

OUR IMPACT

CHILDREN CHANGE COLOMBIA

**Working to ensure a safe
and happy childhood for
every child in Colombia**

2021



Overview:

Understanding our impact

Children Change Colombia works with the most vulnerable and excluded children in Colombia. Our aim is to ensure a safe childhood for as many as possible, as is their right.

We focus on three main 'neglected' areas: recruitment into armed groups, gender and sexual-based violence, and exclusion from education. To do this, we work with partner children's organisations in Colombia. In 2021, we collaborated on 6 different projects.

In 2021, we also commemorated 30 years as a charity working with vulnerable children in Colombia. Over these years, we have worked with close to 50 local Colombian organisations to date, and helped

65,000 children and their families., with £13 million in grants being spent on projects. We have become convinced that allowing children to speak up and including them in important life decisions is a powerful tool for lasting change. Children should be able to demand that their rights are respected, in order to create a better society now and into the future.

In order to track our progress, we have developed a Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) system that measures the impact of our work each year. In this report, using information provided by our partners, and assessed against a set of overarching indicators – verifiable changes that show we are achieving our key strategic aims of:

- 1) Protecting children from immediate harm and defending their rights in the long term.**
- 2) Tackling neglected issues that threaten children's rights.**
- 3) Strengthening children's organisations in Colombia.**

The following report pulls together our overall organisational impact in 2021.



Context and situation in Colombia

Due to the socio-economic situation in Colombia, food scarcity, social discontent and protests were experienced across the country in the first months of 2021. Amid the third peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Colombia faced the biggest and longest protests in recent history, which began on April 28, 2021 and were triggered by a tax-reform bill proposed by the government to stabilize public debt and fiscal deficit. Moreover, the government updated its guidelines for the gradual, progressive, and safe reopening of schools in Bogotá. The strategies implemented to enable the return of face-to-face classes are complex, as educational institutions do not have the necessary elements and infrastructure to guarantee that biosecurity protocols are met for students and teaching staff.

Despite the priority vaccination plan for teachers, parents did not have the economic resources to send their children back to school, while the food support - that in many cases was distributed to all family members - had stopped reaching them.

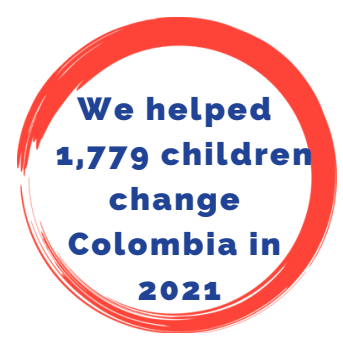
While it is true that virtuality is a complex modality since not all students have access to the internet, virtual learning has allowed for a wider coverage, where students in different locations have been able to interact with each other. Classes have also been held with parents and other family members, generating intergenerational dialogues between teachers, students, and families all together.

Despite all these challenges, we are very proud of the work we've carried out to ensure that the essential services our partners provide for at-risk children have been able to continue. We've been able to continue providing crucial psychosocial support to children who live with trauma as a result of conflict, sexual violence and abuse, by running large events, workshops (online and in person), as well as performances, and other activities.

Overview: 2021 in numbers



The People



- Children and young people we worked with: (female: 957 male: 826 other: 1) **1779**
- Further children – siblings, peers and neighbours of the children who participated in our project activities - whose lives we indirectly impacted: **4586**
- Adults that participated in our project activities or attended forums, performances and campaigns led by children from our projects. (female: 677 male: 266 other: 15) **958**
- Further adults whose lives were impacted: **3272**
- Total people who are better equipped to protect children's rights as a result of our work in 2021: **10,595**

Covid-19 Pandemic

In response to the effects of the pandemic on the communities we support, we launched the Help Colombia Covid-19 Campaign on the 1st of April 2020 and activities were implemented until the end of February 2021. Through the campaign we supported:

27,000
PEOPLE

Overview: 2021 in numbers

The partners

In 2021, we worked with **6** inspiring organisations, providing crucial funding for their programmes, as well as the technical support needed for them to become stronger organisations and be able to better defend the rights of at-risk children in the long-term:



Other impact numbers:



Number of unique visitors on CCC website:

- 👉 User sessions: 37,071
- 👉 New user sessions: 30,803
- 👉 Returning user sessions: 30,803

👉 Number of email subscriptions: 662



Number of Social Media followers:

- 👉 Facebook: 2.9k
- 👉 Instagram: 1141
- 👉 Twitter: 957



6 face to face events:

- 👉 Latino Life in the Park
- 👉 30 year anniversary lunch
- 👉 3 Christmas Markets
- 👉 1 school visit



