



IX Analysis of the Implementation of Anti-Trafficking Policies in Colombia

2015-2024

Balance





We work towards a society free from human trafficking!

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Introduction

First of all, we want to thank you for opening this report! Human trafficking is a difficult subject to tackle, and your decision to learn about it shows us that we have one more ally in this fight. Welcome.

When we talk about human trafficking, **many find it impossible to believe that slavery still happens today.** The truth is that human trafficking is not a made-up story nor a myth but a reality: **one fostered and maintained by numerous intersecting social, economic, political, and environmental factors.**

In 2016, we published our first Assessment **with the goal of giving visibility to human trafficking and analyzing the efforts of governmental and non-governmental actors** to fight it. In so doing, we found wide gaps between national and international commitments and actions implemented. We have credited **the Colombian government for taking on many obligations to combat trafficking. However, from the perspective of civil society and the victims, there is still a long way to go to meet them.**

Over the past eight years, little has changed. The national and local governments, public servants and officials, and action plans have changed, but the structural factors that allow for human trafficking remain the same. Every year, with every Assessment, we highlight the same failures and challenges: lack of comprehensive data, consistent action, comprehensive services for victims, and more.

For these reasons, we **decided to do something different this year.** Instead of repeating the same strategy of sharing official data, stating the actions taken and news reported during the year, we decided to create **a summary of all previous eight Assessments, highlighting the context in which human trafficking occurs, successful strategies to combat it, along with disappointments and hopes for the future.** What's more, we've included a most critical and innovative element: the voices and stories of the victims themselves, stories we have collected during our years of work with human trafficking victims.

Our goal is to strengthen public policies and achieve social changes that can turn the tide on human trafficking.

keyTerms

AGO - Attorney General's Office
COAT - Operating Center for the Fight Against Human Trafficking
CSAM - Child Sexual Abuse Material
CSEC - Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
CSO - Civil Society Organization
DIJIN - National Police Unit - Criminal Investigation Directorate and INTERPOL
GBV - Gender-Based Violence
GLOTIP - The UN Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022
IG - Inspector General
ICBF - The Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing
IOM - International Organization for Migration (UN Migration)
JEP - The Special Jurisdiction for Peace
LGBTIQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer
MinSalud - Ministry of Health and Social Protection
MinInterior - Ministry of the Interior
NGO - Non-Governmental organization
SENA - Colombia's National Learning Service
The Interagency Committee - The Interagency Committee for the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons
UN - United Nations
UNODC - United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

A note on the translation

This report was originally written in Spanish and translated into English. Throughout the report, we reference news stories, laws, technical guidelines, and international protocols. Most of these sources are only available in Spanish; links are included as footnotes in these cases. Wherever possible, we have included links to the English versions of these sources. We have also included footnotes to provide additional context as needed.

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1. What is Human Trafficking?





Attracting, subjugating, and keeping a person in a situation of exploitation to benefit economically from them is synonymous with human trafficking. **Men, women, and children can be victims, within their own country or in another, in multiple forms, including sexual exploitation and forced prostitution, forced labor, domestic servitude, and the extraction and commercialization of organs.** It is a crime that affects almost all countries in all regions of the world due to socioeconomic inequalities, strict immigration policies, armed conflicts, climate change, and structural factors concerning poverty, violence, and discrimination.

Human trafficking is:

1. An action that begins with the capture of a person through deception or coercion, with the aim of subjecting them to a situation of exploitation. .
2. The process continues with the transfer or transportation and the reception or accommodation of the person within and/or outside the country and ends with their exploitation.

The intention to exploit a person is sufficient for the crime to be established; the exploitation does not necessarily have to be carried out.



A person can be declared a victim of trafficking when they have no control over:

The kind of activity they perform:



the person is entirely at the mercy of their captor or trafficker, who forces them to perform whatever activity without taking their will into account.

The conditions of the activity:



minimal or no pay, long work hours, and an inappropriate or dangerous environment are conditions that the victim cannot reject.

Freedom of movement, action, and decision:



the victim can be locked up, isolated, monitored, threatened, or coerced so that they do not escape or report their captor.

2. Methodology





Each year, from 2016 to 2023 we have requested information from government entities and members of the Interagency Committee that have a role in implementing the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking, according to their scope and level of responsibility. The reported period covers 2015 to 2024 since requests for information always refer to the previous year.

The responses outline their actions related to human trafficking **in terms of prevention, protection and assistance for victims, investigation and enforcement of the crime, and the budget**, for all such activities.

These requests for information have been based on the Law of Transparency and Access to Information, Law 1712 of 2014.

This year's Assessment **highlights and contextualizes critical information** reported in previous editions. This information was provided by public entities that are responsible for the implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons 2007-2012, 2016- 2018, and 2020-2024 at the local and national levels; international organizations that provide technical support to Colombia (the IOM and UNODC); and some of the Colombian civil society organizations (CSOs) that are committed to the fight against human trafficking and operate in different regions of the nation and approach the issue from distinct angles: prevention, victim assistance, legal representation, and political advocacy:



1. Nationally, we refer to the members of the Inter-institutional Committee for the Fight against Human Trafficking, the entity responsible for coordinating the actions carried out by the Colombian State through the National Strategy for the Fight against Human Trafficking: Ministry of the Interior (coordinating entity), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF), National Learning Service (SENA), National Police and INTERPOL, Administrative Unit Migration Colombia, Attorney General's Office, Inspector General's Office, and Ombudsman's Office. Locally, we refer to the departmental governments of Amazonas, Antioquia, Arauca, Bolívar, Cundinamarca, Guajira, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Risaralda, Santander, and Valle del Cauca; the district governments of Bogotá and Medellín; and the municipal governments of Pereira and Santiago de Cali. These territories were considered strategic due to their geographical location (border areas) or because they have historically been the origin of most of the victims reported in official records.



Corporación Caribe Afirmativo

(Barranquilla), focuses on prevention by supporting LGBTIQ+ people who are at high risk for human trafficking (it also operates in Cartagena, Medellín, Bucaramanga, and Cúcuta). Caribe Afirmativo aims to strengthen institutional and community capacity by transforming how organizations and institutions view LGBTIQ+ people's role in society.



Corporación CreSer

(Bucaramanga), acts through public leadership by being a member of the first citizen oversight office on human trafficking in the Santander department.



Fundación Frida Kahlo

(Cúcuta), focuses on prevention by working with migrant populations who are at high risk for trafficking, especially women from Venezuela who settle in the region or who travel through to other regions or countries in South America.



Fundación Marcela Loaiza

(Cali), shares the testimony of a survivor of human trafficking who wants to raise awareness in the community.



Fundación Renacer

(Bogotá, Cartagena, Riohacha), provides support to sexually abused and exploited children to contribute to the eradication of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC).



Valientes Colombia ONG

(Bogotá), aims to protect and guarantee the dignity and freedom of children in Colombia through research and the prevention of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

women's **L I N K** worldwide

Women's Link Worldwide

(Bogotá), acts through the law and legal representation, pro-moting social change that favors the rights of women and girls; especially those who face intersecting inequalities.



RED TAMAR - Colombian Network of the Catholic Church,

is committed as a Church to the prevention and fight against human trafficking in Bogotá, Bucaramanga, Cartagena, Cúcuta, and Medellín.



3.Context





** Throughout the text, you will find phrases in italics: these are the exact words of the victims who have been assisted by the Corporación Espacios de Mujer.*



For the purposes of this edition, the context of human trafficking on which our analysis is based synthesizes information gathered between 2015 and 2023.

Human trafficking is **a crime against humanity, and there is no place in the world that is safe from it**. One hundred and fifty-six countries (95% of the world's population) are affected by trafficking, whether they serve as a country of origin, transit, or destination (GLOTIP, 2024).

In Colombia, human trafficking is one of the effects of cultural practices and structural problems such as poverty, lack of education, unemployment, discrimination and violence against women, corruption, and forced recruitment.

Unfortunately, **the context has not improved in the last eight years but has worsened due to the emergence of new factors**: the migratory flow from Venezuela, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, CSEC, exploitation in tourism, and digital communication.



3.1 Poverty and lack of education

Poverty is both a cause and consequence of human rights violations. People with material needs are vulnerable to their rights being frequently ignored; they tend to be overrepresented in the group of people with lower incomes. The dynamics of poverty are also impacted **by discrimination** that results in the exclusion of women, people who are Afro-descendant, Indigenous, have disabilities, are LGBTIQ+, among others².

In many reported cases in Colombia, the victim is someone who has experienced poverty and obstacles to accessing an education; put simply, someone with very few formal job opportunities.

² Barragán, Maryluz. (2017). Pobreza, desigualdad y discriminación en América Latina. <https://www.dejusticia.org/column/poverty-inequality-discrimination-latin-america/>





When faced with the opportunity to make a lot of money quickly, especially when presented by a friend, acquaintance, or family member, it is very difficult to say no: **finding a way out matters more than any risk of abuse or violence!** What's more, it is also likely that this person has already experienced some type of violence, whether physical, sexual, or work-related. The potential benefits outweigh any risks that may arise (even if the victim knows that they may be trafficked), especially if the victim is a single mother or the primary provider for their family.

At Espacios de Mujer, we have had the opportunity to meet with many people who have received tempting offers within Colombia or abroad to improve their circumstances. Even being aware of the risks involved in accepting such offers, they choose to try their luck. This is the case of Felipe:



25-year-old young man receives a job offer to work at a butcher shop in Poland, with a weekly salary of 950 Zloty (approximately US \$250). The offer includes payment for travel tickets, a letter of invitation to enter Poland without difficulties, and on-site accommodation and meals. Felipe doesn't think twice and accepts. Having returned to Colombia, he currently does not have a stable job and must cover his mother's medical expenses, as she is in a delicate state of health...



Stories like Felipe's are more common than one might think,

To prevent trafficking, we need not only to raise awareness of the crime itself; we need to end poverty!

In **Colombia, some population groups are more vulnerable to trafficking than others.** While the Colombian constitution guarantees equality without exception, the reality is that our society is highly unequal. To be a woman, low-income, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, a migrant, a person with disabilities, or an informal worker means starting at a disadvantage compared to those who experience no limitations based on their gender, economic situation, ethnicity, migratory status, physical characteristics, or employment status. Generally, these identities bring with them different economic conditions, access to public services, public protection, education, and work opportunities, as well as more significant vulnerabilities to abuse, exclusion, and discrimination.



3.2 Discrimination and violence against women

Cultural practices in Colombia allow for widespread acceptance of the degradation and abuse of women and girls, which is why **they are disproportionately affected by human trafficking**.

Between 2015 and 2024, 85% of trafficking victims in Colombia were women.

Women and girls are more affected than other population groups by specific characteristics that increase a person's risk for trafficking.

Women are disproportionately affected by limited access to employment and credit, to educational opportunities, to social and health services, and to land and property ownership. They experience greater levels of unemployment and work informality, lower salaries and less protection, employment starting at a young age, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and the degradation of abuse. In many cases, women who are victims of trafficking were first victims of exploitation in their own homes, forced into situations of abuse or prostitution by their own families.

If it were you, **would you prefer to be abused and exploited by a stranger or by your own mother?** Many victims choose the stranger.

“I was born...in a dysfunctional home, where I grew up seeing the abuse of my dad towards my mom, every day, as normal. This made me have a bitter and gray childhood.”

“[Viktor], your voice is so nice, my mom liked it, and that’s how you got her, but you are very ugly, I wouldn’t have paid attention to you. Why did you hit my mom? Why did you lie to her and tell her you would give her a better life? Don’t you see that the poor thing got angry with me, I was a burden she had to carry. Being with you and coming back to you was her downfall.”



