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## **Entrepreneurial Migrants: Educommunication Model for Socioeconomic Inclusion in Northern Ecuador**

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### **Abstract**

*The number of people in a condition of human mobility that use Ecuador as a destination has increased rapidly from 2017 to the present. The populations of the provinces of Imbabura and Carchi in the north of the country perceive this increase immediately because they are border provinces with Colombia and the main entry of Venezuelan, Colombian and other nationalities migrants and refugees. This research aims to explore the entrepreneurial characteristics of migrants in the cities of Tulcán and Ibarra in order to propose an educommunication model for the training of migrants based on the model proposed by Ruiz (2021). For this purpose, surveys show a young migrant population with families who have developed enterprises to improve living conditions according to competencies developed mainly in the service sector. The proposed model to train entrepreneurs allows the incorporation of these characteristics of migrants and opens the possibility of improving entrepreneurial networks in the north of Ecuador and favoring the integration process of the population in conditions of human mobility with the receiving population.*

**Keywords:** Migration, Entrepreneurship, Educommunication.

### **Introduction**

Migrations are a response of individuals or groups of individuals to the need for resources or in response to external pressure from a specific political or social force (McLeman & Hunter, 2010). The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019) defines a migrant as a person who moves away from their usual residence, either within a country or across an international border, on a temporary or permanent basis.

Human mobilization has increased significantly since 2000, in which 173 million migrants were recorded globally, then in 2017, 258 million mobilized were reported (UN, 2018).

Despite the belief that developed countries are the main recipients of this migration, 84% of migrants are hosted by developing countries (UN, 2018), and Ecuador has historically been a recipient country for refugees and migrants.

Since 1989, the Ecuadorian State has granted asylum to more than 70,000 people, 96.9% Colombian nationals (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility [MREMH],

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2021). However, this situation has been altering since 2017, when the steady deterioration of political and economic conditions in Venezuela spurred a process of mass migration into the region from that country. The Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) estimates 5.6 million displaced Venezuelan people by 2021 (R4V, 2021a), mostly in Latin American countries.

At the beginning of this stage of displacement in the region, Ecuador was considered a transit country to other more stable destinations in the south, such as Chile and Argentina; however, that reality was changing as migrants began to enter Ecuador, becoming both a transit and destination country, and by May 2021, it was estimated that there were around 430,000 refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the country (R4V, 2021b). Furthermore, this already challenging situation was compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, severely impacting Latin American countries. Although it was a phenomenon that impacted all citizens, people in a situation of human mobility were especially affected. As a result, difficulties in accessing numerous rights worsened: asylum, migratory regularization, education, health, and participation (UNHCR, 2021a).

For migrants who took Ecuador as a destination country, the production of livelihoods was significantly affected, especially for those who maintained informal activities, because these activities were part of the mainly paralyzed, generating problems in covering basic needs and paying housing rents (UNHCR, 2021b).

Esteves (2020) points out that according to figures from the Central Bank of Ecuador (BCE), during the second quarter of 2020, the GDP declined by 12.5%, with formal employment falling by 11.1% and registering a loss of around 1,270,180 jobs between 2019 and 2020.

The drop in employment was greater for women (20.9%) than for men (12.7%) (Esteves, 2020) and the economic recession, which impacted the commercial area, caused a reduction of USD 5,515 million compared to 2019.

The provinces of Carchi and Imbabura in northern Ecuador receive the main impact of the migratory flow because they are border provinces with Colombia. In the case of Carchi, the percentage of Poverty by Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN) reaches 56.6%, of Extreme Poverty by UBN is 31.7% and Poverty by income 57.1% (Articulación de redes territoriales, Carchi). As of 2019, the number of regularized and settled Venezuelan people increased, in addition to other people of different nationalities in urban and rural sectors of the province, representing a total of 11,336, of which 59% are settled in Tulcán and 28% in Montufar.

It is important to recognize that the 2008 Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador decriminalizes migration (Villamarín et al., 2022) by stating that no human being can be considered illegal because of their migratory status. However, even though Ecuador's legal framework guarantees access to health, justice, assistance, and education, among others, for the population in a situation of human mobility, in practice, state intervention has been seen to fail to meet this group's needs. Thus, three main problems have been identified in the province of Carchi:

- (a) There are no technical, legal or economic instruments in place to address, with due capacity, the migratory flows with the characteristics occurring since 2017.
- (b) A human mobility roundtable does not have adequate mechanisms and tools to efficiently regulate the attention to people in human mobility (GAD of the province of Carchi 2015).
- (c) The risk of human trafficking, smuggling of migrants and labor exploitation are evident.

