), "IACHR Hails Human Mobility Law in Ecuador," March 1, 2017, accessed May 2, 2019, http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2017/022.asp.

32. UNASUR is an intergovernmental body established in 2008 to facilitate regional dialogue and cooperation around political, economic, and environmental affairs. Its constitutive treaty went into force in 2011 with member states Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Mexico and Panama serve as observer states. As of 2019, seven member states had withdrawn from the bloc: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru.

33. Reglamento a la Ley Orgánica de Movilidad Humana, Decreto Ejecutivo 111, Lenín Moreno Garcés, Presidente Constitucional de la Republica de Ecuador, 17 de abril de 2018, https://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/reglamento_ley_de_movilidad_humana_reformado_abril_2018.pdf.

34. "Corte de Ecuador analiza requisitos de entrada para venezolanos," El Nacional, 3 June 2019, www.el-nacional.com/noticias/mundo/corte-ecuador-analiza-requisitos-entrada-para-venezolanos_284275

35. For more, see Marissa Esthimer, "Protecting the Forcibly Displaced: Latin America's Evolving Refugee and Asylum Framework," Migration Policy Institute, January 14, 2016, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/protecting-forcibly-displaced-latin-america%E2%80%99s-evolving-refugee-and-asylum-framework>.



Venezuelan migrants cross the Rumichaca International Bridge towards the Ecuadorian migrants office, in the border between Tulcan, Ecuador, and Ipiales, Colombia. Photo by Luis Robayo/AFP/Getty Images.

restrictive, reflecting changes in domestic and regional politics as well as the size of the flow. At the start of the influx, the administration of President Rafael Correa denied the crisis to protect its strong alliance with Venezuela.

After the May 2017 election of President Moreno—who did not share his predecessor’s support for Venezuela’s President Maduro—the government of Ecuador finally acknowledged the crisis and began a more active response. However, Ecuador’s humanitarian infrastructure was designed to respond to natural disasters and other emergencies, not to displacement crises at the present level.³⁶ Many international NGOs had closed their offices in Ecuador before the current crisis, and UN agencies such as UNHCR had scaled down their office presence there. As a result, in tandem with the UN, there are still relatively few organizations responding to the needs of displaced Venezuelans.

Vacillation Between Increasingly Restrictive and Improved Regularization Policies

However, in August 2018, Ecuador declared a state of emergency in response to a sudden, massive influx of Venezuelans. The government then immediately imposed new restrictions on arriving Venezuelans. Instead of simply presenting national ID cards, they now had to show valid passports. However, the absence of functioning state institutions in Venezuela rendered it nearly impossible to obtain or renew passports and other official documents. Ecuador’s decision thus failed to consider the situation from which Venezuelans were fleeing at precisely the time when neighboring countries should have been making greater efforts to accommodate them.

36. Refugees International meeting with OCHA in Quito, Ecuador, March 11, 2019.



On Ecuador’s northeastern border, UN agencies and humanitarian organizations have created safe spaces for Venezuelans arriving from Colombia to rest and receive emergency services. Those with the necessary documents cross over the Rumichaca International Bridge while others use unofficial *trochas*. Photo by Refugees International.

One exception was made for minors, who could still use birth certificates to enter. This rule was critical to reducing family separation, as Venezuela does not issue passports to children under 9 years old.³⁷ Still, the restrictions essentially closed the border to many Venezuelans. In a welcome move, Ecuador’s public defender challenged the policy and a judge ruled against it later that same month.³⁸ However, even as the government subsequently suspended the measure, it announced that it would require Venezuelans without passports to present government-certified proof of validity for their

identity cards—a similarly difficult burden.³⁹

In October 2018, the government launched an initiative—a *Minga Migratoria*— that sought to facilitate regularization procedures for foreigners, particularly Venezuelans. With the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility adopted new technology, including electronic visas, which helped simplify and accelerate migration processing.⁴⁰ More broadly, Ecuador embraced a more visible leadership role as host of the Quito Process and signatory to the Plan of

37. Agencia EFE, “Ecuador Eliminates Passport Requirements for Venezuelan Kids, Teens,” April 19, 2018, accessed May 2, 2019, <https://www.efe.com/efe/english/portada/ecuador-eliminates-passport-requirements-for-venezuelan-kids-teen/50000260-3724088#>.

