



BULLETIN

2

OBSERVATORY of CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat

Opportunities, challenges and difficulties in public policies to prevent the recruitment, use and sexual violence against children and adolescents by illegal armed groups and organized criminal groups: **Lessons learned**

CONPES 3673 of 2010 is an effort by the Colombian State to prevent the recruitment and use of children and adolescents, based on an approach that comprehensively protects their rights as established in the Code of Infancy and Adolescence. This policy document includes an action plan for 21 national agencies that establishes concrete actions.

Now three years after its creation, this **two bulletin series** assesses the progress made in implementation of planned activities. Beginning with initiation of the policy and continuing through recent implementation efforts, the bulletins contextualize reports from national agencies on the actions taken to address risk factors, vulnerabilities and conditions related to recruitment, use and sexual violence against children and adolescents. These bulletins aim to identify successes and challenges for policy and to support the adoption of new prevention guidelines and strategies.

This first bulletin in the series aims to support a strategic commitment to inter-institutional coordination and the creation of mechanisms to report, facilitate and promote cooperation. The bulletin assesses beneficiary populations and describes collaboration and networking that has been achieved throughout implementation of CONPES 3673. The bulletin also reviews the legal momentum developed by CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat to address specific cases of recruitment, use and sexual violence. Finally, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) presents ways to manage coordination and support local-level policy implementation.

This is an English summary of a bulletin produced by the Observatory of CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat.

Since 2001, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has been implementing its Disengaged Child Soldiers and Youth at Risk of Recruitment Program (CHS). This program is aimed at strengthen the capacity of the Government of Colombia to assist child and adolescent victims of recruitment by illegal armed groups, through institutional strengthening for the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF), and to prevent their recruitment in the context of the armed conflict, through institutional strengthening for the Inter-sectoral Commission on the Prevention of Recruitment, Use and Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents (CIPRUNA). As part of these efforts, the program has supported the creation and strengthening of the Observatory of CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of recruitment and use of children and adolescents in Colombia has been characterized by a multiplicity of interrelated risk factors and variables. In this regard, populations have been affected in different ways, including physical, emotional and social consequences for children and adolescents. The issue of recruitment and use of children and adolescents has been addressed in academic papers, investigations, judicial sentences, policy papers and thematic papers. These documents were used in the initial development of CONPES 3673 of 2010, to examine and analyze issues and risk factors related to recruitment and to establish prevention policy objectives.

The definition of objectives enabled the identification of strategic commitments to “prevent the recruitment and use of children and adolescents by illegal armed groups and organized criminal groups, guarantee the prevalence and effective enjoyment of rights and ensure comprehensive protection by families, society and the State.” This involved a prioritization of institutional action concerning children and adolescents, educational institutions and families, using institutional coordination as a guiding principle and advancing legal cases as a mechanism to ensure prevention.

For the Observatory of CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat, review of the strategic commitments indicated above serves as a prelude to the subsequent evaluation of prevention policies, aimed at identifying lessons learned and opportunities as inputs into the creation of a new policy instrument for recruitment prevention.



BENEFICIARIES

In general, in the development of comprehensive protection policies for children and adolescents, it is considered that actions should be directed solely at children and adolescents. From the perspective of the Childhood and Adolescence Code and CONPES 3673, it is true that participative spaces should be generated for children and adolescents. In addition, however, mechanisms should be developed that delve into the perspective of co-responsibility of the family, society and State to care for, assist and protect children and adolescents.

Monitoring implementation of CONPES 3673 during 2013 resulting in the identification of the strategies implemented by each participating institution and a characterization of beneficiary groups and factors associated with the development of obligations towards children and adolescents. The results also show approaches taken to construct levels of co-responsibility within each institution. The identification of these elements helps to establish the strategic direction and challenges to action.

The majority of activities reported during 2013 were directed toward adolescents (34%), while only 6% were directed toward early childhood populations. The choice of target population could be based in part on each institution's mission, as well as on the identification and targeting of “specific at-risk groups.” Other groups were also targeted by the assessed strategies: 23% of activities were directed towards the family, and 13% towards educational institutions. This is evidence of an increasing focus on co-responsibility and strengthening protective environments for children and adolescents.

COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING

The approaches taken to implement prevention policies in 2013 enabled the emergence of various levels of interaction between institutions, demonstrating the need to identify the precise way in which inter-institutional coordination is initiated as a mechanism to support prevention efforts.

Concepts of “social network” and “network practice” are useful in assessing how opportunities for inter-institutional coordination emerged, and how such coordination can be strengthened and sustained in order to support inter-institutional efforts to consolidate protective environments.

