



Update on women, peace and security in Colombia August 21st 2023¹

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security discussed the situation in Colombia in July 2020 ([S/2020/899](#)) and April 2022 ([S/2022/385](#)). This update summarizes relevant developments since then.

Developments in the Security Council

The Security Council has adopted **three resolutions** on Colombia over the last year: renewing and extending the mandate of the UN Verification Mission until 31 October 2023, expanding the mandate to include monitoring of the implementation of the chapter on comprehensive rural reform and the ethnic chapter of the 2016 peace agreement, and then expanding it once again to add ceasefire monitoring with regards to the agreement reached between the government and the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN). Out of these three resolutions, only the first one included a brief reference to gender issues, urging the parties to “address ongoing challenges (...) through comprehensive implementation of the Final Agreement (...) including its gender provisions (...) and recalling the disproportionate impact of the conflict on women.” As the mandate of the mission keeps expanding, from monitoring the peace agreement with the FARC to supporting on transitional justice, and now also with rural reform and the ethnic provisions of the peace agreement and monitoring the ceasefire with the ELN, the limited references to gender issues in the outcome documents of the Security Council may have an impact on the budgetary allocations for the gender advisory capacity of the Verification Mission, which is still only covered by one international and one national staff. There is however much more detail and attention to gender equality in the statements from many Council Members during the meetings on Colombia, and in the letters from the Secretary-General to the Security Council presenting options for the expansion of mandate, both in June 2023 and December 2022.

The Security Council has also adopted **three press statements** in this period. In October 2022, the Security Council welcomed the participation of the highest number of women legislators in Colombian history and the election of Francia Márquez as Vice-President, recalled that violence continues to have a disproportionate impact on women and on indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, and reiterated the need to accelerate the implementation of the ethnic and gender provisions of the peace agreement, as well as further implementation of the Comprehensive Programme for Safeguards for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders. They echoed some of these points in January 2023, as well as taking note of progress towards the establishment of the Ministry of Equality and Equity. More recently, in July 2023, the Security Council expressed concern at continued conflict-related sexual violence and violence against women and social leaders, encouraged the Government of Colombia to transfer land that has been made available for rural reform purposes to its intended beneficiaries, including rural women, as soon as possible, welcomed congressional approval of measures to address violence against women in politics while improving their participation in decision-making processes and the peace process, and the expected publication of the first national action plan on women, peace and security in Colombia.

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.

The Security Council has also heard from **women from Colombian civil society** in recent months. Most recently, the Security Council heard from Diana Salcedo, Director of the International League of Women for Peace and Freedom and spokesperson for the Special Women’s Instance for the follow-up of the implementation of the peace agreement in Colombia. She welcomed the participatory approach taken by the government to formulate the national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 and the new commitments to a feminist foreign policy, but urged the government to improve significantly on the low rate of implementation of the gender provisions of the peace agreement. In particular, she called for stronger results in rural reform and the formalization of land tenure for women, measures to curb violence against women in politics, and better psychosocial assistance for the victims of the conflict, and especially those affected by sexual violence.² In October 2022, Ms. Elizabeth Moreno Barco spoke of “ethnocide” of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities by legal and illegal extractive industries and the conflict, and spoke of specific cases of girls killed or recruited by armed groups, calling for more direct presence of the UN in the territories most affected by war and violence and greater investments in grassroots organizations and human rights defenders. In July 2022, the Security Council heard from an indigenous woman from Cauca, Ms. Jineth Casso Piamba, who highlighted the importance of supporting women heads of household in conflict-affected regions.

The Security Council also invited Colombian women from civil society to speak at other meetings. At the annual meeting on Children and Armed Conflict in July 2023, the Council heard from a Colombian teenage girl, who described the everyday fears of living in communities affected by the presence of armed groups or gangs and had a list of recommendations for the Council, including supporting and funding efforts to protect the rights of children and young people who are former members of armed groups and the creation of a commission to facilitate the participation of children in the current and future peace processes. In addition, Susana Peralta from Colombia Diversa participated in an Arria Formula meeting in March 2023 on the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) persons, who reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of the 2016 peace agreement and the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repetition with regards to protecting the rights of LGBTQI persons. In particular, she welcomed the July 2022 announcement by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace to open a macro-case of sexual violence, reproductive violence, and other crimes motivated by prejudice, hate, and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, as well as the importance of using the crime of gender persecution to investigate and prosecute these acts. However, she noted that such a case has still not been formally opened.

