

2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Colombia

COLOMBIA (Tier 2)

The Government of Colombia does not meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. However, these efforts were not serious and sustained compared with the previous reporting period, so Colombia was downgraded to Tier 2. Significant efforts included increasing investigations into possible trafficking crimes, and convicting more traffickers, including two complicit officials. In addition, robust law enforcement cooperation with a foreign government led to the arrest of traffickers and seizure of properties used in trafficking crimes. However, services for victims were inadequate, and the government's emphasis on cursory emergency care did not address victims' needs for complex long-term care essential to their recovery. The government terminated a contractual agreement with an NGO to provide support to adult victims, including emergency shelters, in May 2024, leaving victims who were receiving services vulnerable to re-victimization and the approximately 85 to 95 percent of identified victims who were adults without access to adequate care, particularly shelter. The government has not prosecuted or convicted any labor traffickers since 2018, despite reporting that labor trafficking was prevalent in Colombia. The government initiated significantly fewer prosecutions, identified significantly fewer victims, and decreased funding for anti-trafficking efforts. Law enforcement's reliance on victim self-identification combined with the absence of a victim identification protocol to proactively identify victims contributed to systemic underreporting of cases. Additionally, insufficient early intervention efforts to mitigate illegal armed groups' forced recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, which authorities did not consider a human trafficking crime, combined with a lack of proactive efforts to identify and screen vulnerable youth, contributed to the significant increase in forced recruitment of children.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Vigorously prosecute trafficking crimes, including labor trafficking crimes, and seek penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Enable centralized funding for departments and municipalities for the provision of direct and specialized care for adult trafficking victims and victims of forced labor in presidential decree 1066 of 2015, and incorporate victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches, primarily to allow continuity of services and care, notably shelter, until victims' rehabilitation.
- Draft, approve, and implement a victim-centered and trauma-informed identification protocol for all police units and train officials on proactive identification and referral.
- Appoint an anti-trafficking coordinator to lead national and local efforts to combat human trafficking.
- Establish and train specialized police, prosecutors, and judges – allowing permanent or long-term contracts to prevent staff turnover and develop institutional knowledge – to investigate, prosecute, and convict trafficking cases.
- Increase early intervention and outreach efforts to vulnerable youth in areas with a notable prevalence of child recruitment for forced criminality and armed conflict, counter recruitment efforts by criminal actors and illegal armed groups, and recognize forced recruitment and use of children for armed conflict as human trafficking when it meets the international definitions.
- Develop, fund, and implement a centralized data collection system on trafficking to reconcile duplicative data stored across different systems.
- Increase efforts to proactively identify victims who face abusive practices that may amount to trafficking in *criadazgo* (child domestic servitude), refer those identified to

services, and increase prevention efforts to mitigate exploitation of children in domestic servitude.

- Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.
- Develop, adopt, implement, and fund a new national action plan for the elimination of trafficking and include efforts to address rising trends, such as human trafficking in webcam modeling, fraudulent recruitment practices used to hire individuals to work as mercenaries, and trafficking in soccer industries.
- Proactively vet NGOs partnering with law enforcement actors to ensure practices used during trafficking operations are victim-centered and trauma-informed.
- Revise the definition of human trafficking under Colombian law to align more closely with the 2000 UN TIP Protocol definition.

PROSECUTION

The government's prosecution efforts were inadequate; although the government increased investigations and convictions for sex trafficking crimes, for the seventh consecutive year, authorities did not prosecute or convict any labor traffickers.

