## Context

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, Colombia continued to experience armed violence despite peace accords signed in 2016 between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo – FARC-EP).\(^1\) The lead-up to presidential elections held in May 2022 coincided with an increase in political violence, according to the Electoral Observation Mission.\(^2\) As part of its “total peace” policy, which sought the negotiated disarmament of armed groups, the government announced ceasefires with five non-state armed groups at various points during 2022 and 2023. Among them, the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional – ELN) and the government signed a ceasefire agreement in June 2023.\(^3\) However, the ceasefires faced significant hurdles and some groups did not adhere to them.\(^4\) For instance, a ceasefire signed between the government and the Gaitanist Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia – AGC) in December 2022 was suspended months later by the government, according to media reports.\(^5\)

Non-state armed groups remained active during the reporting period, including FARC dissident groups and the ELN, as well as groups, such as the AGC, that succeeded the paramilitary groups that officially demobilized in the mid-2000s. Armed violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups increased in some rural regions of Colombia, disproportionately affecting women social leaders, leaders from Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities, and former FARC-EP combatants.\(^6\) In 2022, at least 215 human rights defenders and social leaders were killed, many by armed groups, the highest number since 2016, according to the Ombudsperson’s Office.\(^7\) Non-state armed groups restricted movement and prohibited communities from leaving their homes using threats and violence, contributing to the forced confinement of at least 102,000 people in 2022 and 88,000 people in 2023; these confinements disproportionately affected Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities.\(^8\)

Armed conflict forced at least 63,200 people to flee in large-group displacements during 2023.\(^9\) The UN reported that 8.3 million people, nearly one-third of them children, were in need of humanitarian assistance in 2023 due to violence, disasters, and internal displacement.\(^10\) However, over 20,000 people in 2023 faced limitations to accessing humanitarian assistance as non-state armed groups imposed restrictions on aid organizations.\(^11\)

Armed violence continued to impact education in 2022 and 2023. When in effect, forced confinements in the north of the country prevented at least two million students from attending classes in person during the reporting period, according to the Coalition Against the Involvement of Children and Youth in Armed Conflict in Colombia (COALICO).\(^12\)

In November 2022, Colombia became the 116th country to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.\(^13\)

## Attacks on Schools

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 41 reports of attacks on schools in Colombia. These attacks occurred primarily in rural areas across about a third of the country’s 32 departments. Many incidents involved improvised explosive devices (IEDs) installed at or near schools; however, confrontations in the vicinity of schools between armed groups, or an armed group and government forces, also occurred, among other types of attacks. At least one school serving Indigenous students and one serving Afro-Colombian students were impacted during the reporting period. The number of reported attacks on schools increased slightly compared to the previous reporting period, when GCPEA identified approximately 15 incidents in 2021 and around 19 in 2020.\(^14\)

In 2022, COALICO documented 23 incidents of attacks on, or military use of, educational institutions spread across several departments, with Córdoba, Norte de Santander, and Valle del Caulca departments particularly affected.\(^15\) However, it was unclear how many of these were attacks on schools, rather than military use. Separately, the UN verified four attacks damaging schools that year.\(^16\) Since some of the attacks may have overlapped with incidents collected by GCPEA, the incidents from COALICO and the UN were not included in the total number of attacks on schools, to avoid double counting. During 2022, insecurity led to the closure of schools in multiple departments, including Antioquia and Nariño.\(^17\)

GCPEA collected approximately 22 reports of attacks on schools in 2022, with Arauca, Cauca, Chocó, Valle del Cauca, and Norte de Santander departments most impacted.\(^18\) Around half of reported incidents involved IEDs placed near schools; others included armed confrontations in the vicinity of schools, lootings, or vandalism carried out by alleged armed groups and other forms of attack. Examples of IEDs reportedly installed near schools in 2022 included:

