

# Colombia

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Reports of attacks on schools, and on teachers and students, as well as the military use of schools increased during 2024 and 2025 as violence increased, and teachers and students continued to face threats. Child recruitment at, or on the way to or from school, also continued.

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## Context

During the 2024-2025 reporting period, the incidence of armed violence increased in Colombia, nearly a decade after the 2016 peace accords signed between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo – FARC-EP).<sup>1</sup> Eight armed conflicts remained in the country as of early 2025, according to the ICRC.<sup>2</sup> The government’s “total peace” policy, which sought the negotiated disarmament of armed groups, has remained in place, with multiple dialogue processes occurring during the reporting period, to varying degrees of success.<sup>3</sup> For example, the ceasefire between the government and the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional – ELN) was not renewed in August 2024, leading to an impasse in dialogue.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the government’s peace strategy, non-state armed groups expanded their presence in various parts of the country during the reporting period.<sup>5</sup> In early 2025, conflict escalated in the Catatumbo region, Norte de Santander department, between the ELN and a FARC-EP dissident group, with the armed groups carrying out forced displacements, confinements, and extrajudicial executions.<sup>6</sup> The UN declared this violence escalation to be the “most severe humanitarian crisis since the 2016 peace agreement.”<sup>7</sup> During the reporting period, fragmentation of several armed groups, as well as increased competition over territories and resources, complicated peace-building efforts, while also increasing the threat of violence against civilians.<sup>8</sup> In the first half of 2025, nearly 1.45 million people were affected by armed conflict, representing a quadrupling compared to the first half of 2024, according to the UN.<sup>9</sup> The UN verified the recruitment of 450 children in 2024, an increase of over 53 percent compared to 2023.<sup>10</sup> The number of casualties resulting from explosive weapons, including anti-personnel mines, explosive remnants of war, launched explosives and controlled detonation devices, rose by 89 percent between 2023 and 2024 and was the highest number in eight years, according to the ICRC.<sup>11</sup>

Between 2024 and 2025, the humanitarian situation deteriorated in many respects. The UN reported that almost 13.4 million people, close to one-third of them children, were in need of humanitarian assistance in the first half of 2025 due to violence, disasters, and internal displacement.<sup>12</sup> According to Save the Children, children faced the highest rates

of displacement in over a decade - on average, armed conflict displaced 78,000 children, or 215 a day, across Colombia in 2025. This was a 30 percent increase from 2024 displacements of children.<sup>13</sup> Overall, mass displacements increased by more than 69 percent between 2024 and 2025, and were the highest in 18 years in 2025, affecting over 88,000 people.<sup>14</sup> Armed groups used forced confinement tactics to exert social and territorial control and threaten communities' rights and access to services, resulting in the forced confinement of at least 138,419 people in 2024, an increase of 58 percent compared to 2023, which remained high in 2025.<sup>15</sup> Attacks on health workers also became more severe, with parties to conflict using ambulances for cover.<sup>16</sup>

In the first half of 2025, the number of people affected by attacks on education increased by over 65 percent in comparison to the same period in 2024, and 93 percent of those affected were students, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council.<sup>17</sup> In early 2025, the escalation of conflict in the Catatumbo region alone resulted in missed education for over 46,000 students, with around 710 school closures.<sup>18</sup> While new government policies led to more migrant children enrolling in schools, with nine percent of the student population being Venezuelan in 2025, in practice students faced challenges with access, according to the UN.<sup>19</sup>

## Attacks on schools

GCPEA identified at least 160 reports of attacks on schools in the current reporting period. This represented a significant increase as compared to the 41 attacks in the previous reporting period, with 19 documented attacks in 2023 and 22 in 2022.<sup>20</sup>

In 2024, COALICO documented 40 incidents of attacks on, or military use of, educational institutions spread across several departments, with Arauca, Cauca, Nariño, and Norte de Santander particularly affected.<sup>21</sup> However, it was unclear how many of these were attacks on schools, rather than military use. Separately, the UN verified 27 attacks on schools that year.<sup>22</sup> 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.