Numerous provisions criminalizing trafficking crimes within the penal code led to an inconsistent law enforcement and prosecutorial response. Article 188A of the penal code criminalized sex and labor trafficking and prescribed punishments of 13 to 23 years' imprisonment plus fines between 800 and 1,500 times the monthly minimum salary. Penalties under Article 188A were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes such as rape. Article 188A of the penal code is inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law, as the law did not include force, fraud, or coercion as an essential element of a trafficking crime. The law criminalized forced child recruitment and forced criminal activity by illegal armed groups under separate statutes; however, prosecutors did not consider or investigate these crimes as potential human trafficking, including in cases that appear to fit within the international law definition of trafficking. The Attorney General's Office (AGO) investigated and prosecuted some sex trafficking crimes under other provisions of the penal code, including article 213 "induction into prostitution," Article 214 "coercion to engage in prostitution," Article 213A "exploitation of the prostitution of a minor," and article 217A "solicitation of commercial sex with a child." The penalties prescribed under these laws were similar to those prescribed under Article 188A, with the exception of Article 214, which prescribed penalties of nine to 13 years' imprisonment and a fine. Similarly, the AGO investigated and prosecuted some cases of forced child criminal activity, using Article 188D of the penal code, "use of minors in criminal acts;" the penalties prescribed under this provision were similar to those prescribed under article 188A.

The sex crimes unit of the national police opened 267 trafficking cases under Articles 214, 213A, and 217A of the penal code, compared with 109 in 2023. The AGO investigated 50 cases of trafficking under Article 188A (51 in 2023), including 48 cases for sex trafficking involving 37 suspects and two cases for forced labor involving six suspects (compared with 45 for sex trafficking and six for labor trafficking with an unspecified number of suspects in 2023). Officials also investigated 379 potential trafficking cases of unspecified forms of exploitation (235 in 2023), including four cases with aggravating factors such as age or psychological immaturity of the victim, and nine cases involving sexual exploitation of protected individuals that may have amounted to sex trafficking. It was unclear if the 397 potential trafficking cases of unspecified exploitation constituted trafficking under international law.

In 2024, the AGO prosecuted 14 individuals using Article 188A, two for sex trafficking and 12 for unspecified forms of trafficking, but it was unclear if these unspecified cases constituted trafficking as defined under international law. This was a significant decrease compared with 56 prosecutions for sex trafficking under Article 188A and one under a different article of the penal code in 2023. Ministry of Labor (MOL) officials referred one case believed to be trafficking to the AGO, but the AGO did not criminally prosecute any cases of labor trafficking. Authorities suspended over 80

percent of all criminal complaints. Criminal cases took an average of six years to resolve and less than five percent of cases reached conviction. Courts convicted 12 individuals for unspecified forms of trafficking under Article 188A (six in 2023), but it was unclear if these cases constituted trafficking as defined under international law. Separately, nine individuals were acquitted, and one case was under appeal. Judicial authorities reported none of the individuals convicted in 2024 received sentences. However, other reporting indicated two complicit officials who reached a plea agreement were sentenced to seven years and six months in prison for conspiring into criminality with human trafficking as an aggravating factor – a sentence that was lower than the 13-year minimum sentence established under Article 188A and the eight-year minimum punishment established under Article 340 of the penal code when aggravating crimes were present. In 2024, the Supreme Court upheld the only known labor trafficking conviction in a case that had been under appeal since 2018.

The MOL's existing identification protocol did not thoroughly explain what labor inspectors can or should do if forced labor or exploitation is suspected. However, the combination of the MOL's lack of legal authority to go beyond routine inspections, their limited knowledge of forced labor, and an AGO insufficiently trained on forced labor contributed to the lack of criminal investigations and prosecutions for labor trafficking. A government official indicated prosecutors did not have a good understanding of trafficking crimes, turnover of personnel was high, and criminal hearings could take years as there were not enough judges available for hearings. An NGO reported that in 2024, prosecutors changed every two to three months, making training efforts ineffective and institutional knowledge limited. According to government and civil society stakeholders, investigators, prosecutors, and judges had significant caseloads, which compounded with their lack of trafficking knowledge and created bottlenecks of institutional coordination. Additionally, an official reported prosecutors often prioritized cases depending on their interest and comfort level, leaving some cases to lapse due to inaction. According to a report, there was confusion among first instance courts about how to determine the proper jurisdiction of cases, leading to a lengthy process that may have hindered victims' timely access to justice. Inadequate and inconsistent protection efforts contributed to victims rarely cooperating with authorities on the prosecution of their traffickers.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action during the year. In 2024, authorities convicted two complicit officials – a retired police chief and an active police superintendent – for their involvement in a sex trafficking ring exploiting women from Medellín in France. In most cases, the government investigated and arrested some complicit officials, but authorities often opted for disciplinary measures in lieu of criminal prosecution, a response that was not commensurate with the severity of the crime and hindered efforts to combat trafficking. The Inspector General reported there were six cases of official complicity in 2024, one which was under initial investigation, four under disciplinary investigation, and one that reached a final disciplinary sanction. The 2023 case involving a police officer in the city of Cartagena who was allegedly working as an informant for a trafficking organization while covering a trafficking investigation remained open at the end of the year.

