

Meeting Report and Recommendations

National consultation on IHL and Peace: *Children in Post-Conflict Contexts*

Paipa, Boyacá – October 2025

Context and framework

The National Consultation on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Peace: Children in Post-Conflict Contexts was held in Paipa, Boyacá, Colombia, on 29 and 30 October 2025, under the co-leadership of the Government of Colombia and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The consultation took place within the framework of the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law, under its IHL and Peace workstream. It contributed to the workstream's thematic focus on IHL in conflict-transition and post-hostilities contexts, examining how respect for IHL can support pathways to peace, reconciliation and social cohesion, with particular attention to children affected by armed conflict.

For the purposes of the consultation, the term “post-conflict contexts” was understood broadly to include transition and post-agreement settings in which armed violence may nevertheless persist, overlap or re-emerge.

Colombia's experience of peacebuilding, transitional justice and continuing armed violence provided an important national reference point for examining both the progress achieved and the persistent challenges involved in protecting and empowering children in transition contexts.

The substantive discussions were conducted under the Chatham House Rule, allowing participants to use the information received without attributing comments to individual speakers or their institutions.

The outcomes of the consultation informed the global reflections and the development of the final outcome document of the IHL and Peace workstream.

Objectives

The consultation pursued three principal objectives:

1. To recognise children and adolescents not only as victims of armed conflict, but also as rights-holders whose participation can contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding and reconstruction processes.
2. To assess reintegration and reparation approaches for children affected by armed conflict, identifying progress, persistent gaps and practices requiring further strengthening.
3. To examine the role of education in rebuilding the social fabric, supporting recovery and preventing renewed violence.

Participants

The consultation brought together representatives of Colombian government institutions, the judiciary, international organisations, civil society, humanitarian actors, academia and diplomatic missions.

A full list of participating institutions is provided at the end of this report.

Opening segment

The consultation was opened by Audrey Purcell-O'Dwyer of the ICRC, who recalled that the meeting formed part of the broader Global Initiative and its IHL and Peace workstream.

She emphasised the importance of moving beyond analysis towards actionable recommendations and invited participants to contribute concrete and operationally relevant proposals capable of informing national and global processes relating to conflict transitions and post-hostilities settings.

Keynote address

Ezequiel Heffes of UNICEF, New York, delivered the keynote address, framing the discussions around the relationship between IHL, the protection of children and peace.

The keynote highlighted:

- the scale of contemporary armed conflicts and their disproportionate impact on children, including recruitment, displacement, disruption of education and long-term psychosocial harm;
- the relevance of IHL as a framework for protecting human dignity and preserving conditions that may support sustainable peace, including during periods of transition between armed conflict and peace;
- the persistent gap between existing legal and policy frameworks for the protection of children and their effective implementation;
- the importance of moments of transition, including ceasefires, demobilisation processes and early recovery phases, as opportunities during which respect for IHL may contribute to trust-building and social cohesion; and
- the role of sustained humanitarian engagement and dialogue with parties to armed conflict in securing concrete protection outcomes for children, including their release, safe transfer and referral to appropriate child-protection services.

Thematic roundtables

Roundtable 1: Children and adolescents as agents of change

Focus

Ensuring the meaningful, safe and inclusive participation of children and adolescents during transitions from armed conflict to peace.

In this context, participation refers to the involvement of children and adolescents in community, educational and policy processes affecting their recovery, protection and reintegration, including through youth councils, school-based initiatives and consultation mechanisms linked to peacebuilding and transitional justice processes.

Key points raised

- Participants emphasised the importance of recognising children and adolescents as rights-holders with agency, rather than solely as victims of armed conflict. Their perspectives and experiences can contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding, recovery and the prevention of renewed violence.
- Participation should be inclusive, age-appropriate and context-sensitive, taking into account differences in age, gender, disability, ethnicity and territorial realities. These factors shape both the risks children face and the ways in which they can participate safely and meaningfully.
- Children affected by armed conflict include both children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups and children who have been indirectly affected by violence. Both groups may bring valuable perspectives to recovery and prevention processes.
- In some contexts, the denial by armed groups of the presence of children within their ranks, or of their association with those groups, can delay their release and restrict their access to protection and reintegration mechanisms.
- Participants noted the potential risks associated with children's participation, including stigmatisation, security threats, inappropriate judicial exposure and the instrumentalisation of children's voices.
- Participation must therefore be accompanied by appropriate safeguards, including confidentiality, informed consent, data protection, psychosocial support and referral to child-protection services.
- Participation can take place through community and educational spaces, including schools, municipal youth councils and local initiatives through which children and adolescents can express their views and contribute to peacebuilding and prevention efforts.
- Participants highlighted the value of documenting and sharing existing practices and experiences, including school-based initiatives, youth-engagement platforms and community activities, to support future peacebuilding and reintegration processes.

