

# Columbia Program

2010 - 2011





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### The initiative

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The program attends to young people, mainly of foreign origin, who were wards of the Community of Madrid. Once they reach the age of 18, **these young people are expelled from the System of Social Services** without obtaining their legal status in Spain; regardless of whether they have a place to go, a social network to support them, or the tools, skills, capacities or sufficient means to be able to make a living.

In the beginning, the program was fundamentally based on providing **basic services** (accommodations, maintenance, and support), as well as a **peer education** program, which is the best route toward socio-cultural integration in our country and the best means of support in the acquisition of the sufficient skills needed to lead an independent life. During these last years, we have been able to prove that the commitment to the peer education program has been the best option, since it has already shown very positive results among these young people. The testimony and the experiences of the team members, who have endured similar situations, have served as a reference and a guide for the young people who have been incorporated into the program. Furthermore, they have been a significant source of support in helping others when they have had to overcome moments of pain and difficulty, including the promotion of breaking unhealthy habits (such as the consumption of hashish and marijuana) already acquired in their countries of origin.

After confirming that the peer education program is an integral part of the program and constitutes one of its pillars, the need to take a step forward became clear. Now, we also want the program to start from a clearer **empowerment** that permits these young people to take back control of their lives and to decide what they want for themselves, while preventing them from conforming to stereotypes of who they are and what they are to do. The program tries to give them the opportunity of choosing a goal to achieve and support them during the first stages of the process, that starts with their individual interests and the need for self-realization, not with what society dictates. One of the motives that led us to choose this approach was the discovery of certain skills and abilities of these young people, as of yet unknown, that reflect the training carried out during childhood in their countries of origin. This led us to consider to what extent we are aware of all the baggage that these young people are carrying when they arrive to our program. For this reason, we believe it is necessary to give these young people the opportunity to choose what they want to dedicate themselves to, and what they want to make of their lives. We do not just point them toward those sectors of employment in which the demand might be greater or those that require lower



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levels of qualification. For this, we offer them the support and the necessary guidance so that they can make a thoughtful and well-based decision. **The options that are offered to them are many; from the typical sectors of employment they would have access to in our society to the option of returning to their country of origin and undertake some new business.**

Because we have always based ourselves on the education among peers that occurs in co-habitation, we intend to try and place greater emphasis on returning the focus to their own lives, since they are the only ones capable of deciding where their paths will lead. Therefore, **our involvement starts from the most basic care and ends with the creation and development of a life plan.**

- Room and board.
- Management of the documents of origin (passport and ID card, if this last one exists) -many of these young people are undocumented.
- Monitoring and advice on the registration and attendance of professional training courses, as well as on learning Spanish (literacy instruction).
- Acquisition of legal status in our country (processing of residence permits, work permits and even a request for proof of nationality, if applicable).
- Advice, support, and monitoring in job placement (necessary for them to be able to live independently).
- Economic support so that they can visit their family in their country of origin (for this they should already have legal status in our country) In this way we ensure that the young people will be able to maintain the bond with their families directly, and not only by telephone. This way we hope to reset this significant relationship of theirs, as well as the memories they have of their homes.
- Development of the life project. Once equipped with economic means and experience and it is observed that they have acquired sufficient abilities for living independently, we suggest that they decide what they would like to do (in what area they would like to work, what they would like to dedicate themselves to, and if they wish to do so in our country, or in their own...) so that we can offer them the respective advice, a microcredit so that they can begin a small business or finance another form of education and/or qualification (many of them request the ability to obtain a driver's license ) and we ask them to give us a date for the completion of this process, and therefore, when they will finally leave our housing facilities, which represents the end of the most direct intervention.
- Once they have left the program's housing, we maintain a continued observation of these young people to guarantee that the process of independence has been carried out successfully. This continued observation is achieved in part thanks to micro-credits, which have already favoured ongoing relations and a bond between the young people and the association.



