

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



**Contribution to the Universal
Periodic Review of
Human Rights (UPR)**

Fourth Cycle

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS - CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR) - FOURTH CYCLE

This document is the result of collaboration between the Alianza por la Niñez Colombiana (Alliance for Colombian Children) and COALICO.



Alianza por la Niñez Colombiana includes the following organisations:

SOS Children's Villages, Bethany Christian Services International Inc, Children International Colombia, Compassion International, Corporación Colombiana De Padres Y Madres (Red Papaz), Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo, Fondo Para La Acción Ambiental Y La Niñez (Fondo Acción), Fundación Antonio Restrepo Barco, Fundación Agencia De Comunicaciones, Periodismo Aliado De La Niñez El Desarrollo Social Y La Investigación (Pandi), Fundación Ama La Vida Aliwen, Fundación Apego, Fundación Centro Internacional De Educación Y Desarrollo Humano (Cinde), Fundación Lumos Colombia, Fundación Misión Internacional De Justicia, Fundación Operación Sonrisa, Plan International, Fundación Saldarriaga Concha, Save The Children Colombia, Universidad Javeriana - Facultad De Psicología, National University of Colombia - Observatorio de Infancia, World Vision International, Colegio Colombiano De Psicólogos (Colpsic), War Child Colombia, Fundación Casa de la Infancia.



COALICO



Coalition Against the Involvement of Children and Young People in the Armed Conflict in Colombia (COALICO) includes the following organisations: Asociación Centro de Desarrollo y Consultoría Psicosocial Taller de Vida, Asociación Cristiana Menonita para Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta (Justapaz), Benposta Nación de Muchach@s Colombia, Corporación Vínculos, Fundación Creciendo Unidos (FCU), Defence for Children International (DNI Colombia), Jesuit Refugee Service Colombia (JRS_COL).

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I. Introduction

1. The *Alianza por la Niñez Colombiana* (Alliance for Colombian Children, hereafter “Alianza”) is a network of national and international civil society organisations¹ founded in 2002. The Alliance brings together actors with extensive knowledge, experience, and track records in working directly with children,² coordinating capacities and efforts to protect children.

2. The *Coalición contra la vinculación de niñas, niños y jóvenes al conflicto armado en Colombia* (Coalition Against the Involvement of Children and Young People in the Armed Conflict in Colombia, hereafter “COALICO”)³ is a platform for national and international civil society organisations. Since its creation in 1999, COALICO has contributed to a reduction in the impact of the armed conflict on children in the country through monitoring, advocacy and the defence and promotion of the children’s rights in Colombia.

3. In the framework of the Universal Periodic Review and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, COALICO and the Alianza have joined forces to raise awareness about the problems affecting children in Colombia, who represent almost a third of the country’s population.⁴ The primary objective is to ensure that these problems are addressed through the government’s public policy and they can be solved in coordination with the private sector and civil society organisations working with children.

4. This document was prepared based on recommendations made to Colombia during the third UPR cycle and the State’s UPR report. The information, statistics, and recommendations we provide are based on our consultations and the field experience of each of the member organisations that work in different regions of Colombia and are aware of the realities of children in those areas. We also facilitated consultations with children so that they could participate in the formulation of our recommendations. Each of our recommendations is based on fundamental rights of the child: protection, family environment, health and education.

¹ The organisations that form the Alliance include: Aldeas Infantiles SOS, Bethany Christian Services International Inc, Children International Colombia, Compassion International, Corporación Colombiana De Padres Y Madres (Red Papaz), Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo, Fondo Para La Acción Ambiental Y La Niñez (Fondo Acción), Fundación Antonio Restrepo Barco, Fundación Agencia De Comunicaciones, Periodismo Aliado De La Niñez El Desarrollo Social Y La Investigación (Pandi), Fundación Ama La Vida Aliwen, Fundación Apego, Fundación Centro Internacional De Educación Y Desarrollo Humano -Cinde, Fundación Lumos Colombia, Fundación Misión Internacional De Justicia, Fundación Operación Sonrisa, Fundación Plan, Fundación Saldarriaga Concha, Fundación Save The Children Colombia, Universidad Javeriana - Facultad De Psicología, Universidad Nacional - Observatorio de Infancia, World Vision International, Colegio Colombiano De Psicólogos (Colpsic), War Child Colombia, Fundación Casa de la Infancia.

² For the purposes of this report “child” refers to all persons under 18 years of age (Article 1, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*).

