

# Analysis of Departmental Youth Public Policies in Colombia: Focus on Rural and Peasant Youth

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## ABSTRACT

This study employs a critical examination of the efficacy of departmental public policies for youth in Colombia, with a particular focus on rural and campesino youth. Given that one in four young Colombians resides in rural areas, it is imperative that public policy address the unique needs and socio-economic context of this demographic. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining document analysis of planning instruments across Colombia's 32 departments and field data from 270 participants. This approach enabled the identification of significant gaps in the inclusion and visibility of rural youth in policy frameworks. The findings indicate that, while some departments have made progress, the majority of policies lack specific, targeted measures for rural youth. This has resulted in the perpetuation of disparities, which have the effect of limiting rural youths' social development and active participation. The study concludes with recommendations for the implementation of differentiated policies and the creation of inclusive frameworks to better address the needs of rural youth.

**Keywords:** Colombian youth, rural youth policies, public policy analysis, campesino youth, social inclusion, departmental youth policies, Colombia.

## INTRODUCTION

In Colombia, the youth population, defined as individuals between the ages of 14 and 28, constituted 24.8% of the national population. Of this demographic, approximately one in four young people resided in rural areas (DANE, 2022).<sup>1</sup> This considerable demographic proportion highlights the crucial necessity for the implementation of comprehensive public policies that address the specific needs and potentialities of

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<sup>1</sup> National Administrative Department of Statistics- DANE (2022). Demography and population: Estimates of demographic change. Retrieved March 10, 2023. Available in: <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/demografia-y-poblacion>

young people, taking into account their geographical location and socioeconomic context.

At the departmental level, youth public policies have the potential to create enabling environments that foster personal growth and empower the most vulnerable youth as agents of change in their communities (Guiskin, 2019).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, concerns persist regarding the extent to which these policies can adequately address the specific needs of rural and peasant youth within the current regulatory frameworks, given the limitations in terms of knowledge, visibility, and capacity (Triana, 2020).<sup>3</sup>

Despite legislative advances, such as the enactment of Law 1622 of 2013 (Youth Citizenship Statute)<sup>4</sup> and there is a notable absence of regulatory planning instruments that integrate inclusive strategies for all young people in the country, despite the modifications that were made in 2018. Prior research indicates that these policies rarely integrate differential approaches that consider the particularities of gender, ethnicity, disability, and rural territory. This considerably limits their effectiveness and scope (Pardo, 2017).<sup>5</sup> This structural omission has the effect of reducing the capacity of policies to adequately respond to the specific needs of rural and peasant youth. Furthermore, it serves to perpetuate social and economic inequalities, which in turn impedes the integral development and effective participation of these groups in Colombian society.

The principal aim of this article is to undertake a critical analysis of the mechanisms and instruments of youth public policies that are currently in place at the departmental level in Colombia during the period 2013-2023. In particular, the focus is on planning mechanisms that incorporate strategies aimed at rural and peasant youth. To achieve this objective, a mixed methodology was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. The initial stage of the study involved a documentary analysis of the youth public policy planning instruments currently in force in the 32 departments of Colombia. This analysis aimed to identify specific strategies through a

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<sup>2</sup> Guiskin, M. (2019). Situation of rural youth in Latin America and the Caribbean. ECLAC, 181, 68. Accessed April 9, 2023. Available in: <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/f94f1075-5e5a-4aa1-aa1d-c203d026afce/content>

<sup>3</sup> Triana, J. (2022). Mapping the reality of Colombian rural youth to support the development of social policies mitigating migration (Tesis doctoral). Universidad de Brasilia, Brasilia. Consulted on February 10, 2023. Available in [https://bdtd.ibict.br/vufind/Record/UNB\\_6310a7a55ed6da429f7c77b47dd3ab6a](https://bdtd.ibict.br/vufind/Record/UNB_6310a7a55ed6da429f7c77b47dd3ab6a)

<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup> Pardo, R. (2017). Diagnosis of rural youth in Colombia. Rural Dialogue Groups, an advocacy strategy. Document Series No. 227. Social Inclusion and Development Working Group. Rural Youth, Territories and Opportunities Program: A strategy of policy dialogues. Rimisp, Santiago, Chile. Retrieved April 10, 2021. Available in [https://rimisp.org/wp-content/files\\_mf/1503000650DiagnósticodelajuventudruralenColombia.pdf](https://rimisp.org/wp-content/files_mf/1503000650DiagnósticodelajuventudruralenColombia.pdf)

critical review of departmental ordinances. Subsequently, this analysis was complemented with the application of structured surveys to 230 rural and peasant youth leaders, selected from the Municipal Youth Councils by the peasant seat in the different departments, and with semi-structured interviews with 40 rural and peasant youth, selected through intentional sampling to ensure geographical, socioeconomic, and gender diversity. This resulted in a total of 270 participants.

