

Colombia: Country Focus





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- Belgium, Centre for Documentation and Research (Cedoca), Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS)
- Sweden, Unit for Migration Analysis, Swedish Migration Agency

Additionally, Colombia expert Jeremy McDermott was engaged as an external reviewer. Mr. McDermott is the co-director and co-founder of Insight Crime, having has over two decades of experience reporting from Latin America. A retired military officer, he became a war correspondent working in the Balkans, the Middle East, and then Colombia, including for the BBC, the Daily Telegraph, and The Economist. He specialises in drug trafficking, organised crime and conflict in Colombia. His organisation, Insight Crime, is a think tank that seeks to deepen and inform the debate about organised crime and citizen security in the Americas through reporting, analysis, investigations, and policy on challenges in the region.



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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2019). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

'Refugee', 'risk' and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither the EUAA, nor any person acting on its behalf, may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report. On 19 January 2022 the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). All references to EASO, EASO products and bodies should be understood as references to the EUAA.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 21 November 2022. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the Introduction.



Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Definition
AFP	Acuerdo Final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una Paz estable y duradera (2016 Final Agreement for Ending Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace)
AGC	Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (Gaitanista Self-defense Forces of Colombia); This report uses the term AGC. AGC is also known as Clan del Golfo, Urabeños, Clan Úsuga; criminal armed group having historic links to paramilitary groups
APM	Anti-personnel mines
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia); far-right paramilitary and drug trafficking organisation that later demobilised and some groups fragmented and were later recycled into other armed groups such as the AGC
<i>Bacrim</i>	A label created by the Colombian government for criminal bands or gangs that include recycled former paramilitary groups but that lack any apparent political agenda; also <i>bandas criminales</i>
<i>banda</i>	Organised criminal group, sometimes used interchangeably with <i>combo</i> ; depending on the context, can mean a small gang or a higher level grouping in the gang hierarchy
<i>Bandas criminales</i>	See <i>Bacrim</i>
Bloque Oriental	Eastern command, a FARC dissident group led by Iván Mordisco; Referred to as First Front in this report
<i>campesino</i>	Small-scale farmers of peasants
Los Caparrapos	Also called Los Caparros but referred to as Los Caparrapos in this report; a paramilitary successor spin-off group of the AGC that broke away in 2017



Term	Definition
CITREP	Circunscripciones Transitorias Especiales de Paz (Special Transitory Peace Seats)
CDF-EB	Comandos de la Frontera-Ejército-Bolivariano; sub-group of FARC dissidents connected to Segunda Marquetalia; also called Los Comandos de La Frontera (Border Command) (formerly La Mafia)
CEV	Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición (Truth Commission)
CNGS	La Comisión Nacional de Garantías de Seguridad (National Commission on Security Guarantees)
COCE	Comando central; central command of the ELN
combo	A term used to mean a gang
Comunes	Name of the political party formed by the FARC-EP after their demobilisation and transition into politics in 2017. The party was originally called FARC, meaning Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (Revolutionary Alternative Common Force), but the name was changed to Comunes in 2021 to rebrand itself and avoid usage of the FARC acronym associated with the armed group
CNTI	La Comisión Nacional de Territorios Indígenas
DPC	Defensoría de Pueblo de Colombia (Office of the Ombudsperson)
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army) formerly Maoist/leftist armed group that demobilized in 1991 which became the criminal group called Los Pelusos. Referred to as EPL in this report.



Term	Definition
ESMAD	Escuadrones Móviles Antidisturbios (Mobile Anti-Disturbance Squadron); Riot police within the Colombian National Police
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
<i>Falsos positivos</i>	False positives; Killings carried out by state security forces who falsely reported civilians as guerrillas; mostly occurring in 2002-2006
FARC dissidents	Also called FARC-EP dissidents, post-FARC groups, Ex-FARC mafia; formed by former FARC members who did not sign on to the 2016 peace accord between FARC-EP and the government
FARC-EP	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army); left-wing Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group that fought against the state of Colombia for 52 years until the 2016 peace accord
FGN	Fiscalía General de la Nación (Attorney General’s Office)
First Front	FARC dissident structure also called Joint Eastern Command, Bloque Oriental, and now includes factions that were under the command of Gentil Duarte; led by Iván Mordisco; Referred to as First Front in this report.
Gentil Duarte	The leader of a dissident faction of the FARC-EP which refused to adhere to the 2016 peace accord. He is now dead and the faction he led is headed by Iván Mordisco under First Front.
<i>gota a gota</i>	‘drop by drop’ informal loans offered by loansharks run by armed or criminal groups
HRD	Human rights defender
IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights



Term	Definition
INMLCF	Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses (National Institute for Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
JAC	Juntas de Acción Comunal (Community Action Councils, Community Action Boards, or Neighbourhood Action Committees)
JEP	Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz (Special Jurisdiction for Peace)
Mafia Sinaloa	Mafia Sinaloa is a former incarnation of the Border Command FARC-dissident group CDF-EB; local Colombian criminal group made up of members of La Constru and FARC
<i>megabandas</i>	Venezuelan crime syndicates such as the Tren de Aragua gang
<i>mestizo</i>	A person of mixed Indigenous-Spanish origin
Military target	A term used by armed groups or the state to demarcate a person deemed to be an opponent
La Oficina de Envigado	Urban organised crime structure initially founded by Pablo Escobar
OAS	Organization of American States
ONIC	Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia
PDET	Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial (Development Plans with a Territorial Focus)
Los Pelusos	Also called EPL, formerly Maoist group turned criminal organisation; referred to as EPL in this report.



Term	Definition
PNIS	Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos Ilícitos (National Comprehensive Programme for the Substitution of Illicit Crops)
Los Puntilleros	Paramilitary successor group with roots in AUC
Los Rastrojos	Paramilitary successor group formerly called Rondas Campesinas Populares
sapo	An informant
SAT	<i>Sistema de Alertas Tempranas</i> (Early Warning System); government alert system for risks of human rights violations; run by the Office of the Ombudsperson
Segunda Marquetalia	A dissident faction of FARC-EP which broke away from the 2016 peace accord in 2019
sicario, sicariato	‘Hitman’; hired killer
Sinaloa Cartel	Mexican drug cartel
SIVJNR	Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y Garantías de No Repetición (Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition)
La Terraza	Organised crime structure in Medellín
UARIV	Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas del Conflicto Armado (Victims Unit)
RUV	Registro Único de Víctimas
UBPD	Unidad de Búsqueda de Personas dadas por Desaparecidas (Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed Missing)



Term	Definition
UNP	Unidad Nacional de Protección (National Protection Unit)
UXO	Unexploded ordnance
<i>vacunas</i>	'Taxes,' 'rents,' or 'protection fees' charged by armed groups through extortion



Introduction

This EUAA COI Country Focus report on Colombia is intended to provide an overview of the key relevant issues for the assessment of claims for international protection. The report provides an overview of the armed conflict, peace process and status, main illegal armed and criminal groups, key security developments and dynamics in Colombia during the [reference period](#), and an overview of main targeted profiles and state protection.

Methodology

Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference for this report were based on a survey in which national asylum authorities of EU+¹ and IGC countries² had the opportunity to express their information needs on Colombia. Requested topics and questions were then formulated into the terms of reference to be addressed in this Country Focus report which can be found in [Annex 2](#).

The reference period for this report is January 2021 to 7 November 2022, but also includes general information to provide background and contextual information to the current situation. The drafting period finished on 7 November 2022, peer review occurred between 7-20 November 2022, and additional information was added to the report as a result of the quality review process during the review implementation up until 21 November 2022. The report was internally reviewed subsequently.

This report was finalised on 21 November 2022, however, on 28 November 2022, Indepaz, a Colombian think tank that studies the conflict and has been used as a source in this report, released a new report on armed groups covering 2021 and the first half of 2022. In an effort to ensure currency, some selected information was included in this new report just prior to its publication by EUAA.

Collecting information

This report is based on publicly available information in electronic and paper-based sources gathered through desk-based research. This report also contains information from multiple oral sources with ground-level knowledge of the situation in Colombia who were interviewed specifically for this report. For security reasons, oral sources are anonymised unless they have chosen to be named in relation to the organisation represented.

¹ EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland

² IGC participating states are: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States.



Sources

Public sources

Public sources in English and Spanish have been consulted across a range of types of sources such as:

- International organisations: United Nations organisations such as the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), and the UN Security Council; Organisation of American States (OAS) and its Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR);
- Internationally based civil society organisations who conduct human rights monitoring with a focal point in Colombia such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International (AI), Frontline Defenders;
- Colombian government institutions such as the Victims Unit, Ombudsperson's Office, Attorney General's Office, Ministry of Defence, Special Jurisdiction for Peace, Truth Commission;
- Local and international think tanks and analytical organisations that monitor and report on conflict, armed groups, crime, and human rights, including the situation of ethnic groups, women, and children/youth in Colombia, such as: Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP), Pares, Somos Defensores, Indepaz (Instituto de estudios para el desarrollo y la paz), International Crisis Group, Insight Crime, and the Washington Office of Latin America (WOLA), Colombian Organized Crime Observatory (OCCO);
- US and European governmental publications that report on human rights in Colombia, including the US Department of State (USDOS), Freedom House, the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS),
- News media from both Colombian and international sources.

Oral sources

In addition to using publicly available documentary sources, multiple oral sources were contacted for this report based on their field knowledge of the situation of conflict in Colombia. Some sources who were interviewed chose to remain anonymous for security reasons. Sources were assessed for their background, publication history, reputability, current ground-level knowledge and experience, seriousness of their research, and recognition of their credentials by peers, the media, and international bodies. Oral sources are described in the bibliography in [Annex 1](#).

Research challenges

Colombia has dozens of active armed groups and hundreds of active local gangs. This report highlights only the main categories and groups, but there are many localised sub-groups or smaller factions which are too numerous to cover in detail within page and time constraints of the current report. Additionally, armed groups frequently change names or composition, for example, as the conflict dynamics shift, leaders are killed, or groups merge or hybridize. Information presented in this report captures only a snapshot in time and space. It aims to



highlight only the most significant groups to illustrate general dynamics and trends; local situations in Colombia are highly variable and under constant change. This cannot account for all specific local conditions.

Obtaining consistent statistical information on human rights violations, crime, and conflict in Colombia is difficult, due to the multitude of actors gathering information using different methodologies and definitions. Information on violations such as homicides, displacement, confinement, recruitment, targeted killings and other human rights abuses has been provided from a selection of key sources from the government, the UN, and civil society in Colombia. However, within these sources, discrepancies between local reporting on exact numbers arises due to differences in approaches mentioned. Hence, it is not always possible to provide harmonised figures, but rather provide an overall picture of key trends.

Due to the nature of the conflict, research and tracking of civilian deaths and homicides in Colombia is not statistically clear among sources. This can be because of differences in how forms of violence/victimisation are defined, or because of the difficulties establishing whether deaths are related to armed conflict or criminality, as well as whether victims are civilians or combatants. The Colombian National Institute for Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (INMLCF, Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses), which is one of the government entities that tracks homicides, defines homicides as being when a person kills another, without distinguishing a motive.³ Colombia's post-conflict Truth Commission defines people killed within the armed conflict as homicides, but does not distinguish civilian from combatant deaths. Information in this report presents information on homicides from a variety of sources.

Note on terminology

This report uses various terms to refer to different illegal armed and criminal groups. There is a plethora of such armed groups and splinter factions, particularly within the dissident groups which split from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo). For this reason, the most common umbrella terms have been used in this report reflect the main groupings of armed and criminal actors:

- 1) 'Post-paramilitary' groups such as the Gaitanista Self-defense Forces of Colombia (AGC, Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia) have their genealogy in the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC, Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia), a right-wing paramilitary organisation. AGC is frequently called other names in sources, such as Clan del Golfo, Urabeños, or Clan Úsuga. For the sake of readability and consistency, all references to this group in the report use the term AGC.
- 2) 'Guerrilla' groups, refers to those of left-wing insurgent origin, but typically now meaning the National Liberation Army (ELN, Ejército de Liberación Nacional) since FARC demobilisation;
- 3) 'Post-FARC dissident' groups, who are also called FARC dissidents or Ex-FARC mafia; these groups splintered from FARC during the peace process and continue their armed activities now on a more criminal basis;

³ Colombia, IMNLCF, Forensis: Datos Para La Vida 2020, April 2022, [url](#), p. 85



- 4) 'Criminal' groups is a term used to refer to those that are essentially organised crime groups and gangs that have no particular political heritage.

Quality control

This report was written by the EUAA COI Sector in line with the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2019)⁴ and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).⁵ The report has been peer-reviewed by COI experts from Belgium and Sweden. Jeremy McDermott, expert on Colombian criminality and armed groups, was also engaged as an external reviewer. Some comments made by the external expert reviewer on the content or to address information gaps have been integrated into this report and are cited as such. All the comments from reviewers were reviewed and were implemented to the extent possible, under time constraints. The peer-reviewers read both Spanish and English and were able to assess the quality of sources used.

Structure and use of the report

This report is intended to capture a general overview of the main issues relevant to international protection in the assessment of claims from Colombia. The report is structured to facilitate the consideration and logical assessment of claims for international protection, providing a general introduction to the country, followed by key issues of importance on the conflict, civilian impacts, state protection, and humanitarian issues:

- Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the country's demographics and main characteristics.
- Chapter 2 provides background information on the conflict in Colombia and political developments as of 2022, as well as background descriptions of the state's structure, such as the legislative, executive, and judicial branches and the security forces. It also provides a general snapshot of the humanitarian situation.
- Chapter 3 gives an overview of the implementation of the 2016 peace accord with the FARC-EP and current developments with President Petro's 'Total Peace' initiative.
- Chapter 4 considers the dynamics of violence and conflict from 2012 to 2021 to cover the period of the peace accord and subsequent developments after FARC-EP's demobilisation, as well as developments and trends in 2022, with a focus on the election of President Petro in summer 2022.
- Chapter 5 focuses on illegal armed groups, including their territorial presence, characteristics, modus operandi, and interaction dynamics, as well as information on the willingness and ability of such groups to track targets in Colombian territory.
- Chapter 6 provides an overview of the types of human rights violations and civilian impacts that occur in the conflict and that affect the population, with an emphasis on recent years.
- Chapter 7 covers selected profiles of civilians who are often targeted by armed and criminal groups, such as social leaders, former FARC combatants, extortion victims, as well as vulnerable groups such as women, children, youth, and LGBTIQ.

⁴ EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

⁵ EUAA, EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide, 2019, [url](#)





- Chapter 8 deals with the state's capacity to provide protection and justice for crimes against civilians, including protection from targeted violence through institutions such as the National Protection Unit.



Map



Figure 1: Map of Colombia⁶

⁶ UN, Colombia, 1 March 2026, [url](#)

1. Country overview

Colombia is a unitary republic governed through elected democracy under a system with divided governmental powers (executive, legislative, judicial) with a written constitution which is the source and origin of all Colombian law.⁷ The country is rich in natural resources and oil reserves.⁸ Colombia is the fourth largest country in South America and among one of the most populated⁹ with 49 million people.¹⁰ It is a majority Roman Catholic country with Spanish as its central language, along with 64-65 official indigenous languages. The population is majority Mestizo (mixed Spanish and Indigenous) as well as White (87.6%),¹¹ with smaller populations of Afro-Colombian (6.8 % to 10.6 %) and Indigenous (3.4 to 4.3%).¹² It has the second largest Afro-Colombian population in Latin America after Brazil.¹³ Colombian society is described as ‘highly stratified’ between classes of wealthy and poorer populations,¹⁴ with the second highest level of inequality in the region.¹⁵

The country is bordered with Venezuela and Brazil to the east, with Ecuador and Peru to the south, with Panama and the Pacific Ocean on the west and to the North by the Atlantic Ocean through the Caribbean sea.¹⁶ Colombia is organised into departments, districts, municipalities and indigenous territories.¹⁷ There are 5 regions, 32 departments (*departamentos*) and the Capital District of Bogotá, and 1 123 municipalities (*municipios*).¹⁸ Below *municipios* there are sub-divisions called *comunas (urbanos)* and *corregimientos (rurales)*, which are divided into neighbourhoods (*barrios* in urban areas and *veredas* in rural areas).¹⁹ At the departmental and municipal levels of government there is executive power in the leadership of governors and mayors, elected for four-year terms by popular vote. Each department has a departmental assembly and municipalities have elected municipal councils. There are also 811 indigenous territories with about 1.5 million people (3.4 % of the population). The land area covered by indigenous territories can range from 30 to 70 % of the territory of some departments.²⁰ These territories have autonomy and indigenous-focused institutions allowing greater access to representation for minority and indigenous communities at local levels although they remain challenged in their implementation.²¹

For more than 50 years, FARC-EP, the oldest and largest guerrilla group in the western hemisphere was in conflict with the government, until 2016 when a peace agreement was reached. A range of other paramilitary and criminal groups also became active, and although

⁷ Globalex, Introduction to Colombian Governmental Institutions and Primary Legal Sources, May 2007, [url](#)

⁸ BBC News, Country Profile – Colombia, 8 August 2018, [url](#)

⁹ BBC News, Country Profile – Colombia, 8 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰ MRG, Colombia, June 2020, [url](#); US, World Factbook – Colombia, [updated] 9 August 2022, [url](#)

¹¹ US, World Factbook – Colombia, [updated] 9 August 2022, [url](#)

¹² MRG, Colombia, June 2020, [url](#); US, World Factbook – Colombia, [updated] 9 August 2022, [url](#)

¹³ MRG, Colombia, June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴ BBC News, Country Profile – Colombia, 8 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 6

¹⁶ MRG, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Colombia, June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷ Colombia, Constitution of 1991 (Amended 2015), [url](#)

¹⁸ Colombia, DANE, Departamentos y municipios de Colombia, 15 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹ Medellín, Datos generales de la ciudad, [url](#)

²⁰ OECD, Colombia, February 2019, [url](#)

²¹ MRG, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Colombia, June 2020, [url](#)



the FARC-EP peace agreement has been significant, other armed and criminal groups now perpetuate insecurity in the country where FARC-EP used to be present.²² Colombia is among the most long-standing democracies in Latin America, despite a long history of widespread human rights violations and violence, which pose challenges to the government's capacity to consolidate the 2016 peace agreement with the leftist guerrilla group the FARC-EP and guarantee citizen security.²³

²² UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), paras 48-65, 106

²³ Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#); BBC News, Country Profile – Colombia, 8 August 2018, [url](#)



2. Background and political developments

2.1. Conflict background

In 2016, the government of Colombia signed a historic peace deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo), marking the end of a 52-year armed struggle against the FARC-EP that lasted from 1964-2016, and earning then-President Manuel Santos the Nobel Peace Prize.²⁴ The FARC-EP was a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla insurgency created in 1964 in the area of Marquetalia (Tolima department) by small-scale farmers and peasants who fought to overthrow the government demanding more land rights.²⁵ The 2016 signing of the Final Agreement for Ending Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace (Acuerdo Final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una Paz estable y duradera) was a significant achievement, and the demobilisation of the FARC-EP and the creation of its new political party (Comunes) are among the most significant outcomes of the peace process, as well as the creation of the 16 Special Transitory Peace Electoral Districts to increase political participation of conflict victims, and the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms.²⁶ The agreement resulted in the demobilisation of 13 000 FARC-EP members and their transition to civilian life.²⁷

Colombia's 2022 Truth Commission (CEV, Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición) findings about the period between 1985 to 2018 indicated that there were 450 000 fatalities due to broader armed conflict in Colombia [not only due to the FARC-EP], 80 % of which were civilians. The main perpetrators were paramilitary groups (45 %), guerrilla groups (27 %) and the state (12 %). There were over 110 000 forced disappearances, 50 000 kidnapping victims, and over 30 000 children and youth recruited to armed groups. Sexual violence has been used widely as a weapon against women, children, Afro and Indigenous groups and LGBTIQ persons. Forced displacement due to the conflict has affected at least 8 million Colombians since 1985.²⁸

The Truth Commission noted that massacres and extrajudicial 'false positive' executions were two homicide modalities requiring special attention.²⁹ Massacres are defined by the UN and Colombian human rights NGO, Indepaz,³⁰ as three or more victims intentionally killed by homicide in the same time and place.³¹ The Ministry of Defence³² and the National Centre for Historical Memory define a massacre as the intentional homicide of four or more people in a state of helplessness in the same time and location.³³ There were 4 237 massacres between

²⁴ BBC News, Colombia profile – timeline, 8 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁵ BBC News, Who are the Farc?, 24 November 2016, [url](#)

²⁶ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 2

²⁷ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/1090), 27 December 2021, [url](#), para. 106;

²⁸ Colombia, CEV, Truth Commission of Colombia – Executive Summary, July 2022, [url](#)

²⁹ Colombia, CEV, Truth Commission of Colombia – Executive Summary, July 2022, [url](#)

³⁰ Indepaz, Masacres en Colombia Durante El 2020, 2021 y 2022, [31 October 2022], [url](#)

³¹ New York Times (The), Colombia Sees Surge in Mass Killings Despite Historic Peace Deal, 13 September 2020, [url](#)

³² Colombia, Ministerio de Defensa, Logros de la política de defensa y seguridad, September 2022, [url](#), p. 10

³³ Colombia, Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, Bases de datos, n.d. [url](#)



1958 to 2021, with half being committed by paramilitaries, according to the National Centre for Historical Memory.³⁴ ‘False positives’ (*Falsos positivos*) were executions committed entirely by State agents, often in alliance with paramilitary organisations who falsely reported civilians to be guerrillas, according to the Truth Commission.³⁵ In 2002, there was a government policy enacted to reward high kill counts and a system of monetary compensation within the army in exchange for such killings. Promotions were contingent on high kill counts and the army perpetrated murders and disappearances of thousands of innocent poor and mentally ill Colombians reported as enemy combatant guerrillas.³⁶ ‘False positive’ executions numbered over 8 200 between 1958-2016, with more than 6 402 happening between 2002-2008.³⁷ However, Jeremy McDermott added that ‘False positives’ usually only refer to those killing carried out under the Uribe administration [2002-2010³⁸], where extrajudicial executions were rewarded with promotions and days off.³⁹

Most victims of the conflict were civilians, and wherein from mainly rural Indigenous and Afro-Colombian people.⁴⁰ Since the peace deal was signed, over 9.3 million Colombians have been recognised by the government as victims of the armed conflict.⁴¹

2.2. State structure

2.2.1. Legislative branch

Colombia has a bicameral Congress with 102 senators and 181 House representatives elected every four years through a proportional representation system.⁴² Former FARC-EP guerrillas who formed the party Comunes after the peace agreement have a temporary guarantee of five seats in both houses until 2026. There are also 16 seats for peace constituencies (Circunscripciones Transitorias Especiales de la Paz, CITREP) that represent conflict victims in 167 of the most-affected municipalities and whose representatives must be certified conflict victims and are intended to increase representation in these areas.⁴³ These Curules de Paz (‘peace seats’) are strategically located in the regions where armed actors have caused high numbers of victims and represent a step forward for political participation, however, there have been obstacles in implementation during the Duque government,⁴⁴ and there were

³⁴ Colombia, CEV, Truth Commission of Colombia – Executive Summary, July 2022, [url](#)

³⁵ Colombia, CEV, Truth Commission of Colombia – Executive Summary, July 2022, [url](#); ABColombia, Truth Commission of Colombia: Executive Summary, [url](#); For the full findings in Spanish, see: Colombia, CEV, Hay futuro si hay verdad, August 2022, [url](#)

³⁶ Perry, J., Can the Government Police Itself? Colombia’s False Positives Scandal, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁷ Colombia, CEV, Truth Commission of Colombia – Executive Summary, July 2022, [url](#); ABColombia, Truth Commission of Colombia: Executive Summary, [url](#); For the full findings in Spanish, see: Colombia, CEV, Hay futuro si hay verdad, August 2022, [url](#)

³⁸ BBC News, Profile: Alvaro Uribe Velez, 28 July 2010, [url](#)

³⁹ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁴⁰ Colombia, CEV, Truth Commission of Colombia – Executive Summary, July 2022, [url](#); ABColombia, Truth Commission of Colombia: Executive Summary, [url](#); For the full findings in Spanish, see: Colombia, CEV, Hay futuro si hay verdad, August 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹ Colombia, Unidad para las Víctimas, n.d., [url](#)

⁴² Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#)

⁴³ Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#); EU Election Observation Mission, Colombia 2022 – Final Report, [url](#), p. 23

⁴⁴ WOLA, Victim Seats in Congress Could Help Advance Peace in Colombia, 11 March 2022, [url](#)



reports that some candidates withdrew candidacy before the elections due to security concerns.⁴⁵ There are also seats reserved for ethnic groups, minorities, and Colombians living abroad.⁴⁶ Freedom House described Duque's governing coalition as a 'fragile working majority' during his term.⁴⁷ Congressional elections were held in March and the new Congress was inaugurated on 20 July 2022.⁴⁸

2.2.2. Executive branch

The executive branch dominates the other branches of government through the powers of the President, Vice-President, ministers, and directors of agencies.⁴⁹ The head of government is the President, who is directly elected to a four year term without re-election (since a 2015 amendment).⁵⁰ In the March 2022 presidential elections, three main coalitions ran [(Pacto Histórico – leftist/Gustavo Petro), Coalición Centro Esperanza (centre/Sergio Fajardo), and Equipo por Colombia (right/Federico Gutiérrez)]. Former President Uribe's Centro Democrático did not participate, nor did Partido Liberal, one of the traditionally strong parties within Congress.⁵¹ In early August 2022, Gustavo Petro (of the Pacto Histórico party) was inaugurated as President of Colombia.⁵²

2.2.3. Legal system and judicial branch

Colombia's judicial branch is composed of the country's highest courts: the Constitutional Court (Corte Constitucional), Supreme Court (Corte Suprema de Justicia) having jurisdiction over civil and criminal law, the Council of State (Consejo de Estado) handling administrative law, Superior Judicial Council (Consejo Superior de la Judicatura), the Attorney General's Office (Fiscalía General de la Nación), and lower courts for administrative and civil matters.⁵³

There are four government bodies that are crucial to the adherence to the rule of law by government officials at all levels to prevent, investigate, and punish irregularities:

- 1) Office of the Attorney General (FGN, Fiscalía General de la Nación⁵⁴): an autonomous organisation under the judicial branch that prosecutes crime;
- 2) Office of the Prosecutor General (PGN, Procuraduría General de la Nación⁵⁵): acting as the guardian of constitutional rights and liberties and the rule of law, the PGN may also take action to hold to account public officials for discipline issues in relation to official

⁴⁵ EU Election Observation Mission, Colombia 2022 – Final Report, [url](#), p. 23

⁴⁶ Globalex, Introduction to Colombian Governmental Institutions and Primary Legal Sources, May 2007, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁸ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/267), 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹ Globalex, Introduction to Colombian Governmental Institutions and Primary Legal Sources, May 2007, [url](#)

⁵⁰ Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#); Harvard Law School Library, Colombian Legal Research, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹ EU Election Observation Mission, Colombia 2022 – Final Report, [url](#), p. 7

⁵² Reuters, Former rebel Petro takes office in Colombia promising peace and equality, 7 August 2022, [url](#); UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513), 27 June 2022, [url](#), para. 3

⁵³ FIU, Colombia, n.d., [url](#); For a graphical chart of the judicial branch, see: Harvard Law School Library, Rama Judicial del Poder Público, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴ Colombia, Fiscalía General de la Nación, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁵ Colombia, Procuraduría General de la Nación, [url](#)



duties.⁵⁶ PGN is also the office primarily responsible for investigating allegations of human rights violations by security forces (except in the context of conflict);⁵⁷

- 3) Office of the Ombudsperson (Defensoría del Pueblo⁵⁸): an independent body with the mandate to defend and protect human rights and liberties under the Constitution and the law;
- 4) Office of the Comptroller General (Contraloría General de la República⁵⁹): Supervises the management and auditing of revenues, expenses and government transactions and calls on the Prosecutor General to file legal actions that may apply.⁶⁰

The ordinary court structure has the Supreme Court of Justice (Corte Suprema de Justicia), followed by Judicial District Superior Tribunals (Tribunales Superiores del Distrito Judicial), and lower courts (Juzgados). There are also special tribunals for the military, for certain authorities of indigenous peoples and through the 2016 Peace accord.⁶¹ Under the 2016 Peace agreement, two key transitional justice mechanisms were developed, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, JEP) [which has jurisdiction over conflict-related crimes⁶²] and the Truth Commission. Both began gathering evidence in 2018.⁶³ Transparencia Colombia reported that the judicial sector is among the main government sectors affected by corruption, as well as the security forces.⁶⁴ Efforts to reform the judiciary have been challenged by problems of corruption, inefficiency, and impunity.⁶⁵

For more information see the section on the [judicial system](#).

2.2.4. Security forces

Colombia has the second largest military in the Americas, including intelligence agencies, and specialised units for organised crime.⁶⁶ The police are responsible for internal law enforcement and fall under the Ministry of Defence, however, it also shares investigative functions with the Attorney General's office. The army shares 'limited responsibility for law enforcement and maintenance of order within the country,' for example military logistical support and security for criminal investigations in 'high-conflict' or 'remote areas'.⁶⁷ The security forces includes the army, navy, air force and police, numbering close to 500 000 active members [approximately 300 000 in the military, marines, and air force⁶⁸]. Each has its own intelligence branch.⁶⁹ The Colombian military relies on conscripted males who are required to serve unless they have an exemption; while those exceptions have expanded in recent years, those who do enlist often 'have no other option'. Crisis Group observed that

⁵⁶ Globalex, Introduction to Colombian Governmental Institutions and Primary Legal Sources, May 2007, [url](#)

⁵⁷ USDOS (United States Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, p. 5

⁵⁸ Colombia, Defensoría del Pueblo, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁹ Colombia, Contraloría General de la República, [url](#)

⁶⁰ Globalex, Introduction to Colombian Governmental Institutions and Primary Legal Sources, May 2007, [url](#)

⁶¹ Harvard Law School Library, Colombian Legal Research, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

⁶² USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 5

⁶³ Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴ Transparencia por Colombia, Así se mueve la corrupción 2016-2020, November 2021, [url](#); p. 47

⁶⁵ Insight Crime, Colombia Profile, 21 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁶ GITOC, Organized Crime Index – Colombia 2021, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁷ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁸ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 19

⁶⁹ Insight Crime, Colombia Profile, 21 January 2021, [url](#)



professionalism levels are low among the rank and file.⁷⁰ The military is described as a labyrinthine bureaucracy with personnel, equipment, and budgetary constraints that hamper law enforcement's effectiveness and presence in Colombia's difficult terrain.⁷¹ The Global Organized Crime Index similarly states that law enforcement is impeded due to the country's difficult geography, large terrain, weak international borders, inaccessible remote areas, sometimes poor communication between intelligence and judicial bodies, and corruption, which have permitted criminal groups to 'consolidate control' in certain areas where security forces have difficulty reaching and maintaining a presence.⁷² The government invests heavily in the security forces (12 % of the general budget / 4 % of GDP). Under Duque, the security response was focused on capture-and-kill operations against high value targets and heads of armed groups; despite this, homicides, massacres, and displacement increased between 2017-2021.⁷³ Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP)⁷⁴ similarly stated that such operations have not reduced crime.⁷⁵ Adam Isacson, Director for Defense Oversight at the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA),⁷⁶ reported that the mismatch between security spending and continued insecurity is explained by chronic state absence in certain areas from rural borders to poor urban neighbourhoods, and weak state institutions linked to the security sector such as the judicial system.⁷⁷

Corruption was reported among all government entities by Transparencia Colombia, and most allegations of corruption were against the security forces between 2016-2020.⁷⁸ There were 'alarming allegations' of high-level corruption within the armed forces reported during summer 2022.⁷⁹ Corruption in the ranks is also a problem, and there were reports that criminal group enlist members of the security forces to inform on colleagues and collaborate or participate in illicit activities.⁸⁰

With the election of President Petro, there was an overhaul of the top ranks, and the appointment of new commanders-in-chief forced the resignation of 52 generals from the armed forces and police.⁸¹ Under the Colombian system if a general is appointed to head the police or the military, then all those equal or senior to him have to resign. Petro deliberately

⁷⁰ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict, 27 September 2022, [url](#), pp. 19-20

⁷¹ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict, 27 September 2022, [url](#), pp. 19-20

⁷² GITOC, Organized Crime Index – Colombia 2021, [url](#), p. 5

⁷³ Isacson, A., Razon Pública, ¿Cómo pasar del gasto en defensa a la seguridad para los colombianos?, 18 September 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁴ FIP is an independent think tank created in 1999 ranked among the most influential in the Americas, focusing on peace and security and institutional capacity. FIP, Quienes Somos, N.d., [url](#)

⁷⁵ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

⁷⁶ WOLA is a US-based research and advocacy organisation focused on human rights in the Americas. WOLA, About Us, [url](#)

⁷⁷ Isacson, A., Razon Pública, ¿Cómo pasar del gasto en defensa a la seguridad para los colombianos?, 18 September 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁸ Transparencia por Colombia, Así se mueve la corrupción 2016-2020, November 2021, [url](#); pp. 43, 47; WOLA, How the Petro Government and Minister Ivan Velazquez can make Colombians safer, 3 August 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁹ WOLA, How the Petro Government and Minister Ivan Velazquez can make Colombians safer, 3 August 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 21; For example: El Espectador, Las pruebas que salpican a cinco oficiales del Ejército en escándalo de corrupción en la Cuarta Brigada, 9 January 2022, [url](#); Cambio, "Esta es la puta guerra": General reconoce alianza con narcotraficantes para enfrentar disidencias de las Farc, 11 February 2022, [url](#); El Espectador, Las sombras de la mafia que persiguen al general (r) Barrero Gordillo, 20 February 2022, [url](#); See also: WOLA, How the Petro Government and Minister Ivan Velazquez can make Colombians safer, 3 August 2022, [url](#)

⁸¹ SWP, Colombia's Path to "Total Peace", September 2022, [url](#), p. 2



chose junior generals in the police and military, those with clean human rights records, thus forcing the resignations of all the more senior officers.⁸²

2.3. Political developments in 2022

In 2022, Colombia held legislative elections on 13 March, presidential elections on 29 May, and the final presidential run-off election on 19 June 2022.⁸³ President Iván Duque's Centro Democrático party governed from 2018 to August 2022 as a traditional right-wing/centre-right party with links to the 'emblematic' right-wing figure and former president, Álvaro Uribe.⁸⁴ Duque was elected in 2018 following a run-off election win against Gustavo Petro [who would later win in the 2022 elections].⁸⁵ According to the EU Parliamentary Research Service, both Uribe and the Centro Democrático were 'vociferous opponents' of the peace accord negotiated between President Santos and the FARC-EP and many Colombians 'remain dissatisfied with the leniency that FARC-EP members received under the accords' such as avoiding jail sentences.⁸⁶ The political environment in 2021-2022 was highly polarised during the presidency of Iván Duque with increasing popular demand for change. In 2021, a third wave of social protests (*Paro Nacional* or National Strike) erupted in reaction to an April 2021 tax reform bill. The Bill was withdrawn but the protest movement continued into June 2022 and evolved to demand other issues such as denouncing government. According to the EU Election Observation Mission to Colombia, the 12 months prior to the 2022 elections were reportedly the 'most violent' since 2014, with 100 community leaders and Peace Accord signatories assassinated in the first six months of the year.⁸⁷ In early August 2022, Gustavo Petro (of the Pacto Histórico party) was inaugurated as President of Colombia;⁸⁸ the first leftist president elected in the country's history.⁸⁹ Petro is himself a former member of the demobilised leftist guerrilla group, M-19.⁹⁰ He was elected under 'mostly peaceful conditions' and won 50.4 % of the vote in a second round run off. The elected vice-president is Francia Márquez, the first Afro-Colombian elected to the post in Colombian history.⁹¹ Petro has few links to the traditional political centre-right establishment and has called for the maximal implementation of the 2016 peace accord, announced peace talks with the ELN and other armed groups, re-establishing diplomatic relations with Venezuela, while establishing policy

⁸² McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁸³ EU Election Observation Mission, Colombia 2022 – Final Report, [url](#), p. 6

⁸⁴ Uribe is described as a polarizing figure who used the military to suppress the FARC during the conflict with them; however his administration had alleged ties to the AUC paramilitary group and Colombia suffered some of the most egregious human rights violations while he was president. COHA, Alvaro Uribe: The Most Dangerous Man in Colombian Politics, 20 October 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁵ Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁶ EU, EPRS, Peace and Security in 2019 – Evaluating the EU's efforts to support peace in Colombia, May 2019, [url](#), p. 42

⁸⁷ EU Election Observation Mission, Colombia 2022 – Final Report, [url](#), p. 6

⁸⁸ Reuters, Former rebel Petro takes office in Colombia promising peace and equality, 7 August 2022, [url](#); UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513), 27 June 2022, [url](#), para. 3

⁸⁹ Reuters, Former rebel Petro takes office in Colombia promising peace and equality, 7 August 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰ Reuters, New Colombia government to propose incentives to crime gang members who disarm, 3 August 2022, [url](#)

⁹¹ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513), 27 June 2022, [url](#), paras. 3-4



priorities around support for Colombia's peace and reconciliation processes, addressing land inequality/reform, rural inclusion and poverty.⁹²

Colombia continued to be 'severely affected' by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, with about 130 000 deaths and more than 5 million reported cases.⁹³ Colombia had one of the longest COVID-19 lockdowns in the world, affecting the number of Colombians in extreme poverty, which grew by more than 3.5 million in 2020 alone.⁹⁴ The pandemic weakened the middle class in Colombia. It also increased common street crime which further eroded public safety,⁹⁵ and restrictions to control it increased poverty and inequality in Colombia.⁹⁶ The pandemic also led to a momentary decline in reported killings however, once the health crisis settled, security again deteriorated as armed groups were empowered to step into the void left by an absent state pre-occupied with COVID-19 and a locked-down population.⁹⁷ These groups strengthened parallel or criminal governance in certain parts of the country as a result.⁹⁸ Illegal armed groups took advantage of this in many rural areas and especially in Pacific Coastal areas, where they enforced their regulations on the population through confinement and displacement and sought to expand control of territory, communities, and illicit economies.⁹⁹ They also enforced lockdowns and even delivered some aid to those in their areas of influence.¹⁰⁰ On 30 June 2022, the government announced the end of the COVID-19 health emergency. The pandemic generated a health crisis, economic and social devastation, particularly for Colombians in situations of displacement, confinement, lost livelihoods, or people migrating.¹⁰¹

2.3.1. Protests and social unrest under President Iván Duque

Following decades of social, economic, and political turmoil, high unemployment, criminality and inequality, these patterns were exacerbated during Duque's presidency by COVID-19 restrictions and reports of government corruption. This erupted into social unrest and in a 2021 'National Strike' (*Paro nacional*) protest that saw outbreaks of violence among demonstrators, police, and criminal actors.¹⁰² Large scale protests occurred between April-June 2021 against Duque's proposed tax reforms,¹⁰³ economic inequality, police violence, and lack of protection.¹⁰⁴ Although these protests were largely peaceful, there were reports some were violent and included attacks on police officers, public infrastructure and involved blockades.¹⁰⁵ NGOs reported that protests were met with police force to break up

⁹² US, CRS, Colombia: Presidential Elections in 2022, 24 June 2022, [url](#)

⁹³ Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁴ ABColombia, COVID 19 pandemic exacerbates poverty and inequality in Colombia, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁵ EU Election Observation Mission, Colombia 2022 – Final Report, [url](#), p. 6

⁹⁶ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁷ ACLED, Understanding the Killing of Social Leaders in Colombia During COVID-19, 5 October 2020, [url](#); Pares, Plomo es lo que hay, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁸ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁹⁹ ABColombia, COVID 19 pandemic exacerbates poverty and inequality in Colombia, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

¹⁰¹ UNHCR, Colombia: Monitoreo de protección (enero-junio 2022), June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰² GITOC, Colombia's National Strike, July 2021, [url](#), p. i, 6-9

¹⁰³ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#); Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2021, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 30; for a timeline of 2021 events see: GITOC, Colombia's National Strike, July 2021, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁰⁴ HRW, Colombia: Egregious Police Abuses Against Protesters, 9 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2021 – Colombia, 12 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 18-19



demonstrations, including use of live ammunition.¹⁰⁶ The police response was described by human rights organisations as using ‘excessive, often brutal, force’¹⁰⁷ or ‘harsh repression,’¹⁰⁸ including using live ammunition.¹⁰⁹ This activity was especially by the anti-riot police squadron (Escuadrones Móviles Antidisturbios, ESMAD).¹¹⁰ There were reports of hundreds being injured and reports ranged from 25¹¹¹ to 47 protesters killed, including of human rights defenders (HRD).¹¹² Some NGOs claimed up to 74 deaths and 111 people missing during the strikes.¹¹³ Investigations into the deaths of protesters have been slow.¹¹⁴ Organised crime and illegal armed groups also took advantage of the social unrest and COVID lockdowns in certain parts of the country to indulge in crime, looting and extortion of the local population in the absence of police.¹¹⁵

2.3.2. Election-related violence in 2022 elections

Colombia’s 2022 elections were described by the EU Observation Mission as ‘peaceful for the most part’ although the impacts of armed strikes by the ELN and AGC during the year and increased violence imposed in rural areas by armed groups impacted freedom of movement and campaigning.¹¹⁶ ACLED reported that targeting of civilians increased in the months leading up to the legislative elections, and in January 2022 reached the highest levels since the previous elections in 2018.¹¹⁷ The Electoral Observation Mission of Colombia also reported 581 violent acts against social, political, and community leaders in the pre-electoral period of 2021-2022 legislative elections, an increase since the previous elections.¹¹⁸ Targeting of political candidates and incumbent officials was also reported.¹¹⁹ There were alleged plots to assassinate Gustavo Petro and candidate Rodolfo Hernández that prompted the cancellation of some events,¹²⁰ as well as three separate attacks on candidates from the Comunes party, two of whom were killed.¹²¹ Hooded men threatened presidential candidate Sergio Fajardo.¹²² Pares reported that there were 163 victims of electoral violence, mainly public servants supporting the election.¹²³ Women candidates, activists, and human rights defenders have been particularly targeted.¹²⁴

¹⁰⁶ HRW, Colombia: Egregious Police Abuses Against Protesters, 9 June 2021, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2021 – Colombia, 12 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 18-19

¹⁰⁷ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2021, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 30

¹⁰⁹ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ HRW, Colombia: Egregious Police Abuses Against Protesters, 9 June 2021, [url](#)

¹¹¹ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#)

¹¹² Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2021, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 30

¹¹³ GITOC, Colombia’s National Strike, July 2021, [url](#), p. i

¹¹⁴ Reuters, Families of protesters killed in Colombia face long wait for justice, 13 September 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ GITOC, Colombia’s National Strike, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 13-18

¹¹⁶ EU Election Observation Mission, Colombia 2022 – Final Report, [url](#), p. 24, 41

¹¹⁷ ACLED, Colombia: Legislative Elections, 25 March 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ Telesur, Colombia: 2022 is the Most Violent Pre-electoral Period on Record, 14 May 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ ACLED, Colombia: Legislative Elections, 25 March 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁰ EU Election Observation Mission, Colombia 2022 – Final Report, [url](#), p. 24

¹²¹ Infobae, Partido de ex-FARC denuncia ataques con dos muertos previo a comicios en Colombia, 25 February 2022, [url](#)

¹²² ACLED, Regional Overview - South America (12-18 February 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹²³ Caracol Radio, Cada dos días hay una víctima de violencia electoral en Colombia: Pares, 13 March 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁴ ACLED, Regional Overview - South America (12-18 February 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2; GIWPS, Violence Targeting Women in Politics: 10 Countries to Watch in 2022, 28 January 2022, [url](#)



2.4. Humanitarian overview

Colombia hosts one of the world's largest internally displaced persons (IDP) populations due to armed conflict over the last fifty years, resulting in 'severe protection issues', forced displacement, confinement, threats, killings, forced recruitments and gender-based violence.¹²⁵ According to UNOCHA, there were 7.7 million 'people in need' of humanitarian assistance in Colombia in 2021, excluding the 1.8 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Colombia.¹²⁶ The key drivers of humanitarian need in Colombia in 2021-2022 are reported to be the increasing socio-economic needs in both peripheral and urban areas due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the expansion and consolidation of non—state armed groups in some regions, natural disaster impacts, social unrest, and the need to integrate Venezuelan migrants and refugees,¹²⁷ which number 2.5 million.¹²⁸ The humanitarian crisis in Colombia continues across large areas of the territory due to violence, natural disasters, and mixed migration causing high humanitarian needs particularly in areas most affected by conflict. Emergency needs are high in the departments of the Pacific zone (Nariño, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, and Chocó), Northwest (Antioquia, Córdoba, southern Bolívar, and Sucre), the border with Venezuela (La Guajira, Norte de Santander, Arauca, and Vichada), and the southern centred departments (Putumayo, Caquetá, Meta, Guaviare, Amazonas, Guainía, and Vaupés).¹²⁹

COVID-19 negatively impacted food security and nutrition with 1.6 million Colombians in a situation of 'severe' food insecurity and 22 million Colombians with 'moderate' food insecurity.¹³⁰ During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019-2020, the share of the Colombian population living in poverty¹³¹ was 35.7 % (2019) and rose to 42.5 % (2020). In 2021, the poverty level improved slightly (decreasing to 39.3 %). Extreme poverty also improved slightly in 2021, moving from 15.1 % down to 12.2 % of the population living in these conditions. Poverty in 2021 was still worse than pre-pandemic levels.¹³² Fifty percent of Colombia's workforce is in the informal sector and the pandemic and COVID-19 lockdowns caused increases in poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition as a result.¹³³

According to Doctors Without Borders, humanitarian organisations have access difficulties due to the placement of mines by armed groups, as well as violence, displacement, sexual assault and kidnappings, which are 'rampant' in conflict-affected areas.¹³⁴ ACAPS also lists Colombia

¹²⁵ DRC, Factsheet – DRC Colombia, 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁶ UNOCHA, Global Humanitarian Overview 2022 – Colombia, [url](#)

¹²⁷ UNOCHA, Global Humanitarian Overview 2022 – Colombia, [url](#)

¹²⁸ International Crisis Group, Hard Times in a Safe Haven: Protecting Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia, 9 August 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁹ DRC, Factsheet – DRC Colombia, 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁰ UNOCHA, Global Humanitarian Overview 2022 – Colombia, [url](#)

¹³¹ The Colombian government defines 'poverty' as living on \$3 per day and 'extreme poverty' as living on \$1.36 a day. Reuters, Colombia poverty declined in 2021, but still above pre-pandemic levels, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

¹³² Reuters, Colombia poverty declined in 2021, but still above pre-pandemic levels, 26 April 2022, [url](#); Colombia Reports, Colombia's poverty rate down to 39.3% as economy recovers from pandemic, 27 April 2022, [url](#)

¹³³ New Humanitarian (The), Why Colombia's next president will have to hit the humanitarian ground running, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁴ New Humanitarian (The), Why Colombia's next president will have to hit the humanitarian ground running, 15 June 2022, [url](#)



to have ‘very high constraints’ for humanitarian access during 2022, alongside countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Ethiopia, Mali, among others. This is due to armed and criminal groups, land mine contamination, clashes, poor roads, frequent natural hazards, drug trafficking activity, and confinements, and remote communities in need.¹³⁵ For more information, see the sections on [confinement](#) and [displacement](#).