- In a rural area of Dagua municipality, Valle del Cauca department, an IED was reportedly planted near a school, along a path students take to class, sometime before early February 2022. The Colombian army performed a controlled detonation of the explosive device, according to local media Semana.\(^19\)
- On July 27, 2022, two explosives were planted near a preschool and secondary school in the middle of the night, in Tibú, Norte de Santander, leading administrators to suspend classes, affecting around 2,000 stu-
In 2023, GCPEA identified at least 19 reports of attacks on schools. The Colombian army performed a controlled detonation of the explosive devices.20

- In mid-November 2022, three IEDs were planted a few meters from a school in a rural area of Puerto Rondón municipality, Arauca department, preventing more than 25 students and several teachers from entering the school for several days, as reported by a local media outlet. Colombian army troops performed a controlled detonation of the explosive devices.21

GCPEA also collected several reports of armed confrontations near schools or school infrastructure in 2022, one of which impacted Indigenous communities. For example:

- On May 9, 2022, an armed clash took place near a school in Mazamorreo area, Buenos Aires municipality, Cauca department, as reported by a local media outlet.22
- On July 22, 2022, an armed clash reportedly took place near a school, while students were in attendance, in Corinto municipality, Cauca department. A local media outlet reported that unidentified armed men attacked a police post in the town, which is next to the school.23
- On August 3, 2022, an armed clash reportedly took place near a school on the Las Delicias Indigenous community reservation in Buenos Aires municipality, Cauca department. A local news outlet reported that Indigenous guards evacuated the students from the school to keep them away from the crossfire.24

In 2023, COALICO documented 46 incidents of attacks on education and military use, including attacks on educational institutions, spread across several departments, with Antioquia, Cauca, and Valle del Cauca departments particularly affected.25 Separately, the UN reported 24 attacks on schools, including threats or attacks against students or education personnel.26 However, it was unclear how many of these were attacks on schools, rather than attacks on education personnel or incidents of military use. Since some of the attacks may have overlapped with incidents collected by GCPEA, the COALICO and UN counts were not included in the total number of attacks on schools for this report, to avoid double counting.

In 2023, GCPEA identified at least 19 reports of attacks on schools.27 Around half of reported incidents involved IEDs emplaced near schools; others included armed confrontations in the vicinity of schools, small arms fire, threats, and raids. Examples of IEDs reportedly installed near schools in 2023 included:

- Sometime before February 7, 2023, five explosive devices were reportedly installed near Cerecal School in Roberto Payán municipality, Nariño department, according to a local media outlet. The rural school offered classes to around 50 students. Colombian military forces reportedly located the explosive devices and performed a controlled detonation.28
- On July 29, 2023, a cylinder bomb was installed inside the Agricultural Technical Educational Institution of Suárez, María Inmaculada, in Suárez municipality, Cauca department, as reported by local media outlets.29 Colombian authorities reportedly performed a controlled detonation, and the school was destroyed, according to international media outlet Infobae.30
- On September 20, 2023, a car bomb was detonated near a police station and the resulting blast destroyed several houses and impacted a nearby school in the Timba area of Buenos Aires municipality, Cauca department, as reported by international media outlet France 24.31

GCPEA also collected several reports of armed confrontations near schools or school infrastructure in 2023. For example:

- On February 6, 2023, an armed clash reportedly took place near a school in a rural area of El Bagre municipality, Antioquia department. As a result, parents and caregivers made the collective decision to keep children at home, meaning around 1,200 students did not attend class that day, as reported by local media Semana and El Colombiano.32
- On May 18, 2023, an armed clash reportedly took place near Los Nutabes Educational Center in El 15 area of Valdivia municipality, Antioquia department, while students were in class, according to a local media outlet.33
- On November 26, 2023, an armed clash reportedly took place near a school in Mosquera municipality, Cundinamarca department, causing damage to the school.34

### ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA compiled around 61 reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. Killings and threats constituted the most commonly reported forms of attack and occurred across at least 20 departments, with Antioquia, Cauca, and Norte de Santander most affected. Non-state armed groups reportedly killed and threatened teachers for their involvement in teachers’ unions, as occurred in the previous reporting period, as well as for their supposed support of rival armed groups.35 Students and educators were also caught in the crossfire of armed clashes, threatened, or exposed to IEDs while on their way to or from school.36 Reported attacks on school students and staff continued at a similar rate compared to the previous reporting period, when GCPEA identified around 24 reports in 2021 and more than 35 in 2020.37

In 2022, GCPEA collected approximately 27 reports of attacks on school students and education personnel, several of which targeted or otherwise impacted Indigenous teachers and students.38 Separately, the UN verified 18 threats and attacks against students, teachers, or other protected persons in relation to schools.39 Since some of the attacks may have overlapped with incidents collected by GCPEA, the incidents from the UN were not included in the total number of attacks on school students and staff, to avoid double counting. In addition, the Secretary of Education of Antioquia, according to local media outlet El Colombiano, reported that there were 400 cases of threats against teachers in the Bajo Cauca and northern areas of Antioquia department, mostly by armed groups, over an approximately 12-month period during 2022 and 2023.40 However, it was unclear if all the threats were made by armed parties or otherwise met GCPEA criteria, so they were not included in the total number, to avoid double counting. Examples of incidents collected by GCPEA included:

- In early February 2022, an alleged armed group killed an Indigenous teacher and leader from the Wounaan community in Medio San Juan municipality, Chocó department, according to a local civil society organization.41
- On February 23, 2022, 16 students in a school bus on their way home from class, together with the driver and a staff member, were reportedly forced to disembark and the bus was set on fire in Paz de Ariporo...
In 2022 and 2023, GCPEA identified at least 40 reported incidents of military use of educational facilities, with Antioquia and Cauca departments most affected. The majority of incidents involved schools being used as fighting positions and bases. Military use of schools increased this reporting period as compared to the period covered by Education under Attack 2022, when GCPEA collected around three reports of military use in 2020 and 2021.14

In 2022, GCPEA identified at least 12 reports of military use.55 Separately, the UN reported that ten schools were used by FARC dissidents, Colombian armed forces, AGC, ELN, and unidentified perpetrators, and that all were vacated.16 However, to avoid double counting, they were not included in the total, since some may overlap with those counted by GCPEA. Examples of military use cases identified by GCPEA included:

- On May 3, 2022, FARC dissidents and another unidentified armed group reportedly entered a school in Gualpi area, Nariño department. Students later found the armed groups in the school.57
- In late May 2022, Colombian army brigade XXVII de Selva reportedly camped fewer than 200 meters from a school in San Salvador community, Puerto Asís municipality, Putumayo department, for several days and conducted patrols in the presence of students. A local civil society organization reported that community members asked the troops to move away from the school, since students were attending classes at the time, but the brigade remained.58
- On July 28, 2022, an armed group allegedly used a school as protection while engaging the Colombian army in combat in El Tambo municipality, Cauca department, as reported by a local media outlet citing a police commander.59
- In early November 2022, a school in Piedritas village, Tuluá municipality, Valle del Cauca department, was reportedly used as a firing position. International news outlet El País reported that students were still in the school at the time.60
- In late November 2022, Indigenous leaders protested the presence of an alleged armed group in schools and other communal and private buildings in the Chimborazo reservation, in Morales municipality, Cauca department, as reported by a local media outlet.61

In 2023, NRC reported 29 instances of military use and occupation of schools.62 That same year, the UN reported 18 cases of military use, and that the schools were subsequently vacated.63 Separately, GCPEA collected around 16 reports of military use.64 However, to avoid double counting, the GCPEA incidents and UN count were not included in the total number of military use incidents for the report, since some may overlap with those in the NRC count. Examples of military use identified by GCPEA included:

- In early 2023, the Colombian army occupied a school for several days in Primavera community in a rural area of Buenaventura municipality, Valle del Cauca department, as reported by a local media outlet citing a regional Ombudsperson’s Office.65
- On February 6, 2023, an alleged armed group bound a person to a chair and killed them in front of a school in a rural area of El Bagre municipality, Antioquia department, according to local media outlet El Colombi-
On March 10, 2022, at least two Indigenous students were recruited on their way to school in Caloto municipality, Cauca department. Students were in the school at the time, as reported by a local media outlet.

