



# BULLETIN

## **OBSERVATORY** of CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat

### Building inter-institutional action at the local level for the prevention of the recruitment and use of children and adolescents: **The experience of Cumaribo**

The Inter-sectoral Commission for the prevention of recruitment, use and sexual violence against children and adolescents by illegal armed groups (CIPRUNA), created in 2011 and composed of 23 agencies, represents the most important effort by the Colombian Government to prevent the occurrence of these rights violations. The Presidential Program for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law has acted as Technical Secretariat since March 2012, and the observatories of the Commission and the Presidential Program work together in synergy.

In order to facilitate decision-making on prevention policies by national agencies, the Observatory analyses risk factors and effective actions developed by the State to address those factors, in the context of the national prevention policy, CONPES 3673 of 2010.

**This bulletin**, created with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), examines the experience of local-level actions developed and implemented in 2013 in Cumaribo, in the department of Vichada, in the first semester of 2013. Working together with municipal authorities, the aim was to strengthen local capacities to prevent recruitment and use of children and adolescents. The methodology supports cooperation between government agencies at all levels, in support of a comprehensive approach to recruitment prevention that includes mitigation of associated risk factors and fostering authentic protective environments.

***This is an English summary of a bulletin produced by the Observatory of CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat.***

*Since 2001, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has been implementing its Disengaged Child Soldiers and Youth at Risk of Recruitment Program (CHS). This program is aimed at strengthen the capacity of the Government of Colombia to assist child and adolescent victims of recruitment by illegal armed groups, through institutional strengthening for the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF), and to prevent their recruitment in the context of the armed conflict, through institutional strengthening for the Inter-sectoral Commission on the Prevention of Recruitment, Use and Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents (CIPRUNA). As part of these efforts, the program has supported the creation and strengthening of the Observatory of CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat.*

## INTRODUCTION

Children and adolescents in Colombia face situations of high risk and vulnerability, including the risk of being recruited and used by illegal armed groups or organized criminal groups. The phenomenon of recruitment is complex, in part due to the correlation and interdependence of diverse risk factors. These include family factors (i.e. violence, food security, youth labor, sexual abuse), community and environmental factors (i.e. insecurity, presence of armed actors, ignorance among community actors about their role in protection of children and adolescents) and institutional factors (i.e. lack of knowledge of issues, lack of State programs in areas where they are needed, institutional responses are ill-timed and lack continuity). These factors, combined with high levels of vulnerability, increase the risk of recruitment and use in the areas where armed actors carry out their activities.

The national recruitment prevention policy<sup>1</sup> is aimed at strengthening local capacities to guarantee rights, promote comprehensive protection and respond to concrete threats. The policy identifies three prevention routes: (1) Early Prevention, by taking all necessary measures to guarantee the exercise and protection of rights, to minimize or address risk factors; (2) Urgent Prevention, by responding to collective threats, direct or implied by actions of illegal armed groups or organized criminal groups, by reinforcing family, community and institutional networks and fostering protective environments; and (3) Protective Prevention, by responding to individual threats against specific children or groups of children, by establishing a local immediate response teams.

In this context, the Observatory of the CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat aims to build capacities and track performance among actors engaged in recruitment prevention, and to document, study and monitor dynamics and factors to support timely and appropriate policies and actions. To achieve this, it is essential for the Observatory to create spaces for analytical discussion of dynamics and factors, as well as of local-level actions, strategies and experiences. In this regard, the experience in Cumaribo provides an important analytical reference.

Cumaribo was targeted based on a prioritization of high-risk municipalities for 2013, for which it registered 10 of the 12 risk and vulnerability factors, as well as on risk alerts generated by municipal actors and the importance of ensuring institutional presence in a municipality that faces diverse obstacles and difficulties including difficult access due its size and geographic location. There had also been recruitment risk alerts in previous years, including reports from the Office of the Ombudsman issued in late 2010 and reviewed by the Early Alert Committee (CIAT).



<sup>1</sup> CONPES 3673, Política de Prevención del Reclutamiento y Utilización de niños, niñas, adolescentes por parte de los grupos armados organizados al margen de la ley y de los grupos delictivos. National Planning Department. 19 July 2010.

## **ACTIONS**

Together with the agencies participating in the Inter-sectoral Commission, the Technical Secretariat carried out inter-institutional coordination efforts to facilitate local-level actions aimed at preventing recruitment in Cumaribo. Local participants included the Mayor of Cumaribo, government authorities, the local ombudsman, the Family Commission, the Police for Children and Adolescents, the National Army, the Air Force, ICBF regional offices, the Education Secretariat, and regional staff of the National Apprenticeship Service (SENA). National-level participants included representatives from the Ministry of the Interior, the Early Alert System (SAT), the Delegate for Children and Women of the Ombudsman's Office, the Unit for Assistance and Comprehensive Reparations for Victims (UARIV), Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF), the Presidential Program for Colombian Youth and the Humanitarian Assistance Group for the Demobilized (GAHD).