Project Metamorfosis, Corporación Espacios de Mujer



The forms of trafficking that most affect women and girls are sexual exploitation (commercial and non-commercial) and forced prostitution, including for child sexual abuse material; forced labor in highly feminized industries such as domestic service, agriculture, and beauty; forced and servile marriage; and forced pregnancy to give birth to babies who are then sold or taken away for illegal adoption.

How do we end this inequality?

- Adopt public policies that ensure equal opportunity between women and men and aim for a better redistribution of wealth.
- Develop policies in the private sector that require the inclusion of diverse gender perspectives.
- Exercise oversight over employment contracts to avoid instability and informality.
- Provide subsidies for single-parent households.

All of the above would-be steps in the right direction, resulting in a redistribution of wealth in a stratified society like ours.



3.3 Migration from Venezuela

Over the past decade, **Venezuela's political and economic instability has led to an unprecedented influx of migrants and refugees throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.** According to data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), by June 2024, more than 7.77 million Venezuelans were outside their country of origin, being, without a doubt, the second-largest displaced population in the world. **Colombia is the most welcoming country in the region** (2.9 millones), seguida por Perú (1.5 millones), Brasil, Ecuador y Chile³.

Colombia is a country of origin, transit, and destination for migrants. The intensification of migratory flows **has allowed for the capture and exploitation of migrants both within the national borders and abroad, producing both local and foreign victims.** Although migration and human trafficking are distinct issues, the latter has

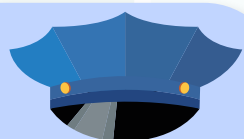
³ OIM, *Situación regional migratoria venezolana*.





thrived on the former because migrants are more vulnerable due irregular immigration situations or the need for shelter or other help to migrate. Human trafficking often victimizes foreign nationals since their uprooting heightens their vulnerability and makes the job of traffickers that much easier.

The desire to flee a situation of poverty or persecution or simply to seek a better life, combined with a lack of support networks in the destination country, debts generated before and during the journey, or irregular migratory status, are all risk factors that can lead to a case of exploitation associated with human trafficking. On their own, those elements are not enough to definitively identify a case of trafficking. However, once in their destination country, many of these **individuals accept precarious conditions, whether due to ignorance of their rights, fear of deportation, or not knowing who to turn to.**



An investigation carried out by the criminal investigation unit of the police and the Colombian Attorney General's Office (AGO) uncovered a network that recruited Venezuelans in Cúcuta through deception: promising them jobs on coffee farms and instead forcing them to sell drugs for criminal groups⁴.

[Click here to read the news](#)



In an operation carried out on October 18, 2018, in Barranquilla, Colombian authorities dismantled a group pretending to be a religious organization that kept around 60 Venezuelans locked up and overcrowded and forced them to do webcam pornography⁵.

[Click here to read the news](#)

⁴ EFE. (2019). *Rescatan a 10 venezolanos que eran obligados a vender droga en Colombia. El Universal.*



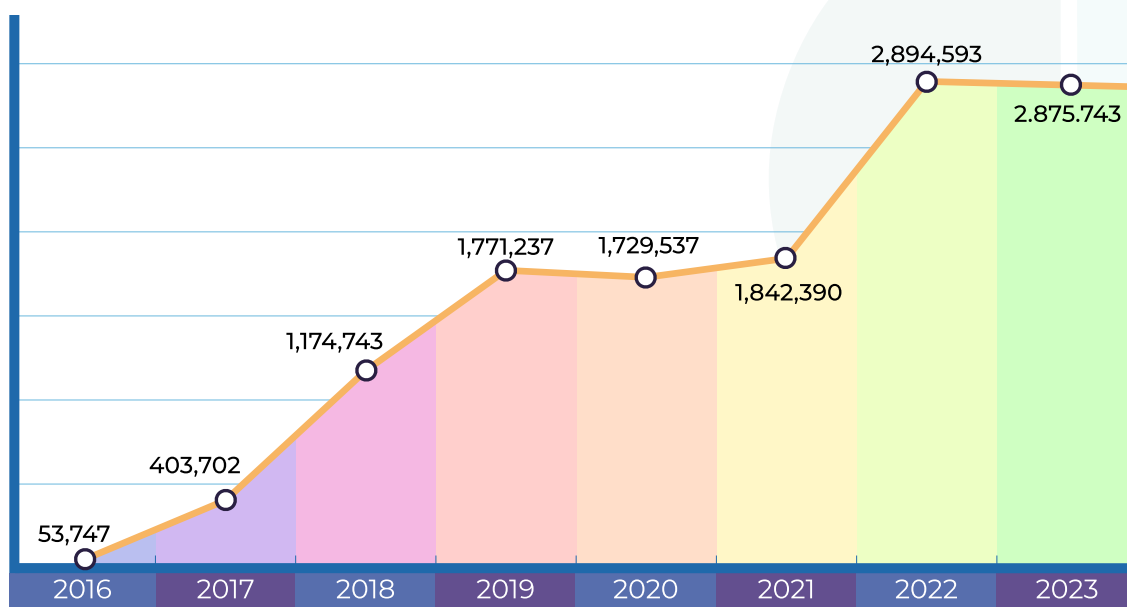


On March 1, 2021, **Colombia extended the ten-year temporary legal status to Venezuelans residing** in the country. The country aims, above all, to regulate the status of undocumented immigrants, provide legal pathways to citizenship, and facilitate access to employment and social services.

According to data from Colombia Migration, venezuelan migration to Colombia between 2016 and 2023 shows consistent growth, as illustrated below:

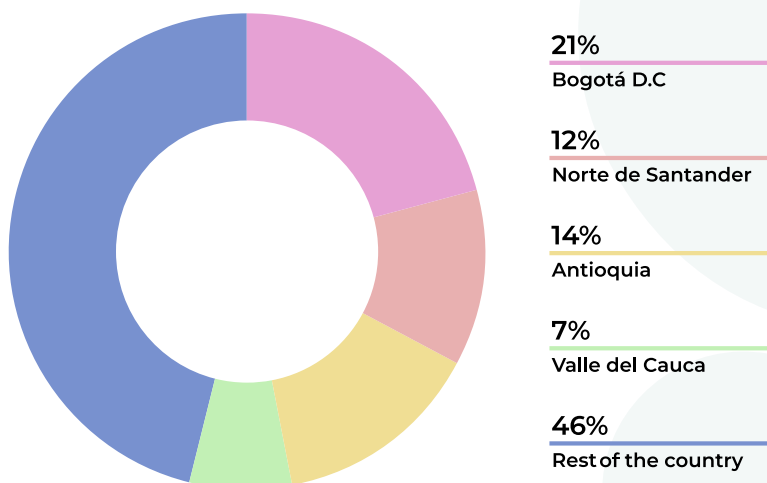
Figure 1

Number of Venezuelans in Colombia (as of January 31, 2024)



Source: Colombia Migration (2024).

More than half of Venezuelan migrants and refugees live in the following departments of Colombia:





3.4 CSEC in travel and tourism

The consolidation of social and economic systems based on consumption, globalization, and the internationalization of capital and communications has created a lax environment in which adults can easily objectify and commodify children's bodies for sexual exploitation.

According to the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF), between 2020 and 2023, 1,264 children have begun the process of re-establishing their rights after experiencing sexual violence and human trafficking in the form of sexual exploitation... 63% of whom are female. ⁶ .

In recent years, **media coverage of CSEC cases**, especially in the context of tourism—has grown substantially. We have indeed asked ourselves: Is it trafficking? The answer is yes. These cases are, in fact, internal trafficking, that is, trafficking that occurs within Colombia.

How does it work? Colombia, a strategically located nation with diverse climates, beautiful landscapes, and friendly people, has become an attractive destination for international tourism. However, **not all tourism is sustainable, and its adverse effects are readily apparent:** The main cities have become epicenters of the exploitation of both children and adults. Areas including La Candelaria in Bogotá, Parque Lleras in Medellín, the Walled City in Cartagena, the Taganga zone in Santa Marta, and the coffee region have **a high demand and supply of child sexual services, which has incited exploitation.** This exploitation has become a source of income for criminal groups that operate with impunity due to the weak rule of law in this matter.

And why is it trafficking? Children and teenagers **do not offer sexual services because they want to or because they enjoy it.** The consent of a minor is not valid under the law, even less so when control over one's life belongs to others. Their age does not allow them to consent to be exploited nor to renounce their fundamental rights as children regardless of the payment for their services, which may be in cash or kind for themselves or a third party. Therefore, they are victims of trafficking.

⁶ [Gómez, Licsa. \(2024\). Menores de edad estarían siendo explotadas sexualmente por \\$50.000. Infobae.](#)





Unlike the trafficking of adults, when we talk about the trafficking of children, physical transportation of the victim must take place for the action to be officially considered human trafficking. This transportation can occur anywhere other than the victim's home, such as a hotel in another neighborhood or city.



*If an adult pays **Sofia**, a 13-year-old girl, to have sex with a tourist in their hotel, **this is human trafficking**. Sofia doesn't need to be tricked or threatened for it to be a case of sex trafficking: Sofia may understand very well what she is doing, and she may travel to the tourist's hotel of her own volition and without fear, but **she is a child, and as such, she lacks the capacity to consent to her exploitation**.*



3.5 Climate change and socio-environmental conflict

Climate change **is closely linked to human rights because of its devastating effects on the environment and the well-being of every human**. In addition to threatening our very existence, climate change is directly obstructing our rights to food, water, health, housing, livelihoods, and life itself, leading people into states of vulnerability.

Colombia is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world and, as such, is very vulnerable to environmental threats. Climate change is one of them, as it causes floods and other natural disasters, forcing people to abandon their homes and, with them, their means of survival.

Rising sea levels and erosion of the Caribbean and Pacific coasts—consequences of global warming—are causing the loss of beaches, soil and aquifer salinization, habitat loss, and increased severity of extreme events like storm surges.



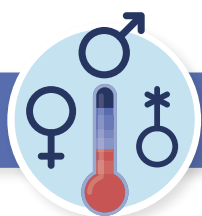
Anti-trafficking policies do not currently recognize climate change as a cause of displacement and migration, nor as a factor that raises the risk for human trafficking. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, Siobhán Mullally, has on multiple occasions invited countries to incorporate climate change into their national laws and policies:



“Climate change and environmental degradation contribute to displacement and to food and economic insecurity, and may increase vulnerability to trafficking in persons, among Afro-Colombian and Indigenous women and women in rural areas. Risks of exploitation are exacerbated by gendered inequalities in land tenure. Loss of livelihoods contributes to increased recruitment by armed groups and criminal organizations, including the recruitment and use of children in illicit activities.”⁷



Colombia suffers from both climate change and socio-environmental conflict. In 2015, Colombia was identified as having the second-highest rate of socio-environmental conflicts (the highest in Latin America) with 72 out of the 100 cases analyzed. **Most socio-environmental conflicts are concentrated in the most populated areas, the Andean and the Caribbean regions, and conservation areas.** Oil production, the construction of hydroelectric dams, and agribusiness generate the most tension and have affected or could affect 7.9 million people, with farmers, people living in cities, and Indigenous people being the most impacted.



3.5.1. Climate change and gender

Most human trafficking victims are women, just as most climate change victims are women⁸.

But what does gender have to do with climate change? Doesn't climate change affect everyone?

⁷ Informe de la Relatora Especial sobre la trata de personas, especialmente mujeres y niños, Siobhán Mullally, sobre su visita a Colombia. Consejo de derechos Humanos, A/HRC/56/60/Add.1
⁸ PNUD. (2023). *¿Qué relación existe entre la igualdad de género y el cambio climático?* ONU Mujeres. (2022). Artículo explicativo: [Cómo la desigualdad de género y el cambio climático están relacionados entre sí.](#)





Well, of course! However, **a growing body of evidence shows that women suffer the effects of climate change more severely than men.** For one, women are more likely to work in climate-related jobs such as agriculture and other manual jobs. The climate crisis affects women in these jobs more than men **due to the unequal distribution of power between men and women.** Women have less access to the resources, services, and official decision-making processes concerning agriculture and climate change. **Women receive less support and are less informed because they have less access to information on adaptation technologies, cropping systems, and weather phenomena.**

Women's participation in decision-making and leadership potential on climate-related issues are hamstrung by their unpaid caregiver responsibilities. Women take on the additional burden of recovering and restoring their homes and communities when climate-related natural disasters occur.

