

CASE STUDY

ECUADOR 2020–2022 / COMPLEX CRISIS

KEYWORDS: Host community integration, Local authorities engagement, Rental assistance, Security of tenure, Social cohesion

CRISIS	Response to the situation of refugees and migrants from Venezuela		
LOCATIONS	Guayas, El Oro, Manabi, Pichincha		
PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT	13,358 individuals - 7,533 individuals from organization 1 - 5,825 individuals from organization 2		
PROJECT OUTPUTS	Activities	Org. 1	Org. 2
	Repair and upgrade of collective shelter/housing	54	24
	Distribution of NFI	675 HH	--
	Cash-for-rent	800 HH	550 HH
	Training and grant support	404 HH	
DIRECT COST	USD 4,142 per HH (Organization 1)		
PROJECT COST	USD 7,300 per HH (Organization 1)		



PROJECT SUMMARY

The organization 1 designed a project with 3 components: 1) Protection - Connecting vulnerable families to the national protection network, supported with a multipurpose cash-based intervention (CBI) and non-food item (NFI) habitability kits; 2) Shelter - Providing shelter solutions by helping migrants and refugees move out of short-term shelters into long-term housing, building a trusted landlord network, and making infrastructure upgrades in single & multi-family housing units and community centers, and 3) Livelihood - generating capacities for self-employment and entrepreneurship.

The organization 2 designed a project focusing on infrastructure improvements of collective housing buildings (emphasizing durability and functionality), the establishment of new temporary accommodation centers, and the construction of community integration centers, aimed to provide spaces for workshops, learning activities, recreation, and protection(multi-sectors) present in 16 countries, coordinate the humanitarian response of the different actors in each country to the needs for shelter and NFIs.



Recreational area for children in a community centre.



Temporary accommodation centres.

CONTEXT

The Republic of Ecuador is in the northwestern region of South America, bordering Colombia to the north, Peru to the south and east, and the Pacific Ocean to the west. In 2019, the country registered an influx of more than 1,850,000 million Venezuelans, most of whom have transited through its territory toward third countries. It is estimated that approximately 417,285 of these individuals remained in Ecuador (R4V, June 2020). Approximately 70 percent of them were living in highly vulnerable conditions in spaces below the minimum habitability standards without access to infrastructure and basic services.

In March 2020, a border closure process began to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, a situation that evolved into social confinement measures and limitations on access to public space and to public services like health and education. This scenario also had an enormous impact on the livelihoods of the Venezuelan and Ecuadorian population, paralyzing informal income-generating activities to cover basic needs and the cost of rent for housing – adding to the strong impact in terms of mental health due to confinement and uncertainty about the future.

The pandemic exacerbated vulnerabilities caused by the difficulties of accessing decent housing and the absence of spaces for community integration that would support processes to strengthen protection networks and peaceful coexistence. The precarious conditions of accommodation had an impact on the increase in exposure to protection risks such as physical and sexual abuse, discrimination, exploitation, and human trafficking.

Despite difficulties, the Ecuadorian State managed to keep the Public Asylum System operating virtually. However, access barriers to housing were identified for comprehensive care and response to priority groups that were reflected in the continued assessments conducted in borders and main strategic cities on the South-North route. Refugees and migrants often found themselves constantly moving from one place to another in search of more affordable or better accommodation, as evictions increased significantly due to difficulties to pay the rent – leading to an increase in homelessness.

NATIONAL SHELTER STRATEGY

Needs assessments conducted in Colombia and Ecuador identified shelter as the second greatest need for refugees and migrants from Venezuela. The regional Venezuelan migrant response network (known as R4V), identified the reinforcement of temporary collective shelter options, rental assistance as an individual option, and Area-Based Approaches as its main priorities.

For more background information on the context of Venezuela, see the “Further Reading” section on Pg. 85.

The sector response and related procedures were harmonized to support a complementary multi sectoral approach. Protection was to be mainstreamed to contribute to the mitigation of risks, including evictions and gender based violence (GBV). The Shelter Sector continued to work alongside the WASH, Health, and Food Security sectors to ensure access to services and assistance including COVID-19 mitigation activities. Additionally, the link with the Support Spaces Working Group was strengthened to provide timely information regarding adequate shelter



Migrants crossing Tufiño Bridge, one of the main gateways between Colombia and Ecuador.

options available across the region. Close collaboration was ensured with the Integration Sector to encourage the transition from emergency assistance toward durable solutions. The Shelter Sector response strengthened collaboration with the regional Cash Working Group, prioritizing the Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) modality for rent, temporary accommodation in hotels, and the provision of essential household items.