The monitoring and evaluation activities carried out by CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat enabled the creation of a network map that shows the coordination carried out in 2013, based on surveys collected from each institution. The map illustrates the level of coordination carried out by each institution, based on the number of other institutions that each one coordinated with.

Analysis of this network map reveals that coordination took the form of an “open social network,” characterized by interactions between institutions (nodes) based on a reciprocal exchange of social support around the issue of prevention. This interaction between institutions enabled the creation of mutually supportive conversations and behaviors. It is clear that some institutions created connections with other institutions in order to: (a) establish agreements for the implementation of joint actions; (b) create spaces for exchanging information; (c) combine resources; (d) jointly identify the course of action (creation of protocols, plans, and other documents); and (e) develop prevention projects, actions and/or strategies beyond the Action Plan established in CONPES 3673, among others.

The map illustrates how it is possible to construct joint actions to prevent recruitment. It shows how there is greater potential for coordination when one of the institutions has a mission to promote inter-institutional coordination, as for example CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat. The network is also strengthened when institutions have strong links with other institutions, as for example the Presidential Program for Human Rights, the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF), the Unit for Assistance and Comprehensive Reparations for Victims (UARIV), the Administrative Unit for Territorial Consolidation (UACT) and the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR), all of which have connections with three to five other institutions. However, the map also reveals the existence of institutions with lower levels of interaction.

Although there are evident patterns of coordination, there is a need to strengthen inter-institutional coordination and dialogue. Joint and coordinated action has likely been strengthened through years of policy implementation. However, it is necessary to better analyze the way that this coordination develops, the type of coordination that currently exists, and the ideal type of relationship that favors. This will support the development of a new policy document, which puts special emphasis on the need to generate, strengthen and ensure sustainability of inter-institutional coordination at national, regional and local levels.

CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING JUSTICE

The prevention of the recruitment and use of children and adolescents faces major challenges within the realm of justice, since actions taken in relation to justice have an impact on the guarantee of non-repetition of violence acts. Connecting institutions involved in reporting cases and institutions that work to address recruitment risks and providing assistance to those affected supports this approach.

For CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat, expediting judicial cases has become a major component of its work. During 2013, the Secretariat developed this component, which seeks to support reporting, investigation and prosecution of recruitment, use and sexual violence against children and adolescents in the context of the armed conflict, as a prevention mechanism. The aim is to support a contextual study of the crime that enables identification of all those involved and discourage others from engaging in such practices.

The Secretariat provides information to the Attorney General's Office based on sources that includes: (a) Risk analyses and monitoring reports from the Early Alert System (SAT) of the Ombudsman's Office, (b) Information collected by regional advisors present at the local-level who are on the CIPRUNA Technical Secretariat team, (c) Information provided by the regional focal points of CIPRUNA's participating institutions, (d) Information obtained through the development of local service coordination activities, and (e) media monitoring (press, television and radio).

Currently, CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat has expedited and referred 142 cases. These actions, together with the core activities of the Public Ministry, the Attorney General's Office, the Victims Unit and the Center for Historical Memory, promotes the fulfillment of the State's responsibility to promote comprehensive protection (through truth, comprehensive reparations and guarantees of non-repetition) and encourage the sanctioning of those who perpetuate, facilitate or conceal these crimes and the right of the victims to reparations.



IOM: THE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION PERSPECTIVE

Institutional Strengthening

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), with the financial and technical support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has developed, consolidated and strengthened strategic partnerships with various institutions participating in CIPRUNA. These partnerships have focused on promoting the coordination of prevention policies between the national and local levels, based on the targeting of high-risk municipalities identified by CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat.

The objective of inter-institutional partnership is to coordinate and align actions between the national and local level to strengthen the implementation of prevention policies. In this context, and with the active participation of local institutions, IOM aims to accomplish the following:

- Contribute to the deepening and strengthening of governance, promoting planning processes for the development of prevention policies.
- Design and construct, in a participative way, comprehensive local prevention plans for the 43 municipalities targeted by IOM. These plans take into account: (a) municipal development plans, (b) the local, regional and national services available, and (c) the identification of the prevention routes that are applicable to the local context.
- Implement in each municipality a pilot application of the Vulnerability, Risk and Opportunity Mapping (MVRO) methodology, with the participation of children, adolescents, youth, families and institutions.
- Develop a pilot verification of the rights of children and adolescents, with the aim of promoting and recommending processes for access to quality rights.
- Raise awareness and mobilize society through recruitment prevention campaigns with a differential approach.

The program targets 8,000 children and adolescents, 1,600 families, 200 public servants and approximately 120 adults who participate as facilitators in the implementation of the MVRO methodology.