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## Mission

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This program seeks to **answer to the needs of the young people** (mainly of foreign origin) who, once they reach the age of 18, are removed from the Child Protective Services of the Community of Madrid and find themselves in a situation lacking protection and at risk of social exclusion due to a lack of resources and networks that support them in their process of attaining independence and in the transition to adult life. Moreover, they are without the minimum documentation required for an adult. We work to bring these young people to equal rights and opportunities that will permit them to reconstruct their lives with guarantees and in doing so promote their integration in our country, at both a socio-cultural and vocational level.

Moreover, we also direct our efforts **to denounce the situations of injustice** among this population, urging the corresponding administrations and governments to take the appropriate measures toward a solution and in the defence of civil rights.

In the same way, we work to **transmit a positive message to society** about the people who have decided to immigrate to our country, mainly focusing on the stories of the youths with whom we work.

## Where is the challenge?

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In our work, we encounter various challenges. The main challenge facing these young people is the recovery of faith and belief in their abilities and skills, as well as **trust in their chances of succeeding**.

In relation to the administrations and governments, the challenge lies in successfully changing or modifying the procedures, actions, and legislations that cause the unjust situations observed, regaining the **rule of law** for this group of population.

Finally, in relation to society, the principle challenge is creating **a change in the perception of immigrants**, and ensuring that they are not looked at as cheap labour, but rather as people who make a valuable contribution to our society, at a cultural, social, and economic level.

## Inspiration

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The principal source of inspiration for this program is the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. Our work focuses on young people, who have recently reached the age of 18 and find themselves unprotected and at risk of social exclusion; therefore **our objective focuses on guaranteeing that these young people have the same rights as any other person in our society**. Given that they start from a situation of clear vulnerability and social disadvantage because of a lack of means and support, our work seeks to ensure that their rights are recognized and guaranteed.



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## The motives that brought MpazM to create this program —

Over its years of operation, the Association has witnessed how many boys and girls have been left to fend for themselves once they've reached the age of 18. These people have spent the greater part of their lives under the protection of Social Services System, and when they turn 18, they are forced to live independently whether they are prepared for it or not. It is a process of precocious and obligatory independence only faced by them, since very few young people today are prepared for such a process at this age; even those who count on the support of their families opt for becoming independent so soon. Therefore our principle motive, which is based on a general concern, looks to contribute, in any way, to improve the current situation, eradicating provisional situations that are becoming structural.

The Columbia Program has been operating in the Association since 1989, trying to give an opportunity to these young people by helping them with the transition to an independent life. This year, the program is taking a step forward, looking into a form of renewed work based on empowerment that will strengthen the work done.

## Innovative Strategies —

The program is continuing to grow and expand its horizons. This year, two strategies can be highlighted, which, we hope, give a new twist to our work and help us better adapt to the needs of these young people with whom we work and to which we offer new alternatives.

The first strategy is based on a commitment to **online training**. First, we look to it as a means of obtaining a diploma in ESO, so that they can combine their work or professional training with obtaining this title. This commitment is aimed at the acquisition of a skill that will enable these young people to develop and take advantage of in the future.

The second strategy is granting **micro-credits**. Those young people who find themselves in the final stage of the program are able to access this method of finance that is provided by the Association. Some take advantage of it in order to obtain a driver's permit: others opt to start some project of self-employment (either in our country or their country of origin).

## Highlighted achievements —

The positive results obtained year after year underscore the Columbia Program's trajectory. In 2010, we signed an agreement with Radio ECCA to promote the acquisition of a diploma from ESO via online education. The program also works in collaboration with the Spanish Foundation of Geriatrics and Gerontology, which offers training to our young people as an alternative to broaden their professional horizons.



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It is also important to point out that the activities undertaken by **the volunteers** have permitted the discovery of skills and abilities of the young people that, until now, were unknown, and which reflect their childhood education. These skills are valuable in rural areas and enable them to function with ease in the field.

Moreover, achievements have been made in the **legislative field**. In article 35.5 of the latest reform of the "Ley de Extranjeria," it states that unaccompanied foreign minors must be heard when the procedure of repatriation is started.

