Save the Children

Colombia

September 2008

Children's Rights Fact Sheet

For more than 40 years Colombia has suffered from civil war, poverty, insecurity, corruption and drug trafficking. Of its 45 million people, 40% are children.

Children are constant targets of the conflict, either directly when they are murdered, kidnapped, tortured, or forced to fight, or indirectly when they lose their families, their homes and their access to education and health services.

General

- Colombia is marked by sharp socio-economic inequalities. With a GINI coefficient [1] of 0.575 it finds itself amongst the most unequal societies worldwide. 64% of the population lives below the national poverty line. (World Bank)
- More than 4 million people, 9% of its population, have been forcibly displaced since 1985 due to its civil war, making it the second biggest internally displaced population after Sudan. This displacement has also made Colombia the most serious and persistent humanitarian crisis outside Africa. (CODHES)

Protection

- There are currently between an estimated 11,000 and 14,000 child soldiers in Colombia serving for both guerrilla and paramilitary groups. This places Colombia third in the world for reliance on child soldiers, following Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of Congo. At least one in every four irregular combatants in Colombia's civil war is under eighteen years old. (Human Rights Watch)
- 60% of parents hit or smack their children, affecting approximately 7.8 million Colombian children. It is this violence of daily life, within the family and community, which is one of the main causes of child death and physical and mental injury. In 2005 - the latest year for statistics are available - there were 13,000 reported cases of serious ill treatment of children due to family violence. (Sexual and Reproductive Health in Colombia, Survey 2005)
- In 2005, 71% of 18,474 reported cases of sexual abuse were against children - a daily average of 38. It is estimated that only one in 20 crimes is reported.
- There are 2.5 million children between the ages of five and 15 working in the country, of whom only an estimated one in five is working legally and 85% engage in the worst forms of child labour including the mining industry and construction (ICBF). An estimated 25,000 to 40,000 minors are sexual workers (UNICEF & Procuraduria).
- Colombia is one of the most notorious trafficking countries in the western hemisphere with 54 rings detected for trafficking children (US Department of State). It is estimated that 45,000 to 50,000 Colombians are trafficked each year, the majority of them women and children (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children).
- 100,000 children are cared for by the Colombia Family Welfare Institute 'ICBF' with 77% of this total number considered abandoned or at risk. 4,500 children are abandoned each year with only 60% being adopted.
- Around 60,000 children live on the streets (Ministerio de la Proteccion Social). Of those children, 37% live in the capital of Bogotá (Universidad Nacional de Colombia). Only about one quarter receives assistance from public or state-funded institutions (COALICO).

[1] The GINI coefficient is a measure of statistical dispersion, most commonly used as a measure of inequality of income distribution or inequality of wealth distribution. Defined as a ratio with values between 0 and 1, a low GINI coefficient indicates more equal income or wealth distribution.

Save the Children

Emergencies

- Last year a further 305,966 civilians had to abandon their homes due to the conflict. (CODHES)
- The majority of Colombia's 4 million-plus internally displaced persons (IDPs) are children (approximately 55%).
- Government assistance is estimated to reach only a third of all displaced households. As a result of the displacement and the inadequate assistance provided, 80% of Colombia's IDPs live in extreme poverty; 75% of displaced children don't have access to education; illiteracy among IDPs is about 10% higher than the national average; and child malnutrition amongst the displaced stands at 23%, compared to the national average of 12%.
- Despite a current demobilisation process, Colombian human rights NGOs estimate that in 2006 alone 43 new paramilitary groups totalling almost 4,000 fighters had been formed in 23 of the country's 32 departments, increasing the danger of children being recruited into illegal armed groups. (Indepaz)
- Colombia is also a country prone to natural disasters. Last year more than 1.5 million people were affected by flooding.

- Other hazards include earthquakes, volcano eruptions and landslides. Displaced populations are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters because they frequently seek shelter in marginal urban settlements which have grown spontaneously on land that is often unsuitable for house construction.

Education

- Around 90% of children are enrolled in primary school but only 61% are enrolled in secondary school. (UNESCO)
- Of the registered students, 9.1% don not pass their respective grade. Therefore, the effective rate of educational coverage is only 68.3%. (Procuraduria)
- 50% of students who pass their school year do not meet basic competencies standards. Taking non-enrollment, failure rates and poor standards together, only 31.7% of the school-age population has access to quality education. (Inspector General's Office)
- Close to four million children receive medium-low to low academic scores in nation-wide exams. (Inspector General's Office)

- The impact of the armed conflict on education is significant. 74.5% of displaced children do not have access to education. (MEN; Inspector General's Office)
- Between 1999 and 2002, 410,000 students in primary education and 366,000 students in secondary education abandoned school (CEDE, University of Los Andes). Since then forced displacement has continued to lead to school desertion (UNICEF).

Health

- Around 100 mothers die per every 100,000 live births. More than 90% of all maternal deaths in Colombia are avoidable. (Inspector General's Office)
- The infant mortality rate for under one year olds is 17 in every 1,000, and 25 in every 1,000 for under five year olds. (UNICEF)
- 12% of all Colombian children under five are stunted, with proportions reaching more than 20% in the three departments of La Guajira, Boayaca and Nariño. (Inspector General's Office)
- On average 20.5% of all adolescents between 15 and 19 years old have at least one child or are pregnant (Profamilia). 37% of all displaced girls aged 15 to 19 are pregnant or already mothers.

Find out more:
savethechildren.org.uk