

# ALTERNATIVE REPORT

TO THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD  
A call to improve the situation of children and adolescents' rights  
2015 – 2021

# THEMATIC REPORT



Bogotá, Colombia | December 2023

**Alianza**  
por la niñez colombiana

 **COALICO**

**ALTERNATIVE REPORT TO THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON  
THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD  
(2015 – 2021)**

THEMATIC REPORT

Children and adolescents under attack by the armed conflict and related violence in Colombia

This document is an integral part of the main document “A call to improve the situation of the rights of girls, boys and adolescents” presented to the Committee on the Rights of the Child within the framework of the Report

Colombian Children’s Alliance  
Coalition Against the Involvement of Children and Young People in the Armed Conflict in Colombia (COALICO)

Colombia - December 2023

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Children and adolescents  
under attack by the  
armed conflict and  
related violence in  
**COLOMBIA**



## I. CONTEXT

This thematic report<sup>1</sup> presents expanded information about the events involving the armed conflict and related violence that affect Colombian children and adolescents. It takes a closer look at successes and challenges in the areas of prevention and protection of children and adolescents who are victims of the armed conflict and/or at risk of becoming victims. The content of this report is based on monitoring, follow-up and analysis actions carried out by civil society organisations during the 2015 - 2023 period<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the progress, obstacles and challenges faced by the Colombian State with the implementation of the Peace Agreement signed by the national government and the FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army), armed violence and its consequences persist in the country and have expanded due to actions by different armed groups, including: ELN (National Liberation Army); EPL<sup>3</sup>; the different groups formed by FARC-EP dissidents; the AGC (Gaitanista Self-defence Forces of Colombia, also known as the Gulf Clan); post-demobilisation paramilitary armed groups; and other armed criminal groups. These groups have a significant impact on the lives of local civilian populations in the different scenarios where they operate, particularly affecting children and adolescents<sup>4</sup>.

According to the Unit for Assistance and Reparations to Victims (UARIV), as of October 1, 2023, a total of 3,707,111 children and adolescents who are victims of the armed conflict in Colombia had been included on the Single Victims' Registry (RUV)<sup>5</sup>. Some of these children and adolescents have been victims of involvement with armed groups, specifically recruitment.

During 2018 and 2019, one of the main threats was the configuration of a new phase of violence that hindered peacebuilding in the territories. Different armed groups and organised crime groups began to emerge and strengthen their operations in several regions across the country. These groups sought to assume control of territories that were previously dominated by the FARC-EP<sup>6</sup>.

Between 2018 and 2022, the Ombudsperson's Office issued 221 Early Warning Alerts<sup>7</sup>. From this total, 120 alerts mentioned scenarios where there were imminent risks of recruitment and use of children and adolescents by armed actors participating in the internal armed conflict. These Alerts were issued for 94 municipalities in 23 departments<sup>8</sup> across the country. This situation continues to occur in Colombia.

<sup>1</sup> This Thematic Report is an integral part of the Alternative Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 2015 - 2021 entitled "A call to improve the situation of children and adolescents' rights" presented by the Colombian Children's Alliance and the Coalition Against the Involvement of Children And Young People in the Armed Conflict in Colombia (COALICO).

<sup>2</sup> The period covered by this report was characterised by a reconfiguration of the armed conflict and violence in territories that have had a historical presence of armed actors, as well as the areas previously controlled by the FARC-EP following the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016 and the laying down of arms by this guerrilla group in 2017. In addition, this situation was affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the National Strike that occurred across Colombia in 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Also known as the Pelusos, particularly between 2019-2020.

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <https://datospaz.unidadvictimas.gov.co/ninas-ninos-y-adolescentes-victimas-del-conflicto-armado/>. UARIV official website, accessed 11 December 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <https://datospaz.unidadvictimas.gov.co/vinculacion-de-ninos-ninas-y-adolescentes/>. UARIV official website, accessed 11 December 2023.

<sup>6</sup> At the same time as the FARC-EP laid down their weapons and entered the reincorporation process, paramilitary groups reconfigured their operations and expanded their territorial control, particularly the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AGC), who are also known as the Gulf Clan. In the first half of 2017 these groups were organised into 15 structures that operated in 274 municipalities across 28 departments. Following the Peace Agreement there was also an expansion of operations by guerrilla groups including the ELN and the EPL, the appearance of FARC-EP dissident groups and the emergence of other groups. This data was contained in a report presented by the Colombian Commission of Jurists, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Early Warning Alert System. Available at: <https://alertastempranas.defensoria.gov.co/>

<sup>8</sup> Antioquia, Arauca, Atlántico, Bolívar, Caquetá, Cauca, Chocó, Córdoba, Guaviare, Huila, Meta, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, Quindío, Risaralda, Santander, Sucre, Tolima, Valle del Cauca, Vaupés and Vichada.

