

Country profile **Peru**

World Vision

GEOGRAPHY

Peru is situated on the Pacific Coast of South America and is slightly smaller than Australia's Northern Territory. It shares a border with Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador. Peru has three distinct geographical regions: the highland Andes, western coastal plain and the lowlands of the Amazon Basin.

The climate is very diverse and ranges from tropical in the eastern lowlands and subtropical and dry in the west. The central Andes Mountains have a cold to cool climate.

PEOPLE

The majority of Peru's population (28.5 million) live in urban areas and along the coast, while the rugged mountains and dense jungle are sparsely populated. Spanish is the official language, but Quechua is widely spoken in the Andes and there are about 70 other languages spoken throughout the country. Christianity is the most widely practiced religion (Roman Catholic 80% and Evangelical Protestant 12%). However, much of the indigenous population retain traditional beliefs.



Map courtesy of The General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin



Children learn about reforestation in their community.

HISTORY

Human settlements existed thousands of years ago along the coast and around Lake Titicaca. By the 12th century, Inca had become the dominant indigenous group. They were excellent farmers, engineers, builders, goldsmiths and administrators. Cuzco, in the Andes was their capital and by the 15th century the Inca Empire controlled most of the area. However, civil war eventually weakened their empire and the Spaniard Francisco Pizarro defeated them in 1533. Over the next 200 years several revolts were crushed by the Spanish colonial rulers. However, Peru proclaimed its independence in 1821 and the remaining Spanish forces were defeated in battle in 1824.

From 1980 to 1993 an extreme Marxist group, the Shining Path, waged an armed struggle with the government, causing up to 70,000 deaths and forcing thousands of people from their homes.

In its recent past Peru has alternated between democracy and military dictatorship. It is also deeply divided politically and economically. A small elite of Spanish descent controls most of the wealth and political power, while indigenous Peruvians are largely excluded from both and make up many of the millions who live in poverty.

ECONOMY

Although many Peruvians work in agriculture, there is a shortage of fertile land suitable to grow crops. As a result, many farmers are unable to produce enough food to feed their families and earn an income. High transport costs, reduced government assistance and low prices for food crops such as maize, potatoes and wheat keep many rural families poor.

Peru faces a number of key environmental problems. Climate change has impacted on Peru in terms of increased water stress, and the increasingly harsh climatic conditions contribute to the lack of food security and consequently malnutrition. Soil erosion and industrial pollution are also problematic. Logging and oil exploration threaten the livelihoods of indigenous groups in the Amazon Basin. The vast majority of workers have only part-time jobs, with widespread under-employment and unemployment rates remaining high. Families struggle to make ends meet even with several members (adults, children and grandparents) working in the informal sector, selling things and doing casual jobs.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Most rural families build their own one-roomed homes, with *adobe* (sun-dried clay brick) walls and a tiled or thatched roof. In cities like Lima, many poor families live in arid settlements on hilly sand dunes, lacking any vegetation. Many of these shanty towns are not recognised as legal communities by the government, so residents do not have access to services such as water, which they pay for trucks to deliver.



Working with preschool children on literacy and reading skills.

Comparatively speaking...

CATEGORY	PERU	AUSTRALIA
Population in millions	28.5	20.9
Urban population (as % of total)	71.6 %	89.1 %
GDP per capita (PPP US\$)	\$7,836	\$34,923
Population living on less than \$2 a day (PPP US\$)	18.5%	0
Population with sustainable access to an improved water source	84%	100%
Adult literacy rate (% age 15 and above)	89.6%	99.0%
Life expectancy at birth	73 years	81.4 years
Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births)	28	4.75

United Nations Development Programme. 2009, *Human Development Report 2009*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Staple foods include corn and potatoes, while fish provides protein for those who can afford it. Young children are highly susceptible to malnutrition. Because of poor nutrition, inadequate sanitation and limited health services (especially in low-income neighborhoods), easily treatable gastro-intestinal and respiratory infections become life threatening. Through the provision of modern agricultural training and equipment, people are able to increase their crop production.

EDUCATION

Most children enrol at primary school. However, many miss classes because they have to earn an income or care for infants. In rural areas there are shortages of trained teachers and the official emphasis on Spanish puts children who speak other languages at a disadvantage.

WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN PERU

- assists sponsored children, their families and communities to meet basic needs including education, health, agriculture, water, gender and economic development.
- empowers communities to build their development capacity and achieve their goals to combat the causes of poverty, which enhances the quality of their lives.
- responds to emergencies and aids in the rehabilitation process.
- advocates for the rights of poor and vulnerable populations to enable them to escape the poverty cycle.

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