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (version 25) and Microsoft Excel, with descriptive and exploratory analyses performed. The qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed with ATLAS.ti, employing a thematic coding approach to identify relevant categories and subcategories. The triangulation of data enabled a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the current situation to be obtained, incorporating both institutional perspectives and those of the actors directly involved.

This article contributes to the academic debate on the inclusion of rural and peasant youth in the public agenda. It provides a detailed analysis of current departmental youth policies and their perceptions from the population group. In addition, it offers strategic recommendations for strengthening and effectively including this population group. These recommendations guide future actions and policies that promote integral development and the active participation of this key population group for the sustainable rural development of the country.

## METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a mixed descriptive approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze youth public policies at the departmental level in Colombia and their impact on rural and peasant youth. In the qualitative phase, a critical review of the planning instruments for youth public policies in force in the 32 departments of the country was conducted, with a particular focus on departmental ordinances.

Departmental ordinances may be proposed by the deputies and the Governor through their secretaries, by citizens through a popular regulatory initiative in accordance with the prevailing statutory laws, and by the Departmental Comptroller in matters pertaining to their functions. Ordinances are administrative acts issued by the Departmental Assembly with the force of law, intended to dictate provisions to resolve matters within its competence. Although there is no consensus regarding the definition of public policy, for the purposes of this study, it is conceptualized as an expression of political power through a long-term planning instrument, with a focus on the development or enhancement of a specific issue of societal relevance. Furthermore, it can be conceptualized as a manifestation of power relations, constructed through a process of consultation with a multitude of actors from the state, civil society, and private agents (Betancourt & Ramírez, 2018).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Betancourt, Mauricio; Ramírez, Cesar. Territorial Public Policy - School of Public Administration (ESAP). January, 2018. p. 1-111. <https://www.esap.edu.co/portal/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2-Politica-Publica-Territorial.pdf> [ Links ]

This analysis aimed to identify the inclusion of specific strategies aimed at rural and peasant youth by locating explicit references in official documents. This allowed for the comparison and contrast of strategies between departments.

In the subsequent quantitative phase, a structured survey was administered to a purposively sampled group of 230 rural and peasant youth leaders, selected from the Municipal Youth Councils by the peasant seat (2021-2025) in the 32 departments, representing approximately 85% of the youth registered in the database of the High Council for Youth (2022).<sup>7</sup>

The survey, which has been validated by experts and has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87, includes questions on perceptions of youth public policies. These questions are answered using four-point Likert scales, which assess the respondents' knowledge of the relevant institutions, the accessibility of the policies, their relevance to the respondents' lives, and the attention paid to these issues. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 rural youth, selected through purposive sampling to ensure geographical, socioeconomic, and gender diversity. The interviews enabled us to gain insight into emerging issues and provide a complementary perspective to the quantitative data.

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (version 25) and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive and exploratory analyses were performed, including the calculation of frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency. The qualitative data were analyzed with ATLAS.ti (version 8) using a thematic coding approach, with the objective of identifying relevant categories and subcategories. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data through triangulation enhanced the reliability of the conclusions by incorporating a multifaceted perspective.

The research was based on the concept of youth as defined in the Youth Citizenship Statute of 2013, which encompasses individuals between the ages of 14 and 28. A distinction was drawn between the categories of “rural youth” and “peasant youth” (INCAH, 2021).<sup>8</sup> In light of the fact that the peasantry in Colombia has been designated a category of individuals entitled to particular safeguards, as set forth in Legislative Act 001 of 2023, Peasant youth maintain a distinctive relationship with the land, based on food production, with the objective of guaranteeing food sovereignty. Moreover, the specific forms of territoriality, geography, demographics, organization, and culture that distinguish this population group ensure an adequate representation of the population of interest.

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<sup>7</sup> High Counseling of the Youth of Colombia (2022). Youth Councils. Accessed April 10, 2022. Available in: <https://colombiajoven.gov.co/consejosdejuventud>

<sup>8</sup> (INCAH, 2021). Conceptualization of the peasantry. Accessed April 10, 2022. Available in: [https://www.icanh.gov.co/recursos\\_user/ICANH%20PORTAL/SUBDIRECCIÓN%20CIENTÍFICA/ANTROPOLOGIA/Conceptos/2020/Conceptualizacion\\_del\\_campe sinado\\_en\\_Colombia.pdf](https://www.icanh.gov.co/recursos_user/ICANH%20PORTAL/SUBDIRECCIÓN%20CIENTÍFICA/ANTROPOLOGIA/Conceptos/2020/Conceptualizacion_del_campe sinado_en_Colombia.pdf)

The study was conducted in accordance with the highest ethical standards, with all participants providing informed consent and with the assurance of confidentiality and protection of personal data. Among the limitations of the study is the use of purposive sampling, which precludes the generalization of the results to the entire population of rural and peasant youth in Colombia. Furthermore, the research provided a cross-sectional view of the subject matter. It would be beneficial for future research to employ longitudinal designs in order to assess changes over time.

