

# Rural Youth in Colombia: Inequalities and Challenges for Territorial Development

Fredy Rafael Pacheco Salgado<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*This article offers a comprehensive diagnosis of the socioeconomic conditions of rural youth in Colombia, with emphasis on their demographic distribution, access to basic services, education, employment, health, and their participation in the planning of public policies at the departmental level. Based on the review and analysis of secondary sources and official statistical data for the period 2020-2023, the main problems and inequalities that affect this population compared to their urban peers are identified. The results show significant gaps in multiple dimensions, which reaffirms the need to strengthen public policies with a differential and territorial approach, aimed at guaranteeing the effective inclusion and comprehensive development of rural youth as strategic actors in regional and national development processes.*

**Keywords:** Rural Youth, Inequality, Rurality, Public Policies, Colombia, Urban-Rural Gaps.

## Introduction

During the twenty-first century, Colombia has gone through an accelerated demographic transition characterized by a sustained reduction in its rural population. While in 1950 more than half of the country's inhabitants resided in rural areas, by 2021 this proportion had decreased to less than 30% (DANE, 2022).

In this scenario, young people constitute 24.8% of the national population, with a marked concentration in urban areas. Currently, only two out of ten young people live in rural areas, which shows the decrease of this population in rural areas (DANE, 2022). Added to this is the limited social mobility in the country, where it is estimated that a Colombian family requires up to eleven generations to overcome the poverty line, a figure that contrasts with six generations in Chile and two in Denmark (OECD, 2019), which is related to the persistence of inequality structures that particularly affect rural youth.

Colombian rural youth face different conditions compared to their urban peers, marked by historical gaps in access to basic services, quality education, decent employment and political participation. These limitations condition their life projects, widen territorial inequalities and perpetuate cycles of social and economic exclusion that restrict their integral development.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the socioeconomic conditions and the main gaps that affect rural youth in Colombia during the period 2020-2023, in order to provide elements for the strengthening of public policies from a differential and territorial approach. Based on the analysis of demographic and socioeconomic variables and youth regulatory frameworks at the departmental level, the research identifies the main factors that condition the quality of life of this population, deepening inequalities compared to their urban peers.

The research also proposes to contribute to the academic debate on rurality and youth in Colombia, highlighting the urgency of rethinking departmental youth public policies from a perspective that recognizes the territorial particularities and diversity of rural youth trajectories.

The specific objectives that guide this analysis are:

---

<sup>1</sup> Universidad de Granada, España, Email: fredypacheco@correo.ugr.es, ORCID: 0009-0008-1254-6998

- To characterize the demographic distribution of rural youth in Colombia and its relationship with socioeconomic and territorial factors.
- To analyze the conditions of access to basic services, education, employment and health of rural youth, identifying the main gaps in terms of infrastructure, coverage and quality compared to urban areas.
- To examine the state of formulation and implementation of departmental public policies aimed at rural youth, with the purpose of identifying gaps and proposing recommendations that strengthen their design and execution from a differential and territorial approach.

### *Hypothesis:*

Rural youth in Colombia face multidimensional structural inequalities that limit their access to fundamental rights and development opportunities, due to the weak presence of public policies with a territorial and differential approach that recognize their particularities and specific needs.

## **Methodology**

The research was developed under a quantitative-descriptive approach, complemented by documentary analysis, which allowed a comprehensive diagnosis of the socioeconomic conditions of rural youth in Colombia. The study was based on the review and analysis of secondary sources and official data corresponding to the period 2013-2023, with emphasis on the presentation and analysis of the most recent information available.

The methodology was structured based on an analytical, interpretative and critical approach, supported by an exhaustive bibliographic review of official and specialized sources. For data collection, the National Population and Housing Census (CNPV, 2018), the Third National Agricultural Census (CNA, 2014) and quality of life surveys were used, complemented with information produced by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) and other government agencies, such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Colombia. For the purposes of the study, the legal definition of youth established in the Youth Citizenship Statute (Law 1622 of 2013) was adopted, which includes people between 14 and 28 years of age.

The methodology included a comparative analysis of socioeconomic indicators between rural and urban areas, aimed at identifying the main structural gaps in education, employment, health, access to basic services and quality of life. In addition, a systematic documentary review of departmental youth public policies in force in the 32 departments of the country was carried out, with the purpose of analyzing the incorporation of rural youth in territorial planning and the existence of specific mechanisms for this population group. The information collected was organized into systematization matrices for each thematic axis of analysis, which allowed a structured and transversal approach to the situation of rural youth in Colombia, identifying patterns, gaps and opportunities in the different dimensions studied.

### *Theoretical and Conceptual Contributions*

#### *Rural Youth as A Category of Analysis*

Rural youth, a complex category of analysis that is in permanent dispute. At the time, denialist approaches went so far as to affirm that "rural youth do not exist", arguing that the absence of educational, cultural and participation opportunities restricted their life trajectories and reinforced their invisibility in public agendas (Souto, 2007). This vision, by reducing the rural to tradition and backwardness, and associating youth exclusively with modernity and progress, generated tensions that have been actively challenged by rural youth themselves. Through the resignification of their identities, these young people have not only questioned the stereotypes that marginalize them, but have also claimed their right to be recognized as

social and political subjects with the capacity for agency, especially in the face of the new dynamics imposed by globalization (López, 2010).