*"The Administration of the State requests information from diplomatic representatives of their country of origin about the circumstances of the minor's family prior to the decision on the initiation of the proceedings for their repatriation. Initiation of the proceedings is agreed upon once it is heard whether or not the minor has had a fair trial and has previously been informed of the protection services for minors and of the Attorney General's Office, the Administration of the State shall give its ruling about the return to their country of origin, (...)" (art. 35.5 LO 2/2009).*

The program has also succeeded in raising again the debate about the procedure of bone density tests to determine age.

Finally, we consider it an achievement that the number of cases in which the **IMMF** (Madrid's Institute of Minors and Family) manages the residence permits for unaccompanied foreign minors has increased, although an improvement in the process is needed in order to avoid arbitrariness and casuistry.

## Founding

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The funding of this program is **private**; part of the budget is obtained from the contributions made by the Barclay's Foundation and the other part is obtained from the free contributions made by the people who are fully involved in the project.

One of the most successful initiatives to raise funds for the program was organized with the Barclay's Foundation. It was an expedition to climb the Toubkal, the highest peak in North Africa. In this expedition the participants were employees from Barclay's, who made a financial contribution to the program. As a testimony to this initiative, a small video was made and it is available at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFYGnrggWo>

We value the freedom given by the "economic independence" (as we do not depend on public subsidies), therefore, we try to organize activities and events in order to raise funds. Moreover, our appearance in the media is one of the most

- (1) Reform of Ley Orgánica 4/2000, January 11, about the rights and liberties of the foreigners in Spain.
- (2) Medical exams are conducted to establish the foreign origin, who do not have documentation to determine if they are minors, in case of doubt.



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effective formulas of fund raising, not for the money, but rather for the subsequent reported contributions made by individuals who have come to learn of us in this way.

## Collaborations

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As we have mentioned, individual contributions have been received, but these are not always economical contributions. The work that is done by the volunteers in this program is fundamental. The number of people who have collaborated with us by offering their time and dedication has been increasing over the years since the start of the program. There are now several people who collaborate with us; some have joined over the years. Others were not able to continue with their dedication and we hope that in the future we will be able to continue relying on the support and help from more interested people. We certainly cannot deny that over the course of the years, we have managed to convince more and more people to participate in this worthwhile project. To date, the **total number of volunteers** who have collaborated or who are currently collaborating with us is **thirty**.

We also count on the collaboration of certain institutions that have helped us continue to grow at different levels. As we already mentioned, The Barclays Foundation has made a financial contribution, but they have also helped us in the organization of events. Thanks to **Radio ECCA**, the young people who we work with now have more ease in obtaining the title of mandatory secondary education through online training and they are able to broaden their professional horizons with the professional training offered by the **Spanish Foundation of Geriatrics and Gerontology**. Working together with the **Police Union** allows us to deepen and share a reflection on immigration from different, but not opposed, areas. Finally, the collaboration with the **Caja de Ahorros del Mediterráneo** (Mediterranean Savings Bank), has allowed us to increase the number of needy young people who attend, by ceding an apartment to the program.

## Beneficiaries of the program

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The direct beneficiaries of the program are 16 people each year. **They are young people between 18 and 22 years old, the majority of whom are of foreign origin and that have been warded by the Community of Madrid.** They arrived to our country as minors without legal status; many of them endured long trips to arrive at our borders, and the majority, in the final stretch, had to take boats. Their journey is usually the result of a family plan, whose objective is to search for new opportunities and a better life.

Once they enter our country, they suffered the persecution of the police, the detainments, and the exams to determine their age, and they have learned how to survive despite the adversities. When it was determined that they were minors, they were placed under the protection of Child Protective Services of the Community of Madrid. They were warded and placed into residential foster care.



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When they reached the age of 18, they were expelled from the system, forced to fend for themselves (without a supportive social network, such as their family) and without legal status (without the minimal documentation required as an adult), because the administration did not make the necessary arrangements to enable them to reside in our country. The majority of them are not able to read or write well in Spanish, and they speak our language, but with great difficulties. They were also not able to obtain enough training to access to employment, once they have obtained legal status.

However, our experience demonstrates that these youth are an example of resilience, as they are strong and have a great ability to adapt to changes; they have the will to live and to maintain their relationships with their families and native countries. Their answer to the difficulties they have been through has encouraged us to undertake with hope and confidence the adventure of microcredit.

It is difficult to estimate how many people benefit indirectly from the program. If we only take into account the families of these young people, the approximate number of indirect beneficiaries would be around 96 people. But here we also have to take into account all of the people that each of these young people know in our country (a difficult figure to determine). Likewise, the Madrid society in general also indirectly benefits from our program as we are offering a service that promotes the integration of part of the population, people who would otherwise be subjected to crime or become part of the underground economy in order to survive.

## Impact on the community

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We can assert that it has had a positive impact on the community level. Although there are prejudices concerning the people we work with, their relationship with their neighbours is good. We have never received complaints, and occasionally, the neighbours even make contributions. But our greatest success is the fact that we have had **no legal trouble** during these years.

It is also important to highlight that the administration seems to show more and more interest in the creation of such a program, given that there is a void in regard to this problem, and thanks to the positive results the program has been having.

At the legislative level, there is also some impact as it is reflected in the amendment of the Immigration Laws, as mentioned before, and also with the achievement of favourable legal judgements in situations of injustice that have been reported.

There is also an impact at the social level, proved by the awareness of certain entities, that once they come to know the problematic life stories of these young people, they usually decide to make contributions to the program. But without a doubt, the most effective way to increase the social impact is the appearance in the media, as we are able to reach more people. We believe that this is the only way we can achieve a reconsideration of the debate on how our society



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is acting, in order to include the issue in the political agendas and to revise the existing laws and policies on immigration.

There are several examples of evidence that can support this change. If we begin with cohabitation, the fact that no complaints have been made by the neighbours of our houses, and that some of them have even made contributions, clearly reflects that cohabitation is the best way to modify prejudices and stereotypes.

The **impact at the legislative level** is demonstrated by the amendment of article 36 of the Immigration Law (L.O. 2/2009) which states that the minor must be heard/testify; and with judgments (sentences) as those made in the court for contentious administrative proceedings, #20 in Madrid on 12/04/2007, in which the repatriation of a Moroccan minor was recognized as illegal.

The **awareness and involvement of certain organizations** are clear if we take into account the financial contributions and the recognition that the Barclays Foundation gives to the program; the ceding of an apartment by la Caja de Ahorros del Mediterráneo (Mediterranean Savings Bank); the achievement of collaboration agreements for the training of the youths with Radio ECCA and adult schools (Post-Secondary Education); as well as the support provided by the Police Union.

Last but not least, the **appearance in the media**. The Board of Directors of the program was held in the presence of the media; some of the attendees included Público, Europa Press and Religión Digital.

## Growth plan for the next five years

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**Ideally, our program would not exist within the next five years.**

This would signify that the reported injustices will have disappeared: that the youths would leave Child Social Services with the support, necessary training, and sufficient means to ensure the path to an independent life and a transition to adulthood with guarantees of success and their legal status in our country would be secured because the competent authorities would have proceeded with the necessary steps.

In order for this to happen, necessary legislative and political changes need to take place to ensure that the injustice that is present today does not have a place in the future. This also entails that there must be a previous social awareness for these issues to be included in political agendas. For this to happen, a greater presence in the media is necessary.

If this is not possible, our plan for growth focuses on providing more alternatives and possibilities than the ones currently available, such as: online training to obtain a diploma in ESO, tutorials to aid their learning of Spanish in adult schools, monitoring of their professional training, the adequate emotional and economic support necessary to visit their families, and entrepreneurial support through the granting of micro-credits. We believe that an increase in the number of spa-



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ces in the program would decrease the quality of the care offered because the means at our disposal are limited, among other reasons. We do not expect that that these means are going to expand considerably, and this will be an even bigger issue in times of crisis. Also, we believe it is most adequate to expand what we offer in terms of professional training in order to enlarge the professional horizons of these young people and to create a model of empowerment.

