

Policy Brief prior to the dialogue on human rights between Colombia and the EU

November 2025

In preparation for the Human Rights Dialogue between the European Union and Colombia, the Oidhaco network¹ presents this document summarising the issues that we, as a network, have identified as priorities for the dialogue agenda and follow-up with European institutions: [Protection of human rights defenders, women's rights and the LGTBQ+ population, enforced disappearance, recruitment, use and exploitation of children and adolescents, restrictions on freedom of movement: forced displacement/confinement/exile, internationalisation of the conflict, drug policies, impacts of investment – Business and human rights, Human rights defenders prosecuted for opposing economic projects](#).

Full respect for human rights

Protection for human rights defenders and social leaders

The number of murders of human rights defenders and social leaders remains alarming: according to data from Indepaz², 237 defenders have been killed since the last human rights dialogue (July 2024), with 161 murdered between January and October 2025, compared to 151 in the same period in 2024. **One human rights defender is murdered every two days.** In addition to the murders, there are numerous other attacks against human rights defenders. According to the Somos Defensores programme³, between January and June 2025 there were 342 attacks, including 175 threats, 30 forced displacements, 22 attacks, 14 forced disappearances and 11 prosecutions.

Of the 161 murders, 38 were communal leaders, 32 were community leaders, 25 were indigenous leaders, 15 were peasant leaders, 14 were politicians, and 9 were trade union leaders. Most are leaders of collective processes. It is also important to emphasise that the types of threats and impacts when it comes to attacks on women defenders have particular characteristics. **It is necessary to implement collective and differential protection measures.**

The National Guarantees Committee met on 16 January 2025⁴, with limited progress on concrete measures for the protection of human rights defenders and social leaders. In addition, the 24 regional committees have weaknesses in terms of capacity and trust, which limit their response to attacks.

The Comprehensive Public Policy on Guarantees for Human Rights Defenders, promoted by civil society organisations, is showing progress, but its planned completion in 2025 remains pending, delaying the adoption of guidelines with a differential and territorial approach for defenders and community leaders. It must explicitly incorporate the recommendations of the Truth Commission.

Low judicial resolution persists: of 1,322 cases of homicides of human rights defenders processed between 2016 and 2024, only 227 have resulted in convictions (17.1%)⁵. Impunity is a factor in the repetition of such acts.

¹ ODHACO, www.oidhaco.org.

² Indepaz, [Viewer of murders of social leaders and human rights defenders in Colombia](#).

³ Programa Somos defensores, [Half-yearly report January–June 2025](#).

⁴ Colombian platforms of human rights, development and peace organisations, [‘The challenge of change’](#).

⁵ Fiscalía Colombia, I. [Homicides against human rights defenders in Colombia](#) (2016-2024).

It is important to urge the Colombian government to reactivate the National Guarantees Process, redesign the protection model of the National Protection Unit, and the strategies for investigating crimes against this population, comply with Constitutional Court ruling SU-546 of 2023⁶, guaranteeing the direct and meaningful participation of human rights organisations and their platforms, and the strengthening of the Early Warning System.

Women's Rights and the LGBTIQ+ Population

Between January and September 2025, the Colombian Observatory on Femicide⁷ recorded 362 femicides, of which 71 were of women of African descent, black women, Raizal women and Palenque women, and 14 were of trans women. It is imperative to address violence against women, and in particular femicide, from a structural perspective.

In 2024, according to the report by Corporación Caribe Afirmativo entitled 'Con permiso para despreciar'⁸ (With permission to despise), 164 homicides of LGBTIQ+ people were documented in Colombia. The report also points to an increase in sexual violence, online harassment, specific deprivations of liberty, and an almost complete lack of effective response from the justice system. There is a high number of threats against LGBTIQ+ people, with a lack of reliable data, which has been noted by the United Nations through the independent expert on sexual orientation and gender identity in the final statement of the visit to Colombia in 2025⁹.