PROJECT DESIGN

This case study reports on the experiences of two organizations in Ecuador, which worked on similar projects with the general objective of improving the well being and integration of the most vulnerable people in Ecuador – including Venezuelan migrants and refugees – for the benefit of all people. This was addressed through three specific components: shelter, protection, and livelihood:

The shelter component focused on improving the housing conditions of Venezuelan migrants and refugees through the identification and adaptation of spaces for decent and dignified housing. This component aimed to facilitate access to adequate long term housing to enhance the welfare of the participant population and support the process of integration. To achieve this, the project focused on five activities:

- The articulation of (collective) shelter exit strategies.
- The implementation of Cash Based Interventions (CBI).
- The identification and creation of safe accommodation maps.
- The facilitation of guidance on the rights to housing and tenants.
- The identification, improvement, and adaptation of family homes.
- Improving community infrastructure and equipping common and individual spaces.
- The distribution of non food items.

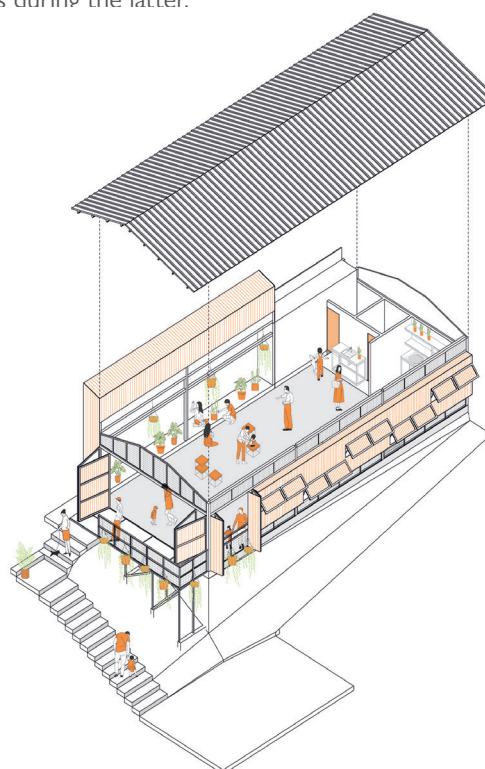
The protection component aimed to guarantee the fundamental rights of migrants and refugees, such as protection against eviction, exit strategies from collective centers, support for the homeless, the incorporation of project participant families into local protection networks, and the strengthening of community-based protection networks. These activities were approached from a gender perspective where women's unique needs were considered and prioritized.

The livelihood component aimed to strengthen economic support mechanisms through tools and training courses, with a focus on autonomy and the development of business schemes. It aimed to expand the income generation of participants through training and support for self-employment.

The project was designed with a comprehensive protection approach. Infrastructure adaptations through direct

implementation were complemented by direct assistance mechanisms through the delivery of cash and non-food item kits, training, and seed capital to generate means of self employment. This was done to enhance access to basic goods and services, aiming to enhance the sustainability of the intervention in the long term.

A two-year project was deemed necessary to better address the needs of full integration and economic independence of migrants. Integration can be a protracted process and most people encountered setbacks along the way – especially those with special needs. The project continued to assist participants throughout the first and second years of implementation while adding new participants during the latter.



The construction of community integration centers counted with differentiated adaptations for women, men, and children. The centers were equipped and furnished to accommodate various activities.

IMPLEMENTATION

The conceptual framework of Human Rights and Community Protection was holistically integrated with the project through the lens of Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) and other parameters proposed by the Sphere Manual.

YEAR 1

During the first year of the project, work teams in each territory were made up of three individuals: a protection officer, a social promoter, and an architect. The humanitarian assistance materialized through CVA, was initially delivered to homeowners as rent payments for the population of interest. Adaptations and interventions of infrastructure were directed primarily to multi family and single family housing spaces. Through the livelihood component, the project offered workshops and provided seed capital grants to participants who developed business plans, in addition to other activities that created opportunities for income generation.

