

The Child Rights-Based Approach of the Colombian Truth Commission Case study







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Acronyms

AUC United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia

CEV Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition Commission

ELN National Liberation Army

FARC-EP Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia — People's Army

JEP Special Jurisdiction for Peace

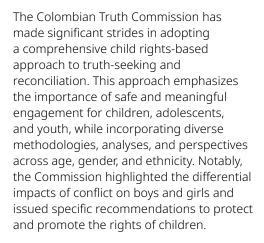
SIVJRNR Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition

UBPD Unit for the Search for Missing Persons

Foreword

Children's Rights at the Core of the Colombian Truth Commission

Tanya Chapuisat, UNICEF Colombia Representative



These efforts have set a benchmark for good practices that can inspire other countries and partners engaged in truth-seeking, transitional justice, and peace-building initiatives. By prioritizing the unique experiences of children in armed conflict situations and advocating for their rights, the Commission demonstrated its commitment to fostering a more peaceful and inclusive society.

This report documents the child rightsbased approach adopted by the Colombian



Truth Commission, its long-term "Legacy" following the completion of its mandate, and highlights UNICEF's contributions. The aim of this report is to provide concrete and valuable insights to practitioners engaged in the implementation of similar initiatives.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Federal Foreign Office of Germany for its unwavering support in promoting the child rights-based approach in the "Legacy" of the Truth Commission in Colombia. Its commitment has been pivotal in ensuring that the Truth Commission's work continues to inspire and guide efforts towards truth, justice and reconciliation.

As we reflect on the achievements of the Colombian Truth Commission, we are reminded of the critical role of children, adolescents, and youth in the broader context of transitional justice and peace building. The lessons learned and practices developed by the Truth Commission and its partners will undoubtedly serve as a guiding light for future endeavors in this vital field.

Executive Summary

This report documents the child rights-based approach of the Colombian Truth Commission (2017–2022), its long-term "Legacy" (2022–2023) after the mandate concluded, and UNICEF's contributions to this transitional justice effort. The goal of this report is to provide insights to those working in the child rights space to effectively implement, operationalize, and monitor a child rights-based approach to truth commissions.

Background

The peace agreement signed in 2016 between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) created the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repetition, which comprises Colombia's Truth Commission among other transitional justice entities. The Truth Commission operated between 2017 and 2022 and was a national autonomous public entity whose mission was to seek the truth of occurrences in the context of the internal armed conflict. More specifically, to shed light on the violations committed therein, to offer society a broad explanation of the complexity of the conflict and an account that includes all voices. The Commission promoted the recognition of victims' right to the truth, and the voluntary recognition of the individual and collective responsibilities of those who directly or indirectly participated in the conflict.

It also promoted coexistence in the territories, with non-repetition of violence and conflict as the ultimate goal.1 Based on its inclusive mandate, the Truth Commission adopted different cross-cutting approaches, including ethnic-, gender-, elderly persons-, disability-, girls and boys-, psychosocial-, and cultural/ arts-based approaches. Operationalizing the Commission's child rights-based approach was enabled through the timely creation of a dedicated unit,² which developed internal guidance and methodologies, and set up a technical committee on children. The Truth Commission produced a final report containing 11 separate volumes, including a dedicated volume on children. The final report and complementary outputs of the Truth Commission, including audiovisual, nontextual, and digitized files, are considered public property, and hosted on a website referred to as Transmedia.

^{1.} CEV, JEP and UBPD, 2019, Colombia's Comprehensive System of Truth Justice Reparation and Non-Repetition (2019) 2. Children are understood as persons under the age of 18 years of age.

^{3.} Truth Commission, Final Report, Children's Volume, p.29.

The child rights-based approach of the Colombian Truth Commission

The investigative process to establish the truth about what happened to children during the armed conflict involved different modalities of active listening and participatory engagement geared towards "healing." The Colombian Truth Commission enabled multiple entrypoints for the safe and meaningful participation of children through the development of child-friendly methodologies, pedagogical tools, and artistic products, and advanced a process of listening and dialogue.

In total, the Truth Commission collected direct testimonies from 45 children, engaged with 605 children, adolescents and youth through (collective) listening exercises and captured insights from 1,217 adults who made references to conflict-related impacts and victimization during their childhoods. In total, the Truth Commission recorded 4,315 acts of violence experienced in childhood or adolescence³ and identified the following overall patterns of violence against children through additional database analysis: 64,084 homicides (1985-2018), 28,192 forced disappearances (1985-2016), 6,496 kidnappings (1990-2018), 16,238 recruitments (1990-2017), and 3,049,527 forced displacements

(1985–2019). The dedicated volume on children in the Truth Commission's final report highlighted the differential impacts of the conflict on children, including varying expressions of absence and orphanhood, experiences of forced displacement, the realities of the armed conflict in schools and their environment, and the recruitment and use of children and adolescents by armed actors.

The Commission's truth-seeking efforts also captured the coping and resistance strategies of children and adolescents. Together with the final report's volumes on ethnicity and gender, a compelling pattern of violence against children in all their diversity is captured. This includes collective harm to Indigenous and Afro-descendant groups, sexual violence against girls and boys, and the differential gendered coping mechanisms undertaken by children affected by the conflict.

In addition to the recommendations in the dedicated volume on children, out of the 67 overarching recommendations the Truth Commission presented to the country, nine are classified as child-focused and address cultural transformation, education, peacebuilding, and reparation for victims, among others.

The post-mandate legacy of the Truth Commission

One year before presenting its final report, the Truth Commission began to strategize about "the time after" the end of its formal mandate. As a result, the "Legacy" of the Truth Commission was born to ensure the processes, testimonies, impact, and recommendations emerging

from the Commission's work will carry on in perpetuity and be accessible to all.

Rooted in the idea that a written final report would need complementary strategies and formats to reach diverse audiences, the Legacy is housed on the Transmedia Archive Platform which is a storytelling platform that comprises a vast collection of more than 200,000 files, including audiovisual, non-textual knowledge, and digitized documents about the Colombian armed conflict and peace process. The child rights-based approach, as well as children's voices, are mainstreamed across different tabs of the transmedia platform.

The Truth Commission worked hand in hand with nearly 3,000 partners to fulfill its mandate, out of which 1,035 specifically supported on the implementation of cross-cutting approaches, such as age, gender, and

ethnicity. Many of these allies and partners, including child-rights and youthled organizations, moved on to become "legatarios y legatarias." These individuals and organizations are committed change agents who continue to work in networks and campaigns to disseminate the findings and recommendations of the Truth Commission, and they continue to demand accountability of duty-bearers, including the formal Monitoring Committee in charge of following up on the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth Commission.

Added value of UNICEF

In line with its dual mandate to provide both humanitarian assistance and development support and its child rights. life cycle-based and intergenerational approach, UNICEF was and remains well positioned to comprehensively support the Truth Commission's work. UNICEF is consistently referred to as a key trusted partner who accompanied the Truth Commission from the very early phases and continues to be engaged in operationalizing its Legacy and transitional justice efforts. The added value of UNICEF's contribution is highlighted in its capacity to contribute to political will, provide expert technical advisory on children's rights, investigations, safe participation, and flexible resourcing, and support for the publication of the dedicated children's volume in the final report.

After the formal end of the mandate, UNICEF provided innovative child-friendly content dissemination strategies to inform and create awareness among children and youth on the causes and consequences of armed conflict, and the ways forward in peacebuilding. This included the development of a

50-page child-friendly summary of the dedicated children's volume of the Truth Commission's final report, and the production of mini-documentaries and audio testimonies on the impact of armed conflict on children, available on the transmedia platform. Other dissemination efforts included the organization of an arts contest inviting children and youth to imagine a reconciled Colombia, a child-friendly toolkit for tour guides of the Truth Commission's exhibit at the Centre of Memory, Peace, and Reconciliation, and the development of an interactive video where players follow teenagers in a backward time travel to discover the stories of children. families, and communities victimized by armed conflict in different periods and places of Colombia. Furthermore, UNICEF contributed to maintaining the momentum of safe participation of children and youth and to empowering them as agents of peace by supporting voluntary youth networks and youthled initiatives, peace leadership and peace education programs, working together with teachers.

Conclusion

Colombia's Truth Commission has contributed considerably towards the development of a comprehensive child rights-based approach to truth-seeking that can be used by future truth commissions around the world. The child rights-based approach adopted by the Truth Commission promoted intergenerational engagement and introduced perspectives from different territories and ethnic groups and cap-

tured the differential impacts of the conflict on boys and girls, while putting forth recommendations for non-repetition. The Legacy of the Truth Commission, still very active at the time of writing, and the Truth Commission's findings and recommendations, include a strong child-focus and good practices that could inspire other countries and UNICEF offices embarking on truth-seeking, transitional justice and peace-building efforts.

Recommendations

Raise awareness and establish a strong position for the agenda of 1 children's rights in truth commissions from the beginning of the process. **Determine that children's engagement** with the Truth Commission is in their best interests, adhering to international standards, and that 2 children's safety and protection is paramount, and adopt an explicit child-rights mandate, enabling an operational structure to support it, with trained and experienced staff both at central and territorial levels. Develop child-friendly protocols, procedures and tools for truthseeking efforts and safe child-centered participation in line with "Key 3 principles for child protection and participation in transitional justice", including a focus on the importance of continued mental health and psychosocial support before, during and after children's participation. **Ensure adequate financial and human resourcing** for inclusive child rights-based truth-seeking and participation efforts that capture 4 the intersectional ethnic, gendered, and territorial realities of children affected by armed conflict. Highlight the differential impacts of conflict on children and include a 5 dedicated children's volume and child-specific recommendations in the final report. **Keep the momentum** going by disseminating findings and supporting the implementation of recommendations and longer-6 term peacebuilding work, including education, protection, reconciliation and other transitional justice programming. 7 Leverage the power of collaboration and partnerships

involving diverse rights holders and duty-bearers.

1.1 Background

UNICEF and Transitional Justice

Over the past two decades, UNICEF has contributed to the development of a child rights approach in support of children's participation and protection in transitional justice mechanisms and processes. In 2007/2008, UNICEF's Innocenti Global Office of Research and Foresight partnered with the International Center for Transitional Justice to publish <u>Children and Truth Commissions</u>. This publication explores the role of Truth Commissions in protecting the rights of child victims and witnesses, supporting children's safe participation according to their best interests and evolving capacities, documenting and analyzing best practices, and addressing ongoing challenges, such as confidentiality, gender specific issues and the effectiveness of reparations.

Furthermore, UNICEF conducted an expert paper series and collaborated with the Human Rights Program at Harvard Law School on the publication of a comprehensive study on Children and Transitional Justice: Truth-Telling, Accountability and Reconciliation. The publication was intended to generate dialogue and consensus, and included "Key Principles for Children and Transitional Justice: Involvement of Children and Consideration of Children's Rights in Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Processes". The Key Principles consolidated best practices to better inform children's protection and participation in ongoing or planned transitional justice processes in complex country contexts. This innovative research contributed to a child rights-based approach to transitional justice that informs UNICEF's advocacy, policy, and program agendas, as well as those of other partners.

Purpose of this Report

This report documents the child rights-based approach of the Colombian Truth Commission (2017–2022), and its long-term "Legacy" (2022–2023) after the mandate concluded. The legacy strategy is defined as:

"a set of narratives, actions, products and processes to disseminate the findings and conclusions of the Truth Commission's Final Report, to create ownership among the Colombian society, State institutions, international community, as well as to generate strong commitments from strategic actors to implement the Truth Commission's recommendations for non-repetition".

Of special interest are the milestones, results, and promising practices of the Truth Commission, and in particular the lessons learned by the Commission's child rights-based approach unit, formally known as the Course of Life and Disability Unit. A final line of exploration is UNICEF's role and contributions towards the adoption of a comprehensive child rights-based approach of the Truth Commission and its Legacy.

The intended audiences of this report are UNICEF staff and other child rights actors. The goal of this report is to help those working in the child rights space to effectively implement, operationalize, and monitor a child rights-approach to truth commissions.

Methodology

This report combines a literature and programmatic desk review with stakeholder consultations of former personnel and representatives the Colombian Truth Commission, UNICEF Colombia staff and consultants, child rights partners, organizations, networks, youth representatives, and a donor, as well as an international expert. A total of 18 people (four youth and 14 adults)

participated in this study through 11 key informant interviews (nine women and two men) and two focus group discussions. One focus group discussion included four youth members of Generación V+, a network of youth volunteers (two women and two men), and the other included representatives of child rights organizations (two women and one man).