On April 21, 2023, at least four Indigenous students were recruited on their way to school in Inzá municipality, Cauca department, as reported by the UN in November 2023. The schools served Afro-Colombian communities, and their occupation prevented students from accessing education.

GCPEA also identified reports of schools being used for indoctrination and child recruitment in 2022 and 2023, as detailed below.

**CHILD RECRUITMENT AT, OR ON THE WAY TO OR FROM, SCHOOL**

GCPEA identified at least 16 reports of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school during the 2022-2023 reporting period, with Antioquia and Cauca departments most affected. In comparison, two incidents of school-related child recruitment were identified in Education under Attack 2022, one each in 2021 and 2020.

In 2022, GCPEA identified reports of at least eight cases of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school. For example:

- On March 10, 2022, at least two Indigenous students were recruited on their way to school in Caloto municipality, Cauca department, according to COALICO.
- In mid-2022, several FARC dissident groups set up arms and gear displays next to schools in Cauca department and encouraged students to look at the military hardware with the intention of recruiting them, according to International Crisis Group. The international organization reported that teachers were intimidated into not raising concerns or forced to flee the area.
- In early October 2022, twelve students were recruited from a secondary school in El Bagre municipality, Cauca department, according to the Office of the Inspector General. Fear of recruitment was keeping some students from attending school in the area.
- On April 10, 2022, a girl student was recruited on her way to school in the Páez de Corinto Indigenous community reservation, Corinto municipality, Cauca department, as reportedly by Indigenous authorities.

In addition, local news outlets reported that, in mid-January and early February 2023, alleged armed group members wearing uniforms and bearing arms entered schools to distribute school supplies and play with the students in Campamento, San Pedro de los Milagros, and Yarumal municipalities in Antioquia department.

Semana reported that an alleged armed group encouraged students in the department to draw and color the armed group’s emblem.

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT, OR ON THE WAY TO OR FROM, SCHOOL**

GCPEA identified one reported incident of sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school during the 2022-2023 reporting period. Education under Attack 2022, which covered 2020 and 2021, reported two incidents of school-related sexual violence in Colombia.

On June 3, 2023, members of an alleged armed group sexually abused a girl student after stopping and robbing a car of students and female teachers on their way to school in Maicao municipality, La Guajira department, as reported by a local media outlet.

**ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

GCPEA collected around 18 reports of attacks on higher education in 2022 and 2023. During the reporting period, police and the Mobile Anti-Riot Squadron (ESMAD) reportedly responded with excessive force to several on- and off-campus student protests over the conditions of university infrastructure and higher education funding. In addition, local media reported that alleged non-state armed groups attacked higher education facilities and threatened university students and professors. In comparison, GCPEA identified approximately four reports of attacks on higher education in 2021 and 15 in 2020.

In 2022, GCPEA identified around 17 reports of attacks on higher education. Examples of repression of education-related protests in 2022 included:

- On June 9, 2022, ESMAD reportedly entered Distrital University-La Macarena in Bogotá and used teargas, water cannons, and stun grenades to disperse student protests. The students demonstrated over the lack of water and other services at the university and to commemorate the “Day of the Fallen Student.”
- On October 5, 2022, ESMAD reportedly used water cannons to disperse students protesting near Córdoba University over inadequate university infrastructure and demanding the resignation of the dean in Montería city, Córdoba department. Local media outlet Semana reported that the students committed several acts of vandalism during the protests.