In 2020<sup>9</sup>, violent events continued as part of the armed conflict despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures adopted to control the virus<sup>10</sup>. During the first quarter of the year, confinement situations increased in different areas of the country, along with territorial control actions carried out by armed actors<sup>11</sup>. This was of particular concern in regions such as Bajo Cauca Antioqueño, the Colombian Pacific coast, Catatumbo in Norte de Santander, the southern zone of the country and the eastern plains region. These situations both directly and indirectly affected children and adolescents<sup>12</sup>.

In 2021, restrictions continued due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which included the closure of all schools in the country. During this period the different armed groups increased the intensity of their actions, which led to a worsening of the humanitarian crisis<sup>13</sup>. In April 2021, Colombia was affected by a widespread National Strike, which continued until the end of the year and involved broad participation from young people.<sup>14</sup>

In 2022, systematic violence by illegal armed actors intensified in different parts of Colombia. This situation was evidenced by the high numbers of massacres and increase in victims of forced displacement, as well as armed strikes that were regularly called by organised armed groups

during the first half of 2022<sup>15</sup>. These actions had a direct impact on the lives of children and adolescents in at least 8 departments in the northern part of the country due to the mobility restrictions and territorial control actions ordered by the Gulf Clan. At least 2 million students were unable to attend school in May 2022<sup>16</sup> because of these armed strikes.

Forced displacement continues to be one of the main violations of rights committed against the civilian population. According to a report presented by the United Nations, a total of 78,154 people were forcibly displaced between January and November 2022 while 108,665 people were subject to confinement during the same period. It is estimated that 40% of these victims were children and adolescents. The departments that were most affected by these actions were Cauca, Chocó, Nariño and Valle del Cauca.

The illicit recruitment of children and adolescents by armed groups is ongoing. This practice continues to be a concern in several regions of the country such as Norte de Santander, Arauca, the Catatumbo area, the border area with Venezuela, the Colombian Pacific coast, the Bajo Cauca Antioqueño region and the Eastern Plains. In 2022 there were reports of 66 child and adolescent recruitment with approximately 159 victims<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> There was a significant increase in massacres during this period. According to OHCHR, 2020 had the highest number of massacres recorded since 2014. According to data published by OHCHR, between 12 February 2020 and 10 June 2021 at least 24 children and adolescents died as a result of the 66 massacres that were committed in the country. According to INDEPAZ (Development and Peace Studies Institute), a total of 91 massacres occurred in the country in 2020, resulting in the murders of 381 people.

<sup>10</sup> Virus causing a respiratory disease called the Coronavirus of 2019 (COVID-19).

<sup>11</sup> ELN, FARC-EP dissidents, EPL and post-demobilisation groups operating in local and urban spaces.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that during the first half of 2020, a health emergency was declared and actions to address this situation were impeded by the lockdowns imposed by national and local governments. Children and adolescents' right to education was affected by the physical closures of schools as part of lockdown measures. During this period there was an increase in students dropping out of school due to their lack of access to technological resources as they could not attend online classes nor do their schoolwork.

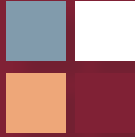
<sup>13</sup> According to reports from the Ombudsperson's Office and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), there was a 57% increase in the number of forced displacement emergencies reported to Local Coordination Teams (LCTs) that are responsible for humanitarian response. At least 73,900 people (181% more than in 2020) were forcibly displaced from their territories of origin. Data available at: <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/colombia/colombia-impacto-y-tendencias-humanitarias-entre-enero-y-septiembre-de-2021-26-de>

<sup>14</sup> Serious human rights violations were reported during the protests. The response from the ESMAD Anti-Riot Unit and the National Police had multiple impacts on the lives of children and adolescents who participated in the National Strike. This included the deaths of six (6) adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17, five in the city of Cali and one in the municipality of Girón, Santander (INDEPAZ, 2021). In addition, two one-year-old infants died in ambulances while suffering medical emergencies in separate incidents. The ambulance transporting one of the children was not able to cross the Buenaventura - Cali highway that runs through the town of Delfina due to the presence of protestors. The same situation occurred for the other child who was in an ambulance that could not access the Tunja - Bogotá highway in the town of Tocancipá because of the protests.