In recent decades, the emergence of the "new rurality" and the effects of globalization have profoundly transformed the ways of being and inhabiting the countryside, making rural youth identities more complex. Far from remaining passive subjects or anchored in tradition, rural youth have deployed dynamics of resistance, reconfiguring their practices and meanings. In this process, the appropriation of digital technologies has become a key strategy, not only to strengthen their local networks and revitalize their traditions, but also to establish links with global spaces and circuits of participation and symbolic production (Kessler, 2007 ; Sánchez-Sánchez, 2022).

These transformations have highlighted the internal heterogeneity of rural youth, marked by inequalities in access to land, gender differences and disparities in the forms of economic insertion and social participation. This diversity breaks with the monolithic idea of "rural youth" and requires the recognition of multiple experiences, trajectories and aspirations that coexist and are disputed within rural territories.

However, this capacity for resignification coexists with historical exclusions that continue to condition the experiences of rural youth. This structural exclusion resulted in truncated youth trajectories, where participation in child labor and early motherhood or paternity were consolidated as almost inevitable destinations for large sectors of this population (Weisheimer, 2013).

From Bourdieu's (1980) perspective , the family, the school, and the community have operated as key spaces of socialization, molding differentiated habitus that configure diverse rural youth identities, deeply situated in their contexts. Bourdieu (1980) emphasized the need to recognize the heterogeneity of youth, arguing that treating them as a homogeneous social entity with common interests determined exclusively by biological age is a simplification that does not reflect their diversity of experiences and realities. In this context, the academic literature has opted for the use of the term youth in the plural, thus recognizing the multiplicity of experiences, identities and perspectives that characterize this group.

Beyond their economic dimension, rural territories are home to a valuable and diverse natural and cultural heritage, historically built through practices such as agriculture and livestock. These activities not only shaped the landscapes, but also the traditions and lifestyles that define rurality (Cejudo et al, 2021).

In this context, Triana (2022) showed that rural youth in Colombia face a scenario marked by the persistence of armed conflict and violence in the territories, a situation that, added to the absence of effective and attractive programs that encourage them to stay in the countryside, has intensified youth migration to the cities. Structural factors such as the scarce inheritance of land, the lack of public services, the absence of recreational spaces and limited technical assistance further aggravate this problem, reinforcing among rural young people the desire to migrate in search of better opportunities and living conditions. In addition, Triana (2022) warns of a particularly worrying phenomenon: the growing "masculinization" of the countryside. An increasing number of rural women express their intention to migrate to cities, which deepens gender inequalities and weakens social cohesion in rural communities.

In short, rural youth must be understood as a heterogeneous, dynamic and constantly transforming category, whose experiences, struggles and contributions are fundamental for the sustainability of the territories and the consolidation of democratic governance in rural Colombia. Far from being passive subjects or mere recipients of public policies, rural youth have deployed various strategies of resilience and cultural resistance that strengthen the social and community fabric, even in contexts marked by violence and exclusion (Rosales, 2017). Recognizing its centrality in territorial development implies going beyond the design of differentiated policies; it requires guaranteeing their effective and active participation in the definition of the life and development projects of their territories.

*Structural Inequalities and Territorial Focus in Public Policies*

The analysis of public policies on youth requires recognizing the polysemic nature of the term, which adds complexity to its interpretation and study. This notion articulates three fundamental dimensions: polity, referring to regulatory structures and frameworks; politics, which refers to the dispute for power; and policy, linked to specific government actions (Gómez & Holguín, 2012). Understood in this way, public policies are not only technical instruments of state management, but also spaces of dispute and negotiation where priorities are defined and social demands are channeled, marking who is recognized as subjects of rights and who is excluded (Roth, 2002).

In Latin America, youth policies have historically oscillated between sectoral approaches and more comprehensive approaches promoted by multilateral organizations and state agencies (Rodríguez, 2020). However, a homogenizing vision persists that, by treating youth as a uniform group, makes invisible the profound internal differences marked by gender, ethnicity, social class and, especially, territory (Sánchez-Sánchez, 2022). This trend reproduces welfare-based, urban-centric, and adult-centric approaches, reducing young people to the category of "vulnerable populations" and denying them their capacity for agency and effective political participation (Alvarado & Vommaro, 2018).

Along these lines, the capabilities approach proposed by Sen (1999) offered a critical and proactive view by placing the expansion of people's real freedoms and effective opportunities at the center of the discussion. Applied to rural youth, this approach makes it possible to overcome welfare-based visions and raises the need to design public policies that strengthen their agency, recognizing them as subjects of rights and as strategic actors in the development of their territories.