New talks and implementation of the 2016 peace agreement

The government’s dialogue with the ELN and other armed groups have continued, in pursuit of its “total peace” policy. The third round of peace talks with the ELN, held in Cuba, culminated in June with agreements on a six-month national bilateral ceasefire and a mechanism to define the methodology for the participation of Colombian society in the peace process. 44 per cent of the members of this committee so far are women, and the committee includes five women’s organizations or platforms and an organization representing LGBTQI rights. On the occasion of International Women’s Day, the parties issued a joint statement announcing that a gender approach would be central in their discussions. In November 2022, the government appointed four more women to their delegation, reaching parity on their side, which is higher than in the Havana talks with the FARC-EP (8 of 16 on the government side, 4 of 10 on the ELN side). There are no LGBTQI+ representatives in any of the delegations. Dialogues also continued at varying stages with a range of illegal armed groups and criminal structures with a presence in conflict-affected regions. In April 2023, the Government and the dissident group of the former FARC-EP that

² Her statement was a very comprehensive review of the implementation of the gender-related provisions in the peace agreement and can be read in full [here](#). She paid special attention to the national budget: for example, she noted that the budget dedicated to Defense in 2023 was 9 per cent higher than in 2022 and 23.6 per cent higher than when the peace agreement was signed.

identifies itself as the *Estado Mayor Central* announced the establishment of a monitoring and verification mechanism for a ceasefire that entered into effect in January, as well as plans for further talks.

Meanwhile, both the government and civil society continue to track implementation of the gender provisions of the 2016 peace agreement. In 2022, speaking to the Security Council for the last time, former President Duque touted his government's efforts in implementing the gender provisions of the agreement, highlighting that 46 of the government's administrative positions were occupied by women, that women were 50 per cent of those benefitting from land programmes, and that the number of women in the armed forces was the highest ever. Ms. Marta Lucía Ramírez, outgoing vice-president and Minister of Foreign Affairs, reported to the Security Council that 26 per cent of the 51 gender indicators tracked by her government for the implementation of the peace agreement have been completed, and the rest have made significant progress, claiming that the average rate of progress for gender-related indicators was 56 per cent, with ten more years left in the implementation timeline. However, independent observers and civil society note that most of these indicators are procedural and leave out many of the gender-related provisions included in the peace agreement. The quarterly monitoring of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, for example, tracks 578 commitments and 130 related to gender issues, and marked 12 per cent as completed by November 2022 (compared to 31 per cent of all commitments), and 18 per cent as not initiated (compared to 13 per cent of all commitments), and generally minimum changes observed in 2022 and a worrisome slowdown in the pace of progress and implementation, highlighting in particular women's insufficient access to land through adjudication. Women's organizations have expressed concern about this deceleration in the implementation of the gender-provisions of the peace agreement in recent years, and the lack of information to be able to even assess whether these provisions are progressing or not. According to a consortium of women's organizations (GPAZ), there is no information about the majority of the gender-related provisions in the peace agreement (as high as 80 per cent of them in point 5 of the peace agreement and 67 per cent in point 6, for example), and the implementation rate has noticeably slowed down: from 70 per cent in 2019-2020, to 26 per cent the following year, to 20 per cent the year after that.

The new government's announcement of a feminist foreign policy and a commitment to adopt a national action plan on women, peace and security, a first for Colombia, were well received by women's groups and the international community. The United Nations country team, the UN mission, the OAS mission, UN Women as the lead facilitator, have provided methodological and logistical support to several regional and local forums involving 800 women and LGBTQI persons, including former FARC-EP members, in the participatory roadmap for the national action plan. These forums will culminate in a national forum in Bogotá on September 28 and 29th. The coordination of the plan's development and adoption is led by the Ministry of Foreign Relations and the Presidential Counsellor for Women's Equality, and 23 women's organizations and platforms are part of the mechanism of dialogue between government and civil society. Several countries (Norway, Sweden, the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada) are funding these efforts, supported by the International Cooperation Gender Table. The government aims at adopting the plan in October 2023, hoping that it will be incorporated into municipal and departmental development plans after the local elections.

Since the new Administration took office, the National Land Agency has purchased tens of thousands of land, but still far from its goal of 500,000 hectares for 2023. During the same period, the Agency formalized land tenure for over 1 million hectares, of which 118,000 hectares is for peasants and 57 per cent of the 118,000 hectares being held by women. After the first meeting of a new dialogue between the Land Restitution Unit and women, the Unit committed to invest more financial resources to integrate a gender approach, address language and connectivity barriers, and work with the judicial branch to streamline women's restitution claims and ensure equal treatment. The national programme for crop substitution benefits almost 100,000 families, and 35.7 per cent are headed by women.