³ COALICO currently consists of: Asociación Centro de Desarrollo y Consultoría Psicosocial Taller de Vida; Asociación Cristiana Menonita para Justicia, Paz y Acción No Violencia (JUSTAPAZ); Benposta Nación de Muchach@s; Corporación Vínculos; Defensa de Niñas y Niños Internacional (DNI Colombia); Fundación Creciendo Unidos (FCU); Jesuit Refugee Service Colombia (JRS Colombia).

⁴ According to 2018 projections from the national census, in 2022 Colombia had around 15,039,915 children and adolescents, equivalent to 28% of the total population. Source: DANE Population Census 2018 projections.

II. Child Protection

Articles 3, 8, 19, 20 and 38 Convention on the Rights of the Child⁵

i. Protection of child and adolescent victims of the armed conflict⁶

5. The statistics on violations of children's rights prompt us to call Colombia to strengthen its response to protect this population. The Single Victims' Registry (RUV for its initials in Spanish) has reported that, as of 31 December 2022, there were 10,940,453 victims of the armed conflict, of whom at least 2,218,240 were under 18 years old, representing 20% of the total. This data shows that despite the implementation of the Peace Agreement between the government and the FARC-EP,⁷ children continue to be a vulnerable population in relation to the armed conflict that persists in the country.

6. Between 2016 and 2022, the COALICO's Observatory of Children and Armed Conflict (ONCA) recorded 1427 armed conflict events that affected around 342,900 children. In this same period, there were 363 reports of the crime of child recruitment that directly affected 838 children.

7. The latest reports from the United Nations Secretary General on children and armed conflict in Colombia, which is part of monitoring the implementation of the Final Peace Agreement,⁸ show that there was only a decrease in effects of the armed conflict on children at the start of its implementation. There was a notable increase in violent acts committed against children in the framework of the armed conflict between 2017 and 2018.⁹ Children were the population with the highest number of rights violations caused by the Colombian armed conflict, particularly affecting Afro-Colombian

and migrant children. A significant gap in this area is evident due to the lack of responses that use an intersectional approach (*enfoque diferencial*) and account for regional differences (*enfoque territorial*).

8. As part of its monitoring and follow-up work on the six categories of serious violations, ONCA reported 44 events of forced displacement in 2019 and 45 in 2020. In 2021 ONCA reported an increase of 23% in the number of forced displacements in 2021, and in 2022 there were 36 events directly affecting at least 14,882 children. The Ombudsman's Office¹⁰ issued 146 early warnings about the recruitment and use of children between 2019 and 2022, which demonstrates an increase in such violations over this period.

9. In the context of armed conflict, a population can be subject to multiple rights violations that are generally interconnected. Prevention of some of these violations¹¹ can result in an overall reduction in violations. Serious violations such as the recruitment and use of children have historically been one of the categories most reported on by national and international organisations. This victimising act causes other types of harm to communities, such as forced displacement, as families flee to protect their children from these violations.

10. Colombia has adopted a Public Policy on the Prevention of Recruitment, Use, and Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents by Organised Armed Groups and Organised Criminal Groups, through Decree 1434 of 2018. However, resources have not yet been allocated for its implementation.

⁵ Linked to recommendations 120.52, 120.131, 120.132, 120.140, 120.141, 120.148, 120.152, 120.153, 120.154, 120.155, 120.156, 120.159, 120.160, 120.161, 120.162, 120.164, made in the document "Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review" of 9 July 2018 as part of the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review.

⁶ UPR Recommendations (3rd cycle) 120.2, 120.4, 120.12, 120.1, 120.16, 120.42, 120.48, 120.18, 120.9, 120.17, 120.14, 120.15, 120.80, 120.63, 120.40, 120.52, 120.43, 120.132, 120.140, 120.164, 120.154, 120.155, 120.165, 120.156, 120.161, 120.162, 120.163, 120.182, 120.183, 120.181 and 121.27; UPR Recommendations (2nd cycle) 116.9, 116.11, 116.26, 116.47, 116.52, 116.112, 116.113, 116.114, 116.115 and 116.116.

⁷ *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo*, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (hereafter FARC-EP).

⁸ Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace between the Government and the former FARC-EP.

⁹ According to the IV report of the Secretary General, in 2017 there were 234 events that affected children and adolescents in the framework of the armed conflict, while the following year the number of events involving this population increased to 430. Taken from: Report of the Secretary General: Children and armed conflict in Colombia. S/2019/1017. 31 December 2019.

¹⁰ For more information, see the early warning alert from the Colombian Ombudsman's Office. Taken from: <https://alertastempranas.defensoria.gov.co/Alerta/TableroPantallaCompleta?Length=0>

¹¹ These include: recruitment and use, sexual violence, killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals, abduction, denial of humanitarian access and forced displacement.

