



Migration Profile of COLOMBIA

A. Executive Summary

Looking at Colombia, one of its greatest challenges is migration due to several issues involved in this phenomenon. Historically, the country has always been receiving migrants, even though in 2017 its net migration rate was negative (-0.6 / 1,000 inhabitants). However, after that, Colombia went from being a country with less than 150,000 immigrants to one that is estimated to have received more than 1.7 million refugees since 2017, especially Venezuelans (7% of them who are abroad currently live in Colombia). It is the country with the most Internal Displaced People (IDPs) in the world, who at the end of 2020 accounted for approximately 7.7 million, followed by Syria (6.7 million) and the Congo (5.2 million). This problem has been caused by natural disasters, but mostly by decades of armed conflicts. In 2020-2021, poverty in Colombia increased even more because of the COVID-19 outbreak, and drug trafficking is still a major problem in the country, despite the active support of the international community.

Notwithstanding the 2016 Peace Agreement signed by the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), many issues still persist, such as the increase in cases of human trafficking or drug trafficking. However, the Colombian government has taken positive steps to promote the acceptance and integration of migrants and refugees in the country.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Colombia is a country located in South America, and as of 2020 it had a population of 50,882,884 inhabitants, with 81.42% of them living in urban areas, while the remaining 18.57% are located in rural areas. The country stands out for its ethnic diversity: 85.94% are mestizo, 10.52% Afro-Colombian, 3.43% indigenous, 0.08% Raizal people (Afro-Caribbean), and 0.01% Roma People (Colombian Census, 2005). As far as religion, 57.2% of Colombians are Catholic, 19.6% are Protestant, while the remaining ones are divided into other religions and non-believers². Another relevant aspect of the country is its social inequality, as the Gini indicator shows 51.3³: the 10% of the richest people in Colombia own 40% of its wealth⁴. According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics, in 2020 multidimensional poverty affected 9.04 million Colombians (18.1% of the population)⁵. The illegal drug trafficking business represents close to 5% of the income of the country⁶, with about 143,000 hectares of coca crops and an annual production of 1,228 tons⁷. Both drug trafficking and guerrilla warfare, which already

caused 218,094 casualties, also determined the internal displacement of thousands of people⁸. There are approximately 6.7 million needy people in the country, 2.3 million of them being children⁹, while as of 2021 Colombian refugees abroad were approximately 400,000¹⁰.

II. International and Internal Migrants

Traditionally, Colombia has never been a country hosting migrants; however, the Venezuelan crisis has changed this trend, after welcoming 2 million Venezuelans of whom at least 90% already worked in the country as of February 2020¹¹.

As IOM points out, immigration into the country has traditionally been regional, especially from Venezuela and Ecuador¹², with 2.1 million Venezuelans in 2021 (a 24% increase from 2020), and 1,742,927 of them registered as refugees. According to the 2005 Colombian census, there were only 109,971 immigrants in Colombia, representing 0.2% of the population. Practically, immigration in Colombia was nonexistent, until the Venezuelan diaspora radically changed the country's migratory dynamics. In fact, until 2017 the net migration rate was -0.6/1,000 inhabitants, indicating that more people were leaving the country than coming in¹³. Since February 2018, forced migration from Venezuela to Colombia has increased 300%, mostly due to violence or political instability in their country¹⁴, and to the fear of Venezuelans facing conflict and unrest. It is very difficult to find an accurate database on immigration because of the lack of censuses and the massive phenomenon of the arrival of Venezuelans, as well as the big number of undocumented people, or holding a dual citizenship and working in casual jobs.

In 2021, the Colombian government allowed all Venezuelan children and youth to enrol in its national education system regardless of their immigration status, and this meant about 260,000 new school enrollments in the country¹⁵. Colombia has recently drafted a decree in order to grant a temporary regularisation to the Venezuelan migrants meeting the established requirements. UNHCR has also been instrumental in the regularisation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, after Colombia announced in February 2021 that it would grant a ten year Temporary Protection Status (TPS) to more than 1.74 million Venezuelans in its territory¹⁶.

According to the UN, the 2021 Venezuelan population in Colombia reached 1.7 million, almost 600,000 more compared to the 2019 figure of approximately 1.1 million Venezuelans, of whom 575,805 were men and 566,514 women, representing 3.4% of the total population (in 2017, there were only 142,319 immigrants, who represented 0.29% of the population)¹⁷.