38. Cuenca High Life, “Judge Overturns Passport Requirement for Venezuelans but Government Adds New Rule,” August 25, 2018, accessed May 1, 2019, <https://cuencahighlife.com/judge-overturns-passport-requirement-for-venezuelans-but-government-adds-new-rule/>.

39. Human Rights Watch, “Amicus Curiae on Venezuelan Immigration to Ecuador,” May 8, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/08/amicus-curiae-venezuelan-immigration-ecuador#_ftnref9.

40. Ministry of Foreign Relations and Human Mobility, “Minga Migratoria,” Government of Ecuador, accessed May 1, 2019, <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/minga-migratoria/>.

Action in November 2018, committing itself to facilitating the migration, regularization, and integration of displaced Venezuelans. However, the Moreno administration pivoted once again at the beginning of 2019. One UNHCR representative described this change to Refugees International as a “knee-jerk reaction” to public outrage over the highly publicized murder of a pregnant Ecuadorian woman by her Venezuelan boyfriend in the Ecuadorian town of Ibarra. The incident, which occurred on January 20, 2019, fueled xenophobia and discrimination, even prompting harassment of and violence against Venezuelans. The government immediately pledged to tighten control over the Venezuelan population newly entering or already inside its borders.⁴¹ On January 21, 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility and the Ministry of the Interior again announced more stringent entry requirements for incoming Venezuelans.

Specifically, the government “demanded that all Venezuelans who wish to enter Ecuador show their passports or ID cards with an authenticated certificate of validity, as well as a record of past criminal activity—or lack thereof—from their home country or the country where they have spent the past five years [...].”⁴² Exceptions were later allowed for children and individuals with Ecuadorian family, those with resident status in Ecuador, or those in transit to another country.⁴³

As before, the impossibility of obtaining these documents for most people effectively closed Ecuador’s border to Venezuelans,

with dangerous consequences. Many Venezuelans were stuck in Colombia, sometimes separated from family members who earlier had been able to proceed. Those unwilling or unable to halt or reverse their journey were effectively forced to enter Ecuador through irregular channels. This process typically puts them at the mercy of smugglers or traffickers who extract high fees and often rob, harass, and exploit them for labor or sex. Moreover, by making it more difficult to process and track the multitudes entering irregularly, the policy actually gives the government of Ecuador less control over its border.

Moving Forward: Legal Challenges to Restrictive Policies

Shortly after the restrictive policies were enacted, Ecuador’s courts ordered them suspended, ruling that the imposition of additional requirements on Venezuelans seeking to migrate to Ecuador was unconstitutional, violating the principles of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in Ecuadorian law and regional legal frameworks.⁴⁴ On March 27, 2019, the Constitutional Court accepted the case and the policies were temporarily suspended.⁴⁵ Hearings began on June 3, 2019, but a decision has not yet been made.

Judicial action taken to overturn restrictive policies is a very important step in the right direction. However, the fact that such policy moves have had to be litigated twice in just six months demonstrates the fragility of Ec-

41. Joe Parkin Daniels, “Ecuador Targets Venezuelan Migrants after Woman’s Death,” *The Guardian*, January 21, 2019, accessed May 1, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/21/ecuador-targets-venezuelan-migrants-after-womans-death>.

42. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), “IACHR Concerned about Ecuador’s New Measures to Address Forced Migration of Venezuelans,” news release, Organization of American States (OAS), February 27, 2019, accessed May 1, 2019, https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2019/047.asp.

