



Update on women, peace and security in Colombia April 8th 2022 ¹

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security discussed the situation in Colombia in July 2020 ([S/2020/899](#)). This update summarizes relevant developments since then.

Developments in the Security Council

The Security Council has adopted **three resolutions** since the last meeting of the IEG on Colombia to extend or expand the mandate of the UN mission. The first two, resolution 2545 in September 2020 and resolution 2574 in May 2021, did not include any references to gender equality or women, peace and security issues. The last one, resolution 2603 in October 2021, mentioned the **gender provisions of the 2016 peace agreement**.² The importance of implementing these gender provisions was also reiterated in **press statements** adopted by the Security Council in November 2021, to celebrate five years since the peace agreement, and in July 2021. Both press statements expressed concern about the continued threats and killings against former combatants and social leaders, including women leaders. In one of them, the Security Council emphasized the need for further progress in implementing the action plan of the Comprehensive Programme for Safeguards for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders and the importance of enhancing education and employment opportunities for women.

In a **February 2021 letter to the Security Council with recommendations for the mandate of the UN mission**, which would then be expanded to include the verification of and compliance with the restorative sentences determined by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the Secretary-General noted that the Mission would continue to integrate a gender dimension in all its verification activities by promoting the meaningful participation of women, including women victims; taking into consideration the differential impact of the armed conflict on women; and fostering conditions that allow for the gender-sensitive implementation of restorative sentences, including through challenging gender bias and promoting women's rights in cases related to gender-based violence. In this undertaking, the Mission will liaise with victims and affected communities, including women that are to be the beneficiaries of reparations. The letter also explains that the Special Jurisdiction for Peace has indicated that it is investigating conflict-related sexual violence across several of its seven "macro" cases, including a case on the recruitment of girls and boys in the armed conflict, and that there are many victims of sexual violence, including from ethnic communities, among the nearly 325,000 victims accredited by January 2021.

Ahead of the most recent meeting on Colombia held by the Security Council, in January 2022, the Ambassadors of Albania, Colombia, Norway, , and the UAE, and held a **joint press stakeout** to speak about their commitment to women, peace and security. Council Members urged the full, equal, and

¹ This background note, including the recommendations at the end of this document, is prepared by UN Women as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, in consultation with other UN entities.

² "Welcoming the progress made towards peace across Colombia since the adoption of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace (the Final Agreement), noting the upcoming fifth anniversary of its signing, and urging the parties, with the support of relevant state institutions and security forces, as well as civil society, to work together to build upon this progress and address ongoing challenges, in particular the continued violence in conflict-affected areas, through comprehensive implementation of the Final Agreement, including rural reform, inclusive political participation, its ethnic and gender provisions, and countering illicit drugs including through crop substitution programmes."

meaningful participation of women leaders in the implementation of the peace agreement, encouraged special attention and priority to its 130 gender provisions as an essential condition for lasting peace, and called for greater progress in ensuring women's economic inclusion in recovery efforts. For his part, the Colombian Ambassador reported that, out of the 51 gender indicators that the government uses in the implementation framework of the peace agreement, 57 percent have either been met or show significant progress.

Since the last meeting of the IEG on Colombia, five Colombian women have briefed the Council in representation of civil society, compared to two between January 2016 and July 2020. In January 2022, **Ms. Luz Marina Giraldo**, a former combatant whose husband was murdered in 2019 and is participating in the reintegration process, called for greater support for the widows and children of killed ex-combatants, including the right to a survivor's pension or basic income even in cases where the family units or de facto marital unions did not reach the threshold of two years of cohabitation. In October 2021, the Council heard from two Colombian women leaders, **Ms. Bibiana Peñaranda** and **Ms. Daniela Soto**, who drew attention to the lack of security for the signatories to the peace accord and social leaders, and warned of the growing presence of armed groups fighting for territorial control, with women and children frequently becoming victims, including of forced recruitment to work as cooks, gatherers of intelligence, sexual slaves and others. Ms. Soto reported that nine indigenous women leaders have been killed in 2021 while defending their territory in Cauca and recounted that she herself was almost killed in May while participating in a protest when an armed civilian shot her in the abdomen in the presence of state security forces.