Regular migration is usually located in the main cities and in places where tourism or the mining industry are active. Irregular migration, instead, is mostly present in the border regions (Santanderes, Urabá, Nariño, Amazonas) and in the main cities (Bogota, Medellín and Cali). The districts facing the biggest challenges are Nariño (27.02%), Antioquia (26.62%), Cundinamarca (14.48%), Cauca (12,21%), and Chocó (12,21%). The Organization for American States (OAS) member countries have enabled corridors to guarantee the return of Venezuelan migrants and refugees to their country: 27,000 returned to their country through the Colombia-Venezuela corridor; three other corridors were opened in April 2020, helping 105,000 returnees from Colombia and 6,000 from Brazil¹⁸.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Colombia has historically been a country of emigration, with approximately 5.81% of its population living abroad. In 2010 (last census available in the OECD countries), Colombians were the second largest South American immigrant group in Europe with 492,057, behind Ecuador with 634,083. However, the 3 main destinations of Colombian emigration have been the United States 36% (the largest wave of migration was between 1965 and 1970), Spain 23.1% (especially in the 90's, and it is the only one that has not stopped growing), and Venezuela 20% (the largest wave of immigration was in the 80's), followed by Ecuador 3.1%, and Canada 2%. As of 2021, the USA has been the main Colombian destination, with 141,087 Colombians living in the country, followed by Spain with 105,818¹⁹ and Venezuela with 96,594.

With 2 million people residing abroad, Colombia is the South American country with the most emigrants, followed by Ecuador (995,000) and Peru (981,000)²⁰. In 2010, qualified migrants were about 375,000 in the OECD countries, with a qualified emigration rate of 10.8 (almost 11% of graduates in higher education and 31.8% with a tertiary degree). Most migrants come (Colombia unites us - Government portal, 2020) from Bogota 18.27%, Antioquia 13.79%, Cauca Valley 10.16%, Cundinamarca 5.56%, and Santander 4.72%.

Remittances in 2021 were 2.5 trillion USD, a significant decrease compared to the 2014 4 trillion figure²¹. Also, in recent years, most remittances have been sent by migrant women, especially because of the high demand for unskilled jobs in Spain. Many Colombians abroad are refugees (396,633)^{22 23}, and are mostly located in Venezuela, Chile and Ecuador. However, the best countries providing refugee status for them are the USA, Canada and Ecuador²⁴.

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)

According to IDMC, for more than 50 years Colombia has been the country with the most significant internal displacement in the world, due to its on-going conflicts and violence. Despite the fact that in 2016 the Government signed a peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), there are still many problems, related to compensation for victims, land restitution, etc. In addition, according to IDMC, natural disasters and “large-scale land acquisitions for development projects” continue to cause internal displacement in the country.

As of 2018, according to the Colombian government there were some 7.7 million internally displaced persons, and just in 2017, more than 90,000 Colombians were forced to leave their lands by illegal armed groups²⁵. Colombia is the country with the most IDPs, followed by Syria (6.2 million) and Congo (4.4 million). The Colombian government provides support to conflict-induced IDPs through different programs, run by the *Unidad para la atención y reparación integral a las víctimas*, which offers relocation, healthcare, finance and educational support to IDPs across the whole country²⁶. The Colombian towns most affected by this violent attacks are Bajo Calima and the rural area of Buenaventura in the department of Valle del Cauca; the Litoral San Juan, Lloró, Alto Baudo and Domingodó in the department of Chocó; Timbiquí in Cauca; and Santa Bárbara de Iscuandé and the community of El Pital (rural area of Tumaco) in Nariño²⁷. The departments with the highest number of IDPs are Antioquia,

Bolívar, Magdalena, Cesar and Caquetá. However, since 2017 this phenomenon has been increasing especially in Antioquia and in the departments close to the border (related to drug cultivation)²⁸. Therefore, between 10% to 18% of the Colombian population are IDPs²⁹. In 2019 new displacements by conflict and violence had a 24% increase, with 106,000 new displacements, while disaster-induced new displacements increased by 83% (64,000 new cases), at the end of 2020³⁰.

Refugees from Colombia are also a persistent issue (400,000 people), and their main destination countries are the USA, Canada, and Europe, even though Ecuador is undoubtedly the country with the most Colombian refugees. According to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility (RREE), there are some 54,750 Colombian refugees, mostly men (52.1%) and between the age of 18 and 59, economically active in the country. Spain, instead, is the country with many asylum requests, 25% of them being from Colombian citizens³¹, only 10% lower than Venezuela. Despite the fact that few asylum applications are approved in the country, the number of Colombians living abroad with refugee status is very high. Of the 395,949 Colombians who have requested it in other countries, 113,605 have obtained it. according to IOM, in 2012 the main countries granting refuge to Colombians were Ecuador (54,243), the USA (22,004), Canada (17,243), Costa Rica (10,297), Venezuela (1,941), Panama (1,598), Chile (924), Spain (664), Brazil (664), the UK (564), Argentina (456), France (455), Italy (387) and others.

Colombia is also a receiving country. It has ratified the Convention on the Status of Refugees. Since March 2018, Colombia has hosted 277 refugees, 625 asylum seekers and 11 stateless persons³², and, along with 1.74 million Venezuelan refugees, in 2020 about 500,000 Colombians returned from Venezuela³³. Colombia received 11,832 asylum applications in 2020, and only 346 were accepted, decreasing the acceptance rate to 2.92%. Colombia also closed its borders due to the Covid-19 pandemic: borders were kept closed until early 2021 except for humanitarian emergencies, transportation of cargo and merchandise, and the departure of foreign citizens, as long as it was coordinated with Migración Colombia and the municipal authorities³⁴.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Colombia is a country of origin, transit and destination for human trafficking. Although, as happens in much of Latin America, there is not a lot of data available on trafficking crimes, it can be argued that around 131,000 people in Colombia live under modern slavery conditions³⁵. Women are the main victims (80% in 2020, and 23% of them were girls)³⁶. Most of the cases are related to sexual exploitation and forced labour, decreasing though from 180 to 144 in 2020³⁷.

The Ministry of the Interior of Colombia³⁸ reports that very few human trafficking cases are prosecuted.

The Peace Agreement, signed between the government and FARC in 2016, brought some people from former guerrillas to other armed groups, such as the National Liberation Army, paramilitary groups, etc. The FARC's dissolution left a vacuum in some regions, especially where coca is produced, creating conflicts and struggles between armed groups, and consequently the intensification of human trafficking. The massive arrival of Venezuelans has also caused an increase in human trafficking, especially in Bogota, where between 2016 and 2018 there were 75% of the cases. This growing practice

of human trafficking on Venezuelan citizens in Colombia represents a unique challenge for the Colombian government (Insight Crime, 2018). Since 2005, Colombia has established in its legislation the crime of trafficking in persons, with prison terms from 13 to up to 23 years; in addition, it has a national committee against trafficking in persons, which is made up of 16 national institutions, articulating the government's responses to help the victims³⁹.

According to the Trafficking in Persons Report: Colombia, 2019, the government of Colombia "fully complies with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking." According to the report, the country makes "serious and sustained" efforts, such as investigating trafficking cases and achieving prosecutions. The 2019, 2020 and 2021 reports also highlight that Colombia is studying the vulnerability of Venezuelan migrants and developing strategies to reduce their being victims of these crimes. In any case, the report also highlights that the country does not provide "adequate services to all the identified victims", so most of them do not receive protection and assistance. It also points out that Colombia did not "sufficiently" finance the civil society actors, also having poor coordination with them.

In addition to the Venezuelan victims that have considerably increased in the last two years, other international victims arrive from South America, Central America, and China. However, the most important trafficking networks are located in Panama, because it is a place for business and is connected to Asia, Europe and the USA⁴⁰. Regarding Colombian traffickers, the departments where they are very active to provide victims for international destinations are Antioquia, Bogota, Bolivar, Risaralda (Dosquebradas and Pereira), Caldas (Manizales, La Virginia, Anserma, Santa Rosa de Cabal), and Valle del Cauca. The destinations are Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore⁴¹. The departments where victims are taken for national trafficking are Antioquia, Bolivar, Cauca and Cordoba; and the departments where victims of trafficking are exploited are Antioquia, Magdalena, Nariño, Santander, Meta, Bolivar, and the Amazonas.

