

Editorial

Education and armed conflict: consequences on the population of children and adolescents in Colombia

Jaime Eduardo Gómez Díaz*, Fredy Quiroz Guzmán**, Sandra Ortegón Ávila***, Yosimar Rojas Torres****

Forma de citar este artículo en APA:

Gómez-Díaz, J. E., Quiroz-Guzmán, F., Ortegón-Ávila, S., & Rojas-Torres, Y. (2022). Education and armed conflict: consequences on the population of children and adolescents in Colombia [Editorial]. *Revista Colombiana de Ciencias Sociales*, 13(2), 449-453. <https://doi.org/10.21501/22161201.4318>

Dear Editor:

Throughout history, the right to education has been a determining and unquestionably necessary factor for the improvement of people; however, as a socio-political process, it has not been free of adversities. In this sense, for more than six decades, Colombia has lived in the context of an internal armed conflict. Thousands of men, women, and children of different ages and cultural origins have seen their right to access to education restricted since -in order to flee from the violence that threatens their lives- they have had to leave the schools where they usually developed their educational process (Castiblanco-Castro, 2020).

Under the above, it is correct to state that the aftermath of an armed conflict is not only manifested by death on the battlefield; there are other consequences or forms of expression of violence that affect people's welfare and quality of life. Thus, armed actors use different ways to achieve their objective, ranging from confrontations, the interruption or manipulation of educational services, to the use of schools as military targets or trenches (Cortés-Salcedo et al., 2016).

* M.Sc en Salud pública. Institución Educativa los Morales, Tierralta-Córdoba. Contacto: eduardogomezdiaz@hotmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1988-5991>

** M.Sc en enseñanza de las matemáticas, candidato a Doctor en Ciencias de la educación. Institución Educativa Campobello, Tierralta-Córdoba. Contacto: fquiroz2190@gmail.com, Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=_9raYHMAAAAJ&hl=es, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3973-6504>

*** M.Sc en Desarrollo educativo y social, candidato a Doctor en Ciencias de la educación. Universidad de los Llanos, Villavicencio-Meta. Contacto: sortegon@unillanos.edu.co, Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.es/citations?hl=es&pli=1&user=10_IszwAAAAJ, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3108-6260>

**** M.Sc en Gestión de la tecnología educativa, candidato a Doctor en Ciencias de la educación. Institución Educativa San José, Ovejas-Sucre. Contacto: yosimarrojasstorres@hotmail.com, Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=blluunYAAAAJ&hl=es>, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4857-1112>

As expected, such actions fall mainly on school-age children and adolescents robbed of the opportunity to enjoy the fulfillment of their rights. Likewise, children witness how their ability to overcome poverty, the possibility of moving up in society, and their ability to obtain a better income are significantly diminished.

It is estimated that in Colombia, there are more than 5 million people displaced from their territories due to the internal conflict, and approximately 48% of this displaced population are children and young people who continue to live in areas where the conflict persists. In several country regions, more than 30% of the out-of-school population are displaced children and young people. Many of them lose interest in education and think that going back to school is not essential for their future. In addition, many of these children are forcibly recruited by illegal armed groups and end up as instruments of war.

In a context in which the parents of these children are displaced by violence and lack employment, it is the children and teenagers who generally work to meet their own basic needs and economically support their families. For these children, studying and working simultaneously is not a feasible option, and education often does not take into account the context and culture from which they come (Pitre-Redondo et al., 2022). On the other hand, those who remain in conflict zones sometimes find an alternative to get money, food, and protection in illegal armed groups and end up involved in illicit activities (Alarcón- Palacio, 2019).

Some indicators reveal that illegal groups such as FARC, AUC, and ELN have recruited at least 4,737 minors into their ranks who have had to interrupt their school process. For its part, the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF for its acronym in Spanish) reported that between 1999 and 2015, it attended to 5,850 minors who were victims of the same crime. However, it should be clarified that not only the war has been the cause of the absence of Colombian children in schools; the gap between children and young people living in the city and those living in the countryside is one of the main structural problems (Gómez, 2017).

War and forced displacement in the country are reconfiguring the cultural geography and social dynamics, with indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations being the most affected (Cano-López & Lozano Mayo, 2021). The cultural uprooting to which these populations are subjected accelerates the loss of ancestral knowledge, and children and young people are forced to deal at school with the rejection produced by the imaginaries and representations constructed by their displaced status. In this sense, children are sometimes labeled as “weirdos”, “those with a different language,” or “the displaced ones”, which increases the emotional and psychological burden of being forced to leave their homes (Alban Achinte, 2012).