Outline

This report comprises an introductory chapter laying out the conceptual basis of the Colombian Truth Commission's child rights-based approach. The second and third chapters focus on the active mandate of the Truth

Commission (2017–2022) and on the post-commission Legacy (2022–2023) respectively, followed by brief reflections on UNICEF's added value. Chapter four includes conclusions and recommendations.

1.2 Children and Transitional Justice

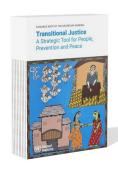
Key Guiding Documents



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) provides a guiding framework for the participation and protection of children in transitional justice contexts and serves as the basis for a truth commission's approach to issues relating to children.⁴ Key principles include: non-discrimination (Article 2); best interests of the child

(Article 3); children's evolving capacities (Article 5); survival and development (Article 6); participation, including the right of every child to express her or his own views freely in all matters affecting the child (Article 12); right to freedom of expression (Article 13); right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Article 14); right to protection from physical or mental violence, neglect or exploitation, including sexual abuse (Article 19); and right to protection and care for children affected by an armed conflict (Article 38).



United Nations Guidance Note on Transitional Justice (2023)

The UN Guidance Note on Transitional Justice (2023) highlights inclusivity as a key feature of transitional justice, stating that transitional justice should focus on "empowering victims, involving the marginalized, adopting a transgenerational and child-sensitive lens, and fostering community ownership." The transgenerational and child-sensitive lens requires harnessing the potential of children and youth in peacebuilding and taking into account the challenges encountered by older persons. To acknowledge children

as rights holders and agents of change, children need to be informed, supported, guided and given age-appropriate tools and platforms in accordance with their best interests and evolving capacities. Their participation in transitional justice can help build their capacity for active involvement in post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding. To empower children requires deliberate policies and procedures that are child-sensitive and centred on youth. In terms of genderresponsiveness the guidance calls for "adopting and consistently advocating for a gender-responsive approach, including by promoting women's leadership and addressing the gendered dimension of root causes of violations."5.

^{4.} Siegrist, S. (2010). Child rights and transitional justice. In S. Parmar, M. J. Roseman, S. Siegrist & T. Sowa (Eds.), Children and transitional justice: Truth-telling, accountability and reconciliation (pp.1-30). Cambridge, MA: Human Rights Program, Harvard Law School.

5. Ibid page 10.

Key Principles for Child Protection and Participation in Transitional Justice⁶

The best interests of the child should guide transitional justice processes.

Children must be treated with dignity and respect.

Transitional justice
mechanisms — including when
designing and implementing
policies and child-friendly
procedures — should ensure the
protection of children against
violence and promote
their physical and
psychological well-being.

Policies and procedures to protect the rights of children involved in transitional justice processes should include a **specific focus on adolescents** and should be consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.

Protection of the **identity** of the child and the child's **privacy** must be guaranteed at all times.

Children have the **right to participate** in decisions affecting
their lives. The participation of
children **should be voluntary**,
with the **informed consent** of the
child and parent or guardian. The
decision not to participate can also
be a form of participation.

A gender-sensitive approach to participation

in transitional justice processes should include a focus on the protection of the rights of girls and should address their specific needs and experiences.

Participation should be **non-discriminatory** and should include, as appropriate, diverse ethnic, racial, religious, and other groups, and take into consideration the specific needs of children with disabilities.

Transitional justice processes should facilitate the **realization of children's civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.** A human rights-based approach to transitional justice processes should be holistic and sustainable, addressing the root causes of armed conflict and political violence, and strengthening the protective and inclusive environment for children in their families and communities.

Rationale: Why Involve Children?

Children have an important role as active participants in truth commission efforts and other transitional justice mechanisms and processes for several reasons. First, they are among the populations most affected by conflict, and their voices and opinions inform reconcilia-tion efforts, as well as ac-countability for crimes committed against them. This involvement also helps protect their rights as victims and witnesses, en-suring that their experiences are acknowl-edged and addressed.

Furthermore, involving children in truth commission processes helps break the intergenerational cycle of violence by promoting a sense of social justice and healing. It also builds their capacity for active citizenship, allowing them to take a key role in post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding. Giving children a platform to share their perspectives can contribute to non-repetition and help ensure that children and young people are equipped to drive lasting change in their commu-nities, in line with their best interests and evolving capacities⁷. The engagement of children in truth commissions has contrib-uted to overall transitional justice efforts and progress towards more effective measures and mechanisms. The table be-low lists some truth commissions, whose final report include a dedicated child-fo-cused volume or section8.

REPORT	Country and Period Covered	Dedicated Child Chapter
"Never Again" National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons	Argentina (1976–1983)	The Repressive Action (Chapter 1), Victims (Chapter 2)
"Memory of Silence" Commission for Historical Clarification	Guatemala (1958–1994)	"Human rights violations and acts of violence", with section entitled "Violence against children"
Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission	South Africa (1995–1998)	"Special hearing for children and young peo- ple" (in Volume 4)
"Never Again" Interdiocesan Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI)	Guatemala (1960–1996)	"The Destruction of the Seed" (in volume I)
Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission	Peru (2001–2003)	<u>"Violence against Children"</u> (in volume VI)
"Witness to Truth" Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission	Sierra Leone (1991–2000)	"Children and Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone" (n volume 3B)
"Enough" Final Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation	Timor Leste (1974–1999)	"Violations of children's rights" (in part VII)
Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission	Liberia (1979–2003)	"Children, Conflict and the Commission on Children's Agenda"
Final Report "Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future" Truth & Reconciliation Commission	Canada (1870–1970)	<u>"Residential schools"</u>
Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission Final Report	Kenya (1963–2008)	"Children and Grave Human Rights Violations" (in Volume IIC)
"There is a future, if there is truth" Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition	Colombia (1958–2016)	"Children and adolescents: Not a lesser evil"

^{7.} United Nations (2023) Guidance Note on Transitional Justice.

^{8.} UNICEF Research and Infographic on Child-rights approaches in past Truth Commissions (unpublished).

The Colombian Truth Commission

2.1 Brief Overview of Colombia's Truth Commission

Colombia's Truth Commission was a national, independent public entity mandated to work between 2017 and 2022. It produced a final report of 11 separate volumes. The work is documented and considered public property, with findings available on a website – referred to as Iransmedia - where all Colombians can access the documents and learn.

The period covered by the Truth Commission spans from 1958 to 2016 and covers decades of armed conflict that concluded in a peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia — People's Army, or Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo, FARC-EP, in 2016. The peace agreement, known as the *Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace*, emphasizes the fundamental rights of vulnerable social groups, including girls, boys, and adolescents. The peace agreement explicitly states: *"In the implementation of everything agreed, the best interests of children and adolescents will be quaranteed, as well as their rights and their prevalence over the rights of everyone else"*⁹.

Furthermore, the peace agreement created the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repetition (SIVJRNR), which comprises the following three institutions: the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition; the Special Jurisdiction for Peace; and the Unit for the Search for Missing Persons. The transitional justice system has a territorial, differential, and gender approach, which corresponds to the specific characteristics of victimization in each territory and for each population, with special protection and attention for women and children victims of the armed conflict. More English language information on Colombia's <u>Comprehensive System of Truth Justice Reparation and Non-Repetition</u> (2019) can be found by clicking on the link.

Mandate

The Colombian Truth Commission is a national autonomous public entity whose mission is to listen and understand, without judging. It seeks the truth of what happened in the context of the internal armed conflict, to shed light on the violations committed therein, and to offer society a broad explanation of its complexity and an account that includes all voices. The Commission also promotes the recognition of victims' right to the truth, and the voluntary recognition of individual and collective responsibilities of those who directly or indirectly participated in the conflict.

It also promotes coexistence in the territories, with non-repetition as the horizon.¹⁰ In its article 2 the mandate references children, when stating that the mandate is:

"to contribute to the clarification of what happened, in accordance with the elements of the Mandate and to offer a broad explanation of the complexity of the conflict, in such a way as to promote a shared understanding in society, especially of the lesser known aspects of the conflict, such as the impact of the conflict on children and adolescents and gender-based violence, among others". 11

Structure

In addition to the plenary of the 11 Commissioners, the Presidency and the General Secretariat, the substantive work of the Truth Commission was carried out by four different Directorates: the Directorate for Social Dialogue, the Directorate of Knowledge, the Directorate of Ethnic Peoples, and the Directorate of Territories.

The Directorate for Social Dialogue was responsible for the key objectives of acknowledgement of truth, coexistence, and non-repetition, and hosted the six cross-cutting units, including the child rights-based approach unit. The Directorate of Knowledge (Research) was responsible

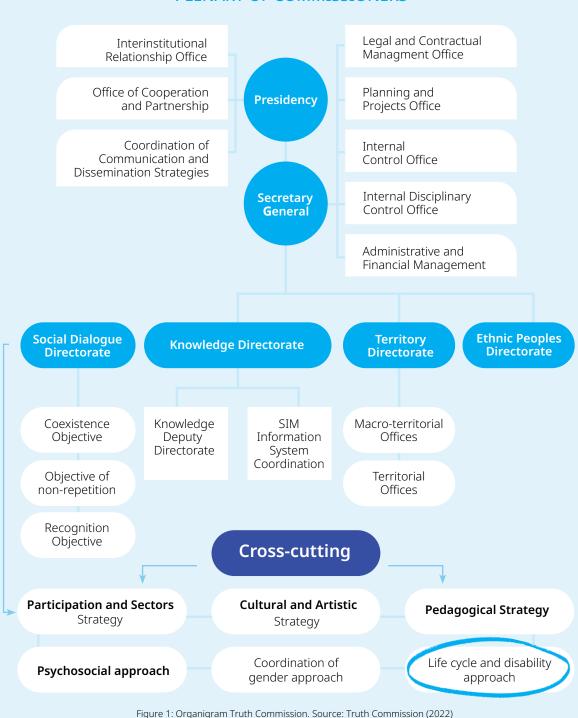
for the Commission's information system, statement taking, systematizing, analysis, and drafting tasks. The Directorate of Territories oversaw 12 macro-territorial teams (including a team working with the Colombian victims in exile), and 28 territorial offices, called Houses of Truth from which mobile teams were deployed to undertake the Commission's listening work. A detailed English language account of the Truth Commission's vision and set-up can be found in the Logbook Of A Journey Towards Peace Systematization Of The Investigation Methodology For The Clarification From The Truth Commission (2022).

^{10.} CEV, JEP and UBPD, 2019 op. cit.

^{11.} Decreto Ley 588 de 2017 https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=80633#:~:text=ART%C3%8DCULO%202.%20Objetivos.g%C3%A9nero%2C%20entre%20otros.

Organization Chart of the Truth Commission

PLENARY OF COMMISSIONERS



Child Rights-Based Approach

The 'life cycle and disability approach' was an analytical-methodological element based on the recognition that, from birth to death, human beings are in a permanent process of development and biological aging within the framework of a context, a social group, and a particular history, where individual, family, work, and social life trajectories are configured. The approach helped to understand and tell the story of what happened to children, young people, and the elderly in the context of the conflict from a broad and transcendent perspective: the life journey, the meaning attributed to the events and the impact on their lives and development. For an English Language account of the methodology, see Systematization Of The Investigation Methodology For The Clarification From The Truth Commission (2022).

The child rights-based focus, embedded in the broader 'life cycle and disability approach', is described in the following terms:

The Truth Commission recognizes children as subjects of rights. We understand childhood as a window of opportunity in which children learn to exercise their rights and citizenship. That is why we carry out participatory exercises in a safe, responsible and respectful manner, through which children's dignity is recognized, as well as their experiences, expectations and interests, reaffirming their right to express their opinion freely in all matters that affect them and enhancing their progressive capacity

to assume responsibilities and make decisions. Clarifying and recognizing what happened to children during the armed conflict is fundamental to contribute to the clarification of the truth, coexistence and non-repetition, as well as to the construction of a more inclusive and democratic country¹².

The course of life principle defined by the child rights-based approach unit contributed to the Truth Commission objectives in the following way:

- In terms of truth-seeking, it contributed to the identification of patterns of violence, specific impacts on children and adolescents, the intergenerational impact, as well as the processes of resistance and resilience of affected children.
- In relation to recognition, it supported the development of scenarios for the recognition of children and adolescents, as rightsholders, as well as their processes of resistance and resilience and their contributions to human rights and peacebuilding.
- In terms of coexistence, interventions in the territories were strengthened with a special emphasis on the participation of girls, boys, adolescents, and youth.
- In the framework of nonrepetition, it contributed to the development of actions, processes, and recommendations that aimed to contribute to the end of armed conflict and ensure its consequences will not be repeated, with special emphasis on the effective participation of children, youth, and adolescents.

