

Labour Market Profile Colombia – 2023/2024



This updated profile provides a comprehensive overview of the labour market situation in the country.

Danish Trade Union
Development Agency

Norwegian Confederation
of Trade Unions



ULANDSSEKRETARIATET – DTDA
DANISH TRADE UNION DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

PREFACE

The Danish Trade Union Development Agency (DTDA), a development organisation, in collaboration with the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO Norway), a national umbrella trade union organisation, join forces to craft the Colombia Labour Market Profile (LMP) to support the development of just and democratic societies with focus on the pillars in the global Decent Work Agenda (DWA).

The profile is used to create knowledge of the country and design programme activities implemented in partner relationships with trade union organisations. The objective of activities is to assist the partner organisations in becoming change agents in their own national and regional labour market context to achieve tangible improvements in the national DWA conditions and the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The LMP format provides a comprehensive overview of the labour market's structure, development, and challenges. Apart from the DWA and SDG framework, LMP also follows several other central factors addressing labour market development aspects such as Just Transition, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the unionism evolution, social dialogue and bi-/tri-partite mechanisms, policy development, and the status of legal reforms in the context of ILO conventions and labour standards, among others.

Primary sources of data and information for LMPs are:

As part of programme implementation and monitoring, national partner organisations provide annual narrative progress reports, including information on labour market developments. Specific data and information relating to central indicators are collected using a unique data collection tool.

National statistical institutions and international databanks are used as a source of general (statistical) data and information, such as ILOSTAT and NATLEX, World Bank Open Data, ITUC Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights, the U.S. Department of State, and other internationally recognised labour-related global indexes.

Academia and media sources are used in research on labour market issues.

The profile is regularly updated, and the current version covers 2023 to 2024. Labour Market Profiles for more than 20 countries are available on DTDA's website:

<https://www.ulandssekretariatet.dk/>.

LO Norway and DTDA prepared the LMP in collaboration with the Confederation of Workers in Colombia (CTC), the General Work Confederation in Colombia (CGT), and the Central Union of Workers (CUT). If any comments arise about the profile, please contact Mr Kasper Andersen (kan@dtda.dk) from DTDA.

The cover photo shows *Cerrejón*, a large open-pit coalmine in *Colombia*, located southeast of the La Guajira district, close to Venezuela's border. It was photographed by Carsten Flint Hunneche.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a result of the global Covid-19 pandemic and the repercussions of the current Russian war against Ukraine, unemployment and poverty temporarily skyrocketed. The economy is projected to rebound in 2024. In June 2022, the first leftist-elected president won the election. A sharp real minimum wage hike entered the scene in 2023 to recover after two years of no improvement.

The country has demonstrated relatively weak legal compliance with labour rights, but an ambitious reform is underway to improve workers' conditions and incomes. No ILO conventions have been ratified during the last two decades, except for backing the Domestic Workers Convention (C189) in 2014. Some central international trade agreements function with labour provisions but have not substantially changed labour conditions. The emerging Just Transition agenda alludes to the job risks of a low-carbon economy that brings coal production in limbo and fails to adopt strategies to re-train coal workers.

Social dialogue has progressed in the public sector, reflected in the mounting coverage of collective bargaining agreements. In contrast, the private sector is dominated by micro-enterprises operating in the widespread informal economy, stuck with legal and practical obstacles that damage collective bargaining. Twisted hiring and employment methods like subcontracting, and among the top-ten most dangerous countries for trade union leaders, have undermined unionism. On the positive side, the trade union membership rate has increased recently. There are some advances in the labour dispute settlement system; for instance, the number of arbitration tribunals set a record in 2021 and benefitted the expansion of labour inspector positions.

Formal employment represents around one in two workers in Colombia, which has slowly risen, except for a slight downturn at the beginning of the 2020s. Labour productivity closed the gap with the regional average at the end of the 2010s. Youth unemployment peaked in 2021 at 26%, primarily females, and very few have

access to unemployment insurance coverage. Labour regulations present obstacles for youth to enter the formal labour market; for example, skewed non-wage labour costs to the payroll tax. It leads to the highest proportion of youth not in education, employment, or training (the NEET rate) compared to neighbouring countries. Colombian women's role in the labour market is improving, and they score considerably high in firms with women's participation in ownership.

The aftermath of the 2016 Peace Agreement brought shifts in the net migration mingled with Colombian returnees and reshuffling the massive number of Internal Displaced Persons, creating mounting pressure on job creation. Since the mid-2010s, the heavy influx of Venezuelans added more load on Colombia's labour market and social protection.

The ratio of pupils in vocational training to all pupils in secondary education was low compared to the regional average but scores high for firms offering training programmes, echoing the Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) dual system with training centres and companies. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is changing the labour market landscape: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been considered Colombia's best prospective industry sector, and the "platform economy" is evolving fast. Retooling is putting tension on the already under-financed TVET system. Although Colombia's education system has demonstrated comparatively weak learning outcomes at the OECD level, it showed progress until the unexpected rupture at the beginning of the 2020s.

Colombia's social protection system took strides in the universal health system and attractive cash transfer programmes, but still, just 46% of persons above retirement age receive a pension. High social contributions are one of the barriers to formal job creation in the country. In 2021, the maternity/paternity leave conditions improved, but informal workers could be side-lined by these regulations.

Status of key labour market indicators in the framework of the Decent Work Agenda (DWA) in Colombia

Creating decent jobs	
Policy reforms addressing creation of decent employment.	Colombia's labour-related policy framework has been comprehensive. Joining the OECD in 2020 led to reforms and progress in labour market and social policies.
ILO standard setting on improvement of status of workers from the informal economy.	A specific Tripartite National Informal Economy Forum has not been established. Instead, other national forums addressing the status of informal economy workers at policy level are ongoing.
Guaranteeing rights at work	
Growth in the central trade union federations (%)	The three main central trade union confederations (CTC, CGT, and CUT) represent an aggregated growth of 5.2% from 2017 to 2022.
Violations of trade union rights.	Colombia's Global Rights Index ranking 5 of 5+ in 2022. *
Labour legislation has improved according to ILO standards.	Act 2101 of 2021 shortened working hours gradually from 48 hours a week to 42 hours in five years. Act 2114 of 2021 extends paternity leave to two weeks
Partner organisations with minimum 30% women representation in decision-making bodies	19% on CUT national board.
Extending social protection	
Covered by Social Health Security (% of total population).	99% affiliated to social health security insurance.
Workers from the informal economy have access to national social security schemes.	Informal workers are side-lined for enrolment in formal pension schemes. Instead, the poorest quintile of the population had a relatively high coverage of social safety-net programmes, but it started to fall at the end of the 2010s.
Promoting social dialogue	
Trade union density of employment (%)	Covering 6.1% of employment in 2022 (13% of employees).
Cooperation in labour-employer relations.	Ranking 66 of 141 in 2019 (1 is best). **
Number of Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs).	The number of CBAs experienced upsurges topping in 2019 of 572. It plummeted to 194 in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
Workers' coverage of Collective Bargaining Agreements (%).	A sharp hike in CBA coverage from 0.9% in 2012 to 11% in 2013, peaking at 16% in 2016.
Bi-/tri- partite agreements concluded.	A new National State Agreement was concluded in August 2021, valid for the next two years with all the trade union confederations in the country, and benefits around 1,200,000 public sector workers. National trade union organisations reached joint guidelines.

* This is interpreted as "no guarantee of rights". Countries with the rating of 5 are the worst countries in the world to work in. While the legislation may spell out certain rights, workers have effectively no access to these rights and are therefore exposed to autocratic regimes and unfair labour practices.

** This indicator is based on data from the Global Competitiveness Index that represents employers' opinions from surveys.

Sources: International Labour Organization; MINTRABAJO; International Trade Union Confederation; World Economic Forum; DTDA own calculations.

COUNTRY MAP



Source: National Online Project.

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ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

Colombia is an upper-middle-income country and the fourth-largest economy in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). It became the 37th member country of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in April 2020.

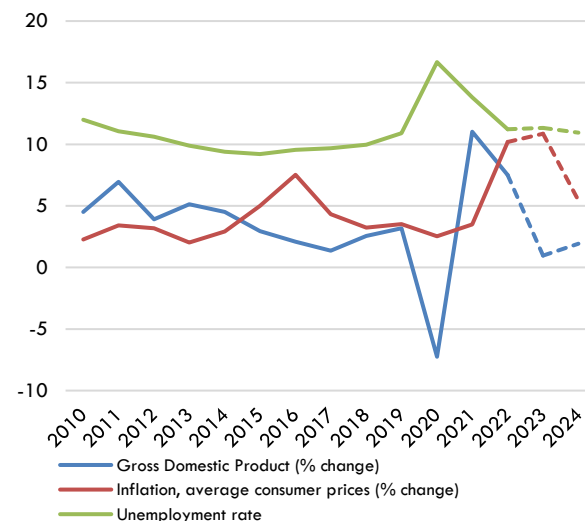
The Colombian government and *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) signed a peace agreement in 2016 to build stability in the aftermath of 52-year low-intensity civil conflict (1964-2016). The latest elections were held in May 2022, overshadowed by discontent and protests amid unprecedented adverse social and economic impacts during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020/2021. The former Bogotá mayor rode a wave of discontent to become the first ever elected leftist president in June 2022.

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2022 aimed to boost equality, entrepreneurship, and legality. The targets were ruptured by unexpected factors triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic and economic repercussions of the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine initiated in 2022. The new National Development Plan (2023-2026) was launched in February 2023, prioritising energy transition, the human right to food, health, development of the bioeconomy, recognition of natural, cultural, and territorial diversity, and the peace process, among others.

The economy's tailwind at the end of the 2010s fell sharply back in 2020; growth fell by ten percentage points, reaching -7.0%, costing US\$53 billion; unemployment and poverty skyrocketed. The policy framework supported the economy's resilience, fuelled by a government debt hike in 2020. On the positive side, astonishing growth rebounded, peaking at 11% in 2021, one of the fastest rates among emerging economies. The pandemic policy response and favourable terms of trade supported growth of 7.5% in 2022. Currently, the economy is going through a transition towards a sustainable growth trajectory, including tightening macroeconomic policies. The economic growth is projected to slowly rebound in 2024 (see more in Figure 1 and Appendix Table 21).¹

As indicated, in the outcome of the recent economic upturn, inflation in consumer prices rapidly escalated far beyond the central bank's target of 3%. It peaked, so far, at 10% in 2022. A part of this situation is effects from the Russian war against Ukraine, echoed in high costs of imports like fuel, wheat, and fertiliser. Weather-related disasters also affected business negatively. The increased inflation has put pressure on public finances, mainly through subsidy spending. Projections suggest that inflation will fall towards the target by end-2024 and narrow the current account deficit gradually to its historical average (about 4% of GDP), the bulk of which will be financed through foreign direct investment.

Figure 1: GDP per capita, inflation and unemployment projections in Colombia, % growth, 2010-2024



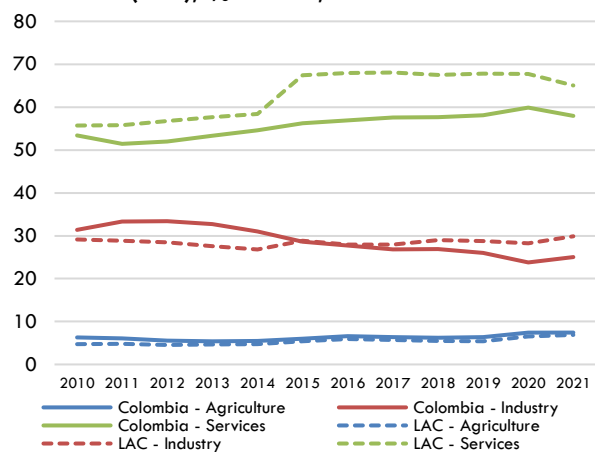
Source: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, May 2023.

Like many South American countries, Colombia's economic backbone is based on its rich natural resources. Agriculture and commodity-driven industries are a large part of the economy, with petroleum, coal, gold, and coffee as the top exports. Industries such as textiles, services, telecommunications, and tourism are also major sectors.

The service sector holds the economic backbone at around 58% of GDP in 2021, with significantly lower value-added than the regional average. The industry sector represents 25% of a declining trend during the last decade, and its value-added was

superseded by the regional average in the mid-2010s. For instance, manufacturing was strong in the economy but became less relevant and competitive. Generally, the industry sector was particularly badly hit by the Covid-19 pandemic leading to an upsurge in unemployment and lost incomes. The agricultural sector plays a relatively modest role economically, with only marginal growth over the last decade and representing about 7.4% of GDP. This sector's value-added aligns with the regional average (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Aggregate sectoral economic changes, value-added in Colombia and Latin America & Caribbean (LAC), % of GDP, 2010-2021



Note: Value-added is the net output of a sector after adding up all outputs and subtracting intermediate inputs.

Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators.

Colombia remains one of the most unequal countries in the world: inequality in the distribution of family income fell slowly over the last two decades, initially from 59 in 2000 to 51 in 2019 (Gini-index 0 represents perfect equality, while 100 represents high inequality). However, the economic downturn in 2020 brought inequality on the rise, projected to bring the Gini Index to at least 54 in 2020.² The Human Development Index (HDI) ranked Colombia as high human development, at 88 out of 191 (1 is best) in 2021, with one step down in the HDI ranking from 2015 to 2021.

The economic ruptures in 2020 also caused many Colombians to balance close to the poverty line: many fell below it. The poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines increased from 36% in 2019 to 43% of the population in 2020. This situation is

further exacerbated by the high inflation in consumer prices in 2022 that hollow out workers' income purchasing power (see more in the Working Conditions section). Although the rebounding economic growth and the continuation of emergency transfers have helped harness poverty, high inflation is undermining progress, and the recovery is only reaching some groups.