<sup>15</sup> An armed strike was ordered by the Gulf Clan armed group in May of that year. This was in response to the extradition of its maximum leader to the United States, Dairo Antonio Úsuga, alias "Otoniel". According to the Pares Foundation (2022), a total of 145 events affected nine departments and 77 municipalities in the country. The departments of Antioquia, Córdoba and Chocó were the epicentres of actions carried out by the Gulf Clan during this strike.

<sup>16</sup> It was possible to verify that in some areas this decision was taken by educational authorities as a preventive measure, while in others the decision was taken due to direct threats made against teachers and administrators, the dissemination of propaganda by the Gulf Clan and armed clashes near schools.

<sup>17</sup> The presence and territorial control exercised by organised armed groups in these areas is concerning as it limits the ability to report and monitor these situations. It also impedes making progress with establishing assistance mechanisms to ensure comprehensive protection for victims of this crime.



## II. SITUATION OF SPECIAL CONCERN

Between January 2015 and June 2023, COALICO's Observatory on Children and Armed Conflict (hereinafter, ONCA) monitored and verified that at least 1,891 events involving the serious violations of children and adolescents' rights<sup>18</sup> occurred as part of the armed conflict. These events at least **381,539** children and adolescents across the national territory<sup>19</sup>.

### 2.1 Violations of the right to life and personal integrity<sup>20</sup>

ONCA identified around **325** events involving violations of the right to life and personal integrity that affected at least **412** children and adolescents between 2015 and the first half of 2023. This situation primarily involves injuries caused by antipersonnel mines and unexploded ordnance, assassinations perpetrated by actors in the armed conflict, injuries caused by bombings and armed clashes in different territories and direct attacks on community leaders in which children were also victims. There were 21 and 35 events identified by ONCA prior to the signing of the Final Agreement with the FARC-EP in 2015 and 2016, respectively.

In 2017 this figure decreased to 17 events, which was due to the first year of implementation of the Peace Agreement and the cessation of actions by the signatory armed group.

Meanwhile, in 2018 and 2019 there was an increase to 28 and 30 events respectively, a trend that has continued in subsequent years<sup>21</sup>.

One of the serious violations against children that forms part of this category have been the bombings of different armed actors' camps in remote areas. In 2021, a bombing of the camp led by alias Fabián in Chocó, leader of the ELN's Western Front, killed four minors, one of whom was 13 years old. The national government's position at the time was that these children were a "legitimate target"<sup>22</sup>. The precautionary and preventive principle of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) was not applied in this incident or for other bombings of armed group camps<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> The categories used for analysing the situation faced by children and adolescents in armed conflict contexts are based on the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) developed as part of Resolution 1612 issued by the United Nations Security Council. Through its CONCA Observatory, COALICO monitors the following grave violations: I. Violations and infractions against the right to life and personal integrity; II. Violations and infringements against personal liberty; III. Violations and infringements of the right to sexual freedom; IV. Attacks and occupations of schools, hospitals and other civilian property; V. Blockades of basic supplies; VI. Forced Displacement and Refuge; and VII. Involvement of children and adolescents by armed groups through recruitment and/or use by legal (civil-military campaigns) and/or illegal armed actors.

<sup>19</sup> This monitoring and follow-up exercise is undertaken as a result of cooperation between COALICO member organisations, allied organisations in the territories from different platforms, local community leaders, grassroots organisations and data taken from reports published by the United Nations, governmental institutions and international cooperation agencies.

<sup>20</sup> This violation refers to any act against the lives and personal integrity of children and adolescents.

<sup>21</sup> A total of 61 events were identified in 2021 when lockdowns across the country continued. In 2022 there were 75 events. During these two years there was a significant increase in the number of massacres and murders committed in the framework of the armed conflict in Colombia. A total of 26 events were identified in the first half of 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Statements by the Minister of Defence, Diego Molano. Available at: <https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/gobierno/diego-molano-las-polemicas-del-ministro-de-defensa-631286#:~:text=The%20minister%20Molano%20affirmed%20C3%B3%20that%20the%20war%20was%20being%20planned%20for%20actions>

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that following the election of President Gustavo Petro, the Minister of Defence Iván Velázquez in August 2022 stated that: "there cannot be operations that endanger the lives of recruited minors (...) bombings must be suspended, we are going to evaluate the specific moment when, with an absolute directive, this can be arranged". This is undoubtedly a step forward for the protection of the rights of children and adolescent who are victims of the conflict and members of the country's different armed groups.