The State has addressed these problems through various actions, such as incorporating human and economic resources, personnel training and advice to migrants in conjunction

with various NGOs. However, in the specific case of women, even with these efforts, the economic integration of women places the Ecuadorian State in the 71st place according to the report on the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2022).

The situation in the province of Imbabura is similar to that of Carchi. The arrival of waves of Venezuelan migrants to stay is constant, as well as people heading to the country's interior and other southern countries. This situation has led to the presence of unaccompanied children and adolescents or those separated from their parents and legal representatives, an increase in begging, and the inability of temporary housing and canteen services to assist all migrants at risk.

Based on the above, implementing a support plan for migrant entrepreneurs was considered, using different approaches. Concerning education, guidance was provided to 36 parents of migrant families for their children's access to the formal education system, assisting them with school supplies and educational materials.

Supporting the generation of livelihoods for the population in human mobility, 112 refugees and migrants participated in training programs to generate employment or entrepreneurship skills, while 50 people received financial support for their enterprises. In this sense, support has been given to groups of entrepreneurs that include Venezuelans, such as VECOTEX, Magic Team Catering and Events, and ASORECIBLAN. Likewise, projects financed by partners of the Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (GTRM), such as the project Promoting gender equality and empowerment for women in displaced and refugee situations and the A Ganar project, which provides training programs, support business plans and provides seed capital, are also maintained.

At the same time, activities were carried out to provide guidance and advice to the population on access to asylum, as well as prevention and protection of the rights of the population in human mobility and the host population. Also, a baseline study on labor demand and local value chains, with emphasis on the employability of women in human mobility in Imbabura, includes a vocational diagnosis for women, a mapping of training and education programs, as well as a systematization of good practices to promote the employment of women in a situation of human mobility based on information from the private sector.

In this context, this research has a focus on the social and economic inclusion of migrants, given that the target group belongs, in a cross-cutting manner, to the most vulnerable population of society, so that, according to UN Women, investing in their economic empowerment contributes directly to gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth, given that women generate an essential contribution to economies in different areas such as business, work in the field, the development of entrepreneurship, among many other economic activities.

Entrepreneurship developed by migrants is an opportunity for receiving countries to increase GDP and decrease the economic burden of receiving large flows of migrants to their territories (Thanh and Turkina, 2013) because it creates job opportunities for migrants, decreases competition with native workers, decreases social conflicts and provides a way for migrants to increase their earnings (Zhou, 2004 and Schlosser and Zolin, 2013), whereby entrepreneurship can be an effective mechanism for promoting the integration of migrants and refugees as agents of development in host countries, considering that "entrepreneurship is increasingly seen as an effective approach to overcoming some of the challenges of integration by offering a way to receive income as well as employment to people with limited access to the labor market" (UN, 2018, p.4).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2010) indicates that entrepreneurship rates among migrants are higher than the global average, even though migrants and refugees face specific obstacles to entrepreneurship related to their

legal status, local regulations, access to services, access to seed capital, and linguistic and cultural difficulties.

## Method

A set of techniques and procedures were employed within the mixed research approach, which, according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), allows quantitative and qualitative data to be analyzed and linked in the same study to address the research problem holistically.

The empirical inductive approach, based on probabilistic induction, allowed the analysis of the profile of the population in the condition of human mobility in the north of Ecuador, which was obtained from a digital survey consisting of 20 questions that aimed to know the typology of the migrant, their current entrepreneurial activity and their interest in taking part in training activities to promote their personal, family or associative enterprises.

Likewise, the introspective experiential epistemological approach was used through participant research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to recognize, through interviews, the elements that would allow adjusting the Intercultural Educommunication Model for Entrepreneurship Training [MEIFE] (Ruiz Chagna & Iglesias, 2021) to the characteristics of the population in the condition of human mobility to present an adequate model of entrepreneurship training that was called MEIFE-MIGRA.

The study area consisted of the provinces of Imbabura and Carchi, specifically the capital cities of Ibarra and Tulcán, respectively, located in the border area of Ecuador and Colombia.

## Data collection techniques

The research was developed considering the bioethical principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence and autonomy and initially included the participants' prior informed consent, who was allowed to withdraw from the research if they considered it pertinent.

The research target group, composed of 122 people, was informed orally about the most relevant aspects of the research, such as objectives, procedures, the importance of participation, duration, laws, codes and norms, voluntary participation and benefits.

The population of direct incidence of the research was selected from three migrant population groups that were related:

- a) Development of technical and entrepreneurial skills and improvement of the quality of life, labor options, training and counseling aimed at the migrant population, which was implemented by the Universidad Politécnica Estatal del Carchi (UPEC) from March 19 to August 5, 2022, with the participation of the migrant population in training workshops and whose source of funding was the International Organization for Migration (IOM).
- b) Entrepreneurial skills training course, developed by the Public Company UEmprende of the Universidad Técnica del Norte, within the framework of the project Development of technical and entrepreneurial skills and improvement of the quality of life of the migrant population, financed by the Hebrew Migrant Aid Society (HIAS), where several trainings were developed in virtual format from August 8 to 13, 2022.
- c) Finally, the participation of the Venezuelan population in the city of Ibarra in the "Comedor de Acogida," administered by the Head of Social Development of GAD Ibarra, who is assisted by the program of social inclusion for migrants, financed by the UN Agency for Refugees UNHCR, was considered.

Interviews, direct observation and focus groups were conducted to identify competencies for entrepreneurship, the use of ICTs and the level of access to non-formal education.

Subsequently, unstructured interviews were conducted to obtain primary information spontaneously from the participants of the workshops in the cities of Ibarra and Tulcán. Similarly, during the interviews and visits, direct observation was carried out, the results of which were recorded in a field diary to describe the conditions of the operating space of the enterprises and social relations with the migrant and host population, which allowed the incorporation of information for the surveys.

On the other hand, focus group meetings were held with the training participants at fairs, which were spaces to show their products and establish a relationship with the local population, to corroborate and strengthen the information obtained through the interviews.

Additionally, in this context, several secondary sources of information were analyzed, the main document being the Protection Monitoring, Northern Border Report of January 2022, carried out by the UNHCR-UN, which mentions statistical data on migration in the northern part of Ecuador.

The documentary review included the analysis of the MEIFE to determine its adequacy for the characteristics of people in conditions of human mobility in northern Ecuador. Finally, the MEIFE-MIGRA entrepreneurship training model was constructed to adapt the Intercultural Educommunication Model for the Training of Women Entrepreneurs.

## **Results**

Individual attributes of entrepreneurs, such as their culture, education and life experience, according to Thanh and Turkina (2013), are determinants in identifying business opportunities for entrepreneurial migrants.

The characteristics of migrants arriving in northern Ecuador are the starting point for constructing any proposal that involves forming this community to develop enterprises following MEIFE-MIGRA.

Regarding the age of the migrants included in the sample, 19.9% are between 18 and 25 years of age, 68.9% are between 25 and 45 years of age, and only 12.3% are older than 46. Of the sample, 66.4% are women, 87.7% are Venezuelan, 9% are Colombian, and 3.3% already have Ecuadorian nationality. Of the sample, only 18.9% have a university education, while 80.3% have primary and secondary education.

In terms of marital status, single people predominate (47.5%), followed by those who say they have a free union (27.9%), who together with married people account for 41.8%, all of whom, whether single or in a couple, have children, 53.2% have three or more children, 27% have two children and 19.8% have one child.

73.8% arrived in Ecuador a year or more ago, 24.6% between three and six months ago, and 1.6% had been in the country for one week at the time of the survey. Regarding housing, 93.4% are renting, while 6.6% live in shared or borrowed accommodation. 81.1% consider themselves heads of household, with one to three people depending on them (55.7%), 4 to 6 people depending on their income in 37.7% of the cases, and 5.6% who are financially responsible for more than 6 people.

Personal enterprises predominate (82.8%), followed by family enterprises (15.6%), while the rest are in associative enterprises. These enterprises are mainly associated with prepared foods, bakeries and pastries, and ice cream, accounting for 55.5% of the total enterprises. The cosmetics area follows with 23.7%, handicrafts at 16.4%, cleaning and maintenance at 3.3% and clothing manufacturing at 2.5%, while the rest of the enterprises are not mentioned in the survey.

Almost the totality of the sample (99.2%) has participated in training activities during 2022, highlighting their participation in courses, workshops and conferences on administration, customer service, environment and technologies; however, they state that they would like to continue training in administration, technologies, the humanistic area, health and the environment.

The willingness to invest weekly time to participate in a free training program indicates that 65.6% would do so for more than 4 hours per week, 24.6% for three hours per week, 9% for two hours per week and the rest for only one hour per week, with a preference for face-to-face classes (87.7%) and a lower percentage for virtual classes (19.7%).

**Intercultural Educommunication Model for the Training of Migrant Women Entrepreneurs (MEIFE-MIGRA)**

The MEIFE (Figure 1) was conceived as a theoretical construction focused on using entrepreneurship as a pillar for the social development of communities and promoting gender and ethnic equity in the Province of Imbabura in Ecuador.

The model is based on the search for a change in the individual’s self-perception as a victim towards a more protagonist position in the processes of change necessary to achieve socioeconomic improvements for the individual, his family and his immediate environment.

This conception of the model was the starting point to propose the MEIFE adjusted to the characteristics of migrant and refugee women in northern Ecuador who decide to develop individual, family or collective enterprises as a mechanism to improve their living conditions. This adaptation is called the Intercultural Educommunication Model for Training Migrant Women Entrepreneurs MEIFE-MIGRA (Ruiz, 2021).

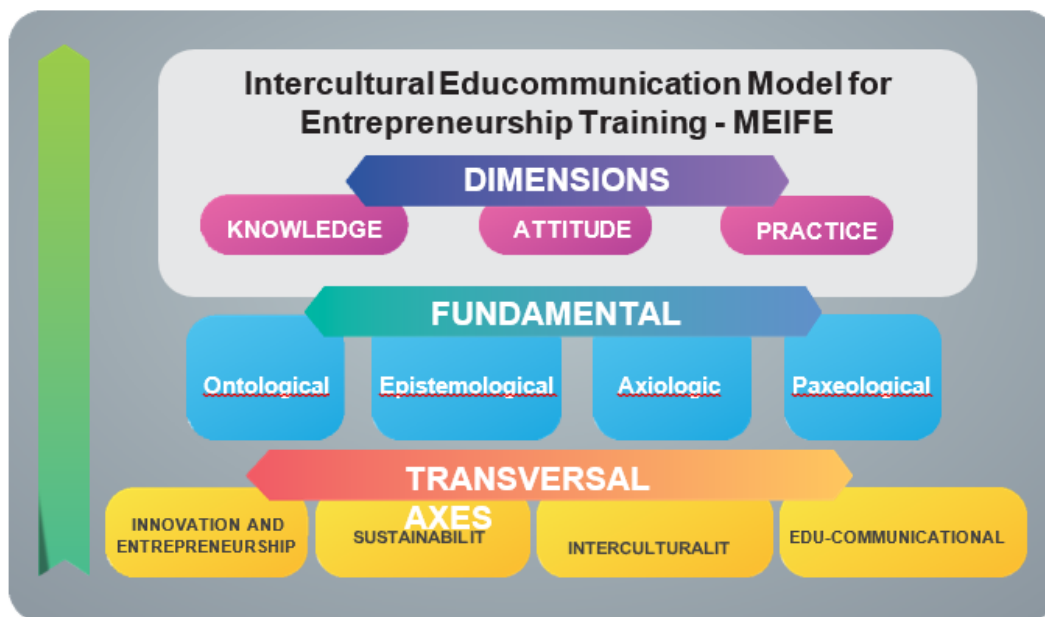


Figure 1. Diagram of the components of the Intercultural Educommunication Model for the Formation of Women Entrepreneurs (MEIFE) of the Province of Imbabura (Taken from Ruiz Chagna, 2021).

MEIFE-MIGRA conceives the integral formation of the subject as the main element to be attended to initiate processes of design, creation of enterprises and elaboration of business plans so that the enterprises are not conceived only as elements to overcome economic difficulties but as values of social impact, improvement of the local economy and a link for the acceptance of the migrant in the receiving communities.