Investor confidence grew and the country took steps during the 2010s to re-brand itself as a nation open to business and innovation. The country attracted some foreign direct investment (FDI), at 4.0% of GDP on average from the 2010s, which was slightly higher on the margin than the LAC average. It plummeted in 2020-2021 to 2.9% of GDP on average due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the Doing Business Index, Colombia ranked 67 out of 190 (1 is best) countries in 2020 at the high-medium level. The best scorings are getting credit (11), protecting minority investors (13), and resolving insolvency (32). Others could be better, e.g. enforcing contracts (177), paying taxes (148), and trading across borders (133). These latter scorings suggest they are costly and time-consuming processes for resolving commercial disputes, paying taxes, and exporting and importing goods (see more details in Appendix Table 20).

Just Transition

Colombia is highly vulnerable to extreme events, particularly flooding from the "La Nina" phenomenon. This vulnerability links to key sectors such as housing, transport, energy, agriculture, and health. Climate adaptation is guided by the National Adaptation Plan to Climate Change (NAPCC), which was formulated in 2011 and has been implemented through various initiatives.³ The government has since adopted a series of laws, policies, and plans aiming at the construction of a robust framework and the provision of economic incentives for the implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures and activities. For instance, a National Strategy for Financing Climate Mitigation and Adaptation is linked with the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). This

NDC was updated in December 2020. The Inter-Sectorial Commission on Climate Change coordinated this government-led consultation process, including trade unions and employers' organisations.

These climate-related laws and policy frameworks allude to the risks of transitioning to a low-carbon economy for jobs, the labour market, and the welfare of communities. On the positive side, the Just Transition Strategy to mitigate those impacts has been expected in 2023. The NDC has also been haunted by a lack of robust instruments to monitor its implementation and a system of indicators to monitor adaptation measures.⁴

Colombia signed the Paris Agreement in 2016 and is committed to its nationally determined contribution. It aims to reduce the country's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions across all sectors by 51%, and black carbon emissions by 40% in 2030, even though Colombia contributes only around 0.4% of global emissions. These goals glue to Just Transition, changing the labour market's landscape. The country is the world's fourth largest thermal coal exporter, and at the end of the 2010s, around 90% of coal production was exported. Coal represents about one-fifth of Colombia's international trade income. It is heavily dependent on the industry for employment and the public budget. Today, prospects for Colombia's coal sector are in limbo, raising concerns for about 30,000 workers and about what will happen when coalmines close, not to mention around 130,000 jobs associated with the coal mining industrial chain. The trade union movement calls on multinational dialogue with workers and communities to ensure a just transition that respects labour and environmental rights. The government has so far failed to promote dialogue with the private sector to design strategies to mitigate the impact of declining coal and oil production, including how to re-train coal industry workers. Large operations have already initiated massive layoffs of workers.

Although the impact of the energy transition on the labour market emerged at the beginning of the 2020s, the government still needs to propose

specific policy responses. Reports found that the potential impacts of the implementation of GHG mitigation and adaptation policies on job markets have not yet received any significant attention from the government and only scant attention from social organisations.⁵ Although the issue has started to emerge in the media, progress continues to be challenged by the limited awareness and recognition of impacts. This suggests that the different climate-related laws, policies, and plans still need to fully trickle down to the population. The control of deforestation is potentially leaving some marginalised rural workers without economic alternatives.

Free Trade Zones

Establishing Free Trade Zones (FTZs) in Colombia was initiated in 1958. FTZs phased out all export subsidies in 2006. They maintained their special customs and foreign exchange regimes through Law 1004 of 2005, establishing a legal framework for the FTZ regime with tax incentives. The number of FTZs has risen from 10 in 2005 to 122 today, covering around 1,009 companies. Most companies cater to a specific cluster in manufacturing or services, generating around 147,000 jobs in 2022.⁶

On-going tax reform has introduced modifications that go against the purposes and objectives of the FTZs by requiring users to export 80% of their total sales. It will require companies to build internationalisation plans and processes. Since most companies operating in FTZs are micro, small, and medium-sized, the reform could bring many of them in limbo.

The working conditions in FTZs are challenged by restrictions. For instance, employers do not have to compensate employees for night, dominical and holiday surcharges, and they can subscribe to labour contracts that apply the integral salary regime to workers with three-times the minimum salary compared to the standard ten.⁷ This salary regime is an all-inclusive contract, indicating that the base salary is relatively high. In contrast, the worker waives any extra over/night-time compensation,

bonuses, pension, severance payment or other employment benefits.⁸

LABOUR LEGISLATION

Colombia's labour market is regulated by a complex legal framework, setting standards and restrictions. It is supported by a comprehensive policy structure.

Labour-related legal reforms reshuffle some labour relations and create a series of requirements leading to administrative burdens and conditions for developing an employment contract.⁹ For instance, Act 2101 of 2021 shortened the working week gradually from 48 hours to 42 hours over five years; Act 2114 of 2021 extends paternity leave to two weeks (see more in the Social Protection section). A list of the latest new laws or decrees is available in Appendix Table 16.

The relatively new government has presented an ambitious labour reform, submitted to Congress in March 2023 for discussion and approval. It aims to improve the conditions and income of workers, not to mention including aspects that have traditionally been marginalised from labour laws, such as domestic and informal workers. It is part of a broader wave of tax, health, and pension reform. The status of central labour-related legislation is summarised below.

Political Constitution

The Political Constitution from 1991 has received several amendments, the latest in 2013 and 2015. In principle, the rights to organise, collectively bargain, and strike are enshrined in the charter. Other central articles set the fundamental labour rights: equality of opportunity for workers; minimum essential and flexible remuneration proportional to the amount and quality of work; employment stability; irrevocability of minimum benefits established in labour regulations; options to negotiate about and reconcile uncertain and arguable rights; a situation more favourable to the worker in cases of doubt in the application and interpretation of the bases of the law; the primacy of facts over established formalities in issues of

labour relations; guarantees for social security, training, instruction, and necessary rest; special protection of women, mothers, and minor-age workers.¹⁰

The State guarantees the right to suitable payment and the periodic adjustment of legal retirement benefits.

Substantive Labour Code

The Substantive Labour Code regulates the right to organise and strike, and collective bargaining is recognised. It was structurally modified during the 1990s and 2000s to introduce more flexibility to the legal framework; for instance, it provides the possibility to use forms of employment without major restrictions and high flexibility regarding dismissal. Other modifications were introduced during the 2010s, including to improve labour and union rights.

The code establishes the rules of compilations for different labour-related aspects such as social security, procedural rules, and employment (e.g. wage, hours, collective bargaining agreements, vacation and sick time, and employment benefits).

Health and Pension Code

The Law 100 of 1993 sets the legal framework of the healthcare and pension system. It unified social security, public and private sub-systems under the general social security scheme in health. It reorganised the system around functions and responsibilities rather than population groups. Furthermore, it created mandatory universal health insurance to improve the equity and performance of public spending on health (see more in the Social Protection section). A pension reform and a controversial health care reform is currently being discussed at the congress level.

Observations on Labour Legislation

Despite the extensive labour-related legislation framework in Colombia, some flaws have been detected concerning international standards in the right to organise, collective bargaining, and strike.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) registered the following issues:¹¹

- Various contractual arrangements, such as workers' cooperatives, service contracts and civil and commercial contracts, which are used to prevent workers from setting up trade unions. In 2011, the government adopted a decree that stipulates that no worker, including workers associated with cooperatives, could be hired without the labour rights established in law and the decree imposes severe penalties on cooperatives that practice labour mediation (see more in the Working Conditions section).
- The pension system is not covered by collective bargaining (Law no. 100 of 1993).
- Article 417 of the Labour Code still prohibits federations and confederations from calling strikes, which makes it extremely difficult to organise legal general strikes, as every single trade union needs to call the strike separately.
- Article 450 of the Labour Code also allows for the dismissal of workers who have taken part in a strike declared illegal, even if the illegality results from requirements contrary to the principles of freedom of association.
- Laws which ban strikes remain applicable to a wide range of public services that are not necessarily essential.

Although many public-sector workers have the right to bargain collectively, several public services, such as the police and military, are prohibited from forming unions and bargaining collectively. The Colombian government has extended this to include several non-essential services such as workers in transportation, telecommunications, mining, and civil servants not exercising the authority of the state, thereby undermining public servants' fundamental labour rights.¹²

Reports have found that government enforcement of applicable laws need to be more consistent. Despite steps by the Ministry of Labour to strengthen its labour law inspection system, the government has not established a consistent, robust strategy to protect the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining.¹³

The widespread informal economy echoes loopholes in labour and business regulations, often due to a lack of awareness or incentives.

Ratified ILO Conventions

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) conventions enumerate international principles and rights at work: Colombia has ratified 61 conventions, of which 49 are in force. During the 2010s and based on plans linked to central trade agreements, the government launched initiatives to protect internationally recognised labour rights via conventions. It reached meagre results. Appendix Table 17 shows that eight out of ten Fundamental Conventions and three out of four Governance Conventions have been ratified, and 14 out of 176 Technical Conventions are Up-To-Date and actively promoted. The latest ratified convention was the Domestic Workers Convention (C189) in 2014.

ILO's independent supervisory system body, known as the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR), has many observations and direct requests for conventions. In 2021, direct requests of the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (C098) concerned the trade union confederation's criticism of the excessive slowness of the arbitration system linked with collective bargaining. Despite the government's initiatives to facilitate the administrative processes of the procedure, particularly the increased use of information technologies and virtual platforms, CEACR pointed out the need to make the multiple stages of the process significantly more flexible via discussions with the social partners and by training arbitrators (see more in the Labour Dispute Resolution System sub-section). CEACR further listed observations dealing with protection against anti-union discrimination and interference, collective accords with non-unionised workers, the personal scope of collective bargaining for apprentices, subjects covered by collective bargaining regarding pensions, and the promotion of collective bargaining in the private sector.

The ILO argues that the application of collective ‘pacts’ arranged with the workers in Colombia should not be used to undermine the position of trade union organisations or the possibility of negotiating collective agreements with them. Law no. 1453 of 2011 stipulates that those who grant collective “pacts” that provide better conditions for non-unionised workers than the conditions set out in the collective agreement for unionised workers in the same enterprise shall be liable to a sentence of between one and two years and a fine of one hundred to three hundred times the legal minimum wage. It was noted that applying this law is complicated and often will depend on how the judge assesses the advantages.¹⁴

Sustainable Development Goals indicator 8.8.2 seeks to measure compliance with fundamental labour rights. Based on ILO textual sources and national legislation, Colombia ranked 4.84 in 2020 (0 out of 10; 0 is best), worse than the South American average (see details in Table 1).

Table 1: Level of national compliance with labour rights for Colombia and neighbouring countries, 2020

Country	Value
South America	3.14
Colombia	4.84
Ecuador	4.40
Panama	4.50
Peru	4.20
Venezuela	7.47

Note: The value ranges from 0 to 10, with 0 being the best possible score (indicating higher levels of compliance with freedom of association and collective bargaining (FACB) rights) and 10 the worst (indicating lower levels of compliance with FACB rights based on ILO textual sources and national legislation).

Sources: International Labour Organization, Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM).

Trade Agreements

Apart from being a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the country is linked with the Global System of Trade Preferences among Developing Countries (GSTP) but lacks labour provisions.

At regional level, the country is a member of the Andean Community (AC), including Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru. This agreement has labour provisions.

Colombia has also signed the Pacific Alliance and Latin the American Integration Association, but they have no labour provisions.¹⁵

Colombia has signed ten Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), five of which have labour provisions: Korea–Colombia; EU–Colombia, Ecuador and Peru; United States–Colombia; Canada–Colombia; Chile–Colombia.

Central trade agreements helped Colombia to make progress in strengthening worker rights protections, hiring hundreds of new labour inspectors to expand labour law enforcement, hiring and training police investigators and criminal prosecutors to focus on cases of violence against unionists, and taking enforcement actions to combat abusive third-party contracting, including the assessment of significant fines against violators. Apart of these improvements, labour conditions did not push other significant changes on the labour market.

SOCIAL PARTNERS

Social partners are central to promoting the realisation of core labour rights and social justice for workers by protecting freedom of association and collective bargaining in bi- and tripartite functions. These partners usually represent government institutions, trade unions, and employers’ organisations.

Government

The Ministry of Labour is the highest executive authority concerning labour matters, responsible for formulating, implementing, and advising on labour policies and regulations. Its mission is to secure decent jobs, formalise employment, guard fundamental labour rights, promote social dialogue, and insurance for older people.¹⁶ The ministry has a Special Investigations Unit to exercise its power to investigate and impose sanctions in the framework of the labour inspection system. The authority leads a tripartite Interinstitutional Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Human Rights of Workers, with participation by the

government, organised workers, and the business community.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection directs the health system and social protection through policies and inter-sector coordination to develop guidelines. The Pensions and Contributions Control Unit is a governmental audit body that controls contributions to the social security system.

The Ministry of Education sets overall education policy and school curricula and monitors education quality. The leading TVET provider and quality assurance body in the education sector is the public *Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje* (SENA), part of the Ministry of Labour.

Trade Unions

Although Colombia's Labour Code prohibits anti-union discrimination, the trade unions claim that there is a strong anti-union practice on the part of the companies. For example, since the law recognises cooperative members as owners, members of associated workers' cooperatives are not allowed to form unions. The law prohibits members of the armed forces and police from forming or joining unions. Legislation automatically recognises unions that obtain 25 signatures from potential members and comply with a registration process. Public-sector employees have the right to bargain collectively.¹⁷

In 2022, 5,857 trade unions were active in Colombia, of these 83% were with less than 100 affiliates, which corresponds to only 18% of the total affiliates, leading to union fragmentation. Of the total union membership in the country, 39% are women and 61% are men.¹⁸ Trade union members are concentrated in Bogotá, Antioquia, and Valle del Cauca. Approximately, half of members were in the private sector and half in the public sector. The public sector represented about 5% of the total employment, and this explains why one out of three (33%) workers in the public sector were affiliated to trade unions while as little as 5% in the private sector were affiliated.