Colombia must strengthen and promote women's socio-political participation as a fundamental tool for defending, promoting, and guaranteeing human rights and peacebuilding. In this regard, it is important **to promote the implementation of Law 2453 of 2025¹⁰, which establishes measures for the prevention, care, rejection, and punishment of violence against women in political life, and other provisions.**

On the other hand, it should be noted that Colombian prisons are not guaranteeing the rights of women deprived of their liberty nor are they complying with the standards of the Mandela and Bangkok Rules, as reflected in ruling T-216 of 2024¹¹ of the Colombian Constitutional Court. Many are imprisoned for crimes linked to poverty and survival (theft or illegal economies). **For this reason, the State is required to fully implement Law 750 of 2002¹² to use alternative measures to imprisonment in the case of women who are heads of households.**

Enforced disappearance

The Truth Commission documented 121,768 victims of enforced disappearance (1985–2016)¹³. Taking into account that there is underreporting, the actual figure, according to some sources, could be closer to 210,000.

Between 1 December 2016, when the Peace Agreement came into force, and 31 July 2025, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)¹⁴ documented 2,144 cases of disappearance during

⁶ Constitutional Court, [Sentencia SU.546/23](#)

⁷ Femicide Observatory, [Vivas nos queremos](#)

⁸ Caribe Afirmativo, [Con derecho a despreciar](#)

⁹ Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, [Declaración fin de la visita](#).

¹⁰ Unified Justice System, [LEY 2453 DE 2025](#)

¹¹ Constitutional Court, [Sentencia T-216 de 2024](#).

¹² Función Pública, [Ley 750 de 2002](#)

¹³ Truth Commission, [Figures from the Truth Commission](#) presented together with the Final Report.

¹⁴ ICRC, [Press release 29/08/2025](#)

that period. Most of these cases involved civilians, including 201 children and adolescents. This equates to one person disappearing every 36 hours.

In June 2024, the President signed Law 2364 of 2024, “Ley de Mujeres Buscadoras”¹⁵, the first law of its kind in Colombia and a pioneer worldwide, which fully recognises and protects women searchers as peacebuilders and subjects of special protection. It mandates guarantees for the right to search, protection from threats, access to information, psychosocial care, reparation, effective participation and guarantees of non-repetition. More than a year after its enactment, Amnesty International noted the lack of progress in its implementation¹⁶, as the regulations for Law 2364 of 2024 are still pending.

Colombia needs to move from recognition to sustained action. To do so, it must prioritise the issuance of the regulatory decree for Law 2364 of 2024, coordinate institutions, secure resources and set verifiable goals for the search for and protection of victims. Implementation with a gender, ethnic, and territorial focus, including the specific and effective participation of searchers, must translate into concrete pathways, financial resources for organisations and groups focused on searching for people, and timely access to information and protection from risks. Registration systems, criminal investigation, and psychosocial care measures must also be strengthened.

Peacebuilding and compliance with IHL by armed actors

The comprehensive implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement and the recommendations of the Truth Commission must be understood as the foundation for peacebuilding in Colombia. Although the 2016 agreement was viewed by the world as exemplary, its limited implementation jeopardises the progress it enabled. The Kroc Institute quantitatively analysed the status of implementation of the 578 provisions of the Final Agreement. As of November 2024, 34% of these provisions had been fully implemented, 19% showed intermediate progress, 38% showed minimal progress, and 9% had not yet been initiated. These results indicate that 47% of the provisions lack sufficient evidence to determine their feasibility of compliance within the 15-year period (2031) stipulated in the Final Agreement. We would also like to emphasise that with regard to differential approaches, the Kroc Institute identified significant gaps in the implementation of specific commitments, with differences of up to 22 percentage points between the overall levels of compliance with the Final Agreement and the commitments with a gender and ethnic focus¹⁷.

It is necessary to insist on the need to accelerate the comprehensive implementation of the 2016 Final Agreement and ensure the protection of its signatories – since the last human rights dialogue (July 2024), 50 signatories to the agreement have been murdered¹⁸.