## 2.2 Attacks on schools, hospitals and civilian objects

Despite the fact that IHL protects schools because they are directly used by local populations and considered civilian objects, Colombia's public security forces and illegal armed groups continue to attack, occupy and use these spaces. They also recruit and use children and adolescents who attend school<sup>24</sup>.

In relation to this violation, ONCA identified **160** events that affected at least **265,640** children and adolescents during the period covered by this report. Between 2016 and 2019 the average number of events was 17 per year. There was a significant drop in this violation due to the pandemic in 2020, with just 6 events reported. However, this situation increased again following the pandemic, with 11 events recorded in 2021 and 23 events in 2022, affecting at least 235,229 children and adolescents by the end of 2022. In 2022, Colombia announced that it would sign the Safe Schools Declaration<sup>25</sup>, making it the 116th country to become a signatory.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.3 Blocking of basic supplies

Monitoring actions identified the concerning situation faced by indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities<sup>27</sup> as they are the primary victims of confinement committed by armed actors. During the period covered by this review, **110** confinement events were identified that affected at least **34,851** minors. The confinement of communities persists as a strategy used by armed groups in the country to exercise territorial control. In many cases it is directly related to forced displacement<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Working with the National of Education for Peace Program (Educapaz), the Truth Commission documented that between 1980 and 2021 there were 881 cases in which educational communities were affected by the armed conflict. This includes actions that threatened the lives or integrity of children, adolescents and teachers, as well as actions that caused damage to school infrastructure, among others.

<sup>25</sup> Declaration that seeks the protection of students, teachers and schools in contexts of armed conflict.

<sup>26</sup> Seven years after being suggested by the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES), civil society organisations, the Kingdom of Norway and the Republic of Argentina.

<sup>27</sup> This is most evident in areas where indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities live with high levels of vulnerability and unsatisfied basic needs. This situation is exacerbated when there are declarations of armed strikes by organised armed groups. In addition to subjecting communities to confinement, these strikes also limit their mobility and impede their access to rights.

<sup>28</sup> Many families and victims who are initially victims of confinement end up moving from their places of origin or settlement to avoid the murder, kidnapping or recruitment of their children.



## 2.4 Involvement in the armed conflict

### Recruitment

Since 2016, the crime of recruitment of children and adolescents has been increasing, as evidenced in the table below:

Year	Events	Number of victims
2016	18	20
2017	22	29
2018	50	57
2019	67	200
2020	79	222
2021	61	151
2022	66	159
2023	77	155
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>993</b>

There was a considerable increase in the number of reports of this crime due to the closure of schools as part of lockdown measures and the confinement of communities as a strategy to limit the spread of COVID-19 during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The armed groups in different territories increased their levels of territorial control due to the freedom of movement they enjoyed in these territories as a result of the lockdowns<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> COALICO Monitoring Bulletin N° 24 and N° 26. Available at: <https://coalico.org/secciones/publicaciones/boletin-onca/>

<sup>30</sup> These campaigns and programs are implemented in communities and schools and involve pedagogical, recreational, and humanitarian actions such as health brigades, artistic activities and educational campaigns. Even though these campaigns and actions are presented as a public service that provide a social benefit to communities, they often involve security forces carrying out tasks that are not part of their mandates. This in turn exposes civilian populations to serious risks, turning them into possible military targets, while also infringing the Principle of Distinction, which is an essential component of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that in addition to implementing actions in the territory, in 2021 the Ministry of Defence launched a digital series on YouTube with a character called "Franco" who sought to alert children about risk situations caused by climate change and recruitment by armed groups. This series is no longer available on the digital platform, however, there is evidence of the permanent sharing of content from this campaign as part of actions implemented in areas with high levels of complexity due to armed conflict.