Authorities collaborated with countries in the region, European countries, and international organizations on trafficking-related law enforcement operations. Officials investigated a trafficking case with the government of France that led to the prosecution of three individuals and the conviction of two traffickers in Colombia. Officials cooperated with the United States on notable law enforcement operations that resulted in the arrest of traffickers, including foreign nationals, seizure of properties used in trafficking crimes, and identification of victims. The AGO received 24 requests for judicial assistance from the Governments of Chile, Mexico, The Netherlands, Norway, Peru, Spain, and Venezuela. The AGO submitted 14 requests for judicial support from the Governments of Ecuador, France, Kosovo, Peru, and Spain. Authorities did not extradite any suspected traffickers but reported seven arrests of individuals with extradition requests. Authorities trained – in most cases with the support of international organizations – immigration officials, law enforcement officials, and prosecutors on the identification and investigation of trafficking crimes. Law enforcement officials continued domestic collaboration with a civil society organization that survivors, media, and international anti-trafficking experts noted did not use a victim-centered and trauma-informed approach.

PROTECTION

The government decreased protection efforts.

In 2024, Colombian authorities identified and referred 123 potential victims to the Ministry of Interior (MOI); foreign government officials also identified 277 potential victims whom authorities referred to MOI. The government reported that of the 400 potential victims referred to MOI, 300 were potential victims of sex trafficking – including 262 women, eight men, 13 persons described as non-binary adults, 16 girls, and one child described as non-binary; 43 were potential victims of forced labor, including 24 men, 15 women, one adult described as non-binary, and three girls; and 57 were victims of unspecified forms of exploitation. This was a significant decrease compared to 1,273 potential trafficking victims identified in 2023, of whom 602 were exploited in sex trafficking, 40 in forced labor, and 631 in unspecified forms of exploitation. Twenty of the cases referred to the MOI came from healthcare providers who suspected trafficking indicators. As a result of these referrals, the MOI identified 13 children as potential trafficking victims and referred to services. The MOI centralized victim identification and referral data through the Operating Center for the Fight Against Human Trafficking (COAT) ; however, various government and NGO stakeholders maintained separate systems, leading to challenges in quantifying number of victims identified, referred, and assisted.

Law enforcement officials did not proactively identify victims and did not have a victim identification protocol. In previous years, officials reported relying on victim self-identification and noted victims had sufficient trust in the police to report their exploitation; however, civil society partners reported victims had a lack of trust in authorities and feared retribution. Law enforcement officials previously reported not knowing what to do when identifying an adult trafficking victim, as there were not any places available for victim assistance after identification. Civil society actors reported police lacked victim-centered, trauma-informed screening for trafficking indicators, which led to police forcing victims to retell their story numerous times, leading to re-traumatization. The MOL had a victim identification protocol for labor inspectors, and officials received training on its use, but it was unclear if the protocol was routinely and proactively used. Labor inspectors, who were not specialized and had a broad mandate, did not identify victims of forced labor during inspections and reported statistics related to forced labor cases were not tracked by the MOL. Immigration officials had a protocol for the identification of trafficking victims in the migration context and a generalized human rights protocol, both of which routed cases to the COAT for registration and referral if trafficking was suspected. Immigration authorities did not report identifying any victims using either protocol. Cases involving children were referred directly to the Colombian Institute of Family Wellbeing (ICBF). An NGO reported national authorities frequently provided training for public servants from different sectors; however, municipal and departmental authorities had pervasive gaps in their understanding of what human trafficking crimes entailed – in some cases as a result of frequent personnel rotations – which led to weak or non-existent identification and referral efforts.