43. Human Rights Watch, “Amicus Curiae.”

44. “Ecuador Suspende Requisito de Pasaporte y Antecedentes para Permitir Ingreso de Venezolanos,” *El Pitazo*, March 29, 2019, accessed May 1, 2019, <https://elpitazo.net/internacional/ecuador-suspende-requisito-de-pasaporte-y-antecedentes-para-permitir-ingreso-de-venezolanos/>.

45. Admissibility decision on Case 0014-19-IN signed by Justices Enrique Herrería Bonnet, Alí Lozada Prado, and Daniela Salazar Marín, March 27, 2019.

cuador’s otherwise welcoming approach. In its upcoming hearing, the Constitutional Court should uphold the law and human rights, protecting Venezuelans’ ease of entry into Ecuador. Moving forward, Ecuador must avoid recreating the devastating outcomes for both Venezuelans and host states of policies that essentially close borders.

CHALLENGES AND SHORTCOMINGS

Obstacles to Regularization and Access to Livelihoods

The UN warns that access to regular status is one of the primary challenges for Venezuelans in Ecuador.⁴⁶ As of December 31, 2018, out of the 221,000 Venezuelans living in Ecuador, there were just 99,583 with regular status.⁴⁷ At minimum, more border officials are needed to handle the larger flows of individuals arriving and departing. This staff increase is critical for preventing irregular crossings, providing individuals with proper documentation and information about rights and services available to them, and enabling more accurate data collection to better inform the state’s response.

Noting the near-impossibility of obtaining official documents in Venezuela, Ecuador’s changing requirements, and associated application costs that prevent many Venezuelans from obtaining the UNASUR visas for which they are eligible, UNHCR reported in early

February that the government had “indicated its willingness to lower these barriers as part of a national response plan.”⁴⁸ This may not be enough, however. Venezuelans fleeing today are poorer than those who left in earlier waves and often arrive with only a little worthless currency, if anything at all.

Unable to work until they secure a longer-term visa, but unable to obtain a visa until they earn enough money to pay for one, Venezuelans are often forced to work illegally.⁴⁹ Doing so exposes them to exploitation and can drive wages down for the host community as well. Moreover, if they are found to be working illegally or to have overstayed their tourist visas, they face fines they are unable to pay. This situation results in a perpetuation of their irregular status. Indeed, the UN has found that those with an irregular status “face particular challenges, including limited access to basic services and lack of income generating opportunities as well as greater exposure to protection risks, such as human trafficking, exploitation and abuse.”⁵⁰ Virtually every Venezuelan with whom RI teams spoke emphasized the importance of access to decent work to support themselves and their families.

Similarly, obstacles to obtaining regular status undercut the potential for Ecuador to benefit from the arrival of displaced Venezuelans who may stay for a longer period of time. A Venezuelan woman in Quito who had been a nurse before migrating explained that high fees and documentation requirements kept her from securing professional certification in Ecuador.⁵¹ Furthermore, the additional steps that employers must take to register foreign

46. R4V, “Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP).”

47. UNHCR, “UNHCR Operational Portal: Refugee Situations: Venezuela Situation,” <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ven-sit>.

48. UNHCR, “Global Focus.”

49. Johnny Magdaleno, “Unable to Afford Work Visas, Venezuelans in Ecuador Face Fines,” Al Jazeera, April 26, 2019, accessed May 2, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/unable-afford-work-visas-venezuelans-ecuador-face-fines-190404144511857.html>.

50. R4V, “Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP),” p. 53.

51. Refugees International meeting with Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) in Quito, Ecuador on March 12, 2019.



Photo by Refugees International.