Undoubtedly, the Ministry of National Education and other governmental and non-governmental humanitarian aid organizations have made efforts to address the educational problems caused by the violence, expanding coverage, improving infrastructure, and stimulating the quality of service in those areas of the country considered vulnerable. However, teachers working in areas that have suffered the ravages of war, we observe with caution how the country is going through a process of “peace consolidation” and the beginning of the “post-conflict” since we are witnesses of how the illegal groups still control certain territories and exert their influence over the communities.

Likewise, regarding the work published by Mosquera Mosquera and Rodríguez Lozano (2020) in volume 11, number 1 of the *Revista Colombiana de Ciencias Sociales* on armed conflict and school, we agree with the authors in the sense that the Colombian state must redouble its efforts to promote memory policies in the educational context in order to create peace awareness in students. However, in a country where illegal armed groups still threaten teaching practice and where talking about peace becomes a risky activity, questioning the school or the educational community for not creating spaces to address the issue—as the authors do in another part of the document—is not the most pertinent thing to do.

With this in mind, we suggest that the authors evaluate the difficulties or restrictions that teachers working in “post-conflict” areas have to speak freely about peace and the social determinants that perpetuate war: drug trafficking, corruption, and forced displacement (Alexander-Monroy et al., 2021; Cortés-Salcedo et al., 2016). Although the absence of remembrance policies in the Colombian educational context increases the historical debt with the student population, it is necessary to consider that teachers’ fear of reprisals is a determining factor that does little to help in the materialization and implementation of such policies. The lack of spaces in the school for open dialogue on peace issues should not be seen as a lack of will in the educational community; probably, in some cases, it is a matter of survival.

Education and peace are interrelated and interdependent realities in the lives of children in our country. Both have diverse meanings and implications in both the individual and collective fields, and both are tasks always under construction (Barrios Andrade, 2021). Concerning the above, we consider that peace and education will only be achieved to the extent that priority is given to the conflict’s structural causes, which are closely linked to security and human development. In this sense, we urge the Colombian state to increase efforts to guarantee equity, health, life expectancy, and education for the children and adolescents of the country in order to be able to talk about and build true peace.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with any commercial institution or association.

References

- Alarcón-Palacio, Y. E. (2019). Reclutamiento forzado de niños y niñas (abduction) en el conflicto armado colombiano: los menores de 18 años como víctimas con protección especial reforzada en el DIH y DIDH. *Vniversitas*, (138). <https://doi.org/10.11144/javeriana.vj138.rfnn>
- Alban Achinte, A. (2012). La educación intercultural ante el desplazamiento forzado: ¿Posibilidad o quimera? *Contextos*, 1(1), 55–66.
- Alexander-Monroy, J., Pineda-Patrón, J. M., Betancur-Giraldo, H., & Olivera-Paniagua, D. (2021). Experiencias pedagógicas para la memoria histórica y la construcción de la paz. Repensando la escuela rural en medio del conflicto armado colombiano. *Encuentros*, 19(2), 74–90. <http://ojs.uac.edu.co/index.php/encuentros/article/view/2707/2432>
- Barrios Andrade, D. (2021). Educación para la paz: una reflexión desde Tomás de Aquino. *Educación y Educadores*, 24(2), 181–196. <https://doi.org/10.5294/edu.2021.24.2.1>
- Cano-López, W. A., & Lozano Mayo, L. A. (2021). Comunidades étnicas y conflicto armado: algunas dificultades para la gobernabilidad en territorios de comunidades negras e indígenas en Riosucio-Chocó, Colombia. *Revista Colombiana de Ciencias Sociales*, 12(2), 846–869. <https://doi.org/10.21501/22161201.3537>
- Castiblanco-Castro, C. A. (2020). Efectos del desplazamiento forzado sobre el acceso a la educación en Colombia. *Revista de Investigación, Desarrollo e Innovación*, 10(2), 297–310. <https://doi.org/10.19053/20278306.v10.n2.2020.10214>
- Cortés-Salcedo, A., Pérez, T. H., & Guerra, L. F. (2016). La escuela colombiana: entre la nuda vida y la biopotencia. *Revista Colombiana de Educación*, 1(71), 383–397. <https://doi.org/10.17227/01203916.71rce383.397>

Gómez, M. (2017). El primer día de la niñez después de la guerra. *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Niñez y Juventud*, 15(2), 1382–1385.

Mosquera Mosquera, C. E., & Rodríguez Lozano, M. N. (2020). Políticas de memoria en la escuela. El caso de Colombia frente a su conflicto armado. *Revista Colombiana de Ciencias Sociales*, 11(1), 267–286. <https://doi.org/10.21501/22161201.2770>

Pitre-Redondo, R., Chiquillo-Rodelo, J., & Hernández-Palma H. (2022). Maltrato infantil en el marco del conflicto armado en Colombia. *Encuentros*, 20, 94–104. <https://doi.org/10.15665/encuen.v20i01.981>