The dedicated "Child Rights Based Approach Unit"

The operationalization of the child rights-based approach was enabled through the timely creation of a dedicated unit, referred to here as Child Rights Based Approach Unit. The two women heading the unit had a track-record in child protection, which was conducive to a close relationship between the Truth Commission and UNICEF. The staff on the unit consisted of about seven people in the capital of Bogotá, and focal points in the territorial offices.

Like other units, the child rights-based approach unit developed an internal guidance document laying out key concepts, principles and methodologies. These included the principles of a person's development over time (course of life), the need for a contextual and territorial understanding, and the principle of free will or agency. The document also highlighted specific features of the differential approaches for children and adolescents (1.1.1); youth (1.1.2); and the elderly (1.1.3).

Technical Committee on Children

The Truth Commission also set up a dedicated technical committee

on children, which comprised about 20 child-rights stakeholders, including civil society partners, government agencies and international organizations, including UNICEF. During the Truth Commission's mandate, the technical committee on children met nine times (about every three months), providing technical, strategic, and political guidance. It served to inform stakeholders about progress, capture technical inputs on tools and methods, and help the Commission navigate through challenging moments.

2.2 The Truth Commission's Child Rights perspective in practice

2.2.1 Dialogue with children

In late 2019, the Social Dialogue Directorate was established to advance and coordinate the different objectives of coexistence, recognition, and non-repetition (as per mandate), the complementary participation, educational/pedagogy, cultural and artistic strategies, as well as the different cross-cutting approaches (with their respective units). Through active listening exercises, the voices of girls and boys were amplified. Children or adults who were child victims and witnesses of violence were also prepared and supported to face their perpetrators in symbolic reparations sessions. Children's narratives were captured through art, music, and other "languages" beyond the spoken word. Different activities organized to dialogue with children can be explored here. To view different methodologies used (often in Spanish only) please use the different 'collections'.



Key Milestones and Achievements

International events

International events constituted an opportunity to raise awareness, learn from international good practices, and build momentum to promote the agenda of children.



Words with Echo | Palabras con Eco (May 2019)

The objective was to carry out an exchange of national and international experiences on the role of children and adolescents in transitional justice and peace building. The event was organized by UNICEF and the European Union and welcomed international guest Amandine Teloh Gbadé, Vice-President of the Action, Justice, and Peace Network of Côte d'Ivoire. Participants included experts and institutions such as the Ministry of Justice, the JEP, UBPD, and CEV.

Methodologies, artistic products, and pedagogical tools

The Truth Commission developed different methodologies to engage children and adolescents, using various communication formats such as writing, audio-visual means, and arts. A compilation thereof can be explored on the 'collections' landing page, which hosts 27 different thematic <u>collections</u>, including the following two dedicated to children, while a child-rights focus is mainstreamed in several of the other collections:



Collection:

Listening to boys, girls, adolescents and youth: we are not condemned to violence

This collection aims to acknowledge,

document and give voice to the feelings, attitudes, reflections and thoughts of children, adolescents and young people about the Colombian armed conflict to contribute to the construction of possible futures. Through different listening spaces, the Truth Commission intended to amplify children's voices, their empathy and experiences of empowerment in the face of the armed conflict experienced in the country.

This collection contains 72 clickable resources on (among others):

- Early childhood; children and adolescents; youth
- National consultation of children and young people for the truth
- Generation v+: young people for the truth.

MUMO - Museum of Objects

(August and September 2021)

An art exhibition featuring items from boys and girls until six years of age. Hosted at the Center for Memory, Peace, and Reconciliation, the event aimed to create a collective memory/ museum, based on significant, and everyday objects of children. The diversity of territories and contexts, loaded with oral histories and stories, contributed to the construction of the space. Photos, videos and additional resources can be found by scrolling through the collection.



Online National Consultation of Children, Adolescents, and Young People for the Truth

(April to November 2021).

This <u>national consultation</u> aimed to promote a space for participation led by children, adolescents, and young people from different regions to hear and understand their opinions on the value of truth, based on five key questions. At the end of the consultation in October 2021, over 5,200 children, adolescents, and youth from 29 departments of the country had responded. Key trends in their responses emerged, including that 97% of participants found it important to learn about the armed conflict. Of these, 80% wanted to engage in dialogue about it in schools, 68% in social networks, 60% in traditional media, and 53% in their families.



Collection:

The Truth Be Told:
Community of
Pedagogical Practices
for Truth, Memory,
and Non-Repetition

The Collection of the Truth Commission gathers pedagogical tools co-created among diverse educational and cultural communities in the country, with an aim to promote an

understanding of the meaning of truth in one's own life and as a public good. It seeks to appeal to people to make the Legacy their own and contribute to repairing the social fabric so fragmented by the armed conflict.

This collection contains several of the cross-cutting methodologies, in particular a section on "imagination, play and playfulness in pedagogical work with children, adolescents and young people on the meaning of truth."

The Book of the Future

(Spanish)

The Book of the Future seeks to foster the imagination of a non-violent scenario for the future through literature and play. From poems and literary texts that speak of the recent conflict in the country, it helps visualizing a new country that rejects violence and injustice.

Itinerant School of Truth

(Spanish)

Enables children and young people to learn about, discuss, and debate the truth and to get closer to different peacebuilding initiatives promoted from the territories. It proposes a didactic sequence made up of three key moments: 1) Truth tellers weaving the history of our country; 2) Empowerment and emerging citizenship for truth and peace building; and 3) Deconstructing violence from the differential approaches of children and youth.

Notable Participation Practice:

Adolescent Mobilization Group for the National Consultation

For the preparation of the National Consultation, the Truth Commission convened a so-called "Grupo Motor," or mobilization group, consisting of 20 adolescent girls and boys from different regions of the country. Between April and November 2021, the adolescents joined forces with the Truth Commission, UNICEF and other partners to co-design and co-create the methodologies and content for the National Consultation, and to support its promotion as well as dissemination of results.

The outcomes of the consultation also informed the final report

of the Truth Commission and UNICEF's strategy on supporting the Truth Commission's postmandate Legacy, constituting a notable example of meaningful adolescent and youth participation.

Adolescents and youth described their participation as an unprecedented power-sharing exercise with a duty bearer, with voice and vote. With the understanding that "participation needs to be learned and practiced by doing it," proactive and meaningful engagement was sustained throughout the whole process.

Processes of listening, dialogue and collective construction



Collection:

Talking and building futures with children, adolescents, and youth

The purpose of this collection is to inform the public about the social dialogue actions carried out with children, adolescents, and young people, in the framework of the fulfillment of the mandate of the Truth Commission. This allows the public to learn about experiences for the construction of truth with children, adolescents, and young people, and to understand what the process of listening to this population meant.

National meeting: <u>Children and</u> adolescents speak to the Truth Commission

(May 2019). This two-day event aimed to position and make visible the importance of the participation of children and adolescents in the Commission's processes.

Journeys for truth (Travesías por la verdad):

A listening process conducted with children, adolescents and young people about what happened in the armed conflict and the construction of proposals for non-repetition in the different regions.

Weaving stories of truth (Entretejiendo re-

latos de verdad): Meetings aimed to promote the participation of children and adolescents from 16 localities of Bogota, around truth as a public good and non-repetition.

Other efforts to engage children include, among others:

12 workshops with children on truth (October to December 2018)¹³.

The purpose of the workshops was to learn about children's and adolescents'

understanding of the truth and to explore their expectations and recommendations for participating in the truth-telling process in different territories. The insights and outputs, such as drawings, were captured in an outcome document.

Dialogue for peace building and the right to truth (February 2020).

This dialogue promoted an exchange to learn about different international experiences of Truth Commissions, with a goal to identify lessons learned related to the right to truth and non-repetition, from the perspective of children and adolescents. Carried out through two working groups, this dialogue contributed to the development of the Truth Commission's final report and the social dialogue. As part of the activities related to Red Hands Day, a designated day against the recruitment of children and adolescents, a symbolic exercise was carried out connecting adolescents in Colombia and other countries in the Americas and Africa.

Cycle of virtual dialogues on recruitment and use of children and adolescents in armed conflict (2020/2021).

When COVID-19 restrictions were impacting in-person gatherings, a cycle of virtual dialogues was developed to enable different actors and sectors of society to participate. These dialogues focused on recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. They also encouraged reflection on the impact of this crime on children, the fundamental elements that contribute to its non-repetition, and the lessons learned in terms of protection and prevention.

Notable Participation Practice:

Engagement with Indigenous and Afro-Descendant Children

The child rights-based approach unit undertook a series of engagements with Indigenous and Afro-descendant children through group and collective exercises. These included:

Focus group discussions on recruitment of Indigenous and Afro-descendant boys, girls, and adolescents

(April 2021)

to deepen understanding of territorial recruitment dynamics. This exploration also allowed for an analysis of the differential impacts of victimizing events on different population groups, infringement of collective rights, and resistance, as well as recommendations for non-continuity and non-repetition of armed conflict.

<u>"Listening Space"</u> with 20 Indigenous girls, boys, and adolescents (May 2021)

in the remote Indigenous territory of Agua Negra in Puerto Leguízamo, Putumayo. The objective was to amplify the voices of children and adolescents of the Murui people and learn about their life experiences in the midst of the armed conflict.

Periogram, a magazine created collectively by students, teachers, parents, elders, and others

to connect Afro community knowledge with educational institutions. This magazine aimed to elevate the value of Pacific Coast ancestral knowledge as a philosophy and way of inhabiting the world. During the co-creation process, oral traditions, ancestral knowledge, and writing were recorded and published, contributing to knowledge about historical truths of Afro-descendant people in Colombia that have been ignored and hidden from the country's memory.



Reflection—Partnerships:

The Truth Commission's achievements in terms of engaging with children were largely possible because of local, national, and international organizations, which also enabled access to the territories, provided information and financed or co-financed preparations, travel and spaces for the participation of children, adolescents, and young people.



Reflection — **Flexible Funding**:

Operationalizing a child rights-based approach is costly and needs to be carefully planned. In practical terms, when children travel, they cannot do it alone and they cannot be on the first flights in the morning or the last in the evening. Often when coming from rural zones, it makes sense to end events at mid-day to allow participants to return on time; accompanying persons must be guaranteed, and budgets must account for their participation. Therefore, participation of children does require additional time and both human and financial resources but can lead to improved outcomes through more meaningful participation of children.

Processes to acknowledge responsibilities: Encounters for Truth

The Encounters for Truth were designed to enhance understanding of the impacts of armed conflict and the diverse forms of resistance of victims, their organizations and communities. The Encounters sought to amplify the voices of people affected by armed conflict, contribute to the right to truth of the victims and society, and create a collective memory of what happened by reflecting on the past, present, and future.

In total there were five Encounters for Truth. The third meeting, which took place in November 2019, aimed to capture the impact of the armed conflict on children and adolescents. The key moment of the encounter was the recognition by armed actors— excommanders and ex-members of the FARC-EP, paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC per its Spanish acronym), as

well as Colombian Armed Forces — of the immediate damage and long-term effects they have caused to children and adolescents in the country. A former guerrilla commander, Rodrigo Londoño, acknowledged the individual impacts and harm on children and adolescents:

"War is a horror, especially for girls and boys because of their vulnerability. That is why I sincerely want to vindicate and dignify the boys, girls and adolescents who were affected by the actions of the FARC-EP in the armed conflict, making a public acknowledgment of their rights. There were minefields where minors fell; we produced the retention of people, which caused pain and suffering to their sons and daughters; the civilian population, including children, was left in the middle of the confrontations and crossfire." (ICTJ 2024:53)

"It was a strong moment of visibility, of recognition of the damage caused to children. There were — more or less — apologies from some perpetrators outside the judicial system. But nonetheless, it was a very strong moment."



The summary publication of this event also includes the following quote of a child: "We need to know the truth and the participation of young people in the reconstruction of a country submerged in the ashes of the conflict is important. Let's show that it is possible: coexistence, truth, peace, participation, justice, and reconciliation." (M., 17 years old, Santa Fe de Ralito, Córdoba)

While some child protection organizations expressed some protection concerns and recommended a longer and substantive preparation with former armed actors/ perpetrators, these encounters and explicit acknowledgement of responsibility in relation to children and youth remains significant in the context of Colombia's armed conflict.