Beyond its technical formulation, the cycle of public policies is a profoundly political process, in which resources and meanings are disputed and diverse interests are negotiated (Mény and Thoenig, 1992). The territory cannot be reduced to a geographical or physical dimension; it is, above all, a social, historical and symbolic construction where differentiated power relations, identities and economic dynamics are configured (Haesbaert, 2016 ; Schejtman & Berdegué, 2004). Recognizing this complexity requires a multi-scalar and relational perspective that considers the tensions between the local, the national, and the global, as well as the differentiated impacts of policies at each level (Manzanal, 2014). Ignoring this territorial dimension not only limits the effectiveness of policies, but also risks reproducing and deepening existing gaps and inequalities (Pierre & Peters, 2020 ; Folke et al., 2021 ).

Faced with this scenario, it is necessary to rethink public policies from a rights-based and human development perspective (Uvin, 2007 ; Sen, 2001 ), aimed at transforming the structural conditions that perpetuate inequality and exclusion. This implies designing strategies that expand the freedoms and capacities of rural youth to decide about their lives and their territories, favoring their effective participation and the strengthening of citizenship. In coherence with the perspective of "development as freedom" (Sen, 1999) and the notion of "inclusive territorial development" (Schejtman & Berdegué, 2021), the need to generate policies that promote youth protagonism in territorial transformation processes is raised.

As García-Arias et al. (2015) point out , participatory planning is presented as a fundamental way in this process, as it is a structured mechanism that facilitates the identification of priorities, the collective construction of solutions and direct dialogue with the authorities. This not only favors the design of policies that are more inclusive and relevant, but also more adjusted to the realities and needs of rural territories. In summary, addressing public policies from a territorial, rights-based and capacity-based approach not only makes visible the multiple structural inequalities faced by rural youth in Colombia, but also transforms the paradigm of state intervention.

## Results

### *Demographic Aspects of Rural Youth in Colombia*

In 2018, 76.2% of the Colombian youth population resided in urban areas, while approximately 23.8% lived in population centers and dispersed rural areas. By 2022, 52.3% of rural women were under 30 years of age, a proportion 8.6% higher than that of young women in urban areas (DANE, 2022). In addition, a considerable part of the rural youth population self-identified as belonging to an ethnic group: 7.2% as NARP (Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero), 4.8% as indigenous, 0.1% as Raizal and 0.01% as gypsy/Rrom (DANE, 2018).

For the year 2023, Colombia presented a "demographic bonus" characterized by a significant proportion of the working-age population, which could represent an economic advantage. However, this phenomenon showed regional variations. For example, in Antioquia, 80% of the young population resided in urban areas, while in Valle del Cauca only 14% lived in rural areas. Border departments such as Vaupés and Guainía had more than 30% of their youth living in dispersed rural areas.

Between 2005 and 2018, the average growth rate of the youth index in Colombia was 0.4%. However, some departments experienced significant increases in their youth population, such as Guainía (4.61%) and Putumayo (3.68%). In contrast, fifteen departments registered a decrease in their youth index, with Caldas and Tolima being the most affected.

The distribution of the rural youth population compared to the total population by department revealed regional inequalities. In six departments and the Capital District, the portion of the rural youth population was equal to or less than 5%. In 16 departments, this proportion was between 6% and 10%, while in seven departments it ranged between 11% and 15%. In only four departments, the rural youth population represented between 16% and 20% of the total departmental population.

### *Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN) in Rural Areas*

The Unmet Basic Needs Index (NBI) is a method used in Colombia to measure poverty, considering factors such as inadequate housing, critical overcrowding, lack of adequate health services, school non-attendance of children between 7 and 12 years old, and economic dependence, which is the relationship between the number of people in the household and the income generated by the head of the household. Based on the direct observation of the living conditions of households, according to the methodology applied by DANE (2018), the NBI classified households according to the degree of satisfaction of their basic needs. A higher NBI index indicated greater needs and therefore greater poverty, while a lower NBI suggested less need and, consequently, lower poverty.

Thus, based on DANE statistics (2018), a significant correlation was found between departments with a high rural youth population and high rates of rural NBI in Colombia. For the year 2018, the departments with the highest rates of NBI in rural areas were: Vaupés, Vichada, Guainía, La Guajira and Chocó. These departments, characterized by high rates of NBI in rural areas, were all bordering, with a high percentage of the population belonging to ethnic groups and located mainly in the south of the country, with the exception of the department of La Guajira, located in the north. While lower rates of NBI were found in the rural areas of the Archipelago of San Andrés, Quindío, Cundinamarca, Valle del Cauca and Bogotá D.C.

Colombia has historically developed a polycentric geographical structure, this model is characterized by a few development nodes located mainly in the center of the country, while large peripheral areas remain lagging behind. This disparity was also reflected in the high inequality of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita between different departments (OECD, 2022). For example, Bogotá, which accounted for 25% of the national GDP, has a GDP per capita five times higher than rural regions such as Amazonas (0.1%), Putumayo (0.4%), Chocó (0.4%), and Guainía (0.0%) (DANE, 2023).



These data show how territorial inequalities in Colombia are not only expressed in terms of infrastructure and access to basic services, but also deepen the social and economic gaps that directly affect rural youth. The concentration of economic development in a few urban nodes and the persistent marginalization of rural and peripheral areas, particularly those with a high presence of young people and ethnic groups, reveal the urgency of rethinking public policies from a territorial and differential approach.