Women are typically responsible for obtaining food, water, and fuel, especially in low- and middle-income countries. **During droughts and irregular rainfall, women, as agricultural workers and primary producers, work harder and harder to secure resources for their families.**

All of this has negative repercussions for girls. Girls often leave school to help their mothers, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limited education and leaving them more exposed to the risk of trafficking.



3.6 Armed conflict

Armed conflict considerably increases the risk of human trafficking. Women and girls are the most affected by trafficking in the forms of forced prostitution and sexual exploitation, frequently combined with other forms of trafficking such as servile marriage, forced labor, and domestic servitude.

In Colombia, armed groups use trafficking **to grow their workforce, forcing people to join their ranks as combatants, informants, sex slaves, and domestic and field workers.**



Trafficking also brings in profits by exploiting people who work in mining and other extractive industries or by forcing people to commit other crimes.

Who are we talking about? Illegal **armed groups**, including the ELN, Segunda Marquetalia, FARC-D, and Clan del Golfo, operate in areas where people are exploited for human trafficking and other illicit activities, predominantly in the departments of Chocó, Norte de Santander, Antioquia, Córdoba, Nariño, and Cauca. Among the victims are Venezuelan migrants and internally displaced Colombians who are exploited for sexual purposes or debt bondage⁹.

Members of these groups **lure or kidnap women to work in their camps, sexually exploiting them and sometimes transporting them to Venezuela**. On the other side, members of El Tren de Aragua (an illegal armed group based in Venezuela) gain the trust of victims by housing them in pay-per-day rooms - pagadarios - in Colombia. At the pagadarios, they provide food for which the victims incur a daily debt, and when the person cannot pay, group members exploit them sexually.

There are known cases in which they marked women and girls behind the ears to signify their status as property, which is not only a form of control and humiliation but also exploitation and domination over the victims.

How many victims are there? It is impossible to determine how many people have been victims of human trafficking in the context of the armed conflict, but available data point to the gravity of the situation. In 2021, members of the JEP announced that between 1996 and 2016, 18,677 children were recruited by the FARC-EP for the armed conflict. Between 2017 and 2019, the Ombudsman's Office issued 108 Early Alerts in which it warned about the risk of recruitment in 182 municipalities

¹⁰.

In 2022, an international organization reported that 77% of municipalities in the Chocó department and 33% of municipalities in the Nariño department were at high risk of child recruitment, particularly Indigenous and Afro-Colombian children.¹¹

Armed conflicts lead to a weakened rule of law, displacement, socioeconomic hardship, social fragmentation, and family breakdown, all of which increase a person's vulnerability to human trafficking, causing their further dehumanization and objectification as war trophies or sexual commodities.

⁹ [Ortiz Fonnegra, María Isabel. \(2024\). 'Tren de Aragua', disidencias, el Eln y el 'clan del Golfo' están detrás de la trata de personas en Colombia, según EE. UU. El Tiempo.](#)

¹⁰ [Defensoría del Pueblo. \(2020\). Entre 2017 y 2019, Defensoría emitió 108 alertas tempranas sobre riesgo de reclutamiento infantil.](#)

¹¹ [Caracol. \(2023\). Más de 12.000 niñas y niños se han movilizado en contra del reclutamiento.](#)





3.6.1 Conflict and gender

Armed conflicts undoubtedly exacerbate the gender differences and inequalities that have traditionally characterized our economic, political, and cultural systems. For this reason, there is growing recognition of the unique impact that conflicts have on women and girls who are subjected to various forms of physical and emotional violence, forced pregnancies, slavery, and sexual violence.

Despite this clarity, Colombia has been slow to take the realities of victims into account: silencing them and allowing the continued violation of their rights, as well as ignoring measures for their reparation.

Women and girls are used as sexual and domestic slaves to boost recruitment and reward soldiers. In this way, they become victims of both sexual violence and human trafficking.



Carolina is a woman from Medellín. A former classmate proposes that she travel to Asia for a very well-paying housekeeping job. Upon arrival, a Colombian woman takes her passport and takes her to a hotel where she stays with five other women.

*The next day, she is taken to work at a nightclub. The cost of the shoes and clothes she has to wear adds to the debt she has already incurred (from travel preparations, documents, plane tickets). After a month, she is sent to another city and begins to work on the street, where she is abused by three men. Convinced that she has already paid her debt, Carolina leaves for another city, but her captors come after her and lock her in a hotel for 15 days, forcing her to provide sexual services. After a while, she manages to pay her debt and can leave, but she has no money for a ticket back to Colombia. After another year and a half she returns to Colombia, where she looks for work. Not finding it, she begins working in prostitution. She meets a woman who tells her that in Norte de Santander, they are looking for waitresses at a stadium. However, there **she is taken by an illegal armed group** and forced into prostitution and domestic servitude. She manages to escape thanks to the help of a group member and returns to Medellín. She currently works for the same company she worked for before leaving for Asia.*





3.6.2 Forced recruitment

While Colombian law prohibits the forced recruitment of children and forced criminal activity by illegal armed groups or organized crime groups, the authorities do not consider these crimes human trafficking and thus investigate them differently

Minors recruited in war carry out activities for illegal armed groups that fundamentally benefit the group itself: they fight, kidnap, extort, work on ranches and in fields, cook, and do logistics work. Apparently, not all of the activities above suggest exploitation since they are carried out only occasionally or align with those that a minor might perform in their place of origin, such as domestic work. However, the mere act of recruiting a child to participate in the armed conflict actively is one of the worst forms of child labor ([Convention 182 of the International Labor Organization](#)) and should be classified as human trafficking.

The most recent U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report (*TIP Report*) states that high-level Colombian officials acknowledged for the first time in 2023 that **the forced recruitment or use of children by illegal armed groups is a form of human trafficking.**



3.6.3 Disappearances

A profound ignorance of human trafficking persists in Colombia as it relates to the armed conflict but also as it relates to disappearances. A person who is missing could be the victim of a crime, so it could be a case of trafficking. Therefore, there is a link between disappearances and human trafficking. Currently, the number of people who have disappeared due to trafficking is unknown.



On March 21, 2021, in Cartagena, the disappearance of the 15-year-old Alexandrith Sarmiento Arroyo was reported in the town of Bayunca.¹⁴ Few answers have been obtained from the institutional investigation of her case. However, according to theories from her family and the Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres (a women's movement), there is a possibility that Alexandrith has been a victim of one of the human trafficking networks managed by criminal organizations that operate in the area of her disappearance, for sexual and economic exploitation of children and women. [...]





During 2020 and 2021, the Ombudsman's Office reported three women victims of trafficking. These disappearances in strange conditions recall the stories of other missing young women like Karina Cabarcas Peñata. After filing a report and after ten years of her being missing, her relatives still do not know anything about her.

On February 22, 2023, in an unprecedented ruling, Alexandrith's uncle, with whom she was last seen, received a sentence of 42 years in prison for aggravated forced disappearance. Despite this ruling, the young woman's whereabouts remain uncertain^{1,2}.



A sentence is not enough until the accused tells the true story of her disappearance.



3.7 Corruption

Corruption and human trafficking are deeply intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

Corruption can facilitate human trafficking in various ways, while human trafficking can enable and perpetuate corruption.

In Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perception Index, Colombia received 40 points out of 100 (0 being very high levels of corruption, and 100 being no corruption). A score below 50 points indicates severe levels of corruption in the public sector. Colombia is ranked 87 out of 180 countries analyzed.

What does corruption have to do with human trafficking?

With corruption, governability weakens, rights become relative, impunity thrives, and inequality is exacerbated. Corruption and official complicity can facilitate human trafficking: for example, police officers may warn traffickers about planned raids, public servants may knowingly falsify documentation of people who are then exploited in other countries, and judges and court officials may take bribes to free traffickers or interrupt legal proceedings.

¹² [Montaño, Jhon. \(2024\). Sin rastro de Alexandrith Sarmiento, la niña de 15 años que desapareció en una playa de Cartagena hace 3 años y 4 meses. El Tiempo.](#)





According to the authorities and as covered by the media outlet La Opinión, local politicians, government officials, drug traffickers, and members of Colombia's national security forces, as well as members of the DIJIN's childhood and adolescent unit, knew of a sexual exploitation network and allowed it to continue operating¹³.



Corruption can enable human trafficking by allowing networks to operate **freely and with impunity**, making victims **less likely to report the crime**. Likewise, corruption weakens institutions in Colombia by breaking public trust in the authorities and the justice system. This makes it more challenging to prosecute trafficking and to secure compensation for victims.



3.8 Digital communications

One of the main results of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the transformation of digital communications into recruitment and exploitation tools. Despite the movement limitations implemented in 2020, **exploitation did not stop: it moved into homes and onto the Internet and social networks**.

Today, traffickers **search for and contact their victims through Internet platforms and other social networks**, posting advertisements with attractive job offers in Colombia and other countries, to which victims usually respond positively.

It is undeniable that cases of trafficking that begin with online conversations have increased and diversified, even moving to lesser-known sites on the *dark web*. For many, it is difficult to determine whether an offer posted on the Internet is fake, especially when the need for work is urgent. Sexual exploitation through *webcams*, where victims are forced to perform live sexual acts for online followers, has also increased.

¹³ [Gorder, Gabrielle. \(2022\). Políticos y policías vinculados a red de explotación sexual infantil en Colombia. Insiqth Crime.](#)





The Internet is not only alarming in its ability to foster sexual exploitation. It also **exposes young people to misleading examples of overnight success**. Every day, influencers and YouTubers who appear to achieve success with little effort present themselves as role models. This phenomenon attracts young people with the illusion of quick, visible, and achievable results, detaching them from reality, where success is built over years of study and focus.

As a result, more and more young people are abandoning their studies, seeing them as a waste of time. **A child online is highly vulnerable to human trafficking**. Even more so when we take into account that in Colombia, the phenomenon of digital orphans is readily apparent ¹⁴.

As a society, we still lack the tools to protect ourselves on the Internet, and traffickers are more effective at building seemingly safe and trustworthy connections.



Sara shows a TikTok video on her phone screen in which two girls are conversing. They speak innocently, an innocence that clashes with some of the comments they receive.

How old are you, blonde?' asks one of the users. 'Do you have a boyfriend?' reads another message.

*A second video shows a girl who dances while receiving many likes, a gift that can be monetized on TikTok. From the background, you can see that this girl lives in poverty. You may think you're just dancing, but you're giving away much information. Sara knows well what it means to be captured for sexual exploitation through a social network and therefore recommends being very careful with what is published...*¹⁵



¹⁴ Huérfano digital es una persona que pasa largas horas en línea, a menudo sin supervisión de una persona adulta o guía adecuada. La falta de apoyo y orientación puede hacer que sea particularmente vulnerable a diversos peligros, incluida la Trata de personas.

¹⁵ 20 Minutos. (2023). Víctimas de explotación sexual captadas por redes sociales: "Parecía una conversación inocente y de repente me vi en un polígono".





While we typically think that children and adolescents are the main groups impacted by the dangers of social networks, adults are also highly vulnerable. A growing number of trafficking victims have been captured through platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and Tinder. These social networks are used to promote fake job opportunities, investments, educational opportunities, and romantic relationships, for which traffickers create attractive and deceptive profiles to gain the trust of their victims and lead them into situations of exploitation.



Alicia keeps her eyes anxiously fixed on the proposal she just received on social media. Her best friend from school dazzles her with photos in Mexico, where she seems to be living the high life. 'I'm doing well here, come and I can help you,' she tells her.