"One challenge was for ex-combatants to publicly recognize harm in front of young people, who were children before, and [come] face to face with each other. However, when it was done, it was very productive, especially because it was done in presence of children who have had traumatic experiences, as well as parents and caregivers. We [Truth Commission staff] felt it was very healing."

Truth Commission Staff

Considerations on safe participation:

The Colombian Truth Commission took steps to ensure multiple ways of fostering a safe environment for children's meaningful involvement and participation. For example, it introduced multiple layers of informed consent of children and their parents/caregivers, engaging, engaging partners and the education stakeholders, including duty bearers, informing broader community about the forthcoming involvement of children in truth-seeking efforts, and ensuring that psycho-social professionals accompanied the efforts and mental health and psychosocial support was available after children participated (local child rights duty bearers and child-rights focused NGO partners). As described previously, the Truth Commission also created multiple formats for children's engagement, including playful means of expressing themselves, amplifying their voices, exploring, and healing.

2.2.2 Knowledge and Truth Seeking

In 2019, the Directorate of Knowledge was created to advance the investigative process to establish the truth about what happened during the armed conflict and to develop a final report (as well as other formats for the dissemination of the Commission's findings). In addition to conventional research and knowledge production, the Truth Commission placed a particular emphasis on engaging directly with communities and capturing testimonies from affected people, including children, adolescents and adults who were victimized during their childhood. Recognizing that the process of collecting testimonies should itself be one of support and accompaniment, staff focused on promoting "healing through the way testimonies are taken" as part of truth-seeking efforts. As such, they prepared participants, including children, for statement-taking through a variety of means, including those described below.

Inductive Methodology

The Truth Commission used inductive methodology, building on the content of the testimonies from the bottom up to document the impact of the armed conflict on children and adolescents, capturing ethnic, gendered and age differentials. The inductive methodology further allowed to explore diverse factors of violence and patterns of violence (including sexual violence, recruitment and use, and displacement), and nuances in the role of children in conflict as victims, and those indirectly affected by armed conflict.

Another element of the research included efforts to enhance children's participation, voice, and agency, to elevate their experiences of resilience and resistance to the effects of armed conflict in addition to their experiences as victims.

Ultimately, the Truth Commission collected direct testimonies from 45 children and insights from 1,217 adults, who made references to conflict-related impacts and victimization during their childhood. Together with

complementary listening efforts, a total of 2,744 testimonies were registered that spoke of episodes of violence against children and as children, the Truth commission recorded 4,315 acts of violence experience in childhood or adolescence (out of a total of 254,908 acts of violence)14. Given that the period under investigation spans from 1958 to 2016, direct testimonies of children focus on the times after the early 2000s, while testimonies of adults on violence experienced as children covered the preceding 50 years, allowing for a consistent engagement regarding the impact of the conflict on children over time.

The individual, group, and collective testimonies from children and from adults on childhood impact were contrasted and complemented with insights from the Social Dialogue process, which used a variety of forms and formats (audio-visual, drawings, cultural expressions), as well as written submissions by child-rights stakeholders.



Reflection: In terms of challenges and limitations, Truth Commission staff referred to the limited time for conducting the "monumental task" of collecting direct testimonies, as well as disruptions and delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Challenge of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Truth Commission faced significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. With public health restrictions in place, staff members were unable

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to travel to territories and conduct in-person interviews, so they shifted to remote data collection. This required adapting to virtual testimonies, ensuring safe and secure internet connections, maintaining confidentiality, and storing confidential information. They implemented measures such as microchip cards on phones to allow remote interviews without risk of eavesdropping. Additionally, they had to adapt their work processes to enable staff to work from home. designing systems for taking testimonies and analyzing data. The pandemic also led to a shift from a linear research process to simultaneous work, as they had to balance data collection, analysis, and writing while addressing pandemic-related delays.

Tools for statement-taking

The team embarked on the design of methodologies for taking testimonies from children, adolescents, and adults who suffered violence in their childhood. Capturing different age ranges and gendered and ethnic particularities, the methodologies included the following three modalities:

1 "Individual"	testimonies with personal interviews and an interview protocol
2 "Group"	testimonies, with focus group discussions and a semi-structured questionnaire
3 "Collective"	testimonies to capture life stories, with guidance to document inputs.

The methodological toolbox (2022)¹⁵ of the child rights-based approach unit is a 57-page document — developed with the support of UNICEF — that includes descriptions of data collection mechanisms for girls, boys, and adolescents, as well as guidance and recommendations. It also puts forth the following three tools, or "booklets," to support statement-taking.

^{15.} Methodological tools document for the development and approach of the clarification (truth seeking) process with boys, girls and adolescents (2022).

Summary of the Methodological Toolbox Guiding Statement-Taking with Girls and Boys (2022)

Tools of data collection with children Booklet **Booklet 1: "Our visions":** Guide for the development of interviews with children and adolescents.

Booklet 2: "My territory and me": Guide for focus group work with children and adolescents.

Booklet 3: "The tree of my life." Guide for

documenting the life stories of children and adolescents.

Annexes

Annex 1. Protocol for the use of annexes in clarification processes with children and adolescents.

Annex 2. Vulnerability assessment, for identifying risks and avoid revictimization of children.

Annex 3. Informed consent form for children (separate from the one for adults/caregivers).

Annex 4. Security checklist.

Annex 5. Checklist for the person in charge of the interview.

The different tools used to take statements from children were designed to include simple and plain questions, starting with open and general questions and moving towards more specific ones. The tools actively used metaphors with figurative elements, such as a pathway or footprints, to indicate "moving forward" and symbolic techniques associated to narrative life stories, such as a tree, its roots, trunk, and leaves. The flexibility and acknowledgement of children's own

forms of narration were encouraged. A notable practice of the Colombian Truth Commission was the involvement of children in the development, piloting, validation, and translation into "child-friendly language" of the data collection instruments.

The Truth Commission collaborated with UNICEF to facilitate awareness-raising and on-the-job training tailored to the different teams of professionals involved in taking statements from children.



Reflection on participatory involvement: While the participatory engagement of diverse children is key, more could have been done to ensure that children were more consistently involved in research and analysis activities, such as "peer statement-takers" or "inside researchers."

Notable Tools: Differential Approach and Listening Methodologies

The Truth Commission developed differential methodologies for listening focused on the particularities of specific groups, which overlap with a child rights-based approach. For example, when addressing the specificity of Romany boys and girls, or approaching sexual violence against children with a gendered lens.

Collective interview datasheet for ethnic collective subject:

The datasheet gathered information on the facts and collective effects on Afro-descendant, indigenous and Roma communities in the context of the conflict, in order to understand patterns and dynamics regarding the traditional use of the territory, the spiritual relationship with it, cultural identity, formalization and legal security, autonomy and self-government, and free, prior, and informed consultation.

Others include:

- Community diagnosis or collective interview for Roma peoples
- Survey of Romany or Gypsy women¹⁷
- Workshop with young Roma or Gypsies
- Interview with lawyers

 psychologists who
 assist victims abroad
- Guide for the approach to sexual violence

For a more detailed description of the more than 10 differential methodological tools see Systematization Of The Investigation Methodology For The Clarification From The Truth Commission (2022).

Preparation
Stage for safe
statementtaking

The Truth Commission teams engaging with children were guided by safe participation principles, engaging in a diligent preparation process when gathering statements and visiting territories. The comprehensive efforts to assess and create conditions for statement-taking with children included a territorial security and child-centered risk assessment, particularly in territories

with continued presence of armed actors. The teams also ensured the accompaniment of trusted child-rights partners when entering territories.

These processes acknowledged that the Truth Commission was a temporary mechanism with a limited mandate and that other organizations and entities (including relevant duty bearers, such as the Colombian

Institute for Family Welfare, or the Ombudsperson's Office) with pre-existing processes in the territories would be more trusted and better prepared to offer accompaniment and, if relevant, referral. There were instances where the statement-taking did not proceed due to the lack of adequate conditions.

Child-friendly interviewing and psychosocial support: Among the statement-takers were psychologists and social workers, some of whom had more experience in taking testimonies with children than others. Consequently, trainings were organized for documenters to sharpen the "Do No Harm" principle, using the consent protocols and applying the risk and vulnerability assessment. Training also helped documenters become familiar with the different data collection tools and learn how to use information on referral pathways in an adequate and timely manner should the need arise.



Reflection – Skills of Statement-Takers:

Statement-takers should have previous practical experience in interviewing children. Depending on the context, expertise with vulnerable populations, including with survivors of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence is an added value. Ideally, a child protection specialist embedded in territorial teams can provide on-the-spot guidance. Comprehensive trainings and recurrent refreshers need to be put in place to ensure international child-rights principles and standards, as well as to ensure national legal frameworks and localized referral pathways are applied correctly.

Statement-Taking

The Truth Commission offered safe spaces for children, adolescents, youth, and adults to share their lived experiences and to narrate their stories. These safe spaces enabled the Truth Commission to document the impacts of the armed conflict on the lives of children and adolescents and their families, as well as the coping and resistance strategies that children and adolescents used before the violence, and their proposals and ideas for non-repetition and social transformation.

Numbers and Data Sources Informing the Dedicated Children's Volume

Statistical estimation and databases:

The report relied on numbers from a data integration and statistical estimation project jointly carried out by the Truth Commission, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), and the Human Rights Data Analysis Group (HRDAG). The project integrated **112 databases** from **42 entities** and social organizations.

Individual and collective interviews: Out of

28,58C

PERSONS LISTENED TO

in 14.971 individual and collective interviews

605

CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS

and young people were interviewed in 366 sessions (no sex disaggregation is available)

were conducted with children and adolescents¹⁹ for testimonial purposes.

- **39 Individual testimonies** of children and adolescents as victims, relatives of victims or witnesses of acts of violence.
- 5 collective interviews •
 - 1 interview conducted with an ethnic collective subject, which refers to ethnic communities in Colombian territory, such as the Afro-descendant population organized in Community Councils, the indigenous population organized in resquardos and cabildos, and the Roma population constituted mainly in kumpañy²⁰.

were conducted with adults who experienced the impact of the armed conflict as children and adolescents.

research team centered their exploration on "childhood," considering both the age of the victim at the time of the incident, which includes adults providing testimonies about incidents of victimization as children, as well as age at the time of providing testimonies.

Furthermore, the

Reports and case studies submitted to the Truth Commission:

reports and 75 case studies (más grande) submitted to the Truth Commission by organizations, public entities, universities and individuals who have dealt with the impact of the armed conflict on children and adolescents.

19. This refers to people under the age of 18 between at the moment of statement taking mostly 2019-2021, while the mandate of the truth commission spans between 2017-2022. 20. https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/themes/custom/cevtheme/como-lo-hicimos/caja-deherramientas/Documentos/investigacion-sujeto-colectivo/quia-de-entrevistas-sujeto-colectivo.pdf

Analysis

The research teams started by listening to testimonies on the impact of the armed conflict on children and adolescents and developed a matrix on emerging topics. This matrix was cross-referenced with emerging trends using information on regional particularities or conflict dynamics from the consolidated searchable database, as well as with information and reports received from the territories and insights from the Social Dialogue Directorate. Based on the insights established, different thematic research groups formed.

When developing contributions for the dedicated volume on children in the final report, the different research teams relied on one or more data analysts to cross-reference and combine qualitative and quantitative data. Data analysts also tracked each piece of data and developed statistical annexes for each volume of the report, including the volume on children, to demonstrate how the teams arrived at the numbers. The plenary of 11 commissioners then discussed and reviewed advanced volumes conceptually.



Reflection

Effectively breaking the adult-centric focus of adults researching on children. This can be achieved by complementing participatory and meaningful engagement of children with listening exercises, consultations, and validation of recommendations. Children should also be involved in the development of tools, data-collection, analysis, and reporting, where possible and appropriate.

Arguments Advocating for a Dedicated Children's Volume

Despite the explicit mandate and the adoption of a child rights-based approach, the decision to have a dedicated volume on children was not initially evident, as the first outline of the final report did not include a specific volume on children. However, this decision was reversed through the concerted efforts of child-rights partners, primarily the technical committee on children (and beyond) in coordination with the Commission's child rights-based approach unit. UNICEF repurposed previously commissioned research into an engaging infographic to demonstrate good practices of past Truth Commissions in adopting a dedicated volume on children. Below is the summary of arguments to advocate for a dedicated children's volume:

Seize opportunities due to peer pressure,

given that Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) had opened the so-called Macro Case 007 on Forced Recruitment of Children in March 2019 and the Truth Commission could not fall behind.