GCPEA collected approximately 55 reports of attacks on schools in 2024, with Arauca, Cauca, Caquetá, Putumayo, Valle del Cauca departments most impacted.<sup>23</sup>

Most reported incidents involved armed confrontations in the vicinity of schools, four of which impacted Indigenous communities. For example:

- On February 29, 2024, an armed clash reportedly took place at night near a school in Mina Canónico area, Montecristo municipality, Bolívar department. The school was damaged as a result, according to UN monitoring.<sup>24</sup>
- On April 8, 2024, an armed clash reportedly took place near a primary school on the Santa Rosa de Capicisco community reservation in Inzá municipality, Cauca department, according to UN monitoring.<sup>25</sup>

- On August 8, 2024, an armed clash reportedly took place near a school in Corinto municipality, Cauca department, while students were in classes. A local news outlet reported that teachers told students to hide under classroom desks and in the bathrooms for protection until they were ordered by authorities to return to their homes.<sup>26</sup>
- On August 27, 2024, an armed clash took place near a school in a rural area of Toribío municipality, Cauca department, while Indigenous students were in classes, as reported by UN monitoring.<sup>27</sup>

GCPEA collected several reports of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) installed near schools.<sup>28</sup> For example:

- In Caloto municipality, Cauca department, an IED was planted near a school, along a path students take to class, sometime before January 2024, according to UN monitoring.<sup>29</sup>
- On April 28, 2024, an IED planted inside of a school in Cumbitara municipality, Nariño department, reportedly detonated while a teacher was cleaning, and they sustained minor injuries, according to UN monitoring.<sup>30</sup>
- On September 18, 2024, an IED was planted near a school in El Cerrito municipality, Valle del Cauca department, according to UN monitoring. A controlled detonation of the explosive device was performed.<sup>31</sup>
- On September 27, 2024, an IED with the flag of an armed group was planted near a school in the early morning, in Santander de Quilichao municipality, Cauca department, leading administrators to suspend classes, as reported by local media *El Tiempo*. The police determined that the explosive device was a decoy.<sup>32</sup>

GCPEA collected approximately 118 reports of attacks on schools in 2025, with Norte de Santander, Antioquia, Cauca, Chocó, and Valle del Cauca departments most impacted.<sup>33</sup> Nearly half of reported incidents involved small arms fire; others included IEDs emplaced near schools, threats, and other forms of attack.

GCPEA collected several reports of small arms fire directed towards schools or occurring near schools in 2025, 13 of which impacted Afro-Colombian or Indigenous communities. For example:

- On February 17, 2025, an alleged armed group shot at a school in Convención municipality, Norte de Santander department, during a parade involving students, as reported by local news outlet. The attack reportedly targeted police forces present.<sup>34</sup>
- On February 20, 2025, shootings and explosions occurred in the vicinity of schools in Jamundí municipality, Valle del Cauca department, causing them to close, as reported by a local news outlet.<sup>35</sup>
- On November 11, 2025, an alleged armed group shot at a police station in the vicinity of a school in Jamundí municipality, Valle del Cauca department, according to UN monitoring and a local news outlet.<sup>36</sup>

GCPEA also collected several reports of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) installed near schools. For example:

- In Caloto municipality, Cauca department, an IED detonated near a school sometime in early 2025, targeting a police station across the street, according to UN monitoring and a local news outlet.<sup>37</sup>
- On February 20, 2025, an IED detonated near a school in Cúcuta municipality, Norte de Santander department, targeting a nearby police station, according to UN monitoring and local media.<sup>38</sup>
- In April 2025, four IEDs were planted near a school in Ocaña municipality, Norte de Santander department, in the undergrowth along a path students take to class, as reported by a local media outlet. Classes were suspended after workers discovered the devices.<sup>39</sup>
- On June 10, 2025, an IED detonated outside of a school in Cali city, Valle del Cauca department, as reported by a local media outlet. Students were in class at the time of the attack.<sup>40</sup>

## Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

GCPEA identified at least 129 reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel in the current reporting period. This represented a significant increase as compared to the previous reporting period, when 34 such incidents were identified in 2023 and 27 in 2022.<sup>41</sup>

In 2024, GCPEA collected approximately 33 reports of attacks on school students and education personnel.<sup>42</sup> For example:

- On January 13, 2024, an alleged armed group published a pamphlet threatening teachers living in the post-conflict zones in Caquetá department, including the municipalities of Puerto Rico, San Vicente del Caguán, Solita, Cartagena del Chairá, Solano, and Belén de los Andaquíes, according to COALICO.<sup>43</sup>
- On February 12, 2024, an alleged armed group opened fire on a vehicle transporting students to school in Piamonte municipality, Cauca department, according to UN monitoring and a local news outlet. The vehicle was clearly marked to designate its school-related purpose. One female student suffered injuries.<sup>44</sup>
- On June 9, 2024, an alleged armed group abducted two students at a school in El Tarra municipality, Catatumbo area, Norte de Santander department, before releasing them days later. Local media outlet *El Tiempo* reported that an armed group claimed responsibility for the incident.<sup>45</sup>

- On July 4, 2024, alleged armed group members abducted two students who were leaving school in Corinto municipality, Cauca department, as reported by a local news outlet.<sup>46</sup>
- On October 18, 2024, an alleged armed group made a collective threat to the teaching staff at a school during a video call with the rector, according to UN monitoring.<sup>47</sup>
- On October 21, 2024, an alleged armed group fired bullets at a police station in San Calixto municipality, Catatumbo area, Norte de Santander department, injuring a 12-year-old girl on her way to school, as reported by a local news outlet.<sup>48</sup>

GCPEA identified 96 attacks on school students and staff in 2025.<sup>49</sup> For example:

- On February 28, 2025, in Barrancabermeja, Santander department, police allegedly used force to disperse students and other protesters who had blocked a road in protest over the lack of school transportation in the municipality, allegedly injuring at least three students, as reported by ACLED and local media.<sup>50</sup>
- As reported on March 19, 2025, San Vicente del Caguan, Caquetá department, following a landslide, an anti-personnel mine was exposed next to a road used by students on their way to their educational institution, as reported by UN monitoring.<sup>51</sup>
- On April 5, 2025, in Victoria Baja village, Florencia municipality, Caquetá department, the military destroyed an improvised explosive device containing more than 40 kilograms of explosives and metal components and which had been planted on a road used by children to get to school, as reported by local media and UN monitoring.<sup>52</sup>
- Around May 29, 2025, forced confinements imposed by non-state armed groups were reported in the township of El Plateado and the rural communities of La Ceiba, El Pinche, Las Vegas, Pepina, and Balastrera in the municipality of Argelia, Cauca department, leading to the suspension of classes at the three educational institutions in the area, leaving 1,600 children and adolescents without access to education, in addition to the forced displacement of 15 teachers, according to UN monitoring.<sup>53</sup>
- On July 10, 2025, in the village of La Tarabita, in the municipality of Almaguer, Cauca department, a non-state armed group allegedly detonated an explosive device, injuring a girl who was on her way to school, as reported by local media and UN monitoring.<sup>54</sup> According to reports, the student suffered hearing loss and was injured by shrapnel from the explosion.

## Military use of schools and universities

GCPEA identified at least 107 reports of military use in the current reporting period. This represented a significant increase as compared to the previous reporting period, when 29 such incidents were identified in 2023 and 12 in 2022.<sup>55</sup>

In 2024, NRC reported 73 instances of military use and occupation of schools.<sup>56</sup> Separately, the UN reported that 35 schools were used by FARC-EP dissidents, unidentified perpetrators, Clan del Golfo, ELN, and Colombian armed forces, and that all were vacated.<sup>57</sup> Separately, GCPEA collected around four reports of military use.<sup>58</sup> However, to avoid double counting, the GCPEA incidents and UN count were not added to the NRC number of military use incidents, to avoid double counting.