Tatiana, from the many dating sites on the Internet, maintains a weeks-long conversation with an older man from another country who tries to seduce her through social networks. 'I like you. Would you like us to meet?' he asks.

*Camila receives a proposal from an Arab acquaintance on WhatsApp to work as a waitress in **Istanbul**, Turkey. The offer allegedly includes payment for the passport, flights, and accommodation for the first few days¹⁶.*



In previous reports, we have highlighted two fundamental techniques used by traffickers to recruit their victims online: **“hunting”** and **“fishing”**.



In **“hunting”**, traffickers create detailed profiles to study potential victims, analyzing their vulnerabilities, interests, and needs. With this information, they develop offers that meet the victims' expectations and desires. For example, they may offer a job that perfectly matches the person's career aspirations or a relationship that meets their emotional needs.

¹⁶ Ávila J. Cristian Camilo. (2021). *Amiga' la engañó con oferta de trabajo para llevarla a red de trata. El Tiempo.*





In **“fishing”**, traffickers use mass advertisements and publications on social networks and other platforms to offer attractive opportunities such as well-paid jobs, cash prizes, or free trips. These offers are designed to attract the attention of many people, with the expectation that some will fall for them. By appealing to a broad audience, traffickers can find those most susceptible to exploitation.

Recognizing and understanding these techniques is crucial to preventing trafficking. Many people cannot identify the offers received from traffickers as fake, which makes them potential victims.

In addition, both adults and young people must be aware of the risks that social networks carry and learn to identify the warning signs. To raise awareness of traffickers' methods, it is crucial to educate ourselves on online safety and how human trafficking occurs in digital contexts. Safety must come first!



3.9 Tourism

Colombia is known for its biodiversity, rich culture, history, and impressive landscapes. The country has made enormous efforts to position itself as an attractive tourist destination, promoting its natural beauty, cuisine, festivals, and hospitality. Tourism campaigns often highlight the diversity of experiences that visitors can enjoy, from beaches and mountains to vibrant cities and historic towns.



Medellín and Cartagena are two of the main tourist destinations in Colombia...According to preliminary data from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, 2023 saw a 23% increase in visitors to the country over 2022. About 5.5 million people, including foreign nationals and Colombians living abroad, visited Colombia, according to official figures¹⁷.



¹⁷ Ramos, Fernando. (2024). *El turismo lleva dólares a Colombia, pero pone a la luz el turismo sexual y la atracción de las drogas*. CNN Español.





Over the last two decades, tourism in Colombia has grown for multiple reasons: the pacification of many territories, improved security, more or less sustained economic growth, as well as aggressive advertising campaigns by national agencies that invite travelers to explore nature, culture, food, sports, and adventure activities. Some campaigns have focused on Colombian women to promote the many tourist destinations in Colombia. For example, in 2005, the Colombia is Passion campaign used a logo that combined a heart with the silhouette of a woman. Additionally, a Colombia is Passion promotional video in English from 2008 explicitly encouraged tourists to discover the beauty of Colombian women (Countless beautiful women and orchids).

While tourism campaigns alone do not intend to encourage sexual exploitation, they can still create an environment that indirectly promotes this type of crime. Emphasizing aspects such as nightlife, physical beauty, and “authentic” experiences may contain subliminal messages that attract tourists seeking sexual services.

CSEC (in the context of travel and tourism) is one of the most visible forms of this problem, and children are the primary victims. In Colombia, cases of the sexual commercial exploitation of children are rising. The Attorney General’s Office announced that between 2021 and 2022, around 8,131 cases entered the system. In Medellín, between 2020 and 2022, social organizations reported 736 victims of exploitation. In Bogotá, figures from the Metropolitan Police show that most of the victims are children (579 victims between 2020 and 2024).

This type of tourism has also been linked to the sale of narcotics, which is why some travel packages offered to foreign tourists include multiple services: all-inclusive hotels, guided tours, parties, and sex and drugs.





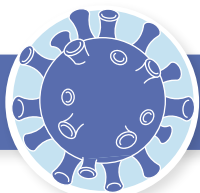
Women, drugs, and partying: this was the package offered by a travel agency in Cartagena

[...] Within the investigation, it was possible to identify that those in charge of the criminal network offered tourist packages to visitors from Europe, North America, and even India (...) The women were presented in a digital catalog, with photos and detailed descriptions of their physical appearance and personality, allowing the tourists to choose who they wanted to have an encounter with. The price varied depending on the client's preferences, establishing a trade based on sexual exploitation (...)



The evidence indicates that the women recruited for this illegal activity were transported to the Manga sector and taken on boats to islands near Cartagena, where parties and sexual encounters took place amid the consumption of narcotics and undignified conditions.¹⁸

It is important to clarify that there are other forms of exploitation in tourism, such as forced labor. Some workers may be subjected to abusive working conditions, particularly in bars, nightclubs, or hotels.



3.10 COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, amplified social vulnerabilities: loss of employment, mobility restrictions, an increase in domestic violence, reduced access to health services, and an increase in situations of exploitation. All of this not only intensified existing vulnerabilities but produced new and devastating effects. COVID-19 exacerbated inequalities and created new barriers to accessing essential resources.

¹⁸ [Diego Rey. \(2024\). Mujeres, drogas y fiesta: así era el paquete turístico que ofrecía una agencia de viajes en Cartagena. Infobae.](#)





1. The global health crisis caused **massive job losses**, lowering incomes for individuals and families and intensifying financial insecurity. Desperation to find new sources of income led many people to accept job offers that turned out to be fraudulent and dangerous, increasing their exposure to exploitation. In Colombia, these difficulties persist even today, reflected in high levels of debt, a persistent lack of decent jobs, and an expansion of informal labor.
2. COVID-19 drove an **increase in the use of digital platforms**, accompanied by the rise in exploitation through the same. The lack of regulation and supervision in digital spaces allowed exploiters to act with greater impunity, enhancing their ability to abuse people without risk of detection.
3. The pandemic forced the national government to **divert resources to the health crisis**, significantly reducing institutional capacity to investigate and prosecute cases of human trafficking. This redistribution of resources severely affected the fight against this crime, weakening rescue operations and the dismantling of criminal networks. As a result, many victims still face barriers to justice.
4. **Victim assistance was also severely affected.** Limitations on the operation of essential services and mobility restrictions hindered effective care. The victims identified during this period had trouble accessing assistance and support, which intensified their situations and delayed their paths to justice and restitution.





4. Human Trafficking in Colombia. Trends and Changes



Human trafficking is in a state of constant evolution, continually adapting to social, political, legal, and technological changes. Methods change, and the ability to attract and recruit victims for subsequent exploitation increases. The crime hides and camouflages to operate more effectively. It evades detection and the intervention of citizens, social organizations, and government officials alike.

For eight years, we have tried to monitor how trafficking transforms and adapts to the current environment. Some of the information we have gathered is summarized in the figures below:



What stays the same

- It is a **normalized crime, invisible and difficult to identify**, which leads to **underreporting**.
- Colombia is a country of **origin, transit, and destination** for men, women, and child victims of trafficking.
- The regular rotation of public servants causes revictimization and breaks continuity in legal and judicial processes.
- **Sexual exploitation** is the most common form of trafficking, and the majority of victims are **women and girls**.
- **The response from the State is slow and poorly coordinated.**



What has changed

- **Trafficking routes and trends** evolve to include new countries of destination and different means of capture.
- The number of **children and teenagers exploited sexually** has increased and **is linked to criminal groups**.
- Trafficking has moved into the home, exploiting victims through the **Internet**.
- **New communication strategies** aim to prevent and raise awareness of trafficking (podcasts, Instagram Reels, TikTok, videoclips)



Between 2015 and 2024, Colombia experienced profound transformations in the dynamics of human trafficking, most notably in the changing tactics of trafficking networks. These transformations underscore the **urgent need** to keep thoroughly investigating and analyzing to ensure that prevention, protection, and enforcement measures are truly adequate and effective.



Please note: The testimonies included are from victims supported by Espacios de Mujer. Their information has been altered to protect their identities.



4.1 Expansion and structural transformation of trafficking networks

Human trafficking networks have expanded to participate in other illicit activities, such as drug trafficking and arms trafficking, which other criminal groups direct.

The integration of these activities has added a new dimension to exploitation. The networks now need people to fill the roles of carrying and selling drugs in the places where exploitation takes place, promoting their consumption. The drugs serve a dual purpose: drug use keeps trafficking victims in a state of submission, and, at the same time, drug sales boost profits for the criminal group. In this way, they generate more income and create cycles of exploitation and addiction that reinforce their control over victims.

There has also been a notable expansion in the number of sites they manage: the same network can operate in up to five or more different places, making them difficult to pin down.

A less obvious factor is the participation of family or community members in these crimes, creating complex and challenging dynamics for victims. When traffickers are relatives, victims may experience a deep conflict between loyalty to their family and acknowledgment of the relative's criminal acts. This can lead to feelings of helplessness, as victims may feel that their options for escape are severely limited.



What's more, fear of retaliation or the potential for further harm to themselves or other loved ones may deter victims from seeking help.

Furthermore, new roles have emerged in these organizations: the phone operator is in charge of coordinating appointments with clients (for sexual exploitation); the nanny or caregiver assumes a role similar to the original handler: taking charge of the coordination, care, and supervision of the victims wherever they are being held.

“I traveled to Ecuador under the promise of working as a salesperson. Upon arrival, I began working in that role briefly so I could reassure my family that I was okay. However, after a few days, [the traffickers] transferred me to a place that resembled a brothel. Once there, they informed me that my real job would consist of prostitution, and they assigned me a phone operator who would be in charge of coordinating appointments with clients.”

“In Europe, in the place where they kept us, there were several young women from Medellín, like me. They forced us to model for the clients, who chose the one they liked the most. This task was carried out by the nanny, a Colombian woman who was in charge of supervising us and enforcing the business rules. The nanny was always accompanied by a man who was armed.”



Another significant change has occurred in the transfer of the victims: instead of being accompanied throughout the trip, the victims now travel to their destinations alone. Current networks trust and delegate their victims to carry out the entire process alone, making the crime even less visible to the authorities.

“At a nightclub, I ran into an old friend who was very well dressed and buying expensive liquor; this caught my attention, and I asked her what she was working on. She said that she would contact me on Facebook with more details.”





“Less than two days later, my friend told me that she was working in Europe and that there were many opportunities there. She offered to give me the contact of someone who could help me work in the cleaning area of a hospital. After talking to this person, I decided to travel to Greece. I sold some of my personal things and asked my family for help to get my passport and plane tickets. Upon arrival at the Athens airport, I received a message on WhatsApp with an address, and they told me to take a taxi, assuring me that they would pay for it...”



4.2 New victim profiles

Although women and children continue to be the most victimized by human trafficking, there has been an increase in the exploitation of men and people from the LGBTQI+ community. We can interpret this as trafficking networks developing more targeted strategies and responding to the changing demands of economic sectors.

The most sought-after profiles in Colombia today are young women between the ages of 18 and 30 (at most 40) who meet specific beauty standards (influenced by narco culture) and are single mothers or the primary providers in their household, who are facing economic hardship and have limited education.

The trafficker may benefit if these women have already engaged in prostitution or performed sexual acts through digital platforms with webcams (as “webcamers”). The trafficker’s ideal profile reflects a more calculated approach, targeting the unique vulnerabilities of women who are most intrigued by fraudulent job offers and wind up being exploited and controlled.





Milagros is a 28-year-old Colombian woman. Like many other women in Colombia, she is a single mother, the sole provider in the home, and faces significant financial challenges. She makes a living providing sexual services through different platforms such as Onlyfans, Manyvids, and MyM Fans, but the income is not always enough to meet her needs. This constant financial pressure motivates her to seek new opportunities to improve her situation.