Recruitment, use and exploitation of children and adolescents

According to the Ombudsman's Office records¹⁹, 578 children and adolescents were recruited in 2024, 227 of whom were girls and 351 were boys. In 227 cases, the children and adolescents belonged to indigenous communities, representing 39% of the total. According to the COALICO-ONCA²⁰ Observatory on Children and Armed Conflict, of the 125 actions with a direct impact on persons under 18 years of age recorded during this period (a total of 362,243 victims), the recruitment of children

¹⁵ Sistema Unificado de Justicia, [LEY 2364 DE 2024](#).

¹⁶ Amnistía Internacional, “[Colombia: after a year, women searching for victims of forced disappearance hope that the country will fulfil its promises](#)”.

¹⁷ Kroc Institut: “[Navigating the Waters of Peace: Progress, Challenges, and Opportunities in the Eighth Year of Implementation](#)”.

¹⁸ Indepaz, [Viewer of murder of signatories to the peace agreement in Colombia](#).

¹⁹ Defensoría del Pueblo – Ombudsman's Office, [Recruitment of children and adolescents in Colombia during the first half of 2025](#).

²⁰ COALICO Observatory on Children and Armed Conflict - [Monitoring Bulletin No. 33](#).

and adolescents by armed groups ranks first, with 31 recruitment events affecting 139 children and adolescents, 6 events involving use in civil-military campaigns affecting a total of 32 children and adolescents, and 1 event involving use affecting 4 adolescents, i.e. 38 events affecting 175 children and adolescents.

It is important to mention that in these situations there is a high level of underreporting of cases. It is also concerning that not only do actors recruit children and adolescents to join their ranks, but they also recruit them to form part of the structures of armed groups without leaving their family environment, which has an impact on the safety of children and adolescents, their families and the social fabric.

Colombia requires a comprehensive and sustained response that prioritises children and the most vulnerable communities, with verifiable commitments to non-recruitment in all dialogue processes, effective coordination between prevention, protection and justice, and the strengthening of early warning systems to anticipate confinement and displacement. This implies stable resources, effective institutional presence in the territories, collective protection with an ethnic and gender focus, and agile routes for psychosocial care and restitution of rights.

Faced with this situation, affected communities are implementing peace initiatives from within their territories, which remain indispensable in many areas. Communities have no choice but to engage with illegal armed actors to reach minimum humanitarian agreements (corridors, no recruitment, no attacks on civilian infrastructure, etc.), and recent history shows multiple successful experiences. However, the current legal framework creates grey areas: Law 2272 of 2022²¹ (Total Peace) concentrated the power to negotiate and sign agreements in the hands of the Presidency, leaving local leaders exposed to the risk of prosecution when they mediate outside official channels. **Therefore, the government should protect and provide legal certainty to these community initiatives with clear protocols, temporary safe conduct and verification routes, thus avoiding their criminalisation and enhancing their contribution to minimum humanitarian agreements in the territories.**

[Restrictions on freedom of movement: Forced displacement / Confinement / Exile](#)

In 2024, the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Colombia reached its most critical point in the last eight years, warned the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) when presenting the report Humanitarian Challenges 2025²². On the other hand, according to the latest OCHA report for Colombia²³, the impact of the conflict on forced displacement continues to rise. With data accumulated up to September, OCHA reports more than 83,700 people were displaced en masse in 2025 and estimates a 93% increase compared to 2024 for this type of event. Between 1 January and 30 September, individual displacements exceeded 103,100 people and 121,800²⁴ people were trapped in their territories due to the confinement imposed by illegal armed groups.

Monitoring carried out by CODHES' Information System on Forced Displacement and Human Rights (SISDHES) between 7 August 2022 and 9 June 2025 in Colombia shows a total of 421 incidents of multiple and mass displacement, resulting in at least 226,157 victims²⁵. 43.58 per cent of them belong to the country's ethnically distinct peoples, with Black, Mulatto, Afro-descendant and Afro-Colombian

²¹ [Law 2272/22](#).

²² ICRC, [Humanitarian challenges 2025 Colombia](#).

²³ OCHA, [Report on Trends and Humanitarian Impact in 2025, \(January–September 2025\)](#).

