

CASE STUDY: Manta, Manabí province, Ecuador

Fostering Stronger Communities: From Emergency Needs to Long-term Inclusion

From the Global Programme on Making Migration Work for Sustainable Development (M4SD)

KEY WORDS: HDPN, displacement, basic needs, empowerment, social cohesion, inclusion, employment, entrepreneurship

MEET ESTRELLA

Estrella¹ is in her mid-20s. Heavily pregnant with her third child, she left Venezuela for Ecuador a year and a half ago to escape an abusive family situation, insecurity, a lack of food, medicine and essential services. The journey was not easy and she gave birth to her baby in the truck on the way. Now Estrella and the four children whom she cares for, including her own small toddlers and her nephew whom she brought with her, live in Manta, Ecuador. Manta² was hit hard by the 2016 earthquake and is still recovering from the devastating impact on the community and economy. However, as a coastal beach town in the province of Manabí, it has a thriving tourism industry and is a very popular destination for new arrivals to Ecuador. Manta welcomes many people on the move: tourists, retirees, displaced Venezuelans, Ecuadorians who are returning after living abroad and others. As one of these newcomers, Estrella is passionate about following her dreams. She said, "My vision is to have my own restaurant and bakery. My current pastry business is named after my children. My dream wasn't actually to have four children but to own a business. So here we are!" She maintains her sense of humor despite her difficult situation. Estrella is not making enough money on her single income to pay for her family's rent in Manta. She has temporarily found shelter with some local Ecuadorian families.



THE SOLUTION?

For people to thrive and provide for themselves and their families, there is a need to move quickly from humanitarian aid to mid- and long-term planning through more integral and holistic approaches. The provincial and municipal governments of Manabí and Manta have joined forces with community and international organizations through initiatives such as M4SD to bridge the gap between aid dependence and empowerment by supporting people on a clear pathway towards sustainable livelihoods.³



“The Municipality of Manta supports the promotion and protection of rights of people in human mobility and the local community, to meet their basic needs, exercise their rights and become integrated socially and in the labour-market. In doing so, it takes advantage of their high potential and capabilities, while contributing to social cohesion and sustainable development of the city.”

Municipality of Manta

¹ Name and identifying factors have been anonymized to protect the identity of the individuals mentioned.

² This approach applies to Manta, the Manabí province, Santo Domingo and other cities and provinces throughout Ecuador.

³ Because activities between projects have sought good synergies to maximize the use of funding and to create whole-of-community engagement, not all the activities here were exclusively funded by the M4SD Programme.

HOW IS IT DONE?

A person is supported to access any of the following areas at any time depending on their personal needs and situation, ensuring that the HDPN is applied:

LONG-TERM EMPOWERMENT AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

Simultaneously, efforts are in place to reduce barriers and create a more welcoming, inclusive community where everyone is welcome and all can thrive, such as:

Migrants and displaced people often struggle to find jobs because local employers do not know very much about newcomers. M4SD-supported workshops taught by lawyers and HR professionals **trained nearly 60 individuals from 20+ companies in Manta and Portoviejo** to demystify migration and explain the benefits of, reasons why and processes for hiring migrants and displaced people.

With technical assistance from M4SD, Manta and Manabí have approved **human mobility “ordenanzas” (local laws or regulations)** which pave the way for a more sustainable implementation of the HDPN at the local level and aim to attain socioeconomic integration of migrants and refugees.

Municipal and provincial governments work together with the **national government, public enterprises, private sector** and **civil society organizations** with the support of the **UN Migration Agency (IOM)** and the **UN Development Agency (UNDP)**. Referral systems are in place to ensure that people in need have access to health, education, regularization, justice and protection. Municipal, **provincial and national institutions** deepen complementarity and strengthen each other's abilities by sharing knowledge.

MID-TERM SUPPORT

As basic needs are being met, people are supported to build a reliable source of income and are empowered to access the full range of opportunities in their communities alongside their neighbours such as:

Certification and training promote new opportunities to support employment and enhancing income from small businesses. The provincial government trained 391 people (60% migrants, 40% Ecuadorians) in courses across three cities with M4SD and PRM support.⁴ The courses focused on technical skills (food handling, electrical systems, phone and computer repair; business administration and bicycle repair) and soft skills (CV writing, making a business plan, accounting, etc.). Students received certifications from a local university, with in-person training complemented by e-courses and online tests.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS

Whenever individuals are not able to meet their basic needs, they can reach out to municipal and provincial services, as well as local and international actors, to provide immediate support.



⁴ In one of these cities (Manta), 184 people were supported by M4SD funds specifically. This is a good example of provincial and national governments creating synergies between different projects and initiatives to support more people more sustainably.

⁵ There is also a new online marketplace and municipal job bank in Santo Domingo, another Ecuadorian city. Data here is only for Manabí.