Concerning the sectoral distribution of trade union members, the number of unions and membership is concentrated in the service sector, especially the community, social and personal services. Around 20% of the total workforce work within this sub-section, and one out of two (51%) of all trade union members belong to this category. The trade, restaurants/hotels sector employs most workers (27% of the workforce), but only 9.4% of union members come from this sector, primarily in the private sector. The 18% share of union members for the industrial sector corresponds to 20% of the workforce. In contrast, the agricultural sector contributes to fewer trade union members compared to the size of the workforce, which is related to informality (see Appendix Table 18).

Trade union membership peaked in the mid-1990s. It started to fall afterwards due to privatisation reforms in the industry sector, proliferation of labour outsourcing methods, and anti-union violence. However, in recent years membership has rebounded: Data from the three central trade union centres suggest an aggregate hike of 5.2% from 2017 to 2022, supported by the slowly improving employment conditions and aftermath of the 2016 peace agreement. Own estimations suggest Colombia's trade union density of employees reached 13% (and 6.1% of total employment) in 2022 (Table 2).

Table 2: Status of trade unions in Colombia, 2022

Indicator	Values
Members of trade unions	1,471,508 *
Trade union density – employment	6.1%
Trade union density - employees	13%
Share of women membership	39%

* Data from three federations and non-federations; the latter group represents a share of 3.3% of total membership.

Source: DTDA data collection and own calculations of trade union densities based on employment data from ILOSTAT.

As indicated, several aspects have hindered the rise of unionism in Colombia. First, the informal economy continues to be widespread, and private firms are dominated by micro-enterprises. Fixed-term contracts are widespread, which has hindered unionism and pension insurance.

Second, continual delays in procedures related to the evaluation of risk and the implementation of unionism protection measures, weak progress regarding collective protection for unionists, and a lack of monitoring mechanisms in place.¹⁹

Third, anti-unionism and anti-union violence have evolved and have become of a critical issue during the last two decades. Registered violations against unionists have dropped over the last decade; 287 cases were listed in 2022, mainly in education and other local services.

Fourth, firms' practices to constrain collective bargaining processes have impeded the development of union organisations and their services. Over 80% of Colombian unions have less than 100 members, thwarting their collective bargaining power. The prevalent usage of controversial methods, such as Collective Pacts and Union Contracts, has distorted the principle of internationally recognised collective bargaining agreements (CBAs). Application of CBAs has remained stagnant in the private sector, and among peripheral workers. A breakthrough for unionism in the public sector emerged at the beginning of the 2010s, reflected in a considerable hike in CBA coverage (see more in the Social Dialogue section).

In the wave of Just Transition, representatives from Colombia's trade union movement are calling on the multinationals to engage in dialogue with workers and communities to ensure a just transition that respects labour and environmental rights.²⁰

Two National Labour Conferences were set up in 2022, delivering a package of urgent measures to improve labour rights, including a series of proposed bills; for example, reform of the Substantive Labour Code, Collective Labour Law: Union Guarantees, prohibition of Collective Pacts and Union Contracts, Strike and its summary procedure; strengthening of the Labour Inspection; pension reform, and ratification of several ILO Conventions.²¹

The status of the central trade union organisations is summarised below.

Confederation of Workers in Colombia

The Confederation of Workers in Colombia (CTC) represents workers in formal bi- and tripartite negotiations with the government and employers' organisations. The confederation had around 226,000 members in 2022 and experienced an increase of 33% from 2017 to 2022. The organisation represented 16% of the three central confederations' membership. CTC is composed of regional and national federations from all sectors of the economy. Close to nine out of ten (87%) members are from the private sector, and the rest (13%) are from the public sector. Regionally, CTC is a member of the *Confederación de Trabajadores de las Américas* (CSA) and *Coordinadora de Centrales Sindicales Andinas* (CCSA). Globally, CTC is affiliated with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).²²

General Work Confederation in Colombia

The General Work Confederation in Colombia (CGT) was founded in 1975, and is legally recognised as a non-profit organisation, representing workers towards employers and governments in formal bi- and tripartite labour market institutions. The organisation comprises regional and national federations from all sectors of the economy but has primarily represented workers from the private sector, including rural informal workers. CTC registered approximately 598,000 members in 2022, representing a share of 42% of central confederations. It experienced a fall of around 1.4% in membership from 2017 to 2022. Unions continue to organise new groups of workers, leading to new services for their members from the informal economy.

Central Union of Workers

The Central Union of Workers (CUT) was created in 1986 by affiliates from pre-existing trade union centres. The organisation represents workers towards employers and governments in formal bi- and tripartite labour market institutions. CUT has been appointed as the union representative in tripartite commissions, such as the permanent commission on minimum wages and the National Council on Occupational Health and Safety. The confederation had about 600,000 members in

2022, representing a 42% share of the three leading organisations. It reached a growth of 3.9% from 2017 to 2022, benefitting a novel collective bargaining process in the public sector. Four out of five (82%) of trade union members in the public sector were affiliated to CUT. Internationally, it is a member of the global umbrella organisation ITUC.²³

Employers' Organisations

In 2021, employers represented approximately 3.3% of total employment in Colombia, slightly below the Latin America and Caribbean average of 4.0%. The Global Competitiveness Index provides a wide range of indicators, including the competitiveness of the labour market based on values linked to surveys among employers in the country and other statistical data. Concerning the competitiveness of the labour market, Colombia ranked 73 out of 141 countries (1 is best). Table 3 shows the country has been especially challenged by hiring and firing practices (117) and workers' rights (115). The best rankings are in internal labour mobility (31), the ratio of wage and salaried female workers to male workers (64), and cooperation in labour-employer relations (66).

Table 3: Labour Market Efficiency in Colombia, 2019

Indicator	Rank
Total	73
Cooperation in labour-employer relations **	66
Flexibility of wage determination *	67
Hiring and firing practices *	117
Redundancy costs (weeks of salary) *	76
Active labour market policies *	90
Pay and productivity *	94
Reliance on professional management *	67
Workers' rights *	115
Ease of hiring foreign labour *	75
Internal labour mobility *	31
Labour tax rate **	80
Ratio of wage and salaried female workers to male workers **	64

* Survey data. ** Ranked by per cent. Note: Rank from 1 to 141 (1 is highest).

Note: Rank from 1 to 141 (1 is best ranking).

Source: The Global Competitiveness Report, 2019, 8th pillar: Labour market efficiency.

Based on the list of 35 risks in the Global Risks Report 2023 identified by the Executive Opinion Survey, the five risks that are the most likely to pose the biggest threat to Colombia in the next two years are rapid inflation, digital inequality, employment and livelihood crisis, state collapse, and cost-of-living crisis.²⁴

Employers' organisations are generally not used in collective bargaining but for economic and coordination purposes within an industry. Collective bargaining is reserved for employers individually and trade unions.²⁵

The status of the leading employers' organisations is summarised below.

National Business Association of Colombia

The National Business Association of Colombia (ANDI) was formed in 1944. It aims to disseminate and promote economic and social policies directed at free commerce based on human dignity, political democracy, social justice, private property, and liberty. As a representative of private-sector interests, ANDI represents its members before national and international institutions, dealing with economic, legal, social, environmental, and business issues.²⁶ ANDI represents approximately 1,200 companies located within 33 sectors of the economy and is affiliated with the International Organisation of Employers (IOE).

Currently, ANDI emphasises innovation and digitalisation of the Colombian economy. It works towards improving the education of students and workers through more cooperation between businesses, government, and universities. The organisation is also aware of the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) that links with challenges they detected in 2023, including finding new energy sources such as biomass, biogas, small-scale hydro, geothermal, ocean power, and advanced biofuels. Employment formalisation has also been raised as a central issue in Colombia. In addition, ANDI's National Survey of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion 2023 found an increase in women's participation in boards of directors from 25% in 2022 to 33% in 2023.

SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Social dialogue functions at national and sectoral levels in Colombia. This system is involved in tripartite dialogue structures and with engagement in consultations on social and economic policies at local level.²⁷

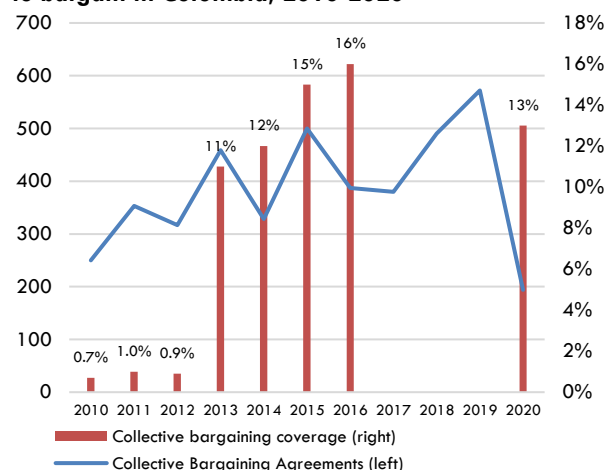
The Colombian constitution and Labour Code protect the right of collective bargaining based on decentralised bargaining negotiated at company level. This system is set by different contractual arrangements: Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) carried out through unions, Collective Pacts, and Union Contracts. The two latter methods have been considered controversial and are not mandatory to enter a union system. They are currently under review for legal conformity. The Ministry of Labour issued administrative acts granting functions to the Special Investigations Unit to investigate the misuse of Collective Pacts and Trade Union Contracts. Several complaint cases concerning the erosion of trade unions' bargaining power and activities are active (see more in the Trade Union Rights Violations section).

The legal and practical obstacles leading to the absence of collective bargaining above enterprise level are reflected the shallow coverage of collective bargaining in the private sector. They are further echoed in the relatively low trade union membership rate from the private sector, linked with the use of subcontracting and fixed-term contracts. In addition, 92% of Colombian firms are micro-enterprises, and the pervasive informal economy contests the development of collective bargaining measures in the private sector, often due to a lack of awareness or incentives.

Decree 1092 of 2012 opened Labour Agreements in the public sector, and this was considered a breakthrough for unionism in the country. This improvement resulted in a sharp hike in CBA coverage from 0.9% in 2012 to 11% in 2013, peaking at 16% in 2016 but down to 12% in 2020. It successfully made CBAs more widespread within the public sector. The number of CBAs also experienced upsurges, topping in 2019 at 572. It

plummeted to 194 in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic (see more in Figure 3).

Figure 3: Number of collective bargaining agreements and percentage coverage of employees with the right to bargain in Colombia, 2010-2020



Note: Lack data of collective bargaining coverage from 2017 to 2019.
Source: SISLAB – ENS; OECD.

Many of the collective agreements go beyond the base wage, specifying other allowances and benefits in kind that supplement, for example subsidies for accommodation, transport and meals, child and education allowances, holiday bonuses, attendance bonuses and seniority bonuses, and explicit access to parental leave for same-sex parents. Note that the pension system is not covered by collective bargaining. Throughout 2020 and 2021, collective negotiations were held, formally and informally, on how to implement public health measures and prevent and control infection due to the Covid-19 pandemic most effectively.

Central Tripartite Institutions

Tripartism implies meaningful consultation and cooperation between representatives from the three central actors in the labour market: government, employers, and organised workers. Ideally, the social partners are treated equally and independently to seek solutions to issues of common concern. The leading institutions are presented below:

Permanent Commission for the Coordination of Wage and Labour Policies

The Permanent Commission for the Coordination of Wage and Labour Policies (PCCWLP) aims to promote fair labour relations and contribute to the settlement of collective labour disputes. The head of the Ministry of Labour chairs the commission.²⁸

The commission has been active; for instance, its agreement to raise the minimum wage in 2022, seeking to protect the purchasing power of wages (see more in the Working Conditions section). The Ministry of Labour also conducted inquiries for the commission, dealing with illegal subcontracting and misuse of collective agreements and social contracts, and drafting reform of the collective bargaining processes.

Interinstitutional Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Human Rights of Workers

The Ministry of Labour leads the tripartite Interinstitutional Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Human Rights of Workers, with participation by the social partners. The commission usually meets several times a year, but due to Covid-19 preventive issues, they met less during 2021, and in virtual sessions.

Special Committee for the Handling of Conflicts referred to the ILO

The Special Committee for the Handling of Conflicts referred to the ILO (SCHCILO) is a tripartite body responsible for making recommendations to the PCCWLP on establishing procedures for disputes that occur in exercising the right to organise and collective bargaining. SCHCILO can also handle disputes submitted at the request of both parties at enterprise level. Initially, the commission could have lived up to the expectations but with some improvements in recent years. Data suggest that from 2012 to 2019, SCHCILO achieved the conclusion of agreements in 63% of the cases examined. In 2020 and 2021, it held 71 meetings, during which 23 cases were identified to promote conciliation decisions and agreements. Agreements were concluded in 95% of the cases.²⁹

Labour Dispute Settlement System

Colombia's labour dispute settlement system links with conciliation and mediation mechanisms. If disputes regarding freedom of association and collective bargaining cannot be resolved by any other instances, the cases can be submitted to the Special Committee for the Handling of Conflicts and referred to the ILO.

At the judiciary level, the Administrative Courts are structured as a Council of State, organised in five different chambers, including one dealing with labour disputes. Individuals who are not lawyers can also have rights of audience, including actions for the protection of fundamental rights and labour disputes.

Several initiatives have been taken to facilitate various administrative processes in arbitration procedures, particularly increased use of information technologies and virtual platforms.

The number of arbitration tribunals convened and resolved has risen in recent years, except a downturn in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic (see Table 4). However, the share of cases that ended in agreement has been falling due to tribunals being delayed by companies or the Ministry of Labour by withholding the appointment of an arbiter to wear out the union.³⁰ Other factors are the lack of requirements for the professional competence of arbitrators; the withdrawal of claims and the commencement of new collective disputes by trade unions, which have the effect of prolonging the special protection of workers against dismissal indefinitely. Another factor is the great length of time required by the process for setting aside arbitration awards in the event of appeals.³¹ On the positive side, the number of inspectors trained in general aspects of labour conciliation and dispute settlement increased from 58 in 2020 to 254 in 2021 (see more in the Working Conditions section).³²

Table 4: Number of arbitration tribunals convened and resolved, 2017-2021

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
38	89	87	64	126

Source: Ministry of Labour.