¹³⁵ ACAPS, Humanitarian Access Overview, July 2022, [url](#), pp. 5, 7, 10, 22



3. Implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP

3.1. Peace Agreement components and Victims Law 1448

The Peace accord between the government of Colombia and the FARC-EP, titled the ‘2016 Final Agreement for Ending Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace’ contains six key components:

- (1) Comprehensive rural reform in order to eradicate poverty, promote equality and encourage the exercise of citizenship rights;
- (2) Broadening political participation and incorporating new voices;
- (3) End to the conflict with the FARC-EP and reincorporation of FARC-EP members into civilian life; security guarantees in the fight against criminal organisations responsible for homicides, massacres, and targeting of human rights and social advocates, such as paramilitary successors and criminal organisations. Additional institutional measures are included for this purpose such as the National Commission on Security Guarantees, Special Investigation Unit, Elite Corps of the National Police, and measures to fight corruption.
- (4) Addresses the problem of illicit drugs/crops and their association with drug trafficking and organised crime;
- (5) Creation of the ‘Victims Accord’ that provides compensation, reparations and justice mechanisms for the investigation and punishment of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and the clarification of the truth for victims of the conflict. The system is composed of the Truth, Coexistence and Non-recurrence Commission, the Special Unit for the Search for Missing Persons, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the comprehensive reparations measures and guarantees of non-recurrence, as well as verification mechanisms to support the implementation of the peace agreement.
- (6) Creation of a Commission for monitoring implementation of the peace agreement composed of members of the National Government, FARC-EP, as well as international monitoring components.¹³⁶

The overall implementation of the peace accord has encountered obstacles.¹³⁷ For instance, prior to becoming president, and as a candidate in the 2018 elections, Iván Duque was the

¹³⁶ Colombia, Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, 24 November 2016, [url](#), pp. 7-8

¹³⁷ EU, EPRS, Peace and Security in 2019 – Evaluating the EU’s efforts to support peace in Colombia, May 2019, [url](#), p. 44



only candidate who was openly opposed the 2016 peace accords,¹³⁸ and his Centro Democrático party campaigned against it.¹³⁹ Human rights organisations and think tanks reported that under Duque, there was a lack of political will to implement it.¹⁴⁰ A quantitative analysis of the Peace Accord implementation by the KROC Institute of International Studies, which officially monitors the implementation of the agreement,¹⁴¹ found that of the 578 stipulations in the agreement, 30 % have been completed, 19 % are in intermediate completion, 37 % are at a minimum level, and 15 % have not yet been initiated. Over the past three years, KROC observed that implementation has been ‘linear’ with ‘few changes in implementation status’.¹⁴² A central pillar of the agreement is comprehensive rural reform and land rights, intending to close the inequality gap affecting rural areas.¹⁴³ Progress has been made such as the creation of 16 special temporary peace districts for victims of the armed conflict. However, components of the Peace Agreement have been ‘implemented inconsistently’ especially those related to rural reform, political participation, illegal drug problems, crop substitution and ethnic issues.¹⁴⁴ Gaps in implementation of the peace agreement have contributed to increasing targeted killings in some areas of Colombia.¹⁴⁵

In 2011, in recognition of the scope of the population impacted by conflict, then-President Juan Manuel Santos signed into law the Victims and Land Restitution Law (Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras) or Law 1448 of 2011. This law provides for protection and restitution for victims of the armed conflict and survivors of human rights violations, including state abuses since 1985.¹⁴⁶ In practice, implementation of the law has remained slow with 12 300 rulings issued out of 133 000 files claimed (September 2021).¹⁴⁷ Many victims are unable to access compensation due to lack of formal documentation of their land claims, or difficulties proving their status as ‘victims’.¹⁴⁸ Of the 8 million registered war victims, 12 % have received financial aid in the past 10 years. The law has been extended to 2031 and the new Petro government estimated it would require 68 billion dollars to make necessary reforms to allow for effective reparations and almost a century to provide reparations to the current victims.¹⁴⁹ According to the Victims Unit (Unidad para las Víctimas), which monitors progress on the Victims’ Law 1448, the following difficulties continue to create obstacles to implementation of protection and prevention guarantees: new victimisations, vulnerability of historically affected populations,

¹³⁸ EU, EPRS, 2018 elections in Colombia: A test for peace?, May 2018, [url](#), p. 3, 6

¹³⁹ International Crisis Group, Risky Business: The Duque Government’s Approach to Peace in Colombia, 21 June 2018, [url](#), p. 1; FP, Can Colombia’s President Achieve “Total Peace?,” [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ WOLA, Colombia’s Peace Accord is Not Weak, It’s Duque Who Insists on Weakening It, 6 October 2021, [url](#); BTI, Colombia’s Partial Peace and Its Discontents, 14 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ KROC Institute monitors implementation in real time and produces regular reports on progress: KROC Institution, Colombia Data Visualizations, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴² KROC Institute, Five Years After the Signing of the Colombian Final Agreement: Reflections from Implementation Monitoring, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴³ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. A.

¹⁴⁴ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), paras. 9-10; see also: WOLA, A Long Way to Go: Implementing Colombia’s peace accord after five years, 23 November 2021, [url](#); UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵ Al Jazeera, Colombians call for end to impunity as activist killings continue, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 12; AI, Colombia: The Victims and Land Restitution Law, April 2012, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 12; HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸ Justice for Colombia, Colombia extends Victims Law until 2031, 19 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ Colombia Reports, Colombia needs \$68B before 2031 for war victims to rebuild lives, 23 August 2022, [url](#)



and the weakness of state institutions to provide a sustained effective presence in certain regions with large numbers of victims.¹⁵⁰

Land ownership is highly concentrated and unequally distributed in Colombia, and this land tenure inequality was one of the underlying grievances of the FARC-EP insurgency meant to be addressed through land reform in the 2016 peace deal.¹⁵¹ Progress on land reform and restoration of stolen lands has been slow.¹⁵² The state still does not have strong presence in many parts of the country, including those where criminal groups made land grabs, working in tandem with local elites and business interests.¹⁵³

3.2. Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, and Reparation

The Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, and Reparation and Non-Repetition (Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y No Repetición, SIVJNR) was created under the peace agreement to provide for restorative and remedial measures for uncovering the truth about the armed conflict in Colombia, guarantee justice in cases of serious human rights violations, and provide legal security for those who participate in the process with the aim of promoting reconciliation.¹⁵⁴ The mechanisms within the SIVJNR are the Truth Commission (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición, CEV), the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, JEP), and the Unit for Disappeared Persons in the Context of the Armed Conflict (Unidad de Búsqueda de Personas Dadas por Desaparecidas en el Contexto y en Razón del Conflicto Armado, UBDP).¹⁵⁵

In the summer of 2022, the CEV presented its final report on the period analysed from 1958 to 2016 taking into account 30 000 interviewees and more than 1 000 reports from organisations among their sources.¹⁵⁶ The JEP has been gathering evidence and prosecuting the most serious human rights abuses by the FARC-EP and the military prior to 2016 and in 2021 ordered the government to implement plans in the peace accord to protect people at risk, including former FARC-EP fighters.¹⁵⁷ The JEP has accredited more than 328 000 victims.¹⁵⁸ Critics of the JEP from the right-wing and military establishment claim the tribunal will hurt

¹⁵⁰ Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, “Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras”, Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), p. 86; See also: Canada, IRB, Colombia: Fact-finding Mission Report, March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁵² International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁵³ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

¹⁵⁴ Colombia, SIVJNR, 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-3

¹⁵⁵ Colombia, SIVJNR, 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-3

¹⁵⁶ Colombia, CEV, Hallazgos y recomendaciones para la no repetición, August 2022, [url](#); Insight Crime, Colombia’s Truth Commission Signposts Road to Peace for President-Elect to Follow, 12 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 58

institutional morale.¹⁵⁹ The JEP has launched 7 macro-cases dealing with serious human rights violations and war crimes,¹⁶⁰ and which affected hundreds of thousands of victims.¹⁶¹

- 1) Case 001 – Kidnapping, serious deprivation of liberty and other crimes by the FARC-EP (21 296 victims and 3 235 perpetrators);
- 2) Case 002 - Serious human rights violations of mainly indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and peasant communities, women and LGBTI people in 3 municipalities of Nariño (105 241 victims);
- 3) Case 003 – Killings and enforced disappearances presented as combat casualties by state agents (1 444 victims, 6 402 killed; 88 members of the security forces referred to the investigation/prosecution unit);
- 4) Case 004 - prioritises the territorial situation based on events of the conflict that occurred in the region of Urabá between 1986 and 2016 (43 385 victims);
- 5) Case 005 - Prioritizes human rights violations and serious breaches of International Humanitarian Law in the context of the internal armed conflict in 17 municipalities located in northern Cauca and southern Valle del Cauca (180 000 victims);
- 6) Case 006 - This case analyses the situation of victimisation of members of the political party Unión Patriótica between 1984 and 2016, mainly by paramilitaries and state agents, who acted in a large-scale systematic way with 5 733 people killed or disappeared in attacks (297 victims);
- 7) Case 007 – Recruitment of children for use in armed conflict (18 677 victims of use by FARC-EP).¹⁶²

In March 2022, it announced its intention to launch three new cases, dealing with crimes committed by the FARC, the military and state agents, and one on violations against Indigenous and Afro-Colombians.¹⁶³ In 2021, the JEP issued charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes against a retired general, and a second set of indictments against 15 soldiers for their respective roles in killings and disappearances during the years 2002 to 2008.¹⁶⁴

3.3. President Petro's *Paz Total* plan (Total Peace)

Petro's new government has pledged to uphold the 2016 peace agreement,¹⁶⁵ has revived peace talks with ELN, and is exploring dialogue with criminal groups under the concept of *Paz Total*, his 'Total Peace' plan'.¹⁶⁶ The Petro Government's 'Total Peace' concept is one of its key priorities and involves the implementation of the FARC-EP peace agreement in addition to resuming peace talks with the ELN, and exploring 'submission to justice agreements, through

¹⁵⁹ NPR, Colombia's tribunal exposes how troops kidnapped and killed thousands of civilians, 28 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ Colombia, JEP, Los grandes casos, n.d., [url](#); WOLA, What Macro-Cases has Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) Opened? 12 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ WOLA, A Long Way to Go: Implementing Colombia's peace accord after 5 years, 23 November 2021, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁶² Colombia, JEP, Los grandes casos, n.d., [url](#); WOLA, What Macro-Cases has Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) Opened? 12 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶³ Foundation Hironelle, First rift between Colombia's peace tribunal and the victims, 14 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-4

¹⁶⁵ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513), [url](#), paras. 3-4

¹⁶⁶ Reuters, New Colombia government to propose incentives to crime gang members who disarm, 3 August 2022, [url](#)



which other illegal actors cease violence in exchange for legal benefits'.¹⁶⁷ Within the plan, there are 'promises that the government will suspend the capture of members of armed groups and offer benefits, such as reduced sentences and a guarantee of no extradition, to members who reveal information on narcotrafficking routes and hand over earnings from illegal sources, such as cocaine trafficking.'¹⁶⁸

Shortly after taking office in August 2022, Petro's government proposed a multilateral ceasefire with all illegal armed groups that agree to negotiate their disarmament/demobilisation.¹⁶⁹ He also suspended arrest warrants and extradition requests against ELN peace negotiators.¹⁷⁰ Some of these illegal armed groups are seeking the same guarantees offered to the demobilised FARC-EP under the Peace Agreement of 2016, as well as the suspension of extraditions to the US for drug trafficking crimes.¹⁷¹ AGC had announced a unilateral ceasefire as an act of goodwill following Petro's inauguration in August 2022.¹⁷² The FARC-dissident group (Segunda Marquetalia) also announced its willingness to discuss demobilisation and disarmament.¹⁷³ Colombia Reports indicated that ELN, AGC, some FARC dissidents were interested in talks, but also organised criminal groups: La Oficina de Envigado (Medellín), Los Pachenca, and La Cordillera.¹⁷⁴ Independent media journalism site, La Silla Vacía, stated that self-declared 'unilateral ceasefire' announcements by these illegal armed groups are gestures that are 'not easily verifiable,' remain dependent on 'goodwill' of these groups, and although clashes between groups and armed forces may have declined recently, the website contacted sources in eight regions of Colombia who reported that armed groups continued to 'kill and torture' the population.¹⁷⁵ For more information see the section on conflict dynamics, especially regarding [Total Peace](#)

Regarding talks with the ELN, Colombia's High Commissioner for Peace and representatives of the UN and Norway met with the ELN in August¹⁷⁶ and separately with a FARC dissident faction also in view of exploring peace talks.¹⁷⁷ The government agreed to recognize the legitimacy of the ELN delegation and suspended arrest warrants and extradition orders against those members of the delegation.¹⁷⁸ The ELN and Colombian government agreed to begin peace negotiations in November 2022, with Norway, Venezuela, and Cuba as observers.¹⁷⁹

¹⁶⁷ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/715), 27 September 2022, [url](#); See also: USIP, Colombia's New Administration Raises Hopes for 'Total Peace', 12 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ FP, Can Colombia's President Achieve "Total Peace?," [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ Colombia Reports, Petro proposes multilateral ceasefire with Colombia's illegal armed groups, 28 August 2022, [url](#); Guardian (The), Colombia says 10 armed groups including FARC dissidents agree to ceasefire, 28 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ SWP, Colombia's Path to "Total Peace", September 2022, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷¹ Reuters, Colombia illegal armed groups propose ceasefire with incoming government, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷² Colombia Reports, Peace talks with Colombia's ELN guerrillas 'about to be resumed': Petro, 8 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷³ Colombia Reports, Peace talks with Colombia's ELN guerrillas 'about to be resumed': Petro, 8 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ Colombia Reports, Petro proposes multilateral ceasefire with Colombia's illegal armed groups, 28 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ La Silla Vacía, El cese al fuego de los grupos ni es verificable ni tiene a salvo a poblaciones, 10 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶ Reuters, Colombia advances towards restarting peace talks with ELN, 12 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/715), 27 September 2022, [url](#), paras. 98-99

¹⁷⁸ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/715), 27 September 2022, [url](#), paras. 98-99

¹⁷⁹ Axios, Colombia to restart peace talks with last remaining major rebel group, 11 October 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Colombia and ELN rebels agree to restart peace talks, 4 October 2022, [url](#)





On 26 October 2022, Congress approved a bill supporting Petro's 'Total Peace' plan aimed at dismantling illegal armed groups and allowing such negotiations to begin.¹⁸⁰ More than 20 groups had expressed interest in negotiating.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ FP, Can Colombia's President Achieve "Total Peace?," [url](#); El País, Las cinco claves de la ley de la paz total de Gustavo Petro, 27 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ Colombia Reports, Colombia's congress gives green light to Petro's "Total Peace" policy, 27 October 2022, [url](#)



4. Overview of violence and conflict dynamics

This section provides a brief overview of the conflict dynamics from 2012-2021, encompassing the transitional period after the 2016 peace accords. The second sub-chapter covers developments in 2022, including the election of President Petro. For information on illegal armed groups mentioned in these sections, see [illegal armed groups](#).

4.1. Dynamics in 2012-2021

Initially, after the signing of the Final Peace Agreement in 2016, there was a decrease in conflict-related violence. However, in the years since, violence has increased again in regions historically affected by armed conflict and the growth in crime represents the main obstacle to lasting implementation of the agreement.¹⁸² As the FARC-EP demobilised and moved out of its traditionally held territory, warring factions of armed groups and criminal organisations have expanded their presence and activities in these areas, competing for control.¹⁸³ Actors in the conflict after 2016 were no longer defined clearly as ‘guerrilla’ or ‘paramilitary’, as in the past, and have been recycled into new formations.¹⁸⁴ Since proliferating post-2016, these groups are more fragmented and hybridised and fight over control of illicit economies and territories, rather than for ideological purposes.¹⁸⁵ In addition, the absence and limited presence of the state and civil authorities in many of these areas has intensified disputes between these armed groups and criminal organisations who vie for ‘social, territorial, and strategic control, further aggravating violence against civilians, hindering governance and altering the lives of entire communities’.¹⁸⁶ International Crisis Group assessed that in a growing number of rural areas, ‘violence and coercion are as bad or worse than before the peace agreement’ and competition between groups and associated homicides are at risk of worsening and destabilising seemingly stable regions.¹⁸⁷ Affected communities blame the absence and limited capacity of the state for failing to deal with the situation; a state that is not seen as trusted.¹⁸⁸ The UN remarked that there is an especially urgent need for the government promote the ‘comprehensive presence’ of the state in rural areas of Amazona, Antioquia, Arauca, Bolívar,

¹⁸² UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/1090), 27 December 2021, [url](#), para. 48; International Crisis Group, Tackling Colombia’s Next Generation in Arms, 27 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸³ Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2021, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 31; UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 6

¹⁸⁴ Somos Defensores, 12 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

¹⁸⁵ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA; Somos Defensores, 12 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

¹⁸⁶ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/1090), 27 December 2021, [url](#), para. 48; see also: Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 321; Al Jazeera, Colombians Call for End to Impunity as Activist Killings Continue, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ International Crisis Group, Tackling Colombia’s Next Generation in Arms, 27 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 7-8; International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 11; See also: HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 68-122



Caquetá, Cauca, Chocó, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, and Valle del Cauca.¹⁸⁹ The lack of state presence has also left human rights defenders, social leaders, ex-FARC-EP combatants and others exposed to targeted attacks and killings.¹⁹⁰ In areas where the state is less present and there are higher concentrations of violence, the provision of basic services such as education, health, and justice are also lacking.¹⁹¹

From 2012, when peace negotiations between the government of Colombia and FARC-EP commenced, to 2016 when the peace agreement was signed, there was a drop in the overall national homicide rate from 35.95 to 23.66/100 000 inhabitants) and a drop in the homicide rate in the 281 municipalities most affected by the conflict (and most at-risk of post-conflict violence).¹⁹² In 2016-2017, the national homicide rate remained similar at 23.66 (2016) and 23.07 (2017), but in those 281 municipalities most impacted by the conflict, the violence began to increase, marked by significant clashes between competing groups in the aftermath of FARC-EP's demobilisation.¹⁹³ This was followed by an additional spike in violence and the rising the homicide rate in 2018-2020 (during the Duque administration) in the most affected municipalities. This was due to outbreaks of violence between ELN against EPL, AGC, and FARC dissidents, respectively; as well as violence between AGC and other paramilitary and criminal armed groups.¹⁹⁴ Multiple NGOs blamed the increase in violence and expansion of armed groups during 2018-2022 on Duque's policies of refusal to engage in peace talks with ELN, failure to confront paramilitarism and to dismantle the AGC, and generating the conditions for impunity.¹⁹⁵ Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) war crimes tribunal determined that 2021 was the most violent year since the government and FARC-EP signed the accord, with the highest number of massacres, massive forced displacements, armed clashes between security forces and armed groups, harassment of security forces and child recruitment.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, FIP indicated that 2021 was the year where armed actions have had the greatest humanitarian impact on the population since 2015, mainly in the form of confinement and displacement.¹⁹⁷ Children have been displaced, confined, recruited, subjected to abuses and sexual violence during the conflict also. This declined after 2016, but since the armed groups have attempted to take over former FARC territory since 2016, conflict levels increased in 2020-2021, causing an increase in conflict-affected youth.¹⁹⁸

¹⁸⁹ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 32

¹⁹⁰ Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2021, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 31; Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 321

¹⁹¹ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 3

¹⁹² Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

¹⁹³ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

¹⁹⁴ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

¹⁹⁵ Colombia Reports, Duque obstructed peace in Colombia 'deliberately', 16 June 2022, [url](#); El Espectador, "Gobierno actuó para hacer trizas la paz": El balance de organizaciones sociales, 14 July 2022, [url](#); Infobae, "El gobierno actual actuó de manera deliberada, para hacer trizas el Acuerdo de Paz", informe de organizaciones sociales, 14 June 2022, [url](#); See the full report: PCDHDD, CCEEU, Alianza, hambre y guerra: El legado del aprendizaje: Balance del último año del gobierno de Iván Duque Márquez, June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶ Colombia Reports, Armed conflict resurged throughout Colombia: war crimes tribunal, 19 February 2022, [url](#); See also: Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 9-11

¹⁹⁷ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁹⁸ ACAPS, Colombia – Impact of the armed conflict on children and youth, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 1; Colombia, CNMH, Un 30% de las víctimas de violencia sexual en el conflicto armado son niñas o adolescentes, 19 June 2021, [url](#)



4.2. Dynamics in 2022

Sources indicate that conflict patterns have remained largely the same since 2016 when there was an initial drop in violence, followed by a reconfiguration of armed groups and growth of criminal groups disputing former FARC-EP territory and filling vacuums left by the FARC-EP's withdrawal.¹⁹⁹ Violence is especially concentrated in the Pacific region largely inhabited by indigenous and Afro-Colombians, and the Department of Antioquia.²⁰⁰ The main departments affected by armed conflict and homicides in 2021-2022 are: Antioquia, Arauca, Bolívar, Cauca, Córdoba, Chocó, Norte de Santander [especialmente Catatumbo on the border with Venezuela²⁰¹], Nariño, Valle de Cauca, as well as departments with lower population density like Caquetá, Putumayo, and Guaviare.²⁰² According to Indepaz, in relation to the impact of armed confrontations and groups on the civilian population, communities and social leaders, the most affected territories number 250 municipalities, however, due to the interconnectedness of mafia groups, cartels, and economic and social power, the conflict 'touches the whole of society and most of the national territory'.²⁰³ The UN OHCHR produced a map and an index of the municipalities most affected by violence and human rights violations during 2021. The map uses five variables: number of verified homicides of human rights defenders, number of verified massacres, rate of displaced people per 100 000 of the population, rate of confinement per 100 000 inhabitants, and assassinations of ex-FARC-EP combatants. Municipalities were coded as level 'critical' (red), 'very high' (orange), or 'high' (red) for impacts of violence.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA

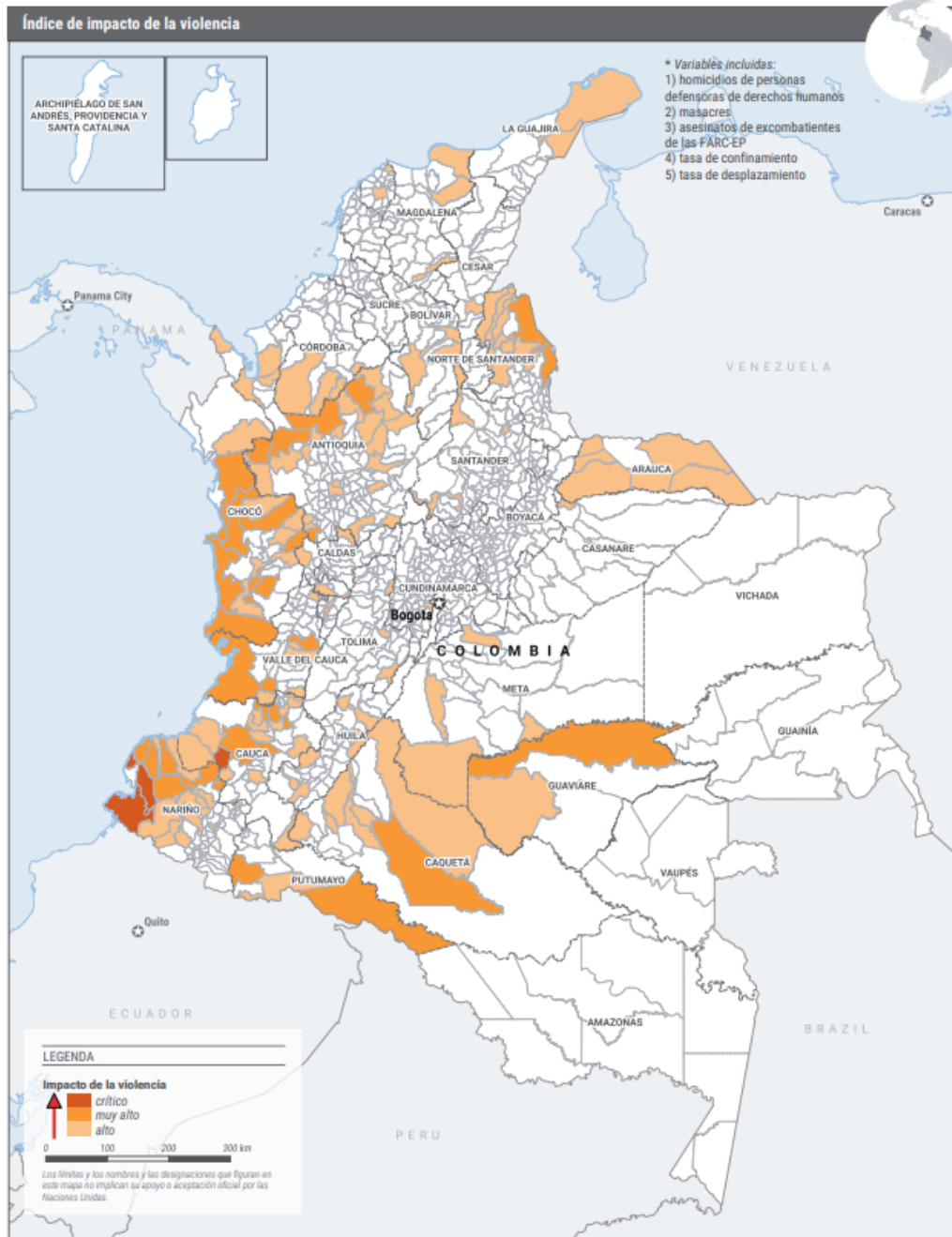
²⁰⁰ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 14

²⁰¹ Colombia Reports, Catatumbo, 20 July 2019, [url](#); HRW, The War in Catatumbo, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁰² ICRC, Colombia: Retos humanitarios 2022, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3; HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#); OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 30; Insight Crime, Colombia's Election Year Begins with Alarming Escalation in Violence, 8 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁰³ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 9

²⁰⁴ See map in: UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 6



Creado: 10 Junio de 2022 Fuentes: ONU Derechos Humanos - Colombia, UNVMC, OCHA Contacto: ohchr-imsupport@un.org

Figure 2: Index of the impact of violence based on variables of homicides of social leaders, massacres, assassinations of ex-FARC combatants, rates of confinement and rates of displacement, June 2022²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 46

The Duque government of 2018-2022, like past governments under Uribe, denied that there was any armed conflict in Colombia, contravening the position of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).²⁰⁶ According to ICRC, as of March 2022 reporting, there were six non-international armed conflicts on-going in Colombia in 2022:

1. The Colombian state versus the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)
2. The Colombian state versus the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC)
3. The Colombian state versus FARC-EP dissident groups [former FARC-EP who do not accept the 2016 Peace Agreement]
4. The ELN versus the AGC
5. FARC-EP dissident groups versus Segunda Marquetalia [itself a FARC-EP dissident group²⁰⁷]
6. FARC-EP dissident groups versus Comandos de la Frontera-Ejército-Bolivariano (CDF-EB) [itself a sub-group of Segunda Marquetalia²⁰⁸²⁰⁹]

The UN reported that violence by armed groups in some areas of the country has increased in 2022.²¹⁰ The UN described the security situation as being of ‘continued concern’ in areas with a historical pattern of conflict²¹¹ In the wake of the 2016 demobilisation of the FARC-EP and the relinquishing of their territory, rival armed groups have emerged and compete to control illicit/criminal economies and territory.²¹² International Crisis Group explained that ‘hostilities between the military and armed groups is no longer at the heart of the conflict in Colombia’ but rather the competition between armed groups for territory [and illicit economies] while trying to avoid direct engagement with the armed forces.²¹³ ICRC described it as a low intensity conflict with ‘extremely high impact’.²¹⁴

Illegal armed groups impose social control over populations in areas they control or seek to control.²¹⁵ Social control in this context is defined by the UN as intimidation strategies, harassment, pressure, extortion, and other actions by non-state armed groups and criminal organisations with the objective to control the population and territories.²¹⁶ Armed groups retain the capacity to control large swathes of territory through demonstrated military capacity, communications, and financial capabilities as demonstrated by the AGC’s ‘armed strike’ in spring 2022 that saw the group threaten 11 departments of Colombia. A Political Analyst based

²⁰⁶ PCDHDD, CCEEU, Alianza, hambre y guerra: El legado del aprendizaje: Balance del último año del gobierno de Iván Duque Márquez, June 2022, [url](#), p. 14

²⁰⁷ Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 21

²⁰⁸ Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 21

²⁰⁹ ICRC, Colombia: Retos humanitarios 2022, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

²¹⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 2; UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 14

²¹¹ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513), 27 June 2022, [url](#), para. 10

²¹² OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 14; OCCO, A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants, November 2020, [url](#), pp. 16, 33; InSight Crime, 1st Front (Ex-FARC Mafia), 13 July 2019, [url](#)

²¹³ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 7

²¹⁴ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 1

²¹⁵ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Calming the Restless Pacific, 8 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 9, 11

²¹⁶ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Calming the Restless Pacific, 8 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 9, 11

in Colombia who monitors security, political, and economic developments and risks in Colombia who was interviewed for this report stated that while they do not appear to pose a threat to the stability of the state at the current time, armed groups have sufficient power and influence to become a strong threat, especially in Catatumbo (Norte de Santander), Cauca, Valle del Cauca, the Pacific coastal region, Tumaco, and the borders with Ecuador and Venezuela.²¹⁷ Jeremy McDermott remarked during his review of this report that while AGC itself has little presence in the border areas of Ecuador and Venezuela, the threat from all armed groups is in all departments along the coast, including Nariño.²¹⁸

Violence and killings are often concentrated in areas where there is a limited state presence in rural areas,²¹⁹ concentrated in former FARC-held areas, and where these illegal armed groups are competing with one another for control over illicit economies [such as cocaine production, drug trafficking, illegal mining, land grabbing, etc].²²⁰ This dynamic has FARC dissidents and other criminal groups willing to forge alliances to achieve their aims.²²¹ Other factors contributing to the rise in violence include the slow stabilisation of areas formerly occupied by the FARC-EP and proliferation of armed groups in their wake, expansion of illicit crops and 'diversification of organised-crime interests.'²²² According to the OHCHR, weak rule of law and lack of development alternatives in conflict-affected by violence has also exacerbated the situation.²²³ Violence particularly and disproportionately affects social and community leaders from the indigenous, Afro-Colombian, peasant and female population in rural areas.²²⁴ The distribution of violence is also closely aligned with the 170 municipalities designated in the peace agreement for post-conflict Territorially Focused Development Programs (Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial, PDET²²⁵).²²⁶ Threats made to

²¹⁷ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA

²¹⁸ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

²¹⁹ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 14; OCCO, A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants, November 2020, [url](#), p. 16; HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#); Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 333

²²⁰ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 14; OCCO, A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants, November 2020, [url](#), p. 16; HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#); Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 333

²²¹ InSight Crime, 1st Front (Ex-FARC Mafia), 13 July 2019, [url](#)

²²² OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 31

²²³ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 7-8

²²⁴ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 14

²²⁵ PDET are municipalities identified for Development Plans with a Territorial Focus and are the main tool through which the Colombian state conducts post-conflict development projects as part of the Peace Agreement. They are intended to increase state presence in areas in historically weak areas and support the participation and reintegration of demobilised Colombians. USAID/IOM, Toward an Integral Approach of the PDET, September 2019, [url](#)

²²⁶ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7; WOLA, A Long Way to Go: Implementing Colombia's peace accord after five years, 23 November 2021, [url](#); For a map of PDET zones and associated physical violence, see: Colombia, Triage poblacional – subregiones y Municipios PDET Colombia 2021, p. 6

female leaders who are outspoken make them ‘particularly vulnerable’ to killing and sexual violence; they also report threats against their children and their extended family members.²²⁷

A 2018 report on urban security by the International Institute for Strategic Studies remarked that cities are not unconnected from post-conflict security and that the absence of the FARC-EP has created shifts in crime and illicit economies inside cities, and that cities are ‘at the centre of new security dynamics’ as insecurity fragments urban territory with some areas disproportionately affected by extortion, violence, and forced displacement.²²⁸ Jeremy McDermott commented that it is true that in rural areas violence and killings are often concentrated in areas with limited state presence and disputes over illicit economies. However he remarked that if there is one group with control in an area, homicides tend to be lower because the armed group has hegemony and may not need to terrorise the local population to keep them in line or control territory. In urban context, there are now few big confrontations between large gangs for territorial control. There are neighbourhoods with higher rates of homicide, but high urban homicide rates do not necessarily reflect the extent of political violence or organised crime inside cities – as opposed to reflecting regular street violence. The state is more present in big cities and police have organized themselves by districts / Centros de Atención Inmediata (CAI) (street posts). However, they are less present in slum neighbourhoods.²²⁹ Indepaz asserted that presence of the armed conflict in urban areas is not new. In 2021-2022, it acquired greater relevance due to the strengthening of the linkages between armed structures with national scope to local gangs/combos, through relationships of outsourcing.²³⁰

For more information on urban areas, see [Homicides](#) and [displacement](#), as well as sections on armed groups.

4.3. Total Peace plan

Shortly after the *Paz Total* (Total Peace) announcement was made by the Petro government, sources report that there was an immediate spike in violence through summer 2022 as armed groups sought to extend and consolidate their territories as much as possible prior to any negotiations.²³¹ According to a Conflict Analyst based in Colombia who specialises in tracking conflict and political developments in the country, in September 2022, homicides decreased in the wake of the Total Peace plan announcement, but other forms of social control by armed groups such as curfews and demands on local elected authorities increased, as these groups sought to consolidate their local social structures of governance and demonstrate territorial control.²³² A researcher for the human rights monitoring NGO, Fundación Ideas para la Paz

²²⁷ International Crisis Group, Tackling Colombia’s Next Generation in Arms, 27 January 2022, [url](#): OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 37-38

²²⁸ IIS, Peace and Security in Bogotá, 2018, [url](#), p. 6

²²⁹ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

²³⁰ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 9

²³¹ Conflict Analyst, 4 November 2022, Correspondence with EUAA; FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

²³² Conflict Analyst, 4 November 2022, Correspondence with EUAA



(FIP) also stated that following the summer peak there was a reduction over the following couple of months, but that disputes and clashes between groups have been continuing.²³³

The Political Analyst remarked that Petro's 'Total Peace' concept is coming into the context of a serious deterioration of security conditions exacerbated by the post-2016 vacuum left by FARC-EP's demobilisation, inability of the state to fill those spaces across Colombia's territory, and post-COVID economic decline.²³⁴ The Conflict Analyst remarked that at the moment, the Petro government is essentially seeking to reduce impacts of the violence on civilians (who are largely located in the most conflict-affected areas / constituencies that elected him), but not necessarily to change the fundamental dynamics of the conflict through a political negotiation or disarmament.²³⁵ The Political Analyst also remarked that although Petro is trying to change the narrative of the conflict, the ability of the Petro administration to implement security policy in the historically affected areas that severely limited by the state's historic inability to exercise the rule of law and the varying control of the state in these areas.²³⁶ Civilians continue to be affected by violence.²³⁷ In the last week of September, Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos (CERAC), which is monitoring the groups that have publicly agreed to the ceasefire reported violations of ceasefires through incidents by ELN, FARC dissident groups, AGC, and by unidentified armed actors.²³⁸ WOLA also provided a list of security incidents and human rights abuses that have occurred in the transitional period between the Duque and Petro governments.²³⁹

²³³ FIP, 3 November 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

²³⁴ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA

²³⁵ Conflict Analyst, 4 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

²³⁶ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA

²³⁷ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

²³⁸ CERAC, Monitor del cese el fuego de grupos armados (Reporte semanal número 1 – período de monitoreo: del 21 al 30 septiembre), 30 September 2022, [url](#)

²³⁹ WOLA, As Colombia Transitions, Abuses Continue, 2 September 2022, [url](#)



5. Illegal armed groups

As mentioned in the introduction, the following section provides a brief overview of the main illegal armed structures and criminal groups involved in conflict in Colombia and general trends in their behaviour. Not all gangs and smaller groups can be covered by this report and the sources footnoted provide more detailed coverage. Sources provide a snapshot in time; groups are present in different strength/presence in different regions, with significant variation by region/department, and dynamics are frequently fluctuating in very localised conditions which cannot be captured by this report.²⁴⁰ The presence of many irregular and criminal armed groups in different regions constantly changes²⁴¹ There is also a high level of uncertainty as several of these groups frequently change their names.²⁴²

This report organises the groupings of illegal armed groups in Colombia under four main structures: the AGC, ELN, FARC dissident groups (in particular the factions of First Front and Segunda Marquetalia, and other urban gangs/criminal structures).²⁴³ These structures have common characteristics making them difficult to eradicate: reliance on increased recruitment of young untrained youth to their ranks; decentralised operations that allow ‘substantial leeway’ to field commanders although they remain under apparent national hierarchies; a sharp decline in the importance of ideology and a strong interest in exerting political control over local communities, land, commerce, dispute mediation and punishment of detractors to ensure territorial dominance.²⁴⁴

According to Indepaz, in 2021 and the first half of 2022, armed group configurations evolved showing the AGC reaffirming itself as the main paramilitary successor group; the post-FARC dissident groups have moved from atomization to convergence under several umbrella structures with varying degrees of coordination, and the ELN has maintained itself as a guerrilla group. The main actions by these groups that have become prominent in 2021-2022 are the conducting of military operations using small armed groupings and the outsourcing of criminal actions subcontracted to local ‘oficinas’, gangs, combos/bandas criminales, in both urban and rural areas.²⁴⁵ These themes are further elaborated in the sections below.

²⁴⁰ EUAA observation on research challenges.

²⁴¹ Norway, Landinfo, Temanotot – Colombia: Vaepnede grupper etter fredsavtalen, 6 April 2022, [url](#), p. 6; Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

²⁴² Norway, Landinfo, Temanotot – Colombia: Vaepnede grupper etter fredsavtalen, 6 April 2022, [url](#), p. 6; Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

²⁴³ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8, 10; International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), pp. 4-5

²⁴⁴ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 5

²⁴⁵ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 9



5.1. Presence

Illegal armed groups and criminal organisations continue to operate in Colombia, despite the peace agreement with the FARC-EP. These groups are responsible for human rights abuses and violence such as killings, sexual violence, executions, use of antipersonnel mines, confinement and forced displacement, extortion, kidnapping, torture, massacres, human trafficking, drug trafficking and illegal exploitation of natural resources.²⁴⁶ Since the signing of the peace agreement, the government has not fully responded to the territorial challenge of providing a comprehensive state presence and has pursued military solutions that have been insufficient to curb the progressive increase in presence of armed groups.²⁴⁷ At the time that the Peace Agreement was signed in 2016, the FARC-EP, guerrilla, and paramilitary groups were mostly active in approximately 300 out of Colombia's 1 123 municipalities. As of August 2022, the Office of the Ombudsperson classified 290 municipalities of being at 'extreme risk' of abuses by illegal armed groups due to territorial disputes. The United States Institute for Peace (USIP) observed that both the AGC and the ELN have more than doubled their territorial presence since FARC-EP demobilised.²⁴⁸ In April 2022, Pares reported that 420 municipalities are now reporting the presence of armed groups, touching 37 % of Colombian national territory.²⁴⁹

Armed groups also 'exercise territorial control in some areas of the cities' such as Medellín and Bogotá, exercising their presence through illegal economies and social control.²⁵⁰ Violence is often concentrated in regions of the country where there is a limited state presence.²⁵¹ However, Jeremy McDermott remarked that this is not the case in the urban context where there is a state presence, nor in areas such as Urabá, home region of the AGC, where there is a significant state and security force presence, but the group still operates there.²⁵² Targeted killings tend to be higher in areas with the presence of multiple armed groups and where there is rivalry between them.²⁵³ Additionally, with Colombia having the highest cocaine production in the world, the coca-growing and drug trafficking industry fuel the armed conflict and its myriad criminal actors in competition with one another, often where coca is grown in Norte de Santander, Nariño, Putumayo, Cauca, and Antioquia. Armed groups are also concentrated in areas where legal and illegal mining is occurring,²⁵⁴ as well as areas of strategic importance such as ports, access corridors through the territory], coasts and borders.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁶ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#); Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#); UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁷ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 58

²⁴⁸ USIP, Colombia's New Administration Raises Hopes for 'Total Peace', 12 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁹ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 10

²⁵⁰ DRC, Colombia: Quarterly Report-Protection Monitoring (October-December 2020), December 2020, [url](#), p. 22

²⁵¹ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 3

²⁵² McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022.

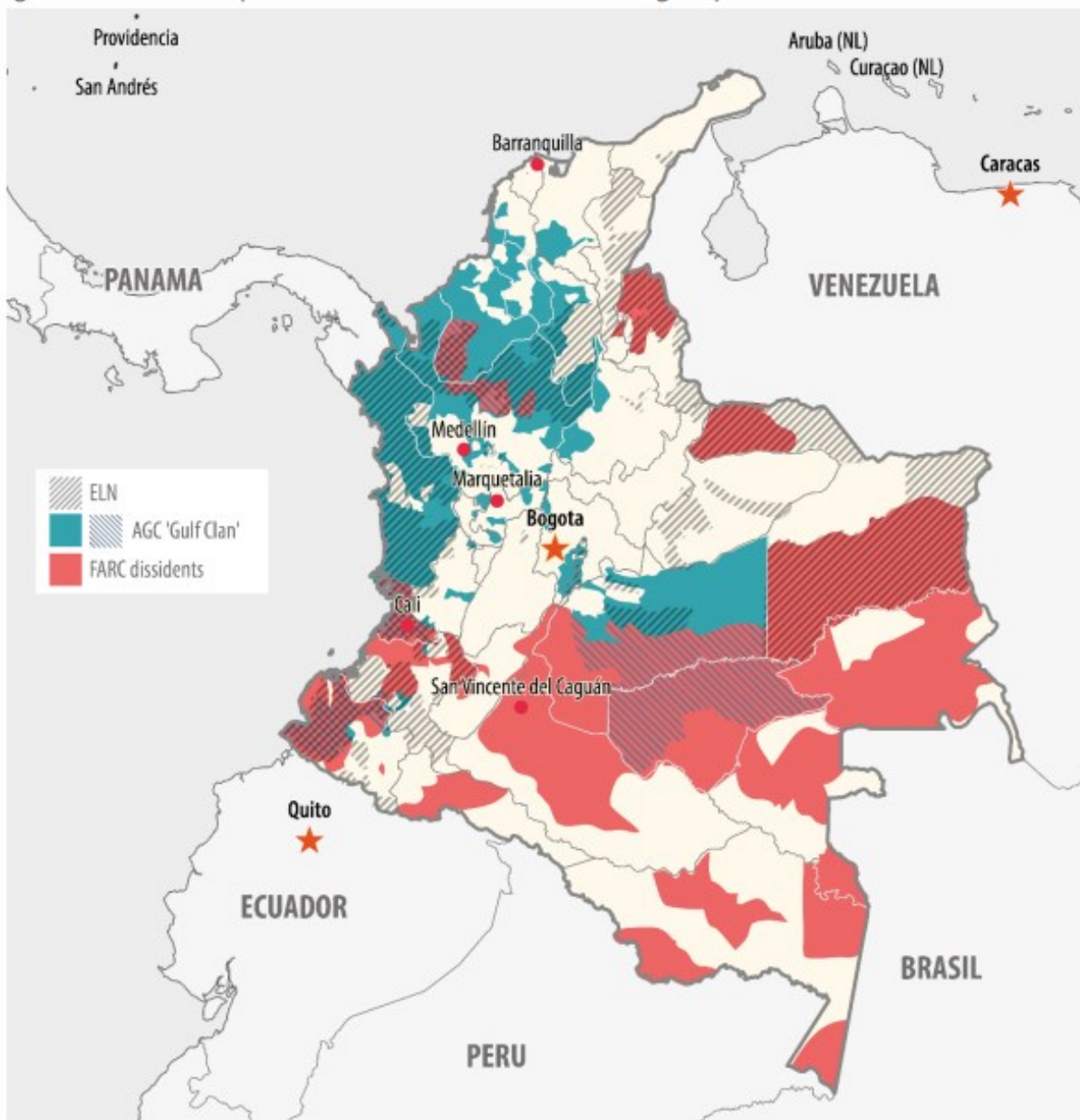
²⁵³ OCCO, A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants, November 2020, [url](#), p. 22

²⁵⁴ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay, April 2022, [url](#), p. 46-50

²⁵⁵ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA



The presence of these groups also overlaps, as shown in this 2018 map by the European Parliamentary Research Service.²⁵⁶



Source: EPRS with data from the Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz (INDEPAZ), '[Illegal armed groups' activity in Colombia \(maps\)](#)', Colombia Reports: Data, 15 March 2019.

