

**Final Report Akelius Language Course
project
Colombia phase 1**

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Project Overview

Duration	01-07-2024 – 01-06-2025
Location	La Guajira (Maicao, Riohacha)
Project name	<i>Protect and Educate Children and Families Affected by the Humanitarian Refugee Crisis in Colombia</i>

Local context

The municipalities of Maicao and Riohacha, La Guajira, is one of the most affected regions by the Venezuelan migrant crisis. As a border area, La Guajira remains a significant point of arrival, settlement, and transit for migrant and refugee populations, most of whom live in conditions of extreme vulnerability.

During the implementation period, the region experienced a deepening of the protracted humanitarian crisis. In early 2025, the withdrawal of international agencies following the shutdown of U.S.-funded programs left thousands of migrants without access to essential services, significantly reducing humanitarian assistance in settlements like La Pista, which hosts over 9,000 individuals. The project’s target population consisted mainly of migrant and refugee families already settled in Colombian territory, many of whom are seeking long-term stabilization. However, they continue to face systemic and prolonged barriers to the realization of their fundamental rights. Children and adolescents from both migrant and host communities experience daily human rights violations, particularly in the areas of education, protection, health, and participation.

In education, multiple barriers persist: limited school enrollment opportunities, economically driven dropouts, a lack of learning materials, digital exclusion, and administrative obstacles to validating prior education. Many children are overage or have never accessed the Colombian school system, making them more vulnerable to child labor, exploitation, and social exclusion.

Project Focus

The project has promoted non-formal learning spaces as a strategic mechanism to safeguard children’s right to education and address structural access gaps. Using an innovative pedagogical model supported by the Akelius interactive learning platform, the project fostered language and digital skills development in safe, inclusive, and context-sensitive environments.

This intervention was integrated into the *Toma mi Mano* strategy by SOS Children’s Villages Colombia, a broader humanitarian response initiative aimed at supporting migrant children. The project contributed directly to the comprehensive protection of children, the fulfillment of their rights, and the creation of conditions for educational and social inclusion in highly vulnerable contexts. Specifically, its primary focus was on improving the learning processes of migrant, refugee, and host community children and adolescents by implementing an innovative pedagogical model supported by the Akelius interactive educational platform. Over 12 months, project teams strengthened learning capacities among children participating in the *Toma mi Mano* strategy, addressing the ongoing migration and humanitarian crisis in the region.

Results

Key Results Achieved

- The project successfully met its target of engaging 200 children and adolescents living in conditions of vulnerability in the communities of La Pista/Container (Maicao) and Milagro de Dios/Container (Riohacha). Participants regularly attended educational sessions held in the digital learning containers, securing their right to education in safe and inclusive spaces.
- Two technology-equipped containers were established—one in Riohacha and one in Maicao—each furnished with 20 tablets, for a total of 40 devices. The spaces were fitted with internet access, electricity, and basic furnishings, ensuring appropriate and functional conditions for educational activities.
- A total of 200 children and adolescents aged 7 to 17 were directly supported through structured learning processes that fostered the development of basic digital skills and language competencies (Spanish and English), using a child-centered and participatory methodology.
- Significant progress was observed in English language learning using the Akelius interactive platform. Participants developed foundational skills such as vocabulary recognition, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and use of simple phrases. For many, it was their first structured exposure to English, which enhanced their interest and academic engagement.
- The project contributed to a notable improvement in digital literacy. Participants learned how to operate tablets, explore digital platforms, and use online educational resources independently. This was particularly impactful for children with no prior access to technology, helping to bridge the digital divide.
- Facilitators provided individualized, needs-based pedagogical support in a safe, motivating, and respectful environment. This approach encouraged sustained participation, active engagement, and positive learning outcomes.
- The project also generated indirect benefits for caregivers, teachers, and community stakeholders by enhancing their awareness of the value of digital education and English language instruction. It fostered more substantial community commitment to children's right to education, particularly in contexts of high social and economic vulnerability.

Impact on Children, Adolescents, and Their Communities

The project had a meaningful impact on participating children and adolescents, as well as on their families, caregivers, and host communities. One of the most transformative outcomes was the equitable access to technological tools and digital educational content, which promoted innovative learning processes and helped close structural gaps in realizing the right to education.

Although caregivers were not the direct users of the tablets or the Akelius platform, their engagement proved essential. The regular participation of their children in weekly learning sessions and their exposure to quality digital content sparked genuine interest among families, particularly among migrant caregivers with limited or no background in information and communication technologies (ICT).

Many caregivers viewed digital English language learning as a novel and valuable opportunity. This perception increased their motivation to support their children's consistent attendance and strengthened their commitment to the educational process.

