



SUCCESS STORY

Giving Displaced Women Hope

Helping displaced women support their families



Photo: IOM/Mauricio More

Orlinda and her daughter work at hand weaving at their home in the town of Bucaramanga, where they escaped to after being uprooted by guerillas.

“Some day we will return to our farm. Until we do, we will keep working at what we have learned. When we do return, we will be wiser and stronger for all we have been through,” says Orlinda de Bucaramanga, a member of the USAID-supported Luz y Vida Artisan Women’s Association.

Telling Our Story
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Orlinda was born and raised on a family farm in the municipality of Lebrija, in Santander, central Colombia. In Lebrija she worked in the field side by side with her four children and husband, who held a second job as a construction worker to make ends meet. Their life was peaceful until the day guerilla violence engulfed Lebrija. Orlinda and her family were forced to flee. Since then, the family has lived in Bucaramanga, the capital of Santander, separated from Lebrija by 18 long kilometers of rough and dangerous roads.

The first four years were the hardest. Orlinda worked in a private home, washing clothes and cooking, while her husband worked sporadically in construction. The children attended school and grew up watching their parents work hard for a better life. Things changed for the better in 1998, when Orlinda met someone from *Luz y Vida* — Light and Life — a women’s artisan association. The mission of *Luz y Vida*, which USAID supports, is to empower displaced women to improve their education, living standards, and their families’ well-being. Through the association, women learn to produce handicrafts, baked goods, and preserves, which they can sell for a modest profit that allows them to improve their quality of life.

After hearing Orlinda’s story and observing her determination, the organization invited her to join. She learned how to make leather goods as well as paper and woven crafts. Eight years later, she is still going strong and even teaching her children how to produce these handicrafts after school, on weekends, and during vacations. Her children have also learned business administration and marketing skills, which will help later in life as they start their own businesses. Most importantly for Orlinda, her family is still together and making ends meet.

Orlinda and her family still dream of returning to their farm one day. But they have built a new life in town, and one that they are proud of. Until the day comes when Orlinda can return home, the skills that USAID and *Luz Y Vida* have provided her will continue helping her as she and her family build this new life.