²⁴ Defensoría del Pueblo – Ombudsman's Office, [More than 159,000 people affected by forced displacement and confinement in the first eight months of 2025](#).

²⁵ Colombian platforms of human rights, development and peace organisations, '[The challenge of change](#)'.

peoples being the most affected, as well as indigenous peoples, accounting for 25.94 per cent and 17.64 per cent of the national total of victims, respectively.

The existence of armed conflicts in the territories, the assassination of social leaders, and violations of international humanitarian law continue to cause people to flee into exile. Although there are no exact figures and this reality has historically been invisible, it affects hundreds of thousands of Colombians and continues to prevent them from considering a possible return in dignified and safe conditions. The Colombian government must recognise exile as a form of victimisation and a violation of human rights, and European countries must ensure clear routes to asylum and international protection for these victims.

Colombia must move towards a sustained and territorialised response. Early prevention with warning systems that activate immediate protection, operational coordination between the State and humanitarian actors, and security guarantees for access to essential services in affected areas. It is essential to prioritise ethnic and gender approaches and strengthen the civil presence of the State. It is also essential to ensure stable resources for assistance, dignified relocation, and durable solutions in line with the guidance on Solutions to Internal Displacement²⁶, published in February 2025 by the Office of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement, in collaboration with members of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).

Internationalisation of the conflict, drug policies.

The National Drug Policy 2023–2033, entitled ‘Sowing life, eradicating drug trafficking’²⁷, appeared to take a new approach with its three pillars:

- Oxygen, seeking a comprehensive transition to legal economies and reducing the vulnerabilities of territories and populations (rural and urban) that depend on and have been affected by the illegal drug market;
- Asphyxiation, seeking to affect the capacities and revenues of organisations and fight corruption, among other things;
- Weaving axes, changing stigmatising narratives and implementing social justice measures.

A new participatory and inclusive policy was proposed, with gender, differential and territorial approaches, focused on caring for life, environmental protection, public health, risk and damage prevention and reduction, human security and Total Peace, and even open to fair and responsible regulation and inter-institutional coordination.

In practice, however, the results have not materialised. The stigmatisation and criminalisation of the most vulnerable sectors, such as peasants, continues, without addressing the underlying structural causes that lead to coca cultivation. The unequal impacts that exacerbate existing structural discrimination based on class, gender, race and territory continue. Thus, women, racialised people and impoverished sectors are disproportionately criminalised. For example, there has been a steady increase in the imprisonment of women for drug-related offences, as they are used in the lowest links of the drug trafficking chain. Hence, Colombia's 2023 Public Utility Law²⁸, which is restorative in nature and gender-focused, but still has gaps in its implementation.

²⁶ UNSDG, [Guidance on solutions to internal displacement](#).

²⁷ [National Drug Policy 2023–2033](#).

²⁸ Juriscol, [Law 2292 of 2023](#)

The prohibitionist approach that has underpinned drug policy to date fails to take into account the lack of productive alternatives in rural Colombia. Options other than coca cultivation do not generate sufficient income as they face several obstacles, including poor infrastructure, lack of marketing channels and price instability, linked to the low implementation of the first point of the Peace Agreement (Comprehensive Rural Reform).

Although President Gustavo Petro has advocated in international and regional forums for an alternative to prohibitionism and for a more humane approach to drugs, a policy that continues to punish the weakest link persists in the country. In practice, the combination of stigmatisation, lack of viable legal income and punitive measures keeps the complexity of the problem intact in coca-growing areas and distances the promise of a truly rights-based policy. President Gustavo Petro's announcement in September 2025 to resume crop eradication using glyphosate caused deep concern, as it revives a practice with a serious history of harming health, the environment and rural communities, contrary to commitments made on human rights and the transition to more humane and sustainable drug policies.