The MOI and the ICBF were responsible for victim protection; the former was responsible for protecting adult victims and the latter was responsible for protecting child victims. Emergency victim assistance could include medical and psychological examination, clothing, hygiene kits, issuance of travel and identity documents, and shelter for five days with a maximum extension of five additional days. In some cases, and only after administrative approval, authorities could provide medium-term assistance, which could include educational services, job skills training, help with job placement, economic support, and legal assistance, including witness protection. The government did not have specialized shelters for adults or victims exploited in forced labor.

Civil society organizations indicated access to services remained a significant challenge, particularly for adult victims of sex trafficking and all victims of forced labor. In May 2024, the government terminated its 2023 contractual agreement signed by the MOI with an NGO to support adult victims of trafficking, including an emergency shelter. It was unclear if the MOI had a contingency plan to ensure continuity of services ahead of terminating the agreement with the

NGO. Officials indicated most victims who received services had already completed their emergency care and those who had not were referred to subnational territorial authorities for care.

In 2024, NGOs and international organizations – in some cases with government support – provided emergency care to 175 victims, mental health support for 158 victims, and legal assistance to 160 victims. COAT officials reported 163 victims received shelter assistance, including 43 adult victims who received non-specialized emergency shelter assistance between February and May 2024 at the shelter prior to its closure. Authorities reported 62 victims received some combination of medium-term assistance, including job skills training, education reinsertion, and job placement. This compared with providing emergency assistance to 123 victims – including 19 victims of forced labor – legal assistance to 37 victims, and shelter assistance to 116 child victims of sexual exploitation, including trafficking, in 2023. ICBF officials reported 23 children were admitted into the administrative process for the restoration of their rights following possible trafficking crimes, including 19 for sex trafficking and two cases of forced begging. In previous years, an NGO reported mental health services were deficient and contributed to a mental health crisis among victims.

Courts could grant restitution for victims at the request of the prosecutor or the victim. However, an NGO reported cases with restitution were extremely rare, mainly because cases were not often identified as trafficking, and it was very difficult to convict traffickers if the case mandated restitution for victims. Separately, judicial processes could last up to eight years, hindering justice for victims.

Presidential decree 1066 designated subnational territorial committees within departments and municipalities as responsible for victim care, creating a gap in Colombia's protection framework, as it placed the onus on underfunded and understaffed stakeholders. This left most victims unprotected and COAT officials struggling to find timely solutions that in most places did not exist. MOI authorities allocated funding from the central budget for technical support, transportation, administrative coordination, and capacity building, but could not provide targeted funding for individual victim care. Lack of effective collaboration with civil society organizations to assist victims, particularly adults, hindered the government's ability to mitigate trafficking crimes; victims who did not receive adequate care were less likely to assist authorities in the case against traffickers.

Civil society actors reported once ICBF authorities admitted child victims into the PARD process, the services were not always specialized to meet the needs of trafficking victims. The ICBF partially funded two shelters for child victims, one of which had a multi-disciplinary team trained to work with victims of sexual abuse, including sex trafficking; however, the number of shelters and ICBF-provided funding was insufficient to provide the comprehensive assistance victims needed. Local ICBF officials in Bogotá operated a shelter for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation that could provide care for trafficking victims, but authorities did not report how many victims received care in 2024. An NGO reported that the government emphasized returning child victims to their families, in some cases going against NGO recommendations to delay reintegration, leaving child victims vulnerable to re-victimization.