Responds
to calls for children's
meaningful participation
included in international
human rights and
children's

rights standards.

Stay true to the inductive methodology adopted by the Truth Commission. The evidence of conflict-related impacts on children emerging in the collected testimonies require a dedicated volume, and the perspectives of children should also be incorporated throughout the final report using a cross-cutting approach.

Numerous
previous
Truth Commissions prior
to Colombia's included a
dedicated volume or section on
children. It would be
detrimental to Colombia's
track record in committed
transitional justice work to not
have a stand-alone volume
on children.

Decision-makers within the Truth Commission should be held accountable

to their own mandate within Colombia's integrated transitional justice system, which is committed to differential approaches, including age. Consider the potential fallout with people and in particular children who provided the testimonies,

as well as likely loss of trust from civil society organizations, including child-rights actors that partnered with the Truth Commission to enable research teams to enter the territories.

2.2.3. Final Report and the Dedicated Volume on Children

On June 28, 2022, after more than three years of investigation and dialogue with victims, perpetrators, and witnesses, including children, and multiple other actors, the Truth Commission launched its final report, *There Is Future If There Is Truth*. The report consists of 11 volumes and 24 books. It includes information about the history of the armed conflict in Colombia, its impacts on different populations, and recommendations for the non-repetition of the armed conflict.

For an English Language account of the research and decision-making process leading up to the final report, see Systematization Of The Investigation Methodology For The Clarification From The Truth Commission (2022).

The Final Report: There Is Future If There Is Truth

Outline of the Final Report

Those that talk about the future:

- Volume 1. Call for a Great Peace: Declaration of the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition (available with English subtitles)
- Volume 2. Findings and Recommendations of the Colombian Truth Commission

Those that explain the conflict:

 Volume 3. You Shall Not Kill: Historical Account of the Internal Armed

- Conflict in Colombia
- Volume 4. Even War
 Has Limits: Violations
 of Human Rights,
 Breaches of International
 Humanitarian Law, and
 Collective Responsibilities
- Volume 11. Colombia
 Inside: Territorial Accounts
 of the Armed Conflict ²¹

The human side of the conflict:

- Volume 5. Suffering War and Rebuilding Life: Impacts, Coping, and Resistance
- **Volume 6.** When the Birds Did Not Sing: Stories of the

- Armed Conflict in Colombia, Testimonial Volume
- Volume 7. My Body Is the Truth: Experiences of Women and LGBTIQ+ People In the Armed Conflict
- Volume 8. It Is Not a
 Lesser Evil: Children
 and Adolescents In the
 Armed Conflict Contents/
 Subtitling in English
- Volume 9. Resisting Is Not Enduring: Violence and Harm Against Ethnic Peoples in Colombia
- Volume 10. Colombia Outside Colombia: The Truths of Exile.

The final report further contains annexes, a series of documents that support the final report. The annexes include content not only from the research point of view, but also from the organizational and operational point of view.

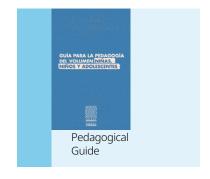
In addition to the dedicated volume, issues relating to children emerge in other volumes throughout the report, including the Findings and Recommendations (Volume 2) and the Testimonial Volume (Volume 6), which includes a project rebuilding the stories of children and adolescents in the context of the armed conflict as well as a category of data entry on "children and youth". Children's issues also appear in the Volume on Resistance (Volume 5) and the Gender and LGBTIQ+ Volume (Volume 7).

The Dedicated Volume on Children

The final report has a volume dedicated to the differential impacts of more than six decades of armed conflict on children, titled: <u>It Is Not a Lesser Evil</u>: <u>Children and Adolescents In the Armed Conflict</u>.

The process of writing the report started a year and a half before the end of the Truth Commission and built on the insights and products of the child rights-based approach unit, some of them developed with the technical support from UNICEF. These include a mapping of sources of information on violations and infractions against children and adolescents in the context of the internal armed conflict, and a context analysis document, among others.





A closer look into the children's volume outline

The outline below gives a general idea of the content of the volume on children and contrasts it with the significance noted by study participants. Overall, the Truth Commission was able to shed a

light on new elements of the impact of armed conflict on children, such as people orphaned because of the armed conflict, as well as the impact of the armed conflict on schools and their environment.

^{21.} Which includes in addition to the Introductory essay, dedicated books from a territorial perspective covering the following regions and departments of Colombia: Amazonia; Antioquia, South of Cordoba and Bajo Atrato Chocoano; Caribbean region; Eje Cafetero (Coffee Axis); Northeastern border; Magdalena Medio; Nariño and Southern Cauca; Orinoco; Pacific; Central Region; Valle and Northern Cauca; as well as on urban dynamics of the war; and the peasantry and the war.

First sub-chapter:

Absence and Orphanhood in the Lives of Child and Adolescent Victims of the Armed Conflict

- **Living through the forced** disappearance or killing of parents: Early memories of being an orphan during childhood, the emotional impacts of 'absence' (of those disappeared/ killed in those left behind), transgenerational impacts.
- **Kidnapping and abduction** in the lives of children and adolescents: Uncertainty, sadness, and courage; children and adolescents who were kidnapped; efforts of girls, boys, and adolescents to get their parents back; lives of children and adolescents after abduction.
- **Daughters and sons of** combatants, ex-combatants, and members of security forces: Growing up with the absence of a father or mother due to the conflict; the stigma of being the daughter or son of a combatant or former combatant and members of the security forces; the memory of parents; girls and boys born in the jungle.

Significance noted: The volume focuses the attention on new categories such as "orphanhood and absences" in the context of the armed conflict. It speaks of the assassination and/or the kidnapping of parents, siblings, and loved ones, and how boys and girls experienced these absences of significant people in their environment.

Second sub-chapter:

Forced Displacement in the Lives of Children and Adolescents

- The tragedy, the journey, and the arrival: Causes of forced displacement of children and adolescents; children and adolescents and the loss of the territory; arriving in new places.
- **Adapting to survive:** Multiple displacements; the search for housing; worst forms of child labor; difficulties in continuing studies; family breakups after displacement.
- **Life horizons:** Seeking stability; separations and reunions.

Significance noted:

More than 50 years of armed conflict and three generations of displaced people leave emotional damage. This volume is significant, because it centers on the "Wounded Colombia" — a country that grapples with layers of intergenerational trauma.

Third sub-chapter:

The Armed Conflict in Schools and their Environments

 Attacks on communities and educational institutions: Violence directed against teachers and students; occupation, control, and use of educational institutions by armed groups; emotional impacts of attacks on schools; out-of-school children. • **Violence in school environments:** Mines and use of explosive devices in school environments; attacks during school activities.

Significance highlighted by study participants: The final report finds that schools are not just a location, but in the context of the armed conflict turned into a military target and objective, which is a violation of International Humanitarian Law. The volume demonstrates that controlling and dominating schools was strategic for all parties to the conflict.

Fourth sub-chapter:

Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Actors

- Factors facilitating the recruitment and use: Recruitment as a naturalized and intentional action; non-compliance of the State's duty to protect children; violence within and towards the family.
- **Recruitment practices:** The use of force, deception, deceit; persuasion and sentimental manipulation.
- **Life of recruited children:** Training, indoctrination, and formation; roles in armed groups; violence against recruited children; punishment and death.
- **Use of children by armed groups:** Transporting weapons and drugs; intelligence activities, and the impacts of recruitment on the lives of children victims.
- **Use of children by security forces:** Use of children in military operations; as informants; to infiltrate armed groups; civil-military campaigns.
- **Disengagement of recruited children:** Children escaping; recovered in combat or through family/ community mediation; released through negotiations or peace processes.

Significance highlighted by the Truth Commission: The diverse gendered impacts of child recruitment in Colombia had not been addressed comprehensively prior to the Truth Commission report. The report sheds light on the fact that children were coerced or influenced to join armed groups because they felt that was the only way to survive. It is imperative to understand that conditions of poverty in many areas of Colombia fed into the conflict and need to be addressed as a root cause of recruitment.

Fifth sub-chapter:

Breaking the Chain of Violence: Coping and Resistance of Children, Adolescents, and Young People

• Personal coping; study, work, and life horizons; artistic expression as a political action; truth as a right; political and organized resistance; youth mobilization as an act of resistance; role of civil society in the protection of children.

Other focus areas

With regards to the overall magnitude of violence against children, the dedicated children's volume highlights the following data on five types of human rights violations that affected children and adolescents:

Violations	Number of Children	Timespan
Homicide	64,084	1985-2018
Forced Disappearance	28,192	1985-2016
Kidnapping	6,496	1990 to 2018
Recruitment	16,238	1990-2017
Forced Displacement	3,049,527	1985-2019



Reflection: The final report and the different volumes unveil multiple patterns of victimization in Colombia that overlap and shape the lives of survivors in different ways. In Colombia, a person can be in a situation of displacement, a victim of sexual violence, and continue to receive death threats as a result of activism — all at the same time.

In relation to intersectional perspectives on the impact of armed conflict on children, the children's volume can be read in conjunction with other volumes, namely:

"Gender" volume is called "My Body Is the Truth. Experiences of Women and LGBTIQ+ People in the Armed Conflict." This volume makes visible the experiences of women and LGBTIQ+ people in different moments of the war and the sexual violence they faced. (Volume 7)

"Ethnic" volume "To Resist Is Not to Endure. Violence and Harm Against Ethnic Peoples in Colombia" aims to contribute to the truths of Colombia's constitutionally recognized ethnic groups, namely the Indigenous, Afrodescendant, Black, Raizal, Palenquero, and Roma peoples. (Volume 9)

Examples that highlight differential impacts on children include:

- Collective harm: Contexts of "religious colonization" included Catholic boarding schools, fragmented families and weakened indigenous cultural relations and practices. Collective physical, mental, and cultural harm occurred along with recruitment of children and young people as their territories became the epicenter of armed confrontation (Vol. 9, p 100).
- Sexual violence against ethnic children: Sexual violence was used as a tactic aimed at humiliating, dominating, terrorizing, dispersing, and forcibly resettling civilian members of a community or ethnic group (Vol 9., p. 239), while sexual violence against women and girls became a way of punishing

Indigenous peoples. Girls from ethnic communities suffered irreparable consequences in their own lives, and their communities were also severely impacted, including the loss of ancestral knowledge and exposure to situations of exploitation, begging, and stigmatization (Vol. 7, p.25-26).

- Diverse gendered roles as a result of conflict affectations: Girls who were orphaned or displaced were forced to assume domestic and caregiving responsibilities and drop out of school earlier than their male siblings (Vol. 7).
- Sub-chapter on Sexual and

Reproductive Violence Against Girls and Women: This sub-chapter captures the devastating effects that sexual violence and assaults has had on the mental and physical integrity of survivors, as well as the victimization of women and girls in commercial sexual exploitation (Vol.7).

• Sexual violence in the context of recruitment: The annex of cases of the final report delves deeper into the experiences of intra-group violence lived by former FARC-EP combatants, specifically regarding the case "Sexual and Reproductive Violence Within the FARC-EP Guerrillas" (Annex).



Reflection: New perspectives emerge from reading these different volumes focusing on differential approaches in conjunction with the children's volume and a child-focused lens. Some of these perspectives include how structural inequalities continue fueling the conflict and how patriarchy, racism/colonialism, and adult-centrism are interrelated.