## RESULTS

Rural and peasant youth in Colombia confront considerable obstacles that constrain their prospects for advancement and social integration, particularly in comparison to their urban counterparts. These challenges include restricted access to quality education, a shortage of adequate job opportunities, and limited political representation (Pardo, 2017; Díaz & Fernández, 2017; Quiroga et al., 2023). Furthermore, climate change serves to exacerbate these difficulties by negatively impacting rural communities (Báez et al., 2021).<sup>9</sup>

In this context, youth public policies in Colombia are structured through a variety of planning instruments designed to meet the specific needs of this population group. These instruments are, in general terms, governance techniques that utilize the power and resources of the state to achieve specific objectives (Ferrusca et al., 2022).<sup>10</sup>

The Colombian regulatory framework for the inclusion and participation of young people was reinforced by the enactment of Law 1622 of 2013, also known as the Youth Citizenship Statute. This legislation established a legal foundation for the formulation of youth public policies at the municipal, departmental, and national levels. Article 11 of the Act stipulates that youth public policies must undergo a continuous process of articulation of principles and strategies and must be participatory and coordinated with other public policies. At the national level, the CONPES (National Council for Economic and Social Policy) documents serve as a primary source of guidance for public policy.

At the departmental level, these policies are formalized primarily through regulatory mechanisms, such as ordinances and decrees, which reflect local priorities and the specific characteristics of each region. Subsequently, these policies are specified in strategic plans of varying durations, including annual, ten-year, short-term, and long-term plans. These instruments aim to incorporate specific population groups, including indigenous youth, individuals with disabilities, victims of conflict, and Afro-

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<sup>9</sup> Baez, J., Caruso, G., Mueller, V., & Niu, C. (2017). Droughts augment youth migration in northern Latin America and the Caribbean. *Climatic Change*, 140(3–4), 423–435. Consultado el 20 de septiembre de 2021. Disponible en: [https://ideas.repec.org/a/spr/climat/v140y2017i3d10.1007\\_s10584-016-1863-2.html](https://ideas.repec.org/a/spr/climat/v140y2017i3d10.1007_s10584-016-1863-2.html)

<sup>10</sup> Ferrusca, F. J. R., Sánchez, P. L. J., & Maya, J. R. C. (2022). Mobility and urban development: a review of the strategic factors of its governance and sustainability. *Regional Studies in Economics, Population and Development: Cuadernos de Trabajo de la Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez*, 12(70), 3–43.

descendants. This ensures that policies are responsive to their distinctive needs and fosters their active involvement in community development (Quiroga et al., 2023). Furthermore, it is imperative to transcend the mere examination of the government's political capacity and instead construct a public interest that entails agreements, regulations, and, in certain instances, the formulation of a public policy that fosters the establishment of a conducive institutional environment for collaboration between stakeholders (Naranjo et al., 2009).<sup>11</sup>

Article 20 of the Youth Citizenship Statute delineates the procedures and deadlines for the formulation of public youth policies at the various territorial levels, respecting the principles of territorial autonomy and coordinated participation. Since its enactment in 2013, the departments were afforded a period of nine months to initiate this process, offering technical assistance to the municipalities to ensure effective coordination and complementary policies. Moreover, existing policies were required to be reviewed and updated with a differential approach, and their dissemination was to be carried out within a period of no more than three months from the enactment of the law.

This research project is focused on the analysis of departmental ordinances. In the Colombian context, departmental ordinances serve as a legal instrument for the formal implementation of youth public policies. Once enacted by the Departmental Assemblies, these ordinances serve to legitimize and formalize government actions directed towards youth. This facilitates the regulation of interactions between government actors and citizens, in accordance with the provisions of the Law. It also allows local challenges to be addressed through solutions that are adapted to the unique context of each department.

Nevertheless, despite the enactment of Law 1622 of 2013, its amendment in 2018, and the democratic election of Youth Councils in 2021, a considerable number of departments in Colombia have not yet implemented the youth public policy instruments determined by this law and lack formal departmental planning mechanisms for youth. This discrepancy revealed a disjunction between the regulatory framework and its practical implementation, which has a detrimental impact on rural and peasant youth, who continue to encounter obstacles to their development and effective participation.

### **Current status**

In consequence of the enactment of Law 1622 of 2013, the departments of Colombia have been obliged to devise and put into effect public policies for the benefit of young people. Nevertheless, until 2024, there is a considerable discrepancy in the advancement of these procedures at the regional level.

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<sup>11</sup> Naranjo Giraldo, Gloria, Lopera Morales, Juan Esteban, & Granada Vahos, James. (2009). Territorial public policies as networks of public policy and local governance: the experience of design and formulation of public policies on forced displacement in the department of Antioquia and the city of Medellín. *Political Studies*, (35), 01-02. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from [http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0121-51672009000200005&lng=en&tlng=es](http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0121-51672009000200005&lng=en&tlng=es).