Figure 3: 2018 Map of Illegal Armed Groups Presence in Colombia²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ EU, EPRS, Peace and Security in 2019 – Evaluating the EU's efforts to support peace in Colombia, May 2019, [url](#), p. 46

²⁵⁷ EU, EPRS, Peace and Security in 2019 – Evaluating the EU's efforts to support peace in Colombia, May 2019, [url](#), p. 46

Indepaz also produced maps of the various armed groups' presence in Colombia in 2020²⁵⁸ and in 2021, as in the graphical representation below.²⁵⁹



Figure 4: Presence of Main Armed Groups in Colombia, 2021²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Indepaz/Colombia Reports, Colombia's illegal armed groups (maps) (2020), [url](#)

²⁵⁹ Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 21

²⁶⁰ Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones, 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 21

5.2. Motivations and strategy for exerting control and targeting civilians

All criminal and armed groups in Colombia are interested in exerting control over communities, land, commerce, and securing territorial control via coercion and control of local populations.²⁶¹ Violence by armed groups is very much over economic and military strategic interests and clashes are used to maintain or dispute power and control.²⁶² In some areas, illegal armed groups behave as a traditional actor of the armed conflict, for example exercising total social control of a territory, while in other areas, they may behave like criminal bandits. For example, AGC behaves like a traditional actor in Urabá, one of its main strongholds. The ELN also behaves this way along the Venezuelan border where they have political and physical control, but in Chocó, for example, they engage in more criminal behaviour. FARC dissidents also do this in the Pacific department of Nariño.²⁶³

Furthermore, the distinction between criminal and political violence is not always clear because most armed groups are not ideologically driven anymore and they no longer distinguish between enemies and allies on this basis, but rather, who aligns with their military or economic interests in that local area at any given moment. This has changed the relations between different groups. Armed and criminal groups establish alliances of convenience,²⁶⁴ for tactical and strategic reasons.²⁶⁵ AGC allies itself with ELN or with FARC dissidents, depending on the area and the interests at stake, while they may clash with them in other territories.²⁶⁶ Configurations can be the domination of territory, for co-existence, or to challenge each other's territory – but there is no longer a single organisational logic to the conflict – it has become fragmented.²⁶⁷ Former paramilitaries, FARC dissidents, criminal gangs and drug traffickers are operating through networks of opportunism.²⁶⁸

The influence of political ideology has declined as a motivating factor, in favour of pursuing illicit markets and territory.²⁶⁹ Sources indicated that the ELN is the group most likely to continue targeting on the basis of its leftist ideology,²⁷⁰ though local fronts vary in their

²⁶¹ International Crisis Group, *Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia*, 27 September 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6; FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

²⁶² FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

²⁶³ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

²⁶⁴ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA; Gil Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

²⁶⁵ Somos Defensores, 12 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

²⁶⁶ Somos Defensores, 12 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA; FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

²⁶⁷ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA; Gil Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

²⁶⁸ CODHES, 14 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

²⁶⁹ International Crisis Group, *Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia*, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 6; International Crisis Group, *Tackling Colombia's Next Generation in Arms*, 27 January 2022, [url](#); FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

²⁷⁰ International Crisis Group, *Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia*, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 6; International Crisis Group, *Tackling Colombia's Next Generation in Arms*, 27 January 2022, [url](#); Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA



adherence.²⁷¹ The Political Analyst noted however that even targets with the ideological alignment to the ELN will be targeted if they become a threat to ELN's objectives.²⁷²

Armed groups 'try to avoid direct confrontation with the military' and instead achieve control and expansion of space through intimidation and co-opting of the local population through economic means such as paid recruitment of youth in remote areas, or co-opting farmers seeking to substitute illicit crops. Additionally 'coercive measures' include intimidating local community bodies such as the Communal Action Councils (JAC, Juntas de Acción Comunal).²⁷³ In urban areas, organised crime groups also exert social control through extortion, recruitment of children, sexual violence, and confrontations between groups.²⁷⁴ Sources indicate that generally criminal groups target those that they see as an annoyance or an obstacle to their economic objectives in the area, or who infringe on the group's interests.²⁷⁵ Civilians who are deemed to be an obstacle to the control of illicit economies and territory are forced out of their homes and those who oppose or resist the control or expansion of these groups, such as social leaders or demobilised FARC-EP combatants are targeted.²⁷⁶ Targets may include a whole community in a strategic area, or specific profiles such as social leaders and human rights defenders, demobilised FARC-EP fighters, indigenous communities, children and youth, journalists, state officials and security force members.²⁷⁷ The UN similarly reported that one of the most significant patterns in homicides human rights defenders by non-state groups in rural areas consists of assassinating community leaders in order to gain control of illicit economics, appropriate profitable illegal economic activities and control drug trafficking routes and extractive projects.²⁷⁸ The killings of social leaders and human rights defenders poses a threat to the peace process as communities lose expertise, relationships, and peace promoters, and others are discouraged from taking up the function or cooperating with authorities.²⁷⁹

All main armed groups retain a capacity to engage in sub-contracting to smaller local groups, depending on the region and the interests at stake, in order to expand their influence.²⁸⁰ According to Indepaz, in 2021-2022, outsourcing as a strategy for territorial control has continued. Local armed structures, generally in urban areas, have been threatened due to leveraging outsourcing of criminal activities by criminal groups with national reach.²⁸¹

²⁷¹ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 6; International Crisis Group, Tackling Colombia's Next Generation in Arms, 27 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁷² Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

²⁷³ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

²⁷⁴ Gil Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

²⁷⁵ A Professor and International Crisis Group Senior Analyst cited in Canada, IRB, Colombia: Targets of criminal groups (2019-June 2021) [COL200703.E], 13 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁶ OCCO, A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants, November 2020, [url](#), p. 33

²⁷⁷ Canada, IRB, Colombia: Targets of criminal groups (COL200703.E), 13 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁸ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 35

²⁷⁹ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 321

²⁸⁰ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA; Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA

²⁸¹ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 11



5.3. Main structures and activities

5.3.1. Paramilitary successor groups, including the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia

Paramilitary successor groups are illegal armed groups also called narco-paramilitaries, *bacrim* (*bandas criminales*, criminal bands) that have been made up of recycled groups through difference generations and cycles of violence in Colombia.²⁸² They originate from right-wing paramilitary organisations that participated in a flawed demobilisation process in 2003-2006.²⁸³ In 2003, then-President Uribe had made an agreement with the AUC paramilitary group to demobilise 30 000 paramilitary fighters, some of whom then regrouped²⁸⁴ splintered, re-organised, and continued activity by reconfiguring into new groups.²⁸⁵ Indepaz reported that there were 22 such groups across 27 departments and 291 municipalities in 2020,²⁸⁶ while Pares reported that AGC was present in 241 municipalities.²⁸⁷ In 2022, the government stated that they are present in 253 municipalities.²⁸⁸ By contrast, Indepaz reported an increase to 345 municipalities in 27 departments during 2021-2022.²⁸⁹

Human Rights Watch reported that paramilitary successor groups commit war crimes and serious human rights violations, including killings, disappearances, and rapes.²⁹⁰ They are frequently in conflict with other illegal armed groups, as well as with each other.²⁹¹ Paramilitary successor groups also offer private security and engage in counterinsurgency; capture state institutions, exercise private justice, forcibly appropriate assets, resources and income; and practice systematic corruption through their businesses and business allies; as well as attempting to promote and establish linkages with politicians.²⁹²

Today, the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC) [also called Clan del Golfo,²⁹³ Urabeños,²⁹⁴ Clan Úsuga²⁹⁵] is the largest narco-

²⁸² FIP 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

²⁸³ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 323

²⁸⁵ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁶ Indepaz, Los focos del conflicto en Colombia, September 2021, [url](#), p. 6; See also: Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 40-42; FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 25-29

²⁸⁷ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay, April 2022, [url](#), p. 41

²⁸⁸ UNHCR, Colombia: Monitoreo de protección (enero- junio 2022), June 2022, [url](#)

²⁸⁹ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 6 [Tabla 1]

²⁹⁰ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#)

²⁹¹ Indepaz, Los focos del conflicto en Colombia, September 2021, [url](#), p. 43

²⁹² Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 9

²⁹³ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513), 27 June 2022, [url](#), 11

²⁹⁴ OCCO, A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants, November 2020, [url](#), p. 6

²⁹⁵ Colombia Reports, Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC) / Gulf Clan, 25 October, 2021, [url](#); Indepaz, Los focos del conflicto en Colombia, September 2021, [url](#), p. 49; InSightCrime, Urabeños – Gulf Clan, 24 October 2021, [url](#)

paramilitary successor group,²⁹⁶ though membership estimates vary from 1 700²⁹⁷ to 3 260 combatants.²⁹⁸ Other successor groups, some of which are AGC associates, are Los Rastrojos, Los Pachencas, EPL [also called Los Pelusos²⁹⁹], Los Caparrapos, Los Puntilleros, Los Contadores, and La Construcción, among others.³⁰⁰ The AGC is responsible for committing 80 % of recorded narcoparamilitary activities and affected 25 departments and 237 municipalities in 2020.³⁰¹ Indepaz reported the following table of paramilitary successor group activity per department/municipality over the period of 2016-2022:³⁰²

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Departments	31	30	27	27	25	27	27
Municipalities	351	310	274	258	292	332	345

Indepaz provided a table of the number of departments and municipalities affected by paramilitary successor groups in 2021-2022:³⁰³

Group	Number of departments in 2021	Number of municipalities in 2021	Number of departments in 2022 (first half)	Number of municipalities in 2022 (first half)
AGC	25	279	25	326
EPL	4	26	3	9
La Oficina	5	19	5	16
Los Pachencas	4	17	4	11
Los Puntilleros	3	14	2	6
Los Rastrojos	5	15	4	7
Los Caparrapos	2	11	1	2
Los Consteños	1	9	1	7
Los Pachelly	1	9	1	4
La Construcción	1	6	1	1
Los Contadores	1	3	1	1
Los Shotas	2	3	1	2
Los Espartanos	1	2	1	2

Of note, the 'Águilas Negras' (Black Eagles) was an old group previously linked to the AUC, but after demobilisation in 2006 the name began to be used as a brand by criminal organisations under which to issue death threats, though it does not currently appear to operate as a group as such; however, it was reported that threats continue to be issued under

²⁹⁶ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#); Indepaz, Los focos del conflicto en Colombia, September 2021, [url](#), p. 43

²⁹⁷ Indepaz, Los focos del conflicto en Colombia, September 2021, [url](#), p. 43

²⁹⁸ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay, April 2022, [url](#), p. 41

²⁹⁹ OCCO, A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants, November 2020, [url](#), p. 6

³⁰⁰ Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 21, 43; See also for a full list of other smaller narcoparamilitaries: Indepaz, Los focos del conflicto en Colombia, September 2021, [url](#), p. 56

³⁰¹ Indepaz, Los focos del conflicto en Colombia, September 2021, [url](#), p. 43

³⁰² For a detailed listing of the affected areas, see the full report, including annexes. Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 10

³⁰³ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 11

the name in 20 of Colombia's 32 departments.³⁰⁴ Professor Gil Ramírez stated that the name is also used by some members of the security forces to launch threats against political and social targets, including sex workers, and for 'social cleansing' against people considered immoral. No logistical centre has ever been found, but pamphlets continue to appear issuing threats.³⁰⁵

AGC, as the largest paramilitary successor group, operates characteristically by sub-contracting out to smaller groups.³⁰⁶ It operates as a criminal network with some of its cells under direct control and others operating as semi-autonomous members of the 'franchise',³⁰⁷ or with a high degree of autonomy.³⁰⁸ The group has a strong nucleus in Urabá which extends to other areas of the country through subcontracting out to local criminal structures who use the brand and anchor control of activities such as drug trafficking and contract killing.³⁰⁹ The AGC grew in size after FARC-EP's demobilisation, and is now present in much of Colombia's north from Chocó to the Catatumbo region.³¹⁰

AGC clashes with ELN, FARC dissidents, and other paramilitary successor groups.³¹¹ AGC has a stronghold in Urabá,³¹² and its activities are concentrated in the Caribbean and Pacific coastal departments, Córdoba, Sucre, Bolívar, Atlántico, Magdalena, San Andrés, Chocó, and Antioquia.³¹³ The AGC continues to maintain the capacity to regulate daily life in communities where it has strength or military strongholds (such as Urabá, Chocó, or southern Córdoba), imposing parallel justice and settling disputes.³¹⁴ The extent of their 'entrenched power' and activities runs deeply in society, including money-laundering via financing political campaigns, establishing front businesses (e.g. petrol stations to construction firms), financing football players/events and having links to some municipal mayors' offices in the Urabá region. They also regulate farming activity, offer loans to farmers and peasants, financing local businesses and infrastructure, as well as causing forced displacement to control land.³¹⁵ They engage in transnational drug trafficking, illegal mining, and extortion.³¹⁶ The AGC's criminal network

³⁰⁴ Colombia.com, Las Águilas Negras: ¿Qué se sabe de este temido grupo criminal?, 27 January 2022, [url](#); Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 14; See also: Insightcrime, Águilas Negras, 3 September 2017, [url](#); For specific information on the Black Eagles (Águilas Negras) and the use of the Black Eagles brand by paramilitary successor groups and other criminal actors, see: Canada, IRB, Colombia: The Black Eagles (COL201106.E), 13 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁵ Gil Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

³⁰⁶ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

³⁰⁷ InSightCrime, Urabeños – Gulf Clan, 24 October 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁸ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 25-29

³⁰⁹ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 25-29; Pares, Plomo es lo que hay, April 2022, [url](#), p. 41

³¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 4

³¹¹ Insight Crime, United They Stand, Divided They Fall – Urbanos Losign Grip in Colombia, 27 April 2022, [url](#)

³¹² Canada, IRB, Whether armed groups such as the National Liberation Army (Ejército de liberación nacional, ELN) or the Gulf Clan (Clan del Golfo) [also known as the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC), Los Urabeños and Clan Úsuga] use non-members to carry out bombings or recruit minors on their behalf (2018–May 2022) (COL201062.E), 16 June 2022, [url](#)

³¹³ Indepaz, Los focos del conflicto en Colombia, September 2021, [url](#), p. 49

³¹⁴ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 25-29; See also: Insight Crime, United They Stand, Divided They Fall - Urabeños Losing Grip in Colombia, 27 April 2022, [url](#)

³¹⁵ Indepaz, Los focos del conflicto en Colombia, September 2021, [url](#), p. 50

³¹⁶ Insight Crime, Urabeños – Gulf Clan, 24 October 2021, [url](#)



extends to countries including links with Mexican and European drug cartels.³¹⁷ The AGC has been the group most affected by state operations and military campaigns that have weakened its command over 2020-2021 with capture and killings of some of its leaders, but the group has recomposed itself.³¹⁸

The group's leader, Dairo Antonio Úsuga (alias 'Otoniel'), was captured in 2021.³¹⁹ In May 2022, the government decided to extradite Otoniel, to the United States. In retaliation, AGC carried out a five-day armed strike, 'with reports of widespread violence affecting 178 municipalities in 11 of Colombia's 32 departments. According to the Investigation and Accusation Unit of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, there were over 300 acts of violence against civilians, including the killing of 24 persons, and 22 attacks against public security forces, killing two of their members.'³²⁰ The armed strike was also enforced by associate gangs within Medellín. The armed strike involved assassinations, assassination attempts, road blocks, disconnection of services, media shutdowns, threats, attacks on police stations.³²¹ The strike mostly affected northern departments, especially Antioquia, Bolívar, Córdoba, Magdalena, and Sucre.³²² Analysts remarked that the armed strike by AGC was more violent and widespread than those seen in the past and by other armed groups such as ELN.³²³ Collaboration between illegal armed groups and security forces has declined however there are still reports by rights organisations that officials tolerate paramilitary successor groups in some areas.³²⁴ Peace talks with the AGC were pursued in 2017 during the government of Santos; however they were broken off under President Duque following a major offensive by the AGC to expand territory.³²⁵ For information on recent developments see the sections on [Total Peace](#). Indepaz provides a map of the intensity of paramilitary successor group activity in 2021:

³¹⁷ Reuters, Colombia's Clan del Golfo gang network extends to 28 countries, November 2021, [url](#); La Prensa, Honduras, entre los 28 países donde el Clan del Golfo envía 20 toneladas de cocaína mensuales, 3 November 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁸ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 25-29

³¹⁹ InSight Crime, What does Otoniel's arrest really mean for Colombia, 25 October 2021, [url](#); BBC, Colombia's most wanted drug lord Otoniel captured, 24 October 2021, [url](#)

³²⁰ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513), 27 June 2022, [url](#), para. 12

³²¹ Colombia Reports, AGC kill 26 during 4-day terror campaign in northern Colombia, 9 May 2022, [url](#); Wradio, JEP advierte que la totalidad del Chocó y La Guajira fueron afectados por el paro armado, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

³²² France24, Colombia: Violence continues even after cartel's 'armed strike' ends, 20 May 2022, [url](#)

³²³ France24, Colombia: Violence continues even after cartel's 'armed strike' ends, 20 May 2022, [url](#)

³²⁴ Freedom House, Colombia – 2022, February 2022, [url](#)

³²⁵ Colombia Reports, Peace talks with Colombia's ELN guerrillas 'about to be resumed': Petro, 8 August 2022, [url](#)



Continuidad actividades Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia 2016-2021 (Ver anexos Tabla 4)

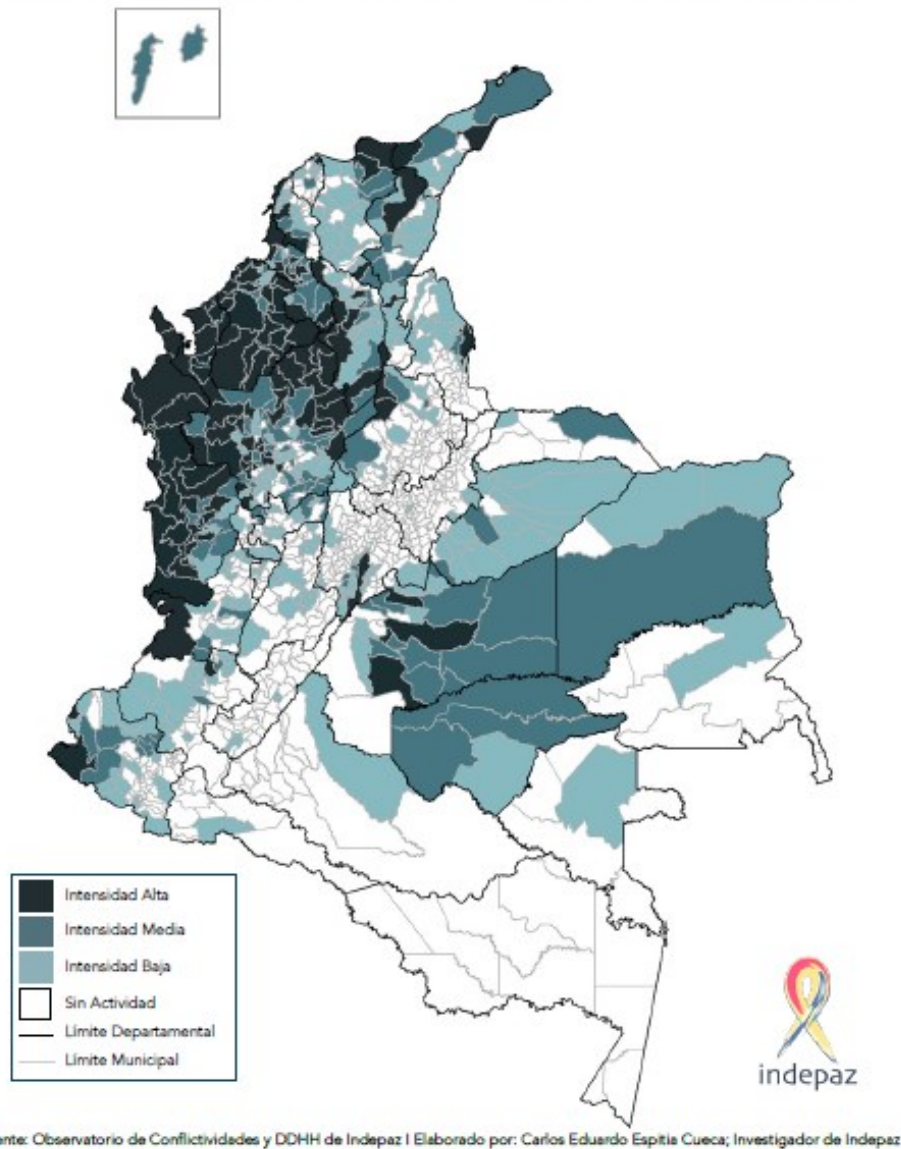


Figure 5: Map of intensity of activities by paramilitary successor groups, 2016-2021³²⁶

³²⁶ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 51

Pares produced a map of the presence of the AGC/Clan del Golfo as of March 2022:

Presencia del Clan del Golfo-2022

Municipios
de influencia

Pares
Fundación Paz & Reconciliación



Fuente: Fundación Paz & Reconciliación • Creado con Datawrapper

Figure 6: Presence of AGC [Clan del Golfo], March 2022³²⁷

³²⁷ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 40

Indepaz also produced a map of municipalities affected by AGC activity in 2022:

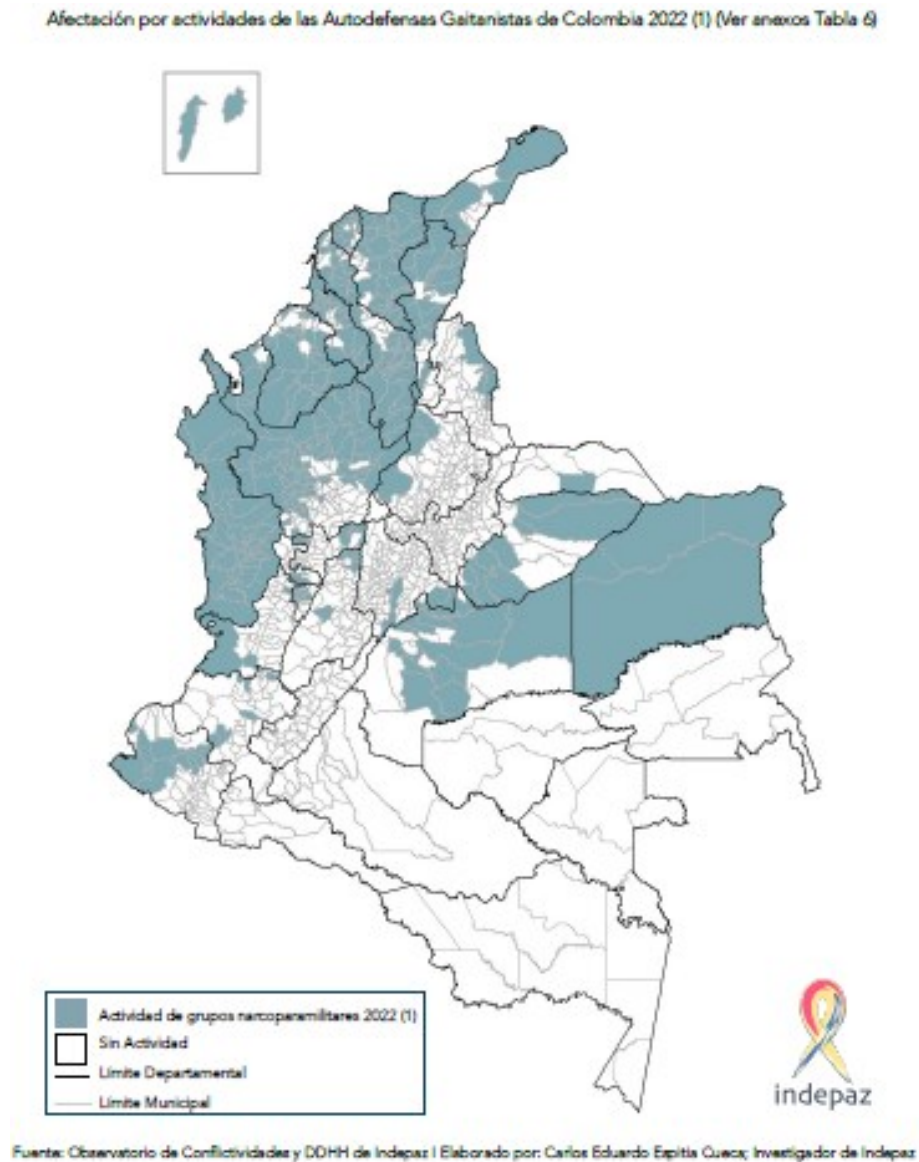


Figure 7: Municipalities affected by AGC, 2022³²⁸

³²⁸ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 57



5.3.2. Ejército de Liberación Nacional

With the demobilisation of the FARC-EP, the National Liberation Army (ELN, Ejército de Liberación Nacional) is Colombia's last remaining active guerrilla group.³²⁹ The ELN is a designated terrorist group under EU law.³³⁰ It is a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group that began in the 1960s but is currently more focused on illicit activities including drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, and controlling coca and cocaine production.³³¹ It also attacks infrastructure which is in keeping with its Marxist ideology and insurgency, undermining foreign capitalism.³³² Insight Crime states that ELN is currently 'the most powerful criminal group in Colombia and Venezuela' having rapidly expanded after the FARC-EP demobilised.³³³ It is the only remaining group that explicitly fights against the Colombian state.³³⁴

The ELN has a 'Central Command' (Comando Central, COCE) and operates eight³³⁵ active 'war fronts' or fighting divisions across Colombia (with further local subdivisions) which have a high degree of autonomy.³³⁶ ELN is described as 'very decentralized,'³³⁷ 'radical and not centrally-controlled' with much of the leadership being of an older generation living in Cuba with limited influence over local units operating in rural Colombia.³³⁸ The ELN has between 2 400 to 4 000 combatants and militia networks.³³⁹ ELN has expanded its presence and location in municipalities over the past several years following the FARC peace accord.³⁴⁰ Sources indicate ELN operates in 16 out of 32 departments in Colombia, including major cities, as well as the border with Venezuela, especially in its Pacific Coast strongholds of Chocó, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, and Nariño,³⁴¹ Norte de Santander (especially Catatumbo and Cúcuta), Arauca, and Vichada, among others.³⁴² Pares similarly reported in 2020 that they operated in

³²⁹ Axios, Colombia to restart peace talks with last remaining major rebel group, 11 October 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 4

³³⁰ EU, Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/138, 5 February 2021, [url](#)

³³¹ Insight Crime, ELN, 11 January 2022, [url](#); Insight Crime, ELN show of force confirms its unmatched criminal presence in Colombia, 2 March 2022, [url](#)

³³² McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

³³³ Insight Crime, ELN, 11 January 2022, [url](#); Insight Crime, ELN show of force confirms its unmatched criminal presence in Colombia, 2 March 2022, [url](#)

³³⁴ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 8

³³⁵ Indepaz, Los focos del conflicto en Colombia, September 2021, [url](#), p. 6; Indepaz provides a detailed breakdown of the military structure of the ELN's multiple 'Frentes de guerra' and sub-structures, including the departments in which they operate. Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 95

³³⁶ Insight Crime, ELN, 11 January 2022, [url](#); Indepaz, Balance sobre las dinámicas del Ejército de Liberación Nacional -ELN- en Colombia 2018-2020, January 2021, [url](#), p. 2, 6-7; Pares, Seguridad en tiempos de pandemia, 14 September 2020, [url](#), p. 22; For more information on ELN's background see: NACLA, Colombia's Longest Insurgency and the Last Chance for Peace? 23 December 2019, [url](#); SWP, Colombia's Path to "Total Peace", September 2022, [url](#); Pares, Plomo es lo que hay, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 43

³³⁷ SWP, Colombia's Path to "Total Peace", September 2022, [url](#), p. 2

³³⁸ Reuters, Colombia advances towards restarting peace talks with ELN, 12 August 2022, [url](#)

³³⁹ Estimates vary: Reuters, Colombia advances towards restarting peace talks with ELN, 12 August 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Colombia and ELN rebels agree to restart peace talks, 4 October 2022, [url](#); Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 43

³⁴⁰ Indepaz, Balance sobre las dinámicas del Ejército de Liberación Nacional -ELN- en Colombia 2018-2020, January 2021, [url](#), p. 2, 6-7; Insight Crime, ELN show of force confirms its unmatched criminal presence in Colombia, 2 March 2022, [url](#)

³⁴¹ Insight Crime, ELN, 11 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁴² Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 44



17 departments, across 167 municipalities,³⁴³ and by 2021, in 183 municipalities.³⁴⁴ The government of Colombia issued an Early Alert (004) stating that they were present in 189 municipalities in 2022.³⁴⁵ Indepaz reported that in early 2022, they were in 19 departments and 162 municipalities.³⁴⁶ Also, in Venezuela, ELN is sheltered and entrenched ‘ostensibly as an ally of the Venezuelan government’.³⁴⁷ ELN has a rapidly expanded presence in border areas of Colombia and within Venezuela, especially in the states of Zulia, Táchira, Apure, and Anzoátegui.³⁴⁸

The group has been involved in drug trafficking, illegal mining, kidnapping,³⁴⁹ human rights violations, war crimes and serious abuses against civilians such as killings, forced displacement.³⁵⁰ It has been conducting attacks on civilians, assassinating social leaders, engaging in forced recruitment, and enforcing social control.³⁵¹ It has also been engaging in armed violence against other illegal armed groups³⁵² and the armed forces.³⁵³ ELN makes armed and political attempts to recruit others to the group’s ideology.³⁵⁴ Violent confrontations with other armed actors have occurred against AGC, FARC dissidents, EPL,³⁵⁵ and in particular against the AGC in Bolívar, Chocó, Norte de Santander, and Antioquia.³⁵⁶ In 2018-2021, there was a sustained reduction in ELN violence during July 2018 to May 2021 and then an uptick during the last five months of 2021; however the annual number of clashes (42 in 2021) was still the lowest since March 2018.³⁵⁷ In 2021-2022, ‘offensive armed actions’ and clashes/fighting by ELN increased in the period around ELN’s February 2022’s armed strike.³⁵⁸ Examples of recent ELN armed acts and attacks include:

- In January 2022, an ELN bombing in Cali injured 13 police officers³⁵⁹ and a three simultaneous ELN attacks on military bases that wounded 20;³⁶⁰

³⁴³ Pares, Seguridad en tiempos de pandemia, 14 September 2020, [url](#), pp. 24-25

³⁴⁴ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 43

³⁴⁵ UNHCR, Colombia: Monitoreo de protección (enero- junio 2022), June 2022, [url](#), p.10

³⁴⁶ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), pp. 14; 90-99

³⁴⁷ Insight Crime, ELN show of force confirms its unmatched criminal presence in Colombia, 2 March 2022, [url](#)

³⁴⁸ Insight Crime, ELN, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁴⁹ Indepaz, Balance sobre las dinámicas del Ejército de Liberación Nacional -ELN- en Colombia 2018-2020, January 2021, [url](#); Reuters, Colombia advances towards restarting peace talks with ELN, 12 August 2022, [url](#); Insight Crime, ELN, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁰ HRW, World Report 2022, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁵¹ Pares, Seguridad en tiempos de pandemia, [url](#), pp. 24-26

³⁵² Pares, Seguridad en tiempos de pandemia, [url](#), pp. 24-26; For information on ELN’s rivalry with factions of FARC-EP dissidents see: Ex-FARC Mafia vs. ELN: a fight too far at Colombia-Venezuela border? 11 January 2022, [url](#); CERAC, Reporte del conflicto con ELN (Reporte mensual número 19 – Período de monitoreo: del 1 al 30 noviembre 2021, 3 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁵³ CERAC, Reporte del conflicto con ELN (Reporte mensual número 19 – Período de monitoreo: del 1 al 30 noviembre 2021, 3 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁴ Indepaz, Balance sobre las dinámicas del Ejército de Liberación Nacional -ELN- en Colombia 2018-2020, January 2021, [url](#), p. 8

³⁵⁵ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 44-46; See for example: Insight Crime, ELN and Urabeños War Again in Northern Colombia, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁶ Insight Crime, ELN and Urabeños War Again in Northern Colombia, 16 August 2022

³⁵⁷ CERAC, Reporte del conflicto con ELN (Reporte mensual número 19 – Período de monitoreo: del 1 al 30 noviembre 2021, 3 January 2022, [url](#); See also the trends graph in the same source.

³⁵⁸ CERAC, Acciones ofensivas atribuidas al ELN y combates con participación de esa guerrilla 2021-2022 (mensual) [Graph], 30 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁹ Reuters, Colombia’s leftist ELN rebels claim responsibility for bombing, 8 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁶⁰ AA, Soldier killed, more than 20 wounded in attacks on Colombian military bases, 27 January 2022, [url](#)



- In January 2022, fighting between ELN and FARC dissidents left at least 23 people dead and dozens more displaced in Arauca, along the border areas with Venezuela;³⁶¹
- February 2022 a three-day long 'armed strike' including attacks on infrastructure, movement restrictions, setting cars on fire, and setting off bombs that injured 8 people, in protest against the government's social and economic policies.³⁶² 65 separate incidents were registered across Colombia, with the majority concentrated in Norte de Santander, Cauca, and Nariño.³⁶³
- In August 2022, renewed fighting between ELN and the AGC in Bolívar displaced 600 families.³⁶⁴

Regarding peace talks, these had been broken off several years ago by the Duque administration following the ELN's 2019 Bogotá bomb attack that killed 22 police cadets.³⁶⁵ Subsequently with the change of government in August 2022, ELN leadership in Cuba met with the new Petro government representatives to restart peace talks.³⁶⁶ CERAC reported that the overall trend has been that armed clashes by ELN dropped in September.³⁶⁷ However, despite promises by the group to engage in peace talks beginning in November 2022, ELN has continued to fight against FARC dissidents in Arauca (a key stronghold) as of October 2022.³⁶⁸ Maps by Pares and Indepaz indicate the presence and municipalities most affected by ELN activities in 2022.

³⁶¹ Al Jazeera, At least 23 dead in clashes between armed rebel groups, [url](#)

³⁶² Reuters, ELN rebels blow up bridge, injure eight in attacks across Colombia, 23 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁶³ Insight Crime, ELN show of force confirms its unmatched criminal presence in Colombia, 2 March 2022, [url](#);

Indepaz, Acciones de ELN durante el paro armado febrero 2022, [url](#)

³⁶⁴ Insight Crime, ELN and Urabeños War Again in Northern Colombia, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

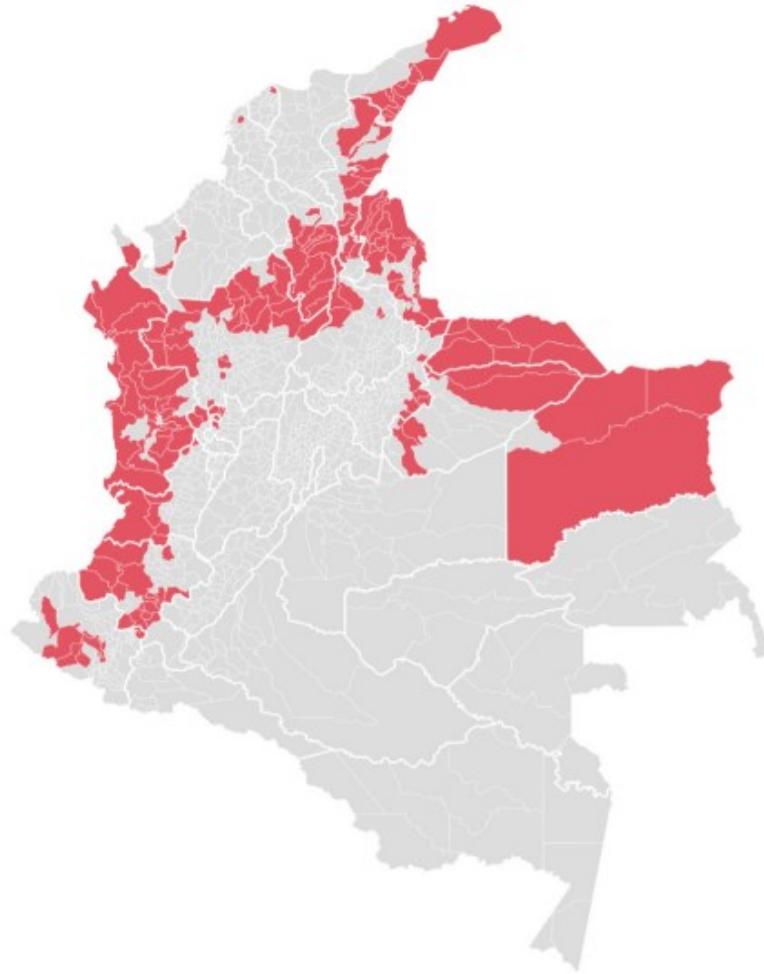
³⁶⁵ Reuters, Colombia advances towards restarting peace talks with ELN, 12 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁶⁶ Reuters, Colombia advances towards restarting peace talks with ELN, 12 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁶⁷ CERAC, Reporte del conflicto con El ELN, 4 October 2022, [url](#);

³⁶⁸ Insight Crime, ELN keeps fighting in key state despite peace talk plans with Colombia government, 14 October 2022, [url](#)

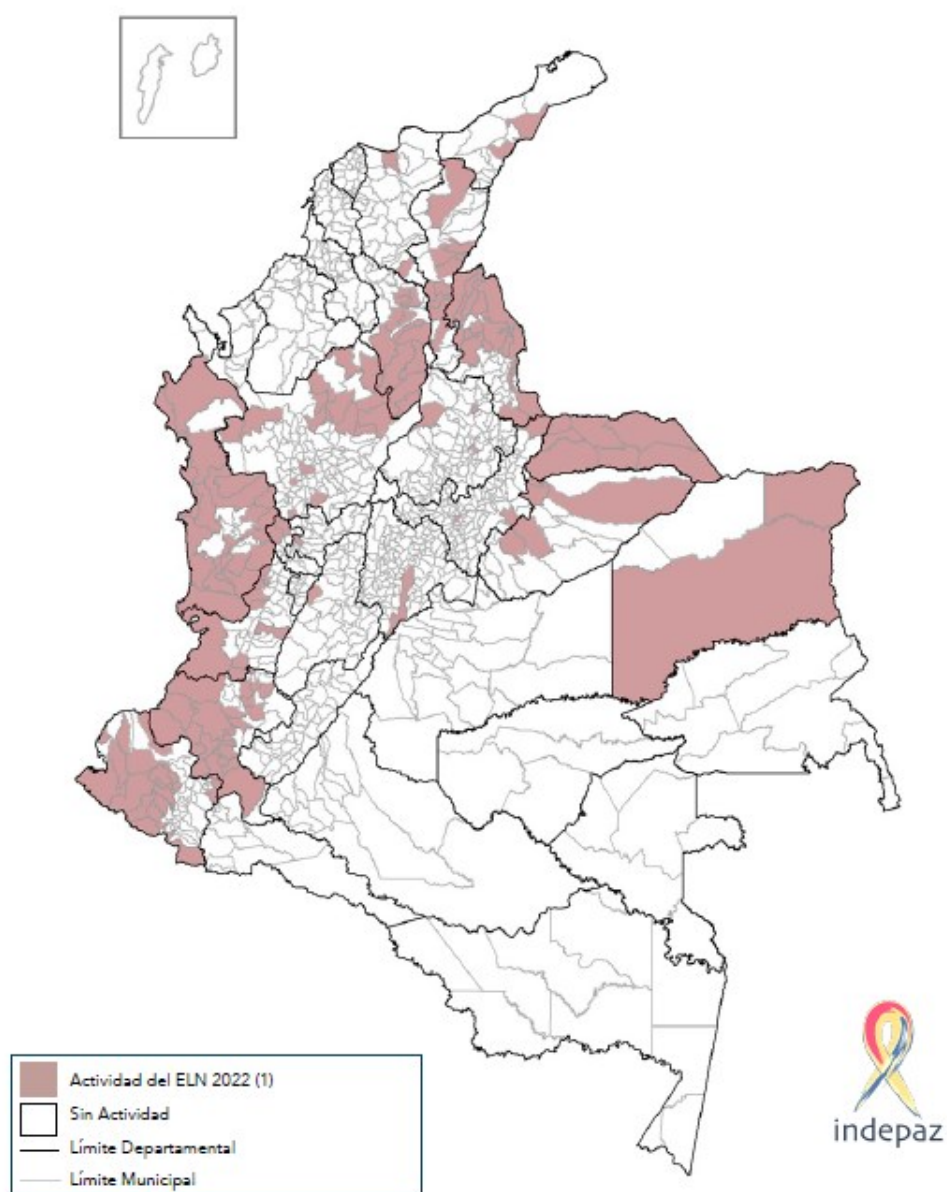


Presencia del ELN-2022Municipios
de influencia**Pares**
Fundación Paz & Reconciliación

Fuente: Fundación Paz & Reconciliación • Creado con Datawrapper

Figure 8: Presence of ELN, 2022³⁶⁹

³⁶⁹ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 43



Fuente: Observatorio de Conflictividades y DDHH de Indepaz | Elaborado por: Carlos Eduardo Espitia Cueca; Investigador de Indepaz

Figure 9: Municipalities most affected by ELN activities, 2022³⁷⁰

³⁷⁰ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 99

5.3.3. FARC dissident groups

FARC dissident groups [also referred to as Ex-FARC Mafia or post-FARC-EP groups] are armed groups whose leaders rejected the 2016 peace agreement and continue fighting the government and other illegal armed groups,³⁷¹ particularly against ELN, AGC, and amongst themselves.³⁷² Formed and led mainly by former mid-level commanders, they are mostly concerned with taking over illicit activities and businesses.³⁷³ There are at least two dozen FARC dissident groups operating across Colombia, although these groups have ‘limited ideological coherence and volatile connections to one another’ and are made up mainly of newly recruited members.³⁷⁴ Estimates of their presence in municipalities ranges from 132 (2020),³⁷⁵ to 161³⁷⁶ and 164 (2022).³⁷⁷ However, a 2022 Early Alert (004) issued by the Office of the Ombudsperson stated such groups have a presence in 230 municipalities.³⁷⁸ The overall trend has been increasing since the peace agreement.³⁷⁹ Total membership estimates by Pares in 2022 were 2764 combatants and 1887 collaborators (4 651 total members) while Colombian intelligence estimated 4 284 in total.³⁸⁰

Between 2021-2022, multiple key leaders of FARC dissident groups have been killed. This has led to concerns about the increased fragmentation of FARC-dissident groups.³⁸¹ However, Indepaz reported that in 2021-2022, FARC dissident groups have reconfigured from atomised groupings into converging main structures: Segunda Marquetalia, Bloque Suroriental (Eastern Command) and Comando Coordinador de Occidente (Western Coordinating Command).³⁸² Other sources describe that many of the estimated two dozen FARC dissident structures are organised under two main structures in competition with one another: the Segunda Marquetalia and the First Front group led by Iván Mordisco.³⁸³ Another category of FARC dissidents, in addition to the First Front and Segunda Marquetalia structures, are what Jeremy McDermott refers to ‘FARCRIM’³⁸⁴ groups – those who are purely criminal groups with roots/links to FARC dissidents.³⁸⁵ Pares also mentions ‘dispersed’ FARC dissidents mainly

³⁷¹ InSight Crime, 1st Front (Ex-FARC Mafia), 13 July 2019, [url](#). For a full explanation of the Post-FARC dissident groups, see pages 58-103 in Indepaz, Los focos del conflicto en Colombia, September 2021, [url](#) and also Pares, Grupos Armados PosFarc: Un nueva espiral de violencia en Colombia, August 2021, [url](#)

³⁷² InSight Crime, Urabeños – Gulf Clan, 24 October 2021, [url](#)

³⁷³ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 4

³⁷⁴ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 11

³⁷⁵ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 11

³⁷⁶ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 12

³⁷⁷ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 35

³⁷⁸ UNHCR, Colombia: Monitoreo de protección (enero- junio 2022), June 2022, [url](#)

³⁷⁹ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 12

³⁸⁰ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 35

³⁸¹ InSight Crime, Decimation of Ex-FARC Mafia Leadership May Continue with Death of Ivan Marquez, 5 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁸² Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 9

³⁸³ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 4; Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 35

³⁸⁴ InSight Crime, Ex-FARC Mafia: The New Player in Colombian Organized Crime, 9 March 2018, [url](#)

³⁸⁵ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

located in the south Pacific region.³⁸⁶ Indepaz similarly mentions the existence of roughly five dissident groups characterised as ‘independent’.³⁸⁷ FARC-dissident structures clash with each other, especially in the regions of Caquetá and Meta, claiming that they are the legitimate owners of FARC-EP’s former assets,³⁸⁸ in Cauca and along the Pacific Coast,³⁸⁹ in Nariño, Putumayo, Antioquia, Arauca, and Catatumbo,³⁹⁰ and Norte de Santander.³⁹¹ Activities of the post-FARC-EP groups include assassinations, kidnappings, threats, forced disappearances,³⁹² cocaine production and drug trafficking, attacking and killing social leaders,³⁹³ causing forced displacement,³⁹⁴ targeting former FARC-EP members.³⁹⁵

(a) First Front / Bloque Oriental / Comando Coordinador de Occidente

Indepaz identified that Bloque Oriental had at least 7 sub-structures and Comando Coordinador de Occidente had 10 sub-structures.³⁹⁶ Néstor Gregorio Vera Fernández (alias Ivan Mordisco) is one of the foremost FARC dissident leaders³⁹⁷ and is in charge of First Front. First Front is one of the largest and ‘arguably the strongest’ of the FARC dissident groups having emerged in 2016 with 400 members³⁹⁸ and in 2022 is the ‘fastest growing’ faction with consolidation of smaller factions and a permanent presence in Vaupés, Vichada, Caquetá and Putumayo forming a strategic corridor to the south-west departments of Nariño and Cauca. It also has a significant presence in the northeast.³⁹⁹ First Front is in open conflict with Segunda Marquetalia ex-FARC faction.⁴⁰⁰ It was believed that Mordisco had been killed in an operation in summer 2022, however he re-appeared in October 2022, and stated that he was interested in participating in President Petro’s Total Peace plan.⁴⁰¹ His re-appearance presents a

³⁸⁶ Pares, Grupos Armados PosFarc: Un nueva espiral de violencia en Colombia, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

³⁸⁷ Indepaz mentions Frente 33, Frente 36, Frente Oliver Sinisterra (FOS), Guerrillas Unidas del Pacífico (GUP), Frente 4. Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 13

³⁸⁸ InSight Crime, FARC Dissidents Want Old Land Back in Colombia’s Caquetá and Meta, 23 July 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁹ International Crisis Group, A Fight by Other Means, 30 November 2021, [url](#), p.28

³⁹⁰ WOLA, FARC Dissident Groups, 24 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁹¹ InSight Crime, FARC dissidents patrol streets in broad daylight on Colombia-Venezuela border, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁹² Pares, Seguridad en tiempos de pandemia, 14 September 2020, [url](#), p. 35

³⁹³ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁴ Pares, Grupos Armados PosFarc: Un nueva espiral de violencia en Colombia, August 2021, [url](#), p. 20