That same month, during the annual Open Debate of the Security Council on women, peace and security, Colombian activist **Ms. Celia Umenza** represented civil society and reported that, on average, at least one indigenous defender is killed every week, and that three women leaders that she worked with closely in her own territory of Cauca were killed in 2020. She criticized the overuse of military responses to protect the economic interests of powerful sectors rather the rights of local populations and accused the state security forces of committing sexual and gender-based violence and using excessive force against protesters in Cali. Ms. Umenza also noted that the Special Forum on Gender, which can provide independent monitoring of the implementation of the 130 gender provisions in the peace agreement, is underfunded and lacks political support, and their members have been threatened and attacked. She recommended greater attention to rural reform and women's access to land, regular consultations and resources and technical assistance for the Special Forum on Gender; accountability for violence against human rights defenders and funding for collective and territorial self-protection measures and representation of affected communities in the National Commission for Security Guarantees and the Intersectoral Commission for Guarantees for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders; demilitarization of the police; informed consent by indigenous and afro-descendant communities as a requirement to make decisions on economic development in their territories; and women's full, equal and meaningful participation in the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement and negotiations with other armed actors in Colombia. Earlier that year, in July 2021, the Security Council was briefed by **Ms. Melissa Herrera**, a young peacebuilder whose sister, a social leader, had been killed by an armed group after participating in the launch of an art exhibition highlighting the work of women peacebuilders in the region.

Council Members have been raising their voice on the **violence against women leaders**, often mentioning specific victims. For example, in January 2022, the Irish Ambassador to the UN highlighted the murder of an indigenous woman leader (and former combatant) Ms. María Muñoz, whose husband, also a former combatant, had been killed a few months ago, and the killing of other 34 human rights defenders, five of them women. A few months earlier, the Irish representative also raised the recent killings of the attorney Ms. Esperanza Navas and the social leader Ms. Derly Pastrana Yara.

Implementation of the peace agreement

The peace agreement is now more than five years old, and according to some estimates may take 26 years to be implemented rather than the planned 15. The government reports spending more than eight billion dollars on the implementation of the peace agreement in the last three years, including USD 263 million for reparations for victims and reintegration of former combatants. Some of the obstacles remain the need for comprehensive rural reform, the high levels of violence against social leaders, human rights defenders, and former combatants, and the limited resources allocated for a gender-sensitive implementation of the peace agreement. According to the Office of the Comptroller General of Colombia, only four percent of the national budget dedicated to the implementation of the peace agreement was allocated to advancing its gender provisions in the last two years.

Women played a prominent and visible role in the **protests and national strike** that took place in April and May of last year in response to the government's proposed tax reform and underlying social and economic inequality, exacerbated by the pandemic. As part of the many reports of excessive force, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights received 60 allegations of sexual and gender-based violence against women and LGBTI persons allegedly committed by public security forces.

In this context, Colombians are participating in **parliamentary and presidential elections**. The parliamentary elections took place in March and the results are still being scrutinized. However, preliminary results indicate that women will make up 28 percent of the new Congress, a record for Colombia both in terms of women's representation as well as indigenous women's representation specifically. More than 40 percent of candidates that ran for the House of Representatives and the Senate were women, as several parties voluntarily implemented the gender parity stipulations of the 2020 reform to the Electoral Code, still awaiting review by the Constitutional Court. In the 16 special transitional electoral districts for peace, 202 out of 403 candidates were women, but their results were markedly lower, obtaining only three of the 16 seats. Among the 39,000 registered candidates for **municipal youth councils**, 43.5 percent were women. Ahead of the presidential elections in May, Ms. Francia Márquez, an afro-Colombian environmental activist who has survived an assassination attempt, is the vice-president of one of the leading presidential candidates. Despite this progress, and according to the non-governmental organization Electoral Observation Mission, women's participation in the 2022 electoral process has been affected by security risks, gender-based political violence, unequal access to resources, and gender-based discrimination, with additional challenges for candidates in the special transitional electoral districts for peace.

