

RISKS TO MINORS AND YOUTH POPULATIONS IN THE POST-ACCORD PERIOD

The importance of attending to the specific needs of youth and minors in postconflict settings grounds in both risk-reduction and goal-seeking motives. For the former, young people – even those not initially at risk – may develop into “spoilers” for peace stabilization if they inherit certain systemic failings of violent societies. Regarding the latter, in contrast, youth and minors can also serve as critical bridge-builders and provide necessary momentum for peacebuilding efforts over the long term.

In the Colombian case, more than a half-century of internal conflict has resulted in 2.3 million children internally displaced by violence, and 45,000 children killed, according to national figures cited by UNICEF. One-third of the 7.6 million registered

victims of the conflict are children, and since 1985, 8,000 minors have disappeared. Though there are no official GoC statistics on recruitment, the same UNICEF report indicates that, since the peace talks with the FARC began four years ago, some 1,000 children have been forcibly recruited by illegal organized armed groups (GAO), and 75 have been killed. This Spotlight analyzes first the roles and risks to former child combatants in various international settings as they may inform debates on the Colombian context. Following, it presents several general risks to minors and youth in general in post-agreement settings, drawn from research conducted by scholars and practitioners in a variety of countries and institutions. The Spotlight closes with recommendations for policy and program development in post-agreement contexts.

THE COLOMBIAN CASE

MINORS AND YOUTH POPULATIONS IN THE FINAL ACCORD: EXAMPLES OF TAILORED APPROACHES

<p>Subsection in Point 3.2 of the Accord (reintegration) dedicated to tailored approach to attendig to and protecting minors exiting the ranks of the FARC-EP</p>	<p>Code of Conduct for the Monitoring and Verification Mission Includes prohibition against gender violence and/or sexual abuse of minors</p>	<p>Capture, recruitment, and use of minors are considered crimes against humanity and are ineligible for any amnesty or pardon provisions within the transitional justice frameworks.</p>	<p>Within the transitional justice frameworks, crimes committed against minors during the armed conflict will have a distinct set of sanctions from those committed against adults.</p>	<p>The GoC and political party of the FARC-EP commit to a National Political Pact to include youth populations, among other citizen groups.</p>	<p>The Accord recognizes that youth populations have been differentially affected by conflict dynamics (e.g., illicit crop production & drug consumption), requiring a tailored approach to age.</p>
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MINORS FORMERLY LINKED TO ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS

In the Colombian case, minors who were formerly linked to GAO are classified as victims and primarily supported by the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF) until they reach adulthood, with the support of international cooperation, such as the ICRC, IOM, and UNICEF.

Historically speaking, worldwide, former child soldiers have generally been left outside of the official DDR processes, handicapping effective treatment, monitoring, and tracing in the postconflict period. To the contrary in Colombia, they have been included in specific moments during the peace dialogues and in various legal frameworks and provisions emanating from the final accord (some instances of which are noted in the figure above).

In 2000, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child obliged States to demobilize, rehabilitate, and reintegrate children who have been recruited or used in hostilities. Following, Security Council Resolution 1460 called for ensuring that former child soldiers are included in all DDR processes, with attention to the specific needs of girls.

Key risks to former child combatants include community hostility and violence, depending on the context. However, communities have also played key roles in rehabilitation and reintegration when leveraged appropriately. Additionally, post-agreement contexts tend to see a rise

in juvenile delinquency and juvenile crime, especially in the face of weak education and dim job prospects; former child combatants are particularly at risk to this tendency both because of their previous training in arms and other illicit activities, and because of the likelihood that they have also been victims of and/or witnessed tremendous violence.

Among the more acute risks for minors formerly linked to illegal armed groups is re-recruitment/use by the same or similar actors, especially when the end of the formal internal conflict does not mark the end of organized armed action in general. However, several international frameworks exist regarding the recruitment and use of minors by GAO.