### *Education and Rural Youth*

Rural youth face significant challenges in terms of quality and access to education. While urban youth aged 15 to 24 have an average of 10.6 years of formal education, their rural peers reach only 8.5 years (Penagos et al., 2020). The disparities are aggravated by the presence of multigrade schools in rural areas. In addition, rural areas lack adequate roads, school transportation, and quality teaching talent. These shortcomings, together with deficiencies in the management of the School Feeding Program (PAE), hinder the effectiveness of educational coverage

Colombia ranks last in educational quality in the OECD, with 71% of students at the lowest levels of performance in the PISA tests. In national tests, urban students perform better compared to their rural peers (LEE-Javeriana, 2023). Only two out of five rural educational institutions offer secondary education. The educational infrastructure in rural areas is deficient. In 2022, 18.1% of rural schools lacked electricity, 79.8% did not have internet access, and 59.7% did not have computer rooms (DANE, 2022).

Total gross higher education coverage in Colombia has grown slowly, reaching 54.91% in 2022. However, there are notable differences between departments. In Antioquia, the rate of access to higher education exceeds 56%, while in dispersed rural municipalities it is extremely low (Min Educación, 2022). The annual college dropout rate in 2021 was 10.08%. The inter-semester absence rate showed a slight improvement, decreasing from 14.66% to 12.84% between 2020 and 2021 (Min Educación, 2022).

In short, the deep gaps in access and quality of education reinforce the inequalities faced by rural youth in Colombia and limit their opportunities for development. The precariousness of infrastructure, low coverage in secondary and higher education, together with the limited presence of teachers and technological resources, perpetuate cycles of exclusion and backwardness.

### *Employment and Work in Rural Youth*

Labor informality is a significant problem in rural areas, where the formal employment rate barely exceeds 15%, compared to 43% in cities. The high level of labor informality limits access to social security and pensions (DANE, 2018). In addition, there is a significant incidence of child labour in rural areas, especially among out-of-school children. This phenomenon is related to the lack of job opportunities and dependence on income from self-employment in vulnerable households (Otero, 2019 ; Corredor, 2016 ).

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the erosion of employment opportunities in the rural labor market, resulting in the loss of approximately 578,705 jobs between March and July 2020 (DANE, 2022). Although agriculture remains the main employer in rural areas, there has been an increase in interest in rural non-agricultural activities, such as commerce and social services (DNP, 2015 ). Gender differences in rural occupations are marked, with men predominantly in sectors such as agriculture, livestock, fishing, and construction, while women are concentrated in commerce, tourism, and communal services (DNP, 2014). Rural youth face high levels of female unemployment, with women constituting 56.1% of unemployment in rural areas and labor participation of only 31.4% (DANE, 2022).

Public employment in rural areas is almost non-existent, with a concentration of 51% of public jobs in the capital, Bogotá. At the national level, public servants constitute 6.20% of total employment (Civil Service, 2022). In 2022, only 22.48% of rural youth were affiliated to the General Pension and Social Security System (SGPS). This percentage reflects the limited participation of young people in the formal labor market and the consequent lack of social protection (Min Salud, 2023).

The youth unemployment rate in 2022 was 17.1%, with a significant gap between women (21.1%) and men (12.2%) (DANE, 2023). 26% of people of working age in Colombia are "ninis" (neither studying nor working), with a higher proportion of young women (17.2%) than young men (8.8%). This segment represents an underutilized potential and poses a growing risk of social and economic inequalities (Balarezo, 2019). Rural youth face barriers such as the scarcity of educational institutions, the limited supply of formal employment, lack of transport and connectivity infrastructure, and dependence on low-paid and highly informal agricultural activities.

In conclusion, the precariousness of the rural labor market and the high informality seriously limit the opportunities of rural youth in Colombia, deepening their vulnerability and social exclusion. Gender gaps, child labor and the growth of the "NEET" phenomenon show the urgency of implementing public policies that promote access to decent, formal jobs with social protection

### *Health and Well-Being in Rural Youth*

Despite advances in health coverage, which reached 98% in 2022, there is still 2% of the population, mainly in dispersed rural areas, without access to medical services. Approximately 7% of rural youth are not affiliated to the social security health system (Min Salud, 2021). There is a notable disparity in the distribution of doctors between urban and rural areas. In the municipal capitals there are 102 health professionals per 10,000 inhabitants, a figure that decreases to 40.8 in rural areas and 28.1 in dispersed rural areas (Min Salud, 2022).

7.1% of the Colombian population lives with a disability, with 20% of this population located in rural areas. Rural youth with disabilities face physical barriers, lack of adapted transportation, and invisibility in their communities (DANE, 2018; Min Salud, 2022). Rural youth have significantly less access to mental health services compared to urban youth. The consequences of armed conflict and the consumption of psychoactive substances (PAS) aggravate mental health problems in these areas (Min Salud, 2015).

Rural youth have a lower prevalence of chronic diseases, but they face high risks of mortality from accidents and aggressions. Homicides account for 43% of deaths in this age group. In dispersed rural areas, the leading causes of youth mortality include transport accidents and intentional self-inflicted injuries (Min Salud, 2022). Rural youth face additional barriers in HIV prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. In 2022, 63% of new HIV cases corresponded to people between 25 and 29 years of age in Colombia (National Institute of Health, 2022).