Colombia does not have a national action plan on women, peace and security, but a joint workplan has been established between the Ministry of Defense and the Presidential Counsellor for Women's Equality to promote gender equality and address gender-based violence in the armed forces. Despite not having a national action plan, women's organizations have developed their own frameworks and reports on WPS.

The government adopted **51 gender indicators** within its framework plan for the implementation of the peace agreement. Out of these indicators, the government claims that 13 indicators have been fully met or completed and 17 show a significant level of progress.

However, the Kroc Institute, which publishes monitoring reports as per established in the Peace Agreement, points out that the indicators adopted by the Government fall short of covering the 130 gender provisions in the peace agreement. The Institute has also warned that the **gender provisions in the accord are being implemented at a slower pace** compared to the rest of the peace agreement. Similar findings have been reported by women's organizations conducting similar monitoring, such as the National Women and Peace Forum and Gender and Peace. The Kroc Institute report shows that only 13 percent of the gender provisions have been completed, compared to 30 percent of the 578 provisions in the agreement. The gender provisions are also over-represented among the ones that have not been initiated at all (22 percent compared to 15

percent) or shown minimal progress (51 percent compared to 37 percent). This is partly explained by the fact that more than half of the gender-related provisions can be considered as long-term objectives and social reforms -particularly with regards to rural reform, political participation, and illicit drugs- that require more years to be implemented but that nonetheless must be initiated without delay. Furthermore, a gender-sensitive implementation of the peace agreement goes beyond the gender provisions and should take place across all the implementation of the accord.

Women are well represented in the complex **institutional architecture** that was established to implement the peace agreement, with some exceptions, such as in the National Reintegration Council and the National Commission on Security Guarantees. Women's organizations have repeatedly raised the issue of lack of funding for the implementation of the gender provisions and for the adequate functioning of the **Special Forum on Gender**, which is meant to monitor independently the progress of the accords. In addition, while women were well represented in the design of the development programmes with a territorial focus, they have not been similarly included in the implementation of these initiatives.

With regards to reintegration, 23 percent of accredited **former combatants** are women. According to the government, 70 percent of women included in the reintegration process are involved in individual and collective **productive projects**. There are 155 cooperatives run by former combatants and 31 of them are led by women, and 13 are exclusively comprised of women former combatants. For example, women are close to 30 percent of the personnel of a humanitarian demining organization led by a woman former combatant, with the support of UNMAS, or have started a community market in Medellín, or a textile shop in Meta. However, these initiatives require adequate technical support to ensure sustainability. The adequate inclusion of women in decision-making remains a challenge, compounded by caregiving duties and the effects of the pandemic. The National Reintegration policy has 18 gender actions, and these have shown limited progress due to the limited technical and financial resources devoted to their implementation. However, the Gender Technical Working Group of the National Reintegration Council has been active in promoting the implementation of these actions in the territories with the support of the UN Mission. The UN, under the leadership of UN Women and UNICEF and the support of the Peacebuilding Fund, has invested in the establishment of childcare centers in reintegration areas and has advocated for better models for the care economy.

At least one-third of the 14,725 families participating in the programme for **substitution of illicit crops** are headed by women. Several women have been targeted and attacked for their active participation and leadership in illicit crop substitution initiatives. The UN Country Team supported the government's programme to give land use rights to families as an alternative to illicit crops and in exchange for environmental conservation efforts, and they supported the formalization of almost 1,400 plots intended for peasants, of which 47 percent were granted to rural women.