Recommendations of the Truth Commission

To draft its 67 recommendations, the Truth Commission considered the 15,000 interviews and 28,000 testimonies collected from victims, more than 1,000 reports from different organizations, and more than 10,000 recommendations from different sectors of society. The recommendations are gathered in a dedicated "Findings and Recommendations" volume (Volume 2) and can be accessed on the online Transmedia platform of the Truth Commission's "Legacy" project, which includes a filter and search function, as well as the option to download recommendations as an Excel document.²²

Child-specific recommendations:

Out of a total number of recommendations, nine have a dedicated child focus and are directed at the National Government and Congress of the Republic, as responsible duty-bearers to children's rights. Given the aim to transform underlying inequalities and contribute to lasting peace, the Truth Commission divided the recommendations into horizons of implementation: for the nine child-focused recommendations, three are to be implemented in the short-term, five in the mid-term, and one in the long-term. For example:

Child-focused Recommendations			
#	ТНЕМЕ	DESCRIPTION	
7	Peace Building Short Term	Adjustments to the policy for the restoration of rights and reintegration, including children: The National Government should review and make the necessary adjustments to the policy of restoration of rights and reintegration, taking into account the lessons learned from other processes.	
10	Victims reparation Short Term	Shock plan to guarantee compliance with comprehensive reparation orders of international sentences. The National Government, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Victims Unit, should advance a shock plan to guarantee, as a priority, compliance with the orders on comprehensive reparation for the victims of the armed conflict contained in judgments of international bodies. In relation to commemorative acts, recognition of responsibility, physical and psychosocial health care, and guarantees of non-repetition. This should be done in consultation with the victims, including children, and their organizations, applying the pro-victim principle and differential approaches.	
57	Territories/ Rural Zone Medium Term	General policy for rural children, adolescents, and young people (in particular rural education, prevention of recruitment, reducing the inequalities between rural and urban zones).	
62	Cultural Transformation Education Medium Term	Strategy for the formation of subjects capable of living in peace: The education system should implement a relevant and effective strategy to help students develop skills to live in and contribute to peaceful communities and societies. Emphasis should be placed on elements of citizenship, reconciliation, socioemotional skills, and human rights education, including intercultural, gender, and women's rights approaches.	



Reflection: In relation to the recommendations, someone searching for a summary of recommendations for children may have difficulty. A standalone section would have been helpful to clearly identify all child-focused recommendations.

Recommendations of the Children's Volume

Additional and complementary recommendations are also included in the dedicated children's volume. Below is a summary of the child-friendly version of the recommendations, organized around the four topics of the children's volume.



Recommendations on absences and orphanhood:

With regard to underreporting, the Truth Commission recommended making orphanhood visible to symbolically recognize the experiences of children and adolescents in Colombia throughout the history of the conflict. In addition, a psychosocial care program should be created with emphasis on overcoming the impacts of this form of violence, regardless of whether the victims are now adults.



Recommendations regarding the effects on schools:

The Truth Commission urgently recommended that the military and police infrastructure be relocated away from the surroundings of educational institutions. It also recommended the prohibition of civic-military campaigns within educational establishments and their surroundings. In addition, all conditions should be guaranteed so that children and adolescents attend school and benefit from quality academic training. Finally, it called for Colombia to sign the Safe School Declaration, which subsequently took place in November 2022.



Recommendations on the impacts of displacement:

The demographic shift that has driven millions of people from the countryside to the city has had enormous cultural, economic, and social impacts. For this reason, the Truth Commission recommended accelerating the implementation of the Peace Agreement, giving special emphasis to the land issue. The Commission recommended that young people be actively involved through the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus (PDET) and special conditions should be created for them to return to rural areas. Finally, efforts should be made to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict with other armed groups, and to reduce persistent risks for children and adolescents.



Recommendations on the recruitment and use of children by armed actors:

The Commission concluded that the recruitment and use of children was not casual or accidental, but intentional. The Commission recommended to strengthen financially the prevention programs to make them sustainable. It also recommended the creation of a program aimed at the recovery of recruited children through action plans that guarantee their life and integrity.



Reflection: While these recommendations in the dedicated volume are more specific to children than the general recommendations, the underlying challenge is that the Monitoring Commission, as per its mandate, only follows up on the recommendations included in the Findings and Recommendations volume (Volume 2). This means that the more specific recommendations highlighted in other volumes, including the child-specific volume, are not systematically monitored, and the relevant duty-bearers are not held to account.

Involvement of Children in Developing Recommendations (May–June 2021)

The Truth Commission's Social Dialogue processes collected specific recommendations on non-repetition through a meeting organized by the child rights-based approach unit. The methodology, called "The Voice of Adolescents and Youth," was designed to acknowledge the diversity and plurality of children. They worked on two out of the ten preliminary findings identified by the Commission:

the lack of protection of children and how continuous discrimination, prejudices, and stereotypes have led to the violation of children's rights. They engaged with the findings through a series of exercises and activities aimed at collectively co-constructing the recommendations.²³

Public Launch of the final report

In June 2022, after more than three years of investigation and dialogues with a broad range of stakeholders, the Truth Commission launched its final report, which included a dedicated volume on children. On the day of the launch ceremony, the final report was symbolically handed over to President-Elect Gustavo Petro, who publicly

committed to implementing the report's recommendations. In the months leading up to the formal presentation of the final report, the commissioners engaged in a process of socialization with different sectors of civil society and with those outside of Colombia, bringing attention to key issues addressed in different volumes of the report.

2.3 Added Value of UNICEF

The Colombian Truth Commission acknowledges UNICEF's consistent support in the (searchable) "Legacy" Allies tab. Below are the types of Truth Commission activities UNICEF supported:

Types of Support UNICEF Provided to the Truth Commission

Broad and diverse listening **Contributed to the investigation** through individual and collective truth-seeking efforts, as well as documentation of life stories and testimonies; reports, cases; and investigations. UNICEF also provided support to other public and private listening formats.

Social and public dialogue

Strengthened diverse public strategies to ensure the dignity of victims, promote the recognition of responsibilities, and mobilize society towards a collective commitment to coexistence and non-repetition.

Population and differential approaches

Provided guidance around approaches related to gender; children, adolescents, and youth; elderly persons; ethnic peoples and against racism; people with disabilities; and psychosocial support to victims and perpetrators.

Institutional strengthening

Contributed to the presence of the Truth Commission throughout the national territory and in 23 countries, as well as to the development of the Mission Information System, and, in general, to the thematic and methodological strengthening of the Commission's processes.

Ethical and political relations

Provided support to position the ethical and political truth and strengthen the mandate of the Integral System for Peace, in permanent dialogue with the National Government, the branches of power, the international community, and other social and political actors.

Among the added value of UNICEF, study participants identified the following:

Early and consistent engagement contributes to political will: UNICEF engaged in a timely manner with the Truth Commission and contributed to positioning the agenda of children and transitional justice within the institution, and in Colombia more broadly. In addition to raising awareness on the child rights-based approach, UNICEF organized and resourced conferences, workshops, and peer-exchanges, and brought onboard international experts. The decision to eventually include a dedicated children's volume in the final report was a direct result of UNICEF's concerted efforts with other child rights actors of the technical com-mittee on children and the Truth Commission's child rights-based approach unit.

Technical advisory and resource accompaniment: UNICEF provided technical assistance through embedding child protection experts in the day-to-day efforts of the Truth Commission's child rights-based approach unit. This included the development of methodologies and tools for engaging with and taking statements from children and prioritizing their safe participation in Truth Commission activities. UNICEF responded to needs,

complemented efforts, and addressed gaps the Truth Commission encountered, including when hiring specialized consultants, supporting the participation of children in activities, or when training statement-takers to collect testimonies without doing harm.

Complementing efforts in report preparation: UNICEF engaged in a principled partnership responding to emerging needs around the development of the dedicated children's volume. This included hiring additional analysts, editors for form, style, and communication, and using child-friendly and plain language. Of added value was the hiring of three complementary child-rights experts — an academic, a practitioner, and a programming specialist — to review an advanced 300-page draft of the dedicated volume. The experts issued a review assessment and contributed to content and flow, also formulating recommendations to improve the manuscript. These multiple efforts contributed to the dedicated children's volume receiving attention for highlighting new aspects and for comprehensive coverage of conflict-related impact on girls, boys, and adolescents.

<u>50</u>

3.1 Brief Overview of the Truth Commission's "Legacy"

One year before presenting its final report, the Truth Commission began to strategize about "the time after" the end of their formal mandate. As a result, the "Legacy" of the Truth Commission was born, rooted in the idea that a written final report would need complementary strategies and formats to reach diverse audiences, contribute to a national dialogue, and engage an international audience.²⁴

In terms of language and format accessibility, the Commission considered the diversity of native languages spoken in Colombia, as well as child-friendly language and translations of selected aspects into English and French.

The Legacy is defined as:

[A] set of narratives, actions, products, and processes to disseminate the findings and conclusions of the Truth Commission's final report, to create ownership among the Colombian society, State institutions,[and] international community, as well as to generate strong commitments from strategic actors to implement the Truth Commission's recommendations for non-repetition.

The Truth Commission published a compilation of lessons learned called <u>"Truth and Non-Repetition: Legacy for Colombia and for Transitional Justice in the World"</u> (available in English), geared toward supporting truth-seeking efforts in other countries. This document contains some references to the child-rights perspective adopted by Colombia's Truth Commission.

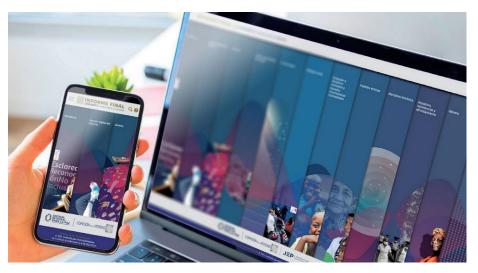
3.2 The Legacy from a Child-Rights Perspective

3.2.1. The Truth Commission's Transmedia Archive Platform

The Legacy project, which is being implemented in collaboration with partners at the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, ²⁵ guarantees continued access to the Truth Commission's findings and recommendations for researchers, educators, scholars, policymakers, peacebuilders, artists and creators, and society at large. The information available comprises a vast collection of more than 200,000 files, including audiovisual, non-textual knowledge, and digitized documents about the Colombian armed conflict and peace process. The files are stored and searchable in a digital Transmedia archive platform hosted on this stable website and includes 22 tabs.

Each of these tabs is programmed separately, considering the different users and a navigation experience centered on the individual "truthseeking" experience. Transmedia thus transcends the delivery of predominantly written final reports and opens new opportunities to engage children and young people in their own languages through ease of online navigation and short, engaging audio, video, and art-centered formats.

The contents of Transmedia are considered a public good, insofar as they belong to the people, who are explicitly encouraged to download, disseminate, engage, and use the content. As will be explored further below, children and adolescents, as well as child-rights actors and youth-led organizations, have made ample use of Transmedia's content, including through community radio, social media, self-organized exhibitions, and documentary screenings.



There is a pedagogical use guide for the Transmedia, with relevant hyperlinks embedded to navigate the site effectively, available in English.

Children on the Transmedia platform

A particular added value of Transmedia is that the Truth Commission's child rights-based approach, as well as children's voices, are mainstreamed across different tabs, while the dedicated children's landing page can be accessed using this <u>tab.</u>



Girls, boys, and adolescents tab

The specific girls, boys, and adolescents tab, "It Is Not a Minor Evil," explores two thematic aspects, each supported by UNICEF. They include: Three generations in the midst of war, as well as 'Conflict and schools. of Justice, the JEP, UBPD, and CEV.



Three generations in the midst of the war

This tab contains audio files with the real voices of persona victims of armed conflict in their childhood, across different age groups. These testimonies exemplify the diverse experiences highlighted in the dedicated children's volume. Below is a summary of some of the content:

0-5 years old:

Diana's mother, a woman of African descent, was killed by paramilitaries, but her body was never found. What did it mean to grow up with this absence?

6-10 years old:

Displacement and forced disappearance marked **Olga María**'s childhood. She tells her story in this painful account.

11 years old:

For **Juan Daniel** a Sunday mass became a nightmare that took him away from his family. He shares what it is like to be kidnapped as a child.

11-14 years old:

Milena was recruited by the ELN as a teenager. She was also a victim of sexual violence by this guerrilla group.

15-17 years old:

For **Robinson**, the nightmare did not end after he escaped from the FARC. From that moment on he was used by the army as an informant. **Elena** was in high school when she experienced paramilitary domination in her school.

18 years old:

Sebastián had to go into exile after receiving death threats.



Conflict and schools

This tab contains seven micro-documentaries on schools, teachers and students affected by the armed conflict in different areas of the country.

<u>Additional Transmedia Tabs to Explore</u> for Child-Focused Content

Findings and Recommendations:

Contains a chapter on recruitment and use of children and forced labor.

Text document

The art of telling our stories:

37 stories written by young people document places and stories associated with the war.

In their writing, the authors rethink situations that have left deep traces in the lives of the inhabitants of the municipality of Vista Hermosa (Meta).