Recommendations

11. Strengthen actions to prevent serious rights violations caused by the armed conflict and organised violence against the civilian population, particularly against children. Considering the recommendations made by the United Nations Secretary General regarding the situation of the children's rights in Colombia, and taking into account relevant statistical trends since 2018, it is clear that challenges persist regarding the protection of children¹² and that the actions taken by the Colombian government have not been sufficient. We recommend that the State concentrate its actions in the departments most affected by armed conflict: Valle del Cauca, Norte de Santander, Cauca, Nariño, Antioquia, and Arauca.

12. We suggest that the government carry out actions to prevent forced displacement that respond to local contexts and lead to a reduction in the occurrence of these effects on the community. Where there is forced displacement, other violations will follow in a chain reaction.

13. The Colombian government must commit to stop carrying out civilian-military campaigns and activities¹³. ONCA recorded 100 events in this category between 2018 and 2022. For a territory where the armed conflict is dormant, this data is extremely worrying. Recreational and sporting activities organised and led by members of the Armed Forces put children at risk and violate the principle of distinction in international humanitarian law.

14. Some progress has been made on the Public Policy on Prevention in municipalities prioritised by the national government. In particular, there has been success in the design and/or updating of local and departmental child and adolescent recruitment prevention plans. Nonetheless, the Alianza and the COALICO identify weaknesses in implementation of these instruments. Colombia must strengthen the technical and financial capacity for the rollout of these plans, define roles and functions and establish mechanisms for the activation and dissemination of early prevention routes in imminent and actual cases.

15. Public institutions must provide an effective, concerted response based on realities in the territories. The ICBF¹⁴ must provide clearer leadership as well. Colombia must reactivate and coordinate the Intersectoral Commission for the Prevention of Recruitment (CIPRUNNA),¹⁵ extending prevention to include all serious violations of children's rights in the context of the armed conflict, such as: attacks and occupations of schools and hospitals; denial of humanitarian access; sexual violence; kidnapping; death and mutilation; and forced displacement.

16. In terms of access to justice in the Comprehensive System for Peace, the State must fully comply with the provisions in the Final Peace Agreement. The State's response must include real and effective guarantees for equality, adoption of affirmative action measures in favour discriminated and marginalised groups, gender-based analysis, an intersectional approach (*enfoque diferencial*) and take into account territorial differences. An intersectional analysis must consider crimes that occurred when victims were children, per article 18 of Law 1957 of 2019.

17. We call on the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) to carry out a comprehensive analysis that uses a cross-cutting age approach in its macro-cases. The JEP must consider children as differentiated victims of the armed conflict without losing sight of an intersectional approach. This will help recognise historical and structural vulnerabilities that have been exacerbated by the different armed conflict events they have experienced. It will also facilitate this population's access to the rights to truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-repetition.

18. We hope that the sum of the reflections and data contained in this document will lead to concentrated efforts to reduce the effects of armed conflict on children. Considering that in order to achieve "Total Peace," which is the current national government's policy in relation to the armed conflict, the first step is to comply with the principle of the best interests of the child, established by the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.¹⁶

¹² Between 2018 to 2022, the Administrative Process for the Restoration of Rights (PARD), which forms part of the ICBF, reported that 144,830 people were victims of different types of violence who received assistance, of whom 99,956 were girls and adolescent women.

¹³ This recommendation was made by Croatia in the previous Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and further noted in the 4th report of the Secretary General.

¹⁴ ICBF: Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (Colombian Family Welfare Institute).

¹⁵ CIPRUNNA: Intersectoral Commission for the Prevention of Recruitment and Use/Utilization and Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents by Organized Armed Groups and Organized Criminal Groups (CIPRUNNA).

¹⁶ Convention ratified by Colombia in 1991.

ii. Protection of child and adolescent victims of sexual and gender-based violence¹⁷

19. In 2022, an average of 50 girls and adolescent women were victims of sexual abuse each day in Colombia, with a total of 18,233 cases for the year. Relevant data shows that sexual violence against girls is a gender-based issue that particularly affects girls aged 10 to 14 (10,070 cases). In most cases the perpetrator is a family member.¹⁸

20. Although the government has developed strategies to address this problem, it still needs to implement preventive actions and strengthen reparations in this area. Girls have the right to enjoy a healthy environment without feeling vulnerable in the places they consider safe, such as their homes and schools where 81% of cases of abuse occur.¹⁹

21. According to a study from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, in 2021 there were 4,732 cases of adolescent pregnancy: an increase of 10% compared to 2020.²⁰ This evidence generates concerns of sexual abuse, which has negative physical, mental and social consequences on victims and the children born as a result of this abuse.