For example, the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (2007) – nearly universally endorsed – are designed to, among other things, protect children from unlawful recruitment or use. Notably, the document recommends four actions to prevent re-armament/re-recruitment of minors in postconflict settings: 1) they should demobilize far from the conflict zones; 2) when appropriate, they should be reunited with their families or placed within protective community environments as soon as possible; 3) adequate, appropriate assistance should be provided for reintegration; and 4) children should be informed of their right not to be recruited in any way.

¹ <http://asillavacia.com/historia/la-reglamentacion-de-la-jep-una-pelea-aplazada-61082>

COMMON RISKS AND CHALLENGES TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH POPULATIONS IN GENERAL IN POST-ACCORD SETTINGS

While minors and youth formerly linked to illegal armed groups have a certain range of anticipated challenges in the transitional period, civilian populations of the same age demographic also face risks distinct from their adult counterparts. Some of these are mentioned in the below figure.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Children with disabilities often overlooked in post accord services context; often hidden in communities.¹
- Indirect health problems caused by conflict dynamics (e.g., child malnutrition due to poverty and insecurity) can be exacerbated by poor implementation of post-accord service provision and development initiatives.²

PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH

- Most rape victims in conflict zones are children, requiring specific attention that is often lacking due to insufficient financial/technical resources.³
- Minors formerly linked to GAO may have difficulties adjusting to a way of life that is no longer familiar and a society that may not be willing to accept them.⁴
- Gendered approaches are often tacked on and insufficient.⁵

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

- Children and youth in post-accord settings may be vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking, both by GAO, and, in certain cases, by those who have been recruited to assist in the post-war rebuilding processes.⁶
- There is often poor service provision for psychosocial support and disease treatment for child victims of sexual exploitation.⁷

CHILD LABOR

- Conflict has a destructive impact on the socioeconomic environment and can increase risk factors associated with child labor.
- Both conflict and emergency situations can increase the likelihood that children already working will engage in more dangerous work.⁸

PROGRAM AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POST-ACCORD INITIATIVES TARGETING MINORS AND YOUTH POPULATIONS

A review of related academic and policy literature, along with knowledge of program requirements for various international cooperation agencies addressing the topics covered in this Spotlight, suggest the following set of recommendations for programs and policies in post-accord settings such as Colombia that target these populations:

- 1. Maintain a multifaceted understanding of well-being for children and young persons** (e.g., reproductive health, appropriate psychosocial supports for their conflict-related experiences, and locally-specific health concerns such as dengue or malnutrition).
- 2. Ensure that targeted minor and youth populations engage meaningfully in the planning and development of projects and policies that target them** (e.g., through youth committees and spokespersons, by requiring tailored approaches to policy and project planning when relevant, and by investing in early-stage

analysis of planned implementation sites to understand the specific needs of the targeted populations).

- 3. Strengthen age-appropriate leadership and vocational skills development opportunities** (e.g., training for leadership roles, training for conflict resolution and/or reconciliation, support for youth forums and networking, recognition of the culturally informed complexity of needs for minor and youth populations).

In addition to these recommendations, programs and policies targeting minor and youth populations in post-accord settings should always include a gender component, as much research has demonstrated the differential experiences and effects of armed conflict on boys versus girls. Finally, extra effort should be made to include children and youth with disabilities, as they are often an underserved and even hidden population in transitioning communities.

¹ von der Assen, et al. (2010) "Including disabled children in psychosocial programmes in areas affected by armed conflict," *Intervention*, 8(1): 29-39.

² Bretlinger, et al. (1999) "Childhood malnutrition and postwar reconstruction in rural El Salvador: a community-based survey," *JAMA*, 281(2): 184-90.

³ Reuters (2013) "Most rape victims in conflict zones are children: report."

⁴ Hart, J. (2002) "Children and adolescents in conflict situations."

⁵ United Nations (2003) "World Youth Report."

⁶ UNHCR and Save the Children-UK (2001) "Sexual violence & exploitation: The experience of refugee children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone."

⁷ Mooney, E. (2007) "Chapter 4: Protecting and reintegrating displaced women and children postconflict."

Other Sources: Final Accord; Paris Principles; Save the Children; UNICEF