Roundtable 2: Reintegration and reparation of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups

Focus

Strengthening reintegration and reparation mechanisms in order to restore rights and dignity and reduce the risk of re-recruitment.

Key points raised

- Coordination gaps persist between child-protection systems, transitional justice mechanisms and other State actors, highlighting the need for clearer institutional responsibilities and stronger inter-institutional cooperation.
- Continuing and overlapping violence in some regions challenges assumptions of a stable post-conflict environment and increases the risk of recruitment and re-recruitment of children and adolescents.
- Reintegration is a long-term and non-linear process. Support should extend beyond the completion of individual programmes and, where necessary, into adulthood in order to promote sustainable social and economic inclusion.
- Responses should be multisectoral and adapted to territorial realities, including through culturally appropriate approaches for Indigenous and Afro-descendant children and communities.
- Participants emphasised that children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups should be recognised primarily as victims and supported through protection, rehabilitation and reintegration measures.
- Where accountability questions arise, responses should prioritise rehabilitative and restorative approaches and comply fully with applicable international law and juvenile justice standards.

Roundtable 3: The transformative role of education in peacebuilding

Focus

Education as a form of protection and as a pathway to recovery, reconciliation and the prevention of recruitment and renewed violence affecting children.

Key points raised

- Schools and routes to and from school require protection from the effects of armed conflict. Participants highlighted the importance of implementing the Safe Schools Declaration, including measures aimed at preventing the military use of schools and protecting continued access to education.
- Schools can serve as important community anchors during recovery, providing spaces in which children and families reconnect, access support services and contribute to rebuilding social cohesion after conflict.
- Colombia's national Cátedra de Paz, or Peace Education curriculum, provides an important foundation for promoting peaceful coexistence and non-violence. Participants nevertheless noted the need for more consistent implementation and adaptation to different regional and cultural contexts.

- Teachers play a critical role in supporting children affected by armed conflict. Strengthening their safety, well-being and training, including in psychosocial support and conflict-sensitive education, was identified as essential.
- Inclusive education policies are necessary to ensure that displaced children, children with disabilities and children belonging to ethnic minorities can access education in safe and supportive learning environments.
- Restoring and strengthening access to education can play an important role in preventing recruitment and supporting long-term recovery by providing children with stability, opportunities and a sense of normality.

Consolidated recommendations

The following recommendations reflect the principal proposals emerging from the consultation. They do not necessarily represent formally negotiated or unanimously endorsed positions of all participating institutions.

Participation of children and adolescents in transitions from war to peace

- Adopt a national framework for the participation of children and adolescents in peace and transition processes, grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other applicable international standards, and informed by relevant IHL protections.
- Define minimum standards concerning safeguarding, inclusion, age-appropriate participation, informed consent, confidentiality, data protection, referral to appropriate child-protection services and psychosocial support.
- Institutionalise participation channels linking municipal youth councils, school governance bodies and child-protection committees with national peacebuilding and transitional justice mechanisms.
- Establish clear feedback mechanisms so that children and adolescents are informed of how their views have been considered by relevant decision-makers.
- Train mediators, negotiators, public officials and local authorities on safe, age-appropriate and trauma-sensitive engagement with children, including do-no-harm communication practices.
- Protect participating children and adolescents from harm, retaliation and stigmatisation through confidentiality measures, informed consent procedures, safe logistical arrangements and community-based safeguarding mechanisms.
- Support youth-led initiatives promoting peaceful alternatives and discouraging recruitment into armed violence, including through arts, sport, digital media and civic engagement.
- Link youth-led initiatives, where appropriate, to education, vocational training and livelihood opportunities.