At the Divino Niño soup kitchen in Ibarra, Refugees International met three Venezuelan brothers who had arrived just three days earlier. Ages 17, 24, and 29, they told of the dire conditions they fled, the perilous journey undertaken so far, and the hope and uncertainty surrounding their future. The men had first travelled from Venezuela to Maicao, a city on Colombia's northeastern border. Unable to afford a bus ticket to Ecuador, they had gotten a ride in a truck carrying drugs, weapons, and other contraband. Along the way, they were robbed of their cell phones and other personal belongings. Dressed only in T-shirts, jeans, and worn shoes, they had been unprepared for the conditions they faced. They could not enter Ecuador regularly because while they had valid passports, they lacked certified records of their past criminal activity, or lack thereof. On their first night in Ecuador, the men slept in the street, unable to find shelter. UNHCR staff approached them and brought them to Divino Niño for a meal and lodging. They planned to continue their journey to Peru, where they had a sister, after a brief pause to receive some assistance. Despite the certain risks and uncertain opportunities ahead, they told the Refugees International team they felt they had no choice but to continue. They had left their families back in Venezuela—one of the young men began crying as he described his undernourished toddler back in Venezuela, and another described his elderly parents in need of medicine—and needed to make money to help them. They showed old photos, indicating how much weight they had lost due to hunger in Venezuela, and expressed their determination to win better lives for themselves and their families.

workers disincentivize hiring them. However, throughout Ecuador—as in other host countries that RI teams have visited—Venezuelans said that employment was their greatest need. Individuals spoke of their desire to be self-sufficient, send money back to relatives remaining in Venezuela, and contribute to the communities that had taken them in. Job training and income-generation programs run by NGOs and the UN will help, but the Ecuadorian government must also facilitate access to the formal labor market.

Limited Access to Asylum

For some Venezuelans, asylum may offer an alternative route to regularization. However, this route also has proven challenging. First, despite Ecuador’s integration of the Cartagena Declaration into national law, officials still conduct refugee status determinations (RSDs) based on the narrower 1951 UN Convention definition, dramatically reducing the number of Venezuelans who might be eligible for this protected status. Unfortunately, this practice is true of other signatory host states, despite a March 2018 Guidance Note from UNHCR encouraging them to apply the broader Cartagena Declaration in making RSDs for Venezuelan asylum seekers, “including as a basis for accelerated or simplified case processing.”⁵² In an updated Guidance Note published on May 21, 2019, UNHCR reissued this call, saying that “the majority of those fleeing [Venezuela] are in need of international refugee protection.”⁵³ Unfortunately, without a firm regional agreement to apply the Cartagena Declaration, no state is likely to do so because of concerns about encouraging a disproportionate flow of Venezuelans to their country.

In fact, relatively few Venezuelans thus far have applied for asylum in Ecuador or elsewhere. The complexity of this long and bureaucratic process, as well as the uncertainty of success, may deter some from applying. Moreover, many Venezuelans with whom the RI team spoke—resolute in leaving but hopeful of returning one day—did not think of themselves as refugees or were not familiar with the concept of asylum. Others who do have their documents may prefer to focus on earning the money they need to obtain a UNASUR visa. As a result, only some 6 percent of the Venezuelans in Ecuador were asylum seekers as of December 2018.⁵⁴

As the crisis persists, however, asylum applications are increasing quickly. UNHCR reported in March 2019 that the number of asylum applications by Venezuelans globally had “increased exponentially,” growing to 414,000 claims since 2014, with nearly 60 percent of those lodged just in 2018.⁵⁵ Regrettably, the relatively few asylum seekers in Ecuador already risk straining the country’s capacity. Ecuador’s asylum system, originally designed to manage about 5,000 claims per year and accustomed to a slower rate of claims, is not equipped to manage a rapid spike in asylum applications.⁵⁶ As of March 2019, none of the Venezuelan asylum claims lodged had been approved. Ecuador thus needs the international community to help strengthen its asylum system.

Strained Social Services

Although classified as an upper middle-income country, Ecuador suffers from a sluggish economy and rising public debt, which limits the state’s capacity to meet even the

52. UNHCR, Refworld, “Guidance Note on the Outflow of Venezuelans,” March 2018, accessed June 4, 2019, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5a9ff3cc4.html>.