It has been dangerous to be an active unionist in Colombia (see more in the Trade Union Rights Violations section). The Attorney General's Office has aimed at reinforcing its capacity to investigate crimes committed against trade unionists. The Technical Investigation Body, known as judicial police, and prosecutors investigating criminal cases of threats and killings are required to determine during the initial phase of an investigation whether a victim is an active or retired union member or is actively engaged in union formation and organisation. Still, it could take several months to transfer cases from regional field offices of the Attorney General's Office to the Attorney General's Human Rights Directorate, and cases are transferred only with the approval of the attorney general in response to direct requests instead of automatically.

In cases of unionist killings, the pace of investigations and convictions has remained slow, and high rates of impunity have continued. Nevertheless, some progress has been made in the rate of case resolution. The Attorney General's Office reported receiving 232 cases of homicides of unionists between January 2011 and January 2021. They reported advancements in 43% of these cases. Labour groups have said that more needs to be done to address impunity for perpetrators of violence against trade unionists and many threat cases.³³

The National Protection Unit (NPU) provides protection measures to vulnerable populations at risk, including trade unionists, from attacks and it investigates and prosecutes these cases. The government is continuing its protection programme for labour activists under threat because of their activities. Based on a declining trend in recent years, the NPU protected 255 labour activists in 2021, reaching a share of 3.2% of the total number of protected persons (see Table 5). Overall, the risk level assessments carried out for trade unionists reached 4,553 from 2012 to 2021.

Table 5: The National Protection Unit's protection programme, persons, 2018-2021

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Union members	370	299	299	255
Total protected persons	7,433	8,316	7,561	7,987

Source: Ministry of Labour.

Exercise of the right to strike in Colombia peaked at 50 strikes in 2010, down to 2 strikes a year in the recent years in the aftermath of the 2016 Peace Agreement.

TRADE UNION RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

For almost 30 years, the ILO and many other international organisations have reiterated their deep concern about anti-union violence and the right to freedom of association in Colombia. The country is among the top-ten most dangerous countries for trade union leaders as top targets for harassment, death threats, and, ultimately, assassinations. Trade union members have experienced all sorts of violations, including collective bargaining distortion, violations of freedom of association, anti-union dismissals, arrests, murders of trade union leaders, and threats against trade unions, and anti-union practices.

The country is at the bottom of the Global Rights Index 2022 at 5 of 5+ (5+ indicates a complete breakdown in the rule of law). This ranking level has been translated into "no guarantee of rights": While the legislation may spell out certain rights, workers have no access to these rights and are therefore exposed to unfair labour practices.

As previously indicated, although the spread of registered violations has decreased, it remains unacceptably high. Cases mainly have been death threats (67%), harassment (11%), and murder (7.4%) (see Appendix Table 19). The actual numbers are most likely even worse because of underreporting, as victims may fear the consequences of speaking out. Most of these crimes remain unresolved due to the culture of impunity in the country, and the justice system is under-resourced. The sectors most affected by this violence were the education, transport, mining, and energy

sectors.³⁴ Most attackers have been unidentified. Paramilitaries are the most frequently alleged perpetrators; state organisations and employers have also been also suspected offenders.

The International Trade Union Confederation’s (ITUC) latest registered specific cases of violations of rights include union leaders who received death threats in 2022; union leader killed in 2020; a series of cases in 2019 dealing with systematic violations of trade unionists’ right to life and integrity, Huawei implements strategies to dismiss unionised workers, impunity poses an obstacle to freedom of association, the United Nations expresses concern over the measures taken by the authorities before general strike action, violations of social and labour organisations’ right to freedom of assembly, and trade union leaders’ right to life threatened.³⁵

Violence associated with the armed conflict has forcibly displaced millions, and impunity for grave abuses remains a serious concern. Police have used excessive and often brutal force in response to mostly peaceful demonstrations occurring in recent years.³⁶

The ILO registered 217 Freedom of Association complaint cases in April 2023, of which 15 are active and 21 follow-ups. The latest are three confidential cases from 2021.

Forced labour – organised begging, mining, agriculture, and domestic service – remain a serious issue. Colombia ranked 113 out of 167 on the Global Slavery Index in 2018 (1 is worst), the tenth worst ranking among 27 countries in America. The index measures modern slavery as slavery-like practices (such as debt bondage, forced marriage, and sale or exploitation of children), human trafficking, and forced labour. An estimated 131,000 (0.3% of the population) are victims of modern slavery in Colombia.

WORKING CONDITIONS

The single national minimum wage links with the annual National State Agreement. By law, no

worker in Colombia can be paid less than the mandatory minimum wage. Approximately half of Colombia’s workforce (10 million employees) receive at least the minimum wage. It is important to realise that the informal economy is widespread, creating loopholes in labour and business regulations, including the minimum wage. Colombia’s minimum wage level is at the low end in the Americas. The real minimum wage growth (nominal deducted for inflation) has been upward for the last decade, except in 2020/2021; with a significant hike in 2023, based on a new agreement setting a 15% increase in the salaries of public servants, an adjustment that exceeds the 7.3% achieved in 2022 (see Table 6 and Figure 4). The minimum wage level relative to median and mean wage is at the high end; it did not exceed progress in labour productivity.

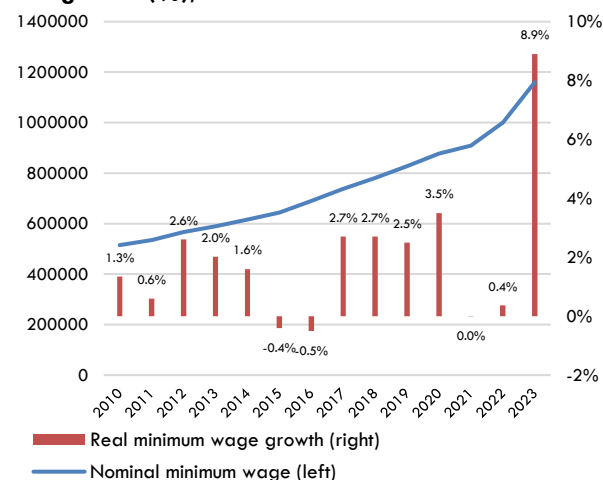
Table 6: Earnings and minimum wage (MW) in Colombia, per month, 2023

	Current Colombian Peso (COP)	Current US\$
Average earnings *	1,407,512	375
Nominal MW	1,160,000	246
Average earnings gender gap	8% favouring women	
Real MW growth, 2020-2023 average	3.2% **	

* Year: 2021. ** Average nominal minimum wage growth minus inflation in consumption prices.

Source: ILO’s KILM; Wageindicator.org; and own calculations on real minimum wage growth.

Figure 4: Minimum wage trend in Colombia, COP and real growth (%), 2010-2023



Source: Escuela Nacional Sindical – SISLAB, Wageindicator.org, own estimations in real minimum wage growth with data from IMF.

Many Colombian workers' wages in the public sector saw progress, accompanied by multi-level collective bargaining at national level. Collective bargaining in the private sector continues to be weak, with weak collective bargaining structures.

The government launched Labour Formalization Agreements (LFAs) in 2012 as a tool to reduce and eventually eradicate the practice of illegal labour outsourcing. This system has often been mentioned as the new path for concerted labour relations in Colombia. However, the number of LFAs was meagre: between 2012-2021, just 417 LFAs were negotiated and signed, covering 44,234 Colombian workers.³⁷ This signals that the scope of this contractual system has yet to reach a broad group of employees. In addition, the quality of some LFAs is poor; for example, one in three LFAs have not received direct and indefinite contracts.

Subcontracting has been on the rise in recent years, particularly among union service contracts and temporary work agencies (i.e., a company does not have a direct employment relationship with either the company or the union and is thus not covered by the Labour Code). For example, people on subcontracts do not benefit from the labour regulations such as minimum wage, hiring and firing rules, affiliation with unions, collective bargaining rights, and social security benefits (see Table 7).³⁸

Table 7: Subcontracting trends and workers coverage in Colombia, 2017-2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Partner labour cooperatives					
Cooperatives	430	305	281	204	295 *
Workers	35,768	30,626	21,044	11,112	11,921
Union service contracts					
Contracts	942	1,103	1,945	1,121	2,779
Workers	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	331,510
Temporary work agencies					
Agencies	N/a	538	581	615	697
Workers	463,880	457,524	415,059	416,269	501,403

* Figures for 2021 have a cut-off date of June 2021.

Source: Ministry of Labour.

Decree No 36 of 2016 regulates union contracts, in which unions provide manpower to employers, effectively shifting the role of unions from worker representatives to employers. Three main issues with the rapid increase in the use of union contracts within the current system concern: i) it has perpetuated and extended the illegal use of intermediate labour arrangements; ii) it perverts union activity, as it does

not respect the basic tenets of trade unionism; and iii) it changes the nature of labour relations.³⁹

The fixed-term contract is one of the most common types of labour contract in Colombia. It is usually in small firms in the private sector, especially in construction or manufacturing. This type of contract often reduces the level of worker satisfaction.

Although the Labour Code protects workers' occupational safety and health in the formal sector, it is side-lined for workers in the informal economy.

The Labour Action Plan with the U.S. and the Road Map with the EU, which are part of trade agreements, led the Ministry of Labour and Social Security Inspectors. In 2021, 904 inspectors were registered. These inspectors represent one per approximately 23,000 workers (11,000 per employee). It appears to be a relatively low inspection coverage since the ILO recommends 1 per 10,000 workers in industrial market economies and one inspector per 20,000 workers in transition economies.⁴⁰ In addition, the ministry aims at reaching 1,332 inspectors in 2024, of which 82% will correspond to the role of labour inspection.

The OECD's Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) stated that 62% of inspectors carry out inspections, and when penalties are imposed, they are often not collected. The trade union movement argues that this demonstrates the lack of political will to bring about change, which is similarly detected in studies that support the fact that specific labour clauses set out in trade agreements are far from complied with.⁴¹

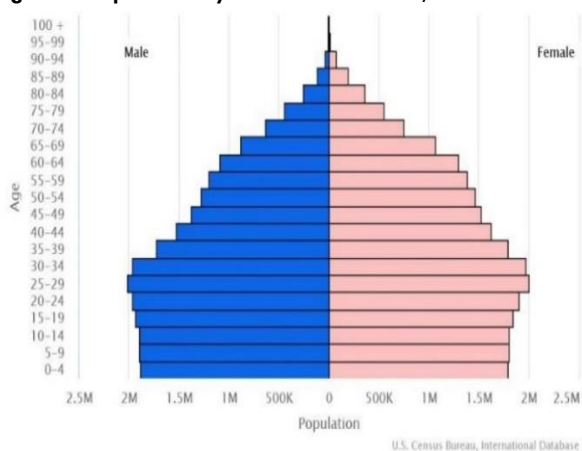
WORKFORCE

Colombia's population was 49.3 million in 2023, the third largest in Latin America. Its growth slowed from 2.3% in 1980 to 1.1% in 2021, similarly to the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region. The fertility rate also fell from 3.9 in 1980 to 1.7 births per woman in 2020, slightly higher than the LAC average at 1.9. Colombians' life expectancy increased from 67 years in 1980,

peaking in 2017-2019 at 77, but down to 75 in 2020, two percentage points higher than the regional average.

The population pyramid in Figure 5 visualises how demographic shifts are evolving in Colombia. Around 23% of the population are below 14 years old; 67% are of working age (15-64); 11% are 65 years and over. The growth of the youth segment up to 30 years old has lost its pace, echoed in the declining birth rate during the last three decades.

Figure 5: Population Pyramid for Colombia, 2023



Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, Colombia.

The evolution of the labour market's landscape has brought challenges due to new forms of organisation, the implementation of information technologies in the ordinary course of labour relations, a new IT-based service model, and the social security payment system based on hours.

Based on the latest national labour force survey data from 2021, around 20.7 million Colombian are in employment, with a ratio of employment-to-population of 57% in 2022, slightly below the World's upper-middle-income average at 60%. The number of employed steadily grew during the 2010s and peaked in 2019 before the Covid-19 pandemic entered the scene. It plummeted by 11% from 2019 to 2020, causing the loss of approximately five million jobs at its most critical point (between April and May 2020). It rebounded in 2021 by 9%. Generally, the employment growth was driven by the adult group (25+ years). In contrast, the youth (15-24 years) dropped close by 7% during the last decade, linked with improved

school enrolment rate at the higher education level and curbing the youth bulge (see more in the Education and Youth sections).

Men dominate the labour market, representing 61% of total employment, while women are 39% (see more in the Gender sub-section). Just 4.2% of the employed operate in the public sector, while 96% are in the private sector.

The group of employees (paid employment jobs) slowly grew during the 2010s, peaking at 50% in 2019. It fell by one percentage point at the beginning of the 2020s due to the pandemic. This rate stayed slightly higher than Ecuador (45%) and Peru (46%) but below Brazil (66%) and Panama (59%). Instead, 51% of Colombian workers operate as self-employed (employers, own-account workers, contributing family workers and members of producers' cooperatives) (Table 8).