- Use humanitarian commitments, including special agreements or relevant clauses in peace or ceasefire arrangements, to support the cessation of the recruitment and use of children, their release and safe transfer to civilian child-protection authorities, and the protection of schools and routes to and from school.
- Create and maintain a repository of tested methodologies, good practices and lessons learned on the participation of children and adolescents, drawing on national and international experience.

Reintegration and reparation

- Adopt a unified national framework for the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, harmonising standards, responsibilities and referral mechanisms across relevant institutions.
- Ground reintegration policies in applicable IHL, international child-rights law and other relevant international standards.
- Prioritise protective, rehabilitative and restorative approaches, recognising children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups primarily as victims.
- Ensure that any accountability measures concerning children comply fully with applicable international law and juvenile justice standards and are consistent with the child's best interests, dignity and prospects for reintegration.
- Strengthen and operationalise procedures applicable when security forces encounter children during military or law-enforcement operations, including procedures for immediate protection, family tracing and prompt transfer to civilian child-protection authorities.
- Support the implementation of such procedures through systematic training and appropriate operational guidance.
- Establish territorial reintegration hubs or integrated service packages combining psychosocial support, reintegration into education, vocational pathways, protection follow-up and community reconciliation.
- Ensure continuity of support beyond the age of 18 where necessary, in order to prevent abrupt termination of services and reduce the risk of re-recruitment.
- Integrate gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate measures into reintegration and reparation policies, including measures responsive to the circumstances of Indigenous and Afro-descendant children and communities.
- Design such measures in consultation with affected children, families and communities, where safe and appropriate.
- Strengthen coordination between transitional justice mechanisms and child-protection authorities so that protective, reparative and judicial responses concerning children are coherent and mutually reinforcing.
- Incorporate child-specific measures into collective reparation programmes, including educational support, psychosocial care, community healing and memorialisation initiatives.

- Ensure the meaningful and safe participation of children and adolescents in the design and implementation of reparation measures, where appropriate.
- Establish community-based monitoring and early-warning mechanisms linking schools, family-defence authorities, local councils, community representatives and civil society organisations in order to identify and respond to risks of recruitment and re-recruitment.

Education as a pathway to peace

- Operationalise the Safe Schools Declaration through clear national and inter-agency protocols, dissemination within the armed forces, police and other relevant institutions, and measurable implementation indicators.
- Reinforce the civilian character of education by including appropriate provisions on the protection of education in peace processes, ceasefire arrangements and humanitarian dialogue.
- Rehabilitate and reconstruct educational infrastructure damaged or destroyed during armed conflict as part of recovery and, where appropriate, reparation measures.
- Ensure that reconstruction processes include community consultation, inclusive design and symbolic recognition of harm where relevant.
- Strengthen measures for the protection, well-being and retention of teachers working in conflict-affected areas.
- Provide teachers with relevant training, including in psychosocial first aid, conflict-sensitive pedagogy, child safeguarding and referral pathways.
- Strengthen the implementation of the Cátedra de Paz through locally adapted, experiential and intercultural approaches.
- Ensure that peace education reflects the realities and experiences of conflict-affected communities and contributes to peaceful coexistence, dialogue and the prevention of renewed violence.
- Promote inclusive access to education for displaced children, children with disabilities and children belonging to Indigenous, Afro-descendant and other minority communities.
- Integrate education into early recovery, reintegration and reparation policies as a central measure for restoring stability, supporting children's development and reducing the risk of recruitment and re-recruitment.

Participating institutions

- Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
- Consejería Comisionada para la Paz
- Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz

- Consejería Presidencial para los Derechos Humanos y el Derecho Internacional Humanitario
- Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar
- Corte Constitucional de Colombia
- Save the Children Colombia
- Coalición contra la vinculación de niños, niñas y jóvenes al conflicto armado en Colombia
- Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz de la Organización de los Estados Americanos
- UNICEF New York
- UNICEF Colombia
- Cruz Roja Colombiana
- Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de las Recomendaciones de la Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad
- Embassy of Sweden
- Embassy of Switzerland
- International Committee of the Red Cross