

4.3.10. Children

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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 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](#)

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