

Elmer's story

A profile from Young Lives in Peru



Elmer is 12 years old and lives with his older sister, Eva, in Lima. He came to the city from his village so he could start secondary school. He helps Eva by looking after her children while she is at work and in exchange she pays for all his school-related expenses. This is not the first time Elmer has moved – he moved once before when his parents were looking for work on a farm. He misses his family but knows he will be going home soon.

Elmer lives with Eva, who is 25, and her two small children. Her husband is a carpenter. They need someone to look after the children while she works in the afternoons in a restaurant. Last year, his older brother came to Lima and this year, it is Elmer's turn. When Elmer goes home, his brother will come back. Before moving to Lima, Elmer and Eva did not know each other very well, as Eva left home when she was just 13 and Elmer was a baby. Their mother thinks spending some time together will be good for their relationship.



Eva and her family live next to a busy road in a densely populated district. The apartment is on the second floor above a car repair shop, close to Eva's work and Elmer's school. It is modest, but the living room and kitchen are spacious and have electrical appliances: a TV, DVD player, stereo, a fridge and a cooker.

Elmer is shy, but happy to answer the Young Lives researcher's questions, although his answers are short. He says that he looks after his nephews, aged 3 and 6, every afternoon and also on Saturdays. He says they are sometimes naughty, don't do what they are told, and play with the stereo.

He acknowledges that coming to Lima has meant a big change in his life. Elmer was in sixth grade at a primary school in the village and now studies at a large secondary school. At home he helped his parents on the smallholding, taking care of the animals, working the land and picking coffee, for which he sometimes got a small payment. He spent a lot of time playing with his little sister and taking care of his youngest brother. The family had moved from one village to another in order to find work on the smallholding and so he had already changed schools once. His grandparents live in another city and he has visited them. Elmer has lots of friends in the village and he misses them. He says that he misses his family too, but knows that he will be going home soon.



“My village is nicer because there are more trees.”



“Why was it important to come to Lima?”

To know more things.

OK, to know more things. Do you like the city?

Yes, I do.

Yes, and what is it that you like the most about living here?

Going out and playing in the park.

What is it that you like least about living here?

There are many cars and a lot of noise.

In comparison with your village, is this a better or a worse place to live?

My village is nicer because there are more trees.”

Elmer says that the transfer from primary to secondary school was better than he expected. He soon made a friend and that helped. What he likes the most in this school is the playground, though he would like it to be cleaner. He thinks secondary school is more difficult than primary school, because there is more homework, and there are more teachers.

Elmer believes education is important. When he drew a child who was not doing well, he drew a boy crying because he got bad marks. In the case of a child who was doing well, he drew a boy smiling because he got presents and clothes from his mother for having got good marks. Elmer's own mother, who brought him to Lima, said that she wanted him to study, particularly as she had only had two years of schooling: “I don't want him to be like me, with no education... we, his parents, will not be here forever, we may die, both of us, but with his education he can find a job.” She believes education is the most important thing for all her children and the family has already invested a lot in their education.

Elmer says he wants to complete secondary school, go to university and become a doctor. He thinks that his parents will be pleased with his plans and will support him. He would like to have a wife and children, but not until he is at least 25 years old. In the future he would like to travel, to visit other places, perhaps Lima too, which he has liked very much apart from the crowds.



Migration

Elmer's family has a history of mobility and migration, with his mother having moved from her birthplace to the place where she grew up, and then moving again with her family to find work on a smallholding. Her children have also moved around, with her eldest daughter settling in Lima and her two eldest sons spending long periods of time there.

The family's history of migration is not unusual for rural families in Peru, which has high levels of migration, especially from rural areas to cities. A third of the country's population now live in Lima.

In addition, around 10% of Peruvians live abroad. Between the two Young Lives surveys in 2002 and 2006, a third of children from the older cohort and over half of their mothers were migrants in their communities; in other words, they had been born elsewhere.

Migration does not occur just because children are seeking education, or indeed because of poverty. In the 1980s and early 1990s many thousands of people fled their homes due to internal armed conflict between the army and guerrilla groups in some areas.

But for many living in the rural areas, the city also means a better life: as one mother said: "I dream, always dream that the city isn't like it is here, here it's always suffering... well, as I see it, there can't be that much suffering [in the city], because they don't get wet, they don't get sunburned, they have their secure jobs, they have their daily schedule, and in contrast, here it's backbreaking."

Source: Gina Crivello et al. (2009) *Becoming Somebody: Youth Transitions through Education and Migration. Evidence from Young Lives in Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 43.

"I don't want him to be like me, with no education... we, his parents, will not be here forever... but with his education he can find a job."

Elmer's mother



Country context: Peru

Peru is regarded as a 'medium human development' country, according to the United Nations criteria, and currently ranks 87 out of 177 countries in the UN Human Development Index. It boasts the fastest-growing economy in Latin America. However, the country's strong economic performance has not been matched in terms of poverty reduction, and there are widening gaps between different sectors of the population.

- In recent years, Peru has experienced continued economic growth, at over 6% per year between 2002 and 2006.
- Inflation has continued below 2%, while exports have grown over 25% per year.
- The overall national poverty rate fell between 2004 and 2006, but this reduction is almost entirely urban.
- The country has one of the highest levels of income inequality in South America.
- Levels of poverty, infant mortality, maternal mortality and malnourishment among indigenous groups are twice as high as national averages.
- The widening gap between rich and poor and town and countryside has led to increased migration to the cities, especially the capital, Lima, which is now home to approximately 28% of Peru's population.

Sources: Young Lives Round 2 Survey Report: Peru; World Bank (2007) *Social Protection in Peru*; 2007/2008 UN Human Development Index.

Young Lives is a unique long-term research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty. By following a group of children over 15 years, we aim to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty, and provide evidence to support the development of effective policies. We are working with 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. The story here is one of a set of twenty taken from the interviews our researchers did with the children individually and in groups. Each child's story has a theme of some kind that emerged from the material and which illustrates the issues that the children are having to contend with, but also gives a wider picture in relation to children's lives. This ranges from child work and education, to migration, health, domestic violence, inequality, gender, and individual circumstances such as being an orphan or being disabled.

The children and their families who are participating in Young Lives willing share with us a great deal of detailed personal information about their daily lives, and we have a responsibility to protect their confidentiality. For this reason, the children's names have been changed. The accompanying photos are of children living in similar communities in similar circumstances to the Young Lives children. Photo credit: © Young Lives / Lucero Del Castillo Ames; Sebastian Castañeda Vita; Raúl Egúsqiza Turriate.

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Young Lives is core-funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) with sub-studies funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, the Oak Foundation, the Inter-American Development Bank (in Peru) and the International Development Research Centre (in Ethiopia).

**Young Lives, Department of International Development, University of Oxford,
3 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK.
www.younglives.org.uk**

Young Lives 
An International Study of Childhood Poverty