One day, Milagros sees on Facebook that her friend Laura is posting photos from cities around the world. Laura tells her that she now works in Greece where she models underwear. At the studio, women can earn money modeling: 15 minutes of work is worth 50 euros; of these, 25 euros are for the studio and 25 for the model. The work is flexible, and the environment seems safe. Milagros is intrigued by the life Laura appears to have, senses the opportunity to boost her income, and expresses her interest in the offer. Laura tells her to keep an eye on her cell phone as she will soon give her the contact of the place's owner to coordinate the details of her trip to Greece... Milagros travels to Greece a few days later, but when she arrives, the job that awaits her is not modeling but forced prostitution.



These eligibility criteria do not apply to men, who are mainly recruited for forced labor in factories and the agriculture and mining industries. Currently, Poland seems to be the country attracting the most Colombian men for work...

4.2.1 Rise in the exploitation of Venezuelan migrants

The migration crisis in Latin America has resulted in a significant increase in the exploitation of Venezuelan migrants. Seeking to improve their living conditions outside of Venezuela, they often have an irregular immigration status that hinders their access to social services and protection, making them easy targets for trafficking networks.





4.3 Evolving recruitment strategies

Technological advances and social changes affect victim recruitment strategies, which are increasingly alluring, sophisticated, and covert.

4.3.1 Internet and social media use

Platforms like *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *Tinder*, as well as the messaging apps *WhatsApp* and *Telegram*, have become vital tools for contacting and luring potential victims. Traffickers use them to spread fake job offers and educational opportunities and establish romantic relationships, all of which facilitate broader and more discreet recruitment.

“ I met him on *Tinder*: he was a very attractive Romanian man who appeared to have a comfortable life. We maintained a friendly relationship on this platform for about a year, during which I shared many aspects of my personal life and confided in him. We agreed that he would come to Colombia to meet my family and then we would travel to Turkey together.

Upon arriving in Colombia, he offered me a job at his travel company, *Toures Colombia*, which, according to him, had two subsidiaries: one in Colombia and another in Turkey. I let myself be fooled and, a month later, I decided to travel with him.



4.3.2 Fake profiles on social networks

Traffickers are highly skilled at designing fake profiles that present them as attractive and compelling, with photos and descriptions that appear legitimate and professional.

These profiles have the sole purpose of deceiving people and obtaining as much information as possible about them, identifying situations of vulnerability to exploit. These profiles do not only apply to job proposals.



An ever-increasing number of victims meet romantic partners through these means, who ultimately exploit them for different purposes.

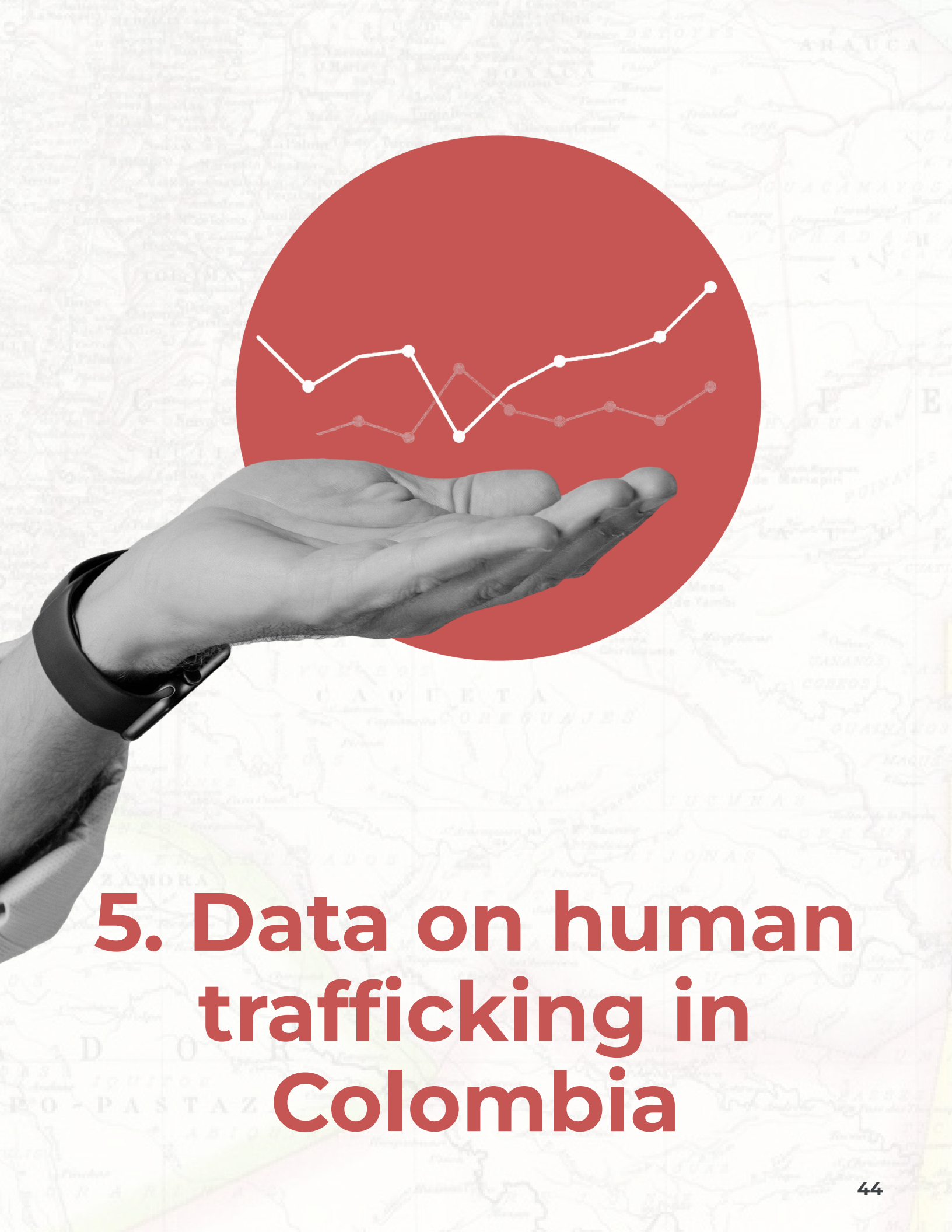
4.3.3 Tempting offers

The leading tactic traffickers use to lure victims is to offer them something: the fulfillment of their personal goals, a perfect life, or simply the ability to meet their basic needs. On other occasions, the trafficker is more transparent about the work they are offering, but the potential economic benefit for the victim outweighs the potential risk. In other words, the victim is not always deceived about the work they will have to do, but upon reaching the destination, the job conditions change and, worse, were not previously negotiated and agreed upon.

“A few years ago, I worked as a prostitute. At first, things were going pretty well for me, but over time, I got tired of that lifestyle. So, I decided to work in a clothing store and then a casino. Both occupations became very exhausting for me. On one occasion, a hairdresser friend told me they were looking for women to work in Japan in “you already know what,” he tells me. They were offering better pay than I was making here at two jobs. I didn’t think much about it since they told me that a flight with several girls was leaving soon, so I accepted the offer. Once in Japan, after living in unfortunate conditions, which I had never agreed to, I was sent to perform a service for a client, who took advantage of me and held me against my will for approximately six months. During that time, I suffered physical, sexual, and emotional aggression. Plus, I got pregnant. When I finally managed to escape, there wasn’t much I could do, so I wound up having the baby.”



The offers are almost always exclusive and require immediate acceptance: the goal is to pressure the person so that they have no time to evaluate the risks and verify the offer’s legitimacy.



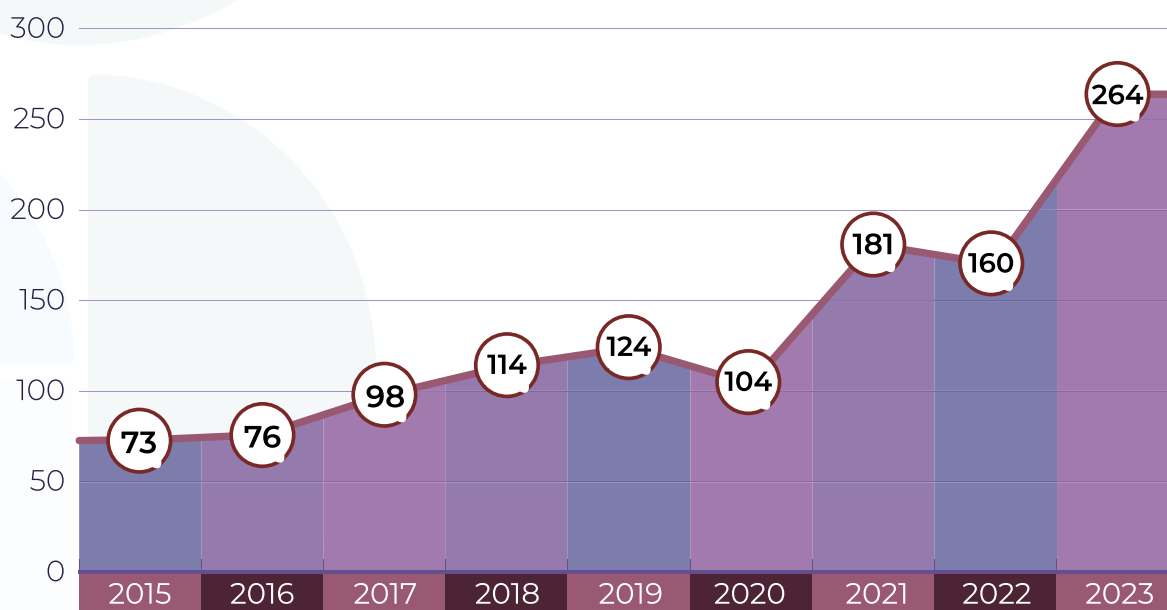
5. Data on human trafficking in Colombia



In each of our annual Assessments from 2015 to 2023, we have shared data reported by all the entities contacted about trafficking cases in the country. We have compiled and summarized this data in graphs to provide a more complete view of how this crime has evolved over the past eight years.

However, despite the data's relevance (they are the only official numbers we have!), we must reiterate that these figures underestimate the true magnitude of trafficking in Colombia. The extent of trafficking is probably greater due to underreporting and limitations in data collection.

Figure 1. Trafficking cases in Colombia between 2015 and 2023



Note: Ministry of the Interior (2024), Response to information request from Espacios de Mujer, February 9, 2024. Reference: RAD 2024-1-004044-008013 ID 276529. Corporación Espacios de Mujer, I-VIII Assessment of the implementation of anti-trafficking policies in Colombia (2016-2022).



2024: As of November 30, 2024, the Ministry of the Interior reports 395 people who are victims of trafficking, a figure that determines an increase in the total number of victims compared to previous years.