Examples of reported attacks on higher education facilities and threats against students and academic staff in 2022 included:

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7 Examples of reported attacks on higher education facilities and threats against students and academic staff in 2022 included:

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In the early hours of February 23, 2022, two explosive devices were reportedly planted in the street in front of the main entrance to the Francisco de Paula Santander University in Cúcuta city, Norte de Santander department. The incident reportedly occurred on the first day of a newly imposed curfew as part of a forced confinement in the area.86

On May 6, 2022, a University of Antioquia bus was stopped and the four university employees on board were told to disembark before the bus was set on fire in Santa Fe de Antioquia municipality, Antioquia department. Local media outlet Semana reported that 34 other vehicles were set on fire that day as part of a forced confinement in the area.87

In April and May 2022, students received death threats for their political activities at Valle University, in Cali city, Valle del Cauca department, as reported by Scholars at Risk and a local media outlet.88

In 2023, GCPEA identified one report of an attack on higher education. On July 26, 2023, ESMAD reportedly used teargas and stun grenades to disperse students protesting at the governor’s office in Barranquilla city, Atlántico department, for free university tuition, as reported by local media outlets. International news outlet Infobae reported that police beat a student inside the building.89

ENDNOTES


2 MOE, Violence against communal, social, and political leaders during the national electoral calendar 2022 (La violencia contra líderes políticos, sociales y comunitarios durante el calendario electoral nacional 2022) (Colombia: Electoral Observation Mission, 2022).


14 GCPEA, Education under Attack 2022 (New York: GCPEA, 2022), Colombia profile.


20 “Explosive device planted near school neutralized in Dagua, Valle del Cauca (Neutralizan un objeto explosivo instalado cerca de una escuela en Dagua, Valle del Cauca),” Semana, February 5, 2022.

21 “Explosive device planted near school neutralized in Dagua, Valle del Cauca (Neutralizan un objeto explosivo instalado cerca de una escuela en Dagua, Valle del Cauca),” Semana, February 5, 2022.

22 “Explosive device planted near school neutralized in Dagua, Valle del Cauca (Neutralizan un objeto explosivo instalado cerca de una escuela en Dagua, Valle del Cauca),” Semana, February 5, 2022.

23 “Explosive device planted near school neutralized in Dagua, Valle del Cauca (Neutralizan un objeto explosivo instalado cerca de una escuela en Dagua, Valle del Cauca),” Semana, February 5, 2022.


26 Information received from a UN respondent on May 15, 2024.

28 El Tiempo (Colombia), as cited in ACLED, Event ID COL19131. Alicia Liliana Méndez, “Explosive deactivation that dissident had installed near a school (Desactivaron por explosión mina que había instalado cerca de una escuela),” Radio Caracol, September 27, 2023.

29 Juan Felipe Sarcitán, “Círculo bomba destroyed the school where Francis María Márquez studied in the midst of heavy fighting in Cauca” (Círculo bomba destruyó la escuela donde estudió Francis María Márquez en medio de fuertes combates en el Cauca),” Infobae, July 24, 2023.

30 The controlled explosion that destroyed the school where Francis María Márquez studied (La explosión controlada que destruyó el colegio donde estudió Francis María Márquez),” Cambio Colombia, July 31, 2023.

31 Juan Felipe Sarcitán, “Círculo bomba destroyed the school where Francis María Márquez studied in the midst of heavy fighting in Cauca” (Círculo bomba destruyó la escuela donde estudió Francis María Márquez en medio de fuertes combates en el Cauca),” Infobae, July 31, 2023.

32 “Children are left without class due to clashes between dissidents and Gulf Clan in Antioquia” (Niños se quedan sin clases por enfrentamiento de disidentes y Clan del Golfo en Antioquia),” Semana, February 6, 2023. “Clashes between Gulf Clan and Farc dissidents leave one dead (Enfrentamientos entre el Clan del Golfo y disidencias de las Farc dejan un muerto),” El Colombiano, February 6, 2023.


34 Local coordination team, as cited by OCHA; “Armed Violence Events in Colombia Monitor (Eventos de Violencia Armada en Colombia Monitor),” 2023, Event ID 3042.