Artistic and Cultural Activations tab:

Adult stories are told by children who narrate the stories and memories, turning them into five animations. <u>Audio-visual files</u> and <u>pedagogical guide</u>

Newsletter:

Towards the final report – dedicated volume on children #2. Newsletter

3.2.2. "Legacy Holders": Networking and Hand-Over to Partners and Allies

The Truth Commission worked hand in hand with nearly 3,000 partners to fulfill its mandate. The Legacy tab "With Whom Did We Do It?" contains a series of graphic visualizations of the different partnerships. Partners are divided into national/international categories, and their support is represented along a timeline as well as clustered by topic. In relation to partnerships that advanced numerous cross-cutting approaches, including children and adolescents, 1,035 partners are listed.

Legacy holders

As part of the socialization and ownership strategy, the Truth Commission symbolically handed over the Legacy to the legatarios y legatarias, "Legacy Holders" — a group of representatives from diverse organized sectors of civil society, including academia, youth, and Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and peasant community leaders, ²⁶ among others, who own and continue to disseminate the Truth Commission Legacy.

Legacy networking agendas

Furthermore, the Truth Commission launched more than 25 networking agendas with various territorial, national, and international partners, advancing specific aspects and topics of the Legacy. Among others, a notable effort relevant to children was the development of processes and methodologies to disseminate Legacy contents to classrooms and pedagogy through social networks.²⁷

Another network is focused on maintaining the Archives of the Truth Commission and linking them to be used in other ongoing transitional justice efforts, such as the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (for judicial processes) and the General Archive of the Nation for documentation efforts, maintaining the voices of children, adolescents, and youth for future generations.

SEREMOS Citizen Platform

A key initiative relates to the <u>SEREMOS Citizen Platform</u>²⁸, which mobilizes civil society to engage with the Truth Commission's Transmedia platform, particularly around the implementation of the recommendations and accountability of duty-bearers. The platform has a dedicated site for relevant <u>pedagogies and methodologies</u> used by the Truth Commission, including child-rights focused methodologies. The search function <u>for action</u> also captures relevant child rights-focused activities, organizations, themes, and diverse approaches.



<u>In Warm Land All Nights</u> <u>are Blue (Publication)</u>

Tags: school, non-repetition, victims
Captures the voices of girls, boys, adolescents, and youth in five regions of the country reflecting on the importance of telling the truth about what happened during the armed conflict in their regions and what should be done for the violence not to repeat.

^{26.} This process included a five-month academic process, spanning a total of 120 hours. It was segmented into four work modules and engaged 45 graduates representing peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant organizations from different areas of southwestern Colombia. These individuals were trained in the diploma course, "Reconciliation and Peace Building: The Legacy of the Commission In the Territories." 27. These networks including Educapaz, Centro de Memoria Paz y Reconciliación del Distrito de Bogotá, and UNICEF.

^{28.} This platform is driven by six allies: Fundación Avina, Corporación Viva la Ciudadanía, Universidad Javeriana de Cali — Instituto de Estudios Interculturales, Asociación Civil Memoria Abierta, UNDP, and Porticus. It will allow a civic and participative follow-up of the collective actions of appropriation of the legacy of the Commission, with special focus on the fulfillment of the recommendations.





The Truth Has a Rural Face (Publication)

Tags: co-existence, school, non-repetition

Group activities based on seven stories, with a summary and reflective questions. Includes regional stories that capture local voices in a playful manner and narratives that demonstrate lived experience, resistance, and confrontation.

We All Knew They Would Come Back for Me (Documentary)

Tags: Schools, Recruitment, VictimsThe girl protagonist tells how drug gangs tried to link her to a sexual exploitation ring, which is why she had to leave her place of origin. As a child, she escapes from the control of the paramilitaries.

Panas de la Verdad | Friends of Truth Another strategy to engage ownership is the <u>Panas de la Verdad website</u>, which contains information about the Colombian Truth Commission, data about the internal armed conflict, videos, infographics, podcasts, and graphic resources for social networks and printing. The objective is to build a community that wants to work for truth in Colombia, laying the foundations

for non-repetition and reconciliation. There is also a suggested thematic route document and a document with key messages that can be shared on social networks. A notable practice is the site's development of practical and engaging tools to reach young people and to enable peer-messaging, thereby deepening engagement of adolescents and young people.

Generación V+: Forming a voluntary youth network In preparing for the hand-over of the Legacy, the Truth Commission created <u>Generación V+</u> (Generation V +) — a voluntary youth network which promotes pedagogical and social mobilization processes.

The network aims to enhance the understanding of the value of truth in the framework of transitional justice and to advance the political and

cultural transformations necessary to confront and change these realities.

The Truth Commission published a protocol, with methodologies and tools, setting out criteria for the selection of voluntary participants. The members of Generation V+ have developed a work plan to assume their role as Legacy Holders. Among the different activities documented on

their dedicated website, <u>Generación V</u> + | Youth, they have developed a youth manifesto for championing the truth, different localized "pacts for truth," and the symbolic remembrance of girls, boys, and adolescents who lost their lives in the context of the armed conflict.

At the time of writing, Generation V+ is still operational in 20 departments and 40 municipalities of Colombia, as well as in five countries outside of Colombia. It is a particularly active Legacy Holder advancing the ownership and keeping the truth, co-existence, and non-repetition agenda alive.



Reflection: Youth participants of Generation V+ reflected on the need to think more about the financial and technical sustainability of voluntary networks following the end of the Truth Commission's mandate. Young women and men shared that while a rewarding experience, it has been a challenge to move from a project logic to self-leadership and to organize themselves. Another challenge they raised is that Colombia is still a country in conflict, in which human rights defenders and social leaders face security threats, which also constrains the activism of Generation V+. Youth consulted are vocal about the need for shared responsibility, not only by victims and civil society as rights holders, but also by state organizations as duty-bearers, and in extension international organizations through the provision of technical assistance.

Members of Generation V+ also raised the issue of adult-centrism in expecting youth groups to be appreciative and thankful for the opportunities of activism provided and to continue to work for free. In addition, the goal to "be inclusive" prompts the invitation of so-called "youth representatives" to speak for the youth, often ignoring the diversity among "youth," as well as privilege structures around location (urban/rural), resources, and ethnic differences of "who speaks." Younger generations also indicate that it is quite a challenge to deal with the expectations connected to being the "leaders of the future" when the situation in the country that is being handed down is difficult to navigate.

3.2.3. Monitoring and Follow-Up Recommendations/Non-Repetition

The primary function of the Monitoring and Follow-Up Committee of the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Truth Commission (Decree 588 of 2017)²⁹ is to monitor and follow up on the implementation of the recommendations, communicate with various entities and victims' and human rights organizations, create periodic follow-up reports on the recommendations (which should have a territorial, differential, and gender focus), and disseminate those reports to the media. The committee will work for seven years (2023-2030) and is composed of seven members (four women and three men). It has committed to publishing biannual follow-up and monitoring reports and promoting broad and diverse participation with social organizations and victims to influence the implementation of the recommendations by public authorities.



The first follow-up report (July 2023)

The Monitoring and Follow-Up Committee's first report focused on the implementation of recommendations, some of them relevant to girls, boys, and adolescents in relation to the education sector. The report established that out of the 16 recommendations related to the education sector, the following were incorporated into the government's National Development Plan and Total Peace policy:

• **57.7:** Strengthen the education processes of ethnic peoples.

- **63.2:** Create a national educational pact for peace education.
- 64.5: Fulfill international commitments in the fight against racism and discrimination

Recommendation highlighted in the report:

The report mentioned the necessity to deepen the rural/agrarian focus of certain recommendations, such as 57.6, which is related to the regulatory, institutional, and budgetary adjustments needed to guarantee coverage, access, quality, relevance, and permanence in education of children and adolescents in rural areas.



The second follow-up report (June 2024):

The second report of the Monitoring and Follow-Up Committee highlighted efforts of dissemination of the Truth Commission's legacy by partners. The committee noted some progress related to peace education strategies. However, it stressed that access to quality education in rural and ethnic areas requires more attention and resources, and that recruitment of children by armed groups is increasing.

Recommendation highlighted in the report:

The committee called on the national government to develop concrete projects and actions to consolidate peace, as well as to operationalize the Public Policy for Reconciliation, Coexistence and Non-Stigmatization. The committee further recommended to strengthen the "Education embraces the truth" strategy, whereby new generations can have a deeper knowledge of history and strengthen their civic participation.



Reflection: There could be a standalone section summarizing the child-centered recommendations to facilitate monitoring and accountability efforts. Furthermore, the embedded recommendations on children, adolescents, and youth from specific volumes could also be highlighted.



Reflection: While in Colombia there is not a sole standardized education curriculum, there are notable efforts from the Education Sector to develop and use peace program. Many teachers in Colombia are receptive, flexible and committed to delivering peace education. location (urban/rural), resources, and ethnic differences of "who speaks." Younger generations also indicate that it is quite a challenge to deal with the expectations connected to being the "leaders of the future" when the situation in the country that is being handed down is difficult to navigate.

3.3 Added Value of UNICFF

In the context of the shift from providing comprehensive support for the Truth Commission to the Legacy, UNICEF provided child-friendly strategies to enable the dissemination of relevant resources through the education system, adolescent and youth networks, and social media, among others. Thus, UNICEF contributed to the interconnected goals of of 1) fulfilling the rights of children and victims to truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition, 2) informing and creating awareness among children and youth on findings and recommendations of the Truth Commission, and 3) empowering children and youth as agents of peace.

Notable Practice: UNICEF's Transitional Justice Program

To contribute to the success and sustainability of the Truth Commission's Legacy, UNICEF, with the support of the German Government, implemented the project "Building Together the Legacy of the Truth Commission: Adolescents and Youth as Peace Leaders." This project aimed to guarantee that children, adolescents, and youth learn about, engage with, and promote the findings and recommendations of the final report as a contribution to reconciliation, social cohesion, non-repetition, and peace in Colombia. To achieve this objective, the project implemented actions in the following three main areas:

Support the production and availability of child-friendly versions and materials of the Truth Commission's final report.

Support adolescent
and youth participation
and mobilization to
disseminate and promote
dialogue about the findings
and recommendations
of the Truth Commission's
final report.

Promote peace education in schools.

Key results of the project, supported by the German government, included:

- The development and dissemination of child-friendly versions of the findings of the Truth Commission, such as a pedagogical summary and interactive video on the Truth Commission's volume on children.
- The launch of a national peace art contest for adolescents and youth called "Trazos de paz: Imagina una Colombia Reconciliada."
- The development of pedagogical guidelines for primary and secondary teachers to mainstream the Truth

Commission's findings in classes.

- The training and coaching of 1,189 teachers on these guidelines, reaching over 74,800 students who improved their knowledge and capacities on this matter.
- The training and coaching of 331 adolescents and youth as peace leaders, who conducted several virtual peace mobilization campaigns reaching over 290,000 people.

UNICEF adopted a multi-pronged strategy to disseminate the Truth Commission's findings and recommendations, considering different audiences, lessons learned and a child rights focus.

Child-friendly
versions of
the Truth
Commission's
dedicated
children's
volume



Development of a <u>child-friendly</u> <u>summary of the</u> <u>dedicated children's</u> volume:

UNICEF drafted, published, and disseminated a pedagogical summary of the children's volume of the Truth Commission's final report. This 60-page summary includes reader-friendly illustrations and infographics and highlights important child-related recommendations of the Truth Commission. Five hundred copies were submitted to strategic partners as well as to adolescents and young people, and a virtual version was disseminated through UNICEF's website and social media channels.



Alternative communications as means to disseminate:

In cooperation with the Truth Commission, UNICEF produced <u>seven mini-documentaries</u> related to the impact of armed conflict

on education, as well 12 audio testimonies of persons victims of armed conflict in their childhood. These materials are available on the Transmedia platform.



Development of an interactive <u>video</u>, "Ecos – Stories of Truth, Peace, and Reconciliation":

In this interactive video, players follow teenagers in a backward time travel to discover the stories of children, families, and communities victimized by armed conflict in different periods and places of Colombia (along the lines of the content of the children's volume).

After each story, players are invited to put themselves in the victims' place, reflect on the risks faced by children, learn key data and findings of the Truth Commission, and decide on actions to be taken to prevent conflict at the individual, community, and national levels. Throughout the experience, players are rewarded with symbols to build up their avatar. At the end, they can leave a public message on the "peace wall."

Public dissemination strategies



Art contest:

UNICEF conducted the peace art contest "Trazos de Paz: Imagine a Reconciled Colombia". The objective was to disseminate and promote the contents and recommendations of the final report of the Truth Commission through the construction of art pieces by adolescents and youth, responding to the question "How do you imagine

a reconciled Colombia?" Overall, the 368 applicants, 22,788 votes, and 427,638 website visits contributed to the promotion of reflections, dialogues, opinions, and meetings of adolescents and young people around the appropriation of the truth and the construction of a possible future. The contest also inspired commitments to implement the recommendations of the Truth Commission.