As they observed their children's progress, caregivers began to reframe their view of the learning spaces positively. This shift fostered stronger home-learning center connections, encouraging active family involvement, reinforcing education as a fundamental right, and recognizing non-formal spaces as legitimate environments for inclusion and development.

Additionally, more than 25 children and adolescents from Maicao who were not part of the project were able to use the container for studying and doing homework whenever needed. This was possible thanks to the fact that the container was located inside the local public school, allowing other students to use it for practice in accompaniment of their teachers.

Project Results Overview

Children & Youth reached	200 (<i>proposed target 200</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spanish 	85
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English 	115
Frequency of educational sessions	Bi-weekly
Average teaching hours per student with Akelius Language Course	20
Project coordinators/Information Manager	3
Facilitators	2
Learning spaces	2 technology-equipped containers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tablets 	40

The Akelius project directly impacted 200 children and youth (75 in Maicao – La Pista community; 125 in Riohacha – Milagro de Dios community), along with their migrant families and host communities. Participants reflected a diverse profile in terms of age, gender, and nationality, as shown below. The monitoring methods included attendance lists, daily registration forms, individual tracking by facilitators, and progress reports for each participant.

Location Specific Project Results

In Maicao, 30 participants advanced through English level A0, completing items 1-6. 45 participants advanced in Spanish, completing items 1-3.

In Riohacha, 80 showed evident progress in English, while 45 participants advanced in Spanish. 90 participants completed levels 1 to 8 (equivalent to 200 words) on the Akelius platform.

Municipality	Target	Age Range	Gender			Nationality	
Maicao	75	7 to 17	Male	8	Female	12	Colombians
				29		26	Venezuelans
Riohacha	125		Male	16	Female	18	Colombians
				41		50	Venezuelans

Activities Implemented and Results Achieved

Activity	Description	Results Achieved
Initial Assessment	A mapping of participating children and adolescents was conducted, focusing on logical-mathematical thinking, communication and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 digital learning containers equipped (1 in Maicao, 1 in Riohacha).

Activity	Description	Results Achieved
	language, protection, and emotional well-being. Digital learning containers were prepared, and the Akelius platform was introduced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200 children and adolescents assessed.
Technology Provision	Learning spaces were equipped with tablets, internet access, and essential infrastructure to provide a safe and functional educational environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40 tablets distributed. • 40 headsets delivered. • 2 educational facilitators hired (1 per municipality).
Bi-weekly Educational Sessions.	Bi-weekly learning sessions were held with all participants, focused on using the Akelius platform to develop English language and digital competencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 session per student every two weeks. This results in each student receiving a total of 20 teaching hours. • Continuous participation of all 200 children and adolescents.

Thematical Achievements of the Project

Learning

- Children and adolescents strengthened their English language skills, achieving notable progress in vocabulary, pronunciation, and basic listening comprehension through the structured and guided use of the Akelius platform.
- Essential digital skills were developed, particularly among participants with no previous experience using technological tools. They learned to operate tablets, navigate educational platforms, and use digital resources independently.
- Many participants demonstrated increased autonomy in their learning processes, managing their time on the platform, following instructions independently, and completing tasks on their own.
- Facilitators conducted interactive Q&A sessions at the end of each class using vocabulary from Akelius Level 1, including numbers, colors, phrases, and fruits. This helped reinforce learning and motivated participants to continue advancing. These interactive moments helped verify learning and build engagement.

Participation

- The project achieved consistent and sustained participation from the 200 children and adolescents, organized into weekly learning groups. This helped overcome barriers such as unfamiliarity with technology and initial apprehension toward new learning environments.
- Caregivers became actively involved in their children's educational processes, showing interest, commitment, and a willingness to ensure regular attendance. Their engagement reinforced the families' sense of belonging to the project.
- The facilitation team enhanced its role as learning mediators by developing and applying pedagogical strategies tailored to participants' learning levels and rhythms, enabling more effective and child-centered educational support.

Community strengthening

- The project established safe, inclusive, and motivating learning environments in communities facing high levels of social and educational vulnerability.

- It promoted a positive perception of education by linking technology use to tangible opportunities for academic and personal development among children and adolescents.
- Family and community bonds were strengthened through a greater recognition of the value of education and shared responsibility in supporting the learning and development of children and adolescents.
- In Maicao, project coordinators initiated first contact with a local school to present the project to the school coordinator. A site visit was also conducted to explore the space where possible future activities could be hosted as part of Akelius Language Course project Phase 2.
- In Riohacha, while no formal collaboration occurred during the project period, the focus remained on strengthening the pedagogical model within community-based spaces, to strengthen the methodology and use of the platform within the set location.