53. UNHCR, “Majority Fleeing Venezuela in Need of Refugee Protection – UNHCR,” <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2019/5/5ce3bb734/majority-fleeing-venezuela-need-refugee-protection-unhcr.html>.

54. UNHCR Operational Portal: Refugee Situations: Venezuela Situation.”

55. UNHCR, “Asylum Applications by Venezuelans Soar to over 400,000,” accessed June 4, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2019/3/5c826efe2e9/asylum-applications-venezuelans-soar-400000.html>.

56. R4V, “Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP).”



HIAS is one of the largest INGOs operating in Ecuador and is UNHCR's primary implementing partner there. It provides services to refugees, educates them about their rights, and advocates on their behalf. Photo by Refugees International.

most basic needs of displaced Venezuelans. Indeed, the rising number of Venezuelans arriving and settling in Ecuador is severely straining the full gamut of national social services. The reality is that overcrowding in schools and health facilities prevents Venezuelans from accessing the rights they are due by law. For example, Guayaquil, a city of more than 2.6 million, has only two hospitals, and both Ecuadorians and Venezuelans face long delays in accessing treatment.⁵⁷ The same is true for mental health services and access to social workers and counselors. Humanitarian workers in Guayaquil told the RI team that securing funding to hire more psychologists and social workers is a top priority.⁵⁸

These resource constraints perhaps are felt most acutely at the local level. In meetings with Refugees International, local government

officials in one province explained they do not have the budgets necessary to implement policy directives issued by the central government. They urged the national government and international community to provide more funds and technical assistance to help them address the needs of Venezuelans in their localities, and to consider their voices in decision-making processes relevant to Venezuelans.

Regrettably, the difficulties Ecuador faces in responding to the crisis may soon worsen. Austerity measures introduced by the Moreno administration's economic "Prosperity Plan" for 2018–2021 will increase under a new agreement reached with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in February 2019.⁵⁹ The IMF's commitment of \$4.2 billion from its Extended Fund Facility (EFF) is part of a

57. Refugees International meeting with HIAS in Guayaquil, Ecuador, on March 13, 2019.

58. Refugees International meeting with Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) in Guayaquil, Ecuador, on March 13, 2019.

59. International Monetary Fund, "Ecuador and IMF Reach Staff-Level Agreement on a US\$4.2 Billion Extended Fund Facility," news release, February 21, 2019, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2019/02/21/pr1952-ecuador-and-imf-reach-staff-level->



In Guayaquil, Ecuador, Jesuit Refugee Services has partnered with Hogar de Cristo to provide shelters for displaced Venezuelans, giving priority to women and children. Photo by Refugees International.

broader package of international financing from various development institutions that will provide \$10.2 billion over the next three years.⁶⁰ However, under the terms of the deal, each government department is expected to make significant budget cuts. As a result, social services in many sectors likely will be reduced. Ecuador therefore will have little capability to provide the services displaced persons need, even as restrictive measures will only worsen conditions for displaced and hosts alike. Donors, development actors, and other members of the international community must provide greater support.

Xenophobia and Discrimination

The public outcry in response to a murder in Ibarra reflects a growing undercurrent of xenophobia and discrimination in Ecuador. Venezuelans with whom the RI team spoke had experienced discrimination in trying to access work, housing, education, and health care. For example, a young mother in Quito traveling with her two-year-old son said she had been forced to leave a shelter after just four days. She had difficulty finding a landlord willing to rent to her because she was Venezuelan, and now struggled to find work to pay the rent.⁶¹ Another young woman in Quito reported that she and others had been denied services and turned away by potential employers despite their professional qualifications.⁶² Humanitarian workers noted

agreement-on-extended-fund-facility.