Protecting Children's rights



In 2021 we protected the rights of:*

1770

children against discrimination

437

children through family guidance as they develop

845

children against violence

47

children with a safe placement

1161

children improving their access to education

1161

children having the right to use their own language and culture

532

children having the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities

845

children from harmful work

351

children from sexual exploitation

845

children from exploitation

181

children in detention

267

children towards recovery and reintegration

Protecting children's rights

83.7%

of children we worked with
in 2021 reported **better
knowledge of their rights**

83%

of the projects we carried
out in 2021 included
**positive leadership
activities with children
and young people**

**In 2021 our 6
partners:**

led 69 activities where
children could **implement
and develop their
leadership skills**

participated in 4 reflection
and learning events

The neglected issue: Exclusion from education

Education is every child's right. If children in Colombia are to break free from the poverty cycle, education is crucial. Not only does education give children opportunities to build independent and fulfilling lives, but it is also a joy that should be experienced by every child.

Situation

Even though the Colombian constitution requires children aged five to fifteen to go to school, **approximately 1.2 million Colombian children (11% of all school-age children) currently do not receive any formal education.**

Although enrolment rates are often high, it can be difficult for the most at-risk children to remain in school. Indeed only about **88%** of those who enrol in primary school stay there until the final primary grade.

According to the OECD the pandemic is likely to lead to higher informality, inequality and poverty - reversing years of improvement. Low-quality basic and professional education is often disconnected from labour market needs, there are large connectivity gaps and high regional inequalities which need to be addressed in order to tackle informality and boost growth and employment in the medium-term.

In Rural Colombia, Children are far more likely to drop out of school early than students in urban settings.

On average, rural children receive **5.5 years of education** while children from towns and cities stay in school for **9.2 years**. Consequently, illiteracy rates among children over 15 years are almost four times higher in the countryside – **12.5% compared to 3.3%.**

Exploitation through **legal and illegal mining** is another risk faced by children living in rural parts of Colombia, where **more than 5,000 children are working in hazardous conditions.** In recent years, illegal gold exports have surpassed the value of cocaine exports, becoming the country's largest illicit export – up to **80%** of Colombia's gold exports and estimated to be produced illegally. Although the government regulates child labour in legal mining, the same regulations do not apply to illegal mining, which currently accounts for **85%** of all mines in the country, meaning that the majority of child labour in mining goes unchallenged. As a result, This has a severely detrimental effect on children's education, leading many children to drop out of school entirely.

Solution

CCC works with local partners

ACADESAN in rural Chocó and Valle del Cauca, and **El Origen** in La Guajira to help at-risk children to know and demand their rights, including their right to accessible, high-quality education. The projects involve the use of innovative educational technologies, vocational training and work on environmental issues.

Our partner **El Origen** works with the most marginalised communities in La Guajira where poverty and school dropout rates are extremely high (**only 29% finish secondary school**). This is due to factors such as: long commutes to school with poor transport; limited equipment and learning resources; and large indigenous and refugee populations where their first language isn't Spanish.

Through **el Origen** in La Guajira, hundreds of children and young people, across five educational centres, have had access to education courses. This has been done by providing tablets and the implementation of the **O- lab app**, an offline application which features fun, engaging and high-quality courses in basic subjects and STEAM (Science, Technology, Education, Arts and Math). Crucially, the courses are offered in local languages as well as Spanish. The use of such devices and the offline app have been particularly beneficial the past few years, given the COVID pandemic which has highly restricted the learning process.

Our partner **ACADESAN** works to prevent child labour by tackling high student dropout rates. This is done through improvement of the quality of education, aimed at keeping children in school.

Our 2021 project with **ACADESAN** worked with 2 schools in Chocó, implementing ethno-education specific to Afro-Colombian culture with conventional teaching methods. The project provides engaging extracurricular educational workshops with teachers and students every month focusing on developing socio-emotional skills amongst children.

Training is also provided to help teachers improve their teaching skills and support the children to create a peaceful, collaborative school environment, known to improve student performance and attendance rates.

The **ACADESAN** project similarly implemented the pioneering **O-Lab App** to improve access and quality of education.

The neglected issue: Sexual and gender-based violence

Sexual violence violates children's rights, damages their health, welfare and development, and increases their vulnerability to further violence. It is the major 'silent' problem affecting children and young people and it is not being addressed as a national priority. The harmful effects of sexual violence can endure generations. A child born of sexual violence can experience rejection and alienation as a result of the mother's severe psychological trauma.

Situation

The majority of children who experience **sexual violence** come from the lowest income groups, living in slums on the outskirts of the cities or in isolated rural communities, and the abuse is usually either at the hands of a member of their own family, or the criminal gangs that control their neighbourhood.