³⁹⁵ WOLA, FARC Dissident Groups, 24 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁶ Bloque Suroriental: Frente 62 Miller Perdomo, Frente Carolina Ramírez, Unidad Jhon Linares, Frente Comandante Jorge Suárez Briceño, Frente Madre (agrupa frentes 1,7,16 y 40), Frente 28, Frente 10, Frente Edison Cinco Mil y Frente 45; Comando Coordinador de Occidente: Compañía Adán Izquierdo, la Columna Móvil Dagoberto Ramos, el Frente Ismael Ruiz, el Frente Carlos Patiño, la Columna Móvil Franco Benavides, la Columna Móvil Urías Rondón, la Columna Móvil Jaime Martínez, el Frente Rafael Aguilera, la Columna Móvil Jhonier Toro Arenas y la Compañía Alan Rodríguez, located in Cauca, Huila, Nariño, Putumayo, Tolima y Valle del Cauca. which are located in the departments of Cauca, Huila, Nariño, Putumayo, Tolima and Valle del Cauca. Both the Columna Móvil Jhonier Toro Arenas and la Compañía Alan Rodríguez appeared in 2022, the first through pamphlets that were distributed among the township of Jardines de Sucumbíos in Ipiales (Nariño), Piamonte (Cauca) and Villagarzón, Puerto Caicedo and Orito (Putumayo). la Compañía Alan Rodríguez, has influence in Roberto Payán and Olaya Herrera in Nariño. Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 13

³⁹⁷ InSight Crime, Iván Mordisco’s Reappearance Brings New Challenges to ‘Total Peace’ in Colombia, 18 October 2022, [url](#)

³⁹⁸ InSight Crime, 1st Front (Ex-FARC Mafia), 13 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁹⁹ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 35

⁴⁰⁰ InSight Crime, Néstor Gregorio Vera Fernández, alias ‘Iván Mordisco’, 17 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰¹ InSight Crime, Iván Mordisco’s Reappearance Brings New Challenges to ‘Total Peace’ in Colombia, 18 October 2022, [url](#)

challenge to Petro's 'Total Peace' given the influence that Mordisco has over whether the dissident groups under his control will participate or not.⁴⁰²

(b) Segunda Marquetalia

Segunda Marquetalia was founded by Luciano Marín Arango (alias Iván Márquez),⁴⁰³ the former lead negotiator for FARC-EP.⁴⁰⁴ He left the peace process in 2019 when he was linked to drug trafficking by the United States.⁴⁰⁵ Márquez was seriously injured in an attack inside Venezuela July 2022 and was reportedly recovering in a Caracas hospital under protection by Venezuela.⁴⁰⁶ Segunda Marquetalia expanded during Duque's presidency from 2018 to 2022 into 61 municipalities.⁴⁰⁷

Indepaz indicated that the group has at least 11 sub-structures.⁴⁰⁸ The group's firm base is in Apure (Venezuela) with their troops controlling much of the drug trafficking along the Colombian-Venezuelan border, specifically in Arauca and Apure. Much of its leadership has been killed in operations in Venezuela, including its top three commanders, leaving uncertainty around how the group will control territory and weakening the group significantly though it still controls important drug trafficking routes.⁴⁰⁹ The group has sub-groups and factions such as Comandos de la Frontera-Ejército-Bolivariano.⁴¹⁰ The group frequently clashes with FARC dissidents First Front, and Colombian and Venezuelan forces.⁴¹¹ In other places, it forms alliances, such as in Nariño, where Segunda Marquetalia has allied with ELN and paramilitary successors to create alliances to dominate territory.⁴¹² Insight Crime indicated that 'broader political achievements' are 'unlikely' for this group despite being weakened.⁴¹³

⁴⁰² Insight Crime, Iván Mordisco's Reappearance Brings New Challenges to 'Total Peace' in Colombia, 18 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰³ Insight Crime, Luciano Marín Arango, alias 'Iván Márquez', 29 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁰⁵ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁴⁰⁶ El Colombiano, El dossier de armas y comandos de la "Segunda Marquetalia" de Márquez, 18 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁴⁰⁸ Sub-groups listed were: Compañía Fernando Díaz, Columna Móvil Teófilo Forero/Unidad Oscar Mondragón, Frente Acacio Medina, Bloque Occidental Alfonso Cano, Frente Alfonso Cano, Frente Diomer Cortés, Frente 18, Frente 41 Cacique Upar, Comando Danilo García, Columna Móvil Cristian Pérez, Comandos Bolivarianos de la Frontera y Frente 37. Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 13

⁴⁰⁹ Insight Crime, Luciano Marín Arango, alias 'Iván Márquez', 29 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹⁰ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁴¹¹ Insight Crime, Luciano Marín Arango, alias 'Iván Márquez', 29 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹² Infobae, Macabre alliance between the Second Marquetalia, ELN and paramilitaries in Nariño, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹³ Insight Crime, Luciano Marín Arango, alias 'Iván Márquez', 29 September 2022, [url](#)

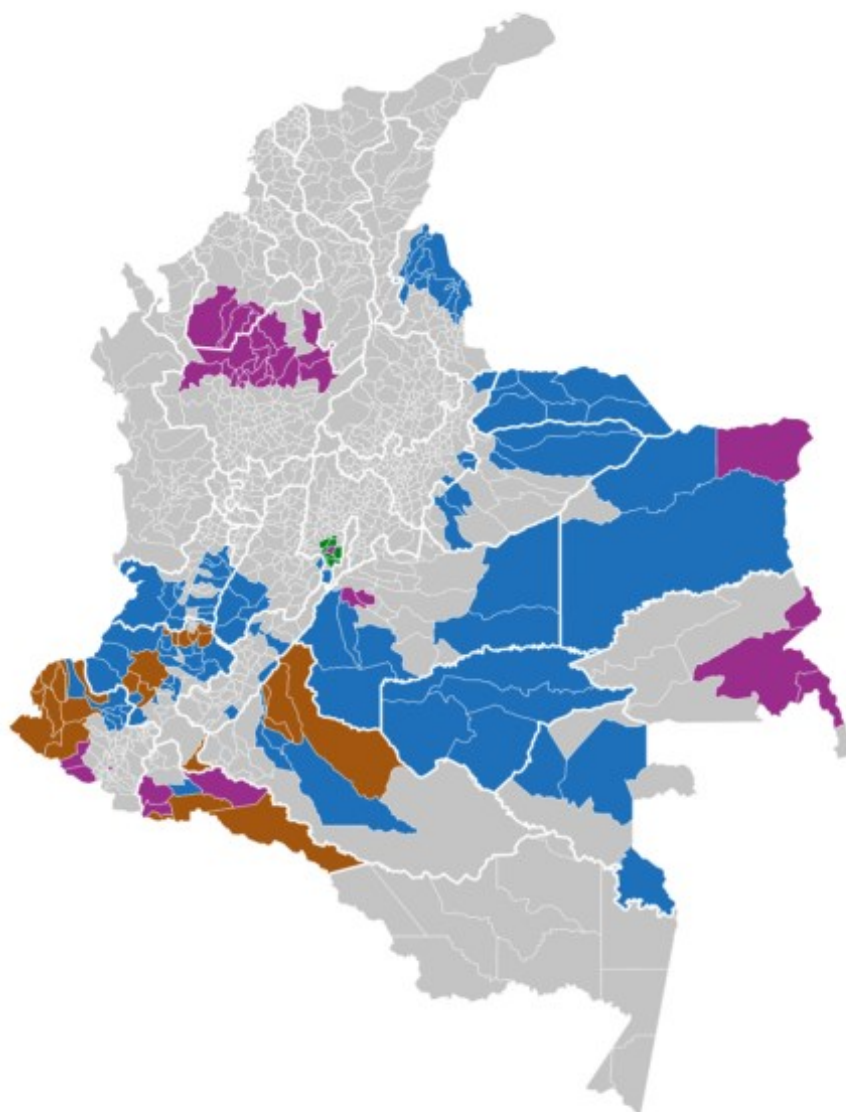
Pares published a map of the presence of FARC-dissident groups as of 2022 [NB Gentil Duarte is referred to as First Front in this report]:

Presencia de GAPF o disidencias-2022

Municipios de influencia

■ Gentil Duarte (GD) ■ Segunda Marquetalia (SD) ■ GD y SM ■ Indeterminado

Pares
Fundación Paz & Reconciliación

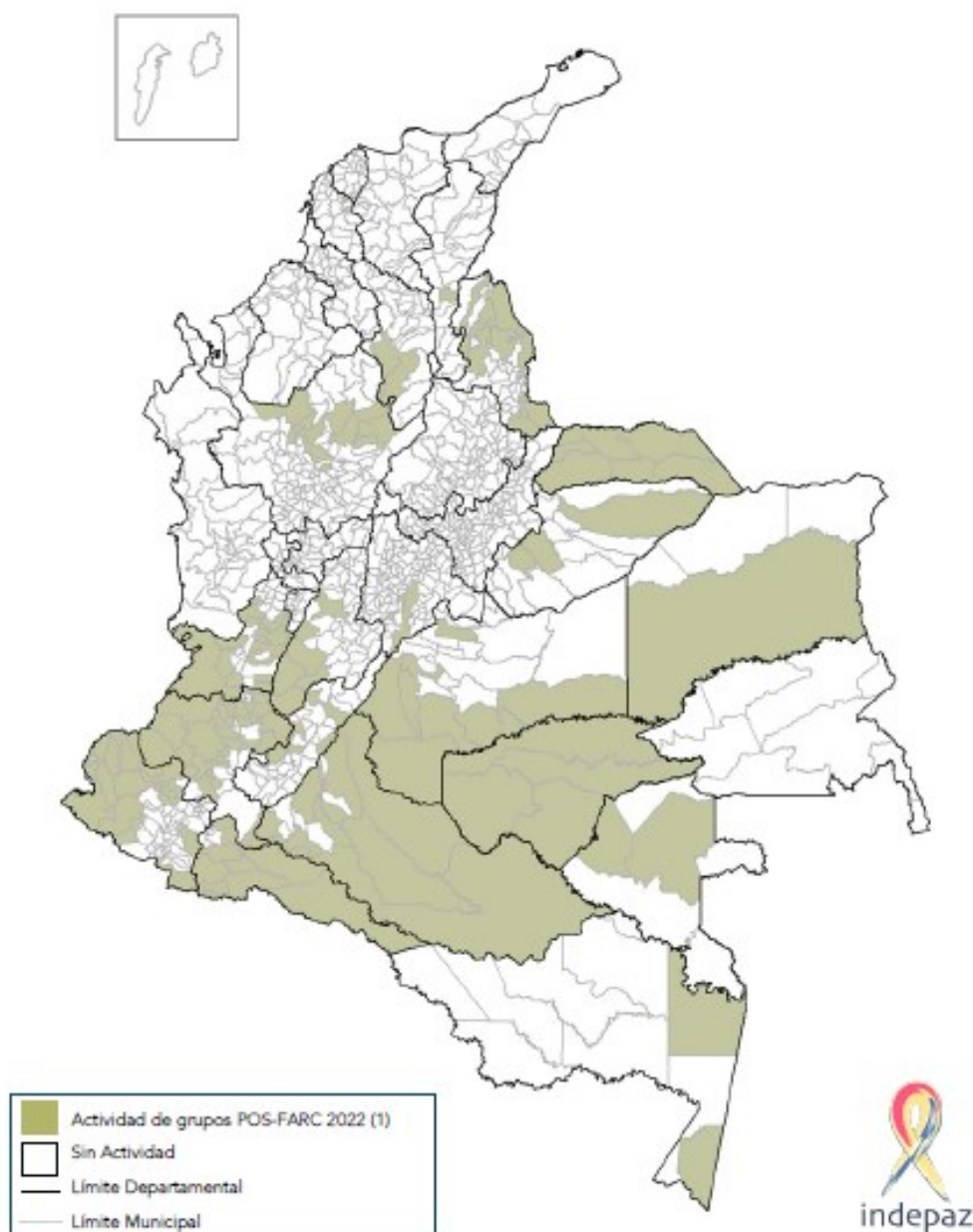


Fuente: Fundación Paz & Reconciliación • Creado con Datawrapper

Figure 10: Presence of Post-FARC/FARC dissident groups, 2022⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁴ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 34

Indepaz also produced a map of municipalities most affected by activities of post-FARC dissident groups in 2022:



Fuente: Observatorio de Conflictividades y DDHH de Indepaz | Elaborado por: Carlos Eduardo Espitia Cueca; Investigador de Indepaz

Figure 11: Municipalities most affected by Post-FARC dissident groups, 2022⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁵ Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021 – 2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 71; see also Indepaz annexes for full listing of municipal presence.



5.3.4. Other criminal groups, organised crime and urban street gangs

In major urban areas organised crime groups exert control through extortion, forced displacement, child recruitment, sexual exploitation, and armed confrontations between groups. Some urban criminal gang structures have long histories, especially in Medellín and to a lesser extent, Cali.⁴¹⁶ In the 1980s, Pablo Escobar set up the first ‘oficina de cobro’ criminal debt collection agency in the municipality of Envigado, in Medellín.⁴¹⁷ Dynamics are very different between Medellín, Cali, Bogota – there is no one size fits all approach to how armed and criminal groups operate locally in these cities. Medellín is traditionally divided up by different groups with longer histories like Oficina de Envigado and La Terraza. Cali has similar tradition but is less organised, and while Bogota does not have that tradition, some suburban areas like Ciudad Bolívar – do not have strong state presence.⁴¹⁸

Urban criminal street gangs now account for an increasing proportion of the violence in Colombia. These groups are also frequently contracted out by larger groups such as AGC and ELN to operate their ‘urban trafficking routes.’⁴¹⁹ AGC is particularly distinguishable for using franchise groups which are often smaller, localised gangs across Colombia who operate under the banner of the larger group⁴²⁰ and with a large degree of autonomy as ‘outsourced’ gangs.⁴²¹ According to Indepaz, local gangs/*combos/bandas criminales* serve the other umbrella structures of paramilitary successor groups (such as AGC, as well as lesser groups such as EPL, Los Rastrojos, etc.), as well as guerrilla structures and Post-FARC dissident groups which are dedicated to drug trafficking and money laundering. These local groups and are strengthened by outsourcing processes from larger structures. Their territorial reconfiguration has mainly occurred around income seeking.⁴²² Gangs active in cities have further grown as a result of social unrest due to protests and lack of economic opportunities in the wake of the pandemic.⁴²³

In Medellín, estimates range from 93 to 350 active gangs [including 15 ‘super gangs’ which coordinate loose federations of street gangs⁴²⁴].⁴²⁵ According to a recent study virtually every low and middle-income neighbourhood of Medellín has a neighbourhood gang (‘*combo*’),

⁴¹⁶ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁴¹⁷ Insight Crime, Oficina de Envigado, 28 October 2020, [url](#)

⁴¹⁸ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁴¹⁹ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 5

⁴²⁰ Insight Crime, United they stand, divided they call – Urabeños losing grip in Colombia, 27 April 2022, [url](#); For specific information on the Black Eagles (Águilas Negras) and the use of the Black Eagles brand by paramilitary successor groups and other criminal actors, see: Canada, IRB, Colombia: The Black Eagles (COL201106.E), 13 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴²¹ Colombiano (El), Así se juega el ajedrez del crimen organizado en el Valle de Aburrá, 1 November 2021, [url](#)

⁴²² Indepaz, Desafío a la paz total. Lo que recibió el gobierno de Gustavo Petro. Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados en Colombia 2021–2022, 28 November 2022, [url](#), p. 40

⁴²³ WSJ, In Colombian city, gangs thrive amid protests and anarchy, 9 June 2021, [url](#); Colombia Reports, Medellín gangs gave as many members as the ELN in all Colombia, 6 July 2021, [url](#); See also: Guardian (The), Colombia’s ‘capital of horror’ despairs amid new wave of gang violence, 23 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴²⁴ Blattman, C., The terrible trade-off: Why less violent cities often means more powerful and organized crime, 11 May 2022, [url](#)

⁴²⁵ Colombia Reports, Medellín gangs gave as many members as the ELN in all Colombia, 6 July 2021, [url](#)



estimating 400 *combos* (8-12 000 men) in total, which are organized into higher level 'razones' (250-500 men) and hierarchical alliances that coordinate illicit activity.⁴²⁶

Criminal groups are responsible for majority of urban homicides and engage in youth recruitment,⁴²⁷ especially among Venezuelan migrants, extortion, money laundering, and drug dealing,⁴²⁸ as well as being used by landlords to enforce evictions and engage in forced urban displacement.⁴²⁹ A study of these gangs in Medellín found they are embedded in the local economy and in extracting various kinds of 'rents' from the territory where they operate: drug retailing, protection and extortion of local retailers and bus lines, loan sharking, contract killing, debt collection, robbery, and being involved as intermediaries in the sale of consumer goods.⁴³⁰ Furthermore, the same study found that in many neighbourhoods, the combos are the local authority in low and middle income areas and provide services and exercise state functions. The strength of criminal governance is correlated with high rates of extortion and 'gota a gota' loans suggesting that rent extraction is one of the primary motivations for gangs to rule territory.⁴³¹ The AGC is also active in Medellín and has allied with local gangs⁴³² and associates located in northern and western peripheral areas of Medellín.⁴³³ La Oficina de Envigado, which evolved from Escobar's first criminal debt collection agency, is the most influential mafia gang in Medellín.⁴³⁴ It is described as the 'mafia federation that regulates almost all criminal activity in Medellín'.⁴³⁵ Jeremy McDermott commented that 'La Oficina de Envigado' is a useful label for the mafia in Medellín, that it has appeared under different names (recently as Cuerpo Colegiado La Oficina), and that it but functions rather more like an umbrella of independent mafias that provide crime services.⁴³⁶ Crime services include extortion, local drug sales, robberies, sex trafficking, contraband, and gota-a-gota loan sharking.⁴³⁷ Murder services are offered by most 'oficinas' in Medellín.⁴³⁸ In Medellín metropolitan area, AGC and La Oficina share control of most of the 350 *combos* in the area; though there are also some gangs who declare themselves independent.⁴³⁹ Other major groups include La Terraza, Los Chatas, and La Sierra, the latter of which is also an outsourced gang associated with the AGC.⁴⁴⁰ In Medellín, there is a presence of criminal gangs (*bandas criminales*), ELN and AGC groups. Most active gangs in Medellín are controlled by the Oficina

⁴²⁶ Blattman, et. al, Understanding criminal organisations: the Gangs of Medellin, Colombia, May 2022, [url](#)

⁴²⁷ Gil Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

⁴²⁸ Colombia Reports, Medellín gangs gave as many members as the ELN in all Colombia, 6 July 2021, [url](#)

⁴²⁹ Colombia Reports, Medellín landlords and gangs skyrocket displacement, 15 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴³⁰ Blattman, et. al, Understanding criminal organisations: the Gangs of Medellin, Colombia, May 2022, [url](#)

⁴³¹ Blattman, et. al, Gobierno criminal en Medellín: Panorama general del fenómeno y evidencia empírica sobre cómo enfrentarlo, October 2020, [url](#), pp. 2-3, 6, 11

⁴³² Colombia Reports, Crime and security in Medellín, 9 August 2022, [url](#)

⁴³³ Colombia Reports, AGC kill 26 during 4-day terror campaign in northern Colombia, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

⁴³⁴ El Colombiano, Así se juega el ajedrez del crimen organizado en el Valle de Aburrá, 1 November 2021, [url](#)

⁴³⁵ Insight Crime, Oficina de Envigado, 28 October 2020, [url](#)

⁴³⁶ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁴³⁷ Insight Crime, For Medellín's Oficina Capos, the Shuffle is Part of the Game, 24 May 2019, [url](#)

⁴³⁸ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁴³⁹ El Colombiano, Así se juega el ajedrez del crimen organizado en el Valle de Aburrá, 1 November 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁰ El Colombiano, Así se juega el ajedrez del crimen organizado en el Valle de Aburrá, 1 November 2021, [url](#)



de Envigado and the remaining groups are under the control of 10 smaller syndicates,⁴⁴¹ such as Los Triana and La Terraza.⁴⁴²

In Bogotá, the Tren de Aragua and Los Maracuchos are two gangs formed in Venezuela responsible for a series of violent murders and dispute with other criminal groups for control of illicit revenues in the city.⁴⁴³ Tren de Aragua originated in Aragua (Venezuela), its power base, and conducts kidnapping, extortion, homicide, and robbery,⁴⁴⁴ weapons offences, drug trafficking,⁴⁴⁵ and human trafficking of Venezuelan migrants.⁴⁴⁶ International Crisis Group noted that according to multiple sources, Tren de Aragua has some operations in Colombia, on the border with Venezuela, in Norte de Santander, and in Bogotá although ‘Tren de Aragua’s presence in the capital and other major cities goes no further than small cells working alongside local illegal outfits’; there are indications that it collaborates with the AGC in Norte de Santander.⁴⁴⁷

5.3.5. Mexican cartels

Mexican cartels work with Colombian armed groups in drugs trafficking and production in the territory,⁴⁴⁸ since 2010, and this intensified after the peace negotiations and the 2016 peace agreement.⁴⁴⁹ The Sinaloa Cartel and the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación were reported by the Brookings Institute to be involved in making alliances with illegal armed groups in Colombia.⁴⁵⁰ In 2020-2021, Mexican drug cartels increasingly shipped high powered guns and weapons to armed groups in Colombia in exchange for cocaine, giving armed groups a firepower advantage over law enforcement.⁴⁵¹ They are mainly concentrated in areas of strategic interest for drug trafficking such as the Pacific coastal areas of Nariño, Norte de Santander (Catatumbo), Magdalena⁴⁵² and in southern Cordoba and parts of Antioquia.⁴⁵³

5.3.6. Venezuelan armed actors

Venezuela has been a safe haven for Colombia’s guerrilla groups at least since 1998.⁴⁵⁴ In border areas between Colombia and Venezuela, multiple armed groups operate openly,⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁴¹ Colombia Reports, Crime and security in Medellín, 9 August 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴² Colombia Reports, Medellín’s violent crime statistics drop significantly, 17 August 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴³ CBS News, “Packaged” corpses sow terror in Colombian capital, 17 September 2022, [url](#); OCCRP, Colombia Dismantles the Los Maracuchos Gang, 15 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁴ Insight Crime, Venezuela’s Tren de Aragua Gang Muscling into Colombia Border Area, 10 July 2019, [url](#); El Espectador, Presuntos cabecillas del Tren de Aragua en Bogotá, a esperar el juicio en prisión, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁵ El Colombiano, Otro golpe al Tren de Aragua: 19 integrantes fueron capturados, 14 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, Hard Times in a Safe Haven: Protecting Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia, 9 August 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁴⁴⁷ International Crisis Group, Hard Times in a Safe Haven: Protecting Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia, 9 August 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁴⁴⁸ GITOC, Organized Crime Index – Colombia 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁴⁹ Brookings Institute, The Foreign Policies of the Sinaloa Cartel and CJNG, 22 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁰ Brookings Institute, The Foreign Policies of the Sinaloa Cartel and CJNG, 22 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵¹ Reuters, Mexican cartels swap arms for cocaine, fueling Colombia violence, 13 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵² Pares, Radiografía de la ominosa presencia de los carteles mexicanos, 10 June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁵³ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁴⁵⁴ Insight Crime, Rebels and Paramilitaries: Colombia’s Guerrillas in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁵ HRW, Venezuela: Security Force Abuses at Colombia Border, 26 April 2021, [url](#)



such as FARC dissidents as well as the ELN.⁴⁵⁶ Colombian intelligence reported in February 2022 that as many as 1 600 ELN and FARC dissidents are involved in conflicts along the border.⁴⁵⁷ The Venezuelan security forces have been complicit with some Colombian illegal armed groups on border areas and have carried out joint operations with the ELN and been implicated in ‘systematic’ human rights violations against civilians and causing displacement between the two countries.⁴⁵⁸ Venezuelan forces have also fought against other Colombian factions who have become ‘unwelcome’ in the region. ELN and FARC dissidents who operate in Venezuelan territory are ‘subject to a sustained Venezuelan security force offensive.’ In areas of Venezuela where there is conflict between Venezuelan forces and Colombian guerrillas, there are ‘airstrikes, gunfights, assassinations, landmines, kidnappings, disappearances, arbitrary detentions, torture, and abuse’.⁴⁵⁹ In border areas where ELN and FARC dissidents have become entrenched they are the de facto authorities, imposing social norms and rules, regulating the local economy and running parallel justice mechanisms. Insight Crime provides a map of the Colombian guerrilla presence in Colombia and Venezuela border regions in 2022.⁴⁶⁰ Venezuelan crime syndicate (*megabanda*) Tren de Aragua has some operations in Colombia.⁴⁶¹

5.4. Interaction dynamics between armed groups

As described in the chapter on conflict dynamics, in several regions, ‘despite the growing presence of the security forces’ illegal armed groups and criminal organisations continued to ‘multiply, expand, and use violence’ which has led to displacement in places due to clashes.⁴⁶² In addition to the state’s armed conflict against illegal armed groups mentioned in Chapter 5, the ICRC lists three on-going internal armed conflicts between ELN, AGC, and different FARC-EP dissident groups.⁴⁶³ These groups seek to avoid direct confrontation with the state, but are ‘apt to engage in firefights’ with one another during competition for control over illicit activities, land, and drug trafficking routes, which often leads to confinement or displacement of civilians.⁴⁶⁴ Often these groups fight with each other and do not necessarily have aligned strategies and no one group has been able to establish hegemony in the way that the FARC-EP previously did.⁴⁶⁵ Traditionally territorially based criminal groups have evolved into flexible networks with branches reaching across jurisdictions and in some cases, internationally.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁵⁶ Insight Crime, Rebels and Paramilitaries: Colombia’s Guerrillas in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁷ ACLED, Regional Overview - South America (12-18 February 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 2-3; El Nacional, Más de 1.600 integrantes de las disidencias y el ELN están en Venezuela, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁸ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#); HRW, Venezuela: Security Force Abuses at Colombia Border, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁹ Insight Crime, Rebels and Paramilitaries: Colombia’s Guerrillas in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁰ Insight Crime, Rebels and Paramilitaries: Colombia’s Guerrillas in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶¹ International Crisis Group, Hard Times in a Safe Haven: Protecting Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia, 9 August 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁴⁶² UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 32

⁴⁶³ ICRC, Colombia: Retos humanitarios 2022, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 8, 9

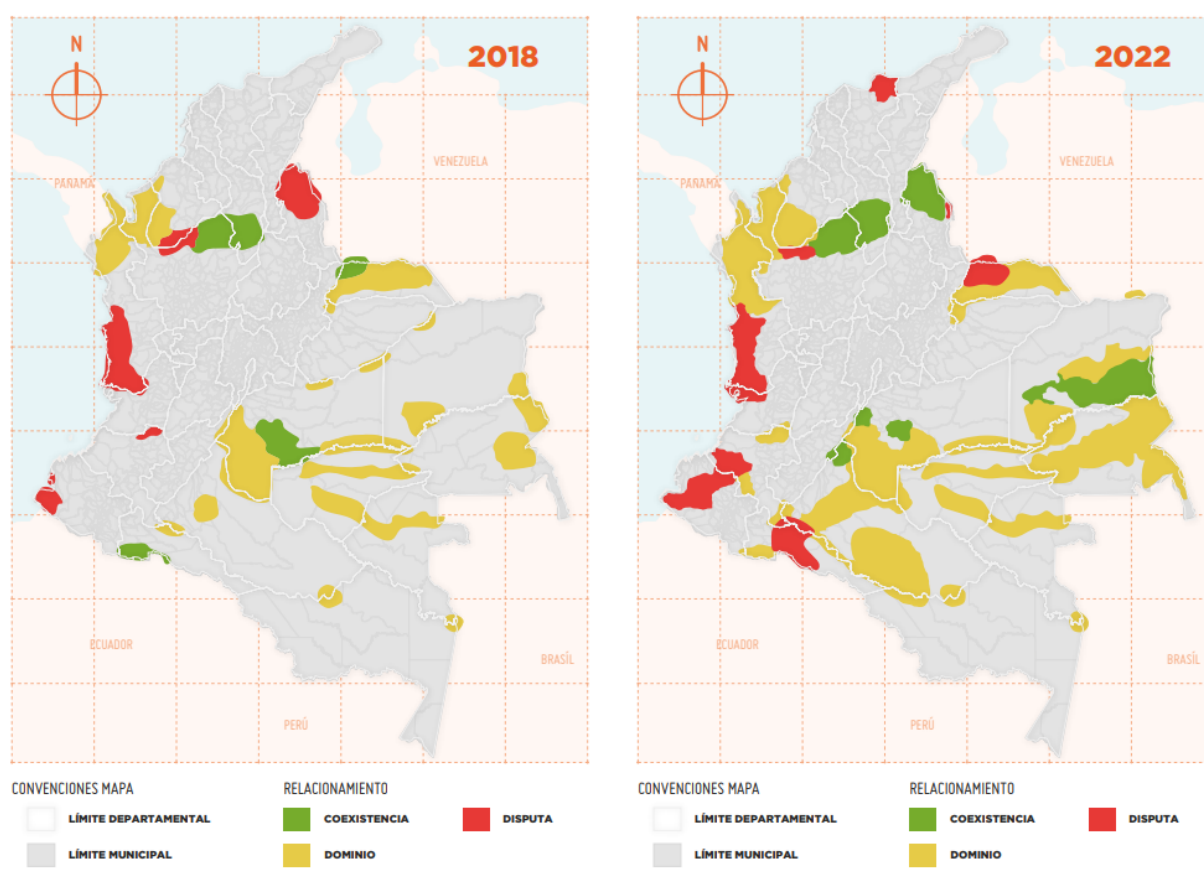
⁴⁶⁵ EU, EPRS, Peace and Security in 2019 – Evaluating the EU’s efforts to support peace in Colombia, May 2019, [url](#), p. 47

⁴⁶⁶ EU, EPRS, Peace and Security in 2019 – Evaluating the EU’s efforts to support peace in Colombia, May 2019, [url](#), p. 47

Pares stated that interactions between armed groups are fragmented and mixed, occurring between the same actors across different territories and configurations. Without providing an exhaustive geographic list, sources outline different modes for how illegal armed groups interact, establish alliances or clash in the territories where they are present, which are not exclusive and which sometimes occur simultaneously:⁴⁶⁷

The map below by FIP shows the areas of the country where there are focal points of interaction between illegal armed groups in 2018 and 2022:

NÚCLEOS DE RELACIONAMIENTO (DISPUTA, DOMINIO Y COEXISTENCIA) 2018 Y 2022



Fuente: Elaboración propia. Este mapa contiene las zonas donde la FIP ha podido corroborar la información de la que dispone. Aunque hay datos de enfrentamientos, reagrupamientos o injerencia de estructuras armadas en otras zonas (como Montes de María, sur del Cesar, Valle y Huila, entre otras), es pronto para plantear que se trata de escenarios de disputa dominio o coexistencia.

Figure 12: Interaction focal points between armed groups⁴⁶⁸

The zones of dominance, co-existence, and dispute are described below headings derived from the analysis of interactions between armed groups by FIP.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 16-17; See also: Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, “Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras”, Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso De La República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), pp. 90-93

⁴⁶⁸ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 16-17

⁴⁶⁹ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 16-17

Zones of dominance

- North of Cauca: FARC dissidents are in constant conflict with the security forces;
- Catatumbo (Norte de Santander): ELN dominates in this territory and exists in a dynamic of confrontation with FARC dissident Front 33; however the groups co-exist for the purpose of fighting against the security forces;
- Norte de Santander (Southern Tibu): ELN disputes AGC for control of the border and access to Cúcuta municipality;
- South-eastern departments of Meta, Guaviare, Caquetá, Guainía, Vaupés, Amazonas: FARC dissidents established control of territory and strategic corridors and are the dominant regional actor causing low intensity conflict and significant control of daily community life.⁴⁷⁰

Zones of co-existence

- South of Bolívar: ELN and AGC co-exist but there are also signs of clashes, as well as with FARC dissident structures;
- North of Caquetá and southern Meta: Factions of Segunda Marquetalia and First Front co-exist;
- Northeastern departments and Bajo Cauca: ELN and AGC co-exist with some incursions by FARC dissident groups. These are areas of strategic military importance because they serve as geographic links to other strategic areas.⁴⁷¹

Zones of dispute

- Antioquia: Especially on the border with Córdoba [Ituango, which connects Córdoba and Chocó/sea access] violent disputes between AGC, FARC dissidents and Los Caparrapos;⁴⁷²
- Southcentral Cauca and pacific Cauca: ELN disputes with AGC and residual dissidents of FARC-EP;⁴⁷³
- Chocó: ELN territorial disputes AGC, especially in the south pacific and San Juan areas;⁴⁷⁴
- Norte de Santander: ELN disputes with EPL; and on the border with Venezuela, violent disputes between ELN, AGC, and Los Rastrojos;⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁰ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 16-17

⁴⁷¹ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 16-17

⁴⁷² Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 32; Atalayar, Armed groups displace 3,700 farmers in Colombia, 29 July 2021, [url](#); FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 16-17

⁴⁷³ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 322; FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 16-17

⁴⁷⁴ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 322; FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 16-17

⁴⁷⁵ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 322



- Caquetá: FARC dissidents fighting against the Sinaloa/La Mafia [not the Mexican Cartel; this is a local Colombian criminal group that adopted the name⁴⁷⁶];⁴⁷⁷
- Putumayo: FARC dissidents factions and allies of Segunda Marquetalia in dispute against factions and allies of FARC dissidents First Front.⁴⁷⁸ Violence has intensified since the growing presence of armed groups in 2018, increasing civilian fatalities;⁴⁷⁹
- Nariño: ELN against the AGC⁴⁸⁰ and ELN against rival FARC dissidents.⁴⁸¹ The pacific region of Nariño is 'the most volatile region of the country' with constant reconfigurations of groups. After intense periods of disputes between armed groups, rearrangement, and security forces intervention, there has been a reduction in confrontations by armed groups. Disputes between factions of FARC dissidents persist;⁴⁸²
- Arauca: ELN against FARC dissidents.⁴⁸³ ELN and FARC dissidents had co-existed until 2021 but in early 2022 their non-aggression pact broke down, leading to combat and murders. Confrontations are concentrated in Venezuelan territory with repercussions for the Colombian side.⁴⁸⁴ Clashes have caused large scale displacement and civilian casualties.⁴⁸⁵

5.5. Engagement with security forces

The Global Index on Organized Crime stated that Colombia has taken a hard line on organised crime and drug trafficking and has successfully scaled back the power of organised criminal groups; however 'significant work remains to be done'.⁴⁸⁶ State efforts to deal with illegal armed groups are predominantly military responses that have not been able to prevent the expansion of these groups and the violence generated.⁴⁸⁷ State actions up to now have not modified the underlying conditions that have allowed illegal armed groups and criminal organisations to expand and continue their activities including: sources of funding and money laundering, corruption, arms trafficking, child and youth recruitment, lack of development alternatives to prevent youth from joining these groups, among others.⁴⁸⁸ They have

⁴⁷⁶ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁴⁷⁷ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 322

⁴⁷⁸ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 16-17; ACAPS, Colombia Risk Report - Escalation in violence between non-state armed groups in Putumayo significantly increases displacement, confinement, and protection needs, 31 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 2-3

⁴⁷⁹ ACAPS, Colombia Risk Report - Escalation in violence between non-state armed groups in Putumayo significantly increases displacement, confinement, and protection needs, 31 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 2-3

⁴⁸⁰ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 322

⁴⁸¹ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 8; Pares, Plomo es lo que hay, April 2022, [url](#), p. 41

⁴⁸² FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 16-17

⁴⁸³ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 322

⁴⁸⁴ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 16-17; Insight Crime, The Battle for Apure: Chavismo and the exFARC, 13 October 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁵ ACAPS, Violence in Arauca Department, 31 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁴⁸⁶ GITOC, Organized Crime Index – Colombia 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁸⁷ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 7-8; International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 14

⁴⁸⁸ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 79-80



conducted operations against armed groups, detained many, and captured and killed members of the leadership of these groups, however crime levels have not decreased.⁴⁸⁹

Despite having a large military of 300 000 personnel, Colombia's military faces organisational challenges that undermine its ability to dismantle armed groups, including reliance on conscription, budget constraints, corruption, human rights abuses, and perceived lack of effectiveness and legitimacy in the eyes of the public.⁴⁹⁰ Colombia is geographically vast with large remote spaces, leaving the civilian population 'to the mercy' of armed groups.⁴⁹¹ Military and police forces are frequently absent in conflict-affected areas except within urban centres, and local populations frequently reject military tactics that include periodic patrols, capture-or-kill operations, and targeting of the local economy.⁴⁹² The state has carried out numerous actions with important results against all types of illegal and criminal armed groups. However, the UN reported that communities have expressed concerns that there is a lack of timely action by security forces, and that these groups are able to pass through security checkpoints and control posts, as well as allowing the passage of heavy machines for illegal mining and inputs for drug/crop processing. This lack of actions makes it easier for these groups to maintain presence and exercise control of territory.⁴⁹³

There are zones experiencing open confrontation between illegal armed groups and public security forces, including in the subregions of Valle de Aburrá, Bajo Cauca, North, Northeast and West of Antioquia, Alto Sinú and San Jorge of Córdoba, and Alto, Bajo and Medio Atrato in Chocó.⁴⁹⁴

While the ELN remains the only group explicitly fighting the state, generally armed groups avoid direct confrontation with the military in favour of a now common tactic of targeting security forces on a smaller scale through opportunistic and asymmetric attacks such as assaulting police stations and military outposts using firearms and explosives.⁴⁹⁵ In some areas, asymmetric attacks have become common enough to prevent the capacity of the military to patrol and conduct offensive operations, meaning a reduction in visible state forces presence and effectiveness in municipalities.⁴⁹⁶ The year 2021 has been described as the deadliest year for security forces since the 2016 peace deal due to increased attacks and assassinations of police officers, murdered by illegal armed groups, mainly the AGC, followed by FARC-dissidents, ELN, and unknown perpetrators. In 2021, 148 members of the

⁴⁸⁹ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

⁴⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 19

⁴⁹¹ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 25

⁴⁹² International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 25

⁴⁹³ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 38

⁴⁹⁴ Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, "Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras", Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), p. 90

⁴⁹⁵ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁴⁹⁶ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 8; see also: UNHCR, Colombia: Monitoreo de protección (enero- junio 2022), June 2022, [url](#)



police/armed forces were killed by attacks by armed groups, a 57 % increase of 2020,⁴⁹⁷ and the most violence year since 2016.⁴⁹⁸ As of July 2022, 61 police force members have been killed, 34 in the line of duty, including in a July killing spree by the AGC killing 6 police by snipers and motorised hitmen.⁴⁹⁹ The Ministry of Defense stated that between January and June 2022, 77 murders of security force members have occurred.⁵⁰⁰

AGC offered reward money for killing police officers, and prior to Petro's election, had stepped up their offensives against police in July 2022. Other reasons for the violence have been described as revenge for police action against organized crime, a signal of strength by paramilitary groups, territorial expansion by armed groups, as well as failures of security and peace policies of the Duque administration,⁵⁰¹ and exertion of pressure on authorities ahead of possible peace talks.⁵⁰²

5.6. Collusion between state forces and illegal and criminal armed groups

Acts of collusion between authorities and illegal and criminal armed groups have been reported.⁵⁰³ Armed groups have 'grown adept at penetrating the military to gather intelligence' and by offering high payments to lower-level members of the security forces. The ELN, AGC, and FARC dissidents have been able to co-opt some military elements into providing information about operations or ignoring illicit activity in their sector.⁵⁰⁴ There have also been reports of acts of collusion between corporations and armed groups, particularly regarding opposition to development or extractive projects by local activists.⁵⁰⁵

FIP explained that collusion has evolved over the years with the conflict. During the years of conflict prior to the peace accord, collusion involved high level relationships between the AUC/Paramilitary groups and the government. However, now collusion happens informally and locally, depending on the corruption and interests of the local security forces. The collusion relationships happen on two levels:

- 1) Low level corruption of military ranks:⁵⁰⁶ The most common types of infiltration of the military involves low-level corruption where an armed group pay soldiers for their services such as providing intelligence, re-directing patrols, or ignoring trafficking activities. Armed groups also try to recruit former members of the military who

⁴⁹⁷ Reuters, Mexican cartels swap arms for cocaine, fueling Colombia violence, 13 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁸ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁴⁹⁹ City Paper (The), Colombia's National Police face killing spree by Gulf Clan, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ UNHCR, Colombia: Monitoreo de protección (enero- junio 2022), June 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ Colombia Reports, Colombia's paramilitaries put target on police, 36 killed so far this year, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰² International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁵⁰³ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 7-8, 109-116; Colombia Reports, Colombia accuses former army captain of drug trafficking, 19 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁴ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁵⁰⁵ Al Jazeera, Colombian environmental activists deluged by threats, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁶ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA



understand military networks and can penetrate them.⁵⁰⁷ An example is a 2022 case of several army soldiers and a General who was reportedly part of La Cordillera, a criminal group linked to the AGC, which recruited active and retired military members to participate in illicit activities.⁵⁰⁸ In 2019, this General was reportedly the Director of the Action Plan for the Prevention and Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists (PAO), and a preliminary investigation has been opened by the Attorney General's Office.⁵⁰⁹

2) Cooperation based on relationships of convenience, for example, AGC and the security forces working together against the ELN.⁵¹⁰ For example, in February 2022, multiple officers, including a high-ranking army Colonel, were being investigated and held for having collaborated with AGC in Nariño in order to pushback the ELN, and facilitate coca and drug production in the department.⁵¹¹

FIP explained that there are also cases of collusion where there is no explicit relationship, but the armed groups instrumentalise the security forces for their own purposes. For example, they kill a social leader in an area belonging to another group to get the attention of the security forces and instigate an operation in the area to push out the other rival group.⁵¹² Collusion between the security forces and armed groups also impacts the population by creating mistrust in the security forces.⁵¹³

5.7. Civilians caught up in the middle

As explained in the chapter on [illegal armed groups](#), armed groups may also form alliances of convenience to further their illicit objectives and then break those alliances leading to armed clashes, causing civilian impacts in the process,⁵¹⁴ such as killings, disappearances, and forced recruitment.⁵¹⁵ It is also common for armed groups to kill civilians they perceive or accuse of supporting the other side,⁵¹⁶ including community social leaders, in order to set an example to remind the population who is in control and ensure their compliance.⁵¹⁷ This is made more complex when the military intervenes in confrontations between armed groups, sometimes

⁵⁰⁷ International Crisis Group, *Trapped in Conflict*, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 22

⁵⁰⁸ *El Espectador*, *Excomandante de las Fuerzas Militares sería parte de tentáculo del Clan del golfo*, 15 February 2022, [url](#); UN OHCHR, *Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno*, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 115; Colombia Reports, *Colombia accuses former army captain of drug trafficking*, 19 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁹ UN OHCHR, *Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno*, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 115

⁵¹⁰ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

⁵¹¹ Infobae, *A la cárcel oficial del Ejército relacionado con el clan del Golfo*, 15 February 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹² FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

⁵¹³ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

⁵¹⁴ HRW, *Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups*, 28 March 2022, [url](#); InSight Crime, *ELN and Urabeños War Again in Northern Colombia*, 16 August 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, *Leaders Under Fire*, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 12

⁵¹⁵ HRW, *Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups*, 28 March 2022, [url](#); HRW, *"The Guerrillas Are the Police,"* 22 January 2020, [url](#)

⁵¹⁶ HRW, *Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups*, 28 March 2022, [url](#); Wesche, P. *Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 322; International Crisis Group, *Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia*, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁵¹⁷ Wesche, P. *Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 322



using intervention as an excuse to further intensify their own campaigns.⁵¹⁸ However the depletion of one group by the military may create perceptions by armed groups that local rural population is colluding with the military.⁵¹⁹ In areas where there are clashes between the state and armed groups, there is ‘a risk of stigmatization’ of the civilian population accused of collaborating with armed groups. People who provide information to the state have been subjected to reprisals from armed groups, including killings.⁵²⁰ Also after security operations there are often reprisals against the community who are perceived to be informants. There have been cases where social leaders have been prevented from leaving their territory because armed groups think they will pass information to the security forces, so they impose confinements.⁵²¹

For example:

- In January 2022, along the Colombia-Venezuela border, clashes broke out between the ELN and the First Front, over control of territory and illegal activities in Arauca department (Colombia) and Apure state (Venezuela). Guerrillas from both sides, previously allies, and also members of the Venezuela armed forces (supporting ELN), have committed ‘brutal abuses’ in border areas. The groups reportedly killed ‘dozens of people’ and the clashes caused nearly 4 000 people in Colombia to be displaced and more than 3 300 in Venezuela.⁵²²
- In March 2022, the military carried out an operation in Putumayo to capture a leader of the Comandos de la Frontera while a civilian bazaar with 30-50 people and children was taking place nearby. The operation resulted in 11 people being killed and 4 injured, mostly civilians.⁵²³
- In Bolívar, a ‘highly coveted region for criminal groups’ due to mineral wealth and drug trafficking routes, relative calm between ELN and AGC, two major armed groups, was disrupted in August 2022. The ELN and AGC have been involved in hostilities in a number of departments such as Chocó, Norte de Santander, and Antioquia. In Bolívar, after the FARC-EP demobilisation, the AGC moved into the traditionally ELN-dominated region and fought for three years until they ended fighting by forming an alliance to keep other legal and illegal actors out of the area and continue their illicit activity. After several years, in August 2022, armed confrontations sparked up again between the groups, causing displacement of 600 families, despite public promises by the group to participate in peace processes under the new President Petro.⁵²⁴

The Colombian military has a historical legacy of ‘atrocities,’ abuses and excessive use of force against rural communities, often without punishment, leading to distrust by the local population. Reforms made later under the peace agreement now allow for abuses by the military during the pre-2016 era such as ‘false positive’ cases to be tried in the transitional

⁵¹⁸ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁵¹⁹ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁵²⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 33

⁵²¹ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

⁵²² HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵²³ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 36

⁵²⁴ InSight Crime, ELN and Urabeños War Again in Northern Colombia, 16 August 2022, [url](#); see also: El Tiempo, Más de 600 familias desplazadas dejan comates entre ilegales en sur de Bolívar, 10 August 2022, [url](#)



justice system, while abuses now carried out under during operations are handled by the Attorney General's Office rather than the internal military system.⁵²⁵ During 2021, the UN received allegations of 'arbitrary deprivation of life' by public security forces in conflict-affected areas, including at least 6 out of 27 verified cases where deaths occurred during operations against these groups. In 2022, 45 allegations were received and are being processed.⁵²⁶ There have also been local reports of the Venezuelan military logistically aiding ELN and Segunda Marquetalia to fight the FARC dissident factions aligned with First Front.⁵²⁷

