



Ready for the future: integrating marginalised young adults from Medellín into the labour market

Project Background

Many young adults in the poor neighbourhoods of Medellín have fled with their families from the armed conflict in rural areas and are trying to build a new life in the city. Unfortunately, they are ill-equipped for this. They lack vocational training, a network and the appropriate behaviour in job application situations. As a result, the unemployment rate for young refugees in Colombia is 58%. The majority of them are female. Frustrated, some become susceptible to the promises of criminal gangs, while others eke out a living as poorly paid day labourers.

Our approach

With this project, we are preparing 460 marginalised young adults from the poor districts of Medellín for working life. After completing their vocational training, a recruitment agency places them in formal employment with a guaranteed minimum wage and social benefits and supports them during their first few months in their new jobs. Parallel to the vocational training, we strengthen the young adults' social and conflict resolution skills and train them on their civil rights and obligations. Experienced specialists help them to work through difficult experiences and to develop realistic life goals.

Project goals

460 internally displaced and marginalised young adults in Medellín improve their financial and emotional situation and contribute to a culture of peace as informed citizens.

- 415 (90% of 460) young adults are vocationally qualified, of which at least 65% (273) subsequently earn the legal minimum wage in a formal job and are covered by social security.
- 415 (90% of 460) young adults handle their experiences of violence and learn to deal with their emotional injuries.
- 415 (90% of 460) young adults know their rights and duties as citizens and contribute to a non-violent coexistence in their families and neighbourhoods as agents of peace.

Project activities

Selection and labour market analysis

The project team carefully assesses the motivation of the young adults and only selects those who do not have the necessary financial means for vocational training. It then discusses with all beneficiaries which training programme matches their skills and interests. We only offer vocational training programmes that are in demand in the region. The digital labour market has potential for employing young people. That is why we specifically place 95 young adults with an affinity for technology in this sector.

Project location

Comunas 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 13, Medellín, Colombia

Topics

Vocational training, labour market integration, coming to terms with the past, peace-building, social participation

Vivamos Mejor Programme

"Bridge to working life"

Duration

2023-2025

Project costs

CHF 577,820

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Impact

Good vocational training has been shown to increase the chances of finding a job and earning a regular income. A randomised study conducted by Vivamos Mejor, the University of Lausanne and the Colombian University of Los Andes examined the medium-term impact of our holistic intervention (vocational training + youth empowerment) on the lives of the beneficiaries from 2018 to 2021. It concluded that the project participants have greater mental resilience and earn more on both the formal and the informal labour market than young people with vocational training who do not participate in the project.

Further information on the impact of our project work can be found at www.vivamosmejor.ch/wirkung

Our mission

With our “Bridge to working life” programme, we ensure that socially disadvantaged young adults have access to vocational training, the formal labour market and social participation.

Our vision

Internally displaced and socially vulnerable young adults should have the same opportunities for a dignified and successful professional future as their peers from more privileged backgrounds, regardless of their origin. As enlightened citizens, they should actively exercise their rights and obligations and help to shape society and build peace.

Our actions are guided by the UN's 2030 Agenda. With this project, we contribute to the achievement of the following SDGs:



End poverty in all its forms everywhere.



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.



Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.



Reduce inequality within and among countries.

Vocational training

The 305 short training courses, for example in fashion sales, security services and the digital labour market, last two to four weeks and are taught at SENA (national vocational training institute) or affiliated institutions. The 110 one-year training programmes last 12 to 15 months and include theoretical lessons and practical training. At the same time, the beneficiaries work on their soft skills in workshops and practise, for example, professional behaviour in everyday working life. On completion, they receive a nationally recognised diploma.

Job placement and support on the job

A social recruitment agency establishes contacts with companies and places the young adults in suitable jobs. During the first six months, we accompany them on the job and provide support when difficulties arise. As many have no savings, we finance the transport costs to the job in the first two months.

Psychosocial support

In workshops, psychological specialists work with the beneficiaries on their social behaviour and self-esteem. They learn how to deal constructively with their feelings, develop realistic life goals and receive psychological counselling.

Participation and peace-building

In workshops, the participants learn about Colombia's political system and their civil rights and obligations. We also sensitise them to conflict-free coexistence and train them to become peace activists.

Target group

Direct: 460 young adults, 830 family members; indirect: 2,500 friends and extended family members

Costs

The project costs amount to CHF 577,820 and we are counting on various donors such as companies, cantons, foundations, municipalities and parishes for funding. The project is co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, as part of the programme contribution.

Local contributions

The total costs do not include local contributions totalling CHF 55,643. The city administration and affiliated institutions provide premises free of charge, while SENA finances the vocational training courses. The young adults contribute to transport costs and help organise the workshops/events free of charge.

Local partner

Our project partner is the grassroots Colombian NPO “Volver a la Gente”. It employs professional local staff and is very familiar with the context. The team has many years of experience, proven expertise in the training and placement of marginalised young adults and actively represents their interests with the authorities. Our partner organisation is recognised for its work in the project regions and is well networked.

Impressions



Young people can expand their IT skills during a short training programme.



After the soft skills workshops, participants receive a certificate attesting to their competences.



The contributions in a workshop on the topic of peace building give rise to hopes for a better future for Colombia.



In the workshops on psychosocial empowerment, the young people can put forward their own ideas and express their dreams creatively.