Recommendations

22. We note that the national government passed the following laws during the period: Law 2205 of 2022²¹ and Law 2137 of 2021²², which created a national early warning system for the prevention of sexual violence against children. These laws have yet to be fully implemented. To implement them, the State must: 1) immediately formulate effective action plans, 2) provide budgetary allocations, 3) monitoring and execution of these two measures during the next legislative period.

23. We recommend that the State immediately establish comprehensive care protocols for girls who are victims of sexual violence. In particular, the State must: 1) provide assistance to families, 2) guarantee timely access to quality health services to reduce the risk of adolescent pregnancy, 3) provide adequate psychosocial assistance without the presence of their aggressor.

24. The State must properly train professionals who respond to sexual violence against girls and adolescent pregnancy, in order to reduce the rate of impunity (94%) and improve the timelines for the resolution of such judicial processes (4-8 years).

¹⁷ UPR Recommendations (3rd cycle) 120.10, 120.7, 120.96, 120.63, 120.13, 120.40, 120.130, 120.52, 120.53, 120.148, 120.49, 120.144, 120.146, 120.131, 120.126, 120.142, 120.131, 120.129, 120.135, 120.134, 120.141, 120.140, 120.148, 120.160 and 120.156.

¹⁸ In 2022, the total number of cases of alleged sexual abuse of children and adolescents was 20,875, of whom 87% were children and women adolescents. In addition, the data shows that around 51% or 9,354 female children and adolescents were assaulted by a relative or person who had legal custody, such as a father, stepfather or uncle. Source: December 2022, National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences - INMLCF.

¹⁹ 77% of the reported cases of alleged sexual abuse of girls and adolescent women occurred in the home and 4% at schools. Source: December 2022, National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences - INMLCF.

²⁰ Report 65: Child and Adolescent Pregnancy in Colombia (Nov. 2022) <https://lee.javeriana.edu.co/-/lee-informe-65>

²¹ Law 2205 of 2022 which created a special unit for the investigation of certain crimes against children.

²² Law 2137 of 2021, which created a national early warning system for the prevention of sexual violence against children.

iii. Right to participation, freedom of expression and non-discrimination²³

25. The National Policy on Childhood and Adolescence 2018-2030 states that: “In terms of participation, there are significant limitations with measuring the participation of children and adolescents, as well as a low level of participation in the spaces provided by current regulations.”²⁴ This right has been so under-recognized in Colombia that there is no clear data on its level of fulfilment.

26. In the preparation of this UPR report, we consulted a group of children through a Consultative Workshop by Plan International.²⁵ They told us: “Sometimes when we express our opinions, we get insulted for speaking up. We should not be afraid, but we are”; “they don’t always listen to us”; “they threaten leaders”; “the right to free expression is not respected. Children are judged for the way they speak and what they wear.”

Recomendaciones

27. Children must be considered subjects of rights so that they can be involved in the decision-making processes that affect them and seek to improve their wellbeing. This change needs to occur from the family level to the public policy level, where children must be given spaces to participate in discussing, managing, and setting the public policy agenda.

28. Colombia must immediately provide the financial, technical and human resources needed to ensure compliance with the third area of action in the National Policy for Children and Adolescents that is focused on participation, mobilisation and citizenship. To meet this goal, we recommend that the State assign financial, technical, and human resources that will permit it to be rolled out in the entire national territory, in order to guarantee that children can actively participate in the decision-making processes that affect them. Similarly, the State must implement the provisions of Law 1195 of 2008²⁶ each year.

29. Colombia must provide an avenue for children to bring individual complaints about violations of their rights. We recommend that Colombia adopt the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure. We note with approval that the government acted to form the National Advisory and Consultative Council for Children and Adolescents (CACNNA). However, it is necessary for the State to establish a recourse that facilitates the filing of individual complaints by children regarding specific violations of their rights.

30. According to the report of PLAN’s Consultative Workshop²⁷ held with children, the following recommendations were mentioned by children: “I would like all children and adolescents to participate and have access to participation because we realised that participation does not happen everywhere. Rural areas, which are more vulnerable, are generally ignored”; “We should provide protection to children, adolescents and young leaders in municipalities where there are problems with security.”

²³ (UPR Recommendations (3rd cycle) 120.25, 120.19, 120.22, 120.20, 120.21, 120.159, 120.153, 120.164, 120.158, 120.152, 121.12, 121.7 and 121.13).

²⁴ National Policy on Childhood and Adolescence, 2018-2030, Colombia, 2018, p. 6.