YEAR 2

In the second year, a social worker was incorporated in each location to follow up on interventions carried out during Year 1. Regarding infrastructure, the implementation of friendly spaces for children and adolescents began in Year 2. These spaces promoted the right to education and play, generated safe spaces for the care of the little ones, and helped to optimize the time of adults responsible for their care. During the second year, interventions in Community Development Centers were addressed with greater force – generating greater impact on community well-being, starting from spaces already active in vulnerable areas of each city and improving homes within the parameters of decent housing.

Additionally, work continued within the protection component through the direct provision of assistance and the referral of cases to/from other institutions. Activities under the livelihood component consisted of the continuation of employability activities, training, the delivery of seed capital, and support for entrepreneurs.



Friendly space for children in the multifamily Callejón Solís in Portoviejo, Manabí.

TARGETING

The criteria for potential housing space and household selection were based on studies carried out by various organizations and the field experience of personnel who were working in the territory.

From the perspective of shelter, the selection criteria for dwellings were:

- Low cost rental living spaces managed, generally, by the owner, and that were rented long-term by vulnerable families.
- The owner or person in charge expressed sensitivity towards migratory issues and towards the population of interest and who showed a commitment to take part in the project.
- Minimum conditions of shelter and safety (without structural risk and with basic services).
- No evidence of rights violation for the tenants.

From the social point of view, the criteria for the selection of families were:

- Single-parent home with the presence of one or more family members with catastrophic or chronic illnesses.
- Single-parent household with the presence of one or more children or adolescents.
- Pregnant or lactating women.
- Single/widow women.
- Persons with disabilities.
- LGBTQI+ individuals.
- The elderly.
- Victims of trafficking, persecution, or torture.
- GBV survivors.
- Victims of domestic violence.
- Homeless individuals.
- Those in informal or formal temporary shelter.
- Those at imminent risk of eviction.



The making of a vegetable patch by community work with the people of the multifamily Carcelén in Quito, Pichincha, Manabí.

For the selection of dwellings and families, the intersectionality and sum of vulnerability factors were considered, and interviews were conducted by the social team to reduce possible risks and identify specific needs.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Neighborhoods with lower rental costs – and therefore the most common for vulnerable Venezuelan families – often have fewer public services and the community plays a key role in ensuring people’s safety. To enhance community engagement efforts, support was provided by neighborhood leaders who helped facilitate access to the selected project locations. Without these support networks, it would have been impossible to complete activities.

The community protection strategy focused on the continuous monitoring and coordination of activities within dwellings and community centers, also contributing to the visibility and presence of other organizations of the protection network and local governments in each city.

COORDINATION

Coordination of this project was carried out at various levels. Internally, a coordinator was appointed for each of the three components (shelter, protection, and livelihoods). In the field, a project manager was appointed to coordinate the project with key actors (such as NGOs and government stakeholders) in response to the Venezuelan situation. This distribution helped to maintain a close accompaniment of activities by the field teams – optimizing resources, managing appropriate solutions, and planning the indicators in an organized manner.

Additional coordination mechanisms took place in specific sub-localities considering that the work and protection tables for refugees and migrants at the national level are present in each locality of the project.



Workshops on participatory design and social construction of the habitat.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Due to the complexity of each territory, particular challenges were identified in each of the provinces. A summary of the most relevant can be found below:

Main challenges	Responses
Recurrent emergency dynamics at the border	Constant monitoring and evaluation of implementation modalities
The ability to call people of interest to participate in workshops was limited if there were no material resources to distribute	Planning of the delivery of humanitarian assistance with material resources was coordinated with other institutions to carry out workshops jointly
WASH infrastructure in the dwellings was old and deteriorated	Renovations were conducted within WASH infrastructure
Access to quality water was limited	Provision of water purification devices. Talks and workshops on good use and management of water
Waste management was inefficient	Talks and workshops on waste management
Structural problems in homes and community centers	Structural reinforcements
Humidity and fungi due to lack ventilation or construction defects	Improvement of ventilation and sanitation of walls and ceilings
Lack of sustainability in the livelihoods component	Training and job placement supported by other organizations were reinforced
Gray water disposal	Interventions in sanitation infrastructure
Overcrowding caused by poor spatial distribution	Spatial redistribution
Very large territory	Strengthen and support the team with a greater number of people, coordinated with the team of other projects from the organization
Poor electrical installations	Improvement of electrical installations

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Gender was the primary cross-cutting issue in project design and implementation. Across infrastructure, protection, and livelihood activities the specific needs of women and girls were considered at every stage.