SUCCESS FACTORS

TIP 1: Connect emergency and non-emergency services. Connecting emergency humanitarian response interventions with longer-term inclusion initiatives ensures that immediate needs of migrant and refugee populations are covered while complementarily working towards sustainable and people-centered solutions. Humanitarian, lifesaving aid should not be the result, but rather a step towards a larger goal: long-term development, where *each person lives well*. As an IOM staff member, Adriana Garces said, "If basic needs are not covered, we can't move onto socioeconomic inclusion." This is one good example of how UN Agencies can [work across the Humanitarian-Peace-Development Nexus \(HDPN\)](#) in practice.

TIP 2: More options, more accessibility. Providing multiple options for accessing services and training courses (virtual, physical, hybrid) can enable service providers to reach everyone who needs support. In Ecuador, organizations like Manabí Produce, IOM and UNDP provide both in-person and virtual training courses through an app that houses all five courses (developed within the M4SD programme). At the municipal level, Manta Capacita also maintains a wide range of courses. Virtual solutions offer more options for people who cannot access physical training centres due to various reasons, such as work or family obligations or disabilities. Manta's municipal government (with M4SD support) has also created an online job bank and marketplace for entrepreneurs to sell their products. However, physical spaces like local markets and stores are still essential for connecting people and creating communities. Manabí's provincial markets enable migrant entrepreneurs to set up stands to sell their products, and a local store in the heart of Portoviejo sells locally made crafts, coffee, chocolate and more. These diverse opportunities provide a space for everyone to engage on their own terms, making opportunities more equitable.

TIP 3: It is not enough to provide a service; you need to make it accessible. If any initiative is going to meaningfully empower and bolster people's well-being, it must look at the entire system of challenges and address them simultaneously. Services should consider gender-specific needs and barriers so that women and people of all genders can participate. For example, people who attend training and CV writing courses can attend these without worrying about daily needs: IOM and UNDP pay for bus passes so they can arrive and leave safely, provide childcare and homework help during courses so people can bring their children and offer food and snacks. It is also important to pair individual support with wider efforts to destigmatize migrants and refugees, to create strong social bonds and restore trust and to demystify the migration journey.

TIP 4: Address systemic barriers to empowerment. Multisectoral and gradual responses to systemic challenges are needed to ensure individuals can make their new homes in host communities. In Ecuador, efforts rooted in human rights and with people-centered approaches improve the conditions for migrants' and refugees' inclusion within social and economic systems. For example, the government's regularization campaigns enable displaced people to fully exercise their rights and to apply for any job on equal footing with Ecuadorians, recognizing their contributions to society and the economy. However, other elements such as degree recognition remain an obstacle for highly educated and experienced Venezuelans (e.g. doctors, lawyers, administrative professionals) who still face difficulties to get their international degrees validated by the national degree repository, even when they do have a regular migratory status. Adjusting systems and identifying institutional solutions is crucial to address chronic under- and unemployment by enabling newcomers to use their talent.

These activities have made life better for Estrella and her neighbours in Manta

Estrella is taking steps towards a better future. IOM provided her with a housing stipend to cover three months' rent so she and her children had a home (SDG 11, sustainable cities and communities).



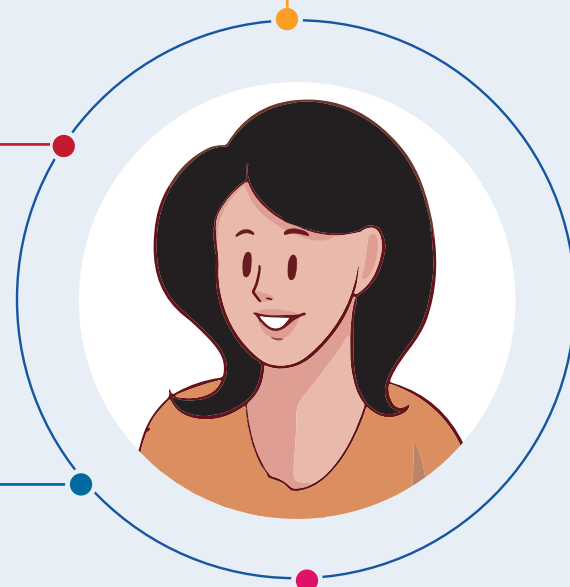
She is currently working in a restaurant selling desserts, but hopes to open her own catering business based on the knowledge she gained within the M4SD training. From this, she has learned everything from food safety to business marketing and is working to put this knowledge into practice (SDG 8, decent work and economic growth).



Estrella received support to apply for regularization so that she and her children have the right paperwork to enable her to obtain full-time employment or open her own business and access a wider range of services (SDG 16, peace, justice and strong institutions).



"I reinvented myself. My children give me strength," says Estrella. When asked what one word she would use to talk about her experience, she said, "Resilience. We take the best from the situation" (SDG 10, reduced inequalities).



These activities are made possible through the partnership established between local governments such as Manabi and Manta, public enterprises such as Manabi Produce and the [IOM-UNDP Global Programme on Making Migration Work for Sustainable Development \(M4SD\)](#), a global programme operating in 11 countries from 2019-2023. The Programme is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). [Read more about Ecuador's activities.](#)

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