Table 8: Key labour market indicators in Colombia, %, 2021

Types	%
Labour force participation rate	64%
Employment rate	53%
Employees	49%
Self-employed	51%
Public sector	4.2%
Private sector	96%

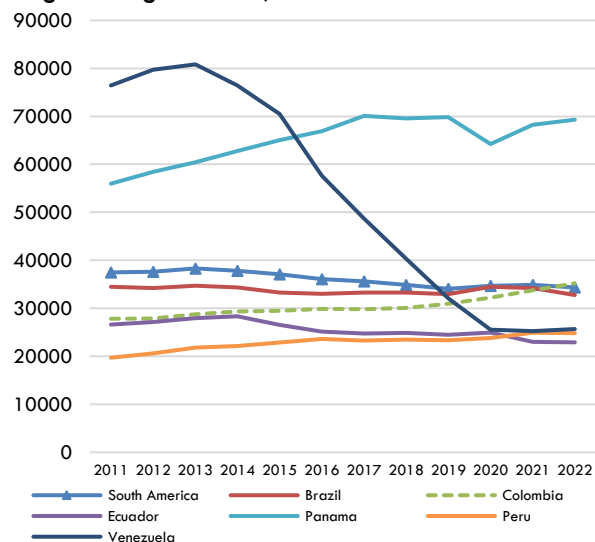
Source: Colombia, *Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares*, 2021.

Small shifts have been detected in the aggregated sectoral employment in Colombia. The agricultural sector represents the smallest group, and it fell on the margin from 19% in 2009 to 16% in 2019. The industry sector has a slightly larger segment, which stood at 20% during the last decade. The country's manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment fell by two percentage points from 2009 to 2021, ending at 11%. The share of manufacturing in GDP is even nowadays half of what it was in the 1980s, and domestic manufacturing is struggling to compete in global markets. This negative trend in manufacturing is challenging the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Appendix Table 15, Indicator 9.2.2). Although the country's economy is primarily

supported by the mining, agriculture, oil, and manufacturing industries, the service sector is still Colombia's largest employment sector: growing by two percentage points and reaching 64% in 2021.⁴²

Figure 6 below shows that the labour productivity in Colombia grew during the 2010s, landing in line with Southern America's average. This upsurge made Colombia one of the strongest economic performers in the region, supported by a commodity boom, a high influx of experienced Venezuelan workers at all skill levels, and a shrinking informal economy. Furthermore, efficiency improvements and technological change within sectors explain almost 70% of labour productivity gains over the last two decades. The country's labour productivity is still not fully up at the level of other more advanced OECD economies. Studies suggest that the labour productivity gap between Colombia and the OECD explains four-fifths of the income gap. Poor infrastructure, low investment in innovation and a relatively higher share of employment in low-productivity activities hinder the development of productivity growth.⁴³

Figure 6: Output per worker trend for Colombia and neighbouring countries, 2011-2022



Note: Output per worker is based on GDP constant 2017 international \$ at PPP.

Source: International Labour Organization, Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM).

Colombia's labour share of national income was stable during the 2010s, reaching 53% in 2019,

hovering above World's upper-middle income average at 50%. It was mainly protected by the slight upsurge in the employees' share of employment, real wage hikes, and rising remittance inflow. A transformation involving the rising power of new technology, globalisation, and still widespread informal economy, questions Colombia's capacity to reach the SDG for with better equality (see Appendix Table 15, Indicators 10.4.1).

Like other Latin American countries, Colombia faces difficulties concerning skills mismatches in the workforce. For instance, the Global Talent Shortage Survey 2023 suggested that 64% of Colombia's employers reported problems filling open positions with appropriately qualified talent, up from 50% in 2016. As a comparison, the world average was 77%: a 17-year high.⁴⁴ Talent mismatch has increased pressure on the labour market. Colombia has tried to increase educational flexibility through educational reform in the national development plan. The essential skills in demand are business unit members, product managers, supply chain managers, financial controllers, and human resource managers with labour relations experience.

Firms are dominated by micro-enterprises accounting for 92% of total domestic firms. In contrast, the OECD average was 80%. Although the number of registered firms increased at the beginning of the 2010s, it has flattened since the end of the 2010s. Still, seven out of ten firms fail within five years. The labour productivity of micro-enterprises was just 16% of that of large firms.⁴⁵

Colombia is one of the top outsourcing destinations, as it offers expertise in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry, a telecommunications network and infrastructure (see more in the Vocational Training sub-section). Even in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the outsourcing industry helped create over 15,000 jobs spread over the major industrial regions of the country.

Unemployment

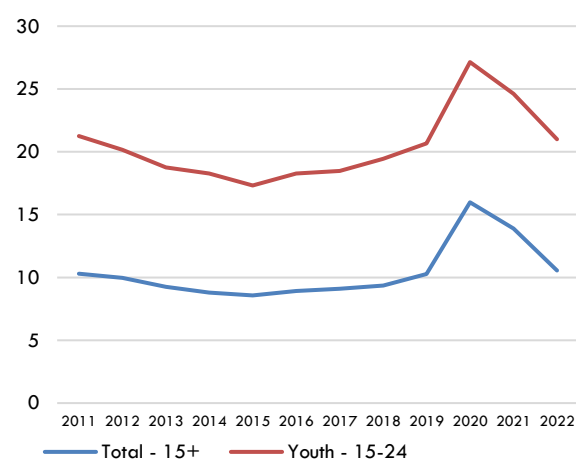
During the last decade, Colombia's unemployment rate peaked in 2020 at 16%, representing the highest level compared to the neighbouring countries. The peak was an impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic that led to direct effects of the economic lockdown on vulnerable sectors. In 2022, unemployment reverted to the previous level in 2019. Youth unemployment started to rise in the mid-2010s, not only due to the slowing economic development but also the aftermath of the 2016 peace agreement and high influx of Venezuelan workers that put pressure on job creation (see more in Table 9 and Figure 7). Note that stark gender gaps are visible; for instance the unemployment rate for young women is ten percentage points higher than for young men (see more in the Gender and Youth sub-sections).

Table 9: Unemployment rates in Colombia, %, 2022

	Gender	%
Unemployment	Total	11%
	Men	8.6%
	Women	13%
Youth unemployment (15-24 age)	Total	21%
	Men	17%
	Women	27%

Source: ILO, Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM).

Figure 7: Unemployment rate trend in Colombia, %, 2011-2022



Source: International Labour Organization, Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM).

Risks arising from the loss of employment are covered through different schemes for formal workers. However, unemployment insurance

coverage was low, at 3% in 2021, eleven percentage points lower than the regional average. Moreover, the lowest household income deciles have the lowest cover. Instead, others are connected to cash transfer programmes (see more in the Social Protection section).

The unemployment rate is higher among the better educated in Colombia compared to those less educated. Many Colombians have given up hope and are not searching for a job, and about one in three of the population is economically inactive, particularly among women, who are excluded as a group from the employed segment statistics. This shadows potentially much higher unemployment.

Even though Colombia's population growth is slowing, it continues to face intense labour supply pressures due to the rapidly growing number of higher-educated graduates. This group often fronts a mismatch between the skills produced by the education system and those needed by the labour market. These frustrations could fuel Colombian youth's social discontent.

Migration

Colombia has ratified central international migration conventions but has not signed the ILO's four migrant-specific instruments. Generally, the national migration legal framework is relatively comprehensive; for example, regular migrants can access public health services on the same terms as Colombian citizens (irregular migrants may only access emergency services), education is free for all children in the country up to the secondary level, all persons with a regular status in the country are entitled to work but must have a work permit.⁴⁶

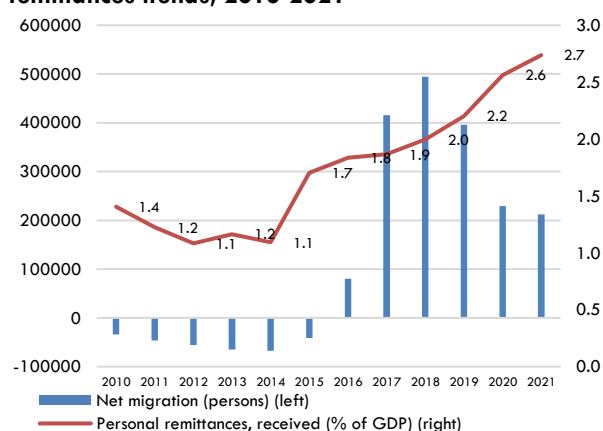
The government launched the Integrated Migration Policy (IMP) in 2021, establishing a permanent legal framework for migration policy in Colombia. It seeks to promote regular migration, improve the socio-economic integration of migrants, and offer better protection to vulnerable migrant populations. It also includes an entire section of Colombians living abroad.⁴⁷ In the same year, the government announced that all Venezuelans in Colombia will

receive a ten-year protection status, known as the Temporary Statute of Protection for Venezuelan migrants (TSPV). This far-reaching protection mechanism grants legal status for migrants to stay in the national territory and the possibility to apply for a permanent resident visa after ten years. It is considered an ambitious plan and the first of its kind in Latin America.

Colombia's population is concentrated in urban areas reaching around 82% today. It is significantly higher than its neighbouring countries, except Brazil (87%) and Venezuela (88%).

Figure 8 below visualises the net migration flow: At the beginning of the 2010s, more left than entered the country, but since 2016 this trend has reversed and accelerated, although slowing down in the early 2020s. These alterations link with the 2016 peace agreement leading to Colombian returnees. Since 2015, the country also has received massive immigration from Venezuelans struggling with political and economic turmoil. This prompted the Colombian government to adopt different measures for migrants, such as the TPSV mentioned above. The Covid-19 pandemic led to border restrictions but did not totally stall the (positive) net migration rate. In addition, climate change is emerging as a migration push factor. Data show that displacement associated with new disasters is mainly from floods affecting 32,000 persons in 2021.⁴⁸

Figure 8: Colombia's net migration and personal remittances trends, 2010-2021



Note: Net migration is the total number of immigrants minus the annual number of emigrants, including both citizens and non-citizens.

Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators.

The scope of Colombia's civil conflict impact is exemplified as one of the largest sources of refugees in Latin America and a large group of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). During the last decade, the IDP group represented 7.2 million persons at its peak in 2016, down to 6.8 million persons in Colombia in February 2023, equalling 13% of the population. The risk of displacements is still present, as other rebel groups fill the void left by FARC, making return difficult for many IDPs: Displacement associated with new conflicts and violence in rural areas was registered at 134,000 persons in 2021.

Colombia's emigration track record has been one of the highest volumes in South America. As of 2021, about 10% of the Colombian population, or five million Colombians, resided primarily outside Colombia. On the negative side, this has led to a brain drain that negatively affects the workforce. On the positive side, studies found that the Colombian diaspora has a wealth of human and social capital that can be mobilised in the process of internationalisation of the Colombian economy.⁴⁹ The scale of personal remittances started to increase in 2015, gradually becoming a more important part of the economy, peaking, so far, at 2.7% of GDP in 2021 (revisit Figure 8). Venezuela, the United States and Ecuador are the top three nationalities for newcomer Colombian immigrants.

As of May 2022, 2.3 million filled out Colombia's socio-economic survey, over 1.2 million were granted a Temporary Protection Permit (TPP), and at least 1 million permits were delivered to Venezuelans. There were around 2.5 million Venezuelans in Colombia as at February 2022; at least 1 million are in irregular status, indicating the new TSPV issuance will require a massive logistical effort. Relatively few were recognised as refugees.⁵⁰ Venezuelans benefited from the open-borders policy and implementing exemplary practices in the provision of services for Venezuelan migrants and returned Colombians.⁵¹ Since many Colombians are living under economic hardship, this open-borders policy has caused some criticism for not prioritising Colombia's own economically poor population.⁵²

Venezuelan migrants represent all levels of education. Most of them have spread to all major urban areas, with many living in poverty and operating in the informal economy. Many have difficulties obtaining work permits, they are often discriminated against in the Colombian labour market, and frequently end up working in informal low-skilled jobs.⁵³

Informal Economy

A legal framework has been developed to curb the widespread informal economy in Colombia (Appendix Table 23). The government has also launched a series of programmes to support the formalisation of jobs, including initiatives to promote young workers to formalise rural jobs; extend the rights of domestic workers; introduce accident insurance for self-employed workers; the one-stop-shop for the registration of companies; a six-month paid apprenticeship programme for university graduates in the public sector.⁵⁴

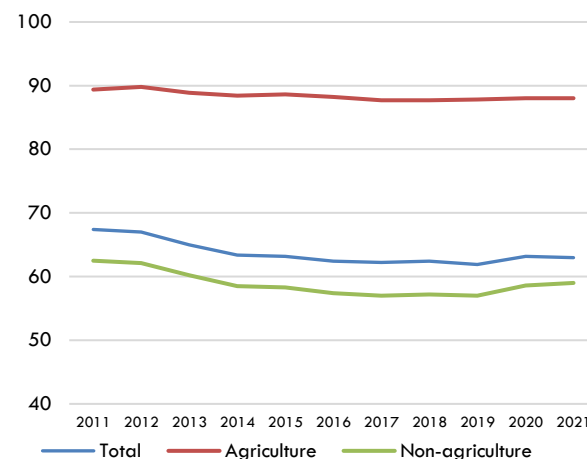
Although these initiatives have fed progress for labour formalisation, the informal economy's scope concerning employment only slowly diminished during the 2010s, mainly among non-agricultural workers. The pace slowed at the end of the 2010s because of the sluggish economic growth and the fast-growing influx of immigration. Informality in employment even rebounded slightly at the beginning of the 2020s as an impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Colombia has one of the highest rates of informality among the neighbouring countries (see Table 10 and Figure 9). The informal economic size show it has fallen over the last two decades, reaching 25% of GDP in 2015, significantly lower than the neighbouring countries.⁵⁵

Table 10: Status of the informal economy in Colombia, 2021

Indicator	Value
Proportion of informal employment in total employment (total)	63%
Proportion of informal employment in total employment (agriculture)	88%
Proportion of informal employment in total employment (non-agriculture)	59%

Source: Source: International Labour Organization, Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM).

Figure 9: Informal employment rates in Colombia, %, 2011-2021



Source: ILOSTAT.

Factors that exacerbate insufficient job creation in the formal sector include over-regulation and high non-wage costs (costs faced by the employer such as health and pension contributions, payroll taxes, and transport subsidies).⁵⁶

Informality is often among old/young workers, low-skilled and less educated workers. These workers usually earn less than their formal counterparts, they are in more vulnerable employment conditions, and they are challenged by low labour productivity.⁵⁷ Others voluntarily exit the formal sector since they find other conditions in informality, such as avoiding paying taxes.