60. Ministry of Economy and Finance, "Noticias: Ecuador y la Comunidad Internacional Alcanzan un Acuerdo," Government of Ecuador, February 21, 2019, <https://www.finanzas.gob.ec/ecuador-y-la-comunidad-internacional-alcanzan-un-acuerdo/>.

61. Refugees International meeting at HIAS Quito North Office in Quito, Ecuador on March 14, 2019.

62. Refugees International interviews with displaced Venezuelans at the JRS Quito office in Quito, Ecuador on March 12,

that Venezuelans who find work in the formal and informal sectors alike are often exploited, receiving lower wages than their Ecuadorian counterparts or not being paid at all.⁶³ In addition, bullying and discrimination against Venezuelan children discourages some from going to school. Together, these trends prevent Venezuelans from accessing their rights under Ecuadorian law.

Some government and international actors are concerned that xenophobia will rise as larger numbers of Venezuelans enter Ecuador. In some areas, local governments have used their meager resources to launch anti-xenophobia campaigns and programs. Local government officials in Ibarra described an information campaign developed jointly with UNHCR and the government.⁶⁴ It includes videos of displaced Colombians—and, more recently, Venezuelans—telling their stories; it has been rolled out in schools to target young audiences. Local officials also organized programs to promote socioeconomic inclusion and deliver health services to both the local and foreign populations. They emphasized that these are efforts to humanize and integrate Venezuelans in ways that promote their rights and highlight their potential contributions to the host society.

Vulnerable Groups

Among the millions of displaced Venezuelans, some face greater risks or have more acute needs that demand heightened protection measures and specific responses. These groups include women and girls; unaccompanied minors; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals; the chronically ill and disabled; the elderly; and members of Venezuela's indigenous communities.

Women and girls: Sexual exploitation and trafficking, longstanding problems in Ecuador's border regions, have increased with the influx of Venezuelan women and girls. In some cases, traffickers lure women with the promise of a job or safe passage; in others, Venezuelan women rely on contacts already in Ecuador to bring them in, seeing little choice but to resort to sex work or survival sex to pay for their journeys and earn income. SGBV is also prevalent, and the stressors created by displacement often exacerbate domestic violence. Perpetuating these risks are a broken system for reporting abuse; stereotypes about Venezuelan women; insufficient access to shelters, health care, and psychological support; obstacles to regularization; and Venezuelans' own lack of understanding about their rights and available services.⁶⁵ A forthcoming report from Refugees International will address some of these protection needs more fully.

LGBTQ individuals: Stigmatization of the LGBTQ community in Ecuador makes access to services more difficult for this group. Discrimination is common, and some shelters turn away gay or transgender Venezuelans. Frameworks for addressing displacement crises tend to omit specific considerations for this group, and the absence of needs assessments hinders the design of an appropriate response. In fact, Diálogo Diverso, a Quito-based NGO, is the first and only organization in the region to focus on the rights and protection needs of LGBTQ individuals in the context of human mobility. Executive Director Danilo Manzano warned that, in addition to underfunding and social stigma, cultural differences keep many LGBTQ Venezuelans from even identifying as such, further complicating efforts to reach all who need additional support. More research and programming are important to begin

2019.

63. Refugees International meeting with JRS staff in Quito, Ecuador on March 12, 2019.

64. Refugees International meeting with local government officials at Prefecture of Imbabura Province in Ibarra, Ecuador, on March 15, 2019.

65. Refugees International meeting with JRS at Hogar de Cristo shelter in Guayaquil, Ecuador on March 13, 2019.



Venezuelan migrants heading to Peru walk along the Panamerican highway in Tulcan, Ecuador, after crossing from Colombia. Photo by Luis Robayo/AFP/Getty Images.

to address this group's specific protection needs.

