

4.3.10. Children

4.3.10. Children

Children continued to experience 'grave' human rights violations in the context of the conflict. The UN reported in 2024 instances of child recruitment (450 cases), killing and maiming (78 cases), sexual violence (33 cases), child abduction (16 cases), and attacks on schools and hospitals (42 incidents), use of schools for military purposes by armed groups (35 schools), and denial of humanitarian access (24 incidents); Afro-descendant and indigenous children were the majority of victims.792

Child recruitment and trafficking of children into armed groups continued in the reference period.793 Children come often from poor low-income urban areas, or remote rural territories where the state has a limited presence.794 The Humanitarian NGO Forum documented the annual increase in the recruitment of children and adolescents between 2021-2024.795 The UN reported 123 cases in 2021, 130 cases in 2022, 277 cases in 2023..796 The Office of the Ombudsperson released a report in March, expressing concern over the recruitment of children, and noting that 463 cases were recorded in 2024, 279 boys and 184 girls.797 marking a 64 % increase compared to the previous year.798 Child recruitment has reached its highest point in ten years, though underreporting is an issue.799 Child recruitment is especially a occurring in Cauca,800 Nariño, Arauca, and Putumayo.801 All criminal and armed groups recruit minors; however the ELN and FARC dissident groups are the most prevalent recruiters.802

Recruitment occurs through trickery, luring, abduction and selling of children.803 Children are lured with promises of money, access to vehicles, cell phones, or status; and recruitment occurs often via social media, with depictions glamorising the benefits of becoming a member of the armed group.804 Boys are sold for approximately 120 USD; while girls can be sold for as much as four times that amount, depending on the child's characteristics. Child recruitment is a source of income for armed groups, but also allows groups to control territory, amass troops and intimidate the local community who fear for the safety of their children. Children often perform many tasks, the most important of which is forming the perimeter of 'expendable troops that protect the core leadership and fighters' often with little training and being sent to remote areas. They also perform chores and 'many are sexually abused.'805 In urban areas, children are a 'cheap labour force' used for transporting drugs, weapons, dealing, extortion collection, hitmen work, and murder.806 Those who try to escape are 'almost certainly killed as punishment' which serves as a deterrent to others. Those who do return from recruitment encounter ostracisation, stigma, risks of re-recruitment, or being killed in retaliation for deserting.807 While prioritising the problem of child recruitment, the Petro government has failed to negotiate an end to the practice, indicating that insufficient pressure has been applied

to armed groups to address the issue,808 and the issue has not been discussed in dialogues between armed groups and the state.809

- 792

  UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia – Report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/161), 13 February 2024, url, para. 19-20; UN Secretary-General on children in armed conflict, Report of the Secretary-General (A/79/878-S/2025/247), 17 June 2025, url, paras. 43-49

- 793

  BBC News, A Colombian presidential hopeful was shot. A 15-year-old is the prime suspect, 13 June 2025, url

- 794

  BBC News, A Colombian presidential hopeful was shot. A 15-year-old is the prime suspect, 13 June 2025, url

- 795

  Humanitarian NGO Forum – Colombia, Situation of the Recruitment, Use and Utilization of Children and Adolescents in Colombia 2024, 30 September 2025, url, p. 2

- 796

  Humanitarian NGO Forum – Colombia, Situation of the Recruitment, Use and Utilization of Children and Adolescents in Colombia 2024, 30 September 2025, url, p. 3

- 797

  UNVMC, Report of the Secretary General, 27 June 2025, url, para. 37; Colombia, Defensoría del Pueblo, 51% de casos de reclutamiento conocidos por la Defensoría corresponde a niñas, niños y adolescentes de pueblos indígenas, 31 July 2024, url

- 798

  UNVMC, Report of the Secretary-General, 26 December 2024, url, para. 11; El País, Colombia, the deadliest country in the Americas for human rights defenders, 6 March 2024, url; Humanitarian NGO Forum – Colombia, Situation of the Recruitment, Use and Utilization of Children and Adolescents in Colombia 2024, 30 September 2025, url, p. 3

- 799

  Dickenson, E., Colombia's Stolen Children, in Foreign Affairs, 8 May 2025, url; See also: BBC News, A Colombian presidential hopeful was shot. A 15-year-old is the prime suspect, 13 June 2025, url

- 800

Dickenson, E., Colombia's Stolen Children, in Foreign Affairs, 8 May 2025, url

- 801

  El País, Colombia, the deadliest country in the Americas for human rights defenders, 6 March 2024, url

- 802

  El País, Colombia, the deadliest country in the Americas for human rights defenders, 6 March 2024, url; Dickenson, E., Colombia's Stolen Children, in Foreign Affairs, 8 May 2025, url

- 803

  Dickenson, E., Colombia's Stolen Children, in Foreign Affairs, 8 May 2025, url; Dickenson, E., Colombia's Stolen Children, in Foreign Affairs, 8 May 2025, url

- 804

  Dickenson, E., Colombia's Stolen Children, in Foreign Affairs, 8 May 2025, url; El País, Colombia, the deadliest country in the Americas for human rights defenders, 6 March 2024, url

- 805

  Dickenson, E., Colombia's Stolen Children, in Foreign Affairs, 8 May 2025, url

- 806

  BBC News, A Colombian presidential hopeful was shot. A 15-year-old is the prime suspect, 13 June 2025, url

- 807

  Dickenson, E., Colombia's Stolen Children, in Foreign Affairs, 8 May 2025, url

- 808

  Dickenson, E., Colombia's Stolen Children, in Foreign Affairs, 8 May 2025, url

- 809

  El País, Colombia, the deadliest country in the Americas for human rights defenders, 6 March 2024, url

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu