

The State of the World's Human Rights; Colombia 2025

Background

Negotiations continued between the government and the various armed groups active in Colombia, but progress was scarce and impact limited. The government suspended negotiations with the National Liberation Army (ELN) in January and did not resume those with the Central General Staff or the Second Marquetalia. Talks with the General Staff of Blocks and Front (EMBF), the National Coordinator of the Bolivarian Army and the Southern Commoners continued. The government also continued its "socio-legal dialogues" with groups operating in the cities of Quibdó, Medellín and Buenaventura, and started a dialogue with the Gaitanista Army of Colombia (EGC) in Qatar.

Despite progress in some of these processes and the introduction of a bill by the government in July, guarantees of truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition for victims remained unclear.

In June, the OHCHR, the UN human rights office, announced a scaling down of its presence in the country due to the drop in international aid to support its mission.

Violations of international humanitarian law

Armed violence continued despite peace negotiations and dialogue. Clashes between armed groups, and between these and the military and security forces, often resulted in violations of international humanitarian law. In May, the ICRC warned that if the trend of increasing violence and adverse impacts on communities continued, humanitarian indicators for the year 2025 would be the worst in a decade.

Particularly worrying events were recorded in Guaviare, Putumayo, Nariño, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Chocó, Bolívar and La Guajira departments, as well as in Catatumbo, Magdalena Medio, North-east Antioquia and South Bolivar regions. Disputes over territorial, social, and economic control intensified, as did the fragmentation of armed groups. The Ideas for Peace Foundation identified 14 disputed zones among these groups – double the number at the start of President Gustavo Petro's term – and recorded an escalation in clashes between armed groups and the military and security forces.

According to OCHA, in 2025 there were 2,794 violent events in the country – of which 1,390 were attacks against the civilian population (including homicides, threats and social

repression) – affecting more than 1.6 million people.

The Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES) documented 139 cases of multiple and mass forced displacement during the year, affecting at least 90,282 people, as well as 80 confinements and restrictions on human mobility, affecting at least 235,345 people. Escalation of violence in the Catatumbo region due to clashes between the ELN and the EMBF resulted in the forced displacement of more than 82,000 people between January and September.

Between January and November, the Coalition against the Involvement of Children and Young People in the Armed Conflict in Colombia recorded 196 events relating to armed conflict, which directly affected at least 364,382 children and adolescents, of whom 172 were victims of recruitment.

According to OCHA, during 2025, at least 7,728 people were affected by or were victims of different explosive devices. Several armed groups also increased the use of drones to carry out attacks with explosives.

The Institute for Development and Peace Studies recorded the killing of 39 ex-combatants who had signed the 2016 Peace Agreement. In September, the Constitutional Court ruled that the security situation of the signatories of that agreement remained critical.

Discrimination

Multiple and massive displacement predominantly affected the peasant and rural populations, who represented about 90% of the victims according to CODHES, with Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendent communities representing the other 10%. Confinement and restrictions on human mobility particularly affected Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities, who represented 40% of the victims.

In June, the Centre for Research and Popular Education reported that the EGC was still exercising territorial control in the Atrato river basin in the department of Chocó. It alleged that the accumulation of power had weakened the organizational structures of the Afro-descendant communities and Indigenous Peoples who were the original inhabitants of the region.

Human rights defenders

The We Are Defenders Programme documented 509 attacks against human rights defenders between January and September, with an average of 1.67 attacks per day between July and September. Although this figure represented a reduction of 25% compared with the same period in 2024, 2025 was expected to exceed the two preceding years in the total number of attacks.