MEIFE-MIGRA, as a theoretical construction, is materialized through the Training Program for Migrant Women Entrepreneurs (PROFEM), developed under the modality of continuous non-formal education, focused on the development of competencies, the principles of educommunication and supported by ICT as a tool to facilitate its dissemination, appropriation of the training process by the participants and expansion of the area of impact.

In many cases, migrants arrive in the host localities with experiences of entrepreneurship development in their communities of origin; these experiences may be culturally and legally decontextualized, but they are an important starting point to take advantage of the migrants' expertise and accelerate the processes of entrepreneurship development based on the experiences of the participants. Thus, PROFEM's conception under the competency-based training approach opens up the possibility of accreditation based on the experience of migrant women participating in the program.

Considering the program under the non-formal education modality also adjusts to the characteristics of migrants who do not have immediate access to the formal education system at the time of their arrival, either due to a lack of registration documents or economic deficiencies. Non-formal education in entrepreneurship is ideal for migrant women who require support to improve their living conditions economically, socially, culturally, and in terms of their relationship with their environment.

Educommunication, which the model assumes as a transversal axis, requires ICTs. Educommunication promotes the development of critical thinking, and ICTs offer the possibility of developing PROFEM adjusted to the schedule of the women interested in the training process and allow for the construction of virtual networks of entrepreneurs and migrants. In order for the use of ICTs to be efficient, low-cost or free Internet access is required. In the case of the Imbabura province, this Internet access is part of public policies, which has materialized through the expansion of free WiFi coverage for migrants and local citizens.

As an epistemological complement to PROFEM, the Systems Theory is incorporated, which allows the consolidation of the training program, through the concept of integration of all the elements and components that constitute the reality of the entrepreneur and the migrant to the north of Ecuador (program, curricular units, contents, entrepreneurs, facilitators, companies, university, associations, training materials, receiving communities, governmental units of support to the migrant, NGOs, among others).

In the same way that the MEIFE of the Province of Imbabura is executed thanks to the support of the Universidad Técnica del Norte in Ecuador, whose philosophical framework, dimensions and transversal elements are cohesive with the way of promoting entrepreneurship in the participants, the MEIFE-MIGRA will use the same support platform, as a response to the reality experienced by the cities of the province with the constant arrival of migrants.

A crucial element in MEIFE-MIGRA is to ensure that PROFEM enables the promotion of entrepreneurship among migrant women.

The migrant comes from a cultural, political and legal reality that is different from the reality of the host community, and this situation is linked to feelings of uprooting, sadness and anguish. Therefore, attending to migrant women from an integral perspective requires the development of an entrepreneurial spirit.

The entrepreneurial spirit promoted by PROFEM is associated with a proactive stance on the part of the trainees that should be fostered by the entrepreneurial training process (Figure 2).

Generally, the entrepreneurial spirit is associated with the subject’s behavior in training for individual improvement. However, MEIFE-MIGRA intends, as mentioned above, not only to promote the development of entrepreneurship but to train the individual integrally, allowing them to integrate into the host community and to understand the Andean idiosyncrasy of northern Ecuador, which is more associated with collective and family development than with individual development. This favors the formation of entrepreneurial networks and the economic growth of localities rather than individuals.

Unlike MEIFE, in which the formation of the seedbed of ideas is based on the internal motivations and social pressures of the participants, mostly in terms of their expectations, in MEIFE-MIGRA the seedbed of ideas is enriched by the previous experiences of migrant women in their countries of origin, which constitutes a strong nucleus for the development of new enterprises in the host communities.

The seedbed ideas are grouped into collective business ideas and individual business ideas. Collective ideas are understood as those that have their origin in the previous socialization among the entrepreneurs, and after a process of exchange of ideas and pooling of individual skills, they materialize in an entrepreneurial project. On the other hand, entrepreneurial ideas can arise from individual experience, in which case the entrepreneur decides to use her competencies and skills to carry out her project without requiring the initial association with other entrepreneurs.

Table 1. Model of the impact of the Training Program for Women Entrepreneurs on the promotion of entrepreneurship (Taken from Ruiz Chagna, 2021).