The use of SPA, such as alcohol and marijuana, is linked to an increase in traffic accidents, violence and poor performance. The average age of initiation of cigarette consumption is 16.8 years for men and 18.2 years for women (DANE, 2019; DANE, 2020). Suicide is a significant cause of youth mortality, especially in departments with high rates of Unmet Basic Needs (UBN) and a large presence of young people belonging to ethnic groups. In 2022, Vaupés reported the highest rate of youth suicide, with 84.83 cases per 100,000 inhabitants (Min Salud, 2022).

In 2015, 24.8% of rural young women between the ages of 15 and 19 were mothers or pregnant, in contrast to 15.1% in urban areas. Between 2015 and 2020, births to girls aged 10 to 14 years in rural areas increased by 80.4%, and in adolescents aged 15 to 19 years by 38.6% (ENDS, 2015).

In summary, rural youth in Colombia face serious limitations in access to comprehensive and quality health services, a situation that deepens their vulnerability to problems such as mental health, the consumption of psychoactive substances, mortality from violence and adolescent pregnancy. The gaps in coverage, medical personnel, and differential care for populations with disabilities or at social risk reflect the urgent need to strengthen the territorial approach and guarantee effective access to health as a fundamental right.

*Public Policies for Rural Youth in Colombia*

In recent decades, Colombia has made progress in the formulation of public policies aimed at youth; however, their scope and implementation in rural contexts remain limited and uneven. The Youth Citizenship Statute (Law 1622 of 2013) defined youth public policies as continuous processes of intersectoral and territorial articulation, aimed at guaranteeing the full exercise of youth rights. The law established the obligation to formulate such policies at all territorial levels, with the active participation of young people and specific budget allocation.

Article 20 of the Statute set deadlines for its formulation: six months after the election of the Municipal Youth Councils and nine months for the departments. In addition, he demanded the updating of current policies, in coordination with the National Youth System. However, by 2022, compliance was limited. Only 404 municipalities had formalized policies, while 629 municipalities had not adopted any regulatory instrument, in breach of the legal mandate (Attorney General's Office, 2022). At the departmental level, in 2023, 24 of the 32 departments had formalized their public policy on youth, but only 13 kept up to date, while 8 departments lacked the instrument.

The analysis showed a scarce inclusion of rural youth in these policies. In most cases, differentiated strategies were not contemplated for this population group, which deepens their invisibility in territorial planning. Departments with high rurality and youth presence, such as La Guajira, Amazonas, Vaupés and Vichada, did not have formal policies, evidencing structural non-compliance.

In terms of institutionality, only Antioquia and Córdoba created specific Youth Secretariats. In the rest, the functions were limited to coordinations or programs with low operational capacity. Additionally, the infrastructure of Youth Houses showed deep gaps: in 2024, there were 86 Houses in 29 departments, concentrated in urban areas, while regions such as Casanare had only one. The research showed that, by 2024, only three departments: Antioquia (2019), Cundinamarca (2023) and Meta (2023) had specific public policies for rural youth, formalized through departmental ordinances. Ordinances are administrative acts issued by the Departmental Assembly, of mandatory compliance, intended to dictate provisions to resolve matters within its competence. Although the definition of public policy is not homogeneous, for this work it is considered as an expression of political power through a long-term planning instrument, focused on building or improving a specific issue relevant to society. It is also understood as an expression of power relations that is built through a process of consultation with multiple actors from the State, civil society, and private agents (Betancourt & Ramírez, 2018).

Two of these instruments, in the department of Cundinamarca and Meta, were recently adopted (2023), reflecting the incipient incorporation of this population into territorial planning. The policies share objectives aimed at strengthening rural youth entrepreneurship and improving access to and quality of education in rural areas. They include training strategies and promotion of youth productive competitiveness. However, there are differences in the technical scope and robustness of the implementation and evaluation mechanisms.

The department of Antioquia, whose policy includes a detailed diagnosis, clear objectives, financing schemes and specific institutional framework, such as the creation of the Departmental Table for Rural Youth, a body for consultation and follow-up that does not exist in the other departments. Cundinamarca and Meta incorporated symbolic mechanisms and incentives, such as the Day of the Rural Youth or the Rural Youth Award, but they lack clear definitions of rural youth and robust monitoring and evaluation systems, limiting the measurement of impacts and the sustainability of actions.

In addition, the three ordinances present gaps in the approach to structural problems such as youth mobility, access to basic services and the guarantee of fundamental rights. Although these ordinances represent advances in the visibility of rural youth in departmental strategic planning, it is necessary to strengthen their comprehensive and territorial approach, ensuring sustainable actions that reduce urban-rural gaps and promote the permanence and development of youth in their territories.



### *Analysis of Inequalities and Challenges for Rural Youth in Colombia*

The above data showed the deep structural inequalities faced by rural youth in Colombia, as a result of the intersection of demographic, social, economic, and political factors that perpetuate historical gaps with their urban peers. Demographically, rural youth constitute a strategic group but in progressive decline, affected by forced or voluntary migration, low birth rates and population aging, phenomena that are exacerbated in territories with high levels of unsatisfied basic needs (UBN) and limited supply of essential services.