Government officials inappropriately penalized trafficking victims for crimes committed as a direct result of being trafficked. Due to inadequate victim identification and screening procedures, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims, including among children in forced criminality, and those forcibly recruited as child soldiers whom the government did not consider to be trafficking victims, even in cases that met the international definition. Observers noted trafficking victims were frequently arrested and charged for presenting fake identification documents to law enforcement officials during operations, including in cases involving extraterritorial sexual exploitation of Colombian minors by tourists. The government did not report the number of trafficking victims who were arrested or penalized in 2024, compared with 40 trafficking victims arrested or penalized in 2023, some for offenses such as petty theft, giving false testimony, or document fraud. Authorities coordinated with foreign governments to repatriate 77 Colombian victims identified abroad.

PREVENTION

The government decreased prevention efforts.

The Interagency Committee for the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons, chaired by the MOI and comprising 15 national-level government entities, held six high-level advisory meetings in 2024 and two additional meetings with department-level committees in Cartagena and Medellín. Authorities worked with NGOs to reactivate a tri-border coordination roundtable in a region with notable prevalence of trafficking. The NAP expired at the end of 2024, but authorities extended the 2020-2024 NAP to mid-2025. There was a notable decrease in funding compared to the previous reporting period. Officials disbursed 1.45 billion Colombian pesos (\$333,000) for anti-trafficking efforts, of which 1.35 billion Colombian pesos (\$310,000) were disbursed to implement anti-trafficking laws, and 102 million Colombian pesos (\$23,000) to an ongoing prevention campaign; no funds were disbursed to the national fund to combat trafficking in persons. This was a significant decrease compared with the disbursement of 3.14 billion Colombian pesos (\$714,000) for national fund and to support implementation of anti-trafficking laws in 2023.

Authorities continued using a phone application where victims could report trafficking crimes; however, the application was not anonymous. The government operated several hotlines where anyone could report crimes, including a 24-hour anti-trafficking telephone hotline. Authorities reported referring 25 cases for investigation and identifying 50 potential victims as a result of calls to the trafficking hotline in 2024.

With the support of an international organization, the MOI maintained an ongoing prevention campaign to raise awareness of trafficking crimes. Authorities promoted initiatives on social media platforms and distributed awareness material in cities where trafficking was prevalent. The government made efforts to reduce the participation of foreign nationals in extraterritorial sexual exploitation and abuse in major tourist cities. Subnational authorities in Medellín implemented an awareness campaign to reduce the demand of commercial sex acts in response to the increased identification of child victims of sex trafficking exploited in the city. Observers noted government messaging that intended to target purchasers of commercial sex by highlighting the illegality of child sex trafficking crimes was confusing, as it did not clearly outline the difference between child sex trafficking and soliciting commercial sex with adults, which was prevalent and legal; these messages also did not highlight that adult sex trafficking victims may be exploited within the legalized commercial sex industry.

With the support of international organizations and foreign governments, the MOL trained officials from territorial directorates on the identification of forced labor and the relevant competencies of the labor ministry in combating trafficking crimes. The MOL also launched an awareness campaign focused on fraudulent job recruitment to mitigate child sex trafficking. Officials noted 48 percent of victims identified abroad were recruited using fraudulent employment offers; however, authorities did not make sufficient efforts to educate adults on fraudulent employment offers or to screen vulnerable Colombian nationals who left the country for work. The MOL did not report investigating recruitment agencies for fraudulent employment claims. The government did not make efforts to address culturally accepted practices in which exploitation and forced labor were prevalent, such as children in domestic servitude. The government had policies to regulate recruitment agencies, including those placing workers abroad, and had regulations prohibiting worker recruitment fees.

