

# Strengthening local capacities for peace and development through a human security approach in the northern border zone of Ecuador



UN Trust Fund for Human Security



## Fast Facts

**Country:** Ecuador

**Duration:** October 2013 to March 2017

**Implementing UN Agencies:** UNDP; UNHCR; UNICEF; UNESCO; WFP; UNFPA

**Other Implementing Partners:** Ministry for Coordination of Security; SECAP; INFA; Ministries of Health and Education, local Governments; CSOs

**Budget:** \$3,374,413 (UNTFHS: \$2,041,832; Pooled Funding: 1,332,581)

**Key Words:** Conflict prevention; social cohesion; human trafficking; youth; women; education; health care

## BACKGROUND

In recent years, security along Ecuador's border with Colombia has become increasingly complex. While Colombia has made significant progress in reducing conflict, some illegal armed groups and criminal networks have shifted their activities to border regions, occasionally crossing into Ecuador. As a result, the northern provinces of Esmeraldas and Sucumbios have experienced higher levels of crime and armed violence. Issues such as youth recruitment into illegal groups, human trafficking, and the illicit trade of drugs and weapons have intensified, further straining communities already facing economic and social challenges. For many years, northern Ecuador has grappled with poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, and limited access to essential services

such as health care and education. Additionally, land use disputes between Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian communities have contributed to tensions in the region. Recognizing the need for a holistic response to these challenges, Ecuador integrated the human security approach into its 2008 constitution and national development plan. This programme serves as a key step in realizing those commitments. By bringing together government institutions, the United Nations system, civil society organizations, and affected communities, it fosters collaborative solutions to address the interconnected challenges along Ecuador's northern border. Through this approach, the programme aims to enhance security, strengthen local resilience, and improve the well-being of the region's communities.

## PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the programme is to strengthen peace and development through a human security approach in the northern border region of Ecuador. To achieve this goal, the programme aims to: (i) strengthen local capacities and livelihood opportunities for the

prevention of human trafficking and the forced recruitment of youth by illegal armed groups; (ii) promote local capabilities for social integration and peaceful resolution of conflicts; and (iii) increase access to health care and education services.

### BENEFICIARIES

An estimated 13,000 of the most vulnerable people in the provinces of Esmeraldas and Sucumbios directly benefit from the programme's activities. This includes some 2,000 young people, almost 5,000 Afro-Ecuadorians, 2,500 indigenous people and around 4,000 refugees fleeing violence on the

Colombian side of the border. The programme indirectly benefits around 200,000 people in these provinces, including approximately 96,000 women and girls. Among them, about 38,500 are in need of international protection, and 23,400 belong to indigenous populations.



## APPLYING THE HUMAN SECURITY APPROACH

Addressing violence, poverty, and fragile social cohesion in northern Ecuador requires a proactive, sustainable approach. Rather than short-term solutions, this programme is built on a preventive framework developed with local communities, civil society, and national and regional governments. By targeting the root causes of insecurity, it aims to foster long-term stability and resilience.

To reduce recurring violence and crime, the programme strengthens local authorities and civil society to promote inclusive economic development and a culture of peace. A key component is an integrated protection and empowerment strategy aligning national policies with local realities. For example, to prevent human trafficking and youth recruitment by illegal groups, law enforcement, judicial officials, health workers, and educators receive training on victim protection, assistance, and

monitoring. Meanwhile, vulnerable groups—particularly women, youth, and refugees—gain access to vocational training and small business support, providing sustainable livelihoods. Young people also engage in community peacebuilding, complemented by training for provincial officials and security personnel in conflict-sensitive planning.

The human security approach offers a practical, comprehensive framework to address these interconnected challenges through collaboration and partnerships. By establishing joint coordination networks between the United Nations, government ministries, and civil society, the programme promotes a cohesive, multi-sectoral response. Above all, ensuring local communities shape solutions helps create conditions where vulnerable populations are better equipped to achieve safety, stability, and opportunity.

### ACHIEVEMENTS

(i) The programme successfully established a robust protection and empowerment network in the Northern Border Zone, uniting 120 institutions and 98 civil society organizations. This coalition played a vital role in enforcing policies that drive local economic development, safeguard human rights, and promote a *Culture of Peace*. By enhancing local management capacities, the network effectively addressed key challenges such as gender-based violence (GBV), human trafficking, sexual and reproductive rights, and maternal and neonatal health. It also contributed to improved livelihoods, access to education, and conflict-sensitive planning.

(ii) Gender equality and economic empowerment were central to the programme's success. Over 8,000 individuals were trained on sexual and reproductive

rights and GBV, raising awareness and fostering resilience across communities. Additionally, 947 women, youth, and refugees—many of whom had experienced violence—received income-generating support, directly benefitting over 1,000 families and improving their economic stability.

(iii) The programme advanced conflict resolution and promoted peace by training over 4,100 individuals, including 400 state officials, 200 civil society members, and 3,500 young people, in peaceful dispute resolution and fostering a *Culture of Peace*. Local media were also equipped with knowledge on human rights and human security to amplify outreach and engagement. Refugees received materials on their

rights and responsibilities, strengthening social cohesion and fostering peaceful coexistence.

(iv) Maternal health outcomes improved significantly through the establishment of five Basic Obstetric and Neonatal Care systems, which contributed to reducing maternal mortality rates in target areas. By connecting local governments, communities, traditional birth attendants, NGOs, and health committees, the programme delivered integrated and culturally sensitive healthcare services. This approach ensured that previously excluded communities accessed essential maternal care, enhancing their overall health security.

(v) The programme facilitated the inclusion of approximately 2,000 children and adolescents into the formal education system by training teachers, equipping civil servants, and improving school environments. By addressing barriers to education, particularly for marginalized groups, the initiative increased access and opportunity. This achievement was recognized by Ecuador's Ministry of Education, which adopted the programme's educational framework as a national public policy, amplifying its impact on education and community development.