

Colombia: People + Partners + Programs = Sustainable Impact

Your Program Impact Report—Spring 2024

2023–2025 OPPORTUNITY COLOMBIA STRATEGIC GOALS

With support from generous donors, impact the lives of an additional **170,454 people**, providing **3 programs** in collaboration with **9 partners**, and releasing **\$26.1M** in capital

THE NEED

In 1971, Opportunity International launched our work in Colombia. Today it remains a very special place for our team. The people of Colombia—our loyal and hard-working local team of experts, the passionate and driven people who participate in our programs, the millions of displaced people from bordering, war-torn countries—it's the people who inspire us to forge ahead with new and innovative approaches to fighting poverty and helping our brothers and sisters create sustainable livelihoods for their families and communities.

THE SOLUTIONS

Due to Colombia's complex challenges, level of poverty, and need for economic development, we launched an Opportunity Zone in the Atlántico-Bolívar region of Colombia, intentionally bringing together our flagship programs—starting with education and microbanking, with plans to add agriculture down the road—into an area with a large population of people living in extreme poverty. Our proven three-pronged interventions of tailored training, financial resources, and support increase incomes, create and sustain jobs, and provide affordable quality education for children and youth.

Opportunity's programs start and end with the client in mind, with interventions tailored to the specific needs of the local demographic and geography. Opportunity's hardworking team in Colombia partners with clients to increase access to quality education, provide financial literacy and access to financial resources, and offer training and support to people participating in the ultra-poverty Graduation program.

PROGRESS ON OUR WORK

EDUCATION

Our EduFinance consultant and EduQuality specialist are focused on developing partnerships with financial institutions and facilitating learning activities with the schools that are part of the EduQuality program. To date, we have:

- Four financial partners signed, and technical assistance completed: Crezcamos, Finanzfuturo, Actuar Famiempresas, and El Alcaravan. They will soon begin offering tailored loans to improve low-cost non-government schools and increase the number of children in a quality school.
- 29 schools in the EduQuality program
- 5,800 children impacted

Two schools in Colombia received [2023 EduQuality awards for excellence](#). Chosen from almost two thousand participating EduQuality schools around the world, first place award winner Colegio Centro Educativo Santa María, Colombia embedded social responsibility in their strategic plan, including interventions such as supporting families in need, sharing groceries, and offering emotional support. Honorable mention recipient Colegio Centro De Capacitación Integral Superar, Colombia, established an inclusive parent group, conducting targeted teacher training, and implementing individualized education plans.

MICROBANKING

We have deployed a series of strategies that impact the most vulnerable communities on the North Coast. Access to financial resources including loans and savings, and relevant financial literacy training create stability and sustainability for the families living in the Opportunity Zone.

- In 2023, over 10,000 loans were disbursed in the Colombia Opportunity Zone.
- From the first half of 2023 to the second half, we achieved 4,700 loans, surpassing the goal for 2025 by 84%.
- More than \$6.6M in loans were deployed to job-creating entrepreneurs.
- We have created 297 new savings groups—including 211 for refugees—impacting 8,200 people and reflecting a 54% progress of the goal for 2025.

With our financial partner Crezcamos, our new program targets smallholder women farmers through a subsidized crop insurance premium so they can have access to loans. This adds to the previous women-focused initiatives with this partner.

We expect to formalize an additional, new partnership in early 2024: Colombia's national government's National Guarantee Fund (*Fondo Nacional de Garantías*). This authority is the guarantor of credits for financial inclusion in the country.

Savings Groups

The savings group program has proven to be one of the most successful interventions for communities living in extreme poverty. It targets the lowest-income communities—in Colombia, known as strata zero, one, and two. Results include:

- Creation and strengthening of savings habits
- Creation of strong community networks
- Increased resiliency
- Improved financial literacy (savings and loans)
- Training in other topics as identified by each group (e.g., conflict resolution, leadership)



Savings group members, Cartagena, Colombia

During 2023, the number of savings groups increased:

- We added a new partnership that focuses on reaching Venezuelan migrants and refugees in the Zone. The objective was to reach 200 new savings groups of migrants, which means reaching 3,000 new clients on average, and we were able to create 211 new groups specifically for migrants and refugees, reaching 3,057 people.
- For 2024, we are expecting to increase the size of the team by 33% and plan to support more than 400 new savings groups.