Child-friendly toolkit for tour guides of the Truth Commission's exhibit:

Together with adolescents and youth, and with the team in charge of the Truth Commission's

exhibit at the Centre of Memory, Peace, and Reconciliation, UNICEF produced practical and child-friendly toolkit for tour guides. These facilitate the visit of children and students, providing them with age-appropriate language, methodologies, and dynamics. A 64-hour training program was designed and conducted with tour guides on the use of the child-friendly toolkit. The training included a module on psychosocial support in case of adverse public reaction, taking due consideration to do no harm.

Adolescent and youth peace leadership



Training and coaching of adolescents and youth as peace leaders:

A virtual peace leadership training program for adolescents and youth called "PazalaVerdad" was developed. This ten-module training, based on the findings and recommendations of the Truth Commission's report, allowed participants to learn about the history of armed conflict — its actors, causes, and consequences — but also about the recommendations to build peace in Colombia. A total of 331 adolescents and youth completed the training and were certified.

Furthermore, youth peace leaders were supported in the planning and implementation of national-level peace mobilizations, including by communication and social media experts in the creation of messages, contents, products, strategies, and targets. Overall, these initiatives reached a total of 282,387 people on social media and 5,610 in person. Examples of actions can be viewed at the following links: #BAJO un mismo cielo, #Pazitoapazito, and #Pazate por la verdad.



Peace education

Pedagogical guides for primary and secondary teachers were developed in collaboration with officials of the Ministry of Education, local education authorities, ex-members of the Truth Commission, and teachers. In addition, a training course for teachers to mainstream Truth Commission findings and recommendations was developed. A total of 1,189 teachers completed the course. These teachers replicated the course in their classrooms, reaching and improving the knowledge and capacity of 74,800 students. A virtual version of the course can be accessed on UNICEF's platform Agora.

4

Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

Colombia's Truth Commission made significant contributions and established a precedent for the development of a comprehensive child rights-based approach that can be used by future truth commissions around the world. In particular, Colombia's Truth Commission succeeded in creating an explicitly child-inclusive mandate, as well as methodo-logies for the safe participatory engagement of children and protocols for children's statement-taking in individual, group, and collective settings. The Truth Commission collected testimonies from children, adolescents, and youth, as well adults who were victimized as children, provided psychosocial support, and developed a dedicated children-focused chapter in its final report.

The child rights-based approach adopted by the Truth Commission not only assumed intergenerational engagement and introduced perspectives from different territories and ethnic groups, but also captured the diverse impacts of the conflict on children. The Truth Commission captured patterns of victimization, but also strategies of resistance, resilience, and agency. With strong support from various child-rights actors — in particular UNICEF — at the international, national, and civil society levels, the Truth Commission enabled the creation of safe spaces for listening and participatory engagement of children.

The Legacy of the Truth Commission, including the dissemination and follow-up of Truth Commission's findings and recommendations, also include a strong child-focus and good practices that could inspire other countries and UNICEF offices embarking on truth-seeking, transitional justice and peace-building efforts.

4.2 Recommendations



Raise awareness and establish a strong position for the agenda of children's rights in truth commissions from the beginning of the process.

It is essential for child-rights stakeholders to engage early with decision-makers and stakeholders, sharing existing key principles, documentation, and lessons learned from previous truth commissions undertaken in different countries. This can be achieved by serving as a knowledge broker, facilitating expert visits and peer-exchanges, and generating international discussions and dialogues to build momentum and institutional will for a child rights-based approach.

UNICEF offices can engage early with prospective truth commissions, sharing international legal frameworks on children and transitional justice and facilitating expert visits and peer-exchanges to build momentum and institutional will for a child-rights approach.

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Determine that children's engagement with the Truth Commission is in their best interests, adhering to international standards, and that children's safety and protection is paramount, and adopt an explicit childrights mandate, enabling an operational structure to support it, with trained and experienced staff both at central and territorial levels.

It is critical that the mandate of the truth commission include specific child-focused elements embedded in international and national legal frameworks and commitments, as well as a political will to operationalize a child rights-based approach. This can be aided through the establishment of a sound institutional structure that includes a dedicated child rights-based approach unit and interdisciplinary teams with expertise in child rights, child protection and case management, psychology, social work, and research capacity.

Furthermore, it is essential that the team composition includes experts who understand the historical context and the impacts of the conflict on children and adolescents. In addition, safe spaces for reflection and peer-exchange need to be established and supported, as well as mechanisms for staff well-being in these high-stress environments.

UNICEF offices can provide technical support and accompaniment in operationalizing a child rights-based approach in the truth commission's mandate. Furthermore, offices can support a child rights-based approach unit and offer experts, capacity building and training for the centralized and territorial teams on a broad range of child rights, child protection, and child participation issues.



Develop child-friendly protocols, procedures and tools for truth-seeking efforts and safe child-centered participation in line with "Key principles for child protection and participation in transitional justice", including a focus on the importance of continued mental health and psychosocial support before, during and after children's participation.

Given the primary importance of children's safety, an assessment in line with the Key Principles for Child Protection and Participation in Transitional Justice (see p.3) needs to be conducted to determine whether a truth-seeking effort is appropriate for child and adolescent participation, and what enabling conditions need to be in place to ensure their safety and well-being. Based on these insights, guidance, tools, and methodologies should be developed to enable participation in ways that are age-appropriate and reflect gendered, ethnic, and territorial particularities, and incorporate child protection and Do No Harm principles.

Child-centered participation should be encouraged by safely involving children in the truth-seeking process through the informed consent of children and their parents/caregivers, so that their voices are heard and respected. It is critical to include and inform parents and communities in support of children's participation. In all efforts to enhance children's participation, stakeholders need to maintain the principles of transitional justice for child protection and participation, in accordance with the Key Principles. In all efforts to enhance children's participation, stakeholders need to follow up and ensure continued mental health and psychosocial support before, during and after children participate.

UNICEF should promote the knowledge that safe and appropriate child participation and engagement empowers children. UNICEF offices can support the development of child-friendly tools, methodologies, and pedagogy, as well as provide technical guidance and resources to roll them out. Cross-functional collaboration across UNICEF program areas such as education, adolescent development and participation, gender, social and behaviour change and communication, should be encouraged to promote a comprehensive approach to truth-seeking and child protection. Diverse modalities and means of participation for children may be pursued, including exploration of innovative ways for children to contribute to research and analysis. UNICEF can help systematize learnings in relation to tools and methodologies by commissioning learning papers and risk assessments, convening spaces for reflection, and developing reports on other truth commissions' decisions concerning child protection and participation as well as best practices for involving children.



Ensure adequate financial and human resourcing for inclusive child rights-inclusive truth-seeking and child participation efforts that capture the intersectional ethnic, gendered, and territorial realities of children affected by armed conflict.

It is crucial to identify, in a timely manner, emerging gaps in child-rights expertise in terms of financial and human resources, and engage child protection organizations, practitioners, and allies to address those gaps. This includes supporting local partners to build capacity and access key human resources through training, engaging the expertise of practitioners and researchers, and planning ahead for the 'legacy' of the truth commission. Furthermore, it requires ensuring early and comprehensive involvement of donors, prioritizing tasks, and generating awareness around the need for flexible and core funds to complement the project logic (for transitional justice and/or reconciliation programming). Be ambitious, bold, and visionary in budgeting and be prepared for possible budget cuts with a contingency plan to navigate financial restrictions.

UNICEF offices can provide dedicated specialized staff and technical and operational support to truth commissions. Offices can offer strategic resourcing and budgetary guidance to ensure effective allocation of resources, advocate for and enable more flexible and core funds, and coordinate with different donors to ensure the truth commission's strategic vision is well resourced. Offices can also ensure tasks are prioritized according to an ambitious budget while being prepared for budget cuts, and can help to ensure fundraising continues beyond the end of the mandate.



Highlight the differential impacts of conflict on children and include a dedicated children's volume and child-specific recommendations in the final report.

To ensure that the impact of conflict on children is effectively highlighted in truth-seeking efforts, it is crucial to conduct focused analysis and include a dedicated children's volume in the final report. This requires supporting and enabling appropriate data collection methods with children and adults who were victimized in their childhood, with a focus on a localized approach. It also requires adopting an intersectional cross-cutting approach that considers the diverse experiences and identities of children affected by conflict. For example, in Colombia, the coordinated efforts of the child rights-based approach unit and gender unit were able to uncover gendered lived realities of girls and boys of different ages and identify differential gendered treatment of children and adolescents, including within the same family and across different population groups.

When formulating recommendations, child-rights considerations need to be mainstreamed and child-specific and gender-sensitive recommendations should be included. To enable more consistent follow-up, the presentation of findings should include a summary of child-rights recommendations, making them explicit and specific.

UNICEF offices can support this process by providing technical support and capacity building in terms of child rights, child protection, and meaningful participation of children in truth-seeking efforts, both at the national and territorial level. Where relevant, UNICEF offices should draw on territorial presence, sub-regional offices, and existing expertise in local contexts. Offices should encourage an intersectional approach that considers the diverse experiences of children affected by conflict. Advocate for the inclusion of a dedicated children's volume in the final report, including specific child-focused recommendations, to ensure that the specific impacts on children are effectively highlighted and followed up on.



Keep the momentum going by disseminating findings and supporting implementation of recommendations and longer-term peacebuilding work, including education, protection, reconciliation and other transitional justice programming.

To ensure broader truth-seeking outcomes with a child-rights focus, it is crucial to maintain momentum by disseminating findings, particularly in the education system and among adolescent and youth networks, as well as implementing recommendations and fostering a longer-term peacebuilding vision. This includes the broad dissemination and amplification of truth commission findings and recommendations in all sectors of society, using child-friendly language and methodologies to engage children and adolescents and build social cohesion. It also involves contributing to the implementation and monitoring of recommendations, with a focus on institutionalizing the "never again" principle. This requires continuous technical advisory support for monitoring and accountability efforts that engage duty-bearers and support the inclusion of child-rights expertise and the involvement of children and adolescents in the follow-up process.

In addition to following up on the implementation of concrete recommendations, efforts should be made to advance longer-term peacebuilding work, including reconciliation and other transitional justice programming. This can contribute to an enabling environment for the implementation and advancement of children's rights.

UNICEF offices can support this process by linking existing programming to transitional justice (including reconciliation efforts) and promoting specific recommendations related to the fulfillment of children's rights. This includes offering strategic guidance on how to link transitional justice with the education curriculum and ensuring that recommendation objectives are integrated into regular programming. Technical support and capacity building should be provided to the truth commission and follow-up committee. Offices should advocate for the inclusion of child-friendly language and methodologies in the dissemination and implementation of findings and recommendations. Finally, offices should empower children and youth-led networks and organizations and secure resources for their initiatives related to implementing Truth Commission recommendations, ensuring continuity and institutionalization within the education system (among others).



Leverage the power of collaboration and partnerships involving diverse rights holders and duty-bearers.

To ensure the effective implementation of truth-seeking efforts, it is crucial to leverage the power of partnerships and allies from various sectors, including children, youth, civil society organizations, the international community, the UN, national and local governments, faith-based groups, and other stakeholders. This includes fostering partnerships and alliances with organizations and individuals and leveraging their expertise, resources, and networks to amplify the impact of the truth commission's work.

It is also important to provide principled accompaniment and support to partners and allies, building their capacity and ensuring that their voices are heard, and their perspectives are considered in the truth-seeking process. This includes supporting or creating technical spaces for peer-exchange among child-protection stakeholders to enable political support and solidarity around the need to firmly position a child rights-based approach in the truth commission's substantive content and ways of working. Within the context of Colombia's Truth Commission, this was showcased by the committed contributions of the Technical Committee on Children. It is also important for national and local duty-bearers to assume their responsibility as quardians in support of child protection and participation.

UNICEF offices can support this process by fostering partnerships and alliances with organizations and individuals dedicated to family and community-based child protection and participation and providing accompaniment and support. A key strength of UNICEF is its inclusive engagement with diverse stakeholders, including children, youth, and marginalized communities, as well as national and local government officials, educators, faith-based and community leaders, child protection experts, social workers, parents and caregivers, and others. Leveraging this strength, UNICEF offices can act as bridge-builders in engaging government and communities in support of the best interests of children.