Education emerges as one of the most critical expressions of this inequality. Gaps in coverage, quality, infrastructure and connectivity restrict the educational trajectories and the possibilities of professionalization of rural youth, forcing them to migrate or remain in conditions of backwardness and vulnerability. This educational exclusion has a direct impact on their labor insertion, where unemployment, informality and concentration in agricultural activities with low added value predominate, with few alternatives for economic diversification. This situation is aggravated for rural women and young people in NEET conditions (neither studying nor working), who face greater risks of being linked to illicit economies and perpetuating cycles of poverty.

Access to health, especially in areas such as mental and sexual health, is another area where deep shortcomings persist. Problems such as youth suicide and teenage pregnancy are a reflection of the fragility of the rural health system, marked by the low density of medical personnel and the precariousness of the health infrastructure, which deepens the exclusion and vulnerability of this population.

In terms of public policies, the balance revealed partial compliance with Law 1622 of 2013, with institutional advances still insufficient to guarantee a comprehensive and differential approach to rural youth. As of 2024, several departments of the country lacked specific instruments that would make visible and respond to the needs of this population, evidencing a weak mainstreaming of the rural approach in territorial planning. Although experiences such as those of Antioquia, Cundinamarca and Meta represent important steps in the recognition of rural youth, their effectiveness will depend on political and financial sustainability, the creation of evaluation mechanisms and the real capacity to transform the structural conditions of inequality.

In this context, territorial planning must be assumed as an exercise in democratic governance, aimed at closing structural and territorial gaps. This requires overcoming the fragmentation of interventions and strengthening intersectoral and intersectional articulation, in order to build comprehensive public policies, with a rights-based approach and a territorial perspective.

## **Conclusions**

During the period analyzed, rural youth in Colombia face structural challenges that limit their integral development and deepen the historical inequalities between rural and urban areas. The persistence of labor informality, educational gaps, and limitations in access to essential basic services restrict their opportunities for full participation in the social, economic, and political life of the country, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and vulnerability. These conditions hinder their access to higher education, decent employment and a life with well-being in their own territories, which increases migratory flows to cities and weakens the social fabric in rural areas.

Overcoming these challenges requires moving towards a comprehensive public policy model that recognizes the diversity and heterogeneity of rural youth, their territories and their different ways of inhabiting and projecting life. In this sense, prioritizing access to quality rural education, promoting the generation of formal employment and guaranteeing decent living conditions in rural areas are fundamental actions to close existing structural gaps.

