



What we do in Colombia

- We're helping to protect nearly 250,000 children from violence and abuse
- We're helping more than 9,000 children get a better education
- We're helping vulnerable communities prepare for natural disasters



For more than 40 years Colombia has suffered from civil war, poverty, insecurity, corruption and drug trafficking. Of its 45 million people, nearly 40% are children. In the last 20 years, 4 million people have been forced to leave their homes because of the fighting. Many end up living in shanty towns or on the streets, where they have little access to healthcare or education.

Generations of children have known only violence and poverty. Armed groups regularly recruit children. There are up to 14,000 child soldiers. Many children also face violence at home, as the burden of displacement and poverty leads to family breakdown, abuse and exploitation.

Colombia is also one of the most unequal societies in the world. Two-thirds of the population lives below the poverty line. Children have to help their families do whatever they can to survive, and many drop out of school to earn money – 2.5 million children between the ages of 5 and 15 work, most of them (85%) in the worst forms of child labour.

Save the Children in Colombia

We've worked in Colombia since 1991, focusing on improving children's access to good quality education. We've helped thousands of children avoid recruitment into armed groups,

and we continue to find ways to protect children and young people from violence and exploitation. Nearly 200,000 children benefited from our work in the last year alone.

We work jointly with three other members of the International Save the Children Alliance. We also work with the government, local authorities, community groups, local and national NGOs and international agencies.

Key areas of work

We're protecting children from violence and abuse

There are between 11,000 and 14,000 child soldiers in illegal armed groups. Children are used as messengers, spies, informants, human shields, guards, human mine detectors, participants in suicide missions and for combat operations. With funding from the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), we're helping displaced and other vulnerable children in Bolivar and Medellín to protect themselves from being recruited. We support local initiatives, such as a radio station run by young people to educate their peers on issues like self-protection, forced recruitment, abuse and children's rights.

The continuing conflict has resulted in many children living apart from their parents. We carried out the first national evaluation of the government's foster parent scheme, interviewing 17,000 children in 12,000 homes. We've made recommendations – for example, for improved protection policies and monitoring – to 20 regional offices of the Family Welfare Institute, which is responsible for foster care.

We're working with the departments for education, health and social welfare in Bogotá to develop an integrated protection service for 1 million children and young people. We're helping the authorities strengthen and implement protection systems to prevent sexual violence, physical abuse and children being recruited into armed forces.

We've trained more than 1,000 teachers and school counsellors how to identify children at risk and provide appropriate community-based care. This includes creating safe spaces for children and young people, and working with parents to promote positive parenting and alternative forms of discipline to corporal punishment. Radio Caracol supported this project with regular broadcast slots, helping us reach as many people as possible.

We've worked with more than 6,000 families to reduce corporal punishment and other forms of violence. And we're working with the Ministry of Social Protection to eradicate child labour and protect more than 1 million young workers. Through a project bringing together 19 public and private institutions, we're promoting a campaign – *Marcela, aquí cambia la traducción* – to make the capital, Bogotá, a safe city for children.

Our work to protect children from harm has gained us national recognition and we're now seen as one of the major child protection agencies influencing government policy and

national strategies. Over the next two years, we aim to have helped 600,000 children in 30 municipalities by improving protection systems and changing the attitudes of parents, teachers and other adults in the community.

We're making sure children affected by the conflict get a good education

Almost a quarter of Colombia's 12 million children aged 5–17 are not in school due to poverty, displacement and violence. And three-quarters of displaced children don't have access to school (illiteracy among this group is 10% higher than the national average). Although generally enrolment rates are high, many children (especially those aged 12–17) don't pass their grades or drop out of school because their parents can't afford the fees. Teachers are often poorly trained and teaching methods tend to be authoritarian. Only 34% of the school-age population receives an education that meets government quality standards.

We're working with local organisations in four areas of the country with large numbers of displaced people – Bogotá, Medellín, Cartagena, the coffee growing areas and the department of Nariño. We've trained 850 teachers in flexible and age-appropriate teaching methods. Schools have also created vegetable gardens and started providing lunches to improve children's nutrition. Some schools have even set up fish farms and started rearing chicken and pigs.

Through the International Save the Children Alliance's *Rewrite the Future* campaign, we aim to improve the quality of education for 500,000 children across seven departments by 2011, and to make schools safer and more inclusive. We're supporting the government's efforts to provide child-centred teacher training, increase the number of alternative educational programmes and provide a good quality education for displaced children. We'll help more than 2,000 children affected by conflict and displacement gain access to basic education. And more than 600,000 children will benefit from improved teaching methods so that what they learn is relevant to their lives.

We're also calling on the government to spend more on education, and working with departmental and municipal staff to ensure that children and young people participate in planning and budgeting processes – having a say in decisions that affect their lives. With our partner, Cesde, we've developed a tool to calculate the cost of educating a child so that local education authorities can budget more efficiently.

Making schools inclusive is an important part of our programme. Children with disabilities are often excluded from school because teachers don't feel able to teach them. We're working with a local organisation, the Luis Felipe Velez Foundation, to help children who are excluded because of physical disability, displacement or poverty. With funding from coffee producer Fine Foods International (FFI), makers of Fair Instant, we're supporting 18 schools in Quindío Department. We provide free school lunches, uniforms, books and other materials. And we're training teachers about how best to include children with physical disabilities in their lessons.

We're working with the social protection ministry in 20 departments to prevent and eliminate child labour, and providing catch-up classes so that working children can return to mainstream schools. So far, 350 children in Cartagena, Palenque and Medellin have enrolled in the scheme.

We're helping children and families hit by natural disasters

Colombia is prone to natural disasters such as flooding. Many of those worst affected have already been forced from their homes by the country's long-running conflict. When floods hit Choco and Bolivar last year, we were able to persuade the government to declare a state of emergency by presenting photographic evidence of the damage. In San Jacinto de Cauca, young people we'd trained carried out rescue operations, including distributing rubber boots and teaching materials for more than 2,000 preschool and primary students.

As part of our ongoing emergency prevention and preparedness work, we're involving children in working with schools, governments and NGOs to draw up plans to make sure that in emergencies and crises, children are protected from violence, abuse and exploitation – including being forcibly recruited into armed groups.



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