

REFORMING EDUCATION FOR PEACE: How can Education Reforms Facilitate the End of Civil Wars?



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

July 2023

Intra-state peace accords often fail to nurture peace because they do not redress broader socio-economic inequalities and do not initiate the long-term structural change essential for reconciliation.

Education reforms can address these challenges in three main ways:

- Education reforms can impact short-term security by incentivising former combatants to lay down their weapons.
- Education reforms can foster medium-term conflict management by recognising and redressing conflict-related inequalities.
- Education reforms can nurture peacebuilding by challenging structural and cultural violence towards all marginalised groups to build a fairer, more inclusive society for all.

Policy Recommendations

Education reforms should be more systematically included in peace agreements.

1. **Education provisions must be designed and adapted to different contexts**, considering ethnic, cultural, political, and socio-economic conditions. Regional diffusion of norms should be complemented with the targeted promotion of specific interventions in appropriate contexts.
2. **Education reforms for peacebuilding should be more frequently embedded in peace accords.** Where appropriate, specific education reforms can also be designed to support security and conflict-management after civil war and conflict.
3. A **policy-smart integration of education reforms** in intra-state political agreements can provide much-needed structural and cultural change to

achieve reconciliation and more robust peace accords.

About the Research

This research analysed the frequency, context and framing of education reforms in intra-state political agreements using the dataset of Formal Education in Political Agreements (FEPA). FEPA is the largest dataset of education in peace accords in the world, and captures reforms of formal education in all 286 intra-state political agreements concluded between 1989 and 2016.

Three main findings emerge from a combination of descriptive statistics and text analysis of the relevant clauses:

- Education is rarely included in peace accords. Only 29.4% of intra-state political agreements address formal education reform. Whilst the priority of peace accords is understandably to end violence, unreformed education systems risk reproducing the causes of conflict and increase the likelihood of conflict recurrence.

- Local and regional precedents affect the inclusion of education reforms. Some regions (such as Central and South America) have adopted education reforms more systematically than others (such as Africa). Best practices in embedding education reforms in peace accords should be disseminated beyond the neighbouring countries and regions. Policy diffusion should take into account the beneficial impact of specific types of education reform in ethnically fragmented and low-income contexts.

- The framing of education provisions differs deeply across different documents. Peace accords present education reform as:

- A. Contributing to short-term security by incentivising former combatants to lay down their weapons. The **'Security frame'** is the most common, but it constrains the contribution of education to only promoting the end of widespread violence.
- B. Fostering medium-term conflict management by recognising and redressing conflict-related inequalities (for example, redistributing power away from the central state and towards conflict-affected and rebel-controlled areas). The **'Conflict management frame'** contributes to structural change but tends to focus on conflict-affected areas and groups that directly participated in conflict.
- C. Nurturing long-term peacebuilding by challenging structural and cultural violence towards all marginalised groups to build a fairer, more inclusive society for all. The **'Peacebuilding frame'** is the most effective approach to challenge structural and cultural violence. It encompasses curricular reform of national subjects, universal access to education, and opportunities for sustained and positive contact between children of different backgrounds. It is mindful of the hidden barriers to educational access and intersecting forms of inequality and exclusion and seeks to challenge them systematically.

About the Authors

Dr Giuditta Fontana, Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham – g.fontana@bham.ac.uk

Thomas Bobo, Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham – tgb235@student.bham.ac.uk

Case Study: Colombia's 'Final agreement to end the armed conflict and build a stable and lasting peace' (2016)

The 2016 agreement aims to end the conflict between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government (1964-2016). Its provisions illustrate the three ways in which education reforms are framed in intra-state political agreements:

Education Reforms for Security: Article 3.1.4.1: 'In implementing the preparatory process for the reincorporation of its combatants into civilian life, the FARC-EP may, in coordination with the National Government, provide FARC-EP members within the TLZNs with any type of training in productive tasks and with instruction to raise their basic primary, secondary or technical level of education, in accordance with their own interests'

Education Reforms for Conflict Management: Article 1.3.2.2: 'A progressive increase in technical, technological and university quotas in rural zones... The provision of scholarships with non-repayable grants for the poorest rural men and women to gain access to technical, technological and university training services, to include, where relevant, subsistence funds'.

Education Reforms for Peacebuilding: Article 1.3.2.2: 'Improvement of the conditions of access of boys, girls and adolescents to the education system and assistance in enabling them to continue their education, through the provision of free access to materials, textbooks, school meals and transport'; Article 2.2.4: 'The creation of a university subject matter in the area of reconciliation and peace policy'.