

Fratelli Maicao: A socio-educational initiative for Venezuelan migrants

Maicao is a town situated in north-eastern Colombia, on the border with Venezuela. Historically linked to intense commercial activity, over the last few decades **it has welcomed thousands of families facing migration and/or forced displacement.**



It was there, almost four years ago, in September 2022, **that** one of the communities of **the Fratelli* Project** was established. **This project is jointly managed by the Marist Brothers and the Brothers of the Christian Schools**, based on a spirit of solidarity with the most impoverished and most vulnerable, especially children and young people, and as an expression of a 'Church on the move' and a synodal Church, because, 'synodality will always mean working together, dreaming together, living together and, obviously, building communion, which is basically what the Church has to show the world', as Brother Carlos Gómez, Vicar General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, has expressed.

Safe educational environments

"In our Fratelli Maicao project, our primary concern is for those displaced from Venezuela - the children, both Venezuelans and returning Colombians," says Brother Julio Huerta, FMS. "We aim to provide them with safe environments in which to be educated, **where they can emotionally overcome the many difficulties they have had to endure** and, little by little, begin to build their own life plans," adds the Spanish Marist Brother.

This is how “the migrants who have arrived in Maicao have found in our home a new beginning, an opportunity to feel ‘at home’”, as Brother Óscar Quiñónez, FSC, who is well aware of what it means for children and young people who have experienced various losses or are going through situations of conflict, violence and abandonment **to return to an educational environment and “find a brotherly family that welcomes them and gives them the tools to work and carry on with their lives”.**

The joy of being brothers

“These families, these children, and even we ourselves, have found just that: a family,” continues the Colombian De La Salle Brother. “That is why ‘Fratelli’—**we are brothers, we are a community, we stand in solidarity with one another.** In one way or another, this is the place where the children find happiness.”

As well as providing educational support for children and young people, aimed at their holistic education, *Fratelli Maicao* does not lose sight of the need to support families. **“We also have a mission to monitor the settlements,”** says Brother Edvaldo Ferreira, a Brazilian Marist with extensive experience as a social worker.

“We run workshops with families on living together in a group, conflict resolution and health issues,” he explains, which involves visiting families, working alongside settlement leaders and gaining a better understanding of the reality on the ground. **“The most important thing is to see how our mission, our educational work, makes an impact and brings about a transformation** for the families of *Fratelli Maicao*,” he concludes.

** The Fratelli Project was launched in 2016 as a joint initiative between the Marist Brothers and the Brothers of the Christian Schools, with the aim of providing a quick international response to crises affecting displaced people — particularly children and young people — in cross-border situations around the world.*

We invite you to find out more about this fascinating story:

Fratelli Maicao is one of the One La Salle solidarity projects.

We invite you to support this solidarity initiative through our non-profit organisation, the La Salle Foundation.

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