The guiding principle of IOM in the context of recruitment prevention policies is to contribute to the sustainable building of local government capacities and the strengthening of social capital of local communities. This effort is only possible through joint and coordinated actions from regional and national levels toward the municipalities that face unresolved humanitarian crises, given the effects of the armed conflict on the population, particularly children, adolescents and their families.

IOM has been working to improve local-level implementation of national policies through programs such as: (1) the "Welfare for New Ethnic Generations" programs developed with the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF); (2) a project to promote family resilience and the strengthening of family bonds beginning in early childhood, as a strategy to prevent forced recruitment, with the Ministry of Education and others; (3) a consolidation strategy in the context of the Prosperity in Border Areas Plan together with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, particularly the project "Support for community stabilization through the improvement of education in border areas."

Together with the Inspector General's Office, IOM and USAID are currently supporting the creation of a "preventive surveillance model for the protection of the rights of children and adolescents in priority regions

affected by the Colombian armed conflict," which will be extremely useful not only for the established objectives but also for institutional prevention efforts.

From the perspective of indigenous and afro-Colombian groups, prevention policies should be based on the recognition of the dignity, worldview, autonomy, governance and identity of each group, based on the fundamental rights established in the Constitution, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Law 1098 of 2006, Law 1448 of 2011, the jurisprudence generated by the Constitutional Court and, in particular, on each group's own legal framework. The best way to strengthen indigenous and afro-Colombian communities is to promote participative and inter-cultural spaces in which to coordinate the adaptation and modification of policies to the local social, cultural, and political context of these communities.

Findings and Progress Made

- The program is targeting 8,000 children and adolescents and 1,600 families through the application of the MVRO methodology in 43 educational institutions. A verification of rights process is being carried out for 200 children and adolescents in each municipality. The aim is to establish how to guarantee rights to education, health, participation, a family, to not work, to good treatment and to a safe environment, as well as the quality of rights, access to rights and established procedures for guaranteeing rights.
- Mayors and local authorities recognize the phenomenon of recruitment and use of children and adolescents in their municipality, although they don't give sufficient importance and priority to the issue in prevention and protection policies.
- Children and adolescents in Dibulla and Riohacha (north-eastern department of Guajira) continue to be targeted by criminal groups. In August 2013, a teacher reported that two children had disappeared.
- In many cases, children and adolescents have parents who are involved in some way with criminal groups, especially with micro-trafficking.
- The family, pivotal for ensuring the rights of children and adolescents and for transferring cultural practices, has become a risk factor in part through generational experiences of poverty, violence, exclusion and a lack of knowledge of the life cycle of their children.
- A high incidence of violence within the family was observed in the 43 target municipalities.
- More than 70% of the educational institutions involved in the project face difficult and complex situations, due to factors that include: lack of technological resources, little use of teaching resources, low quality of school infrastructure, no food provided to students, presence of local gangs and drug dealers that target school areas, and few opportunities for use of free time for children and adolescents.
- Bullying in schools often arises from an early age as children and adolescents reproduce in the classroom what they learn from their family and receive as "values" from society. In the MVRO, for example, it was observed that the dreams and life goals of children and adolescents often align with trades that their parents pursue, such as easy money, motorcycles, or gang leaders, and rarely do children dream of becoming professors or policemen.

Difficulties

- Except in some municipalities, the great majority of local authorities continue to demonstrate relative apathy and lack of knowledge regarding the theme of recruitment and use of children and adolescents.
- There are very few public servants that have knowledge of the prevention policies and the process of constructing and consolidating those policies led by CIPRUNA.
- The recent agrarian strike made it difficult to carry out program activities in various municipalities: in Antioquia, in the subregion of Ituango; in Cauca, in the municipalities of Miranda and Caloto; and in border areas in Narino, particularly in the areas of the Pastos indigenous groups.
- In some cases the coordination with various actors, especially regarding construction and consolidation of a local prevention plan, took more time than was foreseen for three main reasons: (1) In some cases they were not aware of CONPES 3673 and therefore the three prevention routes it establishes, (2) Recruitment is not seen as a priority in the municipality, and (3) Lack of knowledge of how to address and prevent recruitment.

Conclusions

- During 2013, in the context of this program supporting the local-level implementation of prevention policies, an opportunity arose to initiate inter-institutional dialogue with local authorities, who participated in a meeting held in the city of Bogota. The event launched the official strategy for institutional strengthening of prevention policies, led by the Office of the Vice President.
- The local-level activities helped to provide greater visibility for prevention policies and provided a role for regional advisors of CIPRUNA's Technical Secretariat.

Despite the apathy and lack of knowledge on prevention policies, local authorities and institutions have demonstrated a proactive, open and flexible attitude towards learning and, above all, towards recognizing the importance of instruments for preventing all forms of violence against children and adolescents, in particular their forced recruitment and use by illegal armed groups.

