



COLOMBIA YOUTH TRAINING PROGRAMME PLAN 250 MIL (250,000 PLAN)

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A significant part of the unemployed in Colombia are youth. In December 2008 the number of unemployed aged 14 to 26 was 978,000 –almost half of all unemployed. The rate of unemployment among youth is 22% –more than double the adult unemployment rate. This situation elicited a response in the framework of the counter-cyclical policy of the National Government, which is designed to face the economic crisis and strengthen the nation's competitiveness.

As a result, the Government proposes to increase job insertion and training with 250,000 new openings intended for young Colombians, a challenge for both the National Learning Service (*Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje – SENA*), the national institution for professional training, and the organizations thus given a chance to embark on new projects and hire competent personnel. SENA began offering the new openings for additional training as of May 2009, allocating for this purpose a budget of approximately US\$ 150 million.

The policy combines keeping young people in training and fostering job insertion for them as apprentices. One condition to join the programme is that companies wishing to increase the number of apprentices cannot have laid-off personnel for the previous three months. With this plan SENA seeks to reduce the unemployment rate in the 16 to 24 age group by four percentage points, directly impacting the total unemployment rate by close to one percentage point.

1. Introduction

As is the case throughout the region, the Colombian economy feels the consequences of the international financial crisis on employment. The high share of youth in unemployment, together with the loss of productivity implied by young people not engaged in work-related activities, motivated a response in the framework of the counter-cyclical policy of the National Government, which is designed to face the economic crisis and simultaneously strengthen company competitiveness.

The *Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje* (SENA) is to double its training vacancies at technical and technological levels, making 250,000 new positions available to young people aged 16 to 26, unemployed, and living in absolute poverty conditions in the urban areas of Colombia. With this plan SENA seeks to reduce the unemployment rate in the 16 to 24 age group by four percentage points, directly impacting the total unemployment rate by close to one percentage point.

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This measure is part of the emergency plan designed by the National Government to reduce unemployment, and is framed in the counter-cyclical policy which seeks to protect the Colombian economy from the turbulence of the international financial markets.

The 250,000 young Colombians will receive SENA competency-based training and practical training in projects, combining face-to-face and virtual methods, with flexible characteristics, a high level of relevance and in new fields thus pursuing the development of productive projects and employability.

2. Programme description

Aims

To provide professional training and employment to 250,000 young people aged 16 to 26, who are unemployed and live in absolute poverty in urban and rural areas of Colombia.

To reduce the unemployment rate in the 16 to 26 age group by four percentage points. To counteract turbulence in employment arising from the international economic crisis, by developing vocational skills, staying employed, and encouraging entrepreneurship.

Beneficiary population

Young people aged 16 to 26, unemployed, living in absolute poverty in urban and rural areas of the country.

Benefits

Through the above initiative, SENA will offer 187 innovative technical and technological programmes selected after analysing emerging sectors with high-labour demand. The institution also took into consideration existing demand in recent job announcements. The new programmes will operate in the areas of electronics; telecommunications; graphics and communications industries; new materials; nanotechnology and material lining applications; transport and logistics; plant, animal, and industrial biotechnology; industrial design and production; clean production and environmental control; and precision farming, etc.

In addition, the plan includes programmes for building construction and civil engineering works to support development of infrastructure projects that the Government and the private sector are planning to carry out, significantly contributing to job creation. Of all beneficiaries close to 30,000 trainees will also receive aid in kind to cover food and/or transportation, as required. The object of such aid in kind is to provide facilities and well-being to the neediest persons taking part in the Programme.

SENA will give priority to this project in urban areas, while the Young Rural Entrepreneurs Programme (*Programa Jóvenes Rurales Emprendedores*) will emphasize technology in rural communities, stressing the entrepreneurial component. Courses will be scheduled in cities with high unemployment levels, for graduates will be steered towards employability and development of productive activities. Similarly, in 2009 and 2010 all announcements issued by the *Fondo Empezar* –a Fund devoted to promoting business start-up– will address this population group.

For this programme, SENA will announce job openings for 5,000 instructors to be hired, especially professionals recently laid-off by companies affected by the crisis. Course duration will vary with the type of training. Two years at the most are estimated for the technological levels, one year for technicians. However, with individual training methods and training tied to projects, some participants are likely to complete the training in shorter periods.

Of the 250,000 training vacancies, 70% are scheduled to be filled in 2009 via three official announcements in addition to regular announcements issued by SENA nationwide. The institution will take advantage of all agreements and alliances in effect with organizations in the private sector, to ensure support, feasibility, and successful outcomes for the project. SENA will further devote its specialized mobile classrooms to meeting the training targets in the remotest corners of the country.

The budget allocated to this project totals close to US\$ 150 million, mainly to cover the cost of instructors, training materials, project development, and aid in kind (food and transportation) for nearly 30,000 trainees.

The National Government allocated the funds to SENA as an additional budget from surpluses left over after dues collection in past fiscal years. In addition to covering the apprenticeship agreement, training is directed towards project methodology, an innovation introduced by SENA, which focuses training on the solution of real problems and provides a framework for the entire learning process.

Requirements

Beneficiaries must belong to the age group targeted by the project and to the income brackets known as poor and absolute poor. In Colombia, this is equivalent in levels 1, 2, and 3 of the Identification System for Potential Beneficiaries of Social Programmes (*Sistema de Identificación de Potenciales Beneficiarios de Programas Sociales–SISBEN*).

Companies wishing to hire apprentices must not have laid-off personnel in the three months prior to applying for new trainees, nor may they cut-down their payroll while the apprenticeship agreements are in effect.

The additional number of trainees varies according to the existing number of company workers, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Apprentices by size of enterprise

Size of enterprise	From one apprentice to
Enterprises with 1 to 14 workers	50% of the total number of workers
Enterprises with 15 to 50 workers	40% of the total number of workers
Enterprises with 51 to 200 workers	30% of the total number of workers
Enterprises with over 200 workers	20% of the total number of workers

Source: Ministry for Social Protection (2009), Decree N° 1779

Institutional framework

The institution responsible for programme execution is the *Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA)*, a public agency with its own assets and administrative autonomy, in charge of professional training in Colombia. SENA is financed by a mandatory contribution from organizations, amounting to 2% of the wage payroll.

SENA has a steering council composed of representatives of employers, workers, Government, and the Church. The SENA Managing Director submitted this programme to the Council at its regular meetings.

SENA programmes span the entire country through more than 115 training centres operating in all 1,098 municipalities. SENA recently designed innovative forms of training including distance training, virtual learning environments, the *Fondo Emprender* to foster entrepreneurship, techno-parks as stages for materialising technology-based ventures, the rural youth training programme, and mobile units and other itinerant solutions currently totalling more than 140 (www.sena.edu.co).

3. Conclusions

The foregoing programme was designed in the framework of a counter-cyclical policy aiming to reduce the pressure of young people on employment by means of a strategy to retain youth in training and their subsequent insertion in the labour world under an apprenticeship contract.

The apprenticeship contract enables enterprises to provide a place for on-the-job training and apprentices to have access to this practice. While the contract is in effect it helps to acquire competencies and work experience, hence the Colombian Government's bid through SENA to improve insertion of the neediest young people.

Though the programme is just beginning, it has been granted major status among employment and training policies as a counter-cyclical tool. Its results should be closely followed, particularly the assessment to be undertaken after at least one year in operation has elapsed.

References

Ministry for Social Protection (2009) Decree N° 1779 *Por el cual se expeden normas sobre el contrato de aprendizaje*, Republic of Colombia.