37 GCPEA, Education under Attack 2023 (New York, GCPEA: 2023), Colombia profile.

38 A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/leua_2024_references.pdf


40 “More than 100 teachers have been threatened in Antioquia in 2023 (Más de 100 docentes han sido amenazados en Antioquia en 2023),” El Colombiano, November 3, 2023. “Antioquia Secretary of Education denounced 400 threats against teachers (Secretaria de Educación de Antioquia denuncia 400 amenazas contra profesores),” El Colombiano, February 8, 2023.

41 “Overview of Human Rights and Political Violence in Colombia (Panorama de derechos humanos y violencia política en Colombia),” North and Fog Journal, No. 65, Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular Programa por la Paz, January - June 2022, p. 108.

42 Valeska de la Hoz, “School bus was incinerated in Paz de Ariporo, Casanare (Bus escolar fue incinerado en Paz de Ariporo, Casanare),” El Colombiano, February 23, 2022. “For being rats and defending the Peace Accord we will do you harm! threats against teachers in El Guamo (Por ser ratones y defender el Acuerdo nos haremos daño'; amenazas a profes de El Guamo),” El Espectador, April 8, 2022. “Threatened teachers in the south of Tolima to be transferred (Docentes amenazados serán trasladados en el sur del Tolimá),” El Colombiano, April 22, 2022.


44 “Every teacher who is already retired must present their resignation within 24 hours”: the terrible threat of the Gulf Clan against teachers in Moravia, Cauca (Todos profesor que ya estén pensionado deben presentar la renuncia en 24 horas”: la terrible amenaza del Clan del Golfo contra docentes en Bolivar y Sucre),” Semana, May 3, 2023.


48 OCHA, “Armed Violence Events in Colombia Monitor (Eventos de Violencia Armada en Colombia Monitor),” 2023, Event ID 1129. “Every teacher who is already retired must present their resignation within 24 hours”: the terrible threat of the Gulf Clan against teachers in Bolivar and Sucre (Todo profesor que ya esté pensionado debe presentar la renuncia en 24 horas): la terrible amenaza del Clan del Golfo contra docentes en Bolivar y Sucre),” Semana, May 3, 2023.


50 “Public complaint denouncing threats against the teachers of Bolivar and Sucre by the Gallantista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Denuncia pública denunciando amenazas de los Policías por la Defensa Autónoma (Gallantista) de Colombia),” GCPEA press release, May 2, 2023. OCHA, “Armed Violence Events in Colombia Monitor (Eventos de Violencia Armada en Colombia Monitor),” 2023, Event ID 1129. “Every teacher who is already retired must present their resignation within 24 hours”: the terrible threat of the Gulf Clan against teachers in Bolivar and Sucre (Todo profesor que ya esté pensionado debe presentar la renuncia en 24 horas): la terrible amenaza del Clan del Golfo contra docentes en Bolivar y Sucre),” Semana, May 3, 2023.

77. ACIN, “Armed group recruits a minor in Caucho (Grupo armado recluta a menor en Caucho),” Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca press release, July 13, 2023. INDEPAZ, Monitor - OCHA Colombia, as cited in ACLED, Event ID COL21654.

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80. GCPEA, Education under Attack 2022 (New York, GCPEA: 2022), Colombia profile.

81. OCHA, as cited in ACLED, Event ID COL20982. “Teachers denounce alleged case of sexual abuse of student by FARC dissidents in La Guajira (Docentes denuncian presunto caso de abuso sexual a estudiante por disidentes FARC en La Guajira),” Noticias RCN, June 3, 2023.

82. GCPEA, Education under Attack 2022 (New York, GCPEA: 2022), Colombia profile.


84. María Angélica García, “Clashes between ESMAD and protestors at the Distrital U. lasted around 4 hours (Conflictos entre ESMAD y manifestantes en la U. Distrital duraron alrededor de 4 horas),” Publimetro, June 9, 2022.

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