<b>BOOSTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP</b>
INDIVIDUAL BUSINESS IDEAS
<b>TRAINING PROGRAM FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS</b>
COLLECTIVE BUSINESS IDEAS
<b>HOTBED OF IDEAS</b>
<b>CI.</b>
<b>SPACE FOR INTERACTION</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demand analysis</li> <li>2. Innovation evaluation</li> <li>3. Brand positioning options</li> <li>4. Analysis of integration options</li> <li>5. Business plan proposals</li> </ol>

Once the seedbed of ideas has an initial base, the interaction stage begins, which can be developed through virtual or face-to-face working groups, consultancies, exchange of experiences or evaluations of previous experiences by specialists. Thus, in the interaction stage, a dialogic process of knowledge and know-how exchange will occur, in which entrepreneurs, businesswomen, specialists in different areas, and representatives of government agencies and private institutions can participate. This stage of interaction allows, in practical terms, to analyze the potential of the venture idea in terms of the possible previous experience of other associates and to explore the existence of new opportunities and needs in the context in which the associates operate. It also helps to contextualize the entrepreneurial ideas of people in human mobility and to evaluate the successes and failures of the ventures developed in the countries of origin.

Another objective of exchanging ideas is the formation of entrepreneurial networks according to the common points that may arise in each enterprise’s production or service chain. This networking provides greater strength and persistence of the enterprises over



time, and in this way, small enterprises that are more sensitive to market changes obtain greater stability in the short and medium term, linked in such a way that they can form larger systems that can be projected regionally or nationally, always with a view to the ultimate process of internationalization of products.

#### Curricular design of the training program

To implement the Training Program for Women Entrepreneurs, a design consisting of six (6) curricular units that are connected by the transversal axes of MEIFE-MIGRA (Figure 2) and that facilitate the gradual conceptual, practical and attitudinal growth of the subject in training through the application of a socio-constructivist educational approach, where collaborative and experiential learning enables the development of the communicational ecosystem.

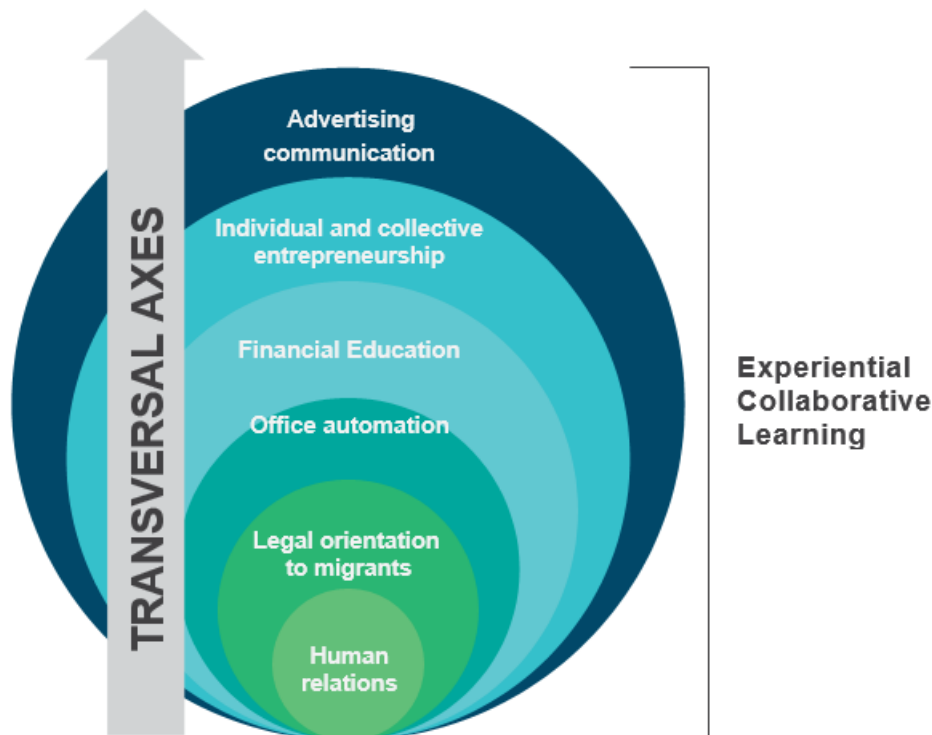


Figure 2. Transversal axes of the experiential collaborative learning.

Source: Own elaboration

The curricular units group the contents according to training in human relations, legal orientation to migrants, office automation, financial education, individual and collective entrepreneurship, and advertising communication.

