

Strengthening rural communities and promoting the peace process

Context

For 50 years Colombia was gripped by an extremely brutal armed conflict between the government and guerrilla groups. According to the official register of victims, this conflict claimed 8.3 million casualties from 1986 onward. More than seven million people were displaced from their homeland. Initially driven by ideology, the conflict was essentially over the distribution of the natural resources of land, water and raw materials. Small peasant families were evicted from their land as they constituted obstacles to the advancement of major agribusiness or mining and oil industry projects. Other problems are environmental degradation, water pollution from mining projects or the destruction of ecosystems as a result of deforestation. The Colombian government did indeed sign a peace agreement with the FARC in 2017; but the demilitarisation of the rebels created a power vacuum which is being progressively filled by organised crime. The new government in office since 2018 bears some of the blame for this, given its wish to implement the peace agreement only partially, if at all. This has combined with the adverse impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the poorest segments of the population to plunge the country into a major political crisis. Other problems are environmental degradation, water pollution from mining projects or the destruction of ecosystems as a result of deforestation. HEKS/EPER has been working in Colombia since the 1980s and has extensive experience in supporting internally displaced people, setting up and consolidating grassroots organizations, as well as in promoting human rights and peace-building.

COLOMBIA
HEKS/EPER Main Focus:
Promotion of Peace




50'878'000
Population (2020)

1'141'748
Area km²





Objectives, priorities, activities

The country programme focuses on the Magdalena Medio region. Thematic priorities are the protection of human rights, enhancing the safety of the local people as well as the equitable use of land. The programme aims to contribute substantially to shaping a more just and peaceful society and enhancing livelihoods for rural communities. The safety of threatened persons and communities who champion the causes of local residents and the environment is to be enhanced and human rights strengthened. To secure access to land and resources, HEKS/EPER assists peasant families in claiming their rights and works to strengthen self-help entities. Organisations of internally displaced people and women's organisations are also being supported.

Target groups

The HEKS/EPER Country Programme benefits primarily the rural civilian population in the Magdalena Medio and Santander conflict regions and their civil society organisations; it also benefits players that advocate for the peace process. Further beneficiaries are peasant families and their organisations in conflict zones, women's organisations and internally displaced families.

In addition, HEKS/EPER has been operating a special programme since 2018 to assist migrants from Venezuela as well as the local people impacted by their presence.

Partnerships, networks, alliances, memberships

HEKS/EPER also works with other aid agencies and institutions on the ground. Partner organizations comprise local grassroots and human rights entities, rural communities, and church-run and social NGOs. They are active in the realms of human rights, peace work, land use and food security, support for women and young adults, protection of threatened persons and population groups, promotion of the rights of peasant families as well as humanitarian assistance and protection for migrants.

HEKS/EPER on the ground

HEKS/EPER maintains a Coordination Office in Colombia, which implements the country programme and provides professional advice and support to partner organisations and projects.

Topics and working approach

HEKS/EPER takes a participatory approach to its work, whereby target groups and partner organizations are closely involved in project planning, implementation and evaluation. Supporting women and young adults is of particular importance to HEKS/EPER. Besides, HEKS/EPER constantly monitors the evolution of the peace agreement and the human rights situation and advocates for lasting peace, a decent life for the rural poor and the safety of the civilian population.

Country:

Colombia

HEKS/EPER No.: 384.200

Responsibility:

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