

Refugees' Radio Broadcast “El Río Habla”

Public Attitudes towards Refugees – Security – Local Integration

UNHCR has supported the creation of “El Río Habla”, a radio slot dedicated to and run by refugees residing in the Sucumbios and Orellana provinces, in which they talk about their experiences prior and during their stay in Ecuador.



UNHCR - 2010

Background

Ecuador has the largest refugee population in Latin America, mainly comprising Colombians. As of June 2011, the Ecuadorian Government had recognized some 54,500 refugees, some 60 per cent of them living in urban areas. The remainder live close to the border in underdeveloped, isolated parts of the country with limited infrastructure and services. This renders refugees – particularly women – vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation. SGBV rates in the border area are higher than the national average and refugee women and girls are at higher risk due to their marginalized status.

UNHCR has opted for the use of radio broadcasting to address the situation of refugees living in isolated border areas.

Location Sucumbios and Orellana Provinces, Ecuador

Time & Duration January 2009 - present

Population Groups Refugees

Actors UNHCR and Radio Sucumbios (local radio station)



Description

To raise awareness among Ecuadorians about the thousands of refugees living in their country, particularly those close to the border with Colombia, UNHCR has supported the creation of “El Río Habla”, a radio slot dedicated to and run by refugees. Refugees come to the radio station and broadcast their stories, their experiences, their situation in Ecuador and their lives in general. In this way, refugees can reach a large number of people and sensitize them about what it means to be a refugee, and about the risks they are exposed to in the border area, particularly SGBV. Persons from the local community also participate in radio broadcasts.

- Faced with public pressure that has arisen due to the broadcasting of “El Río Habla”, Ecuadorian authorities seem more responsive to the demands of refugees and host communities residing in border provinces.

Constraints

The constant rain and the bad state of the roads in the border areas of the Sucumbios and Orellana provinces sometimes make it impossible for refugees to reach the radio station facilities.

Lessons Learned/Keys to Success

Host communities and refugees may be exposed to similar protection risks. Bringing them together to join their efforts in demanding state action may be more effective in capturing authorities’ attention. Moreover, it may create a sense of commonality amongst locals and refugees, which will likely foster better integration.

Steps to Implementation

- UNHCR met with refugees and local community members to discuss what their main concerns were.
- Based on the discussion’s conclusion (e.g. Ecuadorians are generally unaware of the precarious situation of refugees in isolated parts of the country) UNHCR decided to negotiate a radio slot for refugees with Radio Sucumbios, the local radio station.
- UNHCR and refugees worked jointly in designing the contents of radio broadcasts.
- Refugees – and occasionally local community members – went to Radio Sucumbios to broadcast their programmes. There they were assisted by the staff on the technicalities of radio broadcasting.

Impact and Results

- The problems faced by refugees in the border provinces with Colombia are now better known among Ecuadorians and their protection needs have been increasingly addressed.