Within infrastructure interventions, privacy considerations through the repair, replacement, and/or installation of doors in private spaces and sanitary batteries were prioritized. Bathrooms in common areas were also sectored by gender. Spaces shared between several family nuclei were separated by internal divisions.

The asymmetric distribution of childcare efforts increased responsibilities and decreased free and productive time, especially for women. The target population lived in homes that, prior to the intervention, did not have friendly spaces set up for educational and recreational activities aimed at children and adolescents. From a shelter component, suitable and safe spaces were created for this social group where they could access their right to play and multiple learnings that affect their comprehensive development. For this, safe spaces for children's games were identified within homes for children and adolescents. It was verified that the spaces did not have any infrastructure risk and that they were accessible to all the people who lived in the home. The project also set up small booksellers that allowed the provision of literature, encyclopedias, and reference books to children and adolescents

OUTCOMES AND WIDER IMPACTS

Among the most important outcomes of the project were:

- In relation to housing access for one of the projects, 126 refugees and migrants were supported with the improvement of their homes, while 444 families benefitted from legal advice on accommodation and housing options. Additionally, 832 families received rent support for the first time and 827 families received rent support recurrently. Of the second project, a total of 615 families (2,422 individuals) were relocated into safe housing units and granted cash-for-rent.
- A total of 686 families improved the conditions of their homes through the reception of non food item (NFI) kits.
- Approximately 97 percent of families who received cash and in kind support indicated in post-activity monitoring that they successfully met their family's basic needs.
- A total of 36 community development workshops were held.
- Concerning infrastructure interventions: six community centers (common space), three informal shelters, and 45 multi family homes were upgraded. Additionally, 61 safe spaces for children and adolescents were designed and built within care network plans. The implementing organization also provided 197 tablets and 499 sim cards for connectivity and enhanced access to education.
- Seventy seven families were relocated from informal shelters to safe dignified and secured accommodations previously assessed and mapped and that have benefited from program improvements and upgrades.
- Reactivation of 24 neighborhood committees using a strengthening process in coordination with local organizations and governments.
- A total of 71 WASH plans were implemented and 68 COVID 19 prevention and hygiene plans were completed. Additionally, 1,011 bio health and hygiene kits were distributed.
- Access to safe water was improved for 1,907 individuals.

- Workshops to raise awareness of GBV were held in shelter spaces nationwide as a strategy for GBV prevention programs – having implemented 358 GBV programs to date.
- Within the livelihood component, 216 people completed skills and entrepreneurship training and received certifications, 192 business plans were assessed and 60 seed capital grants were provided.

Wider impacts related to the project include:

- The organization's habitability strategy was developed together with the main Shelter actors in Ecuador in 2019. The project provided improvements to the methodology, integrating income-generating activities for the supported families.
- The good practices and improvement of housing for the population in human mobility that emerged from this project were presented to the Ministry of Housing of Ecuador as an option to cover housing needs based on a methodology of housing improvement and protection. This allowed the organization to engage in meetings for the construction of the country's new public housing and urban planning policy, where much emphasis was placed on considering the specific needs of the population in terms of human mobility.
- This project also showed that it is important to cover the wider scale needs in terms of habitability and access to decent housing through infrastructure improvements, but with a focus on facilitating income-generating activities in the house. This has led the organization to propose an improved habitability strategy based on productivity, focused primarily on mothers who are heads of households who cannot leave their homes because they do not have a support network to care for their children. The organization is currently carrying out this strategy in another project.



