

tool 57 Community Engagement in Prevention of Recruitment and Protection of Children at Risk in Colombia

Case study

A civil society network actively engaged in the MRM in Colombia launched an initiative called 'Prevention School' which aims to strengthen the capacity of local actors and communities to identify and protect children at risk of recruitment by armed actors. The initiative builds both on existing community coping mechanisms and on institutional structures set in place to protect children at risk. The 'Prevention School' has two pillars: 1) training and 2) protection.

1) Training component:

Child-minders such as teachers, parents, community members, as well as local welfare officials were identified as key target groups for prevention activities, as they are best placed to identify children at risk and intervene to prevent recruitment and protect the child. The NGO developed a dedicated training manual for child-minders that highlights the legal, conceptual and institutional framework for child protection (and for the prevention of child recruitment in particular), as well as a means of identifying children at risk and recommendations for action.

2) Protection component:

Children identified as being at imminent risk of recruitment can be protected through temporary relocation. In cases where there is no alternative, children can be relocated to a government-run institution in the capital, Bogotá, but preference is given to relocations within the same family or community. In fact, in communities in which the concept of collective responsibility is particularly strong, children can be relocated anywhere within the community, rather than within the limits of their biological family. For instance in the department of Cauca, in the southwestern part of Colombia, the association of indigenous leaders ('cabildos') plays a pivotal role in facilitating and overseeing the relocation of indigenous children at risk from one area of the department to another, placing them under the responsibility of the indigenous authority.

related tools

-  tool 50 – Factsheet 'Linking, monitoring prevention and response to grave violations'