²⁵ Analytical document “Consultative workshop with children and adolescents for the realization of a report with recommendations on the situation of their rights for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Colombia”, p. 13, PLAN 2023 Foundation.

²⁶ Law 1195 of 2008 which establishes the Day of Children and Adolescent Members of Congress in the National Congress.

²⁷ See above.

III. Children's family environment

Articles 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16 and 18 Convention on the Rights of the Child²⁸

i. Protecting children in cases of domestic violence²⁹

31. Colombia recorded an average of 17 cases of domestic violence against children each day in 2022, reaching a total of 6,361 cases. The reports also show that in 66% of the cases the aggressor was one of their parents and that 83% of the cases were perpetrated inside the home.³⁰ The majority of cases involved physical harm to children, in addition to the mental and social consequences of violence perpetrated by a family member.

32. Colombia must strengthen families to ensure that children grow up free of violence and enjoy a healthy, safe, supportive, respectful and loving environment. Colombia must also implement public education campaigns to promote the transformation of concepts around childhood that result in rights violations. To do so, the government must commit to reforming the National Family Welfare System (SNBF) and make progress with the implementation of the National Policy to Support and Strengthen Families.

Recommendations

33. Although the government has made progress by creating regulatory frameworks to generate safe and protective environments for child development, we urge the Colombian state to 1) allocate sufficient resources that would enable the implementation of the national educational strategy for the prevention of corporal punishment, humiliating and/or degrading treatment, as established in Law 2089 of 2021; and 2) involve local governments in the implementation of this law through monitoring and implementing resources that would guarantee the fulfilment of these commitments.

34. The State must implement the family orientation centres mentioned in Law 1878 of 2018 in all municipalities of Colombia, which focus on awareness-raising and prevention of all violence forms.

35. Modernise and strengthen the National Family Welfare System (SNBF) to ensure real cooperation between national, departmental, municipal institutions and civil society. The State must allocate sufficient resources so that information systems can conduct intersectorial monitoring and identify risks.

²⁸ Linked to recommendations 120.152, 120.153, 120.154, 120.158, 120.159, 120.164, mentioned in the document "Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review" of 9 July 2018 as part of the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review.

²⁹ UPR Recommendation (3rd cycle) 120.158.

³⁰ Source: December 2022, National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (INMLCF).

IV. Child and adolescent health

Articles 24, 25 and 39 Convention on the Rights of the Child³¹

i. Sexual and reproductive health services for children³²

36. According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), 106,816 births were reported to mothers aged between 15 and 19 years old. Although this represents a decrease of 3.5% between 2020 and 2021, this data demonstrates the existence of an underlying problem that has physical, mental, and social repercussions on adolescent mothers and their babies.

37. One of these is adolescent pregnancy, which is a higher risk to the health of mother and child. Adolescent pregnancy is correlated with decreased attendance to prenatal check-ups and lower educational and income levels. It also contributes to social problems such as high dropout rates in schools, early entry into the labour market and some cases to the persistence of the cycle of poverty.³³

38. Children stated the following at the Consultative Workshop³⁴ in the section that covered child victims of sexual violence in the context of the armed conflict: “Although the girls consider it to be one of the most relevant rights for the creation of protective spaces, there is a lack of knowledge about the routes and mechanisms for protection and safeguarding for these types of situations.” They also mentioned the importance of “supporting and approving the bill in Congress to guarantee access to justice for victims of sexual violence, especially in the armed conflict.”

Recommendations

39. Although the government has included sexual and reproductive health services in its goals and plans,³⁵ these must be accessible, intersectional (*diferencial*) (ethnic diversity, gender, disability), without barriers or prejudices, tailored to this population and seek to respond to the needs of children. Colombia must promote healthy sexuality using the concept of rights, prevention and health promotion to address issues such as early and forced marriage, adolescent pregnancies and unwanted pregnancies.

40. Government must immediately provide guidelines for sex education strategies in both schools and health centres. These guidelines must 1) guarantee timely access to information, 2) disseminate care guidelines to guarantee access to contraception and abortion, and 3) respond to specific regional, ethnic, socio-economic contexts and account for levels of vulnerability (homelessness, rural areas, disability, victims of the conflict, migrants), among others, ensuring that their implementation is truly effective.

41. In the Consultative Workshop,³⁶ children recommended that the state “Set up a foundation or a project that cares for women and pregnant mothers to prevent illnesses and treat health issues”; “workshops on self-esteem that help us have more love for ourselves.”