It is recommended to insist with the Colombian government on the implementation of the agreement on the solution to the illicit drug problem in accordance with the 2016 Peace Agreement, focusing on prioritising voluntary substitution mechanisms for illicit economies and limiting the forced eradication mechanisms carried out by the security forces. In this regard, it is important to note that during the eighth year of implementation of point 4 of the Peace Agreement, the Kroc Institute reported that there have been no changes or increases in the level of implementation and that, in November 2024, 51% of the provisions had not been implemented or had made only minimal progress²⁹. **As drug policies are interrelated at the global level, it is also recommended that the European Union and its member countries develop policies focused on human rights and avoid policies that criminalise and stigmatise small producers and consumers.**

Cooperation, trade and investment policies that respect human rights and the environment

Impact of investments – Business and human rights

Despite the official discourse on sustainability and energy transition, the extractivist model continues to be favoured by Colombian institutions.

Civil society³⁰ denounces the Ministry of Mines and Energy's disconnect from the country's climate commitments and warns of links between armed actors and the mining industry, which put communities and defenders at risk. Although the recognition of indigenous authorities as environmental authorities is welcome, bold action is still needed: banning extraction in strategic ecosystems (moors, forests, wetlands), promoting an agroecological transition that dignifies the peasantry, and guaranteeing decisive and binding community participation in land management.

Colombia faces the strategic decision of consolidating policies that are fully aligned with the rights of communities and the protection of ecosystems, promoting the complex task of ensuring that business interests are oriented towards and do not conflict with these objectives and fit in with environmental and social safeguard policies.

²⁹ Colombian platforms of human rights, development and peace organisations, '[The challenge of change](#)'.

³⁰ Colombian platforms of human rights, development and peace organisations, '[The challenge of change](#)'.

As highlighted in the report on the visit to Colombia by the United Nations Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises³¹: *"The prevailing economic model favours the exploitation of natural resources through large-scale projects with high production volumes, which account for a good proportion of gross domestic product. The Working Group observed, based on information received during the visit, that this model has systematically marginalized Indigenous, Afrodescendent and campesino communities in the territories where resources are concentrated."*

It is recommended that the Colombian government be asked to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Working Group, in particular, 'to advance and implement legislative initiatives that ensure and enforce respect for human rights by companies, in accordance with international standards' and 'adopt a regulatory and institutional framework to guarantee equal and meaningful participation of potentially affected individuals and communities in decisions on business projects from an early stage until their closure, including adequate access to information and transparency in all phases of the projects, in line with the commitments made following the ratification of the Escazú Agreement'. Clearly, the same recommendations apply to the EU when planning projects under the Global Gateway investment strategy.

Human rights defenders prosecuted for opposing economic projects

The criminalisation of leaders in Boyacá³² in the context of conflicts with extractive industries illustrates the use of criminal and administrative tools to quell community protest.

On the other hand, the regulatory framework for mining is questioned for simulating participation through public hearings and for formalising irregular practices, creating an environment where the defence of the territory can end up facing punitive responses instead of guarantees, which reinforces the perception of persecution of those who oppose megaprojects. Although the Public Prosecutor's Office issued Directive 0001 of 2024³³ to differentiate peaceful protest from crime, a criminal approach against protesters persists, with dozens of people still involved in proceedings for the 2021³⁴ mobilisations, showing the continuity of judicialisation practices that also affect social and environmental leaders.

It is recommended that the Colombian government be urged to protect the right to social protest. We also echo the recommendations of the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights and propose insisting that the Colombian government " Review, in the light of international human rights standards, contracts between companies and the armed forces or the National Police and agreements with the support structures of the Attorney General's Office and ensure that there are no conflicts of interest, thus guaranteeing the impartiality of the public authorities, and suspend these agreements when there is suspicion that human rights and environmental defenders have been criminalized or subjected to violence. Ensure the transparency of these agreements in order to facilitate strict control by civil society." ³⁵

³¹ ONU, [Report of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises - Visit to Colombia](#).

³² Verdad Abierta, [Mayor of Socha criminalises community opposing mining](#).

³³ Fiscalía Colombia, [Directive 0001 10 September 2024](#).

³⁴ Baudó Public Agency, [Imprisoned for protesting. The political prisoners of the National Strike that the press does not talk about](#).

³⁵ ONU, [Report of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises - Visit to Colombia](#).