The Director of the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization has set four priorities for the reintegration process and one of them is gender and women's empowerment, announcing the activation of local action plans in 18 municipalities to implement the gender provisions of the reintegration policy. The new head of the Agency, Alejandra Miller, is a women's rights advocate and a former member of the Truth Commission. As of June 2023, 128 collective projects have been approved by the National Reintegration Council, benefitting 3,972 people (28 per cent of them women), but only 13 of the projects are led by women. In addition, the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization had approved 5,424 individual projects, involving 6,525 former combatants, including 1,606 women. The percentage of female former combatants participating in productive projects stands at 86 per cent (higher than the overall rate of 77 per cent of accredited former combatants). However, more than one third of them provide unpaid care services, compared with only 2 per cent of male former combatants, which limits their opportunities for a complete and effective reintegration process. A joint UN Women-UNICEF project for comprehensive caregiving is underway, benefitting 500 women and 370 young former combatants.

There have also been positive developments with regards to women's participation in politics and public life. Bills were approved establishing measures to address violence against women in politics and stipulating that 50 per cent of positions in public entities should be occupied by women, up from 30 per cent. However, these new measures will not have entered into force ahead of the local elections in October. The current Congress features the highest number of women legislators in Colombian history (29.4 per cent, compared to 18.9 per cent in 2018) and over 60 per cent of the 295 members of Congress are new. Apart from a gender parity cabinet and the creation of the Ministry of Equality (to be led by Vice President Francia Márquez and a focus on issues affecting indigenous and Afro-Colombian women), the President appointed Clemencia Carabalí (an Afro-Colombian activist who briefed the Security Council three years ago) as Presidential Counsellor for Women's Equality. In spite of the record numbers of women's participation and representation at the 2022 elections, it was reported that their participation had been affected by security risks, gender-based political violence, unequal access to resources, and gender-based discrimination, with additional challenges for indigenous and afro-Colombian women. The government and the UN collaborated on a "More Women, More Democracy" campaign and strategy, and more than three-thousand female candidates and 27 large media outlets were engaged through capacity building activities.

Human rights and humanitarian issues, including transitional justice conflict-related sexual violence

One of the main obstacles to the implementation of the peace agreement continues to be the high levels of violence against former combatants, social leaders, and human rights defenders. Since the signing of the Final Agreement, the Mission has verified a total of 375 killings of former combatants (including 11 women). Four months ahead of local elections, the Mission recorded the killing of six members of political parties from across the political spectrum, including one woman. Vice President Francia Márquez survived an assassination attempt in January 2023.

Highlighting the persistence of the violence against social leaders and human rights defenders, the Office of the Ombudsman issued a national early warning on specific risks for these actors, including those related to conflict-related sexual violence. Vice President Francia Márquez announced increased funding for the protection of women leaders and human rights defenders. The Office of the Attorney-General has reported 153 convictions in its investigations into 765 killings of social leaders and human rights defenders since the signing of the Final Agreement and an additional 143 cases are in the trial phase. OHCHR reports the killing of several women human rights defenders every quarter, including renowned local leaders like Edilsan Andrade, Jesusita Moreno, or Luz Marina Arteaga, who was killed while waiting to receive protection measures approved months earlier. In Bolívar, social leader Yirley Velasco

continued to be threatened and stigmatized despite having the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights order protection measures for her. As the government moves forward on comprehensive rural reform, these risks will increase, as many of these women leaders are defending their communities' land and environmental rights. For example, the UN has been monitoring several threats and killings of LGBTIQ leaders in Valledupar since April 2023. A UN Women programme funded by Norway in partnership with the Ombudsman's Office and the support of the UN Verification Mission has reached more than seven thousand women human rights defenders, including with emergency and rapid response funds for people at immediate risk. However, while the participatory process with civil society to update the National Action Plan 2023-2026 of the government-led Comprehensive Programme to Safeguard Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders is ongoing, the Programme still presents implementation and sustainability gaps.

The 2022 annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2023/413) recorded 453 cases affecting primarily women and girls in Colombia last year, as well as the persisting challenges that survivors experienced to reporting and seeking redress, namely death threats by illegal armed groups, stigmatization, the lack of protection measures for victims and witnesses, and the costs of accessing justice. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG-SVC), Pramila Patten, visited Colombia in May, including to participate in the national day for the dignity of women victims of conflict-related sexual violence (more than 35,000 between 1985 and 2022, according to the Victims Unit). Women-led organizations and survivors reported to SRSG-SVC that despite ongoing efforts by the authorities, conflict-related sexual violence remains a prominent feature of the armed conflict. It continues to be used as a tactic of territorial and social control, mostly by non-state armed groups, and there is also a worrying spike in cases of human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation by armed groups and criminal networks. In her press release after the visit, the Special Representative emphasized "the need to guarantee that ceasefire agreements will not be comprehensive if patterns of sexual violence persist; and to ensure that specific provisions on truth, justice and reparation for victims of sexual violence are included". Civil society organizations and institutions, including the Office of the Inspector General, continued to call for the opening by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace of Case 11 on sexual and gender-based violence and violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity. For the first time, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace has included the accusation of gender-based persecution in its indictments. During the first semester of 2023, OHCHR received 42 allegations of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls in Colombia. OHCHR expressed concerns about patterns of trafficking and forced recruitment of girls for sexual exploitation, and rapes of women and girls.