³¹ Linked to recommendations 120.107, 120.109, 120.111, 120.112, 120.115, 120.116, 120.117, mentioned in the document “Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review” of 9 July 2018 as part of the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review.

³² UPR Recommendations (3rd cycle) 120.110, 120.108, 120.109, 120.107, 120.117, 120.112, 120.113, 120.115, 120.106, 120.116, 120.111 and 120.114.

³³ Maternal Mortality in Colombia over the last decade and the effect of Covid-19, 2021-12-20-mortalidad-materna-en-colombia-en-la-ultima-decada.pdf (dane.gov.co)

³⁴ Systematisation document “Consultative workshop with children and adolescents for the preparation of the report with recommendations on the situation of their rights for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Colombia”, p. 13, PLAN 2023 Foundation.

³⁵ Ten-year public health plan 2012 - 2021 and 2022 and 2031

³⁶ Systematisation document “Consultative workshop with children and adolescents for the realization of a report with recommendations on the situation of their rights for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Colombia”, p. 13, PLAN 2023 Foundation.

ii. Children's mental health³⁷

42. In Colombia, an average of one child dies by suicide each day. In 2022, the suicide rate for this population experienced an increase of 15%, going from 275 cases in 2021 to 315 cases in 2022.

94% of these cases occurred among adolescents (12-17 years) with relationships and mental illness cited as some of the contributing factors. This population experiences situations involving abuse, bullying, school stress and abuse of alcohol and psychoactive substances.

43. Colombia needs to guarantee the provision of comprehensive physical and emotional care for children that responds to their mental health needs, especially in cases arising from the COVID-19 pandemic,³⁸ contexts involving armed conflict, migration, and natural disasters.³⁹

Recommendations

44. We recommend that the Colombian state implement strategies for the promotion, care and rehabilitation of children suffering from mental illness. These strategies must include: 1) increasing the availability of specialised professionals for this population, 2) provide tools for the early diagnosis of mental illnesses that can occur at different stages of development, and 3) coordinate actions between families, schools, and the health sector to address the external factors that may aggravate the situation in a timely manner.

45. The State must strengthen processes involving the reincorporation and inclusion of victims of recruitment and use by armed actors by: providing livelihood opportunities, breaking the cycles of violence related to the armed conflict and other forms of violence, income generation, mental health, long-term comprehensive support and progress with the prevention of these violations in order to achieve non-repetition.⁴⁰

46. In the process of reincorporating child victims of recruitment into society, we urge the Colombian state to establish standards that guarantee the quality of professionals who work with children in vulnerable conditions. This includes promoting the hiring of qualified staff who enjoy decent working conditions. This will minimise the risk of rights violations and re-victimisation of these children.

47. In the Consultative Workshop,⁴¹ children made the following recommendations: "More and better psychosocial support for child victims of sexual abuse"; "intensify efforts to prevent sexual violence against children and women and strengthen measures for the rehabilitation of those affected by these acts due to the armed conflict"; "prioritize the issues of drug addiction that affect children and adolescents"; and "psychological support for adolescents who are cutting," among others.

³⁷ UPR Recommendations (3rd cycle) 120.110, 120.113 and 120.115.

³⁸ According to the document 'Mental Health in Colombia: an analysis of the effects of the pandemic', 52.2% of adolescents between 12 and 17 years old experienced at least one or two anxiety symptoms after the pandemic.

³⁹ This idea is reinforced in the analysis provided by the UN Secretary-General in his report on Children and Armed Conflict. Taken from: United Nations. Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict. A/76/871-S/2022/493. 23 June 2022.

⁴⁰ This section is based on the reflections and recommendations shared during 2022 by a group of young people and adults who were previously members of armed groups in Colombia and now form part of the group of experts for the Nairobi Process, which focuses on the reintegration of children and adolescent victims of recruitment and use in different armed conflicts around the world. This is an initiative by the Office of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. This process is accompanied in Colombia by COALICO and its partner organisation Benposta Nación de Muchach@s.

⁴¹ Systematisation document "Consultative workshop with children and adolescents for the realization of a report with recommendations on the situation of their rights for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Colombia", p. 13, Plan Foundation, 2023.

iii. Climate change from the perspective of children⁴²

48. According to Colombians surveyed for the report *Generation Hope: 2.4 billion reasons to end the climate crisis and inequality in the world (2022)*, prepared by Save the Children, 76.5% of the 1,000 children surveyed consider that climate change directly affects their lives. This demonstrates the need for increased guarantees of their right to health, water, food, and a clean and safe environment. 62.1% of those surveyed consider that Colombia and its communities are very unequal. In addition, 70.65% of respondents believe that adults are not doing enough to take care of the environment.