Although all workers are protected by universal health insurance, those in the informal economy are side-lined from the pension insurance schemes (see more in the Social Protection section).

Trade unions in Colombia have expanded their activities to include workers in the informal economy and begun cooperating with other organisations defending the interests of such workers, for example, agricultural workers and day labourers.⁵⁸

A specific Tripartite National Informal Economy Forum has not been established in Colombia. Instead, other national forums addressing the status of informal economy workers at the policy level are ongoing.

Child Labour

Around 21% of Colombia's population is 5-17 years old. The country has ratified all major international conventions on children and child labour, including ILO's Conventions on Minimum Age of Employment (C138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour (C182) (see Appendix Table 17).

The country made significant efforts to eradicate child labour via national legal improvements. The government has established institutional mechanisms for enforcing laws and regulations on child labour. For example, the government promoted a campaign, Working is Not a Child's Task, aiming to prevent and eliminate child labour through awareness-raising efforts. Nevertheless, gaps persist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of child labour laws.⁵⁹

Rules set the minimum age for employment at 15, and 18 for hazardous work. Children under 15 can only work up to 14 hours a week and only in arts, sports, or recreational and cultural activities. The minimum age for employment needs signed documentation from parents and either a labour inspector or a local authority.⁶⁰

At policy level, the Ministry of Labour follows the National Policy to Prevent and Eliminate Child Labour and Protect Young Workers. The government has emphasised combating child labour to stop illegal mining and formalise artisanal mining production, as well as the More Families in Action Programme to fight poverty through conditional cash transfers.

Data suggested that child labour was falling, although it remains rife in rural areas. The reduction was mainly due to the high school enrolment rates in the 2010s and the level of below upper secondary attainment is one of the highest among OECD countries.⁶¹ The percentage of children aged 5 to 17 working in Colombia dropped to 7.8% in 2016 from 10% in 2012.⁶² It most likely continued to fall in the late 2010s as an impact of the 2016 peace agreement. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020/2021 led many families close to

the poverty line and distorted the education system. It may also drive-up child labour. The most recent data available suggest Colombia's child labour was 7% in 2020.⁶³ Generally, most children work informally in the agriculture, cattle ranching, and forestry sectors, as well as in hotels and restaurants.

Some children are recruited into both illegal gangs and guerrilla groups. As part of the 2016 peace agreement, it was agreed that FARC would stop recruiting minors and that they would release all children below the age of 15. Although extra funds have been allocated towards combatting child labour, there are still weaknesses because labour inspection is mainly concentrated in urban areas.

Gender

Colombia has ratified all current international treaties on human rights and women's rights, including ILO's core conventions against the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (C111) and the Equal Remuneration Convention (C100) (Appendix Table 17). The government's goal is that, by 2030, the country will be the world's leader in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality.⁶⁴ The country made significant progress towards laws that promote gender equality and confirm the human rights of women, as well as towards developing strong institutions to support gender rights. The National Development Plan 2018-2022 included an entire chapter on women's rights, not to mention a policy on women's economic empowerment that addresses structural barriers and introduces reforms. The National Development Plan 2023-2026 also references gender issues, but it is somewhat less ambitious than the previous plan.

Overall, Colombia's laws and regulations around the life cycle of a working woman score 84 out of 100 (100 is best) in 2023, slightly higher than Latin America and the Caribbean (81). Rankings score top (100) on mobility, workplace, marriage, parenthood, and assets. When it comes to laws affecting women's pay, constraints on women starting and running a business and concerning the size of a woman's pension, the country could

consider reforms to improve legal equality for women.⁶⁵ The pervasive use of informal employment still creates loopholes in the gender rights on equality and encourages gender-based discrimination in practice. For instance, in specific agricultural sectors, such as the highly profitable cut-flower industry, women are often subjected to pregnancy screening before being hired and they may be fired if they become pregnant.⁶⁶

On a broader gender equality view, the Global Gender Gap Index 2022 from the World Economic Forum ranks Colombia 75 out of 146 countries (1 is best). The best scoring was educational attainment at the top (1), while the rest at the medium level: economic participation and opportunities (93), political empowerment (70), and health and survival (56). Similarly, the Gender Inequality Index from the United Nations Development Programme (with focus on maternal mortality, adolescent birth, the share of seats in parliament, population with at least some secondary education, and workforce participation) placed the country at 102 out of 170 countries (1 is best) in 2021. This relatively low-medium level ranking suggests that Colombia still needs to take significant strides to improve gender equality and stay below the neighbouring countries, except Venezuela.

Table 11 visualises key labour-related indicators for gender gaps. First, there are substantially more men than women representing the employment group. Second, relatively more women are unemployed than men. Third, the gender gap concerning employees and self-employed rates are moderately low. Last but not least, Colombia has a relatively narrow gender pay gap at 6%, or about half the OECD average (13%).⁶⁷

Table 11: Key indicators for labour gender gaps in Colombia, 2021

	Men	Women
Employment share	61%	39%
Unemployment rate	8.6%	13%
Employees rate	47%	51%
Self-employed workers rate	53%	49%

Source: LFS - Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares, 2021.

Another issue that haunts the gender-biased criteria is associated with stereotyped gender roles, rooted in the collective mentality of the 'macho' culture that is widespread in Latin America. This factor is expressed in that women do almost all housework, challenging their professional realisation and for which they are not remunerated. It is also transformed into specific forms of exclusion for women in the labour sphere, echoed in its relatively low employment-to-population rate and the relatively high unemployment rate.

On the positive side, the share of Colombian firms with woman managers increased from 12% in 2010 to 19% in 2017. It was slightly lower than the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) average of 21%. On the other hand, the country scores remarkably high regarding firms with women participation in ownership of 67% while the LAC's average at 46% (Figure 10). This suggests that the country is moving toward the SDG's goal regarding women's share of employment in managerial positions (see also Appendix Table 15, Indicator 5.5.2).

Figure 10: Enterprise Survey in Colombia, Women participation, %, 2017



Source: The World Bank, Colombia Enterprise Survey, 2017.

Youth

Colombia's youth (15-24 years) represent 19% of the population and 21% of the total employment. The demographic landscape has been dominated by young people, but projections suggest that, by

2030, it will reach a turning point and they will no longer be the largest demographic group.

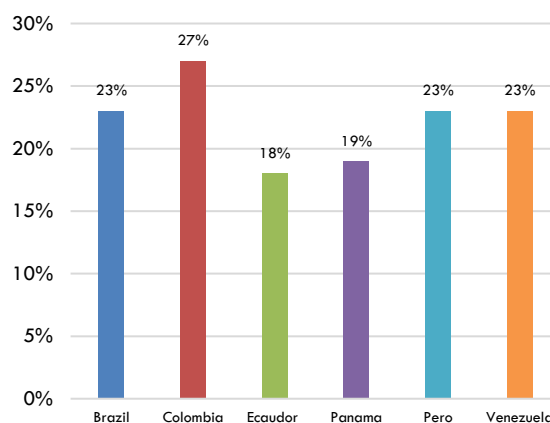
The government has promoted a series of activities to strengthen efforts to ensure that young people are considered a distinct population group. It has no specific youth policy, although in 2023, the Presidency Council for Youth initiated preparation of a youth policy established by coordinated actions with different sectors.⁶⁸ Other reports have found that youth-led civic engagement takes various forms, including advocacy, educational activities, activism via traditional media and social media, and art-based peacebuilding. On the other hand, young people's struggles to secure a livelihood and negative community perceptions hamper their motivation to participate in such activities.⁶⁹

The country's latest ranking on the Global Youth Development Index was 113 of 181 countries (1 is best) in 2020, a better position than the neighbouring countries like Brazil (116) and Venezuela (128) but lower than Peru (68) and Panama (85). The Global Youth Well-being Index registered that Colombia tends toward the lower-middle range of youth well-being in all domains, except health, where it outperforms other Latin American nations in the Index.⁷⁰

The relatively high youth labour under-utilisation rate between 30-41% is worrisome in Colombia.⁷¹ It reflects the inability of the economy to generate employment for those persons who want to work but are not doing so, even though they are available for jobs and actively seeking work. It is further supported by the fact that the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training (the NEET rate) reached 27% in 2021, which was significantly higher than neighbouring countries (Figure 11). Colombia's NEET rate was relatively stable during the 2010s, but rapidly rose at the beginning of 2020 with an upsurge of three percentage points since 2019 as an impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This suggests that many young Colombians are not improving their future employability through investment in skills or gaining experience through employment. They are especially vulnerable to both

the labour market and social exclusion.⁷² This situation has further challenged the specific SDG Indicator 8.6.1 target to substantially reduce the NEET rate proportion (see also Appendix Table 15).

Figure 11: Proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment, or training (NEET), 2021



Source: International Labour Organization, Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM).

Labour regulations make hurdles for youth to enter the formal labour market; for instance, skewed non-wage labour costs in the payroll taxes, weaknesses in the matching process with hiring and search costs, and inadequate training for workers to improve their mobility across different economic sectors. The fast-growing school-to-work transition population and mounting immigration flow are other aspects accelerating the pressure to create new jobs. Furthermore, the lack of opportunities has motivated many young Colombians to leave the country.

Young Colombians faced multiple shocks from the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to the so-called "lockdown generation". Studies showed that young people were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, including disruption to education and training, employment and income losses, and greater difficulties in finding a job.⁷³

EDUCATION

Colombia's education system has experienced significant progress during the last two decades, with much higher school enrolment at all levels and a stable youth literacy rate of 99%. The

government has vowed to make the country the best regional education hub in 2025.

The country's expenditure on education reached 16% of total government expenditure on average in the 2010s, slightly below the Latin American and the Caribbean average.⁷⁴ It stood within the international Education 2030 Framework for Action's benchmark for government financing of education, allocating at least 4% to 6% of GDP.

Table 12 shows that a large share of employment by education reaches at least an intermediate education level, with a significant gender gap at the advanced level favouring females. Few in employment have less than basic education, even lower than the neighbouring countries. Still, a remarkable shift occurred from 2021 to 2022, exemplified by a hike of ten percentage points for this group, reaching 12%. This was due to the Covid-19 pandemic and drops in the basic education level; the other upper education levels stood stable.

Table 12: Employment by education in Colombia, % of employment distribution, age 15+, 2022

	Less than basic	Basic	Intermediate	Advanced
Total	12%	24%	34%	30%
Men	15%	27%	34%	24%
Women	9%	19%	34%	38%

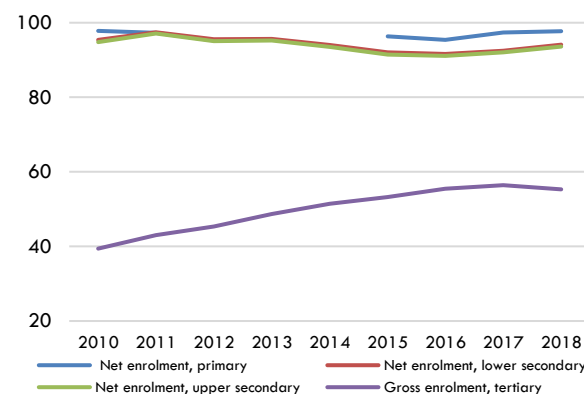
Source: International Labour Organization, Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM).

Since 2012, family payments to public schools have been prohibited in all public schools that serve children between the transition year to the end of upper secondary education to provide free education as well as ensure access and retention of all children in the education system.

Figure 12 visualises the school enrolment rate trends at all levels. It stood stable at the primary education level at close to 100%. Enrolment in lower and higher secondary education fell marginally but stayed in line with the Latin American and the Caribbean average. There are basically no gender gaps at these levels. School enrolment at tertiary education level experienced an upturn during the

2010s. Although it started to slow down at the end of the decade, it still hovered slightly above the regional average and with a significant gender gap of nine percentage points benefitting females. Updated data on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on school enrolment were scarce.

Figure 12: Enrolment in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education in Colombia, %, 2010-2018



Note: Net enrolment is the ratio of children of official school age, who are enrolled in school to the population of the corresponding official school age. Gross enrolment is the ratio of total enrolment, regardless of age, to the population of the corresponding official school age.

Source: The World Bank, Education Statistics.

The latest 2018 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a standardised test for secondary students, reflects relatively low learning outcomes for Colombia compared to other nations. The country ranked second to last among 37 OECD countries, behind Mexico and Chile. This low-ranking is due to inadequate facilities, the location of schools, lack of internet access and low salaries for teachers, which affects general respect for educators.

The government ordered the immediate suspension of classes in schools and universities to curb the spread of Covid-19 in March 2020. More than nine million elementary and secondary school children were forced to learn from home via educational radio and television broadcasts or online for those with access to the internet. The government extended the lockdown until the end of the year.

The high influx of Venezuelans in recent years has put pressure on Colombia's education system. In 2020, around 200,000 Venezuelans under 18 were enrolled in Colombian schools. Furthermore,

260,000 children of Venezuelan migrants were out of school before the Covid-19 pandemic, which worsened their circumstances. Other data suggest that participation in tertiary education among Venezuelan migrants is minuscule and hindered by strict requirements and a lack of funds to pursue education. While many Venezuelan immigrants are educated professionals, they may not have access to adequate academic documents to support their applications to universities.

Apart from the formal system of exams and degrees established in the General Education Law, informal education for work and human development is available to complement and train in academic or labour aspects based on flexible curricula. This educational offer includes courses that last less than 160 hours. It can lead to the issuance of a certificate of attendance, and it must meet the special requirements established by the respective municipality where the course is to be developed.⁷⁵ In recent years, many Colombian students participated in massive demonstrations to increase spending on public higher education and to demand better healthcare and pension benefits, less inequality and corruption, and implementation of the peace agreement with FARC.⁷⁶

Vocational training

A broad legal framework covers Colombia's technical vocational education and training (TVET). It is protected by the constitutional right that the State (and employers) offer training and professional and technical skills to whoever needs them. The National System of Education for Work (*Sistema Nacional de Formación para el Trabajo*, SNFT) sets the structure of vocational training. Formal provision of training for work includes secondary education establishments, institutions of higher education, and training centres run by the public National Training Service (*Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje*, SENA), which is part of the Ministry of Labour. The TVET system aims to improve the education and training of the workforce by standardising, shaping, and certifying national work competencies, as well as establishing a solid

connection between the labour market and the education and training system.