5.8. Capacity and willingness of illegal armed groups to track and trace targets

Sources indicate that illegal armed groups expand their presence and influence through sub-contracting to smaller groups and criminal outfits,⁵²⁸ as well as operating internationally due to participation in international criminal networks.⁵²⁹ Sources consulted by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) stated that 'criminal groups are "definitely" able to track targeted individuals'. The sources indicated this mainly happens through word-of-mouth and country-wide networks of 'urban collaborators' or hiring local urban contacts.⁵³⁰ Regarding whether there was variation in the capacity of various armed actors to conduct such tracking, such as larger versus smaller groups, two sources gave similar views that while almost all armed groups and dissident groups can [track and trace targets], generally, the more national the group, the more likely it is for them to trace someone. Hence a FARC dissident faction, the ELN, or the AGC would be better able to do so than a local delinquent organisation. It does however not rule out that a small group could track someone, particularly because many of these smaller gangs are contracted by larger organisations and hence have access to the extended national networks.⁵³¹ Similarly, the Political Analyst remarked that the AGC or ELN are more likely to be able to carry out coordinated actions, while smaller groups in remote communities would have a more limited scope. However, the source stated that if a group has identified a specific individual as a target, they have the capacity within their criminal networks to effectively carry out a threat. The source stated that 'it is very difficult to know the extent to which armed groups are capable of scaling up their targeting capacity from a local area to an urban centre.'⁵³²

The Conflict Analyst interviewed by IRB remarked that such groups would more easily rely on tracking people through family ties or asking within communities rather than trying to access

⁵²⁵ International Crisis Group, *Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia*, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 22-23

⁵²⁶ UN OHCHR, *Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno*, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 36

⁵²⁷ ACLED, *Regional Overview: South America 12-18 February 2022*, 24 February 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁵²⁸ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA; FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA; Gil Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

⁵²⁹ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA

⁵³⁰ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Colombia: Targets of criminal groups*, 13 August 2021, [url](#);

McDermott, J., *Comments made during the review of this report*, 14 November 2022

⁵³¹ Conflict Analyst, 25 February 2022, Correspondence with EUAA; Gil Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

⁵³² Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA



governmental information for such purposes.⁵³³ A professor interviewed by the IRB in 2021 indicated that in addition to using criminal networks across the country, criminal groups ‘track their victims through informants, contacts in intelligence agencies and the army’.⁵³⁴ In partial corroboration to this, the Conflict Analyst interviewed by EUAA remarked that ‘penetration of local institutions does happen’ and although the analyst did not know of specific cases, indicated that this is a possible strategy that armed groups could use.⁵³⁵

On the issue of factors that influence whether an armed group tracks or traces a person across different regions, the Political Analyst remarked that ‘it is very difficult to generalise.’⁵³⁶ Professor Gil Ramírez remarked similarly that there is no generalised logic to locate/target someone; the criminal world does not follow established patterns of violence, and a person threatened by a local gang in one place may be attacked again, while another person may move away from an AGC threat without problems. It is highly dependent on local factors, and the effectiveness of protection and ability to relocate depend to a large extent on the nature of the group issuing threats, and the motivations for doing so.⁵³⁷ The analyst stated that it is necessary to analyse the specific profile of the targeted person’s local and political situation, threats faced, cases they’ve been involved in or reported on, potential linkages to criminal, armed groups, or the state itself, as well as whether the person comes from an at-risk geographic area, and the local dynamics of the area where they experienced threats.⁵³⁸ The Conflict Analyst stated similarly that a criminal or armed group may or may not necessarily track an individual target if ‘the annoyance is removed’.⁵³⁹ Jeremy McDermott commented that each targeting situation can be different, depending on the group, the location, the profile, including in relation to large cities such as Medellín, Cali, and Bogotá, where the dynamics of armed structures are each distinct.⁵⁴⁰

Sources cited by IRB report that illegal armed groups are more likely to track down individuals with a high profile, or who continue advocacy work for their communities after being displaced, or those who are capable of encroaching on territory or limiting the group’s operations.⁵⁴¹ The Political Analyst stated that factors influencing the tracking of a target stem from the person’s material or operational impediment to the group’s ability to carry out its intended objectives. For example, someone who could provide information to the authorities that would make the group’s operations less effective.⁵⁴² Similarly, the Conflict Analyst stated that,

‘Usually the more serious the threat [to the person] locally, the more likely the person is to be pursued in other cities. Some frequent examples of “serious” offenses, according to an armed group, would be if a leader or threatened person is accused of being an

⁵³³ Conflict Analyst, 25 February 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

⁵³⁴ Conflict Analyst, 25 February 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

⁵³⁵ Conflict Analyst, 4 November 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

⁵³⁶ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

⁵³⁷ Gil Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

⁵³⁸ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

⁵³⁹ Canada, IRB, Colombia: Targets of criminal groups (2019-June 2021) [COL200703.E], 13 August 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁰ McDermott, J., Comments made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁵⁴¹ Canada, IRB, Colombia: Targets of criminal groups (2019-June 2021) [COL200703.E], 13 August 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁴² Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA



informant (either to the military or to another armed group), trying to avoid recruitment into a group (for example a child or youth and his or her family), or someone perceived to have a debt with an armed group. [...] economic elites sometimes threaten people, or have [sic] powerful political and military contacts, who would have even more means to follow someone'.⁵⁴³

Similarly, Jeremy McDermott remarked that:

'Regarding reaching a person who is considered by an armed group as high value or high profile, if a hit is out on that individual, there are local 'oficinas' in most cities, so if there is enough interest or money to pay for it, the group can find someone almost anywhere; but they must want to kill them. In most cases, the group just want the problematic person out of their business. If the target is sitting on strategic or tactical intelligence about a group, they might be prepared to shell out a lot of money to have them murdered. They can often find people by tracking their social media and pressuring friends and family in the area in order to find someone they wish to target.'⁵⁴⁴

On the issue of whether targets have been pursued to other locations, the Conflict Analyst stated that their organisation was 'aware of numerous cases of human rights defenders who were displaced from rural areas to Bogotá and have subsequently been approached by the same group in the city with threats, photos of their activities, and clear evidence that they are being watched once again. They do this through their networks of fighters or paid agents throughout the country.'⁵⁴⁵ The Conflict Analyst observed that 'the efficiency of successfully tracking a person depends on the group, who the targeted person is, how badly the group wants to find him or her, and whether that person's family members are willing to (or pressured to) share information about their whereabouts'.⁵⁴⁶ Similarly, Dejusticia remarked that the effectiveness of relocation for a social leader will depend on their profile, noting that in some cases, criminal organisations do follow them even in large cities, giving the example of a peasant leader who relocated to Bogotá in 2022 and still received threats while staying at a hotel there.⁵⁴⁷

Sources stated that it is much more difficult to relocate from a threat for people in rural areas compared to those in urban areas, where the state is more accessible;⁵⁴⁸ however, the Political Analyst remarked that state capacity in urban areas is still lacking and the ability to relocate to an urban area is 'case by case'.⁵⁴⁹ Dejusticia, a Colombia-based research and advocacy organisation dedicated to the strengthening of the rule of law, social/environmental justice and human rights that monitors judicial effectiveness, commented in an interview with EUAA for this report that, 'when a social leader has a wide range of work around the country

⁵⁴³ Conflict Analyst, 25 February 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

⁵⁴⁴ McDermott, J., Comments made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁵⁴⁵ Conflict Analyst, 25 February 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

⁵⁴⁶ Conflict Analyst, 25 February 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

⁵⁴⁷ Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

⁵⁴⁸ CONPA, 17 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA; Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA

⁵⁴⁹ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA



or at least in several departments, it is more likely that they are attacked again or constantly threatened, regardless of their location.’ Relocation does occur too, however social leaders usually do not have enough money to live in a large city and would lose their connections to the local communities where they work. For this reason, they frequently return to the places where they were attacked after short periods of time and find the loss of connections with family deepen psychological difficulties.⁵⁵⁰ Regarding the situation of re-victimisation, Professor Ramírez stated that in the case of victims of intra-urban displacement, they are not seen as ‘victims’ by the Victims Unit, and despite a Constitutional Court decision (T 268 of 2003⁵⁵¹), applications from intra-urban victims of displacement were being rejected and due to the lack of official assistance, victims have to rebuild their lives without state support and relying on self-protection measures. It is also common for someone to relocate and enter new dynamics with new or different armed actors or groups.⁵⁵² Similarly, the Conflict Analyst remarked that ‘it is very difficult to have intra-urban displacement recognised by any authorities.’ Without providing specific information about the Victims Unit, the Analyst stated that ‘it is so common and widespread that it is rarely taken seriously by the authorities.’⁵⁵³ Dejusticia stated that relocation as a security measure depends on several factors, such as the availability of a possible replacement for work (in order to obtain a livelihood), the possibility of living with relatives, and the sustained conditions of security.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵⁰ Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

⁵⁵¹ Colombia, Corte Constitucional, Sentencia T-268/03, 2003, [url](#)

⁵⁵² Gil Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

⁵⁵³ Conflict Analyst, Correspondence with the EUAA, 4 November 2022

⁵⁵⁴ Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA



6. Impact on civilians

ICRC reported that the civilian population in 2021-2022 is under ‘increasing pressure’ from the reconfiguration of armed groups, their increased armed confrontations, social control and disputes over territory.⁵⁵⁵ Sources indicate the following are the main types of violence encountered by civilian populations and those refraining from participation in hostilities:

- Social control by armed groups⁵⁵⁶ or ‘social cleansing’ through imposed ‘moral’ regulations;⁵⁵⁷
- Threats⁵⁵⁸ [usually in the form of pamphlets, phone calls, text messages, social networks or through intermediary persons⁵⁵⁹];
- Homicides⁵⁶⁰ and femicides;⁵⁶¹
- Massacres;
- Targeted assassinations of social leaders/HRDs/peace agreement signatories;
- Aggression by security forces during social disturbances/protests;
- clashes with illegal armed groups and with security forces;⁵⁶²
- Arbitrary deprivation of liberty: kidnapping, hostage-taking, disappearances;
- Movement restrictions and confinement;
- Forced displacement including large scale and individual/familial displacement;
- Forced recruitment;
- Sexual violence;
- Impacts from explosive artifacts such as land mines;⁵⁶³
- Being perceived to be cooperating with either the state or with armed groups.⁵⁶⁴

Violence and violations of rights particularly impact those who have been historically affected by the patterns of violence in Colombia, such as indigenous and Afro-Colombian people, peasants/*campesinos*, women, and children/youth.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁵⁵ ICRC, Colombia: Retos humanitarios 2022, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁵⁶ HRW, “The Guerrillas Are the Police,” 22 January 2022, [url](#); ICRC, Colombia: Retos humanitarios 2022, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁵⁷ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 19

⁵⁵⁸ ICRC, Colombia: Retos humanitarios 2022, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3; Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 20; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 55

⁵⁵⁹ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 39; see also: Canada, IRB, Colombia: Pamphlets produced by criminal groups declaring a person to be a “military target” (COL200906.E), 9 February 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁰ ICRC, Colombia: Retos humanitarios 2022, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3; Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 20

⁵⁶¹ New Humanitarian (The), A Colombian town’s spike in femicides is linked to armed groups, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶² Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 20

⁵⁶³ ICRC, Colombia: Retos humanitarios 2022, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3; Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 20

⁵⁶⁴ Wesche, P., Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 333

⁵⁶⁵ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 3; UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#)



6.1. Homicides

People who were killed during the armed conflict are counted as homicides in Colombia by the Truth Commission.⁵⁶⁶ The Truth Commission found that around 450 666 homicides committed between 1985 and 2018 were related to the armed conflict. This figure on homicides includes both civilians and combatants, including those killed in clashes, as it was not possible to disaggregate this variable from some databases.⁵⁶⁷

Colombia's National Institute for Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses, INMLCF) is attached to the FGN and also tracks homicides in Colombia. Regarding the tracking of homicides, it observes that homicide is defined as the death caused to one person by another, which is an expression of violence that has marked the history of Colombia for decades. The INMLCF does not classify the reasons for homicides, which is the role of the FGN.⁵⁶⁸ There are numerous contexts in which homicides occur, and for 2020 the most frequent were: 1) interpersonal violence, which involves settling scores, legal intervention and fights, and 2) socio-political violence. However, the most frequent forms of conflict in the Colombian territory come from illegal armed groups and from military actions.⁵⁶⁹

The INMLCF documented a decrease in the homicide rate between 2011 to 2016, followed by an increase in 2018 and slight decrease in 2019-2020 due to pandemic related restrictions.⁵⁷⁰ The Ministry of Defense's statistics reported an increase in 2021: there were 13 362 non-uniformed civilians killed in homicides, the highest number since 2014; and there were 11 021 killed by homicide in 2022 as of October.⁵⁷¹ INMLCF reported that most homicide victims were male (especially indigenous and Afro-descendants), and most were caused by shootings (over 75 %) and stabbings (15 %).⁵⁷² The homicide rate was highest in 2020 in Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina, Cauca and Valle del Cauca. Likewise, the municipalities with the highest homicide rates were Puerto Santander (Norte de Santander), Algeria (Cauca) and Cairo (Valle del Cauca).⁵⁷³ Insight Crime's map below shows homicide rates based on DANE data which indicates Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Arauca, and Caquetá had the highest homicide rates as of March 2022.⁵⁷⁴ FIP also reported on homicides, noting that 2020 was an atypical year due to pandemic-related restrictions; however 2021 indicated was highest since 2016. PDET and PNIS areas generally had higher homicide rates than the national average, as indicated by the graph provided below from FIP based on police statistics.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁶⁶ Colombia, CEV, *Hasta la guerra tiene límites*, August 2022, [url](#), p. 49

⁵⁶⁷ Colombia, CEV, *Hasta la guerra tiene límites*, August 2022, [url](#), p. 49

⁵⁶⁸ Colombia, INMLCF, *Forensis: Datos Para La Vida 2020*, April 2022, [url](#), p. 85

⁵⁶⁹ Colombia, INMLCF, *Forensis: Datos Para La Vida 2020*, April 2022, [url](#), p. 85

⁵⁷⁰ Colombia, IFMLCF, *Forensis: Datos Para La Vida 2020*, April 2022, [url](#), p. 85

⁵⁷¹ Colombia, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, *Logros de la política de defensa y seguridad*, [Last updated October 2022], [url](#), p. 9

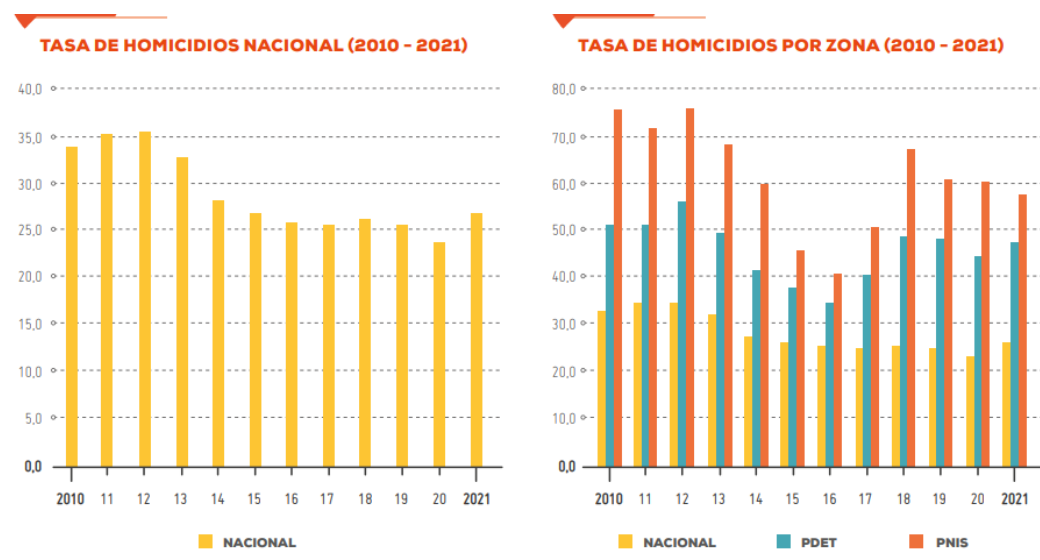
⁵⁷² Colombia, INMLCF, *Forensis: Datos Para La Vida 2020*, April 2022, [url](#), p. 99

⁵⁷³ Colombia, INMLCF, *Forensis: Datos Para La Vida 2020*, April 2022, [url](#), p. 83

⁵⁷⁴ Insight Crime, *Homicide Rate in Colombia*, March 2022, information provided to EUAA

⁵⁷⁵ FIP, *Ni Paz Ni Guerra*, May 2022, [url](#), p. 33





Fuente: Elaboración propia con cifras de la Policía Nacional

Figure 13: Homicide rates from 2010-2021, including in PDET and PNIS areas⁵⁷⁶

Insight Crime provided EUAA with a map of homicide rates as of 2022:

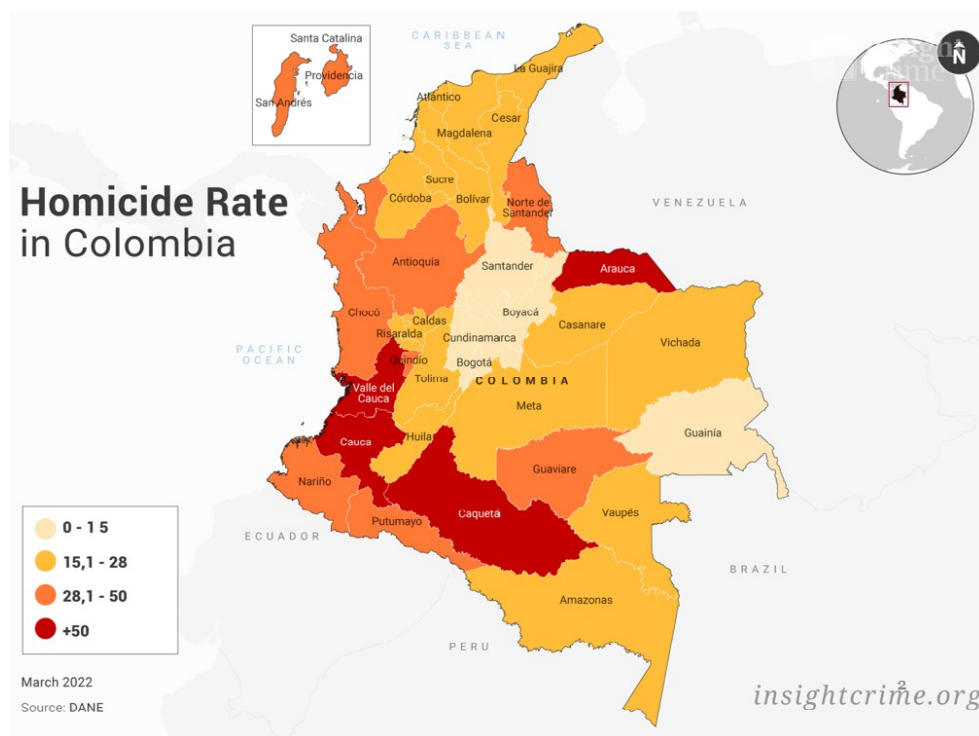


Figure 14: Homicide rate in Colombia based on DANE statistics, March 2022⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁶ FIP, Ni Paz Ni Guerra, May 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁵⁷⁷ Insight Crime, Homicide Rate in Colombia, March 2022, information provided to EUAA



Futuros Urbanos, a Colombian thinktank focused on analysing urban issues, conducted a 2022 report on contracted homicides by hitmen (*sicariato*) in major cities, and reported that according to police data, contract-killings are the most important type of homicide affecting the security of Colombia's main cities. The report stated that this type of killing has registered 'constant growth' since 2017.⁵⁷⁸ Cities in the Caribbean region showed a 'considerable increase' in contracted homicides and indicates an upward trend.⁵⁷⁹ Principal causes include drug trafficking, struggles to control territory, control of drug sales, and settling accounts between criminal organisations. Contract-killing is multi-causal, originating from multiple factors such as those above, as well as family problems, revenge, profit, personal problems, settling accounts, among others.⁵⁸⁰ Between 2017-2021, recorded homicide cases done by *sicarios* ['hitmen'] doubled from 4 080 to 8 161 cases.⁵⁸¹ In 2021, more than 1 000 of those assassinations were in Colombia's five largest cities.⁵⁸² So far in 2022, 61 % of the total homicides registered were carried out by contract-killing, mainly using firearms. *Sicariato* homicides were concentrated in five main cities by level of impact: Cali, Bogotá, Cartagena, Medellín, Barranquilla.⁵⁸³ The main profile of victims are young males (94 %).⁵⁸⁴

In relation to homicide rates in urban centres, Jeremy McDermott observed that where there is one group that has total hegemony, the murder rates tend to be low because the group does not need to kill people because they are dominant, do not have as many disputes, works in tandem with local authorities, and do not want to attract attention. If they are powerful in the area, then no other groups can operate and they are more entrenched in the local economy; people are not inclined to disrupt their hegemony.⁵⁸⁵ Similarly, Professor Gil Ramírez and a report by the Medellín mayor's office also stated that in neighbourhoods where an armed actor has established hegemonic power and control, homicides and the excessive use of violence tend to decrease, and groups instead use displacement to avoid raising the attention of civil authorities or security forces.⁵⁸⁶

6.1.1. Armed attacks, military operations, and civilian deaths

This section should be read in conjunction with sections on dynamics of the conflict, and chapters on interaction dynamics, as well as homicides, particularly definitions of how civilian deaths related to armed conflict are tracked in Colombia. According to the Conflict Analyst interviewed for this report, 'there is no official way of counting civilian deaths and there are differences between the military, the police, civil society, international organisations. Even among state institutions, the official counts may differ.'⁵⁸⁷

Confrontations between armed groups are at the highest level since the peace deal was signed in 2016, with 2021 the most violent year since the signing of the accords, according to

⁵⁷⁸ Futuros Urbanos, *Panorama Del Sicariato En Las Principales Ciudades Del País*, August 2022, [url](#), p. 3, 4

⁵⁷⁹ Futuros Urbanos, *Panorama Del Sicariato En Las Principales Ciudades Del País*, August 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁵⁸⁰ Futuros Urbanos, *Panorama Del Sicariato En Las Principales Ciudades Del País*, August 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁸¹ Futuros Urbanos, *Panorama Del Sicariato En Las Principales Ciudades Del País*, August 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁸² Colombia Reports, *Assassinations driving increase in Colombia's homicides: report*, 29 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸³ Colombia Reports, *Assassinations driving increase in Colombia's homicides: report*, 29 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁴ Futuros Urbanos, *Panorama Del Sicariato En Las Principales Ciudades Del País*, August 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁸⁵ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁵⁸⁶ Medellín, *El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín: Categorización de un fenómeno complejo*, 2019, [url](#), pp. 69, 70; Gil-Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

⁵⁸⁷ Conflict Analyst, Correspondence with EUAA, 4 November 2022



ICRC,⁵⁸⁸ Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) war crimes tribunal determined that 2021 was the most violent year since the government and FARC-EP signed the accord, with the highest number of massacres, massive forced displacements, armed clashes between security forces and armed groups, harassment of security forces and child recruitment.⁵⁸⁹ State forces' operations intended to fight against armed groups can have 'blowback' on civilians with captures of armed group members often causing waves of retaliatory violence and displacement. Also when successful operations occur, armed groups retaliate against civilians, accusing locals of collaboration with the military. The military frequently also has difficulty discerning collaborators or combatants from actual civilians.⁵⁹⁰ Throughout the reference period, there were reports of civilians killed during military operations and due to attacks by illegal armed groups in 2022, such as:

- In March 2022, 11 people were killed in a Putumayo operation which the government claimed was against armed groups; however, local communities and civil society groups later reported that civilians and social leaders were those killed.⁵⁹¹
- In May 2022, AGC carried out a 4-day 'armed strike' to protest the extradition of their former leader, Otoniel (Dairo Antonio Úsaga⁵⁹²) who was extradited to the US for federal prosecution.⁵⁹³ The armed strike mainly affected Antioquia, Bolívar, Córdoba, and Sucre departments.⁵⁹⁴ It caused 'widespread violence' according to the UN, impacting 178 communities in 11 departments; there were over 300 acts of violence against civilians including the killing of 24 people, and 22 attacks against security forces, causing 2 deaths.⁵⁹⁵

6.2. Massacres

Massacres continue to be documented after the peace accord, including in Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities and as a form of extreme violence are used to intimidate local populations.⁵⁹⁶ Used to 'keep entire towns in line', massacres are also used by illegal armed groups to retaliate and punish people perceived to be working or have the appearance of

⁵⁸⁸ New York Times (The), Deep in Colombia, Rebels and Soldiers Fight for the Same Prize: Drugs, 20 April 2022, [url](#); New Humanitarian (The), Why Colombia's next president will have to hit the humanitarian ground running, 15 June 2022, [url](#); ICRC, Colombia, Living in the shadow of armed conflict, 23 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁹ Colombia Reports, Armed conflict resurged throughout Colombia: war crimes tribunal, 19 February 2022, [url](#); See also: Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 9-11

⁵⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, Trapped in Conflict: Reforming Military Strategy to Save Lives in Colombia, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 27; Al Jazeera, 'A massacre': Deadly Colombia military operation sparks outrage, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁹¹ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513), [url](#), para. 10; New York Times (The), Deep in Colombia, Rebels and Soldiers Fight for the Same Prize: Drugs, 20 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁹² Otoniel formerly controlled large areas of Colombia's coastline and led the Clan del Golfo's global cocaine distribution chain; there were 500 open legal cases against him in Colombia for crimes committed 2007-2021, including a 40-year sentence for a massacre of 30 civilians by paramilitaries in 1997. InSight Crime, Otoniel's Extradition Heralds End for a Generation of Colombian Traffickers, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁹³ Reuters, Colombia's Clan del Golfo attacks vehicles to protest Otoniel extradition, 2 May 2022, [url](#); UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513), [url](#), para. 12; France24, Colombia: Violence continues even after cartel's 'armed strike' ends, 20 May 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁴ Reuters, Colombia's Clan del Golfo attacks vehicles to protest Otoniel extradition, 2 May 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁵ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513), 27 June 2022, [url](#), para. 12

⁵⁹⁶ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 17-18; New York Times (The), Colombia Sees Surge in Mass Killings Despite Historic Peace Deal, 13 September 2020, [url](#)



collaborating with a rival.⁵⁹⁷ The Ministry of Defence statistics on ‘collective homicide’ noted an upward trend since 2016⁵⁹⁸ and the UN reported that the official number of massacres increased by 200 % between 2016-2021.⁵⁹⁹ Indepaz documented 91 massacres in 2020, affecting 381 victims; 96 massacres in 2021 killing 338 people, and 87 massacres with 274 victims [up to 31 October 2022].⁶⁰⁰ Departments especially affected have been Antioquia, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Nariño, Norte de Santander, and Putumayo.⁶⁰¹

6.3. Kidnapping

Kidnapping was intensely problematic during the height of the Colombian conflict from the late 1990s,⁶⁰² and especially 2003-2012, in both urban and rural areas and financed FARC’s expansion in the 1990s, however, since 2012 the practice has declined and did so even further after the 2016 demobilisation.⁶⁰³ ELN still continues to use kidnapping but not to the same extent as in the 1990s; rates have declined sharply since 2002. In more than 75 % of kidnapping cases, no perpetrator is ever determined.⁶⁰⁴ There were 207 reported kidnappings in 2016, 195 in 2017, 176 in 2018, 163 in 2019, 192 in 2020, 160 in 2021, and 154 in 2022, as of October 2022.⁶⁰⁵ Armed groups such as ELN and FARC dissidents still engage in kidnapping civilians, including subjecting them to forced labour or as punishment for violation of group rules.⁶⁰⁶ Kidnappings for the purpose of extortion in cities were also reported.⁶⁰⁷

6.4. Enforced disappearances

Enforced disappearances are used by all armed groups to instil fear in the population and ensure social control.⁶⁰⁸ A new disappearance case was reported every second day in Colombia in 2021, totalling 168 cases throughout the year (145 civilians and 23 members of state forces or armed groups).⁶⁰⁹ From 2016 to 2019, disappearances increased nationally and

⁵⁹⁷ New York Times (The), Deep in Colombia, Rebels and Soldiers Fight for the Same Prize: Drugs, 20 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁸ Colombia, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Logros de la política de defensa y seguridad, [Last updated October 2022], [url](#), pp. 10-11

⁵⁹⁹ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 17-18

⁶⁰⁰ Indepaz, Masacres en Colombia durante el 2020, 2021, y 2022, [Last updated: 31 October 2022], [url](#); For example, see: Telesur, Colombia: Indepaz Denounces New Massacre in Cauca, 2 August 2022, [url](#); Telesur, 83rd Massacre in Colombia’s Cali, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁰¹ Indepaz, Masacres en Colombia durante el 2020, 2021, y 2022, [Last updated: 31 October 2022], [url](#); UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 17-18

⁶⁰² McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁶⁰³ Colombia Reports, Kidnapping and extortion, 8 June 2022, [url](#); See also: Colombia, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Logros de la política de defensa y seguridad, [Last updated October 2022], [url](#), p. 13

⁶⁰⁴ Colombia Reports, Kidnapping and extortion, 8 June 2022, [url](#);

⁶⁰⁵ Colombia, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Logros de la política de defensa y seguridad, [Last updated October 2022], [url](#), p. 13

⁶⁰⁶ HRW, “The Guerrillas Are the Police”, 22 January 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁷ Futuros Urbanos, Comportamiento Del Delito Extorsivo En Las 10 Principales Ciudades Del Pais, October 2022, [url](#), p. 3-4

⁶⁰⁸ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 45-46; ICRC, Colombia: Retos humanitarios 2022, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁰⁹ ICRC, Colombia: Retos humanitarios 2022, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 6



in conflict-affected areas, dropping in 2020 and 2021.⁶¹⁰ Areas with the highest numbers of forced disappearances in 2016-2021 were Nariño, Antioquia, Cauca, Norte de Santander, and Putumayo.⁶¹¹ In departments with international borders, the permeability of those borders increases the risk of disputes between armed groups and associated disappearances. The state has a legal framework and robust institutional mechanisms to protect people against disappearances, however important challenges undermine their effectiveness, including issues of access to justice and delays in initiating searches.⁶¹²

6.5. Forced recruitment, including of children/youth

In a 2022 study on recruitment of children/youth to armed groups, the Colombian Observatory on Organised Crime (OCCO, Observatorio Colombiano de Crimen Organizado), an academic think tank focused on criminality in Colombia, used the concept of 'illicit recruitment' when describing the phenomenon, meaning being incorporated into the ranks of armed groups to fulfill different functions and thus satisfy the organisation's needs, whether this is as combatants, cooks, nurses, or other functions, such as gathering information, extortion collection, or selling drugs.⁶¹³ According to International Crisis Group, 'forced recruitment of both Colombian nationals and Venezuelan migrants has been on the increase since 2017 and rose notably after the COVID-19 pandemic started'. Forced recruitment into armed groups and street gangs often targets Venezuelan migrants, who rely on informal labour and have few resources and who are enticed with payment, food and shelter. It occurs both in border areas and throughout the country.⁶¹⁴ OCCO also reported that recruitment of youth occurred in both rural and urban contexts, especially in poor and marginalised neighbourhoods.⁶¹⁵

Forced recruitment of minors continues to be reported in Colombia and since the 2016 peace agreement has increased as illegal armed groups seek to boost their ranks in the absence of the FARC-EP and in the midst of competition for territory.⁶¹⁶ According to the UN, children and youth are disproportionately affected by the armed conflict and suffer lack of education prospects, food security, or means of livelihoods making them vulnerable to recruitment to armed groups.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁰ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay, 22 April 2022, [url](#), p. 17

⁶¹¹ For a trend graph and map see Pares, Plomo es lo que hay, 22 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 17-19

⁶¹² UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 45-46

⁶¹³ OCCO, La niñez reclutada. La participación de niños, niñas y adolescentes en el crimen organizado y conflicto después del Acuerdo de Paz, 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

⁶¹⁴ International Crisis Group, Hard Times in a Safe Haven, 9 August 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁶¹⁵ OCCO, La niñez reclutada. La participación de niños, niñas y adolescentes en el crimen organizado y conflicto después del Acuerdo de Paz, 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

⁶¹⁶ OCCO, La niñez reclutada. La participación de niños, niñas y adolescentes en el crimen organizado y conflicto después del Acuerdo de Paz, 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6; Insight Crime, How Colombia's Lockdown Created Ideal Conditions for Child Recruitment, 28 August 2020, [url](#); Insight Crime, Despite Peace Agreement, Child Recruitment Plagues Colombia, 22 February 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹⁷ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 54-57; See also: OCCO, La niñez reclutada. La participación de niños, niñas y adolescentes en el crimen organizado y conflicto después del Acuerdo de Paz, 2022, [url](#), p. 10; Insight Crime, Despite Peace Agreement, Child Recruitment Plagues Colombia, 22 February 2022, [url](#)



Armed groups perpetrated recruitment of children, including FARC-dissident groups who were among the top perpetrators, and the ELN.⁶¹⁸ The FARC-EP was the main child recruiter from 1960 to 2016, however after the peace agreement, the ELN has been a main recruiter.⁶¹⁹ The threat of recruitment to urban gangs and criminal *combos* is also a cause of intra-urban displacement.⁶²⁰ Children are recruited to armed groups with offers of money, telephones, and are also intimidated and threatened to join.⁶²¹ Armed groups expose children and youth to trafficking, exploitation, and sexual slavery.⁶²² Threats of child recruitment forced families to move, most commonly in Arauca and in Meta.⁶²³

Cases of recruitment of children are underreported.⁶²⁴ Most reported cases occurred in Antioquia, Arauca, Caquetá, Chocó, Córdoba, Guaviare, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Tolima,⁶²⁵ and Putumayo.⁶²⁶ A study on child recruitment by the Colombian Observatory on Organized Crime (Observatorio Colombiano de Crimen Organizado, OCCO), found that armed groups concentrated on recruiting boys aged 12-15 and recruited over 1 000 youth during the four year study (2017-2020), with Indigenous and Afro-Colombians being most at risk. Seventeen departments represent 96 % of all cases, with a significant proportion (56 %) occurring in PDET municipalities.⁶²⁷ Reported cases of recruitment of children and youth increased in 2021.⁶²⁸ In 2021, the OHCHR received 51 alleged cases of recruitment and documented 8 killings and 3 sexual violence cases against children and youth. For the same year the government reported receiving 98 reported cases of children and youth involved being in activities of armed groups, and 94 cases of children and youth who said they were recruited by illegal armed groups.⁶²⁹ Between 2019-2021, more than 270 children from the Nasa tribe in the north of Cauca were victims of recruitment by illegal armed groups.⁶³⁰ In March 2022, indigenous authorities reported that more than 30 indigenous children and youth had committed suicide in Chocó, Antioquia, Nariño, and Cauca, to avoid being recruited by FARC dissidents, ELN, and the AGC.⁶³¹ A 2022 study on the participation of youth in organised crime since the peace accords found that both rural and urban populations are at risk, with Montería and Medellín among the top 10 municipalities with the highest number of cases.⁶³²

⁶¹⁸ UNSC, Children and armed conflict in Colombia - Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1022), 8 December 2021, [url](#)

⁶¹⁹ ACAPS, Colombia – Impact of the armed conflict on children and youth, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁶²⁰ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁶²¹ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 54-57; Guardian (The), Armed groups target Colombia's children as reform process slows, 9 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶²² UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 54-57

⁶²³ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 27

⁶²⁴ OCCO, La niñez reclutada. La participación de niños, niñas y adolescentes en el crimen organizado y conflicto después del Acuerdo de Paz, 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

⁶²⁵ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 54-57. For a more detailed regional analysis, see also: OCCO, La niñez reclutada. La participación de niños, niñas y adolescentes en el crimen organizado y conflicto después del Acuerdo de Paz, 2022, [url](#)

⁶²⁶ Insight Crime, How Colombia's Lockdown Created Ideal Conditions for Child Recruitment, 28 August 2020, [url](#)

⁶²⁷ OCCO, La niñez reclutada. La participación de niños, niñas y adolescentes en el crimen organizado y conflicto después del Acuerdo de Paz, 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

⁶²⁸ UNOCHA, Global Humanitarian Overview 2022 – Colombia, [url](#)

⁶²⁹ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 54-57

⁶³⁰ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁶³¹ Infobae, At least 30 indigenous children in Chocó have committed suicide to avoid being recruited by armed groups, 19 March 2022, [url](#)

⁶³² OCCO, La niñez reclutada. La participación de niños, niñas y adolescentes en el crimen organizado y conflicto después del Acuerdo de Paz, 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6



Armed groups exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to escalate control and increase child recruitment with the closure of schools and worsened living conditions.⁶³³ As of August 2022, the government's early warning system (*Sistema de Alertas Tempranas, SAT*) that warns of human rights violations, has issued 15 Alerts relating to forced recruitment of children.⁶³⁴

6.6. Sexual and gender-based violence

Forms of sexual violence used during the conflict include rape, sexual slavery, early marriage, forced pregnancy, as a means of population control, to extract information, for punishment in the context of recruitment to armed groups of girls and youth, as well as for the purpose of trafficking and sexual labour.⁶³⁵ Between 1959-2020, 31% of those affected by sexual violence in the armed conflict were underage girls.⁶³⁶ Sexual violence against women and girls in the context of the conflict in Colombia has been documented as a widespread, invisible and systemic practice,⁶³⁷ that remains underreported.⁶³⁸ Boys are also abused and hindered from reporting.⁶³⁹ Though less well-documented, sexual violence against men and boys is even more silenced in Colombia than against women and girls due to societal and family shame, fear of reprisals and lack of protection from authorities.⁶⁴⁰ In areas where armed groups are present, victims experience increased barriers to institutional routes for care due to fear of reprisals, stigmatisation, distrust in authorities, revictimisation, lack of confidentiality and prejudice based on race, social background, gender, and age.⁶⁴¹

6.7. Anti-personnel mines, explosive remnants of war, and unexploded ordnance

Due to more than five decades of conflict, Colombia is the country with among the highest number of victims of anti-personnel mines in the world. Between 1999 and 2019, Afghanistan and Colombia alternated placement as the top country having the highest number of mine

⁶³³ Guardian (The), Armed groups target Colombia's children as reform process slows, 9 November 2020, [url](#); Insight Crime, How Colombia's Lockdown Created Ideal Conditions for Child Recruitment, 28 August 2020, [url](#); New Humanitarian, How Colombia's armed groups are exploiting COVID-19 to recruit children, 10 September 2020, [url](#); OCCO, La niñez reclutada. La participación de niños, niñas y adolescentes en el crimen organizado y conflicto después del Acuerdo de Paz, 2022, [url](#)

⁶³⁴ Colombia, CERD – Informes periódicos 20° y 21° combinados que la Colombia debía presentar en 2022 en virtud del artículo 9 de la Convención (CERD/C/COL/20-21), 6 October 2022, [url](#), para. 71

⁶³⁵ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 51-53

⁶³⁶ ACAPS, Colombia – Impact of the armed conflict on children and youth, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁶³⁷ ASP et al., Laying Down Arms Reclaiming Souls: Sexual violence against men and boys in the armed conflict in Colombia, 19 June 2022, [url](#), pp. 9, 12

⁶³⁸ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 51-53

⁶³⁹ ACAPS, Colombia – Impact of the armed conflict on children and youth, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁴⁰ ASP et al., Laying Down Arms Reclaiming Souls: Sexual violence against men and boys in the armed conflict in Colombia, 19 June 2022, [url](#), pp. 3, 9-11

⁶⁴¹ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 51-53; See also, ASP et al., Laying Down Arms Reclaiming Souls: Sexual violence against men and boys in the armed conflict in Colombia, 19 June 2022, [url](#), p. 24

casualties.⁶⁴² From 2012 to 2016 there was a decline in ERW events and casualties.⁶⁴³ Although the number of APM and ERW events dropped, and the number of victims dropped in 2016-2017, casualties per event have been increasing since then.⁶⁴⁴ Despite the peace agreement, improvised antipersonnel devices and mines are still used by armed groups and criminal groups involved in drug trafficking and illegal mineral extraction.⁶⁴⁵ Armed groups use explosive artifacts and improved devices to impede enemy advancement into specific areas.⁶⁴⁶ There were reportedly 15 631 'events' related to these devices between 2012-2022, leading to 1525 incidents causing injury or death, and a total of 2 341 killed or injured.⁶⁴⁷ According to UNMAS, since 2017, the number has increased from 58 victims to 179 (2018), 115 (2019), 174 (2020) and 151 (2021).⁶⁴⁸ For landmines specifically, the government of Colombia recorded 157 victims in 2021, and 89 to date in 2022.⁶⁴⁹ ICRC recorded 486 victims of explosive devices in 2021, which it deemed the highest number of the past five years, registering victims in 21 departments and 131 municipalities during that time.⁶⁵⁰ The UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) reported that most victims are adult (83.4 %) civilians (60.9 %) and disproportionately affected Afro-Colombian and Indigenous (28.5 %).⁶⁵¹ Colombia is considered to have 'medium' level of landmine contamination as of 2021, on par with Somalia and South Sudan.⁶⁵² There are an estimated 260 municipalities with known or suspected contamination, including 138 that are considered inaccessible or partly inaccessible.⁶⁵³ Contamination causes limitations on mobility, livelihoods, health, education, and causes confinement and displacement.⁶⁵⁴ The areas most affected are Nariño, Norte de Santander, and Antioquia,⁶⁵⁵ as well as Cauca, and Valle del Cauca.⁶⁵⁶

6.8. Attacks on health infrastructure

ICRC reported that Colombia has become increasingly dangerous place to deliver health care, due to attacks on health workers, health facilities and vehicles, which have 'increased considerably' over the past three years. There were 218 cases of aggression against health

⁶⁴² ICBL-CMC, Land Mine Monitor 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#), p. 42

⁶⁴³ ACAPS, Colombia – Antipersonnel mines and explosive remnants of war, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁶⁴⁴ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 21

⁶⁴⁵ ICBL-CMC, Land Mine Monitor 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#), p. 12; ACAPS, Colombia – Antipersonnel mines and explosive remnants of war, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁶ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 21

⁶⁴⁷ Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, "Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras", Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), p. 88

⁶⁴⁸ UNMAS, Boletín de Noticias, February 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁹ Colombia, Estadísticas de asistencia integral a las víctimas de MAP y MUSE, 30 September 2022, [url](#). See also: Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, "Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras", Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), p. 88

⁶⁵⁰ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 58-59

⁶⁵¹ UNMAS, Boletín de noticias, February 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵² ICBL-CMC, Land Mine Monitor 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#), p. 31

⁶⁵³ ICBL-CMC, Land Mine Monitor 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#), p. 32

⁶⁵⁴ ACAPS, Colombia – Antipersonnel mines and explosive remnants of war, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁵ Pares, Plomo es lo que hay: Violencia y seguridad en tiempos de Duque, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 21; UNMAS, Boletín de noticias, February 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁶ UNMAS, Boletín de noticias, February 2022, [url](#)

workers and facilities⁶⁵⁷ in 2020 and 553 attacks and incidents recorded in 2021, a 70 % increase from 2020.⁶⁵⁸ Health workers have been attacked by civilians such as members of the community, patients and relatives (66 %) and ‘weapon-bearers’ such as non-state armed groups (17 %). The most severe incidents were homicides, deprivation of liberty, assaults and threats, including extortion. Most incidents occurred in Valle del Cauca, Norte de Santander, Huila, Nariño, and Chocó.⁶⁵⁹

6.9. Displacement

Colombia’s conflict situation of more than 5 decades has led to a long term situation of protracted displacement, with secondary displacement also being common.⁶⁶⁰ Over 9.3 million Colombians have been recognised by the government Victims Unit as having been victims of forced displaced due to the conflict in the period from 1985 to the present.⁶⁶¹ UNHCR reported that in 2021 the number of currently internally displaced people in Colombia was 6.8 million,⁶⁶² second only to Syria (6.9 million).⁶⁶³ There are an estimated 2.5 million Venezuela migrants and refugees living in Colombia.⁶⁶⁴

Displacement of large groups in affected communities, families, and individual-level displacements continue to occur in Colombia due to armed conflict.⁶⁶⁵ Most of the displacement from rural to urban areas happened in late 1990s/early 2000s and since then, displacement has fallen; it usually happens now on individual/family level in both rural and urban areas.⁶⁶⁶ Intra-urban displacement is difficult to quantify given the different variables that are present in this phenomenon and because victims do not always file complaints in this regard.⁶⁶⁷ IACHR noted its concern about the scale of individual/family displacements, and civil society organisations report that individual and family level displacements due to threats from

⁶⁵⁷ ICRC, Health care under threat in Colombia 2020, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁸ ICRC, Colombia: Health care in danger, 23 March 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁹ ICRC, Colombia: Health care in danger, 23 March 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Breaking the Impasse: Reducing Protracted Internal Displacement as a Collective Outcome, 22 June 2017, [url](#), pp. 92-93

⁶⁶¹ Colombia, Unidad Para Las Víctimas, [Last checked on 21 November 2022] [url](#)

⁶⁶² ‘The National Victims Registry of Colombia (Victims Unit) contains the historical accumulated figure of the number of victims of displacement, which continues to increase given that victims continue to be registered in the country. Thus, the total number of people recognized [by Colombia’s Victims Unit] as victims of displacement (...), includes the number of IDPs who are subject to attention and/or reparation, i.e. those who meet the requirements to access the measures of attention and reparation established in Colombian Law 1448 (6.8 million). The number of victims of displacement who are deceased, or IDPs who were victims of homicide or forced disappearance, and other victims who, for various reasons, cannot effectively access these measures, are identified as not being subject to attention or reparation and therefore not included in the figure of 6.8 million. The figure is constantly updated, considering that by legal definition, victims have up to two years to make their declaration and be included in the registry system.’ UNCHR, Global Trends Report 2021, [url](#), p. 25

⁶⁶³ UNCHR, Global Trends Report 2021, [url](#), p. 26

⁶⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, Hard Times in a Safe Haven: Protecting Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia, 9 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁵ ICRC, Colombia: Retos humanitarios 2022, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3; Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 20; UNHCR, Internal Displacement/Colombia: Large-Group Internal Displacement for January to December 2021[Infographic], 25 February 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁶ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁶⁶⁷ Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín: Categorización de un fenómeno complejo, 2019, [url](#), pp. 56-57; Verdad Abierta, El desplazamiento forzado, un crimen irreparable, 3 June 2021, [url](#)



armed groups affect a greater number of people than most displacement, but due to its nature is more difficult to record.⁶⁶⁸

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) reported that the root causes of internal displacement remain linked to the limited progress on the implementation of the peace agreement, particularly relating to the substitution of illicit crops and economic development aimed at mitigating the underlying causes of violence. Other causes include the expansion of non-state armed groups, threats to local populations to push them out of their territories, cuts to state response budgets, and the absence of victim assistance initiatives or weaknesses in their response causing people to return to areas without having risks assessed and guarantees for safe return in place. Civil society groups report that despite the state's major efforts, the response to displacement has fallen short and it does not guarantee protection for the rights of displaced persons.⁶⁶⁹ Threats, harassment, extortion, homicides, and killings by armed groups were listed as principle causes of mass forced displacement in risk areas identified by the Office of the Ombudsperson.⁶⁷⁰ OHCHR reported that some social leaders shared with the organisation that the objective for armed groups is to push them off their land permanently, and that they would rather die than be forced into displacement or to lose their ancestral territories.⁶⁷¹

IDPs face human rights violations such as right to adequate living standards, freedom of movement, residence, housing, health, education, employment and family life, and may become new targets for armed groups or for forced recruitment.⁶⁷² Displaced women are particularly at risk of violence, sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, risks of forced recruitment of their children, and obstacles to owning or protecting assets.⁶⁷³

Forced displacement increased in 2021 to the highest number since 2016⁶⁷⁴ with Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reporting over 100 000 forced displacements and 32 000 disaster related displacements in 2021.⁶⁷⁵ According to UNHCR, during 2021, 62 273 individuals (21 201 families) were displaced due to 145 large-scale group displacements, representing a 151 % increase compared to 2020, with a continued increasing trend since 2017. Most of these large-group displacements were mainly caused by armed confrontations with armed groups (64 %), followed by threats (16 %), combat (9 %), APM/UXO (4 %), homicides (3 %), presence of illegal armed groups (3 %), massacres and recruitment (<1 %). Those mainly affected were Afro-Colombian populations (60 %), small-scale farmers [*campesinos*] (27 %),

⁶⁶⁸ OAS, IACHR, IACHR Expresses Concern Over the Notable Increase in Forced Internal Displacement in Colombia, 30 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁹ OAS, IACHR, IACHR Expresses Concern Over the Notable Increase in Forced Internal Displacement in Colombia, 30 September 2021, [url](#); OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), paras. 152-153

⁶⁷⁰ Colombia, Defensoría del Pueblo, Boletín de Movilidad Humana Forzada #2 31 de Enero-28 de Febrero, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁷¹ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 50

⁶⁷² OAS, IACHR, IACHR Expresses Concern Over the Notable Increase in Forced Internal Displacement in Colombia, 30 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁷³ OAS, IACHR, IACHR Expresses Concern Over the Notable Increase in Forced Internal Displacement in Colombia, 30 September 2021, [url](#); UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 48

⁶⁷⁴ Citing OCHA, UNCHR, and Colombia, in OAS, IACHR, IACHR Expresses Concern Over the Notable Increase in Forced Internal Displacement in Colombia, 30 September 2021, [url](#); CODHES, 2021, el año con mayor número de víctimas de desplazamiento en 5 años, 22 December 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁵ IDMC, Country Profile – Colombia, 19 May 2022, [url](#)



indigenous communities (13 %), and Venezuelan migrants (<1 %). The main areas where displacement was registered were Nariño (39 %), Valle del Cauca (19 %), Cauca (16 %), Antioquia (11 %), Chocó (9 %), Córdoba (3 %), Norte de Santander (2 %), as well as Putumayo and Arauca.⁶⁷⁶ Similar trends were reported by UNOCHA (reporting 72 000)⁶⁷⁷ and the Colombian Ombudsman,⁶⁷⁸ as well as the displacement monitoring NGO, CODHES⁶⁷⁹.⁶⁸⁰ IDMC reported similarly that Colombia's Pacific departments account for most of the displacement due to conflict and in some cases, displacement is highly concentrated in several municipalities, for instance Buenaventura, a major transit point for narcotics where violence is concentrated between competing armed groups.⁶⁸¹

Between January and June 2022, there were 79 large scale displacements, affecting 30 866 people (11 735 families). These large scale displacements were caused by conflict or threats and affected mainly Nariño, Putumayo, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Chocó, Córdoba, Bolívar, Magdalena, Norte de Santander, Arauca, as well as Antioquia and Risaralda.⁶⁸²

6.9.1. Intra-urban displacement

Intra-urban displacement refers to displacement to a different area within the same city.⁶⁸³ Intra-urban displacement in Colombia is a complex phenomenon that often intersects economic development projects, dynamics of the armed conflict, and local criminal activities.⁶⁸⁴ Intra-urban displacement can take place due to armed confrontations among armed actors, usually criminal gangs, to dispute territory or preserve autonomy from other criminal actors.⁶⁸⁵ It also takes place as a tactic by criminal actors or powerful economic interests to gain territorial control over neighbourhoods and control licit and illicit economies, the administration of justice, and social relationships and identities.⁶⁸⁶ Violence in informal settlements is caused mainly by armed groups and criminal gangs, which can trigger intra-urban displacement between urban areas.⁶⁸⁷ According to IDMC, 'illegal armed groups exert social and territorial control over many urban areas in Colombia, and their activities force

⁶⁷⁶ UNHCR, Internal Displacement/Colombia: Large-Group Internal Displacement for January to December 2021, 25 February 2022, [url](#); See also: UNHCR, Colombia: Impacto y tendencias humanitarias entre enero y agosto de 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁷ UNOCHA, Más de 72 mil personas sufrieron desplazamiento forzado en Colombia, 6 January 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁸ OAS, IACHR, IACHR Expresses Concern Over the Notable Increase in Forced Internal Displacement in Colombia, 30 September 2021, [url](#); see also: UNHCR, Colombia: Impacto y tendencias humanitarias entre enero y agosto de 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁹ Consultoría para los derechos humanos y el desplazamiento (CODHES) was created in 1992 to carry out research and advocacy contributing to the promotion and protection of human rights, in particular of the internally displaced population in Colombia.