VI. National Legal Framework

Migración Colombia is an organisation created in 2011 with Law 4062/2011, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and handles all migration matters. In addition, there are other laws that support and shape public and judicial policies for the protection of migrants and refugees. Decree Law 834/2014 regulates all immigration matters, with a different treatment between the Andean Community of Nations and Mercosur. Since December 2011, Mercosur citizens can settle in Colombia with the minimum requirements and obtain a two-year resident visa, thanks to the Agreement for the residence of nationals of the States parties.

Law 1565 of 2012, regulated by Decrees 1000/2013 and 2064/2013, specifies and encourages the return of Colombians living abroad, easing the administrative burden and implementing return support initiatives in the country. Decrees 2840/2012 and 1067/2015 regulate the recognition of refugee status.

Law 1248/2011 on Victims and Land Restitution promotes initiatives to support victims of the Colombian armed conflict, which include relocation services, financial support, healthcare and other benefits that hinge from the Colombian government and taxpayer. Regarding the peace agreements, they are regulated under Decree Laws: 885/2017; 884/2017; 883/2017; and 882/2017. In Colombia, the

United Nations Convention against Transnational Crime Organizations - A / RES / 55/25 and the Palermo Protocol are complementing Law 985/2005, Decrees 1069 and 1066/2014 and 2015 - National Strategy against Trafficking. Law 387 of 1997 - Internal Displacement regulates IDPs status and supporting protocols, which adopted measures for the prevention of forced displacement, and for assistance, protection, socioeconomic consolidation and stabilisation of persons internally displaced by violence in the Republic of Colombia.

VII. Main Actors

The State

The ones responsible for the implementation of the aforementioned policies in Colombia are the Attorney General's Office, Migration Colombia with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministries of the Interior, Labor and Health and Social Protection, and the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare.

It should be also noted that since Colombia has historically been a country of emigration, there are currently shortcomings in the implementation of many policies, and large bureaucracies. Since the 2017 arrival of a large number of Venezuelans, the government has tried to streamline many procedures, but the whole system is overflowed by many and diverse requests. That is why the support of the Catholic Church, other NGOs and even multilateral organisations such as IOM and UNHCR, is deemed necessary.

International Organisations

There are many international organisations in the country, most of them based in the city of Bogota. Regarding migrants and refugees, the strong presence of IOM and UNHCR, with offices in several cities of the country, should be underscored. 33 other organisations work along UN agencies in order to provide protection, water sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food security, health and education, among other services. 48% of these programs are carried out by international NGOs, while 27% of other activities are directly implemented by the UN. The main organisations collaborating with the UN are World Vision International, Action Against Hunger (ACH), Halo, APS and the Diocese of Tibú, among many others. The 2020 services reached a total of 1,212,333 beneficiaries, of whom 62,572 received cash transfers, 10,895 received water, sanitising and hygiene kits, and 50,792 people benefitted from UN's educational programs⁴². Regions where most people received aid have been La Guajira, Amazonas, Nariño and Chocó.

NGOs and other Organisations

In order to prioritise activities on behalf of temporary permit holders approved by the Colombian government for Venezuelans, the UN and the *Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela* (R4V) have focused on specific targets and actions under the 2021 Regional Refugee and Migration Response Plan (RMRP), and La Guajira and Bogota received 23% of the funds available, especially for communication and protection activities. Specifically, the border departments (La Guajira, Norte de Santander and Arauca) obtained a quarter of resources for sectoral activities in protection and food security, in addition to communications support and transversal support. The

remaining 29 departments received 62% of the funds, with a wide concentration of activities in the Caribbean region (11% of the funds), as well as in the departments of Antioquia and Valle del Cauca (10%), and those around Bogota. Finally, almost 15% of other activities are carried out by other partners on a national level. These partners are the *Acción contra el hambre*, *Cruz Roja Colombiana*, *Caritas Suiza*, *Caritas Alemania*, Malteser International, *Terre des Hommes*, *Opción Legal*, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Cuso, Mercy Corps, Tearfund, Bethany, Plan International and Medical Teams International⁴³.