As indicated by the data collected by the Attorney General's Office in 2022 (2023)<sup>12</sup> This assertion was corroborated through interviews with rural and peasant youth, which revealed that only 24 of Colombia's 32 departments have implemented general youth public policies through departmental ordinances. The aforementioned ordinances have facilitated the institutionalization of strategies aimed at the comprehensive development of young people. However, the validity and updating of these regulations varies significantly between different departments, which has an impact on the consistency and effectiveness of the policies implemented.

Following the enactment of Law 1622 of 2013 and its subsequent modification in 2018, several departments, including Santander (2013), Casanare (2014) and Quindío (2014), proceeded to implement their respective youth public policies. Additionally, the departments of Antioquia, Valle del Cauca, and Córdoba initiated processes in 2013, thereby demonstrating an early commitment to national regulations. In addition, several other departments, including Guainía (2017), Meta (2018), Cauca, Caldas, Huila, Risaralda, Boyacá, and Caquetá, have reinforced the institutional framework for youth by enacting new policies between 2018 and 2019.

In recent years, five departments have enacted youth policies. Additionally, Guaviare, Chocó, Sucre, Tolima, and Bolívar have enacted policies, with the latter being implemented in 2023. The departments of Antioquia and Córdoba are currently engaged in the process of updating their policies, with the latter having completed its update in 2023. This ongoing commitment to the adaptability and relevance of youth policies is evident across various departments. By 2024, five policies that were implemented since 2015 will require updating by 2025. These include the policies of Nariño, Arauca, Cundinamarca, Norte de Santander, and Magdalena. The necessity for renewal highlights the significance of maintaining policies in a state of currency in order to respond to the evolving dynamics of youth and guarantee their continued relevance.

Notwithstanding these developments, eight departments remain without up-to-date youth public policy instruments. The departments of Amazonas, Bolívar, Cesar, La Guajira, Putumayo, Sucre, Vaupés, and Vichada have yet to implement a current youth public policy instrument. This gap in the implementation of Law 1622 indicates challenges in the implementation of the aforementioned legislation, which in turn limits the scope of youth policies in these regions. This has the potential to negatively impact the comprehensive development of youth and their participation in society.

### **Specific Ordinances on Public Policies for Rural and Peasant Youth**

It is imperative that public policies direct specific attention to rural and peasant youth, given their heightened vulnerability and distinctive needs (Pardo, 2017). This

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<sup>12</sup>Office of the Delegated Prosecutor Mixed Functions 8: For the defense of the rights of children, adolescents, the family and women (2023). Report on the State of the National Youth System in the Territories – Implementation, Start-up and Operation of Youth Participation Instances in Colombia. Accessed February 10, 2024. Available in: <https://www.procuraduria.gov.co/Documents/febrero%202023/INFORME%20ESTA%20DEL%20SISTEMA%20NACIONAL%20DE%20JUVENTUD%20>

demographic is confronted with distinctive challenges, including constrained access to education and fundamental services, restricted employment prospects, and heightened vulnerability to conflict and displacement. Nevertheless, the integration of this approach into departmental ordinances remains constrained, underscoring a deficiency in addressing the specific needs of these young individuals in rural settings. As of 2023, only three departments have enacted specific ordinances for rural and peasant youth:

- **Antioquia:** The Department of Antioquia can be considered a pioneer in this regard, having established in 2019 a specific ordinance that recognized and addressed the needs of rural youth in the department (Departmental Assembly of Antioquia, 2019).<sup>13</sup> The policy is the most comprehensive, encompassing a range of elements, including specific objectives, institutional arrangements, and financing mechanisms. It also includes the establishment of a Departmental Table for Rural Youth, a participatory mechanism that is absent in the policies of other departments.
- **Cundinamarca:** In 2023, the government enacted an ordinance that includes strategies focused on strengthening the capacities and opportunities for rural youth (Departmental Assembly of Cundinamarca, 2023).<sup>14</sup> While this represents a step forward, the focus is primarily on commemoration and recognition through Rural Youth Day, and there is a lack of robust implementation and monitoring mechanisms.
- **Meta:** Additionally, in 2023, the government enacted an ordinance with the objective of incorporating rural youth into regional development processes (Departmental Assembly of Meta, 2023).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the policy of Cundinamarca places an emphasis on the “Rural Youth” award, with an emphasis on recognition rather than the implementation of concrete strategies.

The extant ordinances exhibit considerable variation in terms of both scope and content. While the Antioquia policy is comprehensive and detailed, the policies of Cundinamarca and Meta are oriented towards commemorative and recognition aspects. Notably, none of these policies explicitly address the challenges associated with rural youth migration or offer incentive strategies comparable to those implemented in other countries. Furthermore, all of the aforementioned policies lack robust evaluation and monitoring mechanisms, which constrains their capacity to assess the efficacy and sustainability of implemented actions over an extended period.

