# Colombian rebel groups ramp up child recruitment via Facebook and TikTok



Rebel groups in Colombia have increasingly been using social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok to recruit children and young adults, according to the United Nations. The recruitment efforts primarily target youth from marginalised communities, including Indigenous populations, where these groups seek to bolster their ranks.

Scott Campbell, the U.N.'s top human rights official in Colombia, highlighted the scale of the problem and the role social media companies play in either curbing or enabling such recruitment. Speaking to the Associated Press, Campbell stated that more significant investment is needed in automated moderation tools and human content moderators, specifically for platforms used in the global south. He remarked that companies often take stronger action in the global north, where there is greater political pressure, but insufficient resources are dedicated to managing the threat in countries like Colombia.

One of the groups involved in these recruitment activities is the FARC-EMC, a faction that emerged following a peace agreement between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the government in 2016. Since then, as fighting and territorial disputes continue in some regions, the pace of recruitment has notably risen. For example, the Human Rights Ombudsman of Colombia reported that 409 children under 18 were recruited by rebel organisations in 2024, which is double the figure from the previous year. The U.N. itself recorded 216 cases of forced recruitment of minors during the same period.

The most acute challenges are observed in Cauca province in southwest Colombia, an area plagued by conflict between military forces, drug gangs, and multiple rebel groups vying for control following the dissipation of the original FARC presence. Anyi Zapata, a human rights specialist from ACIN, an Indigenous association in Cauca, described how rebel groups have long exploited vulnerable children by luring them with small favours or gifts such as mobile phones. More recently, these groups have increasingly turned to social media to glamorise their lifestyle, posting videos that include images of motorcycles, SUVs, and adventurous behaviour, often accompanied by logos of their groups. One example cited is a TikTok video showing a man on a motorcycle in camouflage, with a caption inviting viewers to join for "friendship without hypocrisy."

Campbell also disclosed that he met with representatives from Meta, Facebook's parent company, to address the issue. Meta stated via email that it bans terrorist organisations from its platforms and collaborates with law enforcement to prevent child recruitment. The company also works with other tech firms to share intelligence on these threats. Meta is reportedly aiming to arrange discussions with TikTok representatives as well, but TikTok had not commented by the time of reporting.

Despite account suspensions and content removal, Campbell noted that the problem persists as new accounts frequently replace those taken down. He recommended that social media companies share information about these accounts with Colombian prosecutors to enable legal action against individuals who post such recruitment content. He acknowledged the difficulty in balancing freedom of expression with the need to eliminate content that is illegal and harmful.

The Independent is reporting on the complexities surrounding online recruitment by armed groups in Colombia, shedding light on the ongoing struggles in conflict-affected regions and the critical role social media companies play in managing the digital dimension of this issue.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://apnews.com/article/6b2a8f1577709c35d5388bcb767a6fc3> - This article reports that rebel groups in Colombia, including the FARC-EMC, are increasingly using social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok to recruit children and young adults, especially from marginalized and Indigenous communities. The United Nations, represented by human rights official Scott Campbell, is urging these tech companies to invest more in automated tools and human moderators to detect and remove such harmful content.
* <https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/cgxxjzlg89zo> - This BBC article discusses how fighters belonging to breakaway groups associated with Colombia's largest rebel movement are posting videos on TikTok to entice young people to join them. It highlights the use of social media by guerrilla factions to recruit minors, particularly in rural regions like Cauca.
* <https://www.elpais.com/america-colombia/2024-11-25/x-para-la-politica-tiktok-para-el-reclutamiento-y-whatsapp-para-el-control-social-los-grupos-armados-de-colombia-afinan-sus-estrategias-en-redes-sociales.html> - This El País article details how armed groups in Colombia have adapted their strategies to the digital world, using different social media platforms to achieve their objectives. It specifically mentions the use of TikTok for recruitment and WhatsApp for social control, highlighting the challenges in moderating content on messaging platforms.
* <https://insightcrime.org/news/3-factors-driving-child-recruitment-in-the-colombian-conflict/> - This InSight Crime article examines factors driving child recruitment in Colombia, including the reconfiguration of Colombia’s criminal landscape after the FARC peace agreement in 2016. It discusses how armed groups, such as the ELN and FARC dissidents, have intensified recruitment efforts, particularly targeting minors to bolster their ranks in territorial disputes.
* <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/14/2/85> - This academic article analyzes the intersection of child trafficking and child recruitment for armed conflicts, focusing on the Colombian case. It references reports from the UN Secretary-General to the UN Security Council on the promotion and protection of children’s rights and violations of these rights in armed conflicts, highlighting ongoing cases of sexual violence and the recruitment and use of children by FARC-EP dissident groups and the ELN.
* <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240403-colombia-guerrillas-lure-youth-on-tiktok> - This France 24 article discusses how guerrillas and narcos in Colombia are recruiting minors through TikTok, sharing images of men in fatigues on horseback or crossing rivers, accompanied by motivational and revolutionary messages. It highlights the use of emojis like the green leaf to refer to coca crops and the covered face of a ninja as a symbol of secrecy.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/colombia-united-nations-meta-bogota-facebook-b2742425.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data