## References

- DANE. (2022). Demography and population: Estimates of demographic change. Retrieved March 10, 2022. Available in: <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/demografia-y-poblacion>
- DANE. (2022). Demography and population: Estimates of demographic change. Retrieved March 10, 2022. Available in: <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/demografia-y-poblacion>
- OECD (2019), "Basic Statistics of Colombia, 2018. OECD Economic Studies: Colombia 2019, OECD Publishing, Paris, Accessed March 4, 2022. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/fd729886-es>.
- Souto, S (2007). Youth, Theory and History: The Formation of a Social Subject and an Object of Analysis. HAOL Magazine, No. 13 (Winter, 2007), 171-192. ISSN-e 1696-2060, No. 13, 2007, pp. 171-192. Retrieved April 10, 2024. Available in: <https://historia-actual.org/Publicaciones/index.php/hao/article/view/208/196>
- López, A (2010). Social Preemptory and Rural Social Moratorium: Approaches to the Understanding of Rural Youth. *Universitas Humanística*, (70), 187-203. CINDE. Retrieved March 10, 2024. Available in: [http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci\\_abstract&pid=S0120-48072010000200011&lng=es&nrm=iso&tlng=es](http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_abstract&pid=S0120-48072010000200011&lng=es&nrm=iso&tlng=es)
- Kessler, G (2007). School and juvenile crime. The Educational Experience of Young People in Conflict with the Law *Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa*, vol. 12, no. 32, January-March, 2007, pp. 283-303 Consejo Mexicano de Investigación Educativa, A.C. Distrito Federal, Mexico . Accessed March 9, 2024 available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/140/14003214.pdf>
- Sánchez-Sánchez, David. 2022. "The Rural Youth Condition in Agricultural Territories". *ANDULI, Andalusian Journal of Social Sciences*, n° 22 (August):103-25. <https://doi.org/10.12795/anduli.2022.i22.06>.
- Weisheimer, N. (2013). Sobre a invisibilidade social das juventudes rurais. *DESIDADES Electronic Journal of Scientific Dissemination of Children and Youth*, 1\*(1), 22-27. Retrieved February 22, 2023. Available in <https://revistas.ufrj.br/index.php/desidades/article/view/2464>
- Bourdieu, P. (1980). Identity and representation. *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 35, 63–72. Consultado el 10 de julio de 2024. Available in: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5532282>
- Cejudo E., Cañete J., Navarro, F., & Capote A. (2021). Failure to implement Leader projects in the deep rural areas of Andalusia (Spain): Youth and women. *Ager: Journal of Studies on Depopulation and Rural Development*, (33), 249-278. Retrieved April 10, 2024, from <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=8226031>
- Triana, J. (2022). Mapping the reality of Colombian rural youth to support the development of social policies mitigating migration (Tesis doctoral). Universidad de Brasília, Brasília. Consulted on February 10, 2023. Available in [https://bdtd.ibict.br/vufind/Record/UNB\\_6310a7a55ed6da429f7c77b47dd3ab6a](https://bdtd.ibict.br/vufind/Record/UNB_6310a7a55ed6da429f7c77b47dd3ab6a)
- Rosales, C. (2017). The Social Construction of Rural Youth: The Case of Young People in Northeastern Mendoza (Doctoral Thesis). National University of Cordoba, Center for Advanced Studies, Doctorate in Agrarian Social Studies. Retrieved March 10, 2024. Available in <https://rdu.unc.edu.ar/handle/11086/546354>
- Gómez, C. & Holguín, C. (2012). Notes on the State and Public Policies. Editorial Academia Española.
- Roth, D. (2002). *Introduction to Policy Analysis: Concepts, Methods, and Applications*. Springer.
- Rodríguez, E. (2000). Youth and Public Policies in Latin America: Experiences and Challenges from Institutional Management. *Last decade*, 8(13), 35-58. Accessed March 9, 2023, available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-2236200000200003>
- Alvarado, S., & Vommaro, P. (2018). Transformations and new searches in youth studies: a view from Colombia. *Crossroads. Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales*, 15, e1502. Accessed March 10, 2024. Available in: <https://recyt.fecyt.es/index.php/encrucijadas/article/view/79136>
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- Mény, Y., and Thoenig, J. (1989). *Public policies*. Presses Universitaires de France.
- Haesbaert, R. (2016). From multiterritoriality to new walls: contemporary paradoxes of deterritorialization. *Revista Locale*, 1(1), 119-134. Accessed February 5, 2023. Available in: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=8061069>
- Schejtman, A., & Berdegué, J. A. (2004). Rural territorial development. *RIMISP – Latin American Center for Rural Development*. Accessed February 10, 2023. Available in: [https://www.rimisp.org/wp-content/files\\_mf/1459018941DesarrolloTerritorialRural.pdf](https://www.rimisp.org/wp-content/files_mf/1459018941DesarrolloTerritorialRural.pdf)
- Manzanal, M. (2014). Territories under construction: Actors, plots and governments. A view from Latin America. CLACSO.
- Pierre, J., & Peters, B. (2000). *Governance, Politics and the State*. Palgrave Macmillan
- Folke, C., Biggs, R., Norström, A. V., Reyers, B., y Rockström, J. (2021). Social-ecological resilience and biosphere-based sustainability science. *Ecology and Society*, 26(3), 41. Consultado 10 de febrero de 2024. Disponible en: <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-12026-260341>
- Uvin, P. (2007). *Human rights and development*. Kumarian Press.
- Sen, A. (2001). *Development and Freedom* (2nd ed.). Planet.
- García-Arias, M., Tolón, A., Lastra, X., & Navarro F. (2015). Rural development in times of crisis. Ideas, data and tools to guide the design of Local Development Plans by Local Communities (DLCL). Accessed March 10, 2024. Available in: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354983114\\_Desarrollo\\_Rural\\_en\\_tiempos\\_de\\_Crisis\\_Ideas\\_datos\\_y\\_herramientas\\_para\\_orientar\\_el\\_diseno\\_de\\_Planes\\_de\\_Desarrollo\\_RuralLocal\\_a\\_cargo\\_de\\_las\\_Comunidades\\_Locales\\_DLCL](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354983114_Desarrollo_Rural_en_tiempos_de_Crisis_Ideas_datos_y_herramientas_para_orientar_el_diseno_de_Planes_de_Desarrollo_RuralLocal_a_cargo_de_las_Comunidades_Locales_DLCL)