It is estimated that around 200,000 children in Colombia are sexually abused each year and that over 35,000 children are involved in commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC). Between January and August of 2021, over 13,000 people were victims of sexual violence. but it is thought that these figures are much higher as many cases go unreported due to a culture of silence. Many children are given identity documents with a fake date of birth, so that they can hide among adult sex workers, it is again difficult to determine numbers. Bogotá has been identified as the region in Colombia with the highest incidence of CSEC.

As of October 2020, there was an increase in the sexual exploitation of children in the 'La Guajira' region due to the influx of Venezuelan migrants. The prostitution and sexual abuse of minors is also common in Cartagena, and is particularly normalized in the neighbourhood of Santa Fe in Bogotá, one of Colombia's most infamous 'Tolerance Zones' of sexual exploitation.

Solution

This is a multifaceted problem which needs a holistic solution that simultaneously fights poverty, advocates for a culture that empowers victims, and challenges the marginalization of vulnerable groups. In 2021, our partners ACJ (Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes) and CDE (Círculo de Estudios) started a joint project "Reducing conflict-related sexual violence and commercial sexual exploitation against children and young people" in Bogotá, Cartagena and Quibdó. This is a 3-year project that is protecting and empowering children.

During this project, in 2021 **713 children, young people, youth leaders and other community members were benefited**. Families and caregivers also participated and learnt about human rights.

Community members (public officials, teachers, community leaders, and youth leaders) took part in advocacy activities demanding the protection of children's rights from public institutions. Activities and events were held, such as "Paza la paz mi hermanx", in the Santa Fe neighbourhood, which **300 people** attended. This aimed to unite locals around the prevention of violence through artistic expressions and other community activities of interest. Young people participated as protagonists, leading the troupe that toured the neighbourhood and sent the community a powerful message of rejecting violence. The project's first year of development was successful despite the socio-economic fluctuations, as a result of the general devaluation of the Colombian peso and the ongoing effects of the pandemic.

ACJ also developed "¿Lo sabías?", Did you know?, an informative, preventative awareness campaign for the recognition of human, sexual and reproductive rights, incorporating key concerns identified by the communities. Participants came from various institutions (Colegio Jorge Soto of the Corral and Colegio Republic Bolivariana de Venezuela) and included community leaders.

CDE also worked with children, young people and teachers in schools in marginalised areas of Quibdó (Chocó) and Cartagena (Bolívar) raising awareness for CSEC, how to prevent it, and providing psycho-social support for child survivors of sexual violence and their families. Their work centres around the principle

of a 'círculo' or 'circle', a workshop which combines psychosocial support and training in children's rights with **dance, music and theatre**. These are safe ways to help children retake ownership of their body and value its abilities, instead of seeing it as an object of conflict or exploitation, and to help them articulate what may be traumatic or difficult. It is also one of the only opportunities to play as children, in a community where they are more likely to be valued as a means of bringing in more income for their family.

On the 26th of October, young people from the "Peoples on the Move" CDE program **travelled to Paris in an intercultural exchange**. They performed 'The Bunde of Water' at Salle des fêtes in Nanterre and at the MPAA in Paris, a work of art comprising music, dance and theatre, showcasing their culture and talents. **The aim of this intercultural exchange was to promote the artistic, cultural and personal exchange among the youth from Quibdó and Paris Nanterre, facilitating links between them**. The performance sought to promote the understanding of others, empathy and intercultural communication. Through cultural exchange children will understand the meaning of "diversity". The dance creation reflected everyday life, dreams, thoughts and emotions of young people from the two different regions.

The neglected issue: Forced recruitment into armed groups or criminal exploitation

Protracted violence and poverty in Colombia have led many thousands of children to be recruited into armed groups and gangs, by force or under the impression that becoming a member will offer them an escape from grinding poverty, of which they are extremely vulnerable if they have nowhere else to go. Armed groups forcibly brutalise the children and those who attempt to escape face paying with their life. Those who do manage to escape face severe stigmatisation and insufficient support from the State to build a new life.

Situation

Although the largest guerrilla group, the FARC, has demobilised, **FARC dissidents, alongside the ELN and the paramilitary successor groups, still operate across Colombia**, taking advantage of power vacuums left by the FARC. The narcotics trade and illegal mining continue to fund criminal armed organisations, who threaten human rights in many parts of the country.

According to the National Centre for Historical Memory (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica), from 1958 to 2020, **more than 17,860 Children and Young People (CYP) were recruited by armed groups**. As of December 2021, the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar) has calculated that **121 minors** had been recruited by illegal armed groups in the national territory.