49. Between 2017 and 2019 there were 973,438 victims of natural disasters in Colombia, of whom 362,641 were children according to figures from *Fondo Acción*.⁴³ Extreme rainfall and flooding in 2022 affected the lives of more than 330,000 children, triple the number of children affected by natural disasters between 2017 and 2019.

50. According to *Fondo Acción*, Colombia is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. These climate shocks and stresses will directly affect children across the country in different ways depending on the geographical characteristics of where they live.⁴⁴

Recommendations

51. Colombia must recognise the effects of climate change on children's rights and propose actions that respond to their best interests. Developing a systemic approach and producing information about the effects of climate change will make it possible to generate data and carry out academic research, projects and programs based on children's needs. This will also create binding mechanisms for child and adolescent participation in the National Development Plan and the *Escazú Agreement*.

52. Colombia must encourage child participation in decision-making so that their perspectives on climate change and possible actions are binding when defining the action areas and priorities. To successfully create these processes, the State must strengthen capacities of decision-makers, design tools and information, allocate budgets and strategies for knowledge management, and exchange and implement work methodologies. It is important to use art and culture as tools for training and communicating with children and ensuring their participation on environmental issues.

53. The government should implement programs starting from early childhood to higher education, in formal and non-formal education, to develop environmental and climate skills and knowledge. This can be achieved through the promotion of pedagogical models that are based on observation, research and action and draw on the contexts and interests of children. These models should be based on: 1) field experience, 2) outdoor activities and contact with nature, and 3) developing key skills such as critical, creative and analytical thinking, problem-solving, resilience, empathy, communication, and participation.

54. Colombia must update the National Environmental Education Policy (PNEA) and the National Strategy for Education, Training and Public Awareness on Climate Change (ENSFEPCC). It must strengthen teacher training, the dissemination of information and experiences, and knowledge networks that are focused on environmental and climate issues.

55. Colombia must design and adapt healthy, safe, and friendly urban and rural areas for children with an emphasis on climate change. This involves rethinking cities and towns by placing the comprehensive wellbeing of children at the centre of life. It is important to adopt a systemic view of how spaces are used and inhabited in terms of transport, play, health services, education, and the home.

⁴² Sources: Colombia: our actions for a healthy environment (2023) <https://fondoaccion.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Colombia-nuestras-acciones-por-un-ambiente-sano.pdf>

⁴³ Quijano, P., & Fontecha, M. (2022). Climate change and children. A view from Colombia and the experience of Fondo Acción. Bogotá: Fondo Acción. Retrieved from <https://fondoaccion.org/2022/04/22/cambio-cimatico-ninez/>

⁴⁴ According to the Children's Climate Risk Index (UNICEF, 2021), virtually every child on the planet (>99%) is exposed to at least one of the climatic and environmental risks, shocks or stresses. These include water scarcity, river and coastal flooding, tropical cyclones, vector-borne diseases, heat waves and air, soil and water pollution.

V. Child education

Articles 20, 23, 24 and 29 Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴⁵

56. We note with approval Colombia's adherence to the *Safe Schools Declaration*,⁴⁶ as part of Colombia's progress on children's rights. This declaration recognises that schools should be protected places and respected in all contexts, especially in the context of armed conflict.

57. It is important to note that this is an initial step. It is essential that in the coming months Colombia fulfil its commitment by executing programs to make schools safe spaces. The challenge is significant considering that in 2022 there were 22 attacks on schools,⁴⁷ with children commenting: "in our municipality there is no dignity for our education, we are at school and bullets are flying through our classroom."⁴⁸ The government must safety for schools in rural areas, as they are the most affected by the armed conflict. This is especially the case for schools in communities where access is restricted either due to difficulties with road infrastructure or the presence of armed groups that control these areas of the country.⁴⁹

58. It is important to note that the concept of safe schools should not be reduced to the protection of children from external actors, but first and foremost protection from internal actors. A school that abuses its students or does not provide

necessary care is a school that puts children at risk. Colombia must review criteria for formal education so that they are compatible with an intersectional understanding of. There is also a need to provide training in pedagogical skills that allow these specific contexts to be addressed in a satisfactory manner, as well as the socio-emotional training.

59. Indicators for children's education have worsened during the period. The Ministry of Education reported that in 2021, consistent with the effects of the pandemic, the a school dropout rate reached 3.58%. According to the Entrepreneurs for Education report⁵⁰ the dropout rate increased from 2.55% in 2020 to 3.62% in 2021. The grade repetition rate increased from 6.03% in 2020 to 8.20% in 2021.