Catholic Church

The local Church is also involved in providing support to refugees, migrants and returnees on both sides of the Colombia-Venezuela border, as is the case of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, cooperating with IOM in providing food and support to migrants within the diocese⁴⁴. On the other side of the border, connecting Colombia to Venezuela through the Simón Bolívar bridge, the Diocese of Cúcuta provides more than 1,000 meals daily to Venezuelans arriving in Colombia through the most transited border in the country. Venezuelan migrants and refugees receive support through these parishes and Red CLAMOR (Latin American and Caribbean Migration Network, Shelter and Human Trafficking), an aid network supported by all Latin American countries and CELAM⁴⁵, the Latin American Council of Episcopal Conferences. Red CLAMOR also offers programs run by Caritas, religious orders, and other Church's organisations. Red CLAMOR was preceded by a Holy See initiative called *Puentes Solidarios*, which coordinated the humanitarian efforts of 10 different Episcopal Conferences and the local Venezuelan parishes and communities to support Venezuela⁴⁶. The main actions undertaken by Red CLAMOR are food provision, shelters for migrants, supplies, cash donations to vulnerable migrants for their daily expenses, medical services, legal aid, security and safety for children and teenagers, as well as psycho-social programs to support migrants that have been separated from relatives. This organisation also conducts social research to identify and help prevent human rights violations⁴⁷.

Caritas Colombiana receives help from Caritas Internationalis and other national branches, mainly providing basic needs and essential services to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as offering community empowerment and self-reliance, transparent protection and documentation processes, but also supporting IDPs and the ongoing peace process⁴⁸.

In 2020, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) supported in Colombia 63,178 people, by providing emergency aid, relief & assistance activities, psychosocial support, and organisational capacity and support⁴⁹.

The Scalabrinian Missionaries have 3 centres in the country, in Cucuta, Bogota and Ipiales, and are in the process of setting up two new Integral Centres for Migration Attention (CIAMI), one in the municipality of Villa del Rosario, Norte de Santander, and the other in the centre of the city of Bogota⁵⁰.

November 2021

C. Endnotes

- ¹ Country meters, Población de Colombia, 2020
- ² DiPaz Colombia (2021), Diversidad religiosa, valores y participación política en Colombia, abril 2021
- ³ Data WorldBank, Colombia, 2019.
- ⁴ BBC América Latina. Economía y Desigualdad, 2016
- ⁷ El País, Colombia reduce los cultivos de coca por tercer año consecutivo, 2021
- ⁸ Alvarado, Sinar (2019)
- ⁹ OAS, 2020
- ¹⁰ El Tiempo, 2020
- ¹¹ BBC, 2020
- ¹² DTM IOM, 2021
- ¹³ Migration Policy Institute, 2017
- ¹⁴ R4V, 2021
- ¹⁵ UNESCO, 2021
- ¹⁶ UNHCR support to the Temporary Protection Status in Colombia, 2021
- ¹⁷ Expansión, 2019
- ¹⁸ OAS, 2020
- ¹⁹ Gobierno de Colombia, 2021
- ²⁰ CEPAL, 2018
- ²¹ Data WorldBank, 2021
- ²² UNHCR, 2016
- ²³ CEPAL, 2017
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Colombia Reports 2018
- ²⁶ Gobierno de Colombia, 2021
- ²⁷ Reliefweb, 2017
- ²⁸ Codhes, 2018
- ²⁹ Carlson, Robert, 2018
- ³⁰ Reliefweb, 2017
- ³¹ BBC América Latina. Economía y Desigualdad, 2016
- ³² UNHCR 2021
- ³³ Ibid
- ³⁴ R4V, 2021
- ³⁵ Global Slavery Index, 2021
- ³⁶ U.S. Department of State, 2021
- ³⁷ Id.
- ³⁸ Mint, 2020

- ³⁹ UNODC, 2019
- ⁴⁰ Ibid
- ⁴¹ El Universal, 2013
- ⁴² UNOCHA, 2020
- ⁴³ R4V, 2021
- ⁴⁴ Reliefweb, 2017
- ⁴⁵ Vatican News, 2021
- ⁴⁶ Latinoamerican News, 2021
- ⁴⁷ Red CLAMOR, 2021
- ⁴⁸ Caritas Colombiana 2021
- ⁴⁹ JRS LAS, 2020
- ⁵⁰ Scalabrinianos Colombia, 2021

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