Armed violence continues in the postaccord context. Since 2016, over 400 human rights defenders have been killed in Colombia—the highest number of any country in Latin America, according to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Solution

Every year our partner CRAN (Bogotá & Meta) provides **foster homes and psychosocial support to 60 children formerly associated with illegal armed groups**, helping them recover from their traumas, develop life skills necessary to reintegrate into society, access State support, and navigate the legal system if necessary. In rural areas where children face a high risk of recruitment by armed groups, CRAN educates local community organisations on how to **protect around 50 children every year**.

It also advocates for employers, education providers and local NGOs to eradicate the stigma which these children often face, and to ensure they provide them with equal access to their services.

Our partner **Tiempo de Juego (TDJ)** tackles this issue from a different angle, by promoting positive youth leadership, understanding of rights, and protective environments within and outside the family, to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in gangs and, in circumstances where they are already part of a gang, to reduce the risks they are exposed to. They work with **100 girls and boys in the juvenile justice system and residential care homes**, as well as with their families, who learn about the risks for children joining gangs and how to protect them. **TDJ** provides regular sport, art and therapeutic activities (such as yoga, music and drama), all with a strong emphasis on developing skills in critical thinking, empathy and managing emotions.



This year, CRAN and Tiempo de Juego also joined to start the project “Protecting girls and boys involved in gangs: strengthening communities through youth leadership”, aimed at preparing young people leaving care and detention centres with the necessary practical skills and emotional resilience to help them heal from the trauma experienced, and to support them in their return to their families and communities.

The project also aimed at reducing the risk of young people falling back into patterns of violence, drug addiction, or crime after completing their time at the facilities. During the implementation of this project, **164 adolescents and youths** in the three institutions - **68 girls and 96 boys** - participated in activities. A further **46 professionals** from the two Specialized Attention Centres (SRPA, PARD) - **16 men and 20 women** - also benefited from the support provided by the project.

Cross-cutting issues

There are three cross-cutting topics we work on along side our three neglected issues, and which could evolve to become higher priorities in the future. These are the following:

Young people and the environment

The current climate change situation urges all of our projects to be aware of the natural environment and making choices that benefit the earth, rather than hurt it. Some of the ways to practice environmental awareness include: conserving energy and water, recycling and activism. CCC is already working on environmental issues in its projects with Acadesan in Chocó and plans to expand its efforts with Mision Gaia in Magdalena in 2022.

Children and young people on the move

Colombia hosts around 1.8 million Venezuelan refugees/migrants, & according to the United Nations, the has highest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the world (7.7 million). CCC is currently working IDPs in Quibdó, with Venezuelan families that live in the “Zona de Tolerancia” (Red Light District) in Bogota and with indigenous and Venezuelan children in la Guajira. Additionally, most of the children that participated in the CDE project in Quibdó come from families of internally displaced people.

Pandemic

Covid-19 has affected all projects run by CCC since 2020 and has been a key factor in the design of any further new projects, and will be for the foreseeable future. The basic needs of many at-risk people we work with have not been met (food, rent, toiletries); many have faced new challenges, including health risks, family confinement, school closures, and economic vulnerability. Additionally, the rates of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect have also increased during the crisis.



Capacity building activities

A significant part of our work, and what differentiates us from many other UK-based NGOs, is the extent and permanence of the support that we are able to offer to our partners, thanks to the presence of our permanent monitoring and evaluation, finance and project designer staff in Colombia. We also provide thecnical support though our strategic alliances in the UK.

- **Work with Action for Child Trauma (ACTI) and our local partners**

In April and May 20 staff and our partners attended a fascinating and useful online course by ACTI, a non-profit that offers training in Children's Accelerated Trauma Technique (CATT). The course trained staff members in therapeutic techniques to put into practice with children who have experienced trauma, such as tools to manage anxiety, process difficult emotions, and deal with post-traumatic stress disorder.

ACTI works in 17 different countries, across the Middle East, Africa, Asia and also Colombia, and has been operating for over 10 years. They provide free training for NGO staff working closely with children who have experienced trauma due to war and violence. ACTI focuses on PTSD, specialising in teaching the Children's Accelerated Trauma Technique (CATT), an effective trauma treatment for children and young people.



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Children Change Colombia is a UK registered Charity, No. 1075037.
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Cover photo: children involved in our project with Círculo de Estudios performing “El Bunde del Agua”.

Photographs show real participants in CCC-funded projects.

*Quote names: All the children’s names in case studies have been changed for safeguarding purposes.

A yellow circular logo with the text "CHILDREN CHANGE COLOMBIA" in a stylized font. "CHILDREN" is in red, "CHANGE" is in white, and "COLOMBIA" is in blue. The logo is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page, overlapping with white wavy lines that resemble water.

**CHILDREN
CHANGE
COLOMBIA**