## **ROUTE TAKEN**

Once information emerged of recruitment threats in Cumaribo, the Technical Secretariat began to coordinate discussions with municipal authorities regarding the initiation of comprehensive prevention measures. The process involved first confirming the situation and risk factors with local representatives, and then contacting the municipal mayor to coordinate local-level actions and ensure operational readiness.

A meeting was then held with technical-level representatives of the Commission's agencies to identify how the issue had been addressed, which established the need to visit the municipality and deliver a workshop on recruitment prevention. To support inter-institutional coordination at the departmental level, the Technical Secretariat also initiated discussions with officials and agencies in Puerto Carreño, the departmental capital.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A prevention plan was developed that included all three of the prevention routes established in CONPES 3673 of 2010 (early prevention, urgent prevention, and protective prevention). The plan was developed in two phases. The initial **planning phase**, corresponding to early prevention, assessed and cross-referenced the local risk factors along with the availability of local services. In the **second phase**, the approach for urgent prevention and protective prevention was developed, consisting of the formation of an Immediate Response Team to respond to future threats or cases of recruitment. In addition, a mechanism was established to monitor and follow-up on the commitments made in the context of the prevention plan, led by the Ombudsman's Office with participation of municipal authorities, representatives of the Commission and the Public Ministry.

Actions were carried out in coordination with government authorities, the local ombudsman, the Family Commission, the municipal focal point for victims' assistance, and representatives of the Municipal Council and the Community Action Committee. Participants in the process also included representatives of the Public Forces, the Air Force, the ICBF local office, the SENA regional office, and community advocates from the Office of the Ombudsman, as well as department-level authorities from the Government Secretariat, the Office of Indigenous Affairs, and the Education Secretariat. National-level participation included the indigenous affairs department of the Ministry of the Interior, representatives from Office of the Ombudsman's Early Alert System and Delegate for Children and Women, the Victims Unit (UARIV), ICBF, the municipal focal point for the Social Prosperity Department, the UNIDOS Program, the Presidential Program for Colombian Youth and the Humanitarian Assistance Group for the Demobilized of the Ministry of Defense.

## RESULTS

The compiling of and reflection on the work carried out in Cumaribo enabled confirmation of the need for coordination between the national and local level in the implementation of prevention policies and diverse tools aimed at building local-level response capacities.

In this way, given the existence of situations of vulnerability faced by children and adolescents in Cumaribo, risk reports have indicated risks for recruitment and use and the lack of development opportunities aimed at youth. In addition, workshops carried out the Technical Secretariat with support from municipal actors qualitatively identified the existence of intra-familial violence, youth labor, limited educational opportunities, illegal economies and trafficking areas, as well as the presence of illegal armed groups.

The results demonstrated that **it is possible to simultaneously pursue the three prevention routes** established by CONPES 3673, by developing a **Coordination Plan** for institutional services (early prevention) and establishing an **Immediate Response Team** and a Response Protocol (urgent prevention and protective prevention), in addition to an **Administrative Act** to promote the sustainability of activities carried out by members of the team.

By working on the three prevention routes jointly and in parallel, the intention is to establish municipal capacities to respond to collective and individual cases of recruitment and use, as well as related vulnerabilities, threats and risk factors.

This comprehensive and joint approach also aims to strengthen protective environments for children and adolescents. The recruitment of children and adolescents is a violation of human rights and international humanitarian law. In this context, for the Technical Secretariat, it is of vital importance to keep in mind that the risk of recruitment must be addressed based on the principles related to children and adolescents on which CONPES 3673 is based. This includes the superior interest of the child, the prevalence of rights, comprehensive protection, life cycle, co-responsibility, the right of children and adolescents to be protected from joined illegal armed groups, a rights-based approach, ethnic diversity, differential approach and a gender perspective.

In this sense, the capacities strengthened through the work of CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat suggest that interagency coordination tools should be strengthened at the local level so that prevention policies generate an action plan involving immediate response teams and the consolidation of decrees, which helps to secure the sustainability of the actions taken.



## **CONCLUSIONS AND OBSTACLES TO PREVENTION**

- In the local-level implementation of prevention activities, it is necessary to keep in mind the specific dynamics in each municipality in order to determine the scope, impact and sustainability of prevention activities due to conditions such as land area, since this can directly influence governance and sustainability of the process.
- The creation of an Administrative Act that envisages the creation of an Immediate Response Team and lays out the roles of each team member contributes to the preventive actions and the Action Plans acquire greater sustainability in departmental and municipal policies.
- It is essential to monitor and follow-up (at the national and local level) on the progress made in carrying out the activities established in interagency action plans (for early prevention) and the strategies created by immediate action teams (for urgent prevention and preventive protection).
- Promoting greater visibility and appropriation of recruitment prevention based on a comprehensive perspective and joint action with local-level institutions helps to generate capacity building processes. This should involve the use of three prevention routes and networking by all institutions with the aim of creating protective environments for children and adolescents.
- To determine progress made at the local-level in carrying out prevention activities (for early, urgent and protective prevention) it is necessary to monitor and follow-up on the creation of Immediate Response Teams and Administrative Acts. This includes the need to analyze the actions carried out, the levels of risks of recruitment and use based on which actions were carried out, and the interagency coordinated generated as a result.