The Armed Group Disengagement Program operated by the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF) worked with **7,382 minors who were victims of illegal recruitment** between 16 November 1999 and 30 April 2023 (cut-off date for this data). Of these victims, **5,642 minors disengaged from the armed groups on an individual voluntary basis, 1,300 were captured by members of the Armed Forces and 440 were part of collective surrenders.**

### Civil-military operations<sup>30</sup>

Despite repeated appeals by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UN Secretary-General in their annual reports on children and armed conflict, as well as calls for action by other international bodies, civil-military operations continue to be carried out in the national territory.

The monitoring carried out between 2015 and June 2023 identified a total of **270** events involving civil-military operations that were implemented during this period and affected at least **25,023** children and adolescents in different regions of the country<sup>31</sup>.

## 2.5 Violations of personal liberty

One of the complex crimes committed in the context of the Colombian armed conflict is kidnapping<sup>32</sup>. This is a practice that has been used by armed actors to finance their actions and at the same time generate fear in communities. Kidnapping is related to crimes such as recruitment and forced displacement.

ONCA identified **84** kidnapping events between January 2015 and June 2023 that affected at least **103** children and adolescents. It is important to note that the years with the lowest number of reported kidnappings were 2016 with 6 events and 2020 with 2 events<sup>33</sup>.

There was a clear increase in the number of kidnappings of minors<sup>34</sup> for the purposes of extortion and recruitment in 2021 and 2022. Specific actions are required to address and eliminate this phenomenon.

## 2.6 Sexual violence

Sexual violence committed against children and adolescents in the context of the armed conflict is one of the most difficult violations to monitor. Between 2015 and 2023 there were **54** reported events that directly affected **65** girls and adolescent women.

There is significant concern about under-reporting for this crime due to a number of reasons: the presence of armed actors in the same geographic areas as victims; mistrust of public institutions; the stigma associated with reporting situations that affect boys and adolescent males; and fears of re-victimisation for children and adolescents who are victims of sexual violence. Unfortunately, this crime remains invisible in armed conflict contexts in Colombia.

## 2.7 Forced displacement

This continues to be a persistent violation of children and adolescents' rights in the framework of the armed conflict. Between 2015 and the first semester of 2023 there were **428** forced displacement events reported with at least **54,512** underage victims<sup>35</sup>. The lowest number of reports occurred in 2016 (16 events), with forced displacement events increasing since then. Even during the pandemic in 2020 there were 45 events reported with at least 5,742 victims.

According to the results of ONCA's monitoring, forced displacement is often a type of protection action carried out by families to prevent their children from being recruited, sexually assaulted or even killed. As a result, forced displacement is a strategy used by armed actors that involves involving the terrorising of communities and asserting their power in order maintain territorial control<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> According to the Truth Commission's report, kidnapping has a psychosocial impact as it results in the absence of family members and orphanhood. Children and/or adolescents are often re-victimised after they are released.

<sup>33</sup> These figures are due to the peace process between the national government and the FARC-EP, which was finalised in 2016, and the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred in 2020.

<sup>34</sup> 6 events occurred in 2021, 15 in 2022 and 7 in the first half of 2023. Data from COALICO's Observatory of Childhood and Conflict Armando (ONCA).

<sup>35</sup> COALICO's Observatory on Children and Armed Conflict (ONCA).

<sup>36</sup> Forced displacement in Colombia is recognised as one of the most serious and large-scale situations in the world. In 2021, 59.1 million people were internally displaced according to the Geneva-based IDMC and the NRC. Syria was the country with the largest number of displaced people, with 6.7 million IDPs at the end of 2021, followed by the Democratic Republic of Congo (5.3 million), Colombia (5.2 million), Afghanistan and Yemen (4.3 million).

## 2.8 Peace agreement and progress with its implementation in relation to children and adolescents

The rollout of the Peace Agreement has occurred in hostile and highly complex scenarios. The persistence of the armed conflict across a large area of the national territory has generated difficulties for its full implementation. There are some important factors that have affected this process and should be noted:

- There have been more than 385 murders of FARC-EP signatories as of September 2023, according to INDEPAZ<sup>37</sup>.
- Four young people who were adolescent victims of recruitment by the FARC-EP and participated in the “Differential Path of Life” program have been murdered since the signing of the Peace Agreement<sup>38</sup>.