Within the livelihoods component, participants completed skills and entrepreneurship training.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

- ✓ **An effective needs survey system** contributed to tailoring the emergency response to the assessed needs in each territory.
- ✓ **A participatory process was promoted** to strengthen space acquisition. This enhanced the sustainability of family stability to inhabit spaces and increase a sense of belonging and care for the space in the long-term.
- ✓ **Community and common spaces were strengthened** to support peaceful coexistence and integration between project participants and the host communities.
- ✓ **The protection and livelihood approaches complemented shelter programming** and enhanced sustainability from a more comprehensive and effective long-term sphere.
- ✓ **The assistance through MPCA** was calculated to exceed the cost of the rent, so that the project participants could also cover food, health, and education expenses.
- ✓ **Through this project, the existence of informal shelters was revealed**, which are hostel type spaces with costs of between USD 5–10 per night which have serious protection problems because they are frequently used as spaces of sexual exploitation. Newly arrived families with small children are often accommodated in these spaces. A continuous monitoring and follow up mechanism was established together with partners to provide information and services within these spaces in the province of Pichincha, which allowed some families to better understand the context and their options and ended up being relocated to safe spaces.



The community orchestra using the main room after the infrastructure intervention of the Art Center Picoazá in Portoviejo, Manabí.



FURTHER READING ON SHELTER PROJECTS

On Venezuela: [A.10 / VENEZUELA 2020;](#) [A.11 / VENEZUELA \(REGIONAL\) 2019-2023](#)

On coordination and partnerships: [A.19 / IRAQ 2019–2021;](#) [A.11 / BANGLADESH 2018–2021](#)

On social cohesion: [A.32 / TURKEY 2017–2018](#)

WEAKNESSES

- × **Inadequate staff planning by the executing agency led to delays** in the identification and selection of homes to be repaired and subsequent disagreements with owners. The technical shelter component should also have been involved during the first contact with homeowners and project participants.
- × **Within the livelihood component, it has been a challenge to enhance sustainability** within enterprises considering that the monitoring of each case ends with the project.
- × **It was a challenge to achieve sustainability among families** so that they could generate income once the CBI payment deadline is over, especially for the families that were taken out of the shelters with this payment. Exit strategies in that regard should be included in the design of the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

On the implementation of similar projects moving forward, the organizations have identified four main points:

- Implementing organizations should be highly selective concerning potential landlords to work with. This should be done to ensure that landlords will not mistreat the target participants after improvements have been made to their properties.
- An individualized approach in each territory should be followed from the beginning, understanding that the dynamics are different in each place.
- Accountability system and protocols should be prioritized. At times, the implementing entity's accountability to the project participant population was weak, and they did not know how to communicate with the implementing organization or submit a complaint. A new comprehensive protocol was designed that will be implemented going forward.
- Livelihood programming should be connected more closely with shelter assistance, to take advantage of the productive activities that occasionally may emerge naturally from neighbors in proximity and to enhance options for income generation. Through this, participants can pay the rent after project support ends. In the next phase of the project, “productive housing” activities will be conducted by providing USD 2,500 grants for training and equipment in ten multifamily housing units.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Multiple feedback channels should be opened with the participants as the project covered different aspects within the assistance. For example, for staff in the territory, it was important to establish lines of communication with individuals who use the same technical language in the search for solutions to unexpected problems.
- Within the context of Ecuador, there must be separate implementation strategies for each territory and not a general one, considering that the needs of each locality vary. For livelihoods, this relates to an openness to the different skills/trades that are in demand and the opportunities for training in each place.
- Inter institutional work is key to articulating and strengthening protection networks. Without a mapping of stakeholders linked to the project, aid to project participant families is inefficient.
- There are risks involved in outsourcing livelihood training because trainers might not know the target population well and might not be flexible to their unique needs.
- Implementing building upgrades from a gender perspective has been essential in the building of care spaces, especially spaces for children and adolescents.
- It is essential to understand and streamline the connectedness between habitability and protection to provide a more comprehensive response to many of the identified needs.
- A margin of adaptability within the project to different scenarios was essential for the success of the activities.
- This project showed that the primary selection criteria for a selected dwelling to function as a long-term safe space for assisted families revolves around landlords who show sensitivity and empathy towards the families' situation. In some dwellings where this selection criterion was not strict, families were evicted once the adjustments were completed. This situation did not happen as the project progressed because the implementing organization was more selective with owners and dwellings.
- The project provided several important lessons including the importance of building a strong relationship with host-community landlords in the shelter response, the potential of multipurpose cash transfers as a protection practice when it is properly monitored for ensuring the intended outcomes, and the increasing need to short stay shelters for new arrivals or people in transit.



The improvements implemented in the collective housing included recreational spaces for children.