

# Lupe's story

## A profile from Young Lives in Peru



*Lupe is 6 years old and quite shy. She lives in Lima with her mother, her father, her sister, and her aunt. Lupe's grandmother looks after the girls while their mother is at work. Lupe has just started school which she says is harder than kindergarten. She misses the toys and puzzles they had in pre-school and clearly remembers the first day in primary school after the summer holidays.*

Lupe's family is relatively well-off and lives in a large house in the capital city, Lima. There is a spacious living-dining room with a TV. On one of the walls there are two small shelves with textbooks, storybooks and jigsaw puzzles that belong to the girls. The family has two dogs and a cat. The house has all the basic services. The garage has been converted to a small grocery shop, run by Lupe's grandmother.

Lupe spends most of the time at home with her sister. During the week they are looked after by their grandmother and at weekends they spend time with their mother. They see less of their father because he is always working. Lupe says she is responsible for tidying up her bedroom and her parents', as well as organising what she will wear to school the next morning.

Lupe is at primary school, which she says is harder than kindergarten. She misses the toys and jigsaw puzzles that they had in kindergarten and was deeply disappointed when she arrived at primary school on the first day and found they were not there. Lupe loves doing jigsaw puzzles. She also misses having two breaks in the day; in primary school they only have one. Although Lupe's primary school is in the same building as the pre-school she still feels the differences.

Lupe's classroom has 24 small desks and 24 chairs. There is a blackboard and a whiteboard and a first aid kit. The walls are covered with children's' drawings. At the back of the classroom there is a small puppet theatre.



*Lupe says that one of the most difficult tasks [in school] is writing down all the sentences on the blackboard without getting behind.*



Lupe clearly remembers the first day in primary school after the end of the summer holiday, when her mother bought all the things she needed for school and a new backpack, bigger than the one she had in kindergarten. She says she has several friends at school, but during those first days she had problems with two girls who teased her. The teacher intervened to end the quarrel and one of her classmates supported her. Lupe didn't talk to her mother about the problem, just to her sister, who advised her to not allow anyone to bother her and to fight back.

Lupe thinks it is important to learn how to read and write, as well as learning to draw and to add and subtract in the first grade at primary school. She expects the second grade to be harder and thinks she will need to make an effort to get through it. She says that one of the most difficult tasks is writing down all the sentences on the blackboard without getting behind, and taking dictation. She believes that all children, both boys and girls, should go to school to learn everything that she is learning now. Her teacher is a good person, she says, although she gets cross when students don't do their homework. She mentioned one occasion when her teacher smacked her.

Asked about the best moments during the present year, Lupe talked about the times when she played with her sister and rode her bicycle down a hill near her home. She made a clear distinction between the time when she was *chiquita* (a little girl) and now. When she was little, she said, she couldn't ride a bicycle or race her friend who lives nearby. Lupe also identified a happy moment when her puppy and kitten went to sleep together. Asked what she doesn't like doing, Lupe said she didn't like staying in, especially on Sunday evenings. At these times, she plays indoors with her dolls.

Lupe has had a skin allergy since she was a few months old. Despite much to-ing and fro-ing between different specialists and health services, her parents feel she did not receive adequate attention.



## Pre- and primary school

Lupe is lucky to have attended pre-school kindergarten. Pre-school education is relatively new in Peru: in 1985 only 26.6% of children between three and five years old were enrolled at school; today the figure has risen to 66.6%, while 93% attend primary school. These changes are partly the result of the recognition that early education has a range of beneficial effects. It provides a foundation for success in subsequent school years and improves the transition to primary school. In Latin America, this is seen as particularly important as repetition rates in first grade are high: at the beginning of the 1990s, 42% of children enrolled at first grade repeated the year, while the average in primary was 29%.

Peru now has a raft of legislation on school and pre-school education, including a 2003 General Law of Education which includes pre-school as part of basic education, making it free and compulsory.

A Young Lives study of four areas found that caregivers were generally positive about pre-school, believing that it helped

smooth the transition between home and school. As one rural mother said: "When they go to pre-school, they learn the alphabet, they go [to primary school] with their hand more adapted to write, and they don't suffer so much at school, at least they can already write their name... they are also less shy, they become used to their teacher and their classmates."

Within the schools, however, Young Lives research found that: 'looking at the organisational arrangements in place and the actual practices of teachers, it can be said that transition from pre-school to first grade is not understood and structured as a process within and between educational institutions.' Other Young Lives research also shows that pre-school enrolment seems to be biased in favour of children with more educated and wealthier mothers, towards the oldest child in a family, and those whose father is present in the household. Rural girls show the lowest enrolment levels of all groups, which is important to note because it increases their chances of dropping out later on.

**Sources:** J. Escobal et al. (2008) *Young Lives Peru Round 2 Survey Report: Initial Findings*; Patricia Ames (forthcoming 2009) *Starting School: Who is Prepared?* Young Lives' *Research on Children's Transition to First Grade in Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 47.



## 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).

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An International Study of Childhood Poverty