In contrast, the remaining 29 departments lack public policies for young people in general, and they similarly lack specific public policies for rural and peasant youth. Although their general youth policies may encompass measures that affect both rural

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<sup>13</sup> Asamblea Departamental de Antioquia. (2019). *Ordinance No. 33 of September 27, 2019: Whereby the rural youth policy is established in the department of Antioquia.*

<sup>14</sup> Asamblea Departamental de Cundinamarca. (2023). *Ordinance No. 0107 of June 1, 2023: Whereby the day of the rural youth in the department of Cundinamarca is commemorated and other provisions are issued.*

<sup>15</sup> Asamblea Departamental del Meta. (2023). *Ordinance No. 1244 of 2023: Whereby the day of the rural and peasant youth in the department of Meta is established and celebrated, exalted and recognized.*

and urban youth, the absence of a dedicated approach may impede the capacity of these policies to address the specific requirements of rural and peasant youth.

### **Perceptions of Youth Policies Aimed at Rural and Peasant Youth**

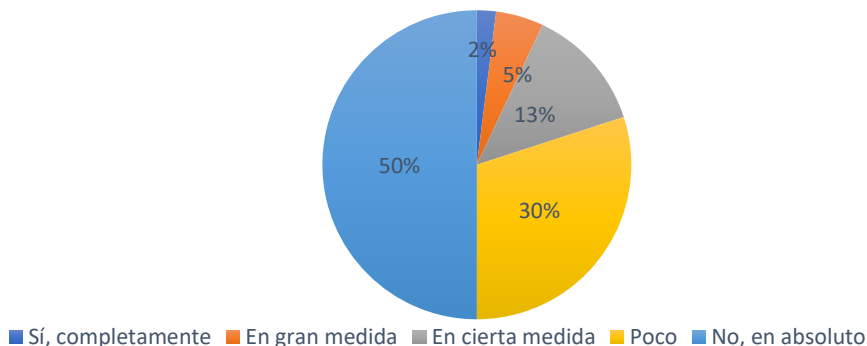
The paucity of attention paid to rural and peasant youth in departmental ordinances is indicative of a glaring omission in the regional public policy agenda. In light of the fact that rural areas constitute a significant portion of Colombia's territory and that these young people face specific challenges, it is imperative that public policies address these realities in a differentiated manner. To gain insight into the perceptions of rural and peasant youth regarding youth public policies in Colombia, the study was complemented with a survey administered to 230 youth counselors and semi-structured interviews conducted with 40 rural youth.

The sample exhibited an average age of 21 years, with 15% of respondents under the age of 18 and 15.6% in the 25-28 age range, thereby providing a diverse perspective on the various stages of rural youth. All participants identified as peasants and residents of rural areas in Colombia. With regard to gender distribution, 48% of respondents were women, indicating a near parity between male and female participation.

The initial section of the survey was designed to ascertain information pertaining to the respondents' educational attainment, occupation, economic and familial circumstances, ethnic affiliation, experiences of victimization, access to land, involvement in productive activities, and engagement in associational life. The data thus obtained permitted the formulation of a comprehensive profile of rural youth, which may be employed in future correlations with variables such as expectations of youth migration.

In response to the following query: The respondents were asked whether they considered the current youth public policies to be effective in addressing the specific needs of rural youth. Their responses were distributed as follows: Affirmative responses were provided by 2% of respondents, indicating that they considered current youth public policies to be completely effective in addressing the specific needs of rural youth. Five percent indicated that they considered the policies to be effective to some extent. The responses were distributed as follows: 13% indicated that they were "*Somewhat*"; 30% indicated that they were "*A Little*"; and 50% indicated that they were "*Not at All*" in agreement.

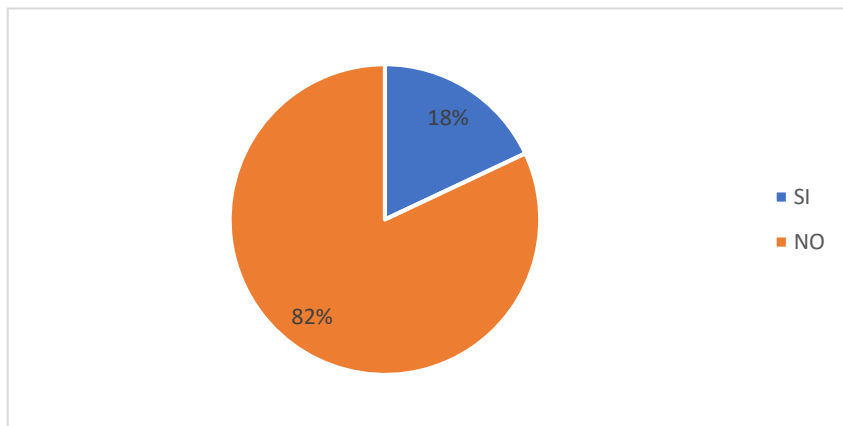
**Do you consider that current youth public policies effectively address the specific needs of rural and peasant youth?**



Source: Results of the survey conducted by the author.