During the last decade, the country has made significant progress in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). It aims to link the educational system closer with the labour market. It is part of the National Qualifications System (NQS) connected with the National Development Plan (PND). The TVET system still lacks systematisation in terms of meetings and agendas and there too much inconsistency in the performance of the various committees.⁷⁷

Social partners like trade unions and employers' organisations are engaged in TVET initiatives, but they somewhat underestimate the sector and the complexity of the policy and institutional framework is complex and requires multiple partners to be involved.⁷⁸

The TVET system links to dual vocational training, a form of training in collaboration with training centres and companies that are jointly responsible for the training of the students. The model uses most hours of training in companies in practice, allowing a closer insight into the labour market reality. It has been considered successful, particularly in terms of the level of interest from the private sector, for example some of Colombia's largest businesses take part in their respective sectoral committees, and smaller companies are also represented in local-level committees. During the 2010s, SENA's business relationship base increased significantly. Nevertheless, SENA argues that the biggest challenge for the Colombian vocational education system is the integration of companies into the training process dominated by micro-enterprises that are known for widespread informality.⁷⁹

SENA is Colombia's largest vocational training institution and South America's second-largest in terms of the number of training places and qualifications. The institution has 117 training centres, over 3,000 training venues and 180 mobile classrooms.

SENA's revenues derive from payroll taxes. Allocations from corporation tax revenues were also applied until they were removed via tax reforms. The payroll tax revenues have been low-medium among other regional countries. Furthermore, the corporation tax rule allows firms to deduct qualified education and TVET expenses from their taxable income. This encourages Colombian firms (excluding micro-enterprises) to offer formal training programmes, resulting in the fourth highest rates in the region, reaching 63% of permanent, full-time employees in 2017.⁸⁰ Formal firms continue to be a small group compared to the widespread informal micro and small enterprises.

TVET has received some attention as an option for Colombian students, echoed by the relatively high proportion of 15-24-year-olds enrolled in vocational education, at 8.7% in 2018 compared with the regional average of 6.8%. On the other hand, the number of secondary vocational pupils enrolled in technical and vocational education programmes in SENA has stagnated during the last decade. This TVET group has a minor gender gap favouring females. The ratio of pupils in vocational education to all pupils in secondary education was significantly lower compared to the regional average (Table 13).

Table 13: Status of Vocational Training, 2018

Colombia		Values
Pupils in vocational training		362,733
Ratio of females in secondary vocational to all secondary vocational		53 %
Comparative estimations	Country/region	%
Ratio of pupils in vocational to all pupils in secondary education, 2010-2018, average	Colombia	7.6 %
	LAC	13 %

Note: Secondary vocational pupils represent the number of secondary students enrolled in technical and vocational education programmes, including teacher training.

Source: The World Bank, Education Statistics.

The TVET sector's education models have relied on face-to-face learning using equipment and other experiential learning strategies. These learning techniques did not lend themselves easily to online

interventions and, as such, were affected by school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic also caused industries' apprenticeships to abruptly close. Generally, TVET in Colombia has struggled as a type of education with lower quality and prestige than others. It is often considered that TVET is chosen by those who were not admitted to university education.⁸¹

Digital transformation is changing the labour-market landscape, raising concerns about how jobs might disappear and where new ones will come from. This and retooling are putting pressure on the TVET system. For example, technological advances and new business models have given rise to the "platform economy", leading to new forms of work such as "gig work" and other forms of on-demand labour.

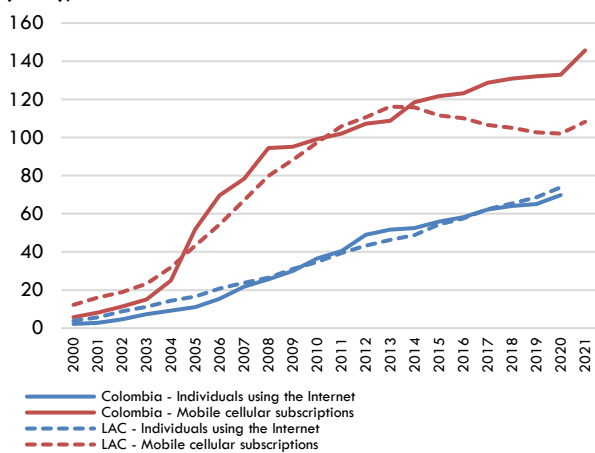
Colombia's government is moving towards more e-government via policies and a more open and innovative government that improves service delivery.⁸² It developed significantly in the period from 2018 to 2022:⁸³ Among American countries, Colombia scores relatively high with the highest E-Government Development Index (EGDI) values. It is well positioned for accelerated e-government development; for instance, related to labour e-formalization policies, contributions to social security can be made online, and enrolment is in progress. For firms' formalisation, a wide range of institutions are coordinating. A committee is monitoring the development of firm formalisation based in part on an e-formalization platform known as VUE. Additional e-formalisation policies include the use of technology by the tax administration.⁸⁴

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been considered as the best prospective industry sector for Colombia, even ranking as one of the industry leaders in Latin America.⁸⁵ In 2019, Colombia passed the ICT Sector Modernisation Law that pursues the reduction of the digital gap in Colombia. The Ministry of ICT is leading the public initiative to boost investment in the ICT sector and for the state's digital transformation by focusing efforts, generating incentives, employing a high-

performance team, and setting an example in the use of ICT in its fully digital services and processes.

Figure 13 below shows that individuals using the internet have increased steadily over the last two decades, which is in line with the regional average. The country's demand for mobile cellular subscriptions has also soared and has far superseded the regional average since the middle of the 2010s.

Figure 13: Individuals using the Internet (% of population) and mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people) in Colombia and Latin America & Caribbean (LAC), 2000-2021



Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Colombia's social protection system has evolved during the last three decades, including the universal health system and increasingly attractive cash transfer programmes. Fiscal decentralisation in the health care system was also implemented, aiming to unify the payment systems for health and pensions. Studies found that significant government support to protect households, firms, and jobs helped Colombia navigate the Covid-19 pandemic well and put its economy on track to a strong recovery.⁸⁶

Public social spending of 13% of GDP is among the lowest rates among the OECD countries.⁸⁷ Financing the social protection system functions is through a mix of employer-employee contributions and general taxes. Social contributions represented

13% of revenue in 2020, one percentage point higher than the regional average. While social contributions are earmarked as part of labour compensation, the disconnection between payments and benefits of the health care system and private family compensation funds reduces incentives to pay into those systems. Since labour informality and social protection coverage are connected, high social contributions are one of the barriers to formal job creation. Instead, the financing burden of social protection should be gradually shifted from workers' contributions towards general taxation, lowering non-wage labour costs.

Nearly two out of three Colombian workers are informal, with weak access to contributory social insurance, such as unemployment insurance, old-age pensions or paid sick and maternity leave. The government has attempted to fill this gap with non-contributory benefits, but coverage and benefit levels could be higher. This situation is related to the coverage of social insurance programmes that are concentrated in richest quintile. In contrast, the range of social safety net programmes reaches the poorest quintile. The trade union movement has raised concerns regarding the commercialisation of social security, driven by the market.⁸⁸

Some improvements in the social protection system are reflected in the fact that coverage of Colombia's population protected by at least one social protection benefit increased from 41% in 2017, peaking so far at 53% in 2020, but falling by 2.8 percentage points from 2020 to 2021 as an impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It stands around ten percentage points lower than the regional average (see more in Appendix Table 22).

The General Pension System is complex and challenged by the high informal employment, skewed pension contributions linked to subsidies paid through payroll taxes, and the significantly growing 60+ population segment that brings a mounting burden on public fiscal sustainability. Colombian firms pay around 70% of social security costs, supporting incentives to avoid such labour-related costs by out-sourcing and off-shoring. This has left many self-employed workers out of the dual

private-public system. It has created areas for improvement in enforcing mandatory participation for these workers.⁸⁹ This system is also a heavy and persistent burden on the public finances due to the difficulties of enforcing employers to pay the contributions for their workers. It has also brought social inequality: about 90% of the highest income quintile contributes to the pension system, while it is down to 5% of the lowest quintile. Overall, data show that persons above retirement age receiving a pension have stood steady at slightly above 50% during the last decade, except for a significant drop from 2020 to 2021 to 46% and significantly lower than the regional average at 79%.

Cash transfer programmes demonstrated notable upsurges during the 2010s; impoverished persons covered by social protection systems and vulnerable persons covered by social assistance almost doubled from the mid-2010s to the beginning of the 2020s, reaching 54% and 29%, respectively (see also Appendix Table 22).

Colombia's health insurance system has improved; for instance, Universal Health Coverage (UHC) service coverage index rose from 51 in 2000 to 78 in 2019, and approximately 97% of Colombians will have medical coverage in 2022. By the same token, the country ranks third for the region's highest public spending on healthcare: about 18% of government spending is directed towards

healthcare and Colombia has the lowest out-of-pocket expenditure on healthcare compared to the neighbouring countries (see Table 14). Furthermore, it demonstrated positive improvements in central health indicators like drops in mortality rate under-5 years and maternal mortality ratio.

Table 14: Status of central health indicators in Colombia and Latin America & Caribbean (LAC), average 2010-2019

Service	Colombia	LAC
Total health expenditure, % of GDP	7.3%	7.6%
Current health expenditure per capita	US\$ 962	US\$ 1,134
Universal Health Service coverage index * (2019)	78	-
Social health insurance coverage (2014)	96%	-

* Coverage index for essential health services (based on tracer interventions that include reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, infectious diseases, noncommunicable diseases and service capacity and access). It is presented on a scale of 0 to 100.

Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators.

Employees are entitled to 18 weeks of paid maternity leave at 100% of the regular salary rate of pay. The employer pays this, fully reimbursed by social security. Law 2114 of 2021 further extended paternity leave from one to two weeks. Also, by mutual agreement, parents can transfer the last six weeks of maternity leave to the father or work half-time during the leave for twice the amount of time. Data are scarce for maternity/paternity coverage.

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL DATA

Table 15: Status of key Sustainable Development Goals in labour market related issues in Colombia

Indicators	Value	Year	SDG Targets
1.1.1: Working poverty rate (percentage of employed living below US\$1.9 PPP)	1.9%	2022	By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.9 a day
1.3.1: The population effectively covered by a social protection system, including social protection floors.	50% *	2021	Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable
5.5.2: Proportion of women in senior and middle management positions	30%	2021	Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
5.5.2: Women share of employment in managerial positions	35%	2021	
8.2.1: Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person	4.4%	2022	Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation through a focus on high value-added and labour-intensive sectors.
8.3.1: Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment	59%	2021	Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, through access to financial services
8.3.1: Women	59%	2021	
8.3.1: Men	58%	2021	
8.5.1: Average hourly earnings of women and men employees (local currency)	6,516 **	2021	By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value
8.5.2: Unemployment rate (Total, 15+)	14%	2021	
8.5.2: Unemployment rate (Youth)	25%	2021	
8.6.1: Proportion of youth (15-24 years) not in education, employment or training)	27%	2021	By 2030, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training
8.7.1: Proportion of children engaged in economic activity (%)	2.0%	2019	Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025, end child labour in all its forms
8.7.1: Girls	1.3%	2019	
8.7.1: Boys	2.7%	2019	
8.8.1: Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries	-	-	Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment
8.8.2: Level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining)	4.84	2020	
9.2.2: Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment	11%	2021	Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and, by 2030, significantly raise industry's share of employment and gross domestic product, in line with national circumstances, and double its share in least developed countries
10.4.1: Labour income share as a percent of GDP	53%	2019	Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality

* Population covered by at least one social protection benefit (see more in Appendix Table 22). ** Colombian Peso.

Source: International Labour Organization, Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM).