Caminantes: Many of the Venezuelan individuals and families with whom Refugees International spoke were traveling by foot. These *caminantes*, or “walkers,” often travel long stretches without coming across shelter and thus must sleep outside in public spaces or along the mountain roads and highways they travel. In these unprotected places, they are more vulnerable to theft; harassment; illness; and lack of access to food, water, and proper hygiene. Some organizations provide cash assistance to Venezuelans that helps them pay for bus tickets. However, some bus drivers worry about facing legal consequences if they are found transporting Venezuelans. A representative of UN Women told Refugees International that, after the January 2019 change in entry requirements, drivers had turned away Venezuelans who did not

have documents.⁶⁶ IOM has also sought to help address this problem by providing free busing to some Venezuelans. Neighboring states like Peru sometimes have resisted this effort, however, being unwilling to facilitate what they expect would be larger, accelerated arrivals of Venezuelans into their countries. Thus far, the Ecuadorian government has allowed IOM to provide limited transfers, primarily to Peru.⁶⁷ Regional cooperation and increased international funding are therefore critical for enabling IOM to increase busing and provide Venezuelans with safe and dignified means of transportation.

66. Refugees International meeting with UN Women in Quito, Ecuador on March 12, 2019.

67. “Venezuelans Entering Ecuador Illegally Receive Help to reach Peru,” Reuters, August 22, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-migration-ecuador/venezuelans-entering-ecuador-illegally-receive-help-to-reach-peru-idUSKCN1L801Q>.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR ECUADOR'S RESPONSE TO THE VENEZUELAN INFLUX

The United Nations

UN agencies' responses to Venezuelan displacement have evolved alongside the Ecuadorian government's responses, building on longstanding work in assisting Colombian refugees over the past 30 years. UNHCR has relied on well-established relationships with local authorities and a small number of active NGOs. However, in recent years, these NGOs and UNHCR had reduced their presence in Ecuador and thus had to scale up operations again in response to the speed and scale of Venezuelan displacement.⁶⁸

Signaling that the Venezuelan displacement crisis was a high priority, in December 2018 the UN launched a regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) for refugees and migrants from Venezuela to better coordinate an operational response.⁶⁹ The Regional Coordination Platform (the Platform), jointly led by UNHCR and IOM, is a model never before used in the region. It encompasses a diverse range of actors and also takes the shape of a national platform within each host country. It is adapted to each country's national context, operating through local coordination mechanisms and with government support.

In Ecuador, this national platform operates as the Working Group on Refugees and Migrants (*Grupo de Trabajo sobre Personas Refugiadas y Migrantes*, or GTRM).⁷⁰

Representatives of participating NGOs and UN agencies told Refugees International that the model is functioning in Ecuador. However, some of them raised concerns about duplication of the existing UN humanitarian cluster system. Some NGO officials also noted the need for greater participation of both international and national NGOs in the GTRM, as well as local civil society organizations.⁷¹ UNHCR and IOM officials are working on new ways to improve coordination and information exchange, and accountability and transparency.

Another important role that UNHCR and IOM should continue to play through the Platform is supporting the Quito Process. Although Quito remains meaningful as a platform for discussion and regional engagement, diplomats, UN officials, and NGO leaders have expressed frustration over its failure to generate concrete change and tangible progress on the ground. UNHCR, IOM, and development actors can support the Quito Process by providing technical assistance to participating countries to create incentives for states to realize their commitments.

Donors

Donor states have underestimated the severity of the Venezuelan displacement crisis and have not yet fulfilled critical funding gaps in the national and international responses. In its 2019 appeal, UNHCR requested \$146

68. HIAS is one of the largest international NGOs operating in Ecuador. It provides services to refugees and advocates for their rights. It established its presence in Ecuador in 2003 and currently has offices in Cuenca, Esmeraldas, Guayaquil, Ibarra, Lago Agrio, Quito, San Lorenzo, Santo Domingo, and Tulcán. For more information, see <https://www.hias.org/ecuador>.

69. UNHCR, "Emergency Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela Launched," accessed June 5, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2018/12/5c136d834/emergency-plan-refugees-migrants-venezuela-launched.html>.