The results of the survey indicate that 80% of respondents perceive that current youth public policies address few, if any, of the specific needs of rural and peasant youth. This sentiment of discontent is exemplified by the testimony of Cristian Arce, a young man from Sampués: *“As rural youth, we are largely invisible within our own territories, which forces us to seek opportunities and studies outside of our communities.”* (C. Arce, personal communication, May 12, 2024). Subsequently, the respondents were asked about their awareness of the available programs. A mere 18% of the rural and peasant youth surveyed indicated that they were aware of the programs from which they could benefit. This 82% lack of awareness demonstrates a considerable discrepancy between the policies in place and their intended beneficiaries.

**Knowledge of the rural and peasant youth surveyed about the institutional offer of youth for rural areas.**



Source: Results of the survey conducted by the author

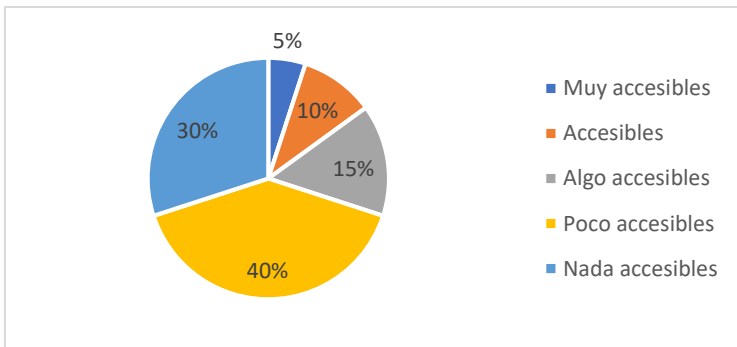
The lack of dissemination and accessibility of these programs was highlighted by María Fernanda Jaramillo, president of the Municipal Youth Council in Jardín, Antioquia: *“Young people from the countryside feel excluded because the activities are almost always carried out in urban areas.”* (M. F. Jaramillo, personal communication, July 8, 2024)

Likewise, Sebastián Alarcón, national representative of Juventudes Campesinas, emphasized:

*“It is essential to create public youth policies in each territory, which include rural, Afro-descendant and indigenous youth. Colombia is mostly rural, and if young people don't stay in the countryside, who is going to produce it?”* (S. Alarcón, personal communication, March 10, 2024)

When evaluating the accessibility of government programs and resources, he asked, “How accessible do you think government programs and resources are aimed at rural and peasant youth in your department?” The responses were: Very accessible: 5%, Accessible: 10%, Somewhat accessible: 15%, Not very accessible: 40%, Not at all accessible: 30%

**How accessible do you consider the government programs and resources aimed at rural and peasant youth in your department to be?**



Source: Results of the survey conducted by the author.

70% of those surveyed considered that the programs are little or not at all accessible, which reinforces the perception of exclusion. Zeir López, a young interviewee from Mitú, Vaupés, said: *“The territorial entities do not give these opportunities to rural youth who are close to the municipality”* (Z. López., personal communication, June 18, 2024). The absence of approaches that consider the particularities of rural youth is evident in the testimony of Andrea Vergara, a rural youth with disabilities: *“The scarcity of educational and job opportunities, and the limited infrastructure prevent us from fully participating in the community”* (A. Vergara, personal communication, May 29, 2024).

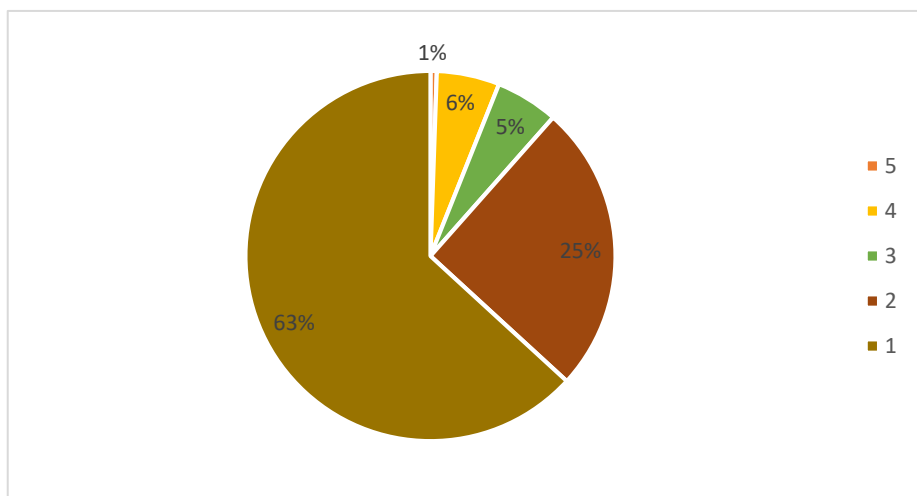
Young rural women face additional barriers to accessing public policies. Lucy Herazo said: *“There is no support and accompaniment to successful youth leadership processes; rural women are still seen as objects and submissive, only fulfilling the role of caregiver mother and household chores”* (L. Herazo, personal communication, June

22, 2024). Similarly, Dayana Gómez indicated: “An additional problem is that some companies are very sexist and have prejudices against women, especially young women” (D. Gómez, personal communication, May 5, 2024).