The following are observations regarding the treatment of children and armed conflict within the Comprehensive Peace System:

- Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP)

The JEP’s Macro-case 07<sup>39</sup>, which covers the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, was opened on 5 May 2020. This case recognises the centrality of child and adolescent victims in the transitional justice scenario and the effects on this population from the more than 50 years of armed conflict in Colombia<sup>40</sup>. Important progress has been

made, such as Order No. 159 of 2021 by the Chamber for the Recognition of Truth, Responsibility and Determination of Facts and Conduct (SRVRDHC), which resulted in the design of the internal prioritisation strategy for the FARC-EP sub-case and 26 people who voluntarily testified<sup>41</sup>.

In the hearings that have taken place, the acknowledgement of responsibility by members of the FARC-EP in relation to children and adolescents in the armed conflict has been precarious and was perceived as a form of re-victimisation by the victims.

- Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repitition (hereinafter CEV)

The Truth Commission ended its mandate in 2022. The chapter on children in its Final Report was titled: “*It is not a lesser evil. Children and adolescents in the armed conflict*”<sup>42</sup>. This chapter evidences the suffering and struggles of children and adolescents in the Colombian armed conflict. It is noteworthy that it addresses the absences of family members and orphanhood caused by armed violence, as well as the differentiated impact suffered by children and adolescents as a result of forced displacement. The report highlights the effects on schools and educational environments, which provides a more holistic understanding of the experiences of children and adolescents in the context of the Colombian armed conflict.

<sup>37</sup> Available at: <https://indepaz.org.co/lideres-sociales-defensores-de-dd-hh-y-firmantes-de-acuerdo-asesinados-en-2023/>.

<sup>38</sup> The UN Mission verified the deaths of three program participants between November and December 2020 (S/2021/603). In July 2021, a former combatant who was a child in 2020 when he joined an armed group was killed in the department of Guaviare (S/2021/1090).

<sup>39</sup> It is important to note that in September 2023, the SJP opened a case investigating gender-based violence in the armed conflict, including sexual and reproductive violence, and crimes committed out of prejudice. This case is directly related to the 07 Macro-case because 35% of the victims of sexual violence in the armed conflict were children and adolescents when these crimes were committed. Available at: <https://www.jep.gov.co/Sala-de-Prensa/Paginas/-la-jep-abre-macrocaso-11-que-investiga-la-violencia-basada-en-genero-incluyendo-violencia-sexual-y-reproductiva-y-crimenes.aspx>

<sup>40</sup> This involves an ethical challenge of establishing a different place in the social structure for children and adolescents and strengthen people’s commitment to social reconciliation. Colombian society needs to understand the importance of providing comprehensive protection to children and adolescents as a basis for non-repetition and achieving peace.

<sup>41</sup> Through this order, the SJP calculated the provisional universe of recruitment and use of children and adolescents by the FARC-EP, which is the highest figure that has been estimated to date and is at least 18,677 minors. There are currently 3,765 child and adolescent victims who have started the registration process, 635 individuals who have been fully registered and 3,130 victims belonging to ethnic peoples who are collectively registered.

<sup>42</sup> Truth Commission, 2022. Available at: <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/no-es-un-mal-menor>

The report makes three key statements about children and adolescents in the armed conflict: (i) *“The recruitment of children and adolescents was not a marginal or random practice; on the contrary, it obeyed a rational logic with planned actions by the illegal armed groups”*<sup>43</sup>; ii) *“The recruitment of children and adolescents was carried out with the full knowledge of the commanders”*<sup>44</sup>; and iii) *“the Truth Commission concluded in its investigation that at no time did the leaders of this guerrilla group establish control mechanisms to prevent the recruitment of children and adolescents, return those who should not have been recruited and sanction the guerrillas who failed to comply with these rules”*<sup>45</sup>.

- Unit for the Search of Missing Persons (UNBPD)

This is an extrajudicial mechanism that has contributed to identifying at least 929 missing persons, of whom 196 bodies have been handed over to their families in a dignified manner while 7 people were found alive. Thanks to joint work as part of Macro-case 07 between the JEP and the UNBPD, an additional 16 missing persons have been found alive. Progress is currently being made with the implementation of Regional Search Plans. These actions prioritise crimes such as disappearance due to recruitment, kidnapping, torture and other criminal acts committed against children in the context of the armed conflict.

## 2.9 Progress with prevention and protection actions

The State has implemented some initiatives in the area of prevention of recruitment, use, utilisation and sexual violence against children and adolescents in the framework of the armed conflict and related violence.

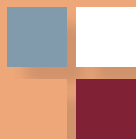
The following actions were carried out during the reporting period:

- The Intersectoral Commission for the Prevention of Recruitment, Use and Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents by Illegal Armed Groups and Organised Criminal Groups (CIPRUNNA) continues to exist. Despite this, it has not been able to continue its work in the territories most affected by the armed conflict. Between 2018 and 2019 no progress was made with the public policy for this area that was formulated and implemented by Juan Manuel Santos’ administration.
- In 2020, the “Join for me” program was implemented. This initiative prioritised 86 municipalities where there was a high risk of recruitment of children and adolescents by armed groups. The goal was to undertake actions to prevent this crime as part of the new public policy for the prevention of sexual violence and the recruitment, use and utilisation children and adolescents by organised armed groups and organised criminal groups.
- In 2021, the public policy “Territorial Installation Manual for Prevention Mechanisms” was designed and implemented.
- Ruling T-056 of 2020: This judicial decision seeks to guarantee access to administrative reparations for direct and indirect victims of recruitment and use in the context of the Colombian armed conflict. In this ruling, the Constitutional Court orders the Unit for Assistance and Reparations to Victims (UARIV) to recognize that children and adolescents recruited by armed groups always have the status of victims and not perpetrators, and that their families have the right to access administrative reparations when these recruited children and adolescents die before reaching the age of 18 as a result of the armed conflict.

<sup>43</sup> CEV, 2022. p. 139.

<sup>44</sup> CEV, 2022 p. 140.

<sup>45</sup> CEV, 2022 p. 140.



### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section you will find the expansion of the recommendations presented in the document “A call to improve the situation of the rights of girls, boys and adolescents” presented to the Committee on the Rights of the Child within the framework of the Alternate Report of the Organizations of the civil society.

It is requested that the CRC urge the Colombian State to:

- Strengthen articulation between obligations and policies that ultimately contribute to the prevention of recruitment, use, utilisation and sexual violence against children and adolescents. This includes adopting the Safe Schools Guidelines. Achieve a joint vision and commitment to prevent grave violations against children and adolescents in the framework of the armed conflict, which will significantly contribute to addressing and overcoming these situations.
- Prioritize the issue of children and adolescents in any peace negotiations and/or peace agreement. There is a need to demand the immediate cessation of actions by the illegal armed groups that threaten the lives of children and adolescents who participate in peace negotiations and/or the justice system<sup>46</sup>.
- Carry out actions to raise awareness and achieve the recognition of children and adolescents as victims of recruitment, use and utilisation by armed groups<sup>47</sup>, always and preferably by State institutions and society.

- Ensure that the CIPRUNNA meetings<sup>48</sup> are held regularly and obtain and sustain financing for the implementation of its Action Plan.
- Include opportunities for higher education and professional, technical or technological training as part of strategies to prevent the involvement of children and adolescents in the armed conflict<sup>49</sup>.
- Generate a rapid and complementary response that involves the provision of assistance and accompaniment from all territorial entities to address threats of child and adolescent recruitment<sup>50</sup>.
- Harmonise and update the Public Policy for the Prevention of Recruitment and Sexual Violence with national public policies for early childhood, childhood, adolescence, young people and families. This includes other serious violations in the context of the armed conflict and related violence and has the goal of strengthening actions at the territorial level<sup>51</sup>.
- Design and implement the Safe Schools Action Plan with concrete actions at national, departmental and municipal levels.
- Guarantee spaces and mechanisms for the direct consultation and participation of children and adolescents.

<sup>46</sup> It is essential that the best interests of the child are protected and that recruitment and use in the armed conflict of all people under the age of 18, as well as other acts of violence against this population that are committed in the context of armed conflict, are stopped immediately.

<sup>47</sup> It is important to not blame children and adolescents for their experiences, nor should any discourse be validated and/or disseminated that justifies the violations of their rights. There is a need to follow up and carry out detailed monitoring of cases of recruitment and use to that face difficulties with verifying the information.

<sup>48</sup> These meetings should be held regularly, which would facilitate monitoring the current situation of recruitment, use and sexual violence against children and adolescents by armed actors. These sessions would also support inter-institutional decision-making to resolve specific bottlenecks that occur in the territories.

<sup>49</sup> This is especially needed for adolescents so that they can access viable alternatives for their life plans instead of joining armed groups.

<sup>50</sup> Immediate Action Teams for situations of risk or recruitment.

<sup>51</sup> Strengthening the intersectional perspective that recognises all approaches in accordance with the current National Development Plan.



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