GRADUATION



The Graduation program offers a long-term solution whereby families living below even the extreme poverty mark of two dollars a day—truly living in subsistence mode—receive support to secure food; start one or two income-generating businesses; learn basic financial skills; mentorship; community linkages; and job skills—support that will pave a

holistic, viable path out of poverty. The Graduation program fits well with Opportunity International’s core model of financial services, training, and support; we tailored it for those who are living at the lowest levels of poverty imaginable. Most candidates for Graduation are women with dependents or persons with disabilities who lack reliable access to basic human needs such as food, clean water, and safe shelter.

Think about Graduation as an approach that:

- Stabilizes the family so they can focus on the program and not just survival.
- Empowers the family to start a journey to sustainability, such as learning life skills and financial literacy.
- Equips the family with productive assets to start and run businesses of their own.

The Graduation program in Cartagena, Colombia is called “**Pathways to Opportunities**” and serves 250 families. The 18-month program started in January 2023 and will conclude in the fall of this year. It is one of the few Graduation programs anywhere that is focused on a community in an urban area; most participants are receiving skills and job training (vs. an asset such as livestock, as in most rural-based Graduation programs).

As of January 2024, the following milestones have been achieved:

- *Training:* 93% of clients have finished business-specific training which develops participants’ ability to thrive in the livelihood of their choice (see chart to the right).
- *Wellbeing:* Graduation participants complete 34 training modules, 24 of which are from Opportunity’s Shalom/Pathway to Wellbeing holistic training program which focuses on an individual’s relationship with God, family, the environment, and self.
- *Livelihoods:* 239 active

Colombia Graduation Program Livelihoods		
Approach	Area	Livelihood Opportunities
Entrepreneurship	Services	Beauty
	Services	Recycling
	Services	Home maintenance services
	Services	Motorcycle mechanic
	Commercial	Misc/varieties/shop
	Commercial	Hardware store
	Productive	Clothing manufacture
	Productive	Artisanal fishing
Employability	Productive	Restaurant/soft drinks shops/bakery
	Services	Tourism
	Services	Security
	Services	Swimming pool/aquatic rescue
	Commercial	Housemaids/wait staff/hotel staff
	Industrial	Logistics
	Industrial	Operator
Industrial	Metal mechanic	

businesses have been supported by assets and supplies. Participants are working in 25 types of businesses ranging from food, beauty, cleaning products, tutoring, and electrical maintenance.

- *Savings*: the 16 savings groups, with 287 members, began their second cycle. The groups have saved more than \$8,000.
- *Stability*: The fourth round of food support stipends has been disbursed to participants, helping them meet daily food and shelter needs while they focus on the program learnings.

Colombia Graduation: Plans for the Next Cohort of Families

Opportunity's local team is putting action plans behind the results of the program assessments so far, to make plans for the next cohort. With an intensive program like ultra-poor graduation, full participation by the families and the program staff must be guaranteed for the duration of the 18 months; we hope to support between 150-250 families, depending on funds raised. The cost per family to participate in the 18-month program averages \$4,000.

PARTNERSHIPS

We are grateful for the local staff, the trust of our clients, and the strategic partnership we have with financial institution partner Crezcamos that is reaching smallholder women farmers through subsidizing crop insurance premium so they can access loans.

The partnership with the City of Cartagena was completed successfully during the last quarter of 2023, equipping 1,050 participants with materials for a business and relevant training (including 187 participants from the ultra-poverty Graduation program). The project—"Somos Progreso"—strengthened the local team's ability to lead entrepreneurship programs in Colombia, becoming a trusted partner for public funded opportunities and opening possible new partnerships with governments at the local and national levels.

Special note on partnerships in Colombia:

- Partnerships, especially those with the government, are key for scaling the programs in Colombia, bringing the possibility of broadening the impact in more communities and reaching more people.
- Thanks to our programs, our clients have been able to access more services that promote leadership, empowerment, and business growth.
- The work we do with migrants has had a profound impact in the communities, since often they are not able to access these kinds of programs with other organizations. This means that we are having an impact in the Venezuelan nationals, as well as the host communities in Colombia.
- Including business-related trainings boosts the results of our programs, giving tools to the clients to build sustainable livelihoods.



Maria and her husband worked tirelessly in the heat collecting recyclable items from the streets to earn a meager income. She didn't want her children to have to do the same work. She is a current participant in Opportunity's Graduation program where she has learned how to run a business, manage her finances, and improve the wellbeing of her family. She has opened her own grocery store and has made improvements to her home.

**As you read and reflect upon these updates, we hope you are as inspired as we are by our brothers and sisters in Colombia, who teach us every day what true "opportunity" is.
Thank you for enabling people to live with dignity and purpose.**