The testimonies collected indicate a necessity for public policies that consider the specificities of gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation, and that facilitate the active involvement of rural and peasant youth in the creation and implementation of such policies through differentiated strategies tailored to the diverse rural contexts.

When asked to rate institutional care on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is “very dissatisfied” and 5 is “very satisfied”), 63% of respondents chose the lowest rating. This high level of dissatisfaction suggests that government institutions are not responding adequately to the needs of rural and peasant youth.

### Perception of institutional care by rural and peasant youth.



Source: Results of the survey conducted by the author.

**Felipe Aristizábal**, a young rural leader, representative of the National Youth Employability Table, said: “The institutional framework is weak in terms of access to spaces and scenarios for consultation or decision-making on the resources allocated to rural youth” (F. Aristizábal, personal communication, June 15, 2024).

The analysis of the structured interviews indicated that a lack of participation in decision-making processes contributes to a growing disconnect between the formulated policies and the actual needs of rural communities. Rural and peasant youth perceive public policies as being poorly adapted to the specific territorial context, indicating a lack of sensitivity to local particularities. Moreover, these policies are perceived as inadequate in terms of their scope and the resources available to them. A considerable proportion of the participants indicated a lack of awareness regarding the procedures for accessing these programs, which contributes to the lack of interest among young people in actively participating. Furthermore, the bureaucratic requirements associated with accessing public policies represent a significant obstacle to the inclusion of rural youth. These findings, analyzed through ATLAS.ti,

highlighted the necessity for the development of more inclusive and accessible policies that adequately address the realities and aspirations of rural and peasant youth.

The general data indicated a dearth of efficacious mechanisms for the planning of public policies directed towards rural and peasant youth in Colombia. The results of the survey and the interviews indicated a pervasive perception of neglect and exclusion by youth public policies towards these groups. The current policies lack differentiated approaches that take into account the particularities of gender, ethnicity, disability, and rural territory, which limits their effectiveness and scope. Factors such as a lack of awareness of available programs (82% of rural and peasant youth are unaware of specific government initiatives designed for their demographic), limited accessibility, the absence of differentiated approaches, and insufficient participation in policymaking contribute to this negative perception.

The survey results indicated that 80% of respondents perceived the current public policies as inadequately addressing their needs. This discrepancy can be attributed to structural deficiencies in the design and implementation of policies. These include the absence of explicit references to rural and peasant youth in regulatory instruments and the homogenization of youth without consideration of their specific characteristics. This hinders the creation of inclusive and equitable strategies. Furthermore, the discrepancy in the enactment and updating of youth public policies between departments indicates that these challenges are more pronounced in regions with less economic and institutional development.

The experience of the departments of Antioquia, Cundinamarca, and Meta, which have enacted specific ordinances for rural youth, represents a notable exception and a valuable opportunity to promote more inclusive and focused policies. Nevertheless, it is imperative to ascertain the implementation, evolution, and monitoring of these ordinances in order to determine their efficacy and replicability in disparate contexts. An evaluation of these aspects will facilitate the identification of lessons learned and the adaptation of strategies to maximize the positive impact of rural youth public policies throughout the country.

The findings indicate the imperative for a comprehensive review and reinforcement of youth public policy mechanisms in Colombia, with a particular focus on the incorporation of differential approaches and the active participation of rural and peasant youth. It is imperative to transform participation into a democratic mechanism that facilitates dialogue between government administrations and communities, thereby conferring a leading role upon all actors involved in the construction of planning processes and in the design of public policies that improve the quality of life (Zuliani et al., 2015).<sup>16</sup> The integration of inclusive and participatory approaches will ensure that public policies effectively respond to the specific needs of these groups,

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<sup>16</sup> Zuliani A, Liliana, Bastidas A, Miriam, & Ariza M, Gustavo (2015). Participation: social determinant in the construction of public policies. *Revista Facultad Nacional de Salud Pública*, 33(1), 75-84. Retrieved October 29, 2024, from [http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0120-386X2015000100010&lng=en&tlng=es](http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0120-386X2015000100010&lng=en&tlng=es).

thus promoting more equitable and sustainable development in rural communities in Colombia.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research demonstrate a clear need for the implementation of strategies that enhance the efficacy and relevance of public policies targeting rural and peasant youth in Colombia. It is imperative to enhance the technical and administrative capabilities of departmental and municipal governments. This can be achieved through the training of personnel with expertise in rural and peasant youth policies, the provision of sufficient resources, and the establishment of effective organizational structures. Furthermore, the implementation of monitoring and evaluation systems is crucial to guarantee the follow-up and efficacy of the actions undertaken, enabling prompt adjustments to be made and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Furthermore, it is imperative to establish formal mechanisms and spaces for participation for rural and peasant youth, such as rural youth councils, roundtables, and community forums. Such spaces should facilitate the consultation process and the co-creation of policies, thereby ensuring the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives. The active involvement of young people in the decision-making process enhances the legitimacy and sense of ownership of public policies, enabling them to respond effectively to the realities and aspirations of this demographic (Torres et al., 2023).<sup>17</sup>