Strategic Partnerships

Community and institutional stakeholders: The successful implementation of the Akelius project was made possible through coordinated efforts with key community and institutional stakeholders. Active involvement from community leaders, caregivers, and educational actors played a vital role in ensuring access, sustained participation, and effective use of the non-formal learning spaces.

Community leaders: Community leaders from La Pista (Maicao) and Milagro de Dios (Riohacha) played a crucial role in mobilizing participants, supporting logistics, and fostering community ownership of the project. Their leadership enabled effective outreach to children and adolescents, reinforcing the perception of technology containers as valuable shared spaces for learning.

Families and caregivers: Families and caregivers also emerged as essential partners. Their ongoing commitment, support, and engagement were crucial for ensuring consistent attendance and reinforcing the connection to digital learning. These alliances contributed to a shared sense of responsibility for upholding the right to education and promoting the use of technology as a tool for inclusion and community development in highly vulnerable contexts.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Main Challenges

- **Unequal learning levels:** Significant differences were observed in the learning pace and comprehension among children and adolescents, particularly in handling digital devices and understanding English. The absence of a dual facilitation team limited the capacity for more personalized support. This challenge was addressed by organizing differentiated sessions and providing individualized attention tailored to the progress of each group.
- **Difficulties with simultaneous platform access:** Logging in with individual email accounts led to logistical delays and disrupted the flow of sessions. To resolve this, a personalized barcode system was implemented, streamlining the login process and ensuring quick and secure access to the Akelius platform.
- **Limited familiarity with technology:** For many participants, this was their first time using a tablet or engaging with a digital learning platform. In response, hands-on sessions were designed with a gradual, patient, and participatory approach. This allowed children and adolescents to become progressively familiar with the digital environment and gain confidence in their learning process.
- **Irregular attendance at sessions:** Some participants showed inconsistent attendance due to personal or family-related circumstances. To address this issue, individualized follow-up phone calls were conducted, and a WhatsApp group was created with caregivers, which improved communication, motivation, and family commitment to the project.

Key Lessons Learned

- Learning processes among children and youth require a differentiated approach. The diverse levels of comprehension and digital literacy revealed the importance of tailoring pedagogical support to each participant's pace and learning progression.
- For many participants, this was their first experience using tablets as a learning tool. Despite initial fear and hesitation, they gradually overcame these barriers, showing curiosity and motivation as they explored a new way to learn English.
- Caregiver engagement proved to be a critical success factor. Their involvement in the educational process contributed to consistent attendance and greater commitment from participants, fostering a supportive and co-responsible learning environment.
- The project highlighted that consistency is more important than speed. Advancing step-by-step allowed for stronger consolidation of previous learning and greater depth in each educational session.
- A key insight was the need to strengthen the English language skills of the facilitation team. Although facilitators had basic knowledge, working with the Akelius platform provided a valuable opportunity to enhance their language proficiency and improve their pedagogical mediation.
- The involvement of school teachers emerged as a promising strategy to reinforce their role in virtual English learning and to better align non-formal educational efforts with the formal education system.
- The process of creating individual email accounts for each child presented logistical challenges. Simultaneous log-ins using personal emails slowed down the sessions, leading to the adoption of a more efficient solution: unique barcode IDs for each user, which streamlined and secured access to the Akelius platform.

Looking ahead

Building on the achievements, lessons, and strengthened community networks from Phase 1, the next phase of the project is focusing on integrating and expanding the Akelius Language Course model within the local community. Phase 2 introduces a deeper pedagogical approach within the communities while formally integrating the methodology into two selected schools in Maicao and Riohacha.

Conclusion

The project successfully achieved its primary objective: to strengthen the learning processes of migrant, refugee, and host community children and adolescents through an innovative pedagogical approach supported by the Akelius educational platform.

During its implementation in Maicao and Riohacha, the project generated significant improvements in participants' digital and language competencies, particularly in English. The active and sustained participation of 200 children and adolescents—combined with continuous technical and pedagogical support—demonstrated that it is indeed possible to bridge educational and digital gaps in highly vulnerable contexts through child-centered, tailored learning methodologies.

Beyond providing access to technology and structured educational content, the project fostered a learning experience that emphasized autonomy, confidence, and motivation, while respecting each child's learning pace and creating the conditions for meaningful and lasting learning.

The project also had a positive impact on families, who came to recognize the value of technology as an empowering and supportive tool in their children’s education. In a setting like La Guajira—where digital exclusion remains high—this experience confirmed the feasibility and relevance of creating inclusive, safe, and non-formal educational spaces as an effective strategy to uphold the right to education for migrant and vulnerable children.

Pictures

