

## Executive Summary

Colombia is currently **the fourth country in the world with the highest number of attacks on education**, according to *Ataques a la educación en Colombia (2017–2025): Consensos globales para un país que se educa en paz*, the latest study by the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP). The study was launched at an event held in collaboration with the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), the Education Above All Foundation, and Save the Children. Only Palestine, Ukraine, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo—contexts of ongoing large-scale international armed conflict—report more attacks. This means that Colombia is the **most affected country in the Western Hemisphere**, even in the aftermath of the peace agreement.

The study shows that teaching has become a high-risk profession in many territories. Colombia is the second country in the world with the highest number of murdered teachers, surpassed only by Palestine. Educators are often targeted because they represent state authority, civic leadership, and community cohesion. At the same time, schools themselves have become objects of warfare. When educational facilities are damaged, destroyed, or used for military purposes by armed groups and armed forces, schools are transformed from safe places for learning into places of danger and violence for students, teachers, and educational personnel .

These events are not isolated. The study identifies a **systematic pattern** the JEP terms “**forced de-schooling**” (*desescolarización forzada*): the interruption of school life due to threats, displacement, territorial disputes, and the presence of armed actors. **Approximately 18,000 children and adolescents** have had to suspend or abandon their education because attending school is too dangerous. Some families flee; others keep children confined at home. When children and adolescents are out of school, they are at heightened risk of **recruitment and use**, since school provides the primary daily structure that protects them from armed groups. When the schools disappear, armed groups emerge as the institution of reference—shaping norms, authority, and future possibilities.

The consequences of “forced de-schooling” are **profound and intergenerational**. Children lose learning, cognitive development, and emotional stability. Exposure to sexual violence, trafficking, and forced labour increases. Communities experience declining trust in public institutions, weakened social cohesion, and rising cycles of multidimensional poverty. Over time, the absence

of schooling contributes to the reproduction of inequality and the transmission of violence across generations. The study finds a strong correlation: **the municipalities with the highest number of attacks on education are also those with the highest multidimensional poverty rates and the highest levels of recruitment and use of children.** Schools, therefore, are not only educational spaces; they are **protective walls.** When those walls fall, children and educational staff are left exposed.

To understand the scope of this phenomenon, the study draws on the methodology developed by GCPEA and strengthened in Colombia through territorial data collection and community-based reporting. “Attacks on education” are defined as any threatened or actual use of force against students, teachers, academics, education support and transport staff (e.g., janitors, bus drivers), education officials, education buildings, resources, or facilities (including school buses). These acts are not random. They are strategies of territorial and social control that seek to replace the school’s role in structuring daily life. The school is not merely a building—it is a symbol of state presence, collective identity, and the possibility of a brighter future.

In 2022, Colombia endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), joining 120 other States in an international political commitment to prevent the military use of schools and ensure safe access to education. Rather than framing this as an unmet obligation, the report positions this moment as an opportunity for action with transformative potential. Meaningful implementation of the SSD can rebuild trust between institutions and communities, strengthen local resilience, and interrupt the cycles of exclusion that sustain violence. Achieving this requires multisectoral and territorially grounded protection strategies, monitoring systems that detect early risks, and active participation from teachers, families, children and youth, Indigenous and Afro-descendant authorities, and local governments.

However, the scale and depth of the harm described in the study demonstrate that protection alone is not enough. The study proposes a **restorative justice approach** to address “forced de-schooling”. This means acknowledging the harm suffered by students, teachers and other education personnel, and communities; repairing the school as a social and emotional space; rebuilding relationships between families, institutions, and territorial authorities; and creating conditions that ensure the non-repetition of violence. Restorative justice in this context is not limited to truth-telling or institutional reform. It is an active strategy to break the

intergenerational transmission of poverty, exclusion, and violence that attacks on education have produced.

Protecting education is not only a legal duty—it is a peacebuilding strategy. However, the report shows that current protection mechanisms are insufficient, especially in regions where armed actors dispute territorial control. It is therefore necessary to strengthen and clarify legal tools for the protection of children, teachers and educational facilities, ensuring rapid response measures and clear accountability when attacks occur.

Yet legal protection alone cannot repair the depth of the harm. “Forced de-schooling” affects entire communities and future generations. For this reason, the study calls for a restorative justice approach, one that restores educational facilities as safe institutions, rebuilds community trust, and makes guarantees of non-repetition a concrete reality, through strengthening legal accountability. Preventing violence from recurring must be at the centre of any response.

This is why the Office of the Prosecutor in a transitional justice system is focused on both clarifying responsibility and addressing the conditions that allowed the harm, so that schools can once again serve as spaces of protection, dignity, and hope. The report provides the evidence and the direction to achieve this.

**To consult the full report, visit the official website of the [Special Jurisdiction for Peace \(JEP\)](#).**