It is similarly advised that departments lacking specific public policies should endeavor to develop them, with due consideration of the exemplary experiences of Antioquia, Cundinamarca and Meta. It is imperative to provide technical assistance and facilitate the exchange of best practices between departments, thereby encouraging the implementation of inclusive policies tailored to the needs of this demographic. Furthermore, it is imperative that gender, generational, territorial, and ethnic perspectives be integrated into the policymaking process. The acknowledgment and appreciation of the distinctions between men and women, young people of varying ages, rural and urban contexts, and diverse cultural and sexual identities will facilitate the development of more inclusive and equitable strategies, thereby circumventing the homogenization that constrains the efficacy of policies.

Moreover, it is recommended that comprehensive studies and assessments be conducted to gain a nuanced understanding of the diversity and complexity of rural areas and their constituent subgroups. The creation of instruments such as budget tracers and rural youth development indices will enable the assessment of advancements and challenges pertaining to the quality of life and opportunities available to young people. Furthermore, it is essential to allocate dedicated financial resources for the implementation of policies and programs targeting rural youth. This

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<sup>17</sup> Torres, Eleuterio Horna, Peralta Tapia, Manuela Esperanza, Torres, Enrique Horna, & Heredia Llatas, Flor Delicia (2023). Relationship between public management and sustainable development, literature review. *Podium*, (44), 81-102. Accessed March 10, 2024. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31095/podium.2023.44.6>

should be accompanied by the definition of clear and quantifiable goals, the delineation of institutional responsibilities, and the establishment of execution deadlines. The implementation of transparent allocation and utilization of resources will serve to reinforce the trust that rural youth place in government institutions.

Ultimately, it is crucial to implement efficacious communication strategies that disseminate information about the programs, resources, and opportunities available to rural youth. This should be done using dissemination channels that are appropriate to the rural context, such as community radios, social networks, and local leaders. Improved dissemination and accessibility of information will enhance the participation and use of opportunities by rural and peasant youth, thereby reducing the current limitations imposed by a lack of knowledge that restrict their access to government benefits.

The aforementioned recommendations collectively aim to bridge the identified gap between existing youth public policies and the needs of rural and peasant youth in Colombia. The implementation of these measures will facilitate the comprehensive development of this population group, encouraging them to remain in the countryside and thereby strengthening the sustainability of the rural sector in the country. It is only through the implementation of collective action and comprehensive strategies that it can be guaranteed that public policies will respond in an effective manner to the realities and aspirations of rural and peasant youth.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research demonstrates that, despite the legislative progress resulting from the enactment of Law 1622 of 2013 (Youth Citizenship Statute) and its subsequent amendment in 2018, significant challenges remain in the formulation and implementation of departmental youth public policies in Colombia, particularly in relation to rural and peasant youth. By 2023, the absence of public policies designed specifically for these young people in several departments, particularly in regions with a high concentration of rural youth population, such as Amazonas, Bolívar, Cesar, La Guajira, Putumayo, and Su. The situation in the departments of CRE, Vaupés, and Vichada is particularly concerning. The absence of effective planning mechanisms and policies in these departments impedes the monitoring of progress, limits the scope for impact assessment, and hinders the implementation of improvements that are necessary to meet the demands and potential of rural youth. This institutional failure perpetuates historical inequalities and restricts opportunities for advancement for young people in general, thereby negatively affecting sustainable development and social cohesion in rural areas of the country.

The findings revealed a low level of knowledge about the available programs and a generalized perception of insufficient institutional care among rural youth. Specifically, 80% of respondents believed that current public policies address their needs little or not at all, and 82% were unaware of the available government initiatives, especially in the most dispersed rural areas.

Notwithstanding the existence of noteworthy exceptions, such as the departments of Antioquia, Cundinamarca, and Meta, where specific policies for rural youth have been

implemented, the deficit in policy coverage for the rural sector represents a historical and contemporary liability. These policies, while representing a promising step forward, require further strengthening in terms of their scope, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure their long-term effectiveness and sustainability.

It is imperative that departments lacking current or specific youth public policies for rural and peasant youth take proactive measures to develop effective planning instruments. It is imperative that policies be designed with differential and inclusive approaches, taking into account the specific circumstances of gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. Furthermore, it is essential to facilitate the active involvement of rural and peasant youth in the development and implementation of these policy instruments. Such actions will not only contribute to the reduction of existing inequalities but will also foster social cohesion, promote sustainable rural development, and ensure food security and territorial balance in Colombia.