The other main challenge in the implementation of the peace agreement is the **continued violence and threats against the thousands of people who laid down arms as well as human rights defenders and social leaders**. In 2021 there was an increase in violence in rural areas and in some urban centers, affecting social leaders, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, and women in rural areas. Since the signing of the peace agreement, 10 women former combatants and 306 men have been killed. In several regions, women former combatants at risk have been asked to avail themselves of their partners' protection schemes, rather than getting their own, due to shortfalls in the National Protection Unit

Adequate implementation of the **Comprehensive Programme for the Safeguards of Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders** is still needed, as it remains limited and circumscribed to only a few regions. The killings of 12 women human rights defenders in 2021 have been verified by the UN, but civil society organizations report many more. Out of the 12 cases, 7 were indigenous women, which illustrates the impact of violence on ethnic women leaders. For example, there are reports of more than 60 threats and

10 killings of women by illegal armed groups in the municipality of Tibú (Norte de Santander Department), with victims ranging from Venezuelan migrants and a prosecutor to social leaders and human rights defenders.

In December 2020, the organization Mujeres Andinoamazónicas temporarily withdrew their participation in the **Special Forum on Gender** due to ongoing attacks against its representative and limited security guarantees for her participation. Following threats reported against 10 of its 16 members, Vice President Marta Lucía Ramírez announced measures to increase their protection in January 2021. In January 2022, Luz Marina Arteaga, a leader in Meta department, was killed while waiting to receive protection measures that had been approved months before.

According to the Ombudsman, there were 64 cases of **femicide** and 76 attempts of femicide between January and October 2021, mainly in departments where disputes between illegal armed groups have a severe impact on women and girls. OHCHR received information about 100 possible massacres in 2021, as has verified 78 of them so far, affecting 292 victims, including 32 women, 15 boys, and five girls.

The **UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund** has a 30 percent earmark for gender-related objectives. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund has supported 24 projects implemented by 33 women-led and women's rights civil society organizations in Colombia.

The **UN Verification Mission** continues to report high levels of **gender balance** in staffing: 44 percent of professional and field service staff, 65 percent of UNVs, 50 percent of individual contractors and consultants, and 34 percent of international observers. The Mission has also reported very few allegations of **sexual exploitation and abuse** since its deployment in 2017. The UN Country Team has achieved gender parity, as almost 56 percent of its staff are women and 14 of 24 UN entities in Colombia are led by women.

Transitional justice and conflict-related sexual violence

Women are well represented in the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Truth Commission. The first session of the **Truth Commission** was devoted to sexual violence in conflict, and hundreds of such cases and testimonies have been documented and submitted to either the Truth Commission or the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. For example, the non-governmental organization Colombia Diversa presented a report to the Truth Commission documenting over 30 cases of violence against LGBTI persons during the conflict in Nariño, Putumayo, and Tolima departments. Out of 16,000 testimonies collected by the Truth Commission, at least 52 percent came from women. On June 28th, the Truth Commission is expected to deliver its final report, and it will include gender as a cross-cutting theme and a chapter focused on women and LGBTI persons.

The first indictment by the **Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP)** against eight former members of the former FARC-EP included charges of sexual violence and it has identified 21,000 victims of kidnapping, 20 percent of them women. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace has received many reports on conflict-related sexual violence and continues to investigate these crimes across its seven "macro" cases. In February 2022, the SJP announced its decision to launch three new cases: one on crimes committed by the former FARC-EP nation-wide; another one addressing crimes committed by the public security forces and other State agents, including in partnership with paramilitary groups and civilian third parties; and the third one focusing on crimes against ethnic communities and territories. According to the SJP, all three cases will address conflict-related sexual violence and forced displacement, among others. In November 2021, as part of Case 05, the SJP held its first hearing with victims about sexual and gender-based violence committed by members of the former FARC-EP and the public security forces. Over 60 women and several women's and LGBTI organizations shared their knowledge and expressed their concerns regarding the security of victims providing testimonies and the inclusion of gender issues in the cases opened by the SJP

and. During the hearing, the Office of the Inspector-General and victims' organizations insisted on their request for the SJP to open a specific case on conflict-related sexual violence.