Moreover, in order to improve the care provided, an increase in funding will be necessary to increase our ability to grant micro-credits and to guarantee each of these young people a family visit in their respective country of origin. In addition, this increase in funding will allow them to establish contacts with more organizations, and in turn, create new collaborative relationships with them. Finally, we will be able to offer more educational and working alternatives to these youths.

## Feasible means of founding to obtain these resources

**The means of funding would be based on private funds and our own funds.** We do not want to depend on public subsidies that do not guarantee long-term stability and that vary according to the change in political power or the current situation. Because of this we opted for the organization of events and activities in order to raise funds and increase public knowledge of our program. As of right now, we are working on the organization of a show for the month of February at the Maravillas Theater in Madrid, with the help of actor Hovik Keuchkerian Burgui.

Inspiration



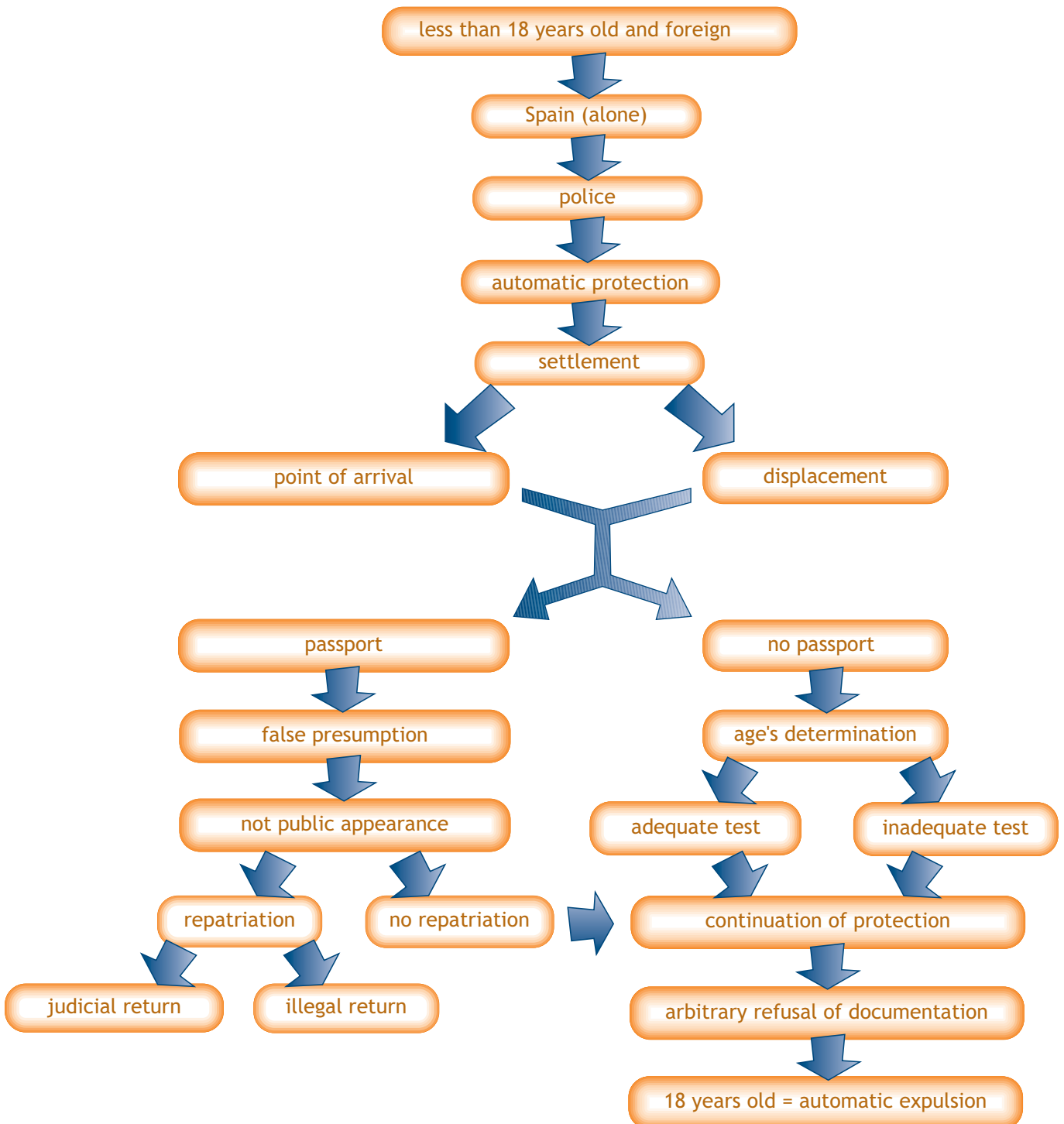
Mission



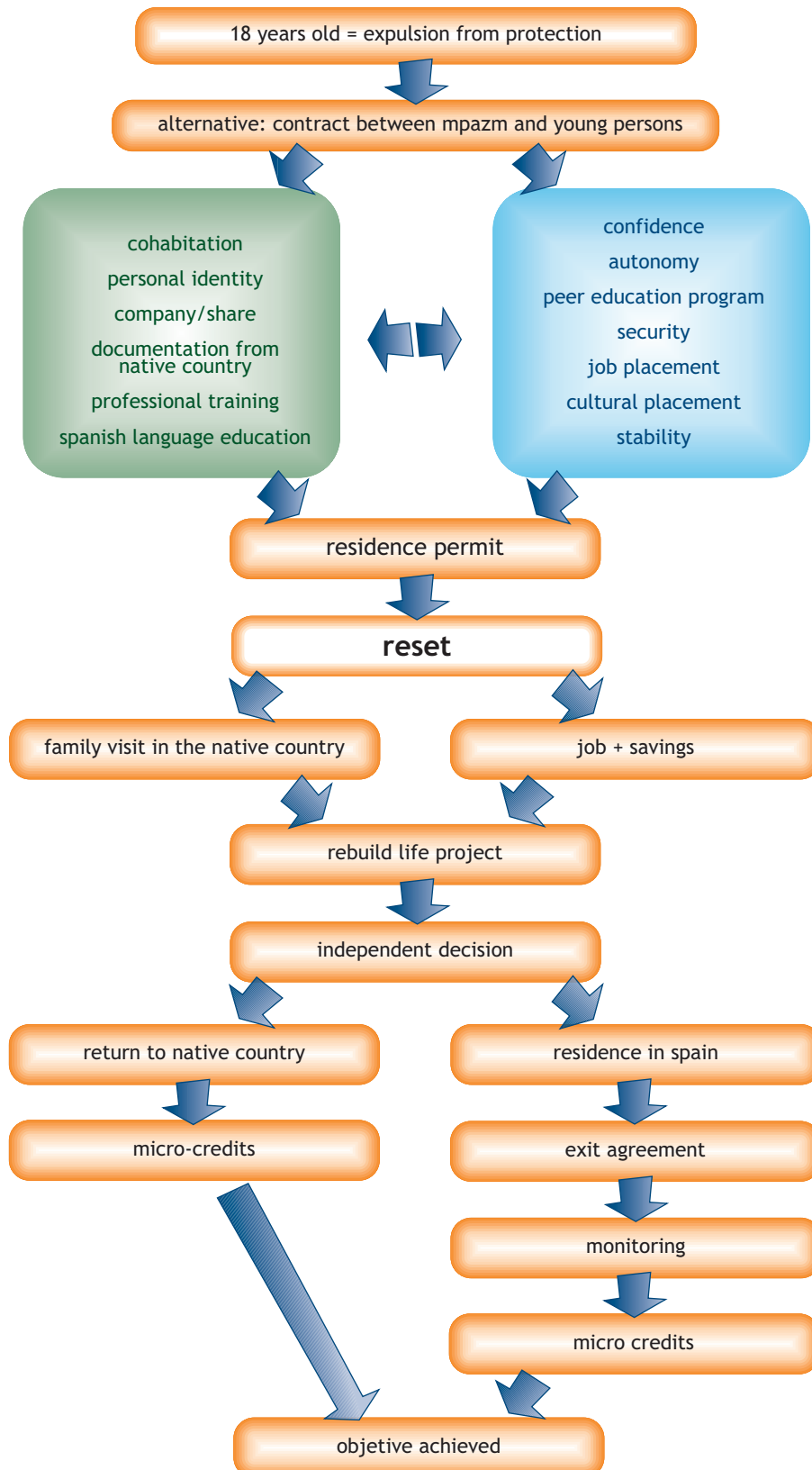
Challenges



# Rational of the Program



# Columbia Program = Empowerment a program of equal

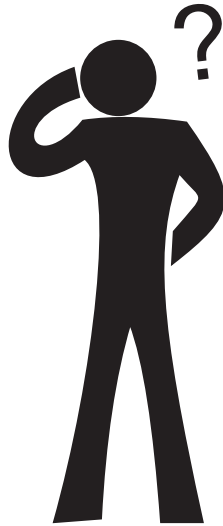