⁶⁸⁰ CODHES, 2021, el año con mayor número de víctimas de desplazamiento en 5 años, 22 December 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁸¹ IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2022, April 2022, [url](#), p. 78

⁶⁸² UNHCR, Colombia: Monitoreo de protección (enero - junio 2022), June 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁸³ Insight Crime, The Nomad Victims: Intra-urban Displacement in Medellín, 10 July 2013, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁴ Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín: Categorización de un fenómeno complejo, 2019, [url](#), pp. 25, 67

⁶⁸⁵ Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín: Categorización de un fenómeno complejo, 2019, [url](#), p. 70; Gil-Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

⁶⁸⁶ Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín: Categorización de un fenómeno complejo, 2019, [url](#), pp. 60, 67; Gil-Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

⁶⁸⁷ IDMC, Addressing Urban Displacement in Colombia's Informal Settlements, 2020, [url](#), p. 5



people, including those already displaced at least once, to flee from one neighbourhood to another.’⁶⁸⁸

Of Colombia’s historically displaced population, 89 % has been displacement from rural to urban areas. In urban informal settlements, the population is densely populated with high levels of poverty, inequality, poor housing and few services.⁶⁸⁹ In Medellín, neighbourhoods of expulsion and destination in intra-urban displacement are mostly located in the peripheral areas⁶⁹⁰ due to the presence of armed actors that seek control of corridors to and from the city for the transportation of drugs and weapons.⁶⁹¹ According to a report on intra-urban displacement in Medellín produced by the Mayor’s office, areas such as northeastern and central eastern parts of Medellín, that tend also to receive IDPs, revictimisation may be a possibility,⁶⁹² with persons being displaced on several occasions to flee threats and physical violence.⁶⁹³ Armed actors tend to remain for long periods of time in neighbourhoods, which facilitates revictimisation of returnees who were displaced in the past.⁶⁹⁴ Oral sources indicated that intra-urban displacement victims are not recognised⁶⁹⁵ or and that the issue is not ‘taken seriously’ by authorities.⁶⁹⁶

Forced urban displacement by gangs also involves death threats, forcing residents to leave so that gangs can gain access to profits [e.g. extortion] in certain territories.⁶⁹⁷ In Medellín, to displace persons out of neighbourhoods, armed actors use homicides, establishment of invisible frontiers, extortion, ‘penalty fees’ for violating imposed social behaviours, child recruitment, open armed confrontations, harassment, social control,⁶⁹⁸ requiring the local population to use goods and services offered by armed actors, and forced evictions for illicit purposes.⁶⁹⁹ Professor Gil-Ramírez stated that intra-urban displacement is caused ‘illegal territorial control practices’ by organised crime groups.⁷⁰⁰ The municipal Ombudsperson of Medellín indicated that, in 2021, that office registered 1,940 intra-urban displacements in the city, an increase from 1,694 in 2020.⁷⁰¹ The same source indicated that most displacements took place in Comunas 1, 3, 7, 8, 13, and 16, and in the jurisdictions of San Antonio de Prado

⁶⁸⁸ IDMC, Addressing Urban Displacement in Colombia’s Informal Settlements, 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁸⁹ IDMC, Addressing Urban Displacement in Colombia’s Informal Settlements, 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁹⁰ Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín: Categorización de un fenómeno complejo, 2019, [url](#), p. 59; Medellín, Desplazamiento forzado intraurbano Medellín, 14 Nov. 2022, [url](#); Colombia, Personería de Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín aumentó alrededor del 15% en 2021 con respecto al 2020, 3 June 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁹¹ Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín: Categorización de un fenómeno complejo, 2019, [url](#), p. 59

⁶⁹² Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín: Categorización de un fenómeno complejo, 2019, [url](#), pp. 56-58

⁶⁹³ Verdad Abierta, El desplazamiento forzado, un crimen irreparable, 3 June 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁴ Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín: Categorización de un fenómeno complejo, 2019, [url](#), p. 132

⁶⁹⁵ Gil-Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

⁶⁹⁶ Conflict Analyst, Correspondence with the EUAA, 4 November 2022

⁶⁹⁷ Doyle, C., Perceptions and Realities of Violence in Medellín, Colombia, June 2019, [url](#), p. 157

⁶⁹⁸ Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín: Categorización de un fenómeno complejo, 2019, [url](#), pp. 71, 73; Colombia, Personería de Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín aumentó alrededor del 15% en 2021 con respecto al 2020, 3 June 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁹ Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín: Categorización de un fenómeno complejo, 2019, [url](#), pp. 71, 73

⁷⁰⁰ Gil-Ramírez, M., Interview with EUAA, 21 November 2022

⁷⁰¹ Colombia, Personería de Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín aumentó alrededor del 15% en 2021 con respecto al 2020, 3 June 2022, [url](#)



and San Cristóbal, and that most of the victims were between 21 and 49 years of age, mostly women.⁷⁰² New Humanitarian interviewed several women who had fled Cúcuta and Tibú in Catatumbo and moved to Medellín and Bogotá. The article states that the women felt ‘isolated and abandoned by the state’, had to move to shelters where they experienced abuse, and had difficulty earning a living. ‘Economic precarity’ in large cities often forced women to return to their hometown in Catatumbo despite threats of being killed.⁷⁰³

In 2021, the Attorney General reported on several cases where alleged members of different criminal groups were prosecuted for incidents of forced displacements, including members of La Oficina de Envigado, Los Sureños, and the ELN, and Los Chuma.⁷⁰⁴ Further information on the results could not be found within time constraints.

6.10. Confinement

Confinement in Colombia is a complex term. Resolution No. 0171 of 2016 under Colombian law defines confinement as ‘a situation of violation of fundamental rights, in which communities, despite remaining in a part of their territory, lose mobility as a result of the presence and actions of illegal armed groups. This restriction implies the impossibility of accessing goods indispensable for survival derived from the military, economic, political, cultural, and social control exercised by illegal armed groups in the framework of the internal armed conflict.’⁷⁰⁵ However, UNOCHA defines confinement without limiting it to being imposed only by armed groups: ‘forced confinement is understood as the limitation of the mobility of the population and their access to at least three basic services or goods (such as food, education, health, water and sanitation, and livelihoods) for at least one week. Restrictions that last for less than one week are considered a restriction on mobility.’⁷⁰⁶

Colombia continues to report a high number of confinement situations and mobility restriction incidents.⁷⁰⁷ Since 2016, a significant increase in confinements has been registered due to actions and threats by non-state armed groups marking a shift in dynamics.⁷⁰⁸ UNOCHA reported an increase in the number of people confined by the armed conflict by 593 % from 2016 to 2021.⁷⁰⁹ Confinements may arise from direct imposition by armed actors to facilitate illegal activities, from the community itself, or indirectly due to conflict, such as due to use of mines, UXO, or explosive devices, due to armed clashes between groups or with the state

⁷⁰² Colombia, Personería de Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín aumentó alrededor del 15% en 2021 con respecto al 2020, 3 June 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁰³ New Humanitarian, A Colombian town’s spike in femicides is linked to armed groups, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁴ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), paras. 172-175

⁷⁰⁵ Article 1 in, Colombia, Resolución 00171 del 24 de febrero de 2016, 24 February 2016, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁶ ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁷⁰⁷ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 154; ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁰⁸ UNHCR, Colombia: Impacto y tendencias humanitarias entre enero y agosto de 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#); ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#), p. 1; New Humanitarian (The), Five years after ‘peace’ the Colombian communities living in forced confinement, 25 November 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁹ ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#), p. 9



forces.⁷¹⁰ Confinement creates a situation of high risk for displacement,⁷¹¹ and is used as a form of social control by armed groups.⁷¹² Confinement imposed mobility restrictions and the presence of armed groups impact the population's ability to access protection, food, health, livelihoods, and access to water and hygiene, and adequate housing/shelter as well as humanitarian assistance.⁷¹³

During 2020, 70 000 known cases of confinement were reported, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and multiplication of armed groups. During 2021, UN sources reported 57 464 people (15 152 families)⁷¹⁴ to 65 236 people were confined mainly due to confrontations with armed groups.⁷¹⁵ Departments and municipalities of the Pacific region were reported to be the most affected.⁷¹⁶ In 2021, these confinements occurred mainly in the department of Chocó (73 %), as well as Nariño (14 %), Antioquia (7 %), Valle del Cauca (3 %), and Cauca, Putumayo, Arauca, and Risaralda.⁷¹⁷ OCHA also reported the increasing trend, with the highest numbers during 2016-2021 also affecting Chocó, Nariño, Antioquia, Norte de Santander, Cauca, and Valle del Cauca.⁷¹⁸ Between January and June 2022, UNHCR recorded 26 mass confinement events that affected 43 059 people (10 488 families), meaning a 22 % increase compared to the number of people confined in 2021. The most affected areas were Chocó (77 %), Valle del Cauca (9 %), and Arauca (9 %).⁷¹⁹ ACAPS provides a local analysis of the conflict dynamics leading to confinements within those 5 most affected departments.⁷²⁰

UNHCR stated that the most affected groups in 2021 were Indigenous (62 %), Afro-Colombian (37 %), and small-scale farmers (1 %).⁷²¹ UNOCHA and ACAPS corroborate that the majority of those affected by confinement are indigenous or Afro-Colombian, often who have been revictimized or previously displaced,⁷²² and who live in areas of strategic interest to armed groups.⁷²³ The same trends were reported in 2022, with most confinement-affected populations being indigenous and Afro-Colombian, and mainly having been caused by clashes, mobility restrictions, threats, fighting, mine and UXO contamination.⁷²⁴ UNOCHA and UNHCR provide maps indicating the relationship between areas where there are attacks and

⁷¹⁰ ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#), p. 3; UNHCR, Colombia: Impacto y tendencias humanitarias entre enero y agosto de 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#)

⁷¹¹ UNHCR, Colombia: Confinements (Jan to March 2022), 3 May 2022, [url](#); ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁷¹² New Humanitarian (The), Five years after 'peace' the Colombian communities living in forced confinement, 25 November 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, A Fight by Other Means: Keeping the Peace with Colombia's FARC, 30 November 2021, [url](#), p. 30; UNHCR, Colombia: Impacto y tendencias humanitarias entre enero y agosto de 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#)

⁷¹³ ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-8; UNHCR, Colombia: Monitoreo de protección (enero - junio 2022), June 2022, [url](#)

⁷¹⁴ UNHCR, Colombia: Confinements (January to December 2021), 2 March 2022, [url](#)

⁷¹⁵ ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁷¹⁶ UNHCR, Colombia: Impacto y tendencias humanitarias entre enero y agosto de 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#), p. 3; ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-14

⁷¹⁷ UNHCR, Colombia: Confinements (January to December 2021), 2 March 2022, [url](#)

⁷¹⁸ ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 1, 9

⁷¹⁹ For additional information on trends, see also: UNHCR, Colombia: Confinements (January 2022 to March 2022), 3 May 2022, [url](#)

⁷²⁰ ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#)

⁷²¹ UNHCR, Colombia: Confinements (January to December 2021), 2 March 2022, [url](#)

⁷²² UNHCR, Colombia: Impacto y tendencias humanitarias entre enero y agosto de 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#), p. 1

⁷²³ ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁷²⁴ UNHCR, Colombia: Monitoreo de protección (enero - junio 2022), June 2022, [url](#)





armed actions by illegal armed groups and areas where there have been incidents of displacement, confinement, and mobility restrictions.⁷²⁵

Confinement is frequently ‘invisible’ statistically due to the lack of communication with government or aid organisations by affected communities.⁷²⁶ Underreporting of confinement situations occurs due to threats, lack of communication, or being perceived as a normal condition of life; hence it is likely that the number of people affected is higher than reported.⁷²⁷

⁷²⁵ UNHCR, Colombia: Impacto y tendencias humanitarias entre enero y agosto de 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNHCR, Colombia: Confinements (January to December 2021), 2 March 2022, [url](#)

⁷²⁶ New Humanitarian (The), Five years after ‘peace’ the Colombian communities living in forced confinement, 25 November 2021, [url](#)

⁷²⁷ ACAPS, Colombia Confinements, 18 February 2022, [url](#), p. 5





7. Profiles

7.1. Social leaders and human rights defenders

In the sources consulted, EUAA observed variances in use of the term ‘social leaders,’ which are closely linked with the definition of ‘human rights defenders,’ and frequently used together or interchangeably in source material due to functional overlaps in the Colombian context.

There is no ‘agreed upon’ definition of ‘social leaders’ and varying definitions within the government of Colombia itself and among civil society which increases the numbers of those eligible for protection and generates variations in tracking statistics for violence against leaders.⁷²⁸ The Attorney-General’s Office prefers a narrower definition of social leaders to include only human rights defenders, while the Ombudsperson’s Office uses broader definitions.⁷²⁹ The IACHR recognizes that ‘the concept of human rights defender is broad and flexible in nature,’ and that in the Colombian context, there are those ‘who are defending human rights by being leaders in their communities’.⁷³⁰ Colombian civil society definitions tend to ‘rely on community recognition to decide who is a leader and based on alternative definitions violence against leaders is ‘more widespread than official statistics indicate’.⁷³¹ CERAC explained that human rights defenders are part of a larger category of ‘social leaders’ used when sources are referring to murders and human rights abuses and that ‘social leaders’ have different roles related to cultural, language, or heritage; while human rights defenders are focused on human rights violations.⁷³² Community Action Councils (JAC, Juntas de Acción Comunal) are the main political participation body at the local level; they are composed of local residents who organise the community and serve as intermediaries with the state and some also promote human rights and development initiatives outside the Councils.⁷³³ The IACHR has stated that JAC leaders are human rights defenders.⁷³⁴ Members of JAC make up a large percentage of the most severely affected profiles.⁷³⁵

Sources indicate that the sectors with the most frequently targeted social leaders and human rights defenders were those working in:

- indigenous issues/rights,⁷³⁶

⁷²⁸ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 4; For a list of profiles designated as social leaders by the Colombian Ombudsperson’s Office, see: HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 15

⁷²⁹ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁷³⁰ OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 23

⁷³¹ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁷³² Norway, Landinfo, Temanotot – Colombia: Vaepnede grupper etter fredsavtalen, 6 April 2022, [url](#), p. 14

⁷³³ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 320; HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁷³⁴ OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 23

⁷³⁵ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 13-14

⁷³⁶ Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 11; Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 320



- civic and communal leaders⁷³⁷ such as members of JAC;⁷³⁸
- peasant (*campesino*) rights;⁷³⁹
- afro-descendants rights;⁷⁴⁰
- union/labour leaders;⁷⁴¹
- environmental rights;⁷⁴²
- questioning the use of power and violence to solve political differences;⁷⁴³
- participating in illicit crop substitution and opposition to illegal economies on the territory⁷⁴⁴ such as drug trafficking;⁷⁴⁵
- defence of land and territorial land rights,⁷⁴⁶ including opposition to large agro-industrial projects, mineral extraction, and unsustainable infrastructure projects,⁷⁴⁷ or working to reclaim territories belonging to displaced families and communities;⁷⁴⁸
- defence of the Peace Agreement and the rights of victims of the conflict,⁷⁴⁹ including programs such as crop substitution programs (Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos Ilícitos, PNIS)⁷⁵⁰ and development program (Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial PDET);⁷⁵¹
- Women's rights defenders;⁷⁵² and
- LGBTI human rights defenders.⁷⁵³

⁷³⁷ Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 11

⁷³⁸ 2020 information from the Colombian Attorney General's Office cited in: Wesche, P., Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 320; International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 13

⁷³⁹ Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 11; Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 320; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 32-33

⁷⁴⁰ Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 11; Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 320; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 34

⁷⁴¹ Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 11; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 43

⁷⁴² UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 34; Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁴³ CODHES, Manual de Autoprotección para personas defensoras de derechos humanos, líderes y lideresas sociales y sus colectivos, March 2021, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁴⁴ CODHES, Manual de Autoprotección para personas defensoras de derechos humanos, líderes y lideresas sociales y sus colectivos, March 2021, [url](#), p. 6; Al Jazeera, Colombians call for end to impunity as activist killings continue, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁵ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 18

⁷⁴⁶ CODHES, Manual de Autoprotección para personas defensoras de derechos humanos, líderes y lideresas sociales y sus colectivos, March 2021, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁴⁷ CODHES, Manual de Autoprotección para personas defensoras de derechos humanos, líderes y lideresas sociales y sus colectivos, March 2021, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁴⁸ OAS, IACHR, IACHR Expresses Concern Over the Notable Increase in Forced Internal Displacement in Colombia, 30 September 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Colombians call for end to impunity as activist killings continue, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁹ CODHES, Manual de Autoprotección para personas defensoras de derechos humanos, líderes y lideresas sociales y sus colectivos, March 2021, [url](#), p. 6; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 41-42

⁷⁵⁰ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary General (S/2021/1090), 27 December 2021, [url](#), para. 17

⁷⁵¹ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 34, p. 35; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 51-52

⁷⁵² OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 31

⁷⁵³ OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 31



In 2021 specifically, the Office of the Ombudsperson similarly indicated that the following were the main vulnerable sectors in order of precedence: Community, indigenous, communal, public officials, human rights activists, victims of the conflict, agrarians or peasants, Afro-Colombians, women, environmental, labour unions, students/academics, peace process coordinators, LGBTIQ, children/youth, and cultural/sport.⁷⁵⁴ Leaders in rural areas receive the most threats, are most attacked and are the most displaced.⁷⁵⁵

Colombia is described as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for human rights defenders.⁷⁵⁶ Attacks against environmental activists in Colombia during 2021 were also described as ‘persistent’.⁷⁵⁷ Peasant leaders and those involved in making land restitution claims, particularly in PDET zones, experienced poor security conditions and have been subjected to threats, disappearances, and homicides.⁷⁵⁸ Social leaders and human rights defenders experience threats, attacks, harassment, and killings by illegal armed groups and criminal organisations.⁷⁵⁹ In addition they encounter stigmatisation and criminalisation by state actors. Their family members are also attacked, harassed, and intimidated.⁷⁶⁰

The Colombian government, international organisations, and civil society all report that there has been an ‘alarming increase’ in targeted homicides, although no exact figure is agreed upon.⁷⁶¹ The Office of the Ombudsperson identified the intensification of this violence since 2016 has persisted and issued three national level risk warnings which led to 25 early warnings (Alertas Tempranas) being issued. However, human rights violations against these profiles continued to be recorded.⁷⁶²

The Office of the Ombudsperson reported 2 829 threats against these profiles between January 2016 and June 2020,⁷⁶³ while the UN recorded 1 911 threats and attacks against human rights defenders in 2020-2021 alone.⁷⁶⁴ In 2021, the Office of the Ombudsperson registered 779 incidents in 263 municipalities in 28 departments and indicated that the most common types of conduct registered have been threats, homicides, attempted homicide, forced displacement, extortion, disappearance, stigmatisation, abduction. However, they

⁷⁵⁴ Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, “Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras”, Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), p. 97

⁷⁵⁵ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA

⁷⁵⁶ Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2021, 23 February 2022, p. 30, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁷ Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2021, 23 February 2022, p. 29, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁸ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 35

⁷⁵⁹ Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, “Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras”, Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), p. 97; UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 35

⁷⁶⁰ OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), Chapter 4. See also: HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁶¹ OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 29-30; 47-48; See also: HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 18

⁷⁶² Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, “Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras”, Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), p. 94

⁷⁶³ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 18

⁷⁶⁴ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 40



noted that the drop in incidents was due to lack of reporting and registration problems due to COVID-19.⁷⁶⁵

Since the peace agreement was signed in 2016, the UN has verified 562 cases of homicides of human rights defenders (including 64 women). The number has increased since then.⁷⁶⁶ The Office of the Ombudsperson reported 883 killings of social leaders between January 2016 and December 2021.⁷⁶⁷ NGO Indepaz has tallied between 1 309⁷⁶⁸ to 1 328 social leaders killed since 2016.⁷⁶⁹

The UN OHCHR documented 58 killings of human rights defenders in 2021 and is verifying 34 other cases.⁷⁷⁰ According to Frontline Defenders, there were 138 Colombian human rights defenders and social leaders killed in Colombia in 2021, or 38% of the 358 killed during the year, making Colombia ‘the deadliest country in the world’ for defenders.⁷⁷¹ There were fewer HRDs and social leaders killed in 2021 than in 2020, however, Front Line Defenders states that this was because in 2020, social leaders were more easily targeted as they were confined to their homes due to COVID-19 restrictions; in 2021, these restrictions were lifted.⁷⁷² Data on assassinations of social leaders and human rights defenders by Indepaz shows there were 279 killings in 2019, 310 in 2020, and 171 killings in 2021.⁷⁷³

Indepaz keeps a real time list updated of social leaders, human rights defenders, and Peace Agreement signatories assassinated in 2022. As of 11 November 2022, there were 162 social leaders and human rights defenders killed and 36 peace signatories/former FARC members assassinated according to the Indepaz monitors.⁷⁷⁴ The Attorney General stated that between 1 January and 31 July 2022, 122 social leaders and human rights activists were assassinated, marking an increase in comparison to previous years.⁷⁷⁵ From January to June 2022, the UNOHCHR verified 22 killings of HRDs, put 64 under investigation and recorded 108 allegations.⁷⁷⁶

7.1.1. Nature of the targeting

The Duque administration perceived targeting of social leaders as a criminal matter resulting from ‘unscrupulous criminal competition and the climate of violence’ promoted by crime.

⁷⁶⁵ Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, “Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras”, Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁷⁶⁶ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 36

⁷⁶⁷ Defensoría del Pueblo, Reporte de homicidios y conductas vulneratorias a líderes sociales y defensores de derechos humanos: 1 de enero a 30 de noviembre, 9 December 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁸ Citing Indepaz [source not accessible], Norway, Landinfo, Temanotot – Colombia: Vaepnede grupper etter fredsavtalen, 6 April 2022, [url](#), p. 14

⁷⁶⁹ Al Jazeera, Colombians call for end to impunity as activist killings continue, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁰ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁷¹ Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2021, 23 February 2022, p. 30, [url](#)

⁷⁷² Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2021, 23 February 2022, p. 30, [url](#)

⁷⁷³ Indepaz, Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022, [url](#), pp.4-5

⁷⁷⁴ Indepaz, Líderes sociales, defensores de DD.HH y firmantes de acuerdo asesinados en 2022, [Last updated: 11 November 2022], [url](#)

⁷⁷⁵ Colombia, Defensoría del Pueblo, Entre enero y julio de este año han sido asesinados 122 líderes sociales y personas defensoras de DD. HH., 19 August 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁶ UNHCR, Colombia: Monitoreo de protección (enero- junio 2022), June 2022, [url](#)



However, civil society groups and political opponents in Colombia perceive the killings as intended as a political message: social leaders are associated with the fulfilment of the peace agreement, land rights, and the fulfilment of ethnic and indigenous rights which are 'politically inconvenient' and threatening to the economic and security interests of armed groups.⁷⁷⁷ The targeting pattern involves 'increased risks' to social and community leaders who are caught up between the interests of competing groups seeking to exercise control over the territory and population. The Public Prosecutor's Office explained: when armed groups arrive in a territory, the first people they approach are the community's leaders, and they give them three options: 'work with them, to close their eyes and shut up, or to leave'.⁷⁷⁸ Many social leaders are killed because of their influence in the community and to weaken the resolve of the community, allowing illegal armed groups to obtain access to their territories.⁷⁷⁹ During territorial disputes, various armed groups may force the community's leaders to cooperate, collect extortion on behalf of the group, or co-opt and divert production of coca by the community for their own purposes. This situation 'draws the leaders into conflict between the competing groups – when they support one group, they almost inevitably become the military target for the other'.⁷⁸⁰

Threats are sent through different means.⁷⁸¹ In 2020, 604 acts of threat against social leaders were registered by Somos Defensores, a human rights monitoring NGO, and most of these threats occurred in the form of pamphlets, harassment, phone calls to landlines and cell phones, text messages, unidentified threats, emails, social media, use of explosives, and murder of relatives.⁷⁸² Pamphlets with threatening messages are most frequently used to intimidate targets such as human rights defenders.⁷⁸³ Elements related to death were often used in threats, such as sending to the target: wreaths of flowers, candles, sympathy cards, mutilated dolls or animal corpses.⁷⁸⁴ Often those social leaders and human rights defenders who are threatened or attacked are forced to lower their profile, end their activism, abandon their communities, relinquish their community or leadership responsibilities, or leave the country.⁷⁸⁵

7.1.2. Geographical distribution

Most killings and areas with the highest rates of violence against social leaders and human rights defenders are those where there has been competition by armed groups for control of territory, drug trafficking routes, conflict over natural resources, areas with historically high levels of conflict and where the FARC-EP was previously present,⁷⁸⁶ as well as areas with high

⁷⁷⁷ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 13

⁷⁷⁸ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 322

⁷⁷⁹ CODHES, 14 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

⁷⁸⁰ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 322

⁷⁸¹ Mercy Corps, A Clash of Contagions, June 2021, [url](#), p. 89

⁷⁸² Somos Defensores, Informe anual 2020, 20 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 102-103

⁷⁸³ Somos Defensores, Informe anual 2020, 20 May 2021, [url](#), p. 103

⁷⁸⁴ Somos Defensores, Informe anual 2020, 20 May 2021, [url](#), p. 103

⁷⁸⁵ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 39-40

⁷⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-6; Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 320; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 30; HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 26



levels of poverty.⁷⁸⁷ Killings are particularly high in PDET municipalities as well as areas where there is the national crop substitution program outlined in the peace agreement.⁷⁸⁸ According to a research paper by Philipp Wesche, an International Professional Officer working on transitional justice in Colombia, which included field interviews with government officials and civil society, post-war violence in Colombia targeting social leaders is 'largely (64.4 %) a rural phenomenon related to the presence of armed groups that primarily affects community leaders at the local level'.⁷⁸⁹ The violence is concentrated in areas where there is little state presence and limited access to basic services like health, education, and justice.⁷⁹⁰ However in addition, International Crisis Group states that community activists denounce armed groups and experience threats 'in remote areas with little state presence as well as in city neighbourhoods where armed actors prey on the vulnerable to extort, traffic goods and recruit youth. Bogotá's southern suburb of Soacha, home to sprawling informal settlements and a significant population of internally displaced conflict victims and migrants, is one such area. The largest number of threats to social leaders have come as a result of their denouncing drug trafficking in the neighbourhood ollas (selling points) that fuel consumption of basuco (local crack cocaine) and marijuana, the latter being used to recruit youth and children'.⁷⁹¹

Attacks against HRDs and social leaders have been mainly concentrated in Cauca, Antioquia, Norte de Santander, Chocó, Nariño, and Putumayo, where the highest homicide rates are found,⁷⁹² as well as Urabá, Valle del Cauca, Córdoba, Meta, Caquetá, Risalda, and Arauca.⁷⁹³

⁷⁸⁷ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 26

⁷⁸⁸ FIP, Ni paz ni guerra, [url](#), May 2022, pp. 32-33

⁷⁸⁹ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 320

⁷⁹⁰ OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 30

⁷⁹¹ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 17

⁷⁹² OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 30

⁷⁹³ OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 50

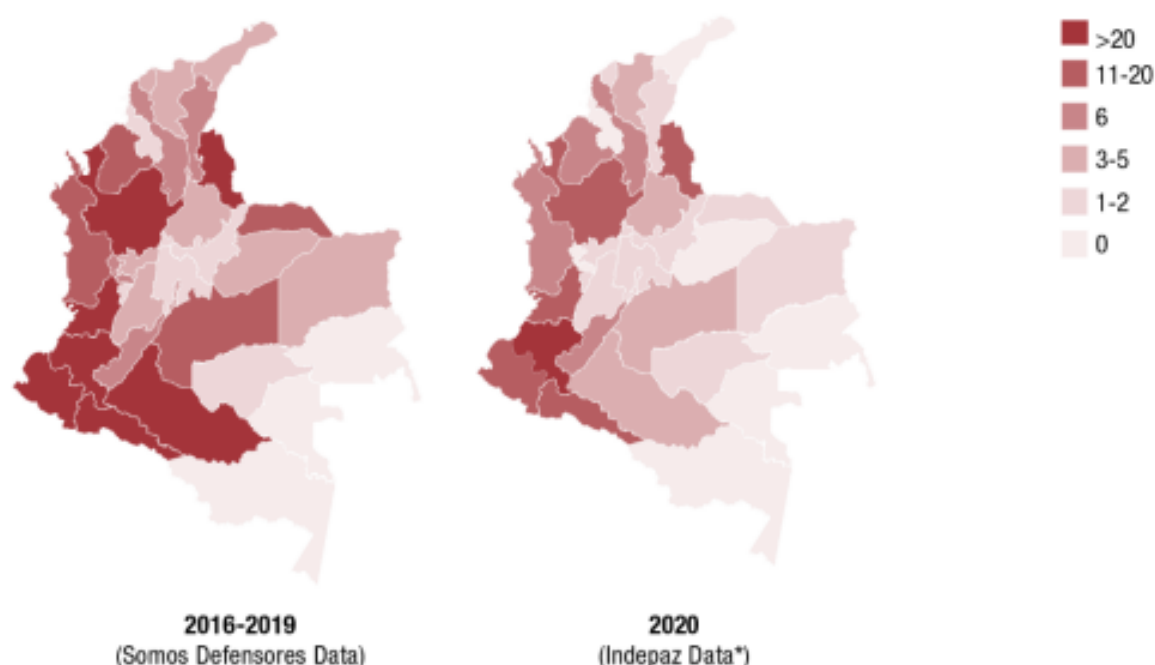


Figure 15: Assassinations of social leaders 2016-2020⁷⁹⁴

7.1.3. Main perpetrators

The strategic and tactical ‘alliances’ made between illegal armed groups for illicit purposes makes the conflict much more complex and it becomes more difficult to identify the true responsible aggressors [command], versus the actual perpetrator of violence toward social leaders.⁷⁹⁵ In many cases of targeted killings, authorities have been unable to identify those responsible at all.⁷⁹⁶ In the absence of the state and fragmentation of armed groups that have grown in the shadow of FARC-EP’s demobilisation, a wide range of armed and criminal groups are reportedly involved.⁷⁹⁷ International Crisis Group compiled data from the Attorney General’s Office that indicated that about 59 % of perpetrators were linked to armed groups and 39 % were individuals without affiliation or belonging to unknown groups, and 2 % were military personnel.⁷⁹⁸ According to State prosecutors, most of the killings are perpetrated by FARC dissidents and ‘local bands without nationwide reach’.⁷⁹⁹ ICG provides a graphic of

⁷⁹⁴ International Crisis Group, *Leaders Under Fire*, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁹⁵ Somos Defensores, 12 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

⁷⁹⁶ HRW, *Left Undefended*, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 27; OAS, IACHR, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia*, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 49

⁷⁹⁷ Al Jazeera, *Colombians call for end to impunity as activist killings continue*, 16 July 2022, [url](#); OAS, IACHR, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia*, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 49; OAS, IACHR, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia*, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 49

⁷⁹⁸ International Crisis Group, *Leaders Under Fire*, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 12

⁷⁹⁹ International Crisis Group, *Leaders Under Fire*, 6 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12; See also: HRW, *Left Undefended*, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 27

‘Assumed Perpetrators in Cases with Advanced Investigations’ from its 2020 report on the targeting of social leaders:

Figure 4: Assumed Perpetrators in Cases with Advanced Investigations

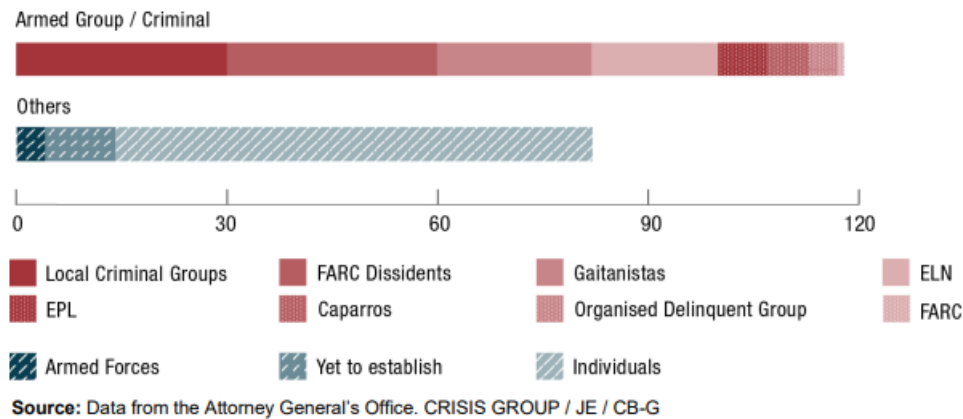


Figure 16: Assumed perpetrators of killings of social leaders in cases with advanced investigations⁸⁰⁰

7.1.4. State treatment

Sources report that HRDs and social leaders have ‘suffered reprisals’ from the state for their work defending human rights, including arbitrary detention, long criminal processes with irregularities, non-compliance with due process and detention with lack of evidence.⁸⁰¹ HRDs and social leaders have been stigmatised and sometimes their actions are criminalised by the state,⁸⁰² paramilitary successor groups,⁸⁰³ which have attempted to associate them with guerrilla groups, which World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) has indicated raises the ‘risk of being attacked’.⁸⁰⁴ Prior to the 2016 accord, there were three sides to the conflict (paramilitaries, guerrillas, and the public security forces); after the agreement was signed, social leaders could no longer be accused of helping the FARC-EP, so threats shifted to leaders claiming environmental rights, protection of natural resources, and rights of ethnic groups.⁸⁰⁵ For example, Milena Quiroz Jiménez is a human rights defender and social leader who was arrested and charged in 2017 by the city of Cartagena for crimes of ‘rebellion,’ ‘conspiracy to commit a crime’ and ‘financing terrorist groups,’ due to demonstrations she organised in her community. She was released due to lack of evidence but it was ruled she could not remain in her community and was forced to relocate to avoid her having influence in her municipality. On 10 occasions she was stigmatised by the Prosecutor’s Office which attempted to link her to guerrilla groups. Such stigma ‘raises the risk of her being attacked’.

⁸⁰⁰ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12; See also: HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 27

⁸⁰¹ OMCT, Colombia: Over 2,000 days of criminalisation against human rights defender Milena Quiroz Jiménez, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰² OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 93; CODHES, 14 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

⁸⁰³ CODHES, 14 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

⁸⁰⁴ OMCT, Colombia: Over 2,000 days of criminalisation against human rights defender Milena Quiroz Jiménez, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁵ CONPA, 17 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA



She survived a 2019 assassination attempt which occurred despite having government protection measures in place to protect her.⁸⁰⁶

7.2. Former members of FARC-EP

The targeted killing of former combatants of the FARC-EP is not a new phenomenon and has occurred in previous periods of Colombian history around demobilisation and ceasefire periods in the 1980s, 1990s,⁸⁰⁷ and during the 2003-2006 AUC demobilisation.⁸⁰⁸

Municipalities identified as priority areas for 2016 peace-building investments are in territories where guerrillas formerly exercised 'control and influence' and are affected by conflict between rival armed groups battling for control over land and illicit economies. Targeted murders occur in former FARC-held areas where the group's demobilisation has left a power vacuum.⁸⁰⁹ With FARC-EP's demobilisation in 2016, male and female former combatants who laid down their weapons continue to face 'persistent violence' such as threats from armed groups, security threats and attacks, and other problems such as co-opting of economic projects and sabotaging of their political and social initiatives.⁸¹⁰ The UN reported in July 2022, that since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016, a total of 327 homicides of former combatants have been documented by the UN Verification Mission in Colombia.⁸¹¹ During 2022, Indepaz reported that as of 11 November 2022, 36 ex-combatants have been assassinated,⁸¹² while the UN reported as of July 2022, that 22 ex-FARC combatants had been killed during the year to date.⁸¹³ A 2020 study mapping the targeting of ex-FARC-EP combatants found that the majority of victims were male and most were of low rank and less than 10 % being commanders.⁸¹⁴ Many of those murdered had been released from prison or were active in local politics promoting re-integration of former combatants.⁸¹⁵ Former FARC-EP members who declined to re-take up arms have been killed and displaced often by FARC dissident groups.⁸¹⁶ It has been difficult to assess who is responsible for the killings with some attributed to ELN and others to other dissident and criminal structures,⁸¹⁷ while the JEP stated that paramilitary successor groups have been largely responsible.⁸¹⁸ Together illegal armed groups and criminal groups perpetrate 78 % of attacks on former combatants.⁸¹⁹ Sources indicate the highest numbers of ex-FARC-EP killings occurred in Cauca, Caquetá, Nariño,

⁸⁰⁶ OMCT, Colombia: Over 2,000 days of criminalisation against human rights defender Milena Quiroz Jiménez, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁷ OCCO, A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants, November 2020, [url](#), p. 8

⁸⁰⁸ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁸⁰⁹ OCCO, A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants, November 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁸¹⁰ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1301), 29 December 2020, [url](#), paras. 10-12; International Crisis Group, A Fight by Other Means, 30 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12

⁸¹¹ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 42

⁸¹² Indepaz, Líderes sociales, defensores de DD. HH y firmantes de acuerdo asesinados en 2022, [11 November 2022], [url](#)

⁸¹³ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 42

⁸¹⁴ OCCO, A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants, November 2020, [url](#), p. 14. This source also provides a map of the 2020 killings of ex-FARC combatants by department.

⁸¹⁵ OCCO, A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants, November 2020, [url](#), p. 15

⁸¹⁶ International Crisis Group, A Fight by Other Means, 30 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12

⁸¹⁷ Al Jazeera, Killings of Colombia ex-FARC fighters persist amid peace process, 18 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸¹⁸ Justice for Colombia, JEP court orders government to take steps to improve security for former FARC combatants, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

⁸¹⁹ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary General (S/2021/1090), 27 December 2021, [url](#), para. 58



Antioquia, and Meta,⁸²⁰ as well as Valle del Cauca.⁸²¹ Most killings occur in areas that have been identified as priorities for peace-building initiatives following the peace agreement.⁸²²

Recent examples include:

- In 2021, a man who was in the process of reincorporation into civilian life was killed while serving as president of the JAC within a local community of Tuluá in Valle del Cauca. He was an activist for the Comunes party and former election candidate.⁸²³
- In July 2022, a former FARC member, who was also a member of the Comunes political party and coordinator for reintegration efforts, was killed by a sniper at his farm in Huila department.⁸²⁴

Several times during 2021 the JEP ordered institutions of the government to implement precautionary protection measures for former combatants including ordering the UNP to provide protection to unaddressed requests.⁸²⁵ By the end of 2021, the government's National Protection Unit (UNP, Unidad Nacional de Protección) had provided 690 ex-FARC-EP beneficiaries with protection and implemented 377 protection schemes.⁸²⁶ However, in January 2022, the Colombian Constitutional Court again ordered the government and the UNP to provide protection to disarmed former FARC-EP combatants as stipulated in the peace accord, due to the low level of implementation of security guarantees for these individuals.⁸²⁷ Following that ruling, in March 2022, the JEP directed the National Commission for Security Guarantees, a special body created by the peace agreement to support dismantling armed groups, to activate its strategy to combat these groups which are largely responsible for killing ex-FARC-EP combatants and social leaders.⁸²⁸

In January 2022, both the Constitutional Court of Colombia and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace stated that the security of former combatants was an 'unconstitutional state of affairs'.⁸²⁹ According to the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, the state-provided security measures have been strengthened since 2017 however due to the lack of a comprehensive security strategy in conflict-affected areas, the 'collective security of former combatants is being increasingly threatened by the actions of illegal armed groups'.⁸³⁰ As of June 2022, the

⁸²⁰ Indepaz, *Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022*, [url](#), p. 15; OCCO, *A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants*, November 2020, [url](#), p. 13

⁸²¹ OCCO, *A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants*, November 2020, [url](#), p. 13

⁸²² OCCO, *A Criminal Peace. Mapping the Murders of Ex-FARC Combatants*, November 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁸²³ Indepaz, *Cifras de la violencia en las regiones 2021, 2022*, [url](#), p. 18

⁸²⁴ Colombia Reports, *FARC reintegration chief assassinated in south Colombia*, 5 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸²⁵ Colombia, JEP, *JEP ordena al gobierno medidas de protección para excombatientes y sus familias*, 18 November 2021, [url](#); Colombia, JEP, *JEP imparte nuevas órdenes a la Consería para la Estabilización y a la UNP para la protección de firmantes de paz*, 19 November 2021, [url](#); Infobae, *JEP ordena nuevas medidas para la protección de los firmantes del Acuerdo de Paz*, 21 September 2021, [url](#); Pressenza, *Colombia: JEP orders protection for peace signatories*, 25 November 2021, [url](#); HRW, *World Report 2022 – Colombia*, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

⁸²⁶ Colombia, UNP, *Informe de rendición de cuentas: Construcción de paz (enero – diciembre de 2021)*, 2021, [url](#), pp. 5-6

⁸²⁷ AFP, *Colombia's top court orders government to protect ex-FARC rebels*, 28 January 2022, [url](#)

⁸²⁸ Justice for Colombia, *JEP court orders government to take steps to improve security for former FARC combatants*, 7 March 2022, [url](#); Colombia Reports, *Colombia's war crimes tribunal orders government to implement peace policies*, 2 March 2022, [url](#)

⁸²⁹ UNVMC/UNSC, *Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513)*, 27 June 2022, [url](#), para. 59

⁸³⁰ UNVMC/UNSC, *Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513)*, 27 June 2022, [url](#), para. 58

Special Investigation Unit of the Office of the Attorney General has had 379 investigations against former combatants, with a total of 55 convictions, of which only 4 are against those who have ordered the attacks. The Unit reported that 80 % of those crimes were committed by illegal armed groups and criminal organisations such as AGC, FARC dissidents, and the ELN.⁸³¹

For more information, see the section on [state protection](#).