- DANE. (2022). Quality of life household survey. Retrieved February 10, 2023. Available in: <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/salud/calidad-de-vida-ecv/encuesta-nacional-de-calidad-de-vida-ecv-2022>
- DANE (2018): National Population and Housing Census. Accessed February 10, 2022. Available in: <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/demografia-y-poblacion/censo-nacional-de-poblacion-y-vivenda-2018>
- DANE. (2023). Departmental National Accounts- GDP by department. Retrieved April 12, 2024. Available in: <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/cuentas-nacionales/cuentas-nacionales-departamentales>
- Penagos A, Ospina A., Quesada C and Castellano F. (2020) A Look at the Rimisp Rural Labor Market. [https://www.rimisp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020\\_11\\_30-MERCADO-LABORAL-RURAL-ANALISIS-VF\\_1-logo.pdf](https://www.rimisp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020_11_30-MERCADO-LABORAL-RURAL-ANALISIS-VF_1-logo.pdf)
- Laboratory of Economics of Education (LEE) of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (2023). Report 79: Characteristics and challenges of rural education in Colombia (October 2023). Accessed March 20, 2022. Available in : <https://lee.javeriana.edu.co/-/lee-informe-79>
- Ministry of National Education (2022). National System of Higher Information. Retrieved April 10, 2023. Available in: <https://snies.mineducacion.gov.co>
- Ibid.
- Otero, A. (2019). The rural labor market in Colombia, 2010-2019. Working Paper on Regional and Urban Economics, No. 281. Publication of the Bank of the Republic. Retrieved October 4, 2021. Available in <https://repositorio.banrep.gov.co/handle/20.500.12134/9762>
- Corredor, A. (2016). Employment and agricultural labor productivity in Colombia. ECLAC publication, LC/L. 4233. Santiago de Chile. Retrieved March 9, 2022. Available in: <https://repositorio.cepal.org/handle/11362/40709>
- DNP. (2015). The Colombian Countryside: A Path to Well-Being and Peace. Mission for the Transformation of the Countryside. Retrieved April 3, 2022. Available in: <https://colaboracion.dnp.gov.co/CDT/Agriculturapequarioforestal%20y%20pesca/EI%20CAMPO%20COLOMBIANO%20UN%20CAMINO%20HACIA%20EL%20BIENESTAR%20Y%20LA%20PAZ%20MTC.pdf>
- DANE (2022) National Quality of Life Survey ECV-2021. Accessed March 10, 2024. Available in: <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/salud/calidad-de-vida-ecv/encuesta-nacional-de-calidad-de-vida-ecv-2021>
- Civil Service (2022). Number of Employment and Type. Accessed March 10, 2024. Available in: [https://www1.funcionpublica.gov.co/cas/login?service=https%3A%2F%2Fwww1.funcionpublica.gov.co%2Fportal%2Flogin%3Bjsessionid%3DAEECFAD73CDD9D03BFCD38103DD3E234%3Fredirect%3D%252Fencuesta-institucional%26refererPlid%3D35447954%26p\\_1\\_id%3D25455601](https://www1.funcionpublica.gov.co/cas/login?service=https%3A%2F%2Fwww1.funcionpublica.gov.co%2Fportal%2Flogin%3Bjsessionid%3DAEECFAD73CDD9D03BFCD38103DD3E234%3Fredirect%3D%252Fencuesta-institucional%26refererPlid%3D35447954%26p_1_id%3D25455601)
- Ministry of Health and Social Protection (2023). Integrated Social Protection Information System. Accessed March 20, 2024. Available in: <https://www.sispro.gov.co/Pages/Home.aspx>
- Balarezo, G. (2019). NEET generation: Young people who neither study nor work. Revista PAIDEIA, 9(1), 77-103. Retrieved April 10, 2022. Available in: <http://revistas.urp.edu.pe/index.php/Paideia/article/view/2266>
- Ministry of Health and Social Protection (2021). Integrated Social Protection Information System. Accessed March 20, 2024. Available in: <https://www.sispro.gov.co/Pages/Home.aspx>
- Min Salud (2015). National Demographic and Health Survey. Accessed March 9, 2022. Available in: <https://profamilia.org.co/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ENDS-2015-TOMO-II.pdf>
- Min Salud (2022). Basic Health Indicators. Accessed August 10, 2023. Available in: <https://www.minsalud.gov.co/sites/rid/Lists/BibliotecaDigital/RIDE/VS/ED/GCFI/indicadores-basicos-salud-2022.pdf>
- National Institute of Health (2022). Epidemiological reports 2018-2022. Accessed April 23, 2023. Available in: <https://www.ins.gov.co/buscar-eventos/Informesdeevento/VIH%20PE%20XIII%202022.pdf>
- Colombia (2013). Law 1622 of 2013 "By means of which the statute of juvenile citizenship is issued and other provisions are issued" (April 29) Official Gazette No. 48.776 of April 29, 2013
- Attorney General's Office (2022). Report on the State of the National Youth System in the Territories – Implementation, Start-up and Operation of Youth Participation Instances in Colombia. Accessed March 10, 2024. Available at: [https://www.procuraduria.gov.co/Documents/febrero%202023/INFORME%20ESTADO%20DEL%20SISTEMA%20NACIONAL%20DE%20JUVENTUD%20-%20%20DICIEMBRE%202022%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.procuraduria.gov.co/Documents/febrero%202023/INFORME%20ESTADO%20DEL%20SISTEMA%20NACIONAL%20DE%20JUVENTUD%20-%20%20DICIEMBRE%202022%20(1).pdf)
- Departmental Assembly of Antioquia. (2019). Ordinance No. 33 of September 27, 2019: Establishing the policy for rural youth in the department of Antioquia.
- Departmental Assembly of Cundinamarca. (2023). Ordinance No. 0107 of June 1, 2023: By means of which the day of the rural youth is commemorated in the department of Cundinamarca and other provisions are issued.
- Departmental Assembly of Meta. (2023). Ordinance No. 1244 of 2023: By means of which the day of rural and peasant youth is established and celebrated, exalted and recognized in the department of Meta.
- Betancourt, M and Ramírez, C (2018): Territorial public policy - School of Public Administration (ESAP). January, 2018. p. 1-111 Accessed April 10, 2024 available at: <https://www.esap.edu.co/portal/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2-Politica-Publica-Territorial.pdf> [