# Beneficiaries of the program

Young people (18-22 years old)  
foreign origin (mainly)  
Ex-wards

## Without:

Documentation  
Training/education  
Good knowledge of spanish  
Job  
Family in Spain  
Social network  
Housing possibilities  
Means of self-sufficiency  
Supports

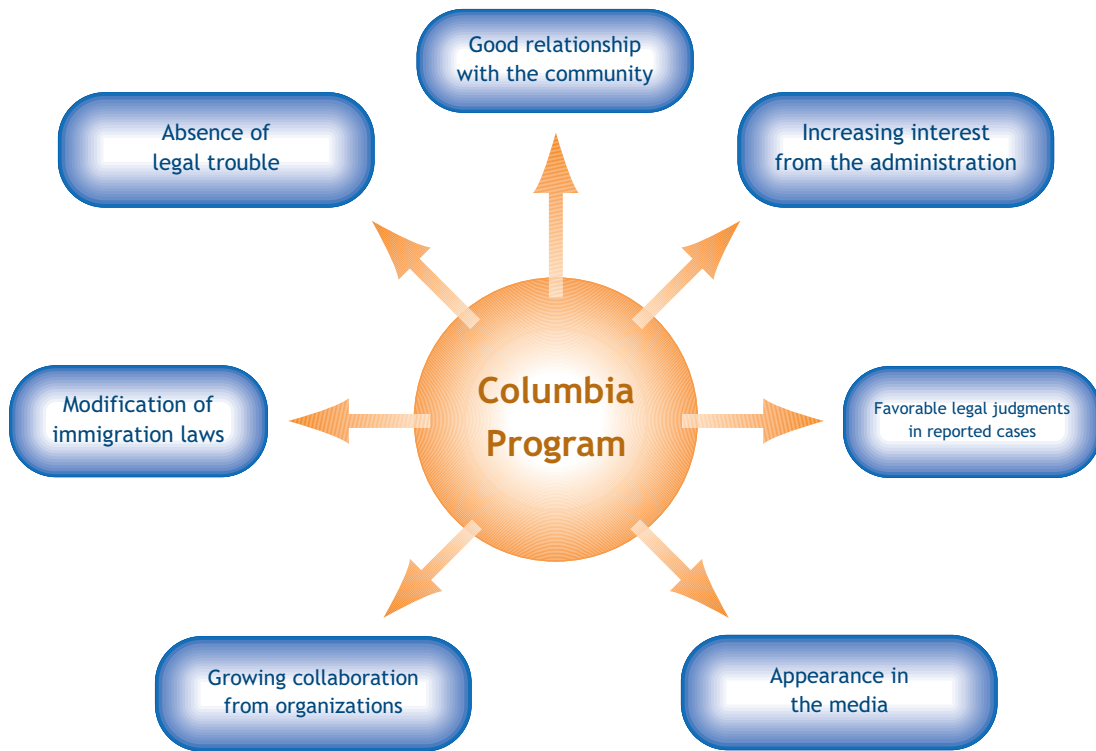


## With:

Hope  
Effort  
Perseverance  
Resilience  
Commitment  
Self improvement  
Ability to adapt to change  
Autonomy  
Entrepreneurial spirit

Our work  
=  
lower incidence of without factors  
+  
higher incidence of with factors

# Impact



# Collaborations