7.3. Victims of extortion

Prior to the 2016 peace agreement, FARC-controlled extortion mechanisms within its territory, but these have since increased due to the recycling and creation of new actors.⁸³² Extortion is pervasive in Colombia,⁸³³ due to reliance on the informal economy, and problems of involvement of criminal groups in regulating circulation of drugs, money, and financial resources.⁸³⁴ Futuros Urbanos reported that there is a high likelihood of high underreporting of extortion as victims due to fear for themselves or reprisals against family members.⁸³⁵ The Ministry of Defense statistics from 2012 to September 2022 indicate an increase in extortion crime since the peace agreement with 4 903 cases reports in 2016, 8 362 in 2019, 8 342 in 2021, and 7 277 as of October 2022.⁸³⁶ Illegal armed groups and criminal organisations in Colombia frequently use extortion as a major revenue stream through licit and illicit economic activity occurring in their territory.⁸³⁷ Thriving illicit businesses, which includes coca production, illegal mining, extortion, and contraband, are embedded in the ‘rudimentary, authoritarian’ form of local governance imposed by armed groups.⁸³⁸ In the context of Colombia’s history of conflict, extortion is used as a form of social control⁸³⁹ by illegal armed groups and criminal organisations to exert pressure on the population in territories where they have an active presence, and can include direct coercion or threats to the population to ensure control and prevent risks to their activities.⁸⁴⁰ ‘Vacunas’ or ‘taxes’ are revenues collected by armed groups, organised crime groups and urban gangs, particularly in areas where police are unable to guarantee security.⁸⁴¹ The practice occurs frequently in coastal areas, border areas,

⁸³¹ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/513), 27 June 2022, [url](#), para. 64

⁸³² CONPA, 17 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

⁸³³ AP, Boom in Colombian extortion rings undermines security gains, 4 February 2015, [url](#); CODHES, 14 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

⁸³⁴ CODHES, 14 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

⁸³⁵ Futuros Urbanos, Comportamiento Del Delito Extorsivo En Las 10 Principales Ciudades Del Pais, October 2022, [url](#), p. 3-4

⁸³⁶ Colombia, Ministerio de Defensa, Logros de la política de defensa y seguridad, [url](#), October 2022, p. 30; see also: Colombia Reports, Kidnapping and extortion, 8 June 2022, [url](#);

⁸³⁷ International Crisis Group, Calming the Restless Pacific, 8 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 9, 11; International Crisis Group, Tackling Colombia’s Next Generation in Arms, 27 January 2022, [url](#); Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

⁸³⁸ International Crisis Group, Colombia’s Armed Groups Battle for Spoils of Peace, 19 October 2017, [url](#), p. i

⁸³⁹ Social control in this context is defined by the UN as intimidation strategies, harassment, pressure, extortion, and other actions by non-state armed groups and criminal organisations with the objective to control the population and territories. UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Calming the Restless Pacific, 8 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 9, 11

⁸⁴⁰ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#); Freedom House, Colombia 2021, February 2021, [url](#); HRW, “The Guerrillas Are the Police,” 22 January 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁴¹ Colombia Reports, Kidnapping and extortion, 8 June 2022, [url](#)

and where the state is less present, as well as in departmental capital cities, such as Medellín, Barranquilla, Cali, and Bogotá,⁸⁴² as well as cities on the Caribbean coast, Cartagena, Cucuta, Santa Marta, Bucaramanga, Ibagué and Villavicencio.⁸⁴³ For example, gangs in Medellín use extortion (*vacunas*) as a control mechanism over the local population and resistance to payments can lead to threats of violence or killings.⁸⁴⁴ Extortion is common in the city's lower and middle class areas because police are either absent or paid by local crime lords. Protection rackets (*vacunas*) are especially targeted at small business owners and transport sector workers who have to pay gangs for permission to work in their territories.⁸⁴⁵

Victims of extortion include merchants,⁸⁴⁶ miners,⁸⁴⁷ businesses, farmers,⁸⁴⁸ bus operators,⁸⁴⁹ builders/engineers/carpenters,⁸⁵⁰ and beneficiaries of coca substitution programs.⁸⁵¹ Extortion practices and protection rackets are also 'rife' in rural areas, especially where there is a lack of access to the formal financial system and property/land rights for the local population,⁸⁵² and extractive sectors and their workers are targeted such as in oil, gas, mining, pipeline, and infrastructure companies.⁸⁵³ Examples of extortion used include:

- Charging local miners fees or demanding extortion payments from those using backhoes to search for gold⁸⁵⁴
- When an armed group moves into a territory in dispute, groups may force local leaders to cooperate and such as collecting extortion on behalf of the group, or requiring that coca and coca leaves produced by the community to be exclusively sold to the armed group;⁸⁵⁵
- In Buenaventura, local gangs have a monopoly on supplies into the city, including food, and suppliers pay the group based on how much is permitted into the city. If new suppliers try to move in, the group impounds the product, issues a threat, and prevents the new operator market access, allowing authorised providers to inflate local prices;⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁴² Caracol, El infierno de la extorsión en Colombia, 7 February 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁴³ Futuros Urbanos, Comportamiento Del Delito Extorsivo En Las 10 Principales Ciudades Del Pais, October 2022, [url](#), p. 3-4

⁸⁴⁴ Doyle, C., Perceptions and Realities of Violence in Medellín, Colombia, June 2019, [url](#), p. 157

⁸⁴⁵ Colombia Reports, Crime and security in Medellín, 9 August 2022, [url](#); see also: Colombia Reports, Medellín's violent crime statistics drop significantly, 17 August 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, Tackling Colombia's Next Generation in Arms, 27 January 2022, [url](#); El Tiempo, En el Área Metropolitana de Barranquilla siguen desbordadas las denuncias de extorsiones, 2 September 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁷ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for Spoils of Peace, 19 October 2017, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁴⁸ HRW, "The Guerrillas Are the Police," 22 January 2020, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for Spoils of Peace, 19 October 2017, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁴⁹ International Crisis Group, Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for Spoils of Peace, 19 October 2017, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁵⁰ Semana, "Falso servicio": denuncian modalidad de secuestro y extorsión en Santander, 24 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁵¹ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁵² GITOC, Organized Crime Index – Colombia 2021, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁵³ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with the EUAA

⁸⁵⁴ International Crisis Group, Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for Spoils of Peace, 19 October 2017, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁵⁵ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 322; International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁸⁵⁶ International Crisis Group, Calming the Restless Pacific, 8 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 11-12



- Armed groups offer false services (*secuestro con falso servicio*) to lure clients who are then kidnapped and extorted,⁸⁵⁷ a rising trend, especially in Valle del Cauca, Antioquia, and Cauca;⁸⁵⁸
- Armed groups or gangs staking out territory in a neighbourhood and charging local people protection fees so the locals can informally work there in menial jobs like washing or parking cars and defending the area from encroachment by other groups;⁸⁵⁹
- Control over bus routes, for example in Barranquilla, whereby bus drivers are extorted to be able to drive through certain areas and killed if they fail to pay;⁸⁶⁰

Victims of extortion receive threats (house visits, letters, phone calls, social networks, visits to home or work), or may be kidnapped for the purpose of extortion.⁸⁶¹ Failure to pay extortion can result in death.⁸⁶² Few victims are willing to report extortion to authorities⁸⁶³ reportedly due to lack of trust in authorities or fear of being killed.⁸⁶⁴ Reporting to police can make the situation worse if extortionists find out.⁸⁶⁵ The Political Analyst observed that extortion practices that lead to violence often thrive in environments where the state is absent and the government fails to regulate the informal sector.⁸⁶⁶ Jeremy McDermott stated that

‘the patterns around intra-urban displacement today tend to be linked around extortion. Another issue is recruitment of neighbourhood kids, usually done by very local groups, such as *combos* in Medellín. This is a very localised threat. Again, if a person upsets the *combo* enough for them to want to kill that person, moving from one neighbourhood to another is not going to be sufficient. However, if a person has not been paying their protection/extortion fees, and have been pushed out of their neighbourhood, the group may not pursue them unless the target still has family in the area whom they can pressure. This tends to happen in neighbourhoods where there are more recent arrivals of people displaced from the rural areas and where the state has not caught up in providing services, paved roads, electricity, decent sewage – and where there is little permanent police presence.’⁸⁶⁷

According to a representative of CONPA (El Consejo Nacional de Paz Afrocolombiano (The National Afro-Colombian Peace Council))⁸⁶⁸ if a person cannot pay their extortion fees, they have three options: negotiate the payment, leave or move away, or be killed. This happens

⁸⁵⁷ Semana, “Falso servicio”: denuncian modalidad de secuestro y extorsión en Santander, 24 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁸ Infobae, “Express kidnapping” is on the rise in Colombia, according to the Ombudsman's Office, 29 March 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁹ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with the EUAA

⁸⁶⁰ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with the EUAA

⁸⁶¹ Futuros Urbanos, Comportamiento Del Delito Extorsivo En Las 10 Principales Ciudades Del Pais, October 2022, [url](#), p. 3-4

⁸⁶² HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶³ HRW, “The Guerrillas Are the Police,” 22 January 2020, [url](#); Caracol, El infierno de la extorsión en Colombia, 7 February 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁴ Caracol, El infierno de la extorsión en Colombia, 7 February 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁵ CONPA, 17 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

⁸⁶⁶ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with the EUAA

⁸⁶⁷ McDermott, J., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 November 2022

⁸⁶⁸ CONPA is a council based on an agreement between organisations of the black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero people, to advocate for the defense and promotion of rights for these groups.



first by receiving a note or phone call, or having their house shot with fire arms. Most people try to find the money and pay.⁸⁶⁹

For more information on urban displacement, see the chapter on [Displacement](#).

7.3.1. *Gota a gota* loans

Urban extortion frequently occurs in the form of loansharking.⁸⁷⁰ Drop-by-drop (*prestamos gota a gota* or *prestadiario*) loans are microcredit informal loans or rapid financing from loansharks at exorbitantly high interest rates ranging from 10 % to 30 %⁸⁷¹ or 40 % per month.⁸⁷² They are frequently used by people who lack access to formal credit,⁸⁷³ often used by taxi drivers, street vendors, mechanics, service employees, businessmen, merchants, housewives, among others.⁸⁷⁴ *Gota a gota* criminal enterprises are managed by criminal networks⁸⁷⁵ and have links to armed groups and gangs.⁸⁷⁶ The groups also use mobile apps to hide transfers, charge customers, and issue threats.⁸⁷⁷ The money loaned out in *gota a gota* schemes facilitates money laundering and is used to move money from drug trafficking and extortion rackets through commercial facades⁸⁷⁸ and to exert control over territory, co-opt local residents, or draw them into surveillance on the groups' behalf.⁸⁷⁹ The situation occurs throughout Colombia, but especially in departmental capitals and main cities in less developed regions, particularly in the Caribbean regions,⁸⁸⁰ Atlántico, Córdoba, Cesar, Sucre, Valle, Cauca, Antioquia, and Tolima.⁸⁸¹ Colombian criminal groups such as AGC, La Oficina de Enigado and La Terraza also run loan operations in other Latin American countries.⁸⁸² AGC reportedly controls 50 *gota-a-gota* networks in Urabá (Antioquia).⁸⁸³

The *gota a gota* operation structure functions through various roles:

- *volanteros* (flyers): who are in charge of distributing advertisement for the loans especially in commercial areas and middle and lower class neighbourhoods to obtain needy clients;

⁸⁶⁹ CONPA, 17 January 2022, Correspondence on file with EUAA

⁸⁷⁰ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with the EUAA

⁸⁷¹ BBC Mundo, Qué son los préstamos "gota a gota" que grupos criminales de Colombia exportan al resto de América Latina, 21 October 2016, [url](#)

⁸⁷² Forbes, El drama del 'gota a gota': un arma de doble filo, 9 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁷³ BBC Mundo, Qué son los préstamos "gota a gota" que grupos criminales de Colombia exportan al resto de América Latina, 21 October 2016, [url](#); Forbes, El drama del 'gota a gota': un arma de doble filo, 9 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁴ Forbes, Microcrédito para todos: ¿El fin del 'gota a gota'?, 7 July 2022, [url](#); Vanguardia, Comerciantes informales siguen acudiendo a préstamos 'gota a gota', 8 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁵ BBC Mundo, Qué son los préstamos "gota a gota" que grupos criminales de Colombia exportan al resto de América Latina, 21 October 2016, [url](#); Forbes, El drama del 'gota a gota': un arma de doble filo, 9 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁶ Connectas, La expansión del 'gota a gota' - Colombia: Un problema de salud pública, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁷⁷ Insight Crime, In Colombia, Loan Sharking is Now Just a Click Away, 27 May 2019, [url](#);

⁸⁷⁸ Insight Crime, In Colombia, Loan Sharking is Now Just a Click Away, 27 May 2019, [url](#); Connectas, La expansión del 'gota a gota' - Colombia: Un problema de salud pública, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁷⁹ El Quindiano, Préstamos "gota a gota" y "cadenas de ahorro", modalidades de alto riesgo para la comunidad, 15 September 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁰ Forbes, Microcrédito para todos: ¿El fin del 'gota a gota'?, 7 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸¹ Connectas, La expansión del 'gota a gota' - Colombia: Un problema de salud pública, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁸² BBC Mundo, Qué son los préstamos "gota a gota" que grupos criminales de Colombia exportan al resto de América Latina, 21 October 2016, [url](#); Insight Crime, Colombia's 'Gota a Gota' Loan Sharks Exploit Chile Market, 2 September 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁸³ Connectas, La expansión del 'gota a gota' - Colombia: Un problema de salud pública, n.d., [url](#)



- *administrador* (administrator): The person who receives and verifies calls and who personally goes to deliver the amount requested which can be via blank checks;
- *cobradores* (collectors): The collectors, who drive motorcycles, collect payment the capital amount and interest accrued on the deadline;
- *Jefes de seguridad* (security chiefs): Specialists in threats and armed violence; when a client is late, security chiefs are sent to press for payment.⁸⁸⁴

Forms of collection can start with phone calls and can lead to threats and violence.⁸⁸⁵

According to the Prosecutor's office, those who do not repay promptly are subjected to threats to themselves and their families, dispossession of their property or identity documents, and become victims of extortion, theft, displacement, injury and homicide.⁸⁸⁶ Consequences of non-payment may also include blackmail, losing one's job, intimidation, death threats, and physical danger to themselves or their family.⁸⁸⁷ In Medellín, for example, most individual cases of forced intra-urban displacement are related to *gota a gota* victimisation, such as collection of extortion fees, regulation of neighbourhood problems, and personal/family problems related to armed groups; such cases are not reported to the authorities.⁸⁸⁸ There have been reports of suicide by non-payers or being forced to work for the armed group transporting drugs.⁸⁸⁹ Victims rarely approach authorities for assistance.⁸⁹⁰ The Attorney General's Office reported that between 2021 and 2022, 4790 charges were laid and 4 779 indictments were registered for extortion and fraud related to *gota a gota*.⁸⁹¹ Further information on prosecution of these crimes could not be found within time constraints.

7.4. People involved in crop substitution

UNODC reported that coca cultivation reach a historically high level in 2021 following an upward trend since 2014, and up by 43 % since 2020, with 62 % of cultivation concentrated in Narino, Norte de Santander, and Putumayo.⁸⁹² The National Comprehensive Programme for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos Ilícitos, PNIS), is a voluntary eradication program established under the peace agreement to provide coca⁸⁹³ cultivators with alternatives, and short-term payments and assistance to transition to legal crops.⁸⁹⁴ PNIS has provided legal income-generation opportunities to over 14,000 families transitioning away from illicit crop growing.⁸⁹⁵ The government made agreements with almost 100 000 growers and pickers in 56 municipalities and voluntarily eradicated nearly 45

⁸⁸⁴ Cundinamarca, Informe especial: Prestamos Gota a Gota, n.d., [url](#), p. 6; Forbes, El drama del 'gota a gota': un arma de doble filo, 9 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁵ El Colombiano, Los gota a gota ahora 'secuestran' su tarjeta débito, 19 September 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁶ Forbes, El drama del 'gota a gota': un arma de doble filo, 9 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁷ BBC Mundo, El suicidio por causa de un préstamo "gota a gota" que conmociona a Colombia, 7 February 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁸ Medellín, El desplazamiento forzado intraurbano en Medellín: Categorización de un fenómeno complejo, 2019, [url](#), pp. 56

⁸⁸⁹ Connectas, La expansión del 'gota a gota' - Colombia: Un problema de salud pública, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁹⁰ El Colombiano, Los gota a gota ahora 'secuestran' su tarjeta débito, 19 September 2022, [url](#); Insight Crime, Colombia's 'Gota a Gota' Loan Sharks Exploit Chile Market, 2 September 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁹¹ Forbes, Microcrédito para todos: ¿El fin del 'gota a gota'?, 7 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁹² UNODC, Survey of territories affected by coca cultivation, 2021, 19 October 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁹³ For maps of coca cultivation areas, see UNODC, Informe de monitoreo de territorios afectados por cultivos ilícitos 2021, October 2022, [url](#), p. 28, 37

⁸⁹⁴ WOLA, A Long Way to Go: Implementing Colombia's peace accord after five years, 23 November 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁵ UNVMC/UNSC, Report of the Secretary General (S/2021/1090), 27 December 2021, [url](#), para. 17



000 hectares of illicit crops.⁸⁹⁶ Illegal armed groups oppose drug cultivation substitution programme.⁸⁹⁷ Furthermore, under President Duque, whose party was critical of the accords, the government stopped signing new agreements and delivery on the program and assistance was slow and has fallen short of assistance promised.⁸⁹⁸ Coercive methods such as forced eradication increased, leaving producers caught between state eradication or threats from armed groups.⁸⁹⁹ Furthermore, the program has led to complaints from peasants of food insecurity, with UNODC finding that 91 % of participant households had some degree of food insecurity despite the programs primary component, food assistance.⁹⁰⁰

Forced eradication of illicit crops has caused conflicts between coca cultivators and security forces to become more frequent, causing blockades, confrontations, and deaths.⁹⁰¹ According to military statistics, in 2021, there were over 1 000 blockades or clashes between public security forces and communities opposed to forced eradication programs, or calling for the expansion of the PNIS program under the peace accord; these have lead to a 'significant number of injured peasants'. Some communities received pressure from armed groups to participate in blockades.⁹⁰² According to Somos Defensores, between 2016-2020, 75 people working on PNIS programs have been murdered, mostly by unknown perpetrators and paramilitary groups and mainly in Antioquia, Cauca, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, and Nariño.⁹⁰³ PNIS municipalities also experience higher than average homicide rates, which increased since 2017.⁹⁰⁴

7.5. Journalists

Colombia is described as one of the western hemisphere's most dangerous countries for journalists.⁹⁰⁵ Journalists continue to experience threats, murder attempts, targeted killings, harassment, assaults, and attacks.⁹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch described the death threats and violence faced by journalists, HRDs, social leaders and activists as 'pervasive'.⁹⁰⁷ Coverages of subjects such as the 2021 national protests,⁹⁰⁸ gender-based violence, drug-trafficking, armed

⁸⁹⁶ WOLA, A Long Way to Go: Implementing Colombia's peace accord after five years, 23 November 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁷ Nilsson, M., Colombia's Program to Substitute Crops Used for Illegal Purposes: Its Impact on Security and Development, 17 May 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁸ WOLA, A Long Way to Go: Implementing Colombia's peace accord after five years, 23 November 2021, [url](#); France 24, "Un total incumplimiento": La desesperanza de los campesinos excocaleros colombianos, 21 November 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁹ New Internationalist, An Uneasy Peace for Colombia's Coca Farmers, 13 October 2021, [url](#); France 24, "Un total incumplimiento": La desesperanza de los campesinos excocaleros colombianos, 21 November 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁰ El Espectador, Entre el hambre y la coca: el fracaso del plan de substitución en el Guaviare, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰¹ New Internationalist, An Uneasy Peace for Colombia's Coca Farmers, 13 October 2021, [url](#); WOLA, A Long Way to Go: Implementing Colombia's peace accord after five years, 23 November 2021, [url](#); Nilsson, M., Colombia's Program to Substitute Crops Used for Illegal Purposes: Its Impact on Security and Development, 17 May 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁰² UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 37-38

⁹⁰³ Justice for Colombia, 75 coordinators of crop substitution murdered from 2016 to 2020, 26 March 2021, [url](#); Somos Defensores, La substitucion voluntaria siembra paz, [url](#), 2021, pp. 56-58

⁹⁰⁴ El Espectador, Sustitución de coca: las propuestas a Gobierno Petro para reformular el PNIS, 10 August 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁵ RSF, Colombia, n.d., [url](#)

⁹⁰⁶ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), p. 957-964; EU Election Observation Mission, Colombia 2022 – Final Report, [url](#), p. 29; RSF, RSF calls for thorough investigation into journalist's murder in western Colombia, 22 September 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁷ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 17; OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 291



groups,⁹⁰⁹ the environment, armed conflict, corruption or collusion of authorities and armed groups cause 'systemic harassment, intimidation, and violence.'⁹¹⁰ Slander and libel laws also caused self-censorship⁹¹¹ and the Ministry of Defence implemented a policy to monitor social media.⁹¹² In 2021, Fundación Para La Libertad de Prensa (FLIP) recorded 117 journalists affected by threats, and 158 journalists affected by incidents of violence and harassment.⁹¹³ For 2022, the FLIP recorded 365 violations of freedom of the press and 417 victims as of 28 September 2022.⁹¹⁴ Three journalists have been killed so far in 2022.⁹¹⁵

Colombian military and intelligence allegedly spied illegally on journalists in the past.⁹¹⁶ Journalist Ricardo Calderón, director of the investigative team for the national newspaper *Semana*, who investigated corruption in the security forces, was targeted and shot six times but survived.⁹¹⁷ He and other journalists working at the publication experienced threats, harassment, and surveillance while working at the publication.⁹¹⁸ The IACHR then ordered in 2021 that the government of Colombia to protect him from 'grave threats' noting that the authorities had failed to bring those responsible to justice.⁹¹⁹ The UNP provided protection to 187 journalists in 2021, however, delays and improper measures caused concerns about perceived protection shortcomings 'such as delays in granting protection and the appropriateness of measures for addressing specific threats.'⁹²⁰ There were 49 complaints of death threats and assaults against journalists benefitting from the state's protection in 2021.⁹²¹ There were allegations that a journalist protected by the UNP was being monitored by GPS tracking without her consent.⁹²² One of the 3 journalists killed in 2022 had been given a panic button, bodyguard, and bulletproof vest by the national protection unit but requested additional reinforcement; the UNP was still considering his request when he was killed.⁹²³ The IACHR stated that while the state has made institutional efforts to investigate and punish those targeting journalists, that there are still major challenges in obtaining justice and that impunity rate in killings of journalists is 78 % and this rises to 98 % when considering other crimes such as threats,⁹²⁴ as convictions remain rare.⁹²⁵

⁹⁰⁹ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 274, 280

⁹¹⁰ RSF, Colombia, n.d., [url](#)

⁹¹¹ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 18

⁹¹² FLIP, Preserving Democracy Begins with Protecting Journalisms, 8 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹¹³ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 17

⁹¹⁴ FLIP, Mapa de violaciones a la libertad de prensa [28 September 2022], n.d., [url](#)

⁹¹⁵ RSF, Journalist receiving state protection gunned down in Colombia, 19 October 2022, [url](#)

⁹¹⁶ CPJ, Colombian magazine *Semana* alleges military spied on journalists, 13 January 2020, [url](#); *Semana*, Chuzadas sin cuartel: la persecución a SEMANA, 12 January 2020, [url](#)

⁹¹⁷ El País, 'Ricardo Calderón: el reportero invisible', 26 April 2022, [url](#)

⁹¹⁸ CPJ, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights orders Colombia to protect journalist Ricardo Calderon, 20 January 2021, [url](#);

⁹¹⁹ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 13 January 2022, [url](#); CIDH, Resolución 6/2021 – Medidas cautelares No. 207-20, [url](#)

⁹²⁰ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 17

⁹²¹ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 279

⁹²² OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 287

⁹²³ RSF, Journalist receiving state protection gunned down in Colombia, 19 October 2022, [url](#)

⁹²⁴ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 303

⁹²⁵ Freedom House, Colombia – 2022, February 2022, [url](#)



7.6. Ethnic groups

Colombian minority groups include indigenous communities, Afro-descendants, and a small population of several thousand Roma people.⁹²⁶ The IACHR has expressed concern at the persistence of violence against indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, who experience situations of harassment, intimidation, homicides and threats to their social and community leaders.⁹²⁷ The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has likewise expressed concern that violence persists following the peace agreement and that this poses a ‘serious threat’ to indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.⁹²⁸ Social and community leaders from both communities are frequently assassinated by armed groups as a strategy to erode the capacity of these groups to assert their rights.⁹²⁹ Additionally, generalised homicides are concentrated in Cauca, Chocó, Nariño, Valle del Cauca, Antioquia, and Norte de Santander, known for the lack of state presence and impacts of the armed conflict and violence disproportionately affected indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, peasants, and community leaders.⁹³⁰ The Colombian government’s Victims Unit, which monitors implementation of the Victims Law 1448 of 2011 stated that ethnic and rural populations endured marked conditions of vulnerability and lack of protection as well as limited or non-existent access to goods and services, access to justice, conflict resolution and permanent security, allowing armed groups to establish de facto footholds in the territory.⁹³¹ In 2021, the SAT issued 21 Alerts warning of risks to the indigenous population and 12 Alerts warning of risks to the Afro-Colombian communities.⁹³²

7.6.1. Indigenous communities

Colombia’s indigenous population makes up roughly 3-5% of the population [with 112 Indigenous People groups⁹³³] who live on approximately 34 million hectares of land granted by the government [28 % of the country’s territory⁹³⁴]. Indigenous lands are frequently rich in resources, located in strategic areas, and ‘highly contested by armed groups’ causing them to be targeted by all sides in the conflict,⁹³⁵ and experiencing violence and human rights abuses.⁹³⁶ Under Decree 4633 of 2011, the government provides for assistance, reparations, and territorial rights to indigenous victims of the armed conflict.⁹³⁷ However, there were delays

⁹²⁶ WOLA, A Long Way to Go: Implementing Colombia’s peace accord after five years, 23 November 2021, [url](#)

⁹²⁷ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 34-38

⁹²⁸ UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#), para. 12

⁹²⁹ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 15

⁹³⁰ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 34-38

⁹³¹ Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, “Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras”, Octavo informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2020-2021, 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 38-39

⁹³² Colombia, CERD – Informes periódicos 20° y 21° combinados que la Colombia debía presentar en 2022 en virtud del artículo 9 de la Convención (CERD/C/COL/20-21), 6 October 2022, [url](#), para. 70

⁹³³ IWGIA, Indigenous Peoples at risk of extinction in Colombia, 27 June 2022, [url](#)

⁹³⁴ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 30

⁹³⁵ Freedom House, Colombia – 2022, February 2022, [url](#); ONIC, 30 September 2021, p. 69

⁹³⁶ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 29-31; ONIC, Informe de afectaciones a los derechos humanos y territoriales en los pueblos indígenas de Colombia, 30 September 2021, [url](#)

⁹³⁷ Colombia, Decreto Ley 4633 de 2011, 9 December 2011, [url](#)



in effectiveness due to poor progress formalizing land claims, the presence of third parties interested in exploiting natural resources, and the impact of the armed conflict on indigenous peoples.⁹³⁸ The lack of implementation of the security guarantees in the peace agreement was also cited as a cause for continued violence against indigenous people in the armed conflict.⁹³⁹ The National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia (ONIC, Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia), an organisation that works to represent the indigenous people of Colombia, documents violations against their community and reported that the top violent acts in 2021 and 2022 against indigenous people have been confinement, mass forced displacement, intimidation and threats, forced recruitment, violations of rights, attempted homicides, homicides, among others.⁹⁴⁰

ONIC reported that the departments most affected by violent acts against indigenous people were concentrated in southern and coastal departments and north-eastern regions:⁹⁴¹ Chocó (11 736), Antioquia (1 008), Valle del Cauca (757), Córdoba (434), Tolima (128), Cauca (103), Nariño (33), and Putumayo (14).⁹⁴² According to the Comisión Nacional de Territorios Indígenas (CNTI), an advisory and consultative body for indigenous communities to engage with the government, there have been 431 homicides of indigenous people since the 2016 peace agreement with a growth rate of 200 % from 10 killings in 2016 up to 114 in 2021 (17 % women victims), with most of them happening in Cauca, Nariño, and coastal departments.⁹⁴³ Most of the victims have been community members (78 %) as well as people with community leadership roles (local authorities, local indigenous guards, leaders, traditional doctors/healers).⁹⁴⁴ ONIC reported that 24 different indigenous groups had people victimised during 2021, mainly among Awá, Emberá Dóbida, Emberá Katío, Emberá Eyábida, Emberá, Sikuani, and Nasa peoples.⁹⁴⁵ CNTI reported that Awá and Nasa peoples were the most affected specifically by homicides and massacres and most were committed by unknown perpetrators.⁹⁴⁶ The UN CERD stated that there has been a lack of progress in investigating, prosecuting, punishing human rights violations against indigenous and Afro-descendant Colombians, as well as delays in paying reparations related to the armed conflict.⁹⁴⁷

⁹³⁸ CNTI, Balance de la implementación – Decreto Ley 4633 – durante el 2021, July 2022, [url](#), p. 10

⁹³⁹ CNTI, El eterno retorno de la violencia política contra los pueblos indígenas en Colombia: Un balance del año 2021, October 2022, [url](#), p. 30

⁹⁴⁰ Informe de afectaciones a los derechos humanos y territoriales en los pueblos indígenas de Colombia, 30 September 2021, [url](#), p. 37; ONIC, Afectaciones a los derechos humanos en los pueblos indígenas de Colombia, October 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁹⁴¹ ONIC, Afectaciones a los derechos humanos en los pueblos indígenas de Colombia, October 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁹⁴² Informe de afectaciones a los derechos humanos y territoriales en los pueblos indígenas de Colombia, 30 September 2021, [url](#), p. 51

⁹⁴³ CNTI, El eterno retorno de la violencia política contra los pueblos indígenas en Colombia: Un balance del año 2021, October 2022, [url](#), p. 15; See also, p. 22 of the same source for a map of the homicides of indigenous peoples in 2021

⁹⁴⁴ CNTI, El eterno retorno de la violencia política contra los pueblos indígenas en Colombia: Un balance del año 2021, October 2022, [url](#), p. 23; see also: Al Jazeera, Indigenous activists' deaths highlight surging Colombia conflict, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁵ ONIC, Afectaciones a los derechos humanos en los pueblos indígenas de Colombia, October 2022, [url](#), p. 21

⁹⁴⁶ CNTI, El eterno retorno de la violencia política contra los pueblos indígenas en Colombia: Un balance del año 2021, October 2022, [url](#), p. 23, 26

⁹⁴⁷ UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#), para. 14



Indigenous people have special legal protections and specialised government assistance, but still experienced discrimination and high levels of poverty and child mortality.⁹⁴⁸ Under the law, indigenous people have recognition and perpetual rights to their lands; however this is often disputed by land owners and even the government.⁹⁴⁹ The constitution provides for a prior consultation mechanism regarding decisions affecting their land but the indigenous groups continued to assert a lack of participation.⁹⁵⁰ Land restitution claims under the Victims Law 1448 also remain limited in their progress, falling short in providing protection and titling to victims of the armed conflict.⁹⁵¹

The armed conflict has posed ‘existential threats’ to indigenous communities and in 2004, the Colombian Constitutional Court issued Ruling T-025 which declared the forced displacement and risk of extinction for 35 Indigenous Peoples to be unconstitutional.⁹⁵² The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UN CERD) remarked that there has been a lack of significant progress on the application of Constitutional Court decisions relating to the protection of indigenous groups at risk of extinction, in particular the Awa and Uitoto people.⁹⁵³

7.6.2. Afro-descendant communities

Afro-Colombians make up 4.6 million people, or 9.4 % of the national total population of Colombia,⁹⁵⁴ a population which has declined by almost 31 % since 2005.⁹⁵⁵ It is the second largest such population in the Americas, after Brazil, and includes Palenqueros and Raizales people.⁹⁵⁶ Afro-descendant Colombians reside mainly in the Pacific and Caribbean areas of Colombia.⁹⁵⁷ The majority (85 %) reside in urban areas and are the majority in towns of the North West as well as having significant numbers in low-income settlements in major cities.⁹⁵⁸ They have been victims of harassment, intimidation, killings, violence, and displacement related to the drug trade and post-conflict insecurity which has pushed them of their communal lands.⁹⁵⁹ They also are disproportionately affected by illicit economic activities in

⁹⁴⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 30; UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#), para. 16

⁹⁴⁹ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 30; UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#), para. 18

⁹⁵⁰ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 30

⁹⁵¹ UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#), para. 20

⁹⁵² IWGIA, Indigenous Peoples at risk of extinction in Colombia, 27 June 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁵³ UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#), para. 22

⁹⁵⁴ Colombia, CERD – Informes periódicos 20° y 21° combinados que la Colombia debía presentar en 2022 en virtud del artículo 9 de la Convención (CERD/C/COL/20-21), 6 October 2022, [url](#), para. 8

⁹⁵⁵ UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#), para. 4

⁹⁵⁶ MRG, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Colombia, June 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁷ Canada, IRB, Situation of Afro-Colombians (2017- May 2020) (COL200219.E), 6 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁸ MRG, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Colombia, June 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁹ UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#); MRG, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Colombia, June 2020, [url](#); see also: Canada, IRB, Situation of Afro-Colombians (2017- May 2020) (COL200219.E), 6 May 2020, [url](#)



their rural lands and lack sufficient state support and presence.⁹⁶⁰ Displacement particularly affected Afro-descendants and they constitute about 14 percent of IDPs registered with the government.⁹⁶¹

Afro-Colombians are entitled to all constitutional and legal rights and protections however, these communities continue to experience discrimination, high levels of poverty and unemployment, and social exclusion from services such as health care, when compared to the rest of the population.⁹⁶² Approximately 32 percent of Afro-Colombians live below the poverty line and in Chocó department, 79 percent are below the poverty line.⁹⁶³

The UN CERD stated that there has been a lack of progress in investigating, prosecuting, punishing human rights violations against indigenous and Afro-descendant Colombians, as well as delays in paying reparations related to the armed conflict.⁹⁶⁴ Land restitution claims under the Victims Law 1448 also remain limited in their progress providing protection and titling to victims of the armed conflict.⁹⁶⁵ There were about 1.2 million people who identified themselves as Afro Colombian registered as victims of the armed conflict in the Victims Unit database.⁹⁶⁶ There was a 2020 Constitutional Court ruling (T-469) which indicated Afro-descendants in Colombia are a 'vulnerable group'.

7.7. People involved in the justice system, including officials and crime witnesses

Intimidation of judges, prosecutors and witnesses hindered judicial functioning.⁹⁶⁷ Violence against justice sector workers, crime witnesses, victims of violence crimes being prosecuted in the justice system and public servants has not decreased with the peace accords and it continues to the ongoing presence of criminal organisations and armed groups.⁹⁶⁸ There is a lack of effective witness protection in Colombia.⁹⁶⁹ Lawyers who work on issues of human rights in particular, or who represent victims of state atrocities, land rights issues, and sensitive cases relating to the conflict, harassment, threats, and efforts to disrupt their professional

⁹⁶⁰ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 29

⁹⁶¹ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 22

⁹⁶² UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#), para. 14; MRG, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Colombia, June 2020, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 29

⁹⁶³ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 29

⁹⁶⁴ UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#), para. 14

⁹⁶⁵ UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#), para. 20

⁹⁶⁶ Colombia, Registro Único de Víctimas RUV, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁷ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 11

⁹⁶⁸ Dejusticia, Correspondence with the EUAA, 2 September 2022

⁹⁶⁹ GITOC, Organized Crime Index – Colombia 2021, [url](#), p. 5; Canada, IRB, Colombia: State protection programs for victims and witnesses of crimes; requirements to access the programs; statistics on the number of applications for relocation that are granted and refused; duration and effectiveness of these programs (2012-March 2016) (COL105470.E), [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 7



functioning.⁹⁷⁰ There have been NGO reports of state spying on lawyers.⁹⁷¹ Protection measures for lawyers are described as insufficient due to the lack of holding perpetrators to account.⁹⁷² More than 700 lawyers have been killed between 1991 to 2013; between 2017-2019, at least 3 were killed and several others faced attempts on their lives. In 2019, two lawyers were killed, and many others threatened.⁹⁷³ Judges are subjected to harassment, threats, and intimidation especially in rural areas where there is a presence of illegal armed groups and a weak state presence.⁹⁷⁴ Public officials involved in administering justice and judicial personnel are subjected to threats, and attacks relating in sensitive political or economic cases, corruption cases, or organised criminal groups.⁹⁷⁵ Land claims cases especially judicial workers to be threatened by armed groups or powerful economic interests.⁹⁷⁶ Between January 2019 and April 2021, there were 6 judicial employees murdered, 26 received threats, 12 were attacked, 3 were prosecuted and 6 were forcibly disappeared.⁹⁷⁷ Dejusticia reported that there were 1145 victims of attacks against judicial workers between 2019-2022, mostly in Cundinamarca.⁹⁷⁸ There have also been smear campaigns against members of the Supreme Court who have pursued Alvaro Uribe for his involvement in forming paramilitary groups.⁹⁷⁹

7.8. Women

Women and girls ‘continue to be the victims of violence and suffer gender inequality’ and discrimination.⁹⁸⁰ In the armed conflict in Colombia, women are particularly vulnerable to conflict-related and sexual violence.⁹⁸¹ Sexual violence and rape has been used as a tool in the war and is linked to control of territory. Women are disproportionately affected by the conflict. 4.6 million women were registered as victims affected by the armed conflict.⁹⁸² Aggression, intimidation, and threats of violence instil fear and dissuade reporting of crimes against women.⁹⁸³ Women from indigenous and African descent faced disproportionately

⁹⁷⁰ Lawyers for Lawyers, Colombia – Submission on the List of Issues by the Lawyers for Lawyers Foundation (Human Rights Committee Consideration of the Eighth Periodic Report on Colombia), 2 May 2022, [url](#); SLAW, Escalating Threats to Colombian Human Rights Advocates, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁷¹ Lawyers for Lawyers, Colombia – Submission on the List of Issues by the Lawyers for Lawyers Foundation (Human Rights Committee Consideration of the Eighth Periodic Report on Colombia), 2 May 2022, [url](#); SLAW, Escalating Threats to Colombian Human Rights Advocates, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁷² Lawyers for Lawyers, Colombia – Submission on the List of Issues by the Lawyers for Lawyers Foundation (Human Rights Committee Consideration of the Eighth Periodic Report on Colombia), 2 May 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁷³ PBI, PBI-Colombia amplifies article about women lawyers subjected to threats, attacks and intimidation, 19 September 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁴ CCEEU et al, Independencia judicial en Colombia: En riesgo por un régimen autoritario, June 2021, [url](#), p. 15, 22

⁹⁷⁵ CCEEU et al, Independencia judicial en Colombia: En riesgo por un régimen autoritario, June 2021, [url](#), p. 8, 70, 22-24

⁹⁷⁶ CCEEU et al, Independencia judicial en Colombia: En riesgo por un régimen autoritario, June 2021, [url](#), p. 22

⁹⁷⁷ CCEEU et al, Independencia judicial en Colombia: En riesgo por un régimen autoritario, June 2021, [url](#), p. 26

⁹⁷⁸ Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

⁹⁷⁹ CCEEU et al, Independencia judicial en Colombia: En riesgo por un régimen autoritario, June 2021, [url](#), p. 26

⁹⁸⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 10

⁹⁸¹ ODI, Women’s participation and influence in transitions from conflict: The case of Colombia, April 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁸² Insight Crime, How Colombia’s Conflict Intensified Violence Against Women and the LGBTQI+ Community, 4 August 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁸³ ODI, Women’s participation and influence in transitions from conflict: The case of Colombia, April 2022, [url](#), p. 12



higher rates of sexual violence in particular in relation to the conflict, and lacked assistance, protection and justice for crimes against them.⁹⁸⁴

Women human rights defenders and social leaders live ‘in a particular situation of risk’ in the context of increases in recent years of murder, torture, and sexual violence against HRDs.⁹⁸⁵ They are more likely to receive threats of sexual violence or to have their family members and children harassed.⁹⁸⁶ The author of the Truth Commission’s chapter on women stated that threats to women has been used an effective means of clearing territory due to the ripple effects on the family and community as women tend to be displaced with their families.⁹⁸⁷

Violence against women and impunity for perpetrators continues to be a serious problem in Colombia.⁹⁸⁸ The main forms of violence against women are domestic and family violence, sexual violence, and femicides.⁹⁸⁹ Women and girls suffer inequality and gender-based discrimination, as well as barriers to accessing health, justice, and protection for victims of violence.⁹⁹⁰ Crimes against women and girls increased during the pandemic due to confinement, while underreporting also remains a problem.⁹⁹¹

Sexual violence can range from verbal harassment to rape.⁹⁹² Despite being prohibited by the law, rape of both women and men, including spousal rape, remains a serious problem.⁹⁹³ The Attorney General’s office received 43 394 complaints of sexual violence in 2021, 86 % of which had female victims.⁹⁹⁴ In the same year, it also received 114 727 complaints of domestic violence, with 77 % being from female victims.⁹⁹⁵ Prosecution rates were low and impunity was a problem in gender-based violence cases.⁹⁹⁶

Femicide [intentional killing of women because they are female] numbers were reported by the Colombian Observatory on Women as 57 in 2016, 208 in 2017, 228 in 2018, and 226 in 2019, with the highest 2019 numbers in Antioquia and Norte de Santander.⁹⁹⁷ In 2021, there

⁹⁸⁴ UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#), para. 24

⁹⁸⁵ OMCT, Colombia: Over 2,000 days of criminalisation against human rights defender Milena Quiroz Jiménez, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁷ Insight Crime, How Colombia’s Conflict Intensified Violence Against Women and the LGBTQI+ Community, 4 August 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 27-28; Pares, Vivir sin miedo: Balance de violencias basadas en género durante 2021 y el primer cuatrimestre de 2022, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-5

⁹⁸⁹ Pares, Vivir sin miedo: Balance de violencias basadas en género durante 2021 y el primer cuatrimestre de 2022, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-5

⁹⁹⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 10

⁹⁹¹ Pares, Vivir sin miedo: Balance de violencias basadas en género durante 2021 y el primer cuatrimestre de 2022, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-5

⁹⁹² Pares, Vivir sin miedo: Balance de violencias basadas en género durante 2021 y el primer cuatrimestre de 2022, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-5

⁹⁹³ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 27

⁹⁹⁴ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 10

⁹⁹⁵ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 10

⁹⁹⁶ Bogota Post, Impunity for femicide in Colombia is still above 90 %, 27 September 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁷ Colombia, Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, Observatorio Colombiano de la Mujeres: Violencia, 2019, [url](#)



were 183 reports of killings of women on account of their gender.⁹⁹⁸ In femicide cases, there is a 93 % impunity rate.⁹⁹⁹

The government has a number of pieces of legislation on the prevention of gender based violations.¹⁰⁰⁰ There is also a national policy for gender equity and an Office of the Advisor on Equality of Women which deals with combating discrimination, however, it persists despite women having the same legal rights as men,¹⁰⁰¹ as did gender-based violence.¹⁰⁰² Gender discrimination within the justice system is reported, both in terms of the representation of women in the judiciary and in decisions made which exclude women in certain areas of law and high courts.¹⁰⁰³ Women of indigenous and African descent experienced multiple forms of discrimination in accessing work, health, and education services.¹⁰⁰⁴

7.9. Children and youth

According to Colombia's Victim's Unit, between 1985 to 2021, the armed conflict affected more than 2 million children through displacement, confinement, recruitment, abuses, and sexual violence. The source stated that there was a decline between 2016 and 2019 due to the peace agreement, but increased again 2021-2021 due to increased conflict intensity, causing an 88 % increase in conflict-affected youth (from 12 481 to 23 465 cases). After 2016, most children affected were in Chocó, Antioquia, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Córdoba, and Bolívar.¹⁰⁰⁵ The UN reported a decrease in 'grave violations' against children since the 2016 peace agreement, however noted that children continue to suffer from the impact of hostilities, most prominently through the recruitment of children by armed groups, and the threat of recruitment causing displacement.¹⁰⁰⁶ Armed groups forcibly recruit and use children as combatants, informants, porters and traffickers, and sometimes girls are used for sex.¹⁰⁰⁷ Child rape and abuse by armed groups continued to be a serious problem.¹⁰⁰⁸ Grave violations against children such as rape and sexual violence are underreported due to

⁹⁹⁸ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 10

⁹⁹⁹ Bogota Post, Impunity for femicide in Colombia is still above 90 %, 27 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁰ Pares, Vivir sin miedo: Balance de violencias basadas en género durante 2021 y el primer cuatrimestre de 2022, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-5