The human relations unit focuses on the entrepreneur's attitudinal formation and her connection with the host locality in terms of culture and local values. Additionally, developing competencies for emotional intelligence, recognition of opportunities, group management and leadership is handled.

The purpose of the second unit is for the migrant to recognize the legal options and limitations of their status as a migrant in Ecuador, their rights and duties, as well as the governmental and non-governmental agencies to which they should turn to initiate a process of normalization of their stay in the host community.

The third and fourth units are related to the theoretical and practical training of entrepreneurs, starting with the development of office automation skills that will make it possible to increase efficiency in the management of enterprises. These skills are necessary for developing the third unit, where basic financial education concepts are treated.

The fifth unit seeks the recognition of strengths and opportunities for the formation of individual or collective ventures, as well as the design, creation and formation of viable business plans that can achieve the formation of entrepreneurial networks.

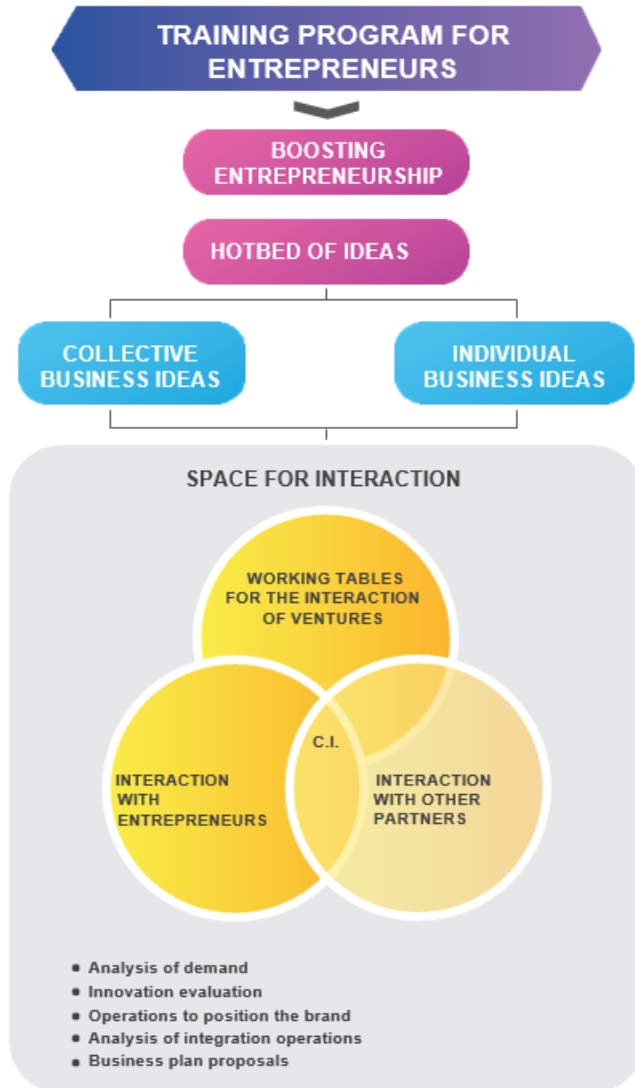


Figure 3. Outline of the curriculum design of the MEIFE-MIGRA Training Program for Women Entrepreneurs.

Source: Own elaboration

Finally, the sixth unit is designed for entrepreneurs to acquire skills to position their venture brand and increase sales by leveraging communication technologies and social networks. Overall, the curricular design facilitates experiential learning for the development of basic competencies to define, build and sustain their enterprises as tools for the improvement of social, economic and environmental conditions of migrant women, achieving, in turn, independence, gender equity, development of critical thinking and incorporation into host communities.

## Conclusions

The population in conditions of human mobility in northern Ecuador is mainly made up of Venezuelan migrants and a smaller proportion of Colombian migrants who have settled in the provinces of Carchi and Imbabura, often developing service enterprises. Most migrant entrepreneurs are in charge of families with three or more people and are willing to participate in entrepreneurship training programs.

In this sense, the application of MEIFE-MIGRA as a model for the training of people in conditions of mobility in northern Ecuador is a tool that will not only improve the formation of entrepreneurial networks that provide greater stability to the local economy but will also favor the processes of legalization and integration of migrants in the receiving localities through training in values and intercultural integration.

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