70. RV4, "The GTRM and the RMRP in Ecuador, Questions and Answers," accessed June 5, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ecuador/gtrm-and-rmrp-ecuador-questions-and-answers>.

71. Organizations operating in more than one participating country are eligible to participate in the Platform. Those that operate only a single country participate exclusively in the relevant national platform.

million to respond to the Venezuela situation. As of May 7, 2019, it was just 28 percent funded.⁷² The requirements for Ecuador alone stood at \$38 million but only 17 percent of that had been funded as of that date.⁷³ Funding requirements for the overall RMRP Response for Venezuelans (R4V), which includes the activities of more than two dozen UN agencies and NGOs, amount to \$737.6 million, of which just 21 percent was funded as of May 7, 2019.⁷⁴ For Ecuador alone, the requirement is \$117.3 million; only 17.4 percent had been covered at that time.

It is imperative that the international community immediately provide additional resources to fully fund the response. As one UNHCR representative working with the Platform put it simply, “Low funding means low implementation. You can have a coordination platform and response plan and numerous partners, but if the money doesn’t come in, you can’t go very far.”⁷⁵

Without additional resources, Ecuador will be unable to overcome the shortcomings described above—particularly as austerity cuts loom and Venezuela’s domestic crisis rages on. Regrettably, humanitarian and development workers expressed concern to Refugees International that developments inside Venezuela may divert resources and attention away from the crisis affecting host states as donors wait to see if an opportunity arises to deliver aid directly to Venezuela. However, even if the political situation inside Venezuela is resolved, the effects of displacement will continue for years to come; thus, immediate funding is needed.

In addition, even as the situation in Venezuela drives out those with more

acute needs, Ecuador’s evolution from a transit to a destination country means the response must provide both longer-term integration and development aid in addition to immediate humanitarian assistance. Donors must therefore increase their support to Ecuador through both bilateral assistance and additional contributions to the UN and development institutions such as the World Bank. In a welcome move, the World Bank Group (WBG) is developing a medium-term strategy for supporting Ecuador, which is expected to include budget support and investment project funding to respond to the increased demand.⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

Although some Venezuelans have found refuge in Ecuador, many others still struggle to access adequate assistance and protection. Despite Ecuador’s legal promises to provide access to health, education, food, and shelter, the situation for many Venezuelans in Ecuador is dire. They need access to basic assistance and livelihoods opportunities, and the chance to contribute to Ecuador as they rebuild their lives.

Ecuador’s welcome to Venezuelans is indeed fragile. The international community, which shares responsibility for Venezuelans in Ecuador, must provide additional support. Without it, Ecuador’s systems may be overwhelmed by a continuing influx of refugees and migrants, especially as many decide to stay rather than transit through Ecuador. As state capacity is stretched thin and austerity measures put in place, tensions between the host and migrant populations are likely to

72. UNHCR, “UNHCR Americas Monthly Report, April 2019,” May 16, 2019, accessed May 17, 2019, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/69527>.

73. UNHCR, “UNHCR Funding Update 2019, Ecuador,” accessed June 5, 2019, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Ecuador%20Funding%20Update%2007%20May%202019.pdf>.

74. R4V, “R4V Funding Situation – May 2019,” accessed June 5, 2019, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/69390>.

75. Refugees International meeting with UNHCR officials conducted remotely on March 21, 2019.

76. World Bank Group, “Beyond Borders.”

rise. The government of Ecuador must therefore remain steady in upholding the human rights of all, including refugees and migrants, as enshrined in its constitution. Moreover, any response must take a long-term view of the crisis. Indeed, to truly address the situation, Ecuador's actions must achieve in practice what its laws and policies have established in principle.

**REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL SENIOR
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ABOUT REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL

Refugees International advocates for lifesaving assistance and protection for displaced people and promotes solutions to displacement crises around the world. We are an independent organization and do not accept any government or UN funding.

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