

Executive summary

Colombia is a country of geographical and cultural diversity. The country has become largely urbanised, also driven by rural to urban migration as the result of poor living conditions and violence in rural areas. But rural life still plays a significant role in Colombia: taking density and distance into account, a little more than 30% of the population and between 60% and 76% of municipalities can be considered rural.

While the national economy has grown strongly since the turn of the century following a deep recession in the late 1990s, economic development has been uneven across the country. Colombia's index of inequality of GDP per capita across regions is more than twice as high as the OECD average and slightly higher than in other Latin American countries, such as Chile, Mexico and Brazil. These regional disparities are influenced by the country's topography which limits connections between regions in the absence of efficient infrastructure. Weak institutions, few linkages between rural and urban areas and a focus on traditional agricultural activities also contribute to regional inequalities.

Poverty in rural areas has declined in line with national trends, but differences with urban areas remain substantial. In 2017, multidimensional poverty was still more than twice as high for rural Colombians compared to urban dwellers, and remains particularly acute in remote areas. Social and economic inequalities based on geography particularly affect Colombia's ethnic minorities which are highly concentrated in regions with higher poverty and, in the case of indigenous peoples, in rural and remote areas.

Although the transition to a post-conflict society remains a long-term task and challenge, the signing of the Agreement to End Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia in 2016 constitutes a remarkable achievement. The peace accords promise greater social well-being and economic prosperity, in particular for the rural population through a commitment to a comprehensive rural reform. This reform also commits Colombia to the implementation of a specific plan for education - a Special Rural Education Plan - which can play a key role in closing educational gaps between rural and urban areas.

While Colombia has made some progress in creating better educational opportunities for rural children and youth, there is still a long way to go to improve access and quality in education for rural students. For instance, the net enrolment rate of students living in cities and agglomerations and students in remote areas still differ by more than 20 percentage points both for lower and upper secondary education. More generally, there remain significant differences between rural and urban areas in educational outcomes.

In the OECD Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015, rural students in Colombia scored on average 38 points below the country's urban students, the equivalent of more than 1 school year. Greater poverty in rural areas explains most of this performance difference, but rural students face additional barriers. Importantly, rural students tend to have lower aspirations for their future education. Rural education provides opportunities, such as smaller classes, but also entails challenges. Less attractive

working conditions often make it difficult to attract and retain high-quality teachers, and low student numbers pose a challenge to offer a broad curriculum, for example.

The review identified the following priorities to improve the effectiveness of resource use in Colombia's school system, and to support efforts to close rural-urban gaps.

Reconcile resource allocations with policy efforts, address priorities gradually while ensuring greater continuity and local capacity, and reform the fiscal transfer system

In recent years, Colombia has set itself many objectives to improve education, from the implementation of full-day schooling, the expansion of early childhood education and care, and the extension of compulsory schooling, to the inclusion of students with special needs and the education of adolescents in the criminal responsibility system. As part of the peace accords, the country has committed itself to the implementation of a Special Rural Education Plan. At the same time, the government has negotiated agreements with the largest teacher union to improve teachers' working conditions. However, all these goals have been set with a shrinking resource base and within a tightening fiscal climate.

In the coming years, the allocation of sufficient resources, therefore, needs to be reconciled with the required efforts to close persisting gaps in educational coverage and quality, including between rural and urban areas. Colombia needs to identify long-term goals and priorities and address these gradually. Since it will be financially difficult to meet set objectives without sufficient funding, Colombia should increase total public resources available for school education, drawing on a range of mechanisms. Given that financing efforts should be permanent, Colombia should discuss a tax reform, but also horizontal equalisation mechanisms to redress the high level of fiscal asymmetries between and within territorial entities. In light of simultaneous demands for increases in funding for tertiary education, authorities should explore alternative options for funding this level, while prioritising gradual investments in the early years.

Since its creation in 2001, the General System of Transfers has been the main source of public funding for school education. While the system has contributed to fiscal sustainability, it has not fulfilled its objective of compensating territories for different levels of disadvantage. The system's financial allocation for education effectively delivers more resources per student to the most vulnerable territories, but the difference is so small that these resources do not offset the highly concentrated contributions of advantaged territorial entities. The review team, therefore, strongly encourages Colombia to reform its revenue sharing system so it promotes greater equity, efficiency and quality.