(Source: Human Trafficking Crime Observatory)

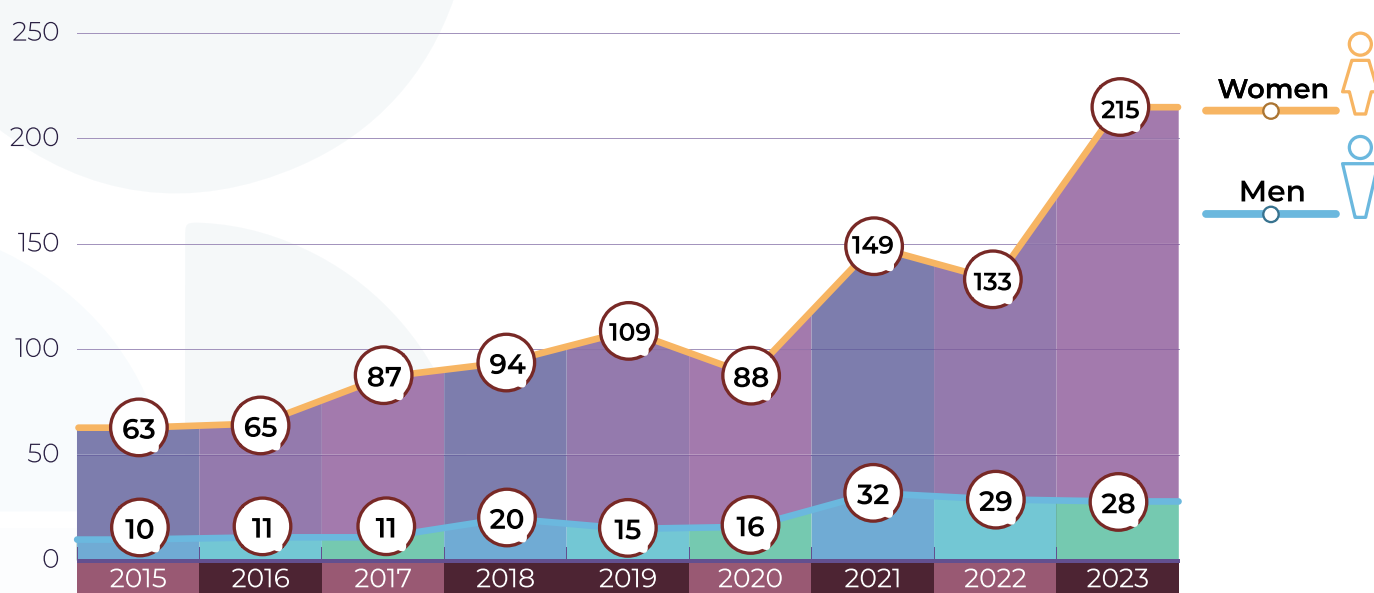
This increase in cases should not be interpreted unequivocally as a genuine rise in human trafficking in Colombia.



It could be the result of improved identification mechanisms and an increase in reporting. In other words, the increase in reported cases could be attributed to a better capacity to detect and record these cases and a greater willingness on the part of victims to go to the authorities.

It should be noted that the authorities still lack the credibility required for all cases to be reported.

Figure 2: Gender identity of victims between 2015 and 2023



Note: Ministry of the Interior (2024), Response to information request from Espacios de Mujer, February 9, 2024. Reference: RAD 2024-1-004044-008013 ID 276529. Corporación Espacios de Mujer, I-VIII Assessment of the implementation of anti-trafficking policies in Colombia (2016-2022).



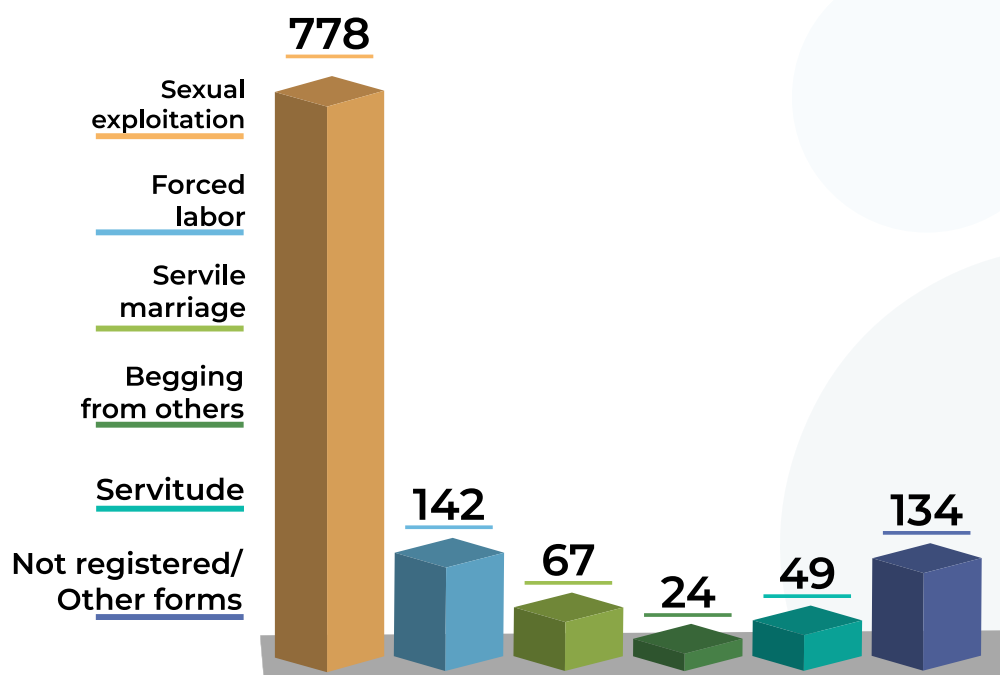
As of November 30, 2024, of the 395 victims of trafficking reported by the Ministry of the Interior, 332 are women (84%).

(Source: Human Trafficking Crime Observatory)

Data from 2024 show that the face of trafficking victims is still predominantly female. In this aspect, Colombia is aligned with the global trend.



Figure 3: Forms of human trafficking in Colombia between 2015 and 2023



Note: Ministry of the Interior (2024), Response to information request from Espacios de Mujer, February 9, 2024. Reference: RAD 2024-1-004044-008013 ID 276529. Corporación Espacios de Mujer, I-VIII Assessment of the implementation of anti-trafficking policies in Colombia



2024: As of November 30, 2024, there are 296 (75%) cases of sexual exploitation, 38 (9%) of forced labor, 8 of servitude, 3 of servile marriage, slavery and other forms of exploitation; the rest (44) do not record the purpose (11%)

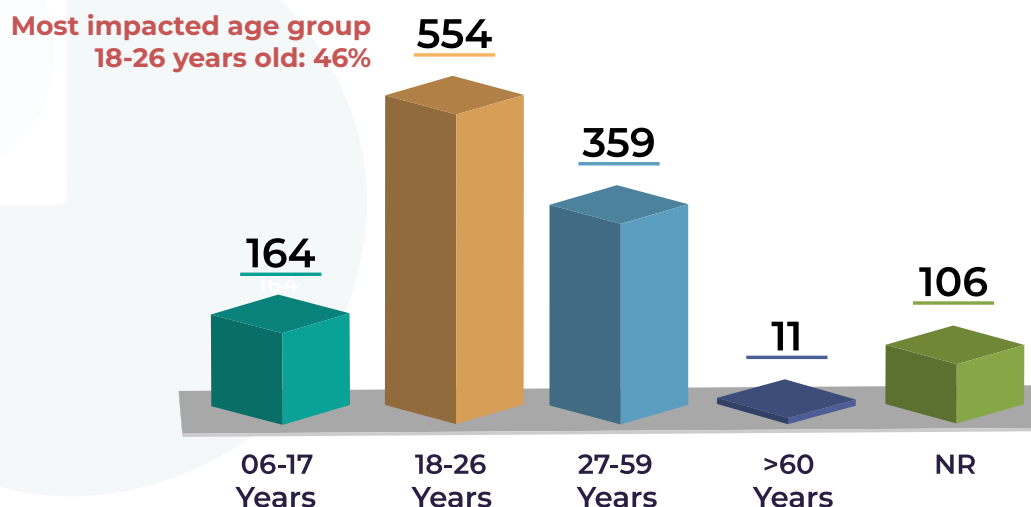
(Source: Human Trafficking Crime Observatory)

In Colombia, sexual exploitation is the dominant form of trafficking, with 65% of reported cases. All the other forms of trafficking make up much smaller percentages, with forced labor at 11% and all other forms comprising 24% (*forced panhandling, domestic servitude, forced recruitment, servile marriage*)

Not only gender but age determines the form of trafficking: young women, girls, and adolescents are most often victims of sexual exploitation and forced prostitution, followed by forced labor. On the other hand, children are also exploited in forced panhandling and the production of child sexual abuse material (See Figure 4).



Figure 4: Age range of human trafficking victims in Colombia between 2015 and 2023



Note: Ministry of the Interior (2024), Response to information request from Espacios de Mujer, February 9, 2024. Reference: RAD 2024-1-004044-008013 ID 276529. Corporación Espacios de Mujer, I-VIII Assessment of the implementation of anti-trafficking policies in Colombia (2016-2022).



2024: As of November 30, 2024, victims between 18 and 59 years of age remain the majority, with 272 cases (68%). It is noteworthy that **girls**, boys and adolescents represent 6% of cases with 26 victims.

(Source: Human Trafficking Crime Observatory)



6. Colombia is a country of origin, transit, and destination of human trafficking





Due to its strategic location at the northernmost point of South America, flanked by the Pacific and Atlantic oceans (*which facilitate the transport of victims to other countries*), combined with socioeconomic and political factors, Colombia faces multiple and complex challenges related to this crime.

It acts as a **place of origin**, in which many people, especially women, girls, and boys, are recruited to be exploited under false pretenses.

It also serves as a critical **transit hub**, where transnational criminal networks establish connections and transportation routes, facilitating the transport of victims to other countries and within Colombia.

As a **destination**, it generates high demand for victims of sexual exploitation, followed by forced labor in sectors such as agriculture, mining, construction, the entertainment industry, and sports.

It is important to note that victims exploited within Colombia can also come from other countries and regions. This is the case of the Venezuelan population in Colombia, who present an easy target for trafficking networks that take advantage of their often irregular immigration status to traffick them.

The majority of Colombian trafficking victims come from the coffee region, Bogotá, Valle del Cauca, and Antioquia and are transported to any other part of the world but especially to other countries in the Caribbean and Latin America, Asia, and Western Europe. According to data from the Ministry of the Interior, 30% of Colombian victims have been registered in only six countries (See Figure 5).





Figure 5: Destination for external trafficking of Colombian victims between 2015 and 2023



Note: Ministry of the Interior (2024), Response to information request from Espacios de Mujer, February 9, 2024. Reference: RAD 2024-1-004044-008013 ID 276529. Corporación Espacios de Mujer, I-VIII Assessment of the implementation of anti-trafficking policies in Colombia (2016-2022).



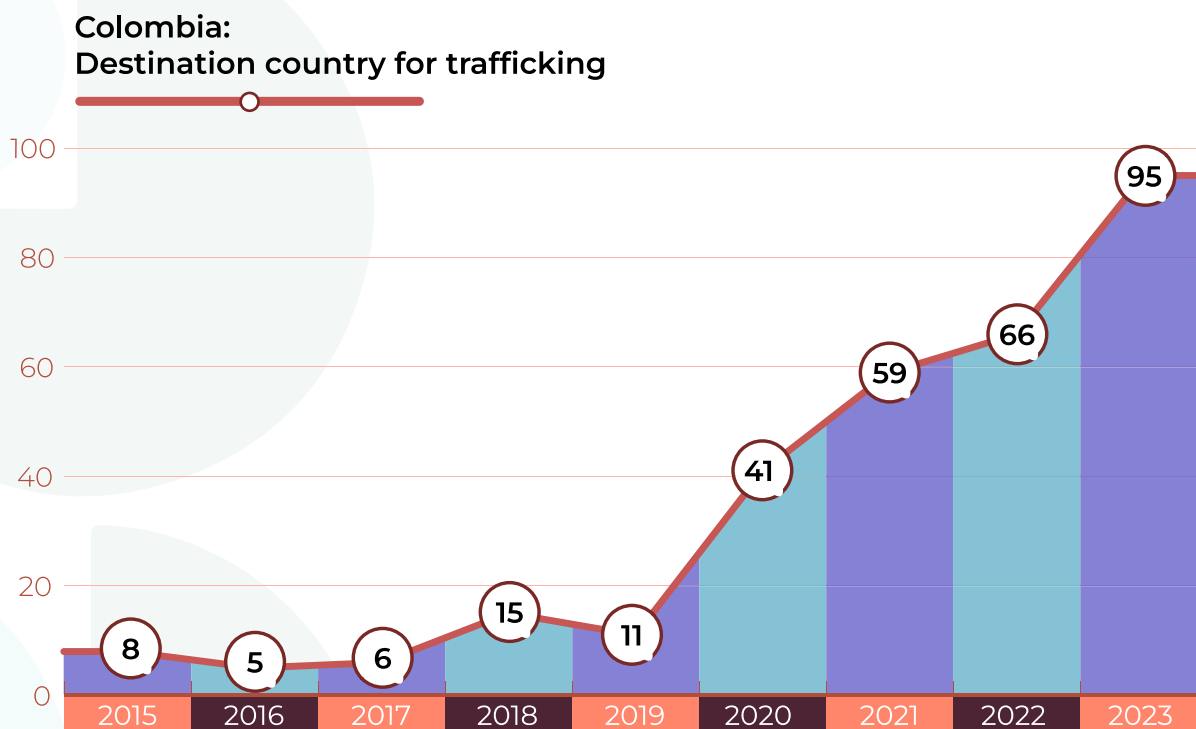
2024: As of November 30, 2024, the trend of reporting cases of external trafficking continues: 321 people were exploited in other countries vs. 57 people exploited within Colombia (17 cases do not report information on this matter).