In July 2020, the **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights** ordered the government of Colombia to adopt all necessary measures for the protection of Yirley Verlasco, a leader of victims of sexual violence who continues to receive threats despite being under the protection scheme of the National Protection Unit. Almost two decades after the kidnaping and sexual abuse of Colombian journalist Jineth Bedoya, the **Inter-American Court of Human Rights** issued a landmark ruling in October 2021 finding the State responsible for a number of violations of her rights. Measures ordered by the Court include the investigation, prosecution, and punishment of those responsible, as well as the implementation of a policy for protection of journalists and the establishment of a centre dedicated to the memory of women victims of conflict, particularly female journalists.

In 2021, the National Victims' Unit recorded 293 cases of conflict-related sexual violence. Of these, 238 were committed against women, 21 against girls, 18 against men and 4 against boys. Twelve victims identified as LGBTQI. Eighty-one victims were Afro-Colombians, 17 were individuals from indigenous communities, and 21 cases affected persons living with disabilities. In 2021, the United Nations verified reports that at least three girls were victims of sexual violence during their association with armed groups. A case of sexual slavery was documented against a Colombian woman, who was kidnapped and brought to a camp of an armed group. Another woman was subjected to rape to force disclosure of information about family members linked to an armed group. Conflict-related sexual violence was also perpetrated against ex-combatants and their families, including two women and three girls, reported by the United Nations.

In 2021, mobility restrictions due to insecurity continued to limit survivors' access to support networks, protection and justice. Virtual spaces were offered in the latter half of the year by the Ombudsman and Attorney General's Office, but follow-up on legal complaints yielded limited success according to survivors. As reported by the Early Warning System from the Ombudsman's Office, survivors seeking justice continued to face structural obstacles, including low conviction levels, weak institutional presence in rural areas and threats from armed groups against survivors and local authorities. While sixty-two cases of conflict-related sexual violence were referred to the Attorney-General's Office affecting primarily women and girls, justice system records indicate that in 2021, **the level of convictions for these crimes was just over 17 per cent of total cases.**

Recommendations

The Security Council, in resolutions or statements on Colombia, should consider the following language:

- Demand the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in the implementation of the peace agreement and the negotiations with other armed actors in Colombia.
- Urge the government of Colombia to provide adequate technical and financial support to accelerate the implementation of the gender provisions of the peace agreement.
- Call for the implementation of the Comprehensive Programme of Safeguards for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders and the action plan for the security of women former combatants under the reintegration policy.
- Request the Mission to continue to integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue into its planning, operations, and reporting, commend the Mission's efforts to achieve gender parity and engage systematically with women's organizations, note the importance of supporting the deployment of gender expertise.

In addition, Security Council Members and the IEG co-chairs could:

- Encourage the Government to expedite the implementation of the gender-relevant provisions of the peace agreement, including by providing financial and operational support for the adequate functioning of the Special Forum on Gender.
- Support the Government's intention to develop a national action plan on women and peace and security and encourage it to be developed in a consultative and participatory manner, particularly with the active and meaningful engagement of civil society.
- Advocate for the government to add a gender marker to its financial tracking on peace-related spending, as requested by women's organizations.
- Security Council members and other international partners should step up their support to the Government of Colombia and civil society for the implementation of rural development plans targeting gender issues in the territories most affected by the conflict, as well as stronger implementation of the peace agreement's gender provisions on political participation and illicit crop substitution.
- Inquire on the status of the investigations over the murders of women human rights defenders, social leaders, and former combatants, and advocate for adequate representation by women's organizations representing indigenous and afro-descendant communities in the National Commission for Security Guarantees and the Intersectoral Commission for Guarantees for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders.
- Urge the government to allocate the required resources for the implementation of the gender actions of the national reintegration policy at national and local levels.
- Urge the government to fully implement the decision of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, as well as the security forces' plan to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence.
- Encourage the government to guarantee the establishment by the state authorities of the conditions necessary for the implementation of the restorative sentences expected to be issued by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace at the end of 2022, including its gender-related elements, and to continue to work towards eradicating impunity for conflict-related sexual violence, both through the transitional justice mechanisms and the rest of the justice system in Colombia.
- Support the meaningful participation of women in any follow-up mechanism or initiative to implement the recommendations of the final report of the Truth Commission.