There was a notable increase in forced recruitment and use of child soldiers for armed conflict in 2024. Observers noted scant government presence in areas of the country where forced recruitment and use of child soldiers were prevalent. Insufficient emergency protection services, fear of reprisals, and slow government coordination contributed to systemic underreporting of cases. Lack of sufficient physical protection in educational facilities left children vulnerable to forced recruitment by illegal armed groups. The Office of the Ombuds registered 541 cases of forced recruitment or use of child soldiers by illegal armed groups in 2024 (compared with 184 in 2023), and reported the death of 11 child soldiers in armed combat in 2024 and 11 in January 2025. Press

reports indicated the discovery of two mass graves in the Cauca region where 14 children were identified; authorities noted they were presumably shot while trying to escape from the armed groups that recruited them. An investigation was open at the end of the reporting period. The AGO documented 2,340 cases of forced recruitment and use of child soldiers between 2020 and 2024, of which approximately 650 took place in the first half of 2024. ICBF officials reported the government demobilized 318 child soldiers in 2024.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Colombia, and traffickers exploit victims from Colombia abroad. Traffickers lure victims with fraudulent employment opportunities to later exploit them in sex trafficking and forced labor. Authorities estimate traffickers recruited 48 percent of victims using fraudulent employment offers and exploited 81 percent of victims from Colombia in other countries. In 2024, 30 percent of victims identified were Venezuelan, and 68 percent were Colombian nationals. In 2022, 36 percent of victims in domestic trafficking cases were from Bogotá and Antioquia Departments, and 59 percent of victims were identified in Bogotá, Antioquia, and Norte de Santander. Government reports indicate between 85 and 95 percent of victims identified in Colombia were adults. Groups at high risk for trafficking include Venezuelans; individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual; Afro-Colombians; members of Indigenous groups; individuals with disabilities; migrants, including those with intentions to cross the Darién region between Colombia and Panama and illegally migrate to the United States; internally displaced persons (IDPs); and those living in areas with active illegal armed groups and criminal organizations. The practice of compelling children to labor as domestic workers, *criadazgo*, is a common form of trafficking in the country and is largely normalized and invisible to authorities. Middle- and upper-income families in urban and rural areas take on children, almost exclusively from impoverished Afro-descendent and Indigenous families, as domestic workers. Families are promised compensation for their children, including room, board, money, a small stipend, or access to educational opportunities, but very few children in these work conditions receive the promised compensation. ICBF authorities did not keep a record of how many children were in *criadazgo* situations. According to a report, 4,893 children, some of whom may have been trafficking victims, entered the process to reestablish their rights between 2019 and 2023. Colombian children in situations of *criadazgo* are highly vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking.

The nearly 3 million Venezuelans living in Colombia were at high risk for sex and labor trafficking. In 2022, an investigative report uncovered cases of Venezuelan children in Cartagena exploited in forced begging by family members and acquaintances. Venezuelan migrants in border cities often used their daily earnings to cover the costs of pay-per-day rooms, or *pagadarios*, and, when they could not pay, some owners allegedly exploited migrant tenants in forced criminality or sex trafficking as means for paying rent. Sex trafficking of Colombian women and girls is prevalent in the country, particularly in densely populated cities and areas with tourism and large extractive industries. An NGO reported Colombian men and Colombians who were described as transgender in commercial sex are vulnerable to sex trafficking in Colombia and Europe. Traffickers recruit vulnerable women and girls, mostly Colombians and displaced Venezuelans, into “webcam modeling” – an unregulated industry that likely generated more than \$1.2 billion a year in Colombia. In some cases, traffickers drugged women and girls, employed fear and coercion tactics, retained their identity documents, and created situations of debt bondage and extortion to force victims to perform live streamed sex acts. Government officials and civil society organizations have expressed concern about the burgeoning webcam industry and its ties to sex trafficking. Traffickers lure boys into forced labor, promising the opportunity to play in international soccer leagues; subjecting them to debt bondage, document confiscation, and wage garnishment; and in some cases, exploiting them in different sectors, including sex trafficking and domestic servitude. Forced labor is common. Observers report traffickers may use online social media platforms to lure and recruit potential trafficking victims. Traffickers exploit Colombian nationals in forced labor activities across mining, coffee, and domestic service sectors. Forced labor is prevalent in the extraction of