(**Source:** Human Trafficking Crime Observatory)

When Colombian nationals are victimized in other countries, the Colombian consulates typically refer the cases to the Operating Center for the Fight Against Human Trafficking (COAT). At the consulates, victims report what they experienced and request repatriation to Colombia. Thanks to the coordination of these consulates with international organizations, resources are secured so that the victims can return home and, once in Colombia, receive the support they need.



Figure 6: Colombia as a destination country for foreign victims between 2015 and 2023



Note: Ministry of the Interior (2024), Response to information request from Espacios de Mujer, February 9, 2024. Reference: RAD 2024-1-004044-008013 ID 276529. Corporación Espacios de Mujer, I-VIII Assessment of the implementation of anti-trafficking policies in Colombia (2016-2022).



2024: As of November 30, 2024, there are 121 foreign victims in Colombia. Of these, 114 are of Venezuelan nationality.

(Source: Human Trafficking Crime Observatory)

Colombia is not only a country that “exports” trafficking victims; it has also become a destination country for foreign victims: Venezuelan women forced into prostitution in Cartagena, Indigenous Ecuadorian children taken to panhandle for others in Cali, migrants of different nationalities recruited by illegal armed groups to commit crimes, among others.

Finally, Colombia is the origin and destination of Colombian trafficking victims, that is, a country with cases of trafficking within its borders. Internal trafficking is particularly difficult to address since the victims, being in their own country, face more significant challenges in acknowledging and reporting their circumstances. This leads to a low reporting rate and heightened complexity in preventing and identifying these cases.

7.Regulatory Framework





The fight against human trafficking requires a regulatory framework that establishes legal foundations, provides clear guidelines for authorities, and ensures adequate protection and support for victims.

The key international legal instruments to address human trafficking are the [Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#) (2000), with its two protocols: [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children \(Palermo Protocol\)](#), (2000) and [the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air](#) (2000), el [ILO Forced or Compulsory Labor Convention No. 29](#) (1930), [ILO Convention No. 105 concerning the abolition of forced labor](#) (1957) [the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor](#) (1999), [the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development).

Colombia declared human trafficking a crime with Law 985 of 2005. Since that year, the State has issued decrees that addressed support for victims and adopted the National Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons, the central national policy on this subject.

Six (6) decrees

- **[Decree 4319 of 2006.](#)**

Establishes a particular budgetary account dedicated to combating human trafficking

- **[Decree 4786 of 2008.](#)**

Adopts the first National Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons 2007-2012

- **[Decree 1069 of 2014.](#)**

Decree on assistance to victims

- **[Decree 1066 of 2015.](#)**

Unique Regulatory Decree of the Administrative Sector of the Interior

- **[Decree 1036 of 2016.](#)**

Adopts the second National Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons 2016-2018

- **[Decree 1818 of 2020.](#)**

Adopts the third National Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons 2020-2024



One resolution - [Resolution 1328 of 2021](#) created the Operational Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, a strategic body that seeks to amplify the impacts of investigation and enforcement of the crime.

Principles, approaches, and areas of intervention organize the national public policy against trafficking. Each area (coordination and sustainability, protection and assistance, investigation and enforcement, knowledge generation and management, prevention, international cooperation, migration and borders) defines its objectives, strategies, goals, and results. Every four years, the government issues a new strategy to reflect the country's current challenges. The national government is currently preparing for the strategy that will take effect in 2025.

In the Colombian regulatory framework, human trafficking intersects with legal areas:

Relating to migration: The Comprehensive Migratory Policy ([Law 2136 of 2021](#)), sets the definitions, principles, and guidelines for migration policy and confirms the Colombian government's commitment to the adoption of measures designed to prevent, protect, and assist victims of trafficking in migrants and investigate and enforce the crime.

Relating to the armed conflict ([Law 1719 of 2014](#) added article 141B to the Colombian Penal Code), which included the crime of human trafficking in a protected person for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

The Colombian Constitutional Court has delivered two significant verdicts on the subject:

Ruling C-470/2016

Eliminates the requirement that victims of trafficking file a criminal report to receive mid-term assistance.

Ruling T-236/2021

Orders a series of structural changes aimed at improving care for victims of trafficking.



The **Interagency Committee for the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons** (The Interagency Committee) is the advisory body of the national government responsible for coordinating the actions carried out by the Colombian government through the National Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons. The Committee members are the following government agencies:

Interagency Committee for the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons

Ministry of the Interior	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Ministry of Labor
Ministry of Health and Social Protection	Ministry of Education	Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing
Ministry of Defense	Ministry of Justice	Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications
National Police Force	Colombia Migration	Presidential Advisor for Women's Equality
The Office of the Ombudsman	The Office of the Inspector General	
Financial Information and Analysis Unit.	INTERPOL	The Office of the Attorney General

Supporting members

Senior Presidential Advisor for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law

Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism

The Committee as a whole meets several times a year and, within it, has three thematic subcommittees: (1) Protection and assistance, (2) Investigation and enforcement, and (3) Knowledge generation and management.

It is important to highlight that members do not all have the same level of responsibility and commitment in the fight against trafficking, and some of them lack internal policies or protocols that address the issue. Notably, most of them do not have human, financial, and technical resources specially assigned to the fight against human trafficking.

8.Actions against Trafficking





Throughout this report, we have stated that our requests for information have focused on the actions implemented to prevent trafficking, assist victims, and enforce the crime. Therefore, we feel it is important to define each of these action areas.



Prevention.

Definition

To prevent indicates to prepare, avoid, or anticipate something. In relation to human trafficking, prevention means **taking appropriate measures** to stop this crime from occurring.

For Espacios de Mujer

preventing human trafficking is not limited to informing the public and raising awareness about this severe violation of human rights; effective prevention requires more profound and comprehensive actions that address the root causes and factors that lead to and perpetuate the crime.



- a) **Expand access to social services**, so that all people have equal access to the support and assistance they need.
- b) **Generate career opportunities**, to provide viable economic alternatives that reduce vulnerability to exploitation.
- c) **Develop job skills**, training people areas allowing them to access diversified and sustainable work.

This preventive approach aims to create social and economic conditions that minimize the risks of violence and exploitation.



Protection and assistance.

Definition

Protect and assist means safeguarding, caring for, helping, or defending a person from danger. In relation to human trafficking, protection and assistance means **supporting a victim** in restoring their rights by providing timely and specialized services.

For Espacios de Mujer

restoration for victims implies much more than mere access to immediate care or essential and emergency services (like the ones currently provided by the State). Assisting a victim of human trafficking must aim to restore their rights fully, and this is accomplished through a process of support and psychosocial care.





*A true restoration of the rights of a victim requires a broad, continuous, and interdisciplinary process (from a psychology and social work perspective) that includes (1) processing the grief related to their experience to begin healing emotionally, (2) resignifying the facts to understand and accept what they experienced, therein making progress towards recovery and (3) share their stories and experiences with other people in similar situations, to strengthen their social support network. Psychosocial support and counseling not only help victims overcome trauma but allow them to change their attitude toward life and gain the ability to restart their lives. The integration of these care elements allows for the **transformation of victims into survivors** with the capacity to face the future with a new perspective and tools for a full and more autonomous life.*

- e) Investigation and enforcement.** These two words describe investigating to uncover an action and then taking it through the legal and judicial process when that action is suspicious and illegal. In relation to human trafficking, investigation and enforcement mean prosecuting and punishing the crime and guaranteeing **access to justice for victims**.

8.1 The National Government

All State institutions at all levels in Colombia are obligated to comply with the commitments made in a range of public policies (Law 985/2005, National Strategies to Combat Trafficking in Persons) and commit to following up, evaluating their actions, developing training programs specifically designed for the target population and region, making accurate diagnoses, and taking into account any permanent changes in trafficking dynamics.

Over eight years (from 2015 to 2023), we have asked the State what it has done specifically to combat human trafficking: what actions and measures it has taken to prevent trafficking or support victims, how it has prosecuted offenders and ensured justice was served, and how much money it has invested in this fight.

Some institutions have responded to us in detail, others less so, and still others never responded at all. Some of our questions have turned out to be “very delicate,” so they have remained unanswered, such as the budget issue or the management of victim support services. There have been many words, promises, and commitments but few concrete actions.



The questions that have guided us over the past eight years have covered the following topics:

- **Internal policies:** *Are there specific protocols, programs, guides, or manuals on human trafficking in your institution?*
- **Information gathering:** Does your institution have territorial diagnoses, systems for collecting quantitative and qualitative data, or thematic research?
- **Accountability:** Do you publish the data and information produced on your institution's website in a way that is understandable and accessible to the public? Does your institution have a monitoring and follow-up system for the cases handled?
- **Assigned personnel:** Does your institution have personnel exclusively dedicated to support for victims of human trafficking? What are their qualifications?
- **Budget:** Does your institution have a budget specifically assigned to implementing actions to prevent trafficking, assist victims, or prosecute offenders?



MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

The Ministry of the Interior (MinInterior) is the State entity with the most significant responsibility in the fight against trafficking. Through the Subdirectorate of Government, Territorial Management and the Fight against Trafficking (which is linked to the Directorate of Security, Citizen Coexistence and Government), it establishes the guidelines for public policy, plans, and actions in this area.

The MinInterior coordinates the Technical Secretariat of the Interagency Committee, coordinates the Anti-Trafficking Operational Center (COAT), and directs the Group to Fight Human Trafficking, which advises local entities in the implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons and the development and monitoring of action plans. It has a budget specifically allocated to the fight against human trafficking.

Over these past eight years, the MinInterior has contributed more information to the Assessment than any other government agency, answering our questions in whole or in part.



For **PREVENTION**, the MinInterior periodically reports the performance of:

- **Information and awareness campaigns and workshops**, designed for both the general population and target audiences.
- **Technical assistance** to local anti-trafficking committees for developing, implementing, and evaluating action plans.
- **Information and training** on the National Prevention Plan to raise awareness of how trafficking works and how to spot it, with an emphasis on at-risk populations, including women, people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, migrants and refugees, and children, among others.
- **Training** for public officials, security forces, and other relevant actors to build capacity for identifying, preventing, and responding to cases.
- **Management of the Free National Line 018000 52 20 20** where callers can receive guidance, request information, or report cases.
- **Fairs, Roundtables, and Binational Meetings** with Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and Argentina, countries that have joined Colombia in signing a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the prevention, investigation, and control of human trafficking and the protection and assistance to victims.
- **Interinstitutional coordination** with international organizations and civil society organizations to develop educational materials.

For **PROTECTION and ASSISTANCE**, it has coordinated the provision of **immediate and medium-term assistance** services to victims, including medical, psychosocial, and legal support. Through the COAT, it has also coordinated the actions carried out by the different entities that make up the Interagency Committee.

