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Social Protection
in contexts of **Fragility & Forced Displacement**

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ECUADOR

"But with hope and perseverance you manage to move forward."

Natalia



TESTIMONIES

"The situation became excruciating, there was nothing else we could do. One day, we ran away to save our lives. Starting over in a new country is always difficult, you encounter many obstacles on your way. But with hope and perseverance you manage to move forward. I want the other refugees to know the benefits of having a bank account. It will improve their lives."

Natalia*, 23, Colombian refugee, Graduation Model beneficiary

After fleeing her hometown of Nariño, Colombia, 7 years ago when her father was threatened, Natalia arrived in Ecuador and received assistance through the UNHCR (with support from WFP) Graduation Model.



"From the nutritional workshops (offered by WFP) I learned to cook Quinoa and mix ingredients to cook something more nutritional [and] I can keep my child with me while selling clothes from a catalogue. The graduation model helped me develop my business".

Lina Rebolledo, Colombian refugee and single mother, Graduation Model beneficiary



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Ecuador is a middle-income country with stable democratic institutions and a legal system that provides basic services, including free public health and education, to citizens and non-citizens. It hosts the largest refugee population in South America, mostly Colombians, many of whom have developed strong roots in the country. Despite the peace agreement in Colombia, Colombians still seek asylum in Ecuador. Up to 6,500 asylum seekers are expected in 2018, including an increasing number from Venezuela and the Middle East. Refugees have the right to work but, like many Ecuadorians amidst a serious economic crisis, lack adequate employment. Local integration is government policy and embedded in legislation: the rights of refugees and their access to basic services are guaranteed by the constitution and the Human Mobility Law.

GOVERNMENT VISION: COACHING AND CO-RESPONSIBILITY- NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2017-2021)

The Family Coaching Program (*Servicio de Acompañamiento Familiar*) run by the Ministry of Social and Economic Inclusion (MIES) is similar to the Graduation model and is based on principles of community, economic inclusion and co-responsibility. Through cash transfers, intensive coaching (i.e. home visits, psychosocial support) and building community networks, beneficiaries are lifted out of extreme poverty. Co-responsibility envisions social protection as resulting from a legal and ethical covenant among family, community and the state. As such financial assistance is conditional and requires participation in reproductive health programs and compulsory school attendance (children under 15 are explicitly excluded from any type of work).

The Family Coaching Program operationalizes Ecuador's National Development Plan¹ (2017-2021) according to the Plan's principles ("rights for all, always; more society, better state") and objectives ("a dignified life with equal opportunities for all; and a participatory society with a state at the service of the community").

¹ Also known as the National Wellbeing Plan.



PROMISING PRACTICES FROM PAST EXPERIENCES

- In April 2016 Ecuador's coast was hit by an earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale. At least 671 people died, and more than a million were affected; some 50,000 houses were damaged and more than 10,000 people were sheltered. In addition to providing shelter, the government, through MIES and in coordination with international actors, launched a cash transfer social protection scheme to meet basic needs (e.g. rent and food) of the affected population in the emergency phase and, later on, supporting economic and social reintegration. The program reached a total of 63,341 affected families, including 24 refugee families. (The number of refugee families in the affected area was small).
- Ecuador is one of few countries in which the Graduation Model, which hails from the world of development assistance, is applied in a refugee situation. It aims to 'graduate' people out of poverty, raising them above the poverty line; in the case of refugees, the model emphasizes self-reliance as a step towards local integration. The model consists of a sequenced set of interventions that include consumption support, skills training, mentoring, financial training (including the opening of a bank account) and inclusion in safety networks within the community. In the Ecuadorian context, families 'graduate' according to 4 criteria that can be adapted based on situation: 1) eating at least three nutritious meals a day; 2) family income rises above the poverty line; 3) 5% of income is in savings in a bank account; and 4) beneficiaries are members of a community/social network (e.g. a church organization).
- Currently, the UNHCR (with the support of WFP food assistance) Graduation Model supports 1,810 families (6,438 individuals). Of these families, 162 have completed the 12 months of consumption support and are on their way to graduation within the next 3 months, with 59% having completed all 4 graduation criteria.

MAIN CHALLENGE(S) AHEAD AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

- Constitutional norms and legislation (in particular the new Human Mobility Law) needs to be put in practice. While refugees can work and have access to basic service in Ecuador, they face bureaucratic obstacles when applying for an ID document, which would give them access to a wide array of rights and services, on par with Ecuadorians. The significance of obtaining such a document, and the underlying agreement of the Ecuadorian Government to allow this, cannot be overstated.
- UNHCR's goal in Ecuador is to gradually and responsibly disengage from direct assistance while handing over to existing public services and programs, in line with Ecuador's legal framework. In the longer term, Ecuador has expressed willingness to include refugees in similar condition in state programs for the poor, but the state lacks the necessary resources amidst an economic downturn. President Lenin Moreno's planned structural reforms to improve the economy need time to take effect. Meanwhile, structural and budgetary support of donors is essential.



USEFUL RESOURCES

[Programa de Acompañamiento Familiar](#)

[UNHCR and partner Poverty graduation and refugees newsletter](#)

[WFP earthquake support](#)

[WFP study on social protection](#)