In February, a group of human rights defenders who had fled Venezuela to settle in Colombia reported hostile conditions for continuing their work in the country. In October, human rights defenders Luis Peche and Yendri Velásquez – the latter also an asylum seeker and member of Amnesty International – suffered a serious attack in the capital, Bogotá.¹

Stigmatization of human rights defenders increased. In March, President Petro claimed that civil society organizations in the Catatumbo region were “subordinated” to armed groups operating in the area.² His government refused requests to retract such statements. Months later, several organizations reported the persistence of a stigmatization campaign against them on social media. In September, the 33rd Front of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia directly and publicly stigmatized the Catatumbo Social Integration Committee (CISCA) by claiming that it was involved in the actions of other armed groups.³ Persistent and escalating attacks against CISCA and other social and human rights organizations generated concern with regard to their safety and the barriers they faced in carrying out their activities.

The National Committee on Safeguards, a space for dialogue between the state and civil society for defenders, met three times during the year. Since January, human rights platforms and civil society organizations involved in the roundtable warned of a lack of progress in agreeing security and participation measures for the defence of human rights and poor coordination of the institutional response. At year’s end, publication and implementation of the Comprehensive Public Policy on Guarantees for the Defence of Human Rights was still pending.

Enforced disappearances

Between January and May, the ICRC documented 136 new enforced disappearances in connection with armed conflict, including 26 children and adolescents.

In June, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) recognized Yanette Bautista as both a victim and, in an unprecedented decision, a woman working in the search for victims of enforced disappearance. Yanette Bautista died in September, leaving a legacy that was instrumental in defending the rights of victims of enforced disappearance and the women who search for them.

Discussions continued on regulations for Law 2364 of 2024, which recognized and comprehensively protected the work and rights of women searching for victims of enforced disappearance, but they had still not been approved at the end of the year.⁴ Regarding implementation of the National Search System, talks continued for the adoption of a comprehensive public policy on the search for persons declared disappeared.

Between January and September, the Search Unit for Disappeared Persons found 111 people alive, recovered 1,161 bodies, delivered 762 bodies to the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences, and conducted 166 acts of dignified delivery of remains and “meetings for truth” with relatives.

In January, the search for the remains of victims of enforced disappearance began in the city of Buenaventura's San Antonio estuary, on the Pacific coast. Human remains were also found in a sector of Medellín known as La Escombrera and on an army base in Bogotá where the intelligence and counter-intelligence Charry Solano Battalion or XX Brigade had operated.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

In January, after over 20 years of litigation and negotiation, the government reached a settlement with the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, which included institutional commitments regarding recognition and reparation of victims of serious human rights violations. The Justice Evaluation Commission – chaired by the Ombudsperson's Office – was formally constituted in April and President Petro issued a public apology in June for the human rights violations suffered for many years by members of the Community.

In September, the JEP issued its first two rulings. In the first, it sentenced seven former commanders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) to eight years of restorative sanctions (*sanciones propias*) for their responsibility in war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the implementation of a policy of abductions between 1993 and 2012. In the second, it convicted five officers, four non-commissioned officers and three lower-ranking soldiers of the Colombian Army to between five and eight years of restorative sanctions for war crimes and crimes against humanity relating to 135 murders and enforced disappearances masked as combat casualties in the departments of Cesar and La Guajira between 2002 and 2005. In both cases, those convicted had already admitted responsibility for the crimes.

Before and after the rulings were issued, various actors, including the JEP itself, warned of shortcomings in funding and the construction of the infrastructure required for correct delivery of the restorative component of the sanctions. The scope of the retributive component of such sanctions was also criticized for lack of clarity in their application and incompatibility with the other activities of those convicted.

The JEP brought new indictments against former members of FARC-EP for their participation in crimes relating to the abductions policy in different regions of the country, recruitment and use of children and adolescents in the armed conflict, and attacks on the civilian population in Cauca and Valle del Cauca departments. It also filed charges against former members of the military and security forces for extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances in the department of Antioquia. Criminal proceedings against 16 members of the military and security forces were dropped because they were not considered ultimately responsible for the extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances under investigation in Meta and Santander departments.