¹⁰⁰¹ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁰⁰² Pares, Vivir sin miedo: Balance de violencias basadas en género durante 2021 y el primer cuatrimestre de 2022, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-5

¹⁰⁰³ CCEEU et al, Independencia judicial en Colombia: En riesgo por un régimen autoritario, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 74-76

¹⁰⁰⁴ UN, CERD, Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports on Colombia, 22 January 2020, [url](#), para. 24

¹⁰⁰⁵ ACAPS, Colombia – Impact of the armed conflict on children and youth, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 1; Colombia, CNMH, Un 30% de las víctimas de violencia sexual en el conflicto armado son niñas o adolescentes, 19 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁶ UNSC, Children and armed conflict in Colombia - Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1022), 8 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁷ ACAPS, Colombia – Impact of the armed conflict on children and youth, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰⁰⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 27

fear of stigma and reprisal.¹⁰⁰⁹ Groups convince children to join in poorer areas with offers of food and money.¹⁰¹⁰

The impacts of the conflict, displacement and confinement on children include a ‘total disruption to their lives’ including risks of family separation, mental health, education, and access to food and water.¹⁰¹¹ Children were also killed and maimed during the conflict. The UN reported 118 verified cases during June 2019-July 2021 (78 killed, 48 maimed) who were victims of gunshots, anti-personnel mines, unexploded ordnance, and aerial attacks.¹⁰¹²

7.10. LGBTIQ

In the armed conflict, the Truth Commission found LGBTIQ people to have been targeted due to both prejudice and social complicity,¹⁰¹³ disproportionately.¹⁰¹⁴ All armed actors in the conflict have violated the rights of LGBTI people in varying degrees.¹⁰¹⁵ The armed conflict exacerbated violence against LGBTI people and the Victims Registry (RUV, Registro Único de Víctimas RUV has registered 4 971 self-identified LGBTI people as victims, mainly in departments of Antioquia, Nariño, Bolívar, Valle del Cauca, and Chocó.¹⁰¹⁶

There were no reports of official discrimination based on sexual orientation when accessing housing, employment, or education, however there were reports with regard to health care access.¹⁰¹⁷ The Constitutional Court ruled in favour of tasking medical insurance companies with covering costs of gender reassignment surgery.¹⁰¹⁸

Societal discrimination and abuses were reported.¹⁰¹⁹ The primary forms of abuse against LGBTIQ people were physical, sexual, and psychological aggression, particularly against transgender men with reports of sexual abuse and corrective rape. There were allegations of police violence based on sexual orientation,¹⁰²⁰ and discrimination.¹⁰²¹ The UN reported that the Ombudsperson’s office handled 72 cases of gender-based violence against LGBTIQI persons in 2021.¹⁰²² USDOS between 2008-July 2021, there were 185 LGBTIQ people killed,

¹⁰⁰⁹ UNSC, Children and armed conflict in Colombia - Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1022), 8 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁰ ACAPS, Colombia – Impact of the armed conflict on children and youth, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰¹¹ ACAPS, Colombia – Impact of the armed conflict on children and youth, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰¹² UNSC, Children and armed conflict in Colombia - Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1022), 8 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰¹³ Insight Crime, How Colombia's Conflict Intensified Violence Against Women and the LGBTQI+ Community, 4 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁴ Insight Crime, How Colombia's Conflict Intensified Violence Against Women and the LGBTQI+ Community, 4 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁵ Colombia Diversa, Who is Going to Tell Us? Report for the Truth Commission on the Experiences of Gay, Bisexual, and Trans People in the Colombian Armed Conflict, September 2020, [url](#), p. 44

¹⁰¹⁶ Colombia, La Unidad reafirma su compromiso con las víctimas del conflicto armado con orientaciones sexuales e identidades de género diversas, 16 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁷ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 34

¹⁰¹⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 34

¹⁰¹⁹ Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#); WOLA, LGBT+ Rights and Peace in Colombia: The Paradox Between Law and Practice, 3 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁰ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 34

¹⁰²¹ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 11

¹⁰²² UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 11

mostly transgender women. In 2021, there were 39 homicides of LGBTI people reported by the NGO Diversa, including 26 transgender people.¹⁰²³ However the Office of the Ombudsperson reported in 2021, 27 killings of transgender persons, 111 complaints of violence against transgender people, and 9 threats against rights defenders.¹⁰²⁴ The Colombian NGO Temblores reported in a 2019 report that according to information from the Colombian legal medicine department, between 2009-2018 there were 1 944 acts of violence against LGBT people recorded, 19.8 % homicides, 10 % acts of sexual violence, and 70.2 % interpersonal violence. Abuses were underreported. Most of the registered violence cases had ‘no information’ or unknown perpetrators.¹⁰²⁵

On paper, Colombia has one of the ‘strongest legal frameworks in Latin America’ for defending the rights of LGBTIQ people, however in practice protections are ‘rarely enforced’.¹⁰²⁶ The JEP has opened two cases relating to the violence perpetrated by the FARC-EP and paramilitaries against LGBTIQ people in the armed conflict.¹⁰²⁷ The government of Colombia has a public policy and action plan on guaranteeing the rights of people from the LGBTI sector, including coordination with multiple national institutions. However, NGOs reported concerns about the absence of nationwide measures to implement them.¹⁰²⁸ There are high levels of impunity for crimes against LGBTI people.¹⁰²⁹ The UN remarked that the FGN did not have a clear approach to conducting investigations with an LGBTI dimension making it difficult to determine whether attacks were related to sexual orientation or gender identity of the victim.¹⁰³⁰ The Prosecutor General continues to prioritise investigating cases with high concentrations of incidents in main cities such as Cali, Medellín, Bogotá, as well as providing training to investigators on LGBTIQ perspectives.¹⁰³¹

¹⁰²³ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 34

¹⁰²⁴ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), pp. 965-966

¹⁰²⁵ Temblores, Qué maricada con nuestros derechos, 2019, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁰²⁶ WOLA, LGBT+ Rights and Peace in Colombia: The Paradox Between Law and Practice, 3 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁷ WOLA, LGBT+ Rights and Peace in Colombia: The Paradox Between Law and Practice, 3 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁸ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), pp. 965-966; UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 12

¹⁰²⁹ Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#); UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 11-12

¹⁰³⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 11

¹⁰³¹ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), pp. 965-966; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 34-35



8. State protection

8.1. Justice system

According to Transparency International (TI), corruption in Colombia ranks 87th out of 180 countries in TI's Corruption Perceptions Index for 2021, compared to Venezuela (177th) and Chile (27th),¹⁰³² making it in line with regional averages.¹⁰³³ However, corruption in Colombia is also described as 'endemic in all state branches and levels of government,' including politicians forming alliances with criminal groups in exchange for election support, bribery of judges and attorneys including in high courts, and corruption of officials in the police, military, and prison system.¹⁰³⁴ The justice system has a lack of resources and there are high levels of corruption and high levels of impunity.¹⁰³⁵ Widespread corruption is 'one of the greatest obstacles to effective law enforcement;' and killings and impunity have led to calls for police reform.¹⁰³⁶ According to the NGO Colectivo de Abogados, an NGO that works on judicial issues with consultative status with the UN, the four most important problems of judicial independence in Colombia are underfunding and initiatives to limit judicial autonomy, harassment, attacks and targeting of judicial officers, politicised appointments to the judiciary, and failure to comply with judicial decisions that check executive authority. The justice system's lack of effectiveness causes distrust from citizens to deal with rights violations by the state and armed groups.¹⁰³⁷

The justice system is compromised by corruption and extortion, with allegations also touching the Constitutional and Supreme Courts, though they remain independent from the executive.¹⁰³⁸ Colombia's justice system is described as having numerous independent mechanisms to regulate it; however it is affected by a lack of resources, high levels of corruption and characterised by 'exceedingly high impunity rates'.¹⁰³⁹ The prosecution service is described as 'relatively professional' though there have been allegations of reduced independence under Duque.¹⁰⁴⁰ Despite reforms made in 2021 to accelerate legal procedures, due process 'remains weak, and trial processes move very slowly'.¹⁰⁴¹

¹⁰³² TI, Corruption Perceptions Index 2021, 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰³³ WJP, Rule of Law Index 2022 - Colombia, 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁴ GITOC, Organized Crime Index – Colombia 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁰³⁵ GITOC, Organized Crime Index – Colombia 2021, [url](#), p. 5; Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p.329

¹⁰³⁶ GITOC, Organized Crime Index – Colombia 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁰³⁷ CCEEU et al., Por la defensa de la independencia de la justicia en Colombia, June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁸ Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁹ GITOC, Organized Crime Index – Colombia 2021, [url](#), p. 5; See also: Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 329-330

¹⁰⁴⁰ Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴¹ Freedom House, Colombia 2022, February 2022, [url](#)



8.2. Reporting crime

Communities are often unwilling to report crimes by armed groups or participate in cooperation with authorities for fear of retaliation and lack of protection.¹⁰⁴² Some communities are not willing to cooperate with state authorities because illegal mining or coca growing are their only source of income, while others have been victims of forced eradication, disappearances, extrajudicial killings, or human rights violations by public security forces.¹⁰⁴³ In some areas, armed groups have corrupted local state institutions, including law enforcement, local mayors and civil servants, making it 'high risk' for crime witnesses to cooperate and causing distrust in the state due to lack of protection.¹⁰⁴⁴

8.3. Mechanisms for state efforts to protect individuals

Colombia has been regarded as a pioneer in protecting human rights defenders due to the creation of the physical protection programme dating back to 1997. It has more than 14 relevant laws and decrees and 18 institutional bodies involved in protecting human rights defenders. The government's strategy has focused mainly in physical security of at-risk individuals, but has evolved to take greater account of prevention and accountability.¹⁰⁴⁵ Despite the extensive protection framework for defenders and efforts to strengthen protection under the peace agreement, this has not restrained the increase in post-war violence against HRDs since 2016, 'partly because they are relatively recent, with many newer instruments lacking full implementation'.¹⁰⁴⁶ In August 2022, the newly elected Petro government launched the first Unified Command Post for Life (PMU), located in Caldonio in Cauca department. The PMU is an initiative that is part of a protection plan covering 65 municipalities in which the state plans to provide 'accompaniment and maintain a permanent presence' including in 10 municipalities where social leaders have been systematically assassinated.¹⁰⁴⁷ Further information on implementation could not be found. Colombia's Truth Commission released its final report in June 2022, and called on the government to provide increased state protection to social leaders and to address violence against them and negligence by the state.¹⁰⁴⁸

The Colombian government's approach to protection focuses on providing security to individuals and attacking armed groups, both of which are described by the International

¹⁰⁴² Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 330

¹⁰⁴³ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 330-331

¹⁰⁴⁴ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 331

¹⁰⁴⁵ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 324

¹⁰⁴⁶ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 327

¹⁰⁴⁷ People's Dispatch, Colombian government launches initiative for protection of social leaders, 23 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁸ Al Jazeera, Colombians call for end to impunity as activist killings continue, 16 July 2022, [url](#)



Crisis Group as temporary interventions. The individual protection schemes have saved lives but been unable to stop the groups issuing threats to life; the military operations to stop armed groups have not resolved the environment and underlying causes of violence.¹⁰⁴⁹

Human Rights Watch reported that protection measures such as bullet proof vests do not address the underlying factors that ‘foster violence against social leaders’ such as drug trafficking, state absence, and slow judicial processes,¹⁰⁵⁰ weak implementation of the peace agreement or institutional weaknesses.¹⁰⁵¹ Nor do measures provide for broader planning to account for collective risks faced by communities that may oppose an armed group or large scale development/energy project.¹⁰⁵² Civil society organisations described the state’s response to threats as ‘reactive’ and militarized, rather than preventive, as the majority of incidents of threats, harassment, and murder go unpunished.¹⁰⁵³ The government of Colombia’s efforts to deal with the underlying causes of violence and the conditions that facilitate the activity and expansion of armed groups and criminal organisations is described by sources as limited in preventing and diminishing violence.¹⁰⁵⁴ Protection through reactive physical measures is insufficient to mitigate risks in the context of ‘widespread and systematic violence’ particularly in rural and remote areas with little infrastructure, nor does the state have resources to afford protection for all defenders at risk.¹⁰⁵⁵ The UN concluded in July 2022 in its recommendations to the incoming Petro government that the state’s response to violence has been insufficient in reducing violence, preventing abuses by illegal armed groups and criminal organisations, and adequately protecting communities and their territory.¹⁰⁵⁶

Under the 2016 peace agreement, social leaders and human rights defenders are explicitly identified as being in need of protection and guarantees are to be provided to them through state mechanisms such as an Elite Corps within the National Police for rapid response to threats, a special investigative unit within the General Attorney’s Office to investigate and prosecute crimes against ex-FARC-EP and social leaders, and strengthened capacity for the Early Warning System, and the Office of the Ombudsperson and the UNP.¹⁰⁵⁷ The National Commission on Security Guarantees was also intended to play a key role in dismantling armed criminals, paramilitarism, and protecting vulnerable groups, however it remains lacking in implementation.¹⁰⁵⁸ It is a high level commission that includes the President of Colombia, key cabinet ministers, the human rights ombudsperson, the attorney-general, the inspector

¹⁰⁴⁹ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 29; See also: Al Jazeera, Colombians call for end to impunity as activist killings continue, 16 July 2022, [url](#); Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 334-335

¹⁰⁵⁰ Al Jazeera, Colombians call for end to impunity as activist killings continue, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵¹ Al, ¿Por qué nos quieren matar?, 8 October 2020, [url](#), p. 43

¹⁰⁵² Al, ¿Por qué nos quieren matar?, 8 October 2020, [url](#), p. 43

¹⁰⁵³ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 93; GITOC, Organized Crime Index – Colombia 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁰⁵⁴ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 79-80; HRW, Left Undefended, February 2021, [url](#), p. 70

¹⁰⁵⁵ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 328-329

¹⁰⁵⁶ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 40

¹⁰⁵⁷ WOLA, A Long Way to Go: Implementing Colombia’s peace accord after five years, 23 November 2021, [url](#); Colombia, Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, 24 November 2016, [url](#), p. 8; UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 75

¹⁰⁵⁸ WOLA, A Long Way to Go: Implementing Colombia’s peace accord after five years, 23 November 2021, [url](#); Colombia, Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, 24 November 2016, [url](#), p. 8, 69



general, military and police commanders, and representatives of civil society and international organisations.¹⁰⁵⁹ Under Colombian law, the Commission is mandated under the 2016 Peace Accord to design and implement a policy to dismantle armed groups that attack social leaders/human rights defenders, but has yielded limited results.¹⁰⁶⁰ Since its creation in November 2016, they have met only 22 times and have yet to function properly.¹⁰⁶¹ There is also the Timely Action Plan on the Prevention and Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Social Leaders, Community Leaders and Journalists, a 2018 strategy to articulate protection programs and resources to safeguard these groups.¹⁰⁶² Additional protection measures are required to be provided by governors and mayors at the local level, as local authorities are 'legally the first responders' to threatened social leaders.¹⁰⁶³

The Colombia government has two long-standing systems that have been important in protecting against human rights violations and targeted persons, 'though both suffer from insufficient funding and other constraints': The Early Warning System (Sistema de Alertas Tempranas) through the Office of the Ombudsperson and the National Protection Unit (UNP). A number of other mechanisms have developed since the peace agreement, but these have only been 'superficially promoted' and most remain 'barely functional'.¹⁰⁶⁴ Furthermore, while the Office of the Ombudsperson has achieved a wider territorial presence and community trust, in many territories, its presence continues to be weak and it encounters a large number of demands from communities under daily pressure and threats.¹⁰⁶⁵

8.3.1. Early Warning System (SAT, Sistema de Alertas Tempranas)

Under Colombian law, the Office of the Ombudsperson is responsible for an alert system called the Early Warning System (Sistema de Alertas Tempranas, SAT), which collects and analyses information on risk to civilians and their human rights due to the armed conflict, and which issues alerts to inform competent authorities of the need for a timely response, including recommendations to take steps to prevent and mitigate risks.¹⁰⁶⁶ The SAT Office of the Ombudsperson has a presence in multiple regions where there are 'few other state actors'.¹⁰⁶⁷ When an alert is issued by the system, municipal, departmental, and national authorities are required to trigger a 'rapid response' to prevent abuses from occurring, which is coordinated by the Ministry of Interior.¹⁰⁶⁸ Between 2016 and December 2020, 278 warnings were issued (including 50 in 2019 and 49 in 2020), in which risks were flagged in 549 of Colombia's 1 123 municipalities; however defenders were killed in over 30% of these cases

¹⁰⁵⁹ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 91

¹⁰⁶⁰ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 91, 93

¹⁰⁶¹ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 77

¹⁰⁶² Colombia, Plan de Acción Oportuna de prevención y protección para los defensores de derechos humanos, Líderes sociales, comunales y periodistas (PAO), 19 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶³ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 29; See Decree 2252 de 2017 regarding individual and collective protection for human rights defenders provided by governors and mayors: Colombia, Decreto 2252 de 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁴ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 4-5

¹⁰⁶⁵ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 74, 86, 87

¹⁰⁶⁶ OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 106; Perry, J., SAIS Review of International Affairs, Can the Government Police Itself? Colombia's False Positives Scandal and its Lessons for Atrocity Prevention, 5 August 2022, [url](#); HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 82

¹⁰⁶⁷ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁰⁶⁸ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 82



after an alert had been issued.¹⁰⁶⁹ In 2019 alone, 56 Alerts were issued warning of risks in 32 departments and 418 municipalities, 1 of which was national in scope. In 2021, the system issued 21 Alerts of risks to Indigenous communities and 12 to Afro-Colombian communities.¹⁰⁷⁰

The system has reportedly prevented some human rights violations against ‘marginalized communities.’¹⁰⁷¹ However, sources indicate that there is a lack of response and coordinated local action by authorities to the issued alerts¹⁰⁷² Despite their legal obligation to respond, national, state, and local authorities reportedly fail to respond to the ‘scores’ of early warning alerts issued by the system identifying risks to human rights defenders in hundreds of municipalities.¹⁰⁷³ Between 2016-2020, 30 % of HRD killings in these cases occurred after an alert had been issued to warn of the risks.¹⁰⁷⁴ The government was ‘systematically ignoring’ alerts and failed to provide adequate protection funding according to a top official of the Office of the Ombudsperson.¹⁰⁷⁵ The Victims Unit also reported in 2022 that although alerts are being issued, there is a low level of compliance with the recommendations of the SAT by national and territorial entities.¹⁰⁷⁶

Furthermore, the state-run and designed SAT system is not designed to issue alerts for governmental abuses by security forces such as situations of ‘false positives’ [*falsos positivos*] and have ‘little ability to monitor or prevent state abuses’.¹⁰⁷⁷

The Office of the Ombudsperson publishes a listing on its website of issued *Alertas Tempranas*, including an interactive map of those that have been issued.¹⁰⁷⁸

8.3.2. National Protection Unit (UNP, Unidad Nacional de Protección)

The National Protection Unit (UNP, Unidad Nacional de Protección), [under the Ministry of Interior¹⁰⁷⁹ which is the primary government entity responsible for protection policy¹⁰⁸⁰] is responsible for the protection program for victims of threats to their life, liberty, integrity or security due to their political, public, social, or humanitarian activities.¹⁰⁸¹ The UNP has a

¹⁰⁶⁹ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 82-83

¹⁰⁷⁰ Colombia, CERD – Informes periódicos 20° y 21° combinados que la Colombia debía presentar en 2022 en virtud del artículo 9 de la Convención (CERD/C/COL/20-21), 6 October 2022, [url](#), para. 69-70

¹⁰⁷¹ Perry, J., Can the Government Police Itself? Colombia’s False Positives Scandal, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷² OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 106; HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 5; Colombia Reports, Government systematically ignoring alert system put in place to prevent killing of social leaders, 6 May 2019, [url](#); HRW, The War in Catatumbo, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷³ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁰⁷⁴ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 82-83

¹⁰⁷⁵ Colombia Reports, Government systematically ignoring alert system put in place to prevent killing of social leaders, 6 May 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁶ Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, “Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras”, Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), p. 104

¹⁰⁷⁷ Perry, J., Can the Government Police Itself? Colombia’s False Positives Scandal, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁸ Colombia, Alertas Tempranas [interactive map], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁹ ISHR, Defenders Toolbox – Colombia: National Protection, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁰ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 324

¹⁰⁸¹ Colombia, UNP, ABC para acceder a las rutas de protección individual y colectiva, May 2020, [url](#), p. 2; Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 324





budget of approximately 260 000 EUR [\$1 338 615 611 624 Colombian Pesos] as of January 2022.¹⁰⁸² The UNP faced ‘significant budgetary constraints’ as well as understaffing according to HRW.¹⁰⁸³

Protection measures through the UNP can only be applied for by individuals where there is a nexus between the threat and their political, public, social, humanitarian activities. Individuals who are victims of threats or extortion that are not directly related these activities cannot obtain protection measures from the UNP, or if they have an ‘ordinary’ risk level [see below].¹⁰⁸⁴ UNP provides two types of protection measures: individual protection, and ‘collective protection’ from a threat to a community, ethnic group, or collective of people.¹⁰⁸⁵

UNP requires that those wishing to request protection file a criminal complaint with the Attorney General’s office.¹⁰⁸⁶ In areas where there is no UNP office, applicants can obtain assistance to apply at the local Office of the Ombudsperson or the Municipal Ombudsperson (Personería), municipal mayor’s office, or by calling UNP’s hotline.¹⁰⁸⁷ Police, local authorities, the Office of the Ombudsperson, and the UN can also recommend cases.¹⁰⁸⁸

Applications are received by a committee and assessed for the level of risk and those that are accepted are sent to the UNP Director for the implementation of measures.¹⁰⁸⁹ Under Colombian law, the processing time should be 30 days.¹⁰⁹⁰ There are three levels of risk: ordinary, extraordinary, and extreme. Ordinary risk can ‘occur to any person or community independent of their activities’ and does not oblige the state to provide protection measures. Extraordinary risk is one arising as a direct consequence of one’s political, social, humanitarian, or public activities or functions. This level of risk will trigger protection measures where the threat affects the individual, family members, or community; has occurred recently, is clear, concrete, disproportionate and is not based on suspicion, and threatens rights to life, liberty integrity or security. Extreme risk is for threat situations that are above extraordinary, where immediate attention is required because the possibility of occurrence is very high and severe.¹⁰⁹¹

Since its creation in 2011, UNP has provided protection schemes to thousands of individuals and prevented attempted murders,¹⁰⁹² and since 2016, has increased the number of protection schemes granted to those it considers human rights defenders.¹⁰⁹³ The UNP reported that in 2020, it received 51 097 applications and of that, 4 795 were accepted (17.5 %). In 2021, it received 28 467 applications to the Risk Assessment Sub-directorate; of which 5 746 (20 %)

¹⁰⁸² Colombia, UNP, Resolución 0003, 3 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰⁸³ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72, 76

¹⁰⁸⁴ Colombia, UNP, ABC para acceder a las rutas de protección individual y colectiva, May 2020, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰⁸⁵ Colombia, UNP, ABC para acceder a las rutas de protección individual y colectiva, May 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁸⁶ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 73

¹⁰⁸⁷ Colombia, UNP, ABC para acceder a las rutas de protección individual y colectiva, May 2020, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁰⁸⁸ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁰⁸⁹ Colombia, UNP, ABC para acceder a las rutas de protección individual y colectiva, May 2020, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰⁹⁰ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 77

¹⁰⁹¹ Colombia, UNP, ABC para acceder a las rutas de protección individual y colectiva, May 2020, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁰⁹² OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 106-107

¹⁰⁹³ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72





were deemed eligible for protection.¹⁰⁹⁴ As of July 2021, more than 8 000 individuals were receiving UNP protection, of which 4 000 were human rights defenders and social leaders, 187 journalists, 255 mayors, 16 governors and 435 departmental deputies, councillors, judges, local ombudsmen.¹⁰⁹⁵

Thousands of protection measures have been deployed to protect the rising number of those in need of it.¹⁰⁹⁶ The government reported that between 2019-July 2022 more than 66 000 'protection measures' had been given to human rights leaders, particularly leaders in indigenous and afro-Colombian communities, as well as 185 relocation assistance measures.¹⁰⁹⁷ Provision of body guards, armoured cars, cell phones, panic buttons, direct communications with police, and temporary relocation have been the 'centre of the Colombian protection regime'.¹⁰⁹⁸ Variation in terms of protection measures provided is 'enormous' and may range from mobile phones, panic buttons, self-protection courses, bullet-proof jackets, armoured cars, to bodyguards; those more at risk may be relocated to another area in their region and be given bodyguards, while those 'most imperilled' are moved into town with armoured cars and given a basic income and fuel.¹⁰⁹⁹ The most common measures given are bulletproof vests and cell phones.¹¹⁰⁰

Collective protection

During the Peace process, the government adopted additional instruments to regulate 'collective protection' by the UNP,¹¹⁰¹ and the UNP made efforts to provide collective protection to ethnic groups, trade unions, women's rights and human rights organisations.¹¹⁰² Heavy backlogs processing collective protection requests caused delays with 915 requests being made from 2016-2020 and only 16 % being granted measures.¹¹⁰³ HRW mentioned that UNP's collective protection programs have encountered significant constraints such as budget problems meaning communities had difficulties obtaining protection.¹¹⁰⁴ Community protection schemes largely mirrored individual protection measures such as self-protection training and

¹⁰⁹⁴ Colombia, UNP, Informe evaluación rendición de cuentas 2021, 25 August 2022, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰⁹⁵ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 17, 25, 27

¹⁰⁹⁶ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 31; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 106

¹⁰⁹⁷ Colombia, CERD – Informes periódicos 20° y 21° combinados que la Colombia debía presentar en 2022 en virtud del artículo 9 de la Convención (CERD/C/COL/20-21), 6 October 2022, [url](#), para. 196

¹⁰⁹⁸ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 327-328

¹⁰⁹⁹ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 31; See for example the listed measures in 2021: OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 88

¹¹⁰⁰ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA

¹¹⁰¹ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 324

¹¹⁰² UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 49; HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 78

¹¹⁰³ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 48

¹¹⁰⁴ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 78-79



armoured cars.¹¹⁰⁵ Community groups not registered with the government reported problems obtaining protection from UNP.¹¹⁰⁶

Effectiveness of UNP

Thousands of protection measures have been deployed to protect the rising number of those in need of it.¹¹⁰⁷ The government reported that between 2019-July 2022 more than 66 000 ‘protection measures’ had been given to human rights leaders, particularly leaders in indigenous and afro-Colombian communities, as well as 185 relocation assistance measures.¹¹⁰⁸ Provision of body guards, armoured cars, cell phones, panic buttons, direct communications with police, and temporary relocation have been the ‘centre of the Colombian protection regime’.¹¹⁰⁹ Variation in terms of protection measures provided is ‘enormous’ and may range from mobile phones, panic buttons, self-protection courses, bullet-proof jackets, armoured cars, to bodyguards; those more at risk may be relocated to another area in their region and be given bodyguards, while those ‘most imperilled’ are moved into town with armoured cars and given a basic income and fuel.¹¹¹⁰ The most common measures given are bulletproof vests and cell phones.¹¹¹¹

According to the International Crisis Group, the UNP scheme’s infrastructure ‘works in many settings, particularly in urban areas, though it may create some new risks and is far from fool proof’.¹¹¹² There is little evidence of an articulated and effective response by the competent authorities to prevent risk situations or rapidly advance protection measures of the UNP and investigations by the Attorney General’s Office.¹¹¹³ Despite efforts made by the state to prioritise protecting social leaders, strengthen the prosecution of these crimes and provide additional protections, violence levels have not been reduced.¹¹¹⁴ During the year, the UN received information on operational deficiencies in individual protection measures, dismantling of protection schemes ‘without objective justification’ and the inadequacy of protection measures in the context and work of human rights defenders.¹¹¹⁵ Similarly, IACHR reported on limitations to protection schemes, associated in many cases with difficulties guaranteeing victims’ mobility, lack of resources to mobilize bodyguards, and the

¹¹⁰⁵ Al, ¿Por qué nos quieren matar?, 8 October 2020, [url](#), p. 42; International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 31

¹¹⁰⁶ Compromiso, Amenazas e incidentes de seguridad y violencia basada en género que se han presentado en el departamento de Santander (enero a marzo 2022), March 2022, [url](#), p. 13; International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 31

¹¹⁰⁷ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 31; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 106

¹¹⁰⁸ Colombia, CERD – Informes periódicos 20° y 21° combinados que la Colombia debía presentar en 2022 en virtud del artículo 9 de la Convención (CERD/C/COL/20-21), 6 October 2022, [url](#), para. 196

¹¹⁰⁹ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 327-328

¹¹¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 31; See for example the listed measures in 2021: OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 88

¹¹¹¹ Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA

¹¹¹² International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, Leaders under Fire, [url](#), p. 31

¹¹¹³ This statement was in reference to the situation in Santander in 2022: Compromiso, Amenazas e incidentes de seguridad y violencia basada en género que se han presentado en el departamento de Santander (enero a marzo 2022), March 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹¹¹⁴ AP, Colombia struggles to keep social leaders safe, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁵ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 47



characteristics of protection provided.¹¹¹⁶ In its 2022 report to Congress, the Victims Unit stated that there is a lack of coordination between civil authorities and security officials in addressing risk to victims, there is a lack of monitoring and contingency planning, and that despite protection measures being in place for some, there have still been attacks, killings and displacements of those under protection.¹¹¹⁷

The UNP faced ‘significant budgetary constraints’ as well as understaffing according to HRW.¹¹¹⁸

UNP requires that those requesting protection file a criminal complaint with the Attorney General’s office, however, they often face significant obstacles doing so due to lack of access in their municipalities, or lack of coordination when threats are reported to local authorities or human rights Ombudsperson offices.¹¹¹⁹ Underreporting was a problem; to avoid having to abandon their home or community, some social leaders did not request protection measures or rely on their own informal warnings.¹¹²⁰ Cooperation with authorities puts social leaders and human rights defenders at ‘major risk’ of becoming victims of post-war crime and violence for reporting actions of armed groups to police in areas where there are armed groups present, as well as in the absence of territorial disputes. Doing so may result in the person being declared a ‘military target’ or a ‘sapo’ (informant).¹¹²¹ In some areas, some protectees prefer not to use their protection scheme for fear it will increase their visibility and chances of being targeted.¹¹²² Other sources reported similarly protected leaders have said that the measures sometimes increase their vulnerability because they are made more visible by having protection.¹¹²³ De justicia explained that armoured vehicles can be more easily seen and targeted by assailants from illegal armed groups.¹¹²⁴

Committees to assess risk deal with approximately 350 cases a week.¹¹²⁵ Measures are delayed and often take months,¹¹²⁶ typically three to five months.¹¹²⁷ NGOs complained that time delays left those in need of protection at risk.¹¹²⁸ In September 2021, reform processes

¹¹¹⁶ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), para. 87

¹¹¹⁷ Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, “Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras”, Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), p. 103

¹¹¹⁸ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72, 76

¹¹¹⁹ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 73-74

¹¹²⁰ HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, Leaders under Fire, [url](#), p. 31

¹¹²¹ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 322; see also: International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, Leaders under Fire, [url](#), p. 31; HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72-73

¹¹²² Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 328; HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 75

¹¹²³ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA; Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

¹¹²⁴ Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

¹¹²⁵ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, Leaders under Fire, [url](#), p. 31

¹¹²⁶ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, Leaders under Fire, [url](#), p. 31; AI, ¿Por qué nos quieren matar?, 8 October 2020, [url](#), p. 42; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 17

¹¹²⁷ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 47; See also: HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 77

¹¹²⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2021 – Colombia, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 38; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 107; HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 77



were adopted to reduce wait times; however these ‘may prove inefficient’ without a comprehensive institutional response.¹¹²⁹ According to the Victims Unit, the UNP’s average number of days to process an evaluation improved from 140 days (2019) to 157 days (2020) to 77 days (first quarter of 2022) which they attributed to Decree 1139 aimed at speeding up the evaluation and granting of measures.¹¹³⁰

Measures offered often do not correspond with the level of risk and risk factors to social leaders.¹¹³¹ Risk assessments and protection fail to take into account differentiating factors contributing to increased risk, such as gender, age, local context.¹¹³² Protection schemes do not extend to family members of the targeted person.¹¹³³ This was a particular issue for female social leaders, as aggressions against them frequently include threats to their children and family.¹¹³⁴

The government has deployed thousands of protection measures as the number of figures needing protection has risen, and the government has been unable to investigate them quickly enough.¹¹³⁵ NGOs stated that UNP monitoring has not granted sufficient measures to effectively counteract threats to all those at risk and protection was described as weak¹¹³⁶ and inadequate in many cases.¹¹³⁷

Measures sometimes do not consider geographic circumstances and life in rural areas and remote areas, such as lack of road access, or providing home-protection at rural defenders.¹¹³⁸ The FIP researcher remarked that killings of social leaders and other profiles have ‘different logics’ that vary from region to region, and leaders often adopt self-protection measures such as asking neighbours to watch out for them, due to lack of state assistance.¹¹³⁹

Other reported problems include delivering armoured vehicles without providing sufficient gas; providing cell phones without credit or giving phones to protectees living in areas with poor cell phone reception.¹¹⁴⁰ Protection by bodyguards, armoured cars, and bulletproof vests is ‘very limited’ in areas controlled by armed groups where law enforcement may only enter if

¹¹²⁹ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 47

¹¹³⁰ Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, “Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras”, Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), p. 98

¹¹³¹ Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

¹¹³² AI, ¿Por qué nos quieren matar?, 8 October 2020, [url](#), p. 42; UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 47; OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2021 – Chapter 5: Colombia, 2022, [url](#), paras. 84, 90; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 109; HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 74

¹¹³³ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 328; Conflict Analyst, 4 November 2022, Correspondence with the EUAA; FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with the EUAA

¹¹³⁴ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

¹¹³⁵ International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, Leaders under Fire, [url](#), p. 31

¹¹³⁶ AI, ¿Por qué nos quieren matar?, 8 October 2020, [url](#), p. 42

¹¹³⁷ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 328; FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA; Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA; Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

¹¹³⁸ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 328; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 109

¹¹³⁹ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

¹¹⁴⁰ AI, ¿Por qué nos quieren matar?, 8 October 2020, [url](#), p. 42



accompanied by military force.¹¹⁴¹ The FIP researcher similarly indicated that protected social leaders have reported that protection measures like bodyguards, vehicles, vests, and others have been ‘largely useless’ because these leaders live in areas where armed groups presence is so strong the state is not effective there.¹¹⁴² Difficult terrain and small rural roads are often not accessible to large armoured SUVs.¹¹⁴³

Although the state may be more present in urban areas, their response does not necessarily indicate that the complaints or concerns in urban areas will be dealt with in sufficient time to preserve the person’s safety and integrity. The source was aware of individuals who have a very high security risk and live in urban areas where the state has not responded to their case to provide sufficient protection.¹¹⁴⁴

The majority of social leaders assassinated since 2016 had no protection measures.¹¹⁴⁵ There have been cases of HRDs and social leaders who have been placed under UNP protection measures and still been subjected to assassination attempts or attacks while under protection,¹¹⁴⁶ have been killed despite being given protection measures,¹¹⁴⁷ been killed while waiting for protection measures to be initiated, or been killed after protection measures were dismantled.¹¹⁴⁸ The Victims Unit reported that from 2016 to the first quarter of 2022, there were 59 attacks against people under protection schemes (including social leaders, people reintegrating into civilian life, ethnic minorities, human rights defenders and NGO representatives). These attacks resulted in 31 fatalities and 17 injuries, despite having UNP protection.¹¹⁴⁹ In 2021, the UN reported 6 cases of human rights defenders who were killed and one disappeared while under UNP protection.¹¹⁵⁰

In 2022, one journalist withdrew from her UNP protection measures over concerns that her armoured car was being tracked by GPS without her consent and because she alleged that her data was accessible by at least one member of the former Security Administration Department (Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, DAS). DAS was eliminated in 2011 for targeting journalists and replaced with the UNP.¹¹⁵¹ Another journalist under UNP protection in 2022 also made allegations in 2022 of UNP connections to DAS, and involvement in alleged

¹¹⁴¹ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p.328

¹¹⁴² FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

¹¹⁴³ Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

¹¹⁴⁴ Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

¹¹⁴⁵ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 73

¹¹⁴⁶ OMCT, Colombia: Over 2,000 days of criminalisation against human rights defender Milena Quiroz Jiménez, 28 July 2022, [url](#); see also: CPJ, Armed men attack car, bodyguard of Colombian journalist Julian Martínez, 28 February 2022, [url](#); Martínez, J./La Nueva Prensa, Mi carta desde el exilio a la UNP, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁷ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 27; Political Analyst, 2 September 2022, Interview with EUAA; FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

¹¹⁴⁸ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

¹¹⁴⁹ Colombia, Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo a la Implementación de la Ley 1448 de 2011, “Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras”, Noveno informe de seguimiento al Congreso de la República 2021-2022, 22 August 2022, [url](#), p. 99

¹¹⁵⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia [Year 2021] (A/HRC/49/19), 17 May 2022, [url](#), para. 47

¹¹⁵¹ LatAm Journalism Review, ‘This is a forced resignation in the face of a very serious situation’: Colombian journalist Claudia Duque after returning her protection scheme, 30 March 2022, [url](#); FLIP, Alerta por recolección masiva de datos de la periodista Claudia Duque, 27 October 2021, [url](#)



crimes,¹¹⁵² as well as spying on those they are assigned to protect.¹¹⁵³ Information corroborating these allegations could not be found among the sources consulted.

8.4. Police and Attorney-General's Office (Fiscalía General de la Nación, FGN)

According to the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index 2022, Colombia's criminal justice system is ranked below the regional and global averages at 119th out of 140 countries, scoring below average on the criminal justice system's effectiveness in criminal investigations, timely and effective adjudication, reduction of criminal behaviour, impartiality, freedom from corruption, improper government influence, and due process.¹¹⁵⁴ According to FIP, although the Peace agreement strengthened protection, capacity, and provided training to the FGN, this has not translated into better investigations and prosecutions of crimes committed by armed groups.¹¹⁵⁵ The state and law-enforcement lacks a consistent presence in areas of the country affected by armed violence, particularly in rural areas where impunity especially for targeted killings remains a problem¹¹⁵⁶ at nearly 90 % or more in Colombia.¹¹⁵⁷ Areas with high rates of current and historic violence coincide with areas that have low rates of democratic governance and weak local institutions, few resources, and overburdened municipal representatives who also face personal risk.¹¹⁵⁸ In the regions most severely affected by conflict, the criminal justice system is described as 'dysfunctional' with a 'precarious' law enforcement presence, with few and poorly equipped agents in areas controlled by armed groups. As a result of the lack of resources and high security risks, police often fail to attend to crime scenes or implement arrest warrants in cases of targeted killings by armed groups.¹¹⁵⁹ The criminal justice system is described as having a 'limited reach' in its capacity to dismantle organisations responsible for attacks against HRDs given the context of widespread poverty and rights violations.¹¹⁶⁰ Impunity for human rights abuses and targeted killings is an ongoing concern.¹¹⁶¹ Local prosecutors frequently do not advance cases against armed groups, but focus on crimes such as theft or family violence.¹¹⁶²

¹¹⁵² Martínez, J./La Nueva Prensa, Mi carta desde el exilio a la UNP, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁵³ AP, High-risk Colombians say GPS devices only add to dangers, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁴ WJP, Rule of Law Index 2022 – Colombia – Criminal Justice, 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁵ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

¹¹⁵⁶ Al Jazeera, Colombians call for end to impunity as activist killings continue, 16 July 2022, [url](#); GITOC, Organized Crime Index – Colombia 2021, [url](#), p. 5; Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 331; Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

¹¹⁵⁷ Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

¹¹⁵⁸ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 83-84

¹¹⁵⁹ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 330

¹¹⁶⁰ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 333

¹¹⁶¹ Wesche, P., Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 334; HRW, World Report 2022 – Colombia, 16 December 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Leaders Under Fire, 6 October 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹¹⁶² Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 330



Colombia's National Police also have an Elite Team specialised in the task of dealing with homicides of social leaders; however, they lack personnel and budget.¹¹⁶³ The FGN has taken steps to increase the effectiveness of investigations of crimes against HRDs such as a new system of investigations that prioritizes cases against armed and criminal groups and in locating the principal perpetrators who ordered the crimes and focusing on command and control of these groups, as well as patterns between cases.¹¹⁶⁴ Within the FGN, there is a specialised investigation unit for dismantling criminal groups responsible for attacking and killing social leaders.¹¹⁶⁵ The Special Investigation Unit of the Attorney General's Office has captured a significant number of members of armed and criminal groups, for instance 570 members of the AGC; however, even with the capture of members and leadership cadres, this has not prevented or reduced the violence and failed to stop the expansion of armed groups.¹¹⁶⁶

Sources explained that one of the key problems with the criminal justice system is the lack of effective investigations of crimes.¹¹⁶⁷ The FGN is 'weak in clarifying threats' and in obtaining sentences resulting from issuing threats; described as a 'major gap in the Colombian protection regime'.¹¹⁶⁸ IACHR indicated that there was a failure to investigate crimes against targeted profiles in Colombia.¹¹⁶⁹ FIP stated that the FGN often cannot access crime scenes because they are in areas where even the security forces cannot enter, and it is the communities themselves that have to deal with collecting evidence and corpses.¹¹⁷⁰

Figures of cases 'clarified' for investigation by the state and those tracked by civil society differed. The Colombian government claims a solve-rate of 50 %, while civil society groups state that only 8.5 % of cases they track resulted in convictions.¹¹⁷¹ Efforts to bring perpetrators to justice in the cases of targeted killings of human rights defenders has been 'more meaningful' and produced 'significant progress' compared to other periods of Colombian history.¹¹⁷² However, investigations and prosecutions have encountered significant challenges including finding the 'intellectual authors' behind targeted killings, providing too few prosecutors, judges, and investigators in regions most affected by killings, limited capacity of the special bodies created under the peace accord, such as the Special Investigation Unit and Elite Police team, such as lack of staff and budget funding; limited and delayed attendance to crime scenes by military and police.¹¹⁷³

¹¹⁶³ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 9

¹¹⁶⁴ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 333

¹¹⁶⁵ HRW, Left Undefended, 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 6; OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁶ UN OHCHR, Violencia territorial: Recomendaciones para el Gobierno, 2 July 2022, [url](#), para. 79; FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

¹¹⁶⁷ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA; Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

¹¹⁶⁸ Wesche, P. Post-war Violence Against Human Rights Defenders and State Protection in Colombia, July 2021, [url](#), p. 333

¹¹⁶⁹ OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 65 (Section F)

¹¹⁷⁰ FIP, 3 November 2022, Interview with EUAA

¹¹⁷¹ OAS, IACHR, Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in Colombia, 6 December 2019, [url](#), p. 65; Dejusticia, 2 September 2022, Correspondence with EUAA

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Gil Ramírez, M.Y., 21 November 2022, Interview with EUAA. Dr. Max Yuri Gil Ramírez is a professor at the Institute of Political Studies of the University of Antioquia, specializing in citizenship, immigration, human rights and armed conflict. He is a sociologist, with a master's degree in political science and a doctorate in human and social sciences. He worked as an official in the Permanent Human Rights Unit of the municipal Ombudsperson's Office (Personería) of Medellín and was also the coordinator of the Antioquia Eje Cafetero region¹¹⁷⁴ of the Truth Commission.

McDermott, J., 14 November 2022, Comments made during his expert review of this report. Mr. McDermott is the co-director and co-founder of Insight Crime. Mr. McDermott has over two decades of experience reporting from around Latin America. He is a retired military officer who then became a war correspondent working in the Balkans, the Middle East, and then Colombia. Mr. McDermott has worked for the UK's most prestigious media outlets including the BBC, the Daily Telegraph, and The Economist. He specializes in drug trafficking, organised crime and the Colombian civil conflict. His organisation, Insight Crime, is a think tank that seeks to deepen and inform the debate about organised crime and citizen security in the

¹¹⁷⁴ This territory covers municipalities in the departments of Antioquia, Caldas, Quindío, Risaralda and some in the south of Córdoba and in the north of Valle del Cauca. Colombia, CEV, En los territorios, n.d., [url](#)



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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

Reference period: 1 January 2021 – 7 November 2022

The reference period encompasses 2021-2022 in order to capture most recent annual data/trends at the end of President Duque's administration. It covers up to November 2022 to capture the first several months of President Petro's administration following his August inauguration.

Country overview/background

- Overview of basic information such as geography, demographics, state structure, background to the conflict 1964-2016

Recent developments

- Recent developments in the conflict/major events/trends in 2021-2022/since 2016 peace agreement, such as COVID-19 situation/impact on security/targeting/state capacity, election of Petro in 2022
- Other relevant developments for international protection caseload

Security overview/trends

- Main security/criminal/conflict dynamics and drivers
- Recent developments in the conflict/major events/trends since 2016 peace agreement
- Geographic overview/armed groups presence: main areas of conflict, trends/patterns in security incidents/confrontations

Main actors in the conflict (capacity, areas of operation, alliances, motives/activities)

- Non-state armed actors/illegal armed groups – overview of criminal/conflict dynamics (Post-paramilitary groups/AGC, etc, ELN, FARC dissidents, Criminal gangs – structure, dynamics, presence)
- Government of Colombia: Security forces capacity/response to conflict and integrity issues Integrity issues (corruption, abuses, collusion between state and non-state armed actors, etc.)

Impact on civilian population (Rights violations, fatalities/homicide rates/killings, confinement and displacement, humanitarian situation)

Individual profiles

- Information on targeting dynamics, perpetrators, threats, and types of targeting, regional dynamics/specificities (e.g. threat, disappearance, killing, etc)
- Main targets: E.g. information on profiles such as: social leaders/HRDs (Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, peace process, etc); Former members of the FARC; Individuals involved in the administration of justice (attorneys, judges, lawyers, crime witnesses); Journalists; Local politicians and election-related targeting (as relevant); Members of the Juntas de Acción Communal (Neighbourhood associations); Children recruited to



armed groups; Extortion a victims and loansharking practices and targets; LGBT; Other profiles as relevant (research dependent)

- Capacity of armed groups to track/trace targets/relocation

State response and protection – what state protection measures are available to victims and witnesses (and family members) and what is their presence, capacity and effectiveness?

- Judiciary system, including filing complaints to police or the Fiscalía, prosecutions, judicial remedies
- National Protection Unit (Unidad Nacional de Protección, UNP)
- Office of the Ombudsperson (Defensoría del Pueblo)