In June 2022, the Truth Commission published its final report, after hearing more than 30,000 individual and collective testimonies. The report included a specific chapter on women and LGBTIQ victims. 68.5 per cent of the women who provided testimonies were peasants, and reported that the loss of land had affected them the most. Among indigenous women who spoke to the Truth Commission, for example, 31.6 per cent reported forced displacement and 7 per cent reported sexual violence. The Truth Commission recorded 1294 incidents of sexual violence, affecting 1554 victims, 90 per cent of them women and girls. This violence was especially pronounced in areas where there was coca cultivation, and it increased with the implementation of *Plan Colombia* and the advance of paramilitary groups in these regions. The Commission also registered the use of forced abortion or forced contraception within the ranks of the FARC-EP, and 173 attacks against women who were occupying a political office or a civil service position at the time, including killings, threats, and forced displacements. The Truth Commission also established a committee to follow up and monitor its recommendations, comprising four women and three men, including from women's and LGBTIQ organizations. These recommendations focused on state capacity to advance gender equality, cultural and social transformations, and reparations, and guaranteeing adequate and comprehensive reparations for women victims of the armed conflict.

Although more than 61,000 cases of GBV have been reported by the Government in 2022, including 23,000 cases involving adolescents and children in departments of Colombia targeted for humanitarian assistance, underreporting and lack of comprehensive GBV service provision continue to be key challenges for the humanitarian response. The GBV sector remains chronically underfunded (currently, less than 25 per cent funded). Due to the recent escalation of sexual violence against women and girls in El Nariño department and increased risk of sexual violence incidents targeting female humanitarian workers, the Humanitarian Country Team released a joint press statement on 13 July raising these concerns. The localized violence in El Nariño against isolated rural populations disproportionately impact indigenous and Afro-descendants community groups that have socially and historically been marginalized. This trend is also observed in other areas of the country with significant presence of non-state armed groups, such as the Pacific region.

Recommendations:³

As the last three resolutions on Colombia have not included much language related to gender, the recommendations articulated for previous meetings of the IEG are still relevant. When discussing new resolutions or statements, these elements could be considered:

- 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 adequate implementation of the Comprehensive Programme of Safeguards for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders.
- Request the Mission to continue to integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue into its planning, operations, and reporting, and note the importance of supporting the deployment of gender expertise as appropriate to adequately perform the functions added to the mandate, and commending the Mission's efforts to achieve gender parity and engage systematically with women's and LGBTIQ organizations.

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

- Inquire about the institutional set up planned for by the current government to ensure women's active participation in monitoring and tracking the implementation of gender-related provisions in the peace agreement, as well as in the national commission to determine the participation of Colombian civil society in the talks with the ELN and other armed groups, and encourage the government to expedite the implementation of the gender-related provisions of the peace agreement.
- Urge the Government to propose the inclusion of the prohibition of conflict-related sexual violence and violence against women and LGBTIQ people in all future ceasefire agreements, and that these issues be discussed early on in the negotiations with armed groups.
- Inquire about the opening of macro-case number 11 on conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence and violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and ensure the integration of these issues in all other relevant cases, highlighting the need for women's and LGBTIQ organizations and victims' representatives to be involved at every step.
- Urge the authorities to ensure comprehensive assistance to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence that continue to experience severe physical and mental health consequences of rape and other brutal forms of sexual violence, as well as challenges in accessing socioeconomic reintegration, particularly in areas controlled by illegal armed groups and criminal networks.

³ These recommendations are prepared by UN Women as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, in consultation with other UN entities.

- Support the call by the Office of the Ombudsman to develop a collective reparations plan with a gender focus, with the input of women and LGBTIQ representatives from conflict-affected territories.
- Partner with the Government in the full implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security, the recommendations of the final report of the truth commission, and the national development plan, including and the implementation of rural development plans targeting gender issues in the territories most affected by the conflict.
- Advocate for increase funding to strengthen and expand coverage of GBV service provision and coordination efforts under the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, and direct humanitarian funding to local women-led organizations to provide GBV assistance.