coal, alluvial gold, and emeralds; coffee harvesting; palm production; begging in urban areas; and domestic service. Traffickers exploit Colombian children working in the informal sector and street vending in forced labor. In 2022, an international NGO indicated *pagadarios* in Bogotá were a gateway to the recruitment of victims by criminal groups, who often induced migrants to consume drugs to foster a dependency that would compel them into criminality. Traffickers operating fake charities offer shelter to vulnerable migrants to later exploit them in sex trafficking and forced criminality. An NGO reported drug trafficking organizations are running human trafficking rings in Amazonas, Choco, La Guajira, Antioquia, and Norte de Santander, allegedly forcing individuals into criminality.

Several illegal armed groups, including Clan del Golfo and U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army (FARC-EP) dissident groups, including the General Staff of Blocs and Fronts (Estado Mayor de los Bloques y Frentes or EMBF) and groups formerly known as Segunda Marquetalia, are known to operate in areas where vulnerable people may be exploited in human trafficking and other illicit activities. These groups, particularly in the departments of Cauca, Chocó, Córdoba, Nariño, and Norte de Santander, forcibly recruit or use child soldiers, including Venezuelan, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian youth, to serve as combatants and informants and harvest illicit crops. These groups also exploit children in sex trafficking. There was a tenfold increase in the forced recruitment and use of child soldiers by illegal armed groups from 2021 to 2024, according to government reporting. Experts noted these numbers were likely off by up to 30 percent due to poor data collection and because families did not always report cases due to fear of reprisal by armed groups. In 2022, an international organization reported 77 percent of municipalities in Chocó department and 33 percent of municipalities in Nariño department were at high risk for child soldier recruitment, particularly Indigenous and Afro-Colombian children. Women, children, and adolescents who demilitarized and separated from illegal armed groups are vulnerable to trafficking. According to an investigative report released in 2023, Tren de Aragua – a transnational criminal organization originating in Venezuela – and the ELN operate sex trafficking networks in the border town of Villa del Rosario in the Norte de Santander department. These groups exploit Venezuelan migrants and internally displaced Colombians in sex trafficking and take advantage of their economic vulnerabilities to subject them to debt bondage. According to sources, members of the ELN and FARC-EP lure or kidnap women to work in their camps, exploiting them in sex trafficking and, at times, transporting them into Venezuela. Separately, members of Tren de Aragua reportedly gained the trust of their victims by housing them in *pagadarios* in Colombia, providing them food, allowing them to incur daily debts, and, when they are unable to pay, exploiting them in sex trafficking. They allegedly marked women and girls behind their ears to prove ownership. Tren de Aragua reportedly used the local transportation hub in Cúcuta to transfer victims of trafficking to other countries in the region, including Argentina, Ecuador, and Peru, in addition to facilitating trafficking operations in Bogotá, Cali, Medellín, Pereira, and border cities.

A notable increase in the number of Colombian victims of trafficking identified in Poland led to the Government of Poland updating its entry requirements for Colombian nationals. Colombian men were vulnerable to fraudulent employment offers by transnational security firms that hired ex-military officers for security jobs and later forced many of them to serve as mercenaries in foreign conflicts, including in the Russia-Ukraine war and as part of paramilitary groups fighting in Sudan. Media and NGOs report unscrupulous actors, including Russian officials and illicit recruiters, fraudulently recruited women ages 18-22 from South America – including Colombia – for vocational training programs and subsequently placed them in military drone production sites. Press reports indicate workers at these sites are subjected to hazardous conditions, surveillance, hour and wage violations, contract switching, and worker-paid recruitment fees, all of which are indicators of human trafficking.