60. The percentage of children involved in ICBF and DPS services who entered formal education was 77.07%. The immediate enrolment rate in primary education was 88.09% and the graduation rate from secondary education was 85.14%. Just 40.04% of those who complete secondary education enter higher education programs.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Linked to recommendations 120.113, 120.120 mentioned in the document "Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review" of 9 July 2018 as part of the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review. UPR Recommendations (3rd cycle) 120.103, 120.102, 120.113, 120.119, 120.122 and 120.120.

⁴⁶ Safe Schools Declaration, adopted 28 May 2015, signed by Colombia 18 November 2022: UNICEF, "UNICEF welcomes the signing of the Safe Schools Declaration by the Government of Colombia," 18 November 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/colombia/comunicados-prensa/escuelasseguras>.

⁴⁷ Observatory of Children and the Armed Conflict (ONCA).

⁴⁸ Systematisation document " Consultative workshop with children and adolescents for the realization of a report with recommendations on the situation of their rights for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Colombia ", p. 13, PLAN 2023 Foundation.

According to ONCA's monitoring actions, the departments most affected by this scourge are Cauca, Atlántico, Arauca, Valle del Cauca, Norte de Santander, Casanare, Córdoba, Antioquia, Putumayo, Sucre and Chocó.

⁴⁹ The Entrepreneurs for Education Foundation is an independent knowledge network created by an alliance of business people to influence the education sector through analysis and production of information and the generation of spaces for debate, dialogue and training that contribute to managing and monitoring public policies in education.

⁵⁰ The same source cites impact indicators for 2018. In municipalities such as Uribe the illiteracy rate was 54%, in Chocó it was 33%, in Sucre 31%, in Magdalena and La Guajira 28%, in Cordoba 27%, in Bolivar and Vaupes 26%, in Maicao and Vichada 25%. <https://obsgestioneducativa.com/one-page/>

VI. Conclusions

Recommendations

61. Colombia must implement the aforementioned Public Policy the Prevention of Recruitment, Use, and Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents by Organised Armed Groups and Organised Criminal Groups. This includes programs that would support and strengthen families to prevent their children from dropping out of school.⁵²

62. Finally, it is essential to undertake systematic efforts to strengthen access to and quality of rural education, which will eliminate existing gaps for this population. Guaranteeing education for children in populations with special needs is a protective factor against multiple forms of violence.

63. Although Colombia has made efforts to design an institutional framework, strategies, and some programs to guarantee that children can access and enjoy their rights, there are still many gaps in their implementation. This is evident in the worsening of some problems that affect their safety and lives. We urge the government to lead coordination strategies involving public entities, the private sector and others that combine efforts to promote the wellbeing of children and facilitate the implementation of existing legislation.

64. We call on the government to prioritise children in its public policy, to allocate sufficient resources for the implementation of quality and relevant care for the country's children, considering intersectional differences. We hope the government will allocate the necessary financial, physical and human resources to implement the actions aimed at children outlined in the National Development Plan 2022-2026.

65. Finally, in order to guarantee the full enjoyment of rights, we call on the government to strengthen and adequately finance the Comprehensive Protection System so that it can effectively address violations of children's rights. This would achieve an effective presence for Ombudsman's Offices, Family Police Units and administrative authorities in the entire national territory, leading to better provision of services and improvements to public spaces and infrastructure, and timely and respectful care for the public.

⁵² According to the National Development Plan, the relevant action areas include: 1. Generate and strengthen tools for the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents in their vital spaces (intervene in territories, non-repetition and the prevention of domestic violence, child abuse, gender-based violence and sexual violence). 2. Generate and strengthen actions against different forms of violence and exploitation in order to the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents rights. 3. Generate measures that promote the socio-economic stabilisation of families (promoting protective environments, income generation, life projects for children and adolescents, protection against OGA), and 4.

List of Appendices

1. Alliance for Colombian Children and COALICO. 2023. UPR Recommendations Matrix.
2. Coalition against the involvement of children and young people in the armed conflict in Colombia (COALICO). 2023. Monitoring report on children and armed conflict in Colombia. <https://coalico.org/secciones/publicaciones/boletin-onca/>
3. National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE). August 2021. Statistical Note. Mental health in Colombia: An analysis of the effects of the pandemic.
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6. Fondo Acción. March 2023. Colombia: Our actions for a healthy environment.
7. Plan International, 2023. Consultative Workshop with children and adolescents for the creation of the UPR Recommendations Report.
8. Javeriana University. 4 November 2022. Statistical Analysis Report LEE No. 65: Child and adolescent pregnancy in Colombia.