Ensuring greater continuity in policy and building local capacity should be further key priorities. In order to promote greater stability in the school system and more co-ordination across levels of governance, authorities should re-establish national and subnational education boards. In rural education, specifically, the Ministry of National Education should establish a dedicated unit for supporting and leading efforts to close rural-urban gaps in education. Technical capacities are highly asymmetrical across territorial entities and need to be further developed to equalise learning opportunities.

Improve the organisation of school clusters, build school capacity through greater collaboration, and create a more pertinent educational offer

The organisation of schools into clusters in Colombia brings a series of potential benefits for students in rural and remote areas. They can provide access to education and smooth

transitions to higher levels of education. Moreover, they can help maintain broad coverage of the school network and provide rural communities with additional resources while avoiding the closure of small rural schools. In practice, however, school clusters differ greatly in their number of sites and the distance between them. This can make it difficult for school leaders to manage their schools and to take advantage of these potential benefits. Transport and boarding are crucial parts of provision especially in rural areas but are also scarcely considered at present. Overall, the current organisation of schools thus carries a considerable risk of inequity for rural schools and students.

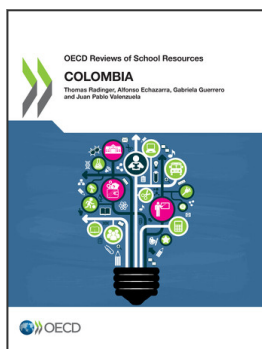
The central level should encourage the Secretaries of Education of certified territorial entities to review their school networks together with transport and boarding arrangements. Reorganisation should not, in principle, entail closing sites with a very low number of students, but establish schools with an adequate number of sites that provide high-quality conditions for learning. The certified territorial entities should collaborate in their school network planning and involve local communities in their decision-making process. To make school clusters work in practice, education authorities at all levels need to significantly strengthen school leadership and provide more support to schools. Rural schools and teachers have a lot to gain from more systematic networks, for example.

A lack of interest in education is one of the main reasons for adolescents not attending school. Educational aspirations tend to be lower among rural youth. Central and territorial education authorities (in collaboration with the National Learning Service, employers and universities), therefore, need to improve the educational offer in rural areas while building synergies with other policy areas to create opportunities for young people and motivate them to remain in or move to rural areas. For instance, more could be done to promote possibilities for students to develop their own Pedagogical Productive Projects.

Promote a new vision of teacher professionalism and make the allocation of teachers more efficient and equitable

Colombia has taken considerable steps to professionalise teaching over the last two decades. Overall, past reforms have mainly focused on the individual teacher and paid less attention to the organisational and institutional conditions required for effective teaching and learning. Sustainable school improvement, however, is a complex process that needs time, pedagogical leadership and a sense of collective responsibility. In coming years, Colombia should develop a more comprehensive model of teacher professionalism. This model should be based on a vision of schools as professional communities and consider the needs of rural teachers, in particular for their learning and development.

Teacher recruitment in Colombia is essentially based on teachers' rights rather than students' needs, leading to inefficiencies and inequities in the allocation of teachers. Although teachers recognise the benefits of working in a rural school, they generally prefer teaching in more advantaged contexts. Also, a relatively large share of teachers is employed on temporary contracts, and many of these provisional teachers work in rural areas. To address these inequities and inefficiencies in the distribution of teachers, education authorities should help make teaching in rural areas more attractive by shaping the working conditions and professional opportunities in these schools. Stronger financial incentives could also be put in place based on empirical evidence. An adequate supply of high-quality initial teacher education in rural areas will also be essential. The Ministry of National Education should ensure the proper funding and governance of higher teaching schools which educate teachers for rural areas, and encourage and support faculties of education to provide practical experiences in rural parts of the country.



From:
**OECD Reviews of School Resources: Colombia
2018**

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264303751-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

Radinger, Thomas, *et al.* (2018), "Executive summary", in *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Colombia 2018*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264303751-3-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.