

Children are the most affected by violence in Ecuador



By María Josefina Arce

Children are undoubtedly one of the sectors hardest hit by the wave of violence in Ecuador, which in 2023 recorded more than 7,000 homicides, which led to it being classified as the most violent country in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Recent official data showed that more than 119 thousand minors left school in the last year, due to the high insecurity in the nation, where since last January the "state of armed conflict" was declared by President Daniel Noboa.

The COVID 19 pandemic imposed distance classes to protect the health of students and teachers, a modality that was maintained until the end of the school year last March in many educational centers due to being in high crime areas.

Last February, UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund, noted that the worsening insecurity that led to the temporary closure of schools in Ecuador deprived more than 4 million children and young people of adequate educational services.

Many of them live in impoverished areas, where they do not have the technological and pedagogical resources required to ensure the quality of teaching.

The UN agency pointed out that the interruption of basic services in areas controlled by criminal groups prevents not only access to education, but also to health and protection of this population segment.

Unfortunately, violence has also claimed many lives in that sector of society. In 2023, 770 murders of infants and adolescents were reported, a figure that represents an increase of 640% compared to the 104 cases registered in 2019.

And only in the first two months of this year, 58 homicides of minors were recorded in Ecuadorian territory.

One problem is their recruitment by armed gangs, which take advantage of poverty and the absence of State policies in favor of the most vulnerable. In Ecuador, according to official statistics, poverty stood at 27% in 2023 and extreme poverty at almost 11%.

In statements to the Prensa Latina news agency, analyst Juan Francisco Oña, from the World Vision organization, pointed out that when they are recruited it is very difficult for them to get out of that situation, since they do not know any other life option and many do not reach adulthood because in that context, death is something everyday.

The ineffective presence of the State throughout the country and the lack of essential policies that guarantee access to basic services have opened the way for criminal groups and put a sector as vulnerable as children at risk in Ecuador.

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