Table 16: List of approved labour related legislation in Colombia, 2017-2022

Type of legislation	Law/decree
2017	
General Provisions	Ley núm. 1864, de 17 de agosto de 2017, que modifica la Ley núm. 599 de 2000 y dicta otras disposiciones para proteger los mecanismos de participación democrática
	Ley núm. 1857, de 26 de julio de 2017, por medio del cual se modifica la Ley núm. 1361 de 2009 para adicionar y complementar las medidas de Protección de la Familia y se dictan otras disposiciones
	Ley núm. 1850, de 19 de julio de 2017, por medio de la cual se establecen medidas de protección al adulto mayor en Colombia, se modifican las leyes núm. 1251 de 2008, núm. 1315 de 2009, núm. 599 de 2000 y núm. 1276 de 2009, se penaliza el maltrato intrafamiliar por abandono y se dictan otras disposiciones
	Ley núm. 1846, de 18 de julio de 2017, por medio de la cual se modifican los artículos 160 y 161 del Código Sustantivo del Trabajo y se dictan otras disposiciones
	Decreto Ley núm. 895, de 29 de mayo de 2017, que crea el Sistema Integral de Seguridad para el Ejercicio de la Política
	Decreto Ley núm. 896, de 29 de mayo de 2017, que crea el Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de cultivos de uso ilícito (PNIS)
	Decreto-Ley núm. 897 de 2017, de 29 de mayo, por el cual se modifica la estructura de la Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración de Personas y Grupos Alzados en Armas y se dictan otras disposiciones
	Decreto-Ley núm. 899 de 2017, de 29 de mayo, por el cual se establecen medidas e instrumentos para la reincorporación económica y social, colectiva e individual, de los integrantes de las FARC-EP, conforme al Acuerdo Final suscrito entre el Gobierno Nacional y las FARC-EP el 24 de noviembre de 2016
	Decreto-Ley núm. 902 de 2017, de 29 de mayo, por el cual se adoptan medidas para facilitar la implementación de la Reforma Rural Integral contemplada en el Acuerdo Final en materia de tierras, específicamente el procedimiento para el acceso y formalización y el Fondo de Tierras
	Decreto Ley núm. 898, de 29 de mayo de 2017, que crea la Unidad Especial de Investigación para el desmantelamiento de las organizaciones y conductas criminales responsables de homicidios y masacres, que atentan contra defensores/as de derechos humanos, movimientos sociales o movimientos políticos o que amenacen o atenten contra las personas que participen en la implementación de los acuerdos y la construcción de la paz, incluyendo las organizaciones criminales que hayan sido denominadas como sucesoras del paramilitarismo y sus redes de apoyo
	Decreto Ley núm. 900, de 29 de mayo de 2017, por el cual se adiciona el artículo 8 de la Ley núm. 418 de 1997, a su vez modificado por el artículo 1 de la Ley núm. 1779 de 2016, y se dictan otras disposiciones.
	Decreto Ley núm. 901, de 29 de mayo de 2017, por el cual se proroga la duración de las Zonas Veredales Transitorias de Normalización (ZVTN) y los Puntos Transitorios de Normalización (PTN), establecidos por los Decretos núm. 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026 de 2016 y núm. 150 de 2017
	Decreto Ley núm. 903, de 29 de mayo de 2017, por el cual se dictan disposiciones sobre la realización de un inventario de los bienes y activos a disposición de las FARC-EP
	Decreto Ley núm. 890 de 2017, de 28 de mayo, por el cual se dictan disposiciones para la formulación del Plan Nacional de Construcción y Mejoramiento de Vivienda Social Rural
	Decreto Ley núm. 890 de 2017, de 28 de mayo, por el cual se adiciona un párrafo al artículo 190 de la Ley núm. 1448 de 2011 en lo relacionado con el proceso de restitución de los derechos de los niños, niñas y adolescentes a cargo del ICBF, desvinculados de las FARC-EP en virtud del Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera
Decreto Ley núm. 893, de 28 de mayo de 2017, por el cual se crean los Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial (PDET)	

	Decreto Ley núm. 889 de 2017, de 27 de mayo, que adiciona un artículo transitorio al Decreto núm. 2067 de 1991
	Decreto Ley núm. 883 de 2017, de 26 de mayo, por el cual se modifica la Ley núm. 1819 de 2016 para incluir a las empresas dedicadas a la minería y a la explotación de hidrocarburos en la forma de pago de obras por impuestos
	Decreto Ley núm. 884 de 2017, de 26 de mayo, por el cual se expiden normas tendientes a la implementación del Plan Nacional de Electrificación Rural en el marco del Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera
	Decreto Ley núm. 885 de 2017, de 26 de mayo, por medio del cual se modifica la Ley núm. 434 de 1998 y se crea el Consejo Nacional de Paz, Reconciliación y Convivencia
Equality of opportunity and treatment	Ley núm. 1833, de 4 de mayo de 2017, que modifica y adiciona la ley 5ª de 1992, crea la Comisión Legal para la Protección de los Derechos de las Comunidades Negras o Población Afrocolombiana del Congreso de la República de Colombia y dicta otras disposiciones
Education, vocational guidance and training	Decreto Ley núm. 892, de 28 de mayo de 2017, por el cual se crea un régimen transitorio para la acreditación en alta calidad de los programas académicos de licenciaturas a nivel de pregrado que son ofrecidos en departamentos donde se localizan municipios priorizados para la implementación de los Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial (PDET)
	Decreto Ley núm. 882 de 2017, de 26 de mayo, por el cual se adoptan normas sobre la organización y prestación del servicio educativo estatal y el ejercicio de la profesión docente en zonas afectadas por el conflicto armado
Social security (general standards)	Ley núm. 1850, de 19 de julio de 2017, por medio de la cual se establecen medidas de protección al adulto mayor en Colombia, se modifican las leyes núm. 1251 de 2008, núm. 1315 de 2009, núm. 599 de 2000 y núm. 1276 de 2009, se penaliza el maltrato intrafamiliar por abandono y se dictan otras disposiciones
	Decreto núm. 546 de 2017, de 30 de marzo, por el cual se modifica el Decreto núm. 1429 de 2016, que modificó la estructura de la Administradora de los Recursos del Sistema General de Seguridad Social en Salud - ADRES.
Maternity protection	Ley núm. 1822, de 4 de enero de 2017, por medio de la cual se incentiva la adecuada atención y cuidado de la primera infancia, se modifican los artículos 236 y 239 del Código Sustantivo del Trabajo y se dictan otras disposiciones"
	Ley núm. 1823, de 4 de enero de 2017, por medio de la cual se adopta la estrategia Salas Amigas de la Familia Lactante del Entorno Laboral en entidades públicas y empresas privadas
Specific categories of workers	Decreto Ley núm. 894, de 28 de mayo de 2017, por el cual se dictan normas en material de empleo público con el fin de facilitar y asegurar la implementación y desarrollo normativo del Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera
International agreements	Ley núm. 1839, de 12 de julio de 2017, que aprueba el "Acuerdo entre la República de Colombia y la Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte sobre Cooperación y Seguridad de Información"
	Ley núm. 1840, de 12 de julio de 2017, que aprueba el "Acuerdo entre el Gobierno de la República de Colombia y el Gobierno de la República Francesa sobre el Fomento y Protección Recíprocos de Inversiones"
	Ley núm. 1841, de 12 de julio de 2017, por medio de la cual se aprueba el "Tratado de Libre Comercio entre la República de Colombia y el Estado de Israel" hecho en Jerusalén, Israel, el 30 de septiembre de 2013, y el "Canje de Notas entre la República de Colombia y el Estado de Israel, por medio de la cual se corrigen errores técnicos del Tratado de Libre Comercio entre la República de Colombia y el Estado de Israel, efectuado el 13 de noviembre de 2015 "
	Ley núm. 1844, de 12 de julio de 2017, por medio de la cual se aprueba el "Acuerdo de París", adoptado el 12 de diciembre de 2015, en París, Francia
2018	
-	-
2019	
-	-

2020	
General Provisions	Decreto núm. 488, de 27 de marzo de 2020, por el cual se dictan medidas de orden laboral, dentro del Estado de Emergencia Económica, Social y Ecológica
Equality of opportunity and treatment	Resolución del Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social núm. 1314, de 3 de agosto de 2020, que adopta los lineamientos para la realización de pruebas rápidas fuera del laboratorio clínico para el diagnóstico temprano de la infección por VIH, sífilis, hepatitis B y hepatitis C.
Conditions of employment	Decreto Legislativo núm. 771, 3 de junio de 2020, que adiciona un párrafo transitorio a la Ley núm. 15 de 1959, que crea el auxilio de transporte
Social security (general standards)	Decreto núm. 676 de 2020, de 19 de mayo, que modifica el Decreto núm. 1477 de 2014, para incorporar el COVID-19 Virus identificado - COVID-19 Virus no identificado a la tabla de enfermedades laborales
2021	
General Provisions	Law 2101 of 2021.
	Law 2088 of 2021.
	Decree 688 of 2021.
	Decree 952 fo 2021.
2022	
-	-

Source: ILO, NATLEX, Country Profile Colombia, Basic Laws; DTDA, Data-collection tool: Colombia, 2021.

Table 17: Ratified ILO Conventions in Colombia

Subject and/or right	Convention	Ratification date
Fundamental Conventions		
Freedom of association and collective bargaining	C087 - Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, 1948	1976
	C098 - Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949	1976
Elimination of all forms of forced labour	C029 - Forced Labour Convention, 1930	1969
	C105 - Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957	1963
Effective abolition of child labour	C138 - Minimum Age Convention, 1973	2001
	C182 - Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999	2005
Elimination of discrimination in employment	C100 - Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951	1963
	C111 - Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958	1969
Occupational safety and health	C155 - Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981	Not ratified
	C187 - Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006	Not ratified
Governance Conventions		
Labour inspection	C081 - Labour Inspection Convention, 1947	1967
	C129 - Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969	1976
Employment policy	C122 - Employment Policy Convention, 1964	Not ratified
Tripartism	C144 - Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976	1999
Technical Conventions (Up-to-date)		
Working time	C014 - Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention, 1921	1933
	C106 - Weekly Rest (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1957	1969
Free of association, collective bargaining, and industrial relations	C151 - Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention, 1978	2000
	C154 - Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981	2000
Wages	C095 - Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Convention, 1949	1963
Labour Administration and inspection	C160 - Labour Statistics Convention, 1985	1990
Employment policy and promotion	C159 - Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983	1989
Occupational safety and health	C161 - Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985	1990
	C162 - Asbestos Convention, 1986	2001
	C167 - Safety and Health in Construction Convention, 1988	1994
	C170 - Chemicals Convention, 1990	1994
	C174 - Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents Convention, 1993	1997
Indigenous and tribal peoples	C169 - Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989	1991
Specific categories of workers	C189 - Domestic Workers Convention, 2011	2014

Note: Fundamental Conventions are the ten most important ILO conventions that cover five fundamental principles and rights at work. Equivalent to basic human rights at work. Governance Conventions represent four instruments that are designated as important to building national institutions and capacities that serve to promote employment. In addition, there are 73 conventions, which ILO considers "up-to-date" and actively promoted.

Source: ILO, NORMLEX, Ratification for Colombia.

Table 18: Number of Trade Unions and Membership per Sector in Colombia, 2016

Subsector	Number of Unions	%	Union Members	%
Agriculture, Hunting & Forestry	540	9.9%	92,750	9.0%
Mining & Quarrying	75	1.4%	18,901	1.8%
Manufacturing	620	11%	120,583	12%
Electricity, Gas & Water	88	1.6%	30,355	3.0%
Construction	124	2.3%	7,921	1.0%
Trade, Restaurants & Hotels	865	16%	96,796	9.4%
Transport, Storage & Communication	536	10%	85,940	8.4%
Finance, Real Estate & Business Services	220	4.0%	40,582	4.0%
Community, Social and Personal Services	2,180	40%	524,788	51%
Activities not Defined	201	3.7%	7,138	1.0%
Total	5,449	100%	1,025,754	100%

Source: Escuela Nacional Sindical - SISLAB – August 2017 Report.

Table 19: Number of cases of violations against unionists in Colombia, 2012-2019

Type of Violation	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total	Share
Threats	449	337	244	121	201	137	175	51	1,715	67%
Harassment	50	63	78	30	30	26	8	7	292	11%
Murders	25	37	21	21	20	22	34	9	189	7.4%
Attacks with & without injuries	9	18	24	17	18	17	10	1	114	4.5%
Forced displacement	90	3	1	-	1	1	2	-	98	3.9%
Arbitrary detentions	19	24	17	8	5	9	-	-	82	3.2%
Illegal searches/ raids	3	2	2	2	8	1	1	-	19	0.7%
Forced disappearances	2	-	1	4	2	1	3	-	13	0.5%
Torture	5	1	-	2	-	1	1	1	11	0.4%
Abduction	-	4	-	3	-	-	-	1	8	0.3%
Total	652	489	388	208	285	215	234	70	2,541	100%

Source: Sistema de Información en Derechos Humanos, SINDERH, ENS and ITUC, Colombia: Peace at Risk.

Table 20: Ease of doing business in Colombia, 2019-2020

Topics	2019	2020	Changes
Overall	65	67	+2
Starting a Business	100	95	-5
Dealing with Construction Permits	89	89	0
Getting Electricity	80	82	+2
Registering Property	59	62	+3
Getting Credit	3	11	+8
Protecting Minority Investors	15	13	-2
Paying Taxes	146	148	+2
Trading Across Borders	133	133	0
Enforcing Contracts	177	177	0
Resolving Insolvency	40	32	+8

Note: Doing Business 2019-2020 indicators are ranking from 1 (top) to 190 (bottom) among countries.

Source: World Bank, Ease of Doing Business 2020 in Colombia.

Table 21: Colombia's key economic data, projections, 2019-2024

Values	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
GDP (current, US\$)	323bn	270bn	314bn	343bn	362bn	380bn
GDP per capita (PPP, US\$)	15,633	14,421	16,403	18,693	19,573	20,332
Total investment (% of GDP)	21%	19%	20%	20%	21%	21%
Gross national savings (% of GDP)	17%	16%	14%	15%	16%	16%
General government expenditure (% of GDP)	33%	34%	35%	35%	34%	33%
Government gross debt (% of GDP)	52%	66%	65%	61%	60%	59%

Source: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, October 2022.

Table 22: Proportion of population covered by social protection systems in Colombia, %, 2021

Group	Coverage
Persons covered by at least one social protection benefit	50%
Persons above retirement age receiving a pension	46%
Persons with severe disabilities collecting disability social protection benefits	12%
Unemployed receiving unemployment benefits	2.5%
Employed covered in the event of work injury	44%
Children and households receiving child and family cash benefits	34%
Poor persons covered by social protection systems	54%
Vulnerable persons covered by social assistance	29%

Source: International Labour Organization, KILM.

Table 23: Legal framework to formalise the labour market in Colombia

Laws/decrees/reforms
Formalisation and Job Creation Law of 2010 took steps to increase formalisation in employment and reduce the risk of losing access to free health care or conditional cash transfers.
Tax reform in 2012 furthermore reduced the cost of non-wage labour
Act No. 1429 of 29 December 2010 on the regularisation and creation of employment.
Decree No. 0933 of 9 May 2013 issuing provisions to formalise traditional mining activities.
Decree No. 0604 of 2013 regulating access to and the functioning of the Supplementary Social Service for Periodical Cash Benefits.
Act No. 1610 of 2013 regulating certain aspects of labour inspection and labour formalisation agreements. ⁹⁰
Decree No. 1875 of 2017 regulating the one-stop-shop for the registration of companies.

Source: International Labour Organization, Transitioning from the informal to the formal economy, Report V(1), 2013.

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