Disputes between military criminal justice and the ordinary criminal justice system continued in investigations relating to possible human rights violations or crimes under international law.⁵

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Impunity for human rights violations committed during protests continued, although there was some progress. In June, an officer from the former police Mobile Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD) was convicted at first instance for the murder of Juan Carlos León Acosta during the 2013 agrarian strikes. The Supreme Court had still to reach a decision regarding another of ESMAD members, on conviction for the murder of Nicolás Neira during protests in Bogotá on 1 May 2005, with Nicolás Neira's family continuing to denounce the impunity in the case 20 years after his death.

Resolution 1840 providing a manual for the National Police on the use of less lethal weapons, ammunition and devices was published in June. The civil society initiative Coalition for Police Reform highlighted the significant progress the manual represented in terms of protocol and technical and operational clarity in the use of such weapons by the police, but nevertheless warned of the risks and limitations of the regulations, in particular regarding criteria for the acquisition and use of less lethal weapons and the lack of both adequate independent oversight mechanisms and an ethno-racial perspective.

Comprehensive police reform with a human rights perspective remained pending.

Freedom of expression

In October, the Communications Regulatory Commission wrote to several media outlets requesting information and internal documents on editorial processes, warning of possible administrative sanctions in case of non-compliance. The Foundation for Press Freedom (FLIP) expressed concern at such requests and their implications for press freedom.

FLIP recorded 468 attacks on the press during the year, including 191 threats against journalists, 61 cases of stigmatization, 26 instances of judicial harassment and one murder. An attempted murder, 15 forced displacements and seven cases of exile were also documented.

Women's rights

In January, the president enacted legislation establishing the possibility of divorce based on the sole will of either of the spouses.

The Colombian Observatory of Femicides registered 609 femicides between January and September, compared with 662 during the same period in 2024. Despite this minor decrease, the number of femicides highlighted the persistence of violence against women and the need to implement more and better measures for its eradication.

LGBTI people's rights

The NGO Caribe Afirmativo documented 85 serious acts of violence against LGBTI people in the country, mainly targeting gay men (39 cases) and transgender women (32 cases), as well as a sustained increase in threats and intimidation by armed groups against this population.

Sexual and reproductive rights

The update to the national policy on sexual and reproductive rights was still pending. The Roundtable for Women's Life and Health reported that barriers to accessing voluntary termination of pregnancy services persisted. The 2025 National Demographic and Health Survey identified some of the barriers hindering access to abortion, including health teams changing women's decisions (34.3%), a lack of comprehensive and timely information (21.1%) and delays by health facilities in scheduling procedures (16.2%).

Refugees' and migrants' rights

The Ombudsperson's Office, together with those of Panama and Costa Rica, reported a decrease of 97% in northward irregular migration flows between January and August, with a significant increase in southward migration over the same period. Despite such changes in human mobility dynamics, these bodies highlighted persistent violence along migration routes and borders and significant control exerted by human trafficking networks operating in the three countries.

In April, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants noted that some 75,000 asylum applications had been registered in early 2025, of which 29,305 were still pending. The average processing time for asylum claims, based on the information available, was three to four years, leading him to conclude that Colombia lacked an efficient asylum system.

In August, the official website of the Migration Colombia government agency reported a total of 2,831,561 Venezuelan nationals in the country, 484,658 of whom had irregular migratory status. These figures showed an increase in the number of people entering the country on an "entry and stay permit". This revealed that Venezuelan migration to Colombia had continued under temporary immigration regularization schemes that were inaccessible to many and lacked protection mechanisms in line with the circumstances of those fleeing Venezuela.

Economic and social rights

In January, the Inspector General's Office requested that the Constitutional Court declare an unconstitutional state of affairs in relation to the deterioration of the social security health system. In addition, in March, the Ombudsperson's Office requested that the rights of health service users be guaranteed. Discussions continued throughout the year on the need to increase and streamline public investment in health.

Labour and pensions legislative changes were enacted in June and July, affecting a number of economic and social rights. The outcome of a review of the constitutionality of the changes to

pensions was pending at the end of the year.