Examples of military use identified by GCPEA:

- On February 15, 2024, an armed group used a school as protection while engaging the Colombian army in combat in a rural area of Planadas municipality, Tolima department, according to COALICO.<sup>59</sup>
- On May 26, 2024, an armed group allegedly used a school as a camp for treating wounded members in Remedios municipality, Antioquia department, following combat with another armed group, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>60</sup>
- On August 14, 2024, an armed group allegedly used a school as protection while engaging the Colombian army in combat in a rural area of Ataco municipality, Tolima department. At the time of military use, authorities had already evacuated students and staff from the school, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>61</sup>
- On September 20, 2024, an armed group and law enforcement allegedly used a school as protection while engaging in combat in a rural area of El Doncello municipality, Caquetá department. The school was damaged as a result of the fighting, according to UN monitoring.<sup>62</sup>

In 2025, GCPEA collected 34 reports of military use.<sup>63</sup> Examples of military use included:

- In Los Andes Sotomayor municipality, Nariño department, an alleged armed group used a school as a defensive position sometime before February 10, 2025, according to UN monitoring, Colombian military, and a local news outlet. The military found traces of blood, bullet holes, and damaged equipment inside the school, as well as six IEDs near the school, which they neutralized.<sup>64</sup>
- In Arenal municipality, Bolívar department, a school was occupied by state forces sometime before February 15, 2025, according to local civil society.<sup>65</sup>
- On March 13, 2025, an alleged armed group occupied a kindergarten in Fortul municipality, Arauca department, to carry out an attack on a military patrol, as reported by a local news outlet. Children were reportedly inside at the time.<sup>66</sup>

- On April 4, 2025, an alleged armed group occupied a school on the Floresta Alto Coqueto community reservation in Puerto Caicedo municipality, Putumayo department, after they stopped a school bus with students on board, according to UN monitoring.<sup>67</sup>
- On April 25, 2025, an alleged armed group used a school as a defensive position during armed clashes in Páez municipality, Cauca department, while students and teachers were present, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>68</sup>
- On November 12, 2025, an alleged armed group used a school as a defensive position in Yondó municipality, Antioquia department, as reported by a local coordination team.<sup>69</sup>

#### Child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school

GCPEA identified at least 13 reports of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school, in the current reporting period. This represented a slight decrease as compared to the previous reporting period, when eight such incidents were identified in both 2023 and 2022.<sup>70</sup>

In 2024, GCPEA identified reports of two cases of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school:

- On September 17, 2024, two female students were allegedly recruited at a secondary school in La Plata municipality, Huila department. One of the students had told her parents before the incident that she had been harassed about recruitment by members of armed groups, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>71</sup>
- A week later, on September 24, 2024, two female students were reportedly recruited from the same secondary school in La Plata municipality, Huila department, according to UN monitoring and a local media outlet.<sup>72</sup>

In 2025, GCPEA identified reports of 11 cases of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school.<sup>73</sup> Examples of child recruitment included:

In Apía municipality, Risaralda department, an alleged armed group recruited students with offers of money at a school sometime before May 13, 2025, according to UN monitoring and a local media outlet.<sup>74</sup>

In San Vicente Del Caguán municipality, Nariño department, an alleged armed group recruited students with offers of money at a school sometime before July 16, 2025, according to UN monitoring.<sup>75</sup>

## **Sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school or university**

GCPEA identified at least one report of sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school in the current reporting period.<sup>76</sup> In comparison, one such incident was identified in the previous reporting period.<sup>77</sup>

## **Attacks on higher education**

GCPEA identified at least one report of attacks on higher education in the current reporting period. This represented a decrease as compared to the previous reporting period, when 17 such incidents were identified in both 2023 and 2022.<sup>78</sup>

On October 30, 2025, UNDMO used tear gas to disperse students protesting at University of Atlántico against rector elections in Barranquilla city, Atlántico department, injuring 15 students, as reported by ACLED and local media.<sup>79</sup>