For **KNOWLEDGE GENERATION** it shares activity from **the Human Trafficking Crime Observatory**, which collects and analyzes data on human trafficking to identify trends, patterns, and areas of greatest vulnerability—essential information for designing effective prevention strategies.

Regarding **INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**, the MinInterior works in close collaboration with other countries and international organizations to strengthen the fight against human trafficking on a global level.



Noteworthy actions:

1. In 2021, it developed the Protocol to Identify, Protect, and Assist Victims of Human Trafficking in Migratory Contexts.
2. In 2021, it signed the Strategic Alliance with the Tourism Sector to Prevent Human Trafficking (ASOBARES, CORPOTURISMO, COTELCO, ACODRES, ANATO, FONTUR) to involve the private sector in efforts to prevent human trafficking.
3. Since 2021, it has led the Operational Committee to Fight Human Trafficking, a high-level strategic body aimed at strengthening the investigation and enforcement processes related to human trafficking.

Conclusions from CIVIL SOCIETY:

Due to the MinInterior's level of responsibility, we believe it necessary to improve the quantity and the quality of the data and documents produced to allow the public to access current, clear, and exhaustive information on the State's efforts to combat human trafficking. The reported numbers do not always coincide with those reported to us by the local governments, and sometimes, they lack key variables, such as the type of assistance and services provided or the gender identity of the victims. It is challenging to understand trafficking if we lack reliable data; therefore, we need an operational, institutional website that provides updated information.

As Law 985/2005 requires the Ministries, other members of the Committee, and the Technical Secretariat of the Interagency Committee to prepare regular reports on their actions against human trafficking for Congress and the President, we call for these entities to make those reports available to citizens by publishing them in their information channels.

Finally, to prepare for the next National Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons, it is vital to introduce redistributive policies that recognize disparities related to gender, ethnicity, and immigration status, always with a focus on human rights. Short- and medium-term strategies should include awareness campaigns, training, risk map development, and integrating community-based methods, especially when considering unique vulnerabilities. This work should aim to improve living conditions for people, groups, and communities.



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN RELATIONS

Human trafficking is a cross-border phenomenon that requires effective **international cooperation** therefore, this Ministry plays a fundamental role. This Ministry:

- **Establishes bilateral and multilateral agreements** with other countries to combat human trafficking. Between 2012 and 2018, it signed Memorandums of Understanding with Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, Honduras, El Salvador, Paraguay, Costa Rica, Peru, Panama, and Brazil to coordinate joint actions against this transnational crime.

In April 2024, it signed a memorandum of understanding with Brazil for the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of the crime of human trafficking, assistance and protection for victims, and knowledge sharing.

- **Participates in international forums** and the implementation of **global policies** against this crime.

In October 2022, it presented and led the negotiations of [Resolution 11/8 of the 11th Conference of the Parties](#) to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (COP UNTOC), which aimed to strengthen the Protocol's application.

In October 2023, it co-chaired for the first time the Working Group on Human Trafficking of the COP UNTOC at its 13th Session.

- **It collaborates with international organizations** such as the IOM and the UNODC.

For the 2021-2024 period, it signed two important cooperation instruments: (1) the new Country Strategy of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Colombia; (2) the Country Programmatic Framework of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Colombia (UNODC).



Noteworthy actions:

1. In the 2017-2019 period, it cooperated with the **Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants (GLO.ACT)**. This program supports the Colombian government in the areas of protection and support for victims and people at risk, as well as prevention, legal investigation, and enforcement in both areas. The program aims to strengthen the fight against human trafficking and solidify the fight against migrant smuggling. It is a joint initiative of the European Union and the UNODC, implemented in partnership with the IOM and UNICEF.
2. During the 2022-2027 period, **it is committed to the United States in the Child Protection Compact (CPC) Partnership**, which aims to build the capacities of national entities in the areas of prevention, protection, and prosecution of child trafficking, child labor, sexual exploitation of children, and the forced recruitment of minors by illegal armed groups.

Conclusions from CIVIL SOCIETY:

Despite the efforts and commitments secured through international agreements, there is no clarity about the current circumstances of foreign trafficking victims in Colombia, nor about what level of coordination exists with their countries of origin.

It seems to us that a more forceful response to trafficking requires that this entity continue training Consulate officials abroad on the identification and response to cases of human trafficking, as well as the allocation of adequate financial and human resources.

It is important to highlight that, to date, **Colombia has not yet signed onto** the Protocol Against the Illicit Trafficking of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air, which complements the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The bill was filed in the House of Representatives in May 2024 (#450/2024) and was approved in the first debate in June, but there is still a long (legislative) way to go before its final approval.



This office is deeply committed to the fight against human trafficking, from prevention and support for victims who return from abroad. It has a dedicated budget and internal assistance protocols. It serves repatriated Colombian and foreign victims who need some form of help, management, procedure, or guidance from the entity upon entry or during their stay in the country. In the case of a victim who is a foreign national, Colombia Migration evaluates their immigration status and, if they are in an irregular situation in the country, carries out all the necessary procedures to legally guarantee their stay while the other entities carry out the process of reestablishing their rights. What's more, this person is exempt from any payment resulting from sanctions they may have incurred due to their irregular stay in the country.

Concerning the prevention of trafficking, Colombia Migration regularly conducts training for its officials so that they are equipped with the appropriate tools and skills. Since 2018, Colombia Migration has used its *Guide to Procedures, actions, and Strategies for Intervention in Human Rights*, which provides specific instructions to agency officials on how to deal with trafficking cases. As a result of the challenges presented by the abuse of communication technologies, Colombia Migration formed an Operational Group with judicial police powers (in cooperation with the AGO) that conducts investigations into the use of webcams and has achieved significant results in apprehending offenders.



Noteworthy actions:

- **In 2020, Colombia Migration launched LibertApp**, an application designed to save lives from human trafficking. Alerts generated by the tool have led the Human Rights Observation Group and the Judicial Police Group of the Migration Verification Subdirectorates of Colombia Migration, in coordination with the COAT and other national and international authorities, to conduct rescue operations in Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Greece, and China.





Application achievements to date (June 2024):

- Forty victims of human trafficking were rescued (25 Colombians, 14 Venezuelans, and 1 Panamanian, trafficked in the forms of forced labor, domestic servitude, and sexual exploitation).
- The panic button, which immediately sends the geolocation of the person who activates it, has been activated on 161 occasions.
- The application has received 248 phone calls, which go directly to the national toll-free line 018000 522020.
- More than 6,000 users have registered in Colombia (3,989), Venezuela (462), Brazil (95), the United States (93), Argentina (64), Mexico (62), Ecuador (47), Italy and Peru (22), and other countries (239).

Conclusions from CIVIL SOCIETY:

Although the commitment of this agency in the areas of prevention and victim support is admirable, we are struck by the fact that there is no data on the number of foreign nationals entering Colombia who visit mainly for tourism and have been associated with complaints of human trafficking. Considering the events covered by the national news, it would be important to start examining the link between these phenomena (international tourism and exploitation in travel and tourism), and Colombia Migration holds the ideal position to perform this type of analysis thanks to its role in monitoring the flow of entry into the country.



Ministry of Labor

This Ministry is not known for its work on human trafficking. It leads actions on prevention by identifying and raising awareness of fraudulent job offers - the main method of recruiting victims - and supports legitimate employment searches through the Public Employment Service, a network of authorized providers through which it seeks to minimize the risks associated with these offers.



Noteworthy actions:

- **In 2021, in partnership with the UNODC,** the Ministry of Labor developed the Mechanism for the Identification of Possible Cases of Human Trafficking for the Purposes of Forced Labor, an active search tool for cases of trafficking in the form of forced labor in Colombia. The country's labor inspectors are primarily responsible for the operation and application. The mechanism has a referral process developed with the AGO to initiate and expedite any resulting legal action. The current government has proposed changes to better align with the guidelines established in the National Development Plan. These adjustments are in process to ensure that the mechanism aligns with the government's new policies and objectives.

Conclusions from CIVIL SOCIETY:

To date, Colombia has not reported complaints of forced labor. Identifying trafficking cases related to forced labor, with a special focus on migrant, Afro-descendant, and Indigenous populations, is essential, especially given the strong presence of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in the workforce.

Here, we share a case of forced labor in the city of Bogotá in 2014, sentenced by the Supreme Court of Justice as a case of trafficking in the form of domestic servitude.

A woman paid for the tickets for a young Indigenous woman to travel from the city of Mitú to Bogotá. She offered her shelter and food under pretext of employing her as a live-in housekeeper, however, once in her home, she was assigned household chores from six in the morning to ten at night without days off; she was not allowed contact with her family or any other person. She also could not leave the house; it was kept locked. She did not receive any compensation for her services.

The Court determined that this was a case of human trafficking after evidence showed that the offender transported and received a young Indigenous woman for exploitation through domestic servitude, characterized by international standards as a form of slavery.

The offender, sentenced to 158 months in prison, had used debt as a mechanism of coercion to sustain the exploitation. She told the victim that she had to work to pay for a decorative household item that she broke, which cost five million pesos. To pay it off, the victim had to work for about two years without compensation.



SENA - Colombia's National Learning Service

SENA plays a significant role in helping victims rebuild their lives. It offers job training programs and projects to improve their employment prospects and entry into the world of formal work (all through the Public Employment Agency). All of its activities are strategies for victims to improve their self-confidence and independence and find a means to support themselves and their families.

In our Assessments, the data provided by SENA have shown limited coverage of professional and human development for victims of human trafficking, a concerning reality when one considers that the lack of employment is one of the primary causes of trafficking in Colombia.

Conclusions from CIVIL SOCIETY:

A lack of communication persists between the different regions of Colombia and central headquarters: While local authorities report having referred victims to the services provided by SENA in their regions, SENA's national headquarters reports that no trafficking victim has been referred to their service (nor, consequently, received their service). Currently, SENA has no record of trafficking victims who have accessed its courses.

All people can attend training courses or access job offers through SENA without specifying their circumstances (in this case, victims of trafficking). However, it would be valuable to include this information to determine the effectiveness of this service for trafficking victims. Victims have priority access to SENA courses by law, but SENA sets the schedule for a course only when the course has a minimum number of participants. Victims cannot take a course that interests them if not enough other people sign up.





This Ministry does not have a specific role in the fight against trafficking, but it is responsible for ensuring the health of victims.

The report that public and private health service-providing institutions make to the Public Health Surveillance System - Gender and Domestic Violence identifies sexual exploitation and human trafficking. This report uses the definition of human trafficking included in the Public Health Surveillance Protocol for Gender Violence and Domestic Violence, which states: *“Human Trafficking: is any act through which people are marketed as objects to satisfy sexual and labor exploitation markets through the recruitment, transfer, reception and shelter of the victim.”*

Health service providers implement the Comprehensive Health Care Protocol for Victims of Sexual Violence, a methodological and conceptual tool with essential and indispensable criteria for the comprehensive approach to victims of sexual violence. This Protocol recognizes the autonomy of victims as paramount when medical recommendations are offered at any point during any procedure performed for the comprehensive care of a victim of sexual violence.



Noteworthy actions:

- The Public Health Surveillance System for Gender Violence, Domestic Violence and Attacks with Chemical Agents annually reports data related to human trafficking in the form of sexual exploitation, covered by the General Health Social Security System. In 2019, 2020, and 2021, 28, 25, and 29 people were reported respectively.





Conclusions from CIVIL SOCIETY:

This Ministry does not have a specific strategy or budget to combat human trafficking. However, as an agency with full access to school environments and vulnerable communities, it has an excellent opportunity to lead effective prevention and awareness campaigns.

The current focus of the Ministry of Health has been limited exclusively to the identification and care of victims of sexual exploitation or forced prostitution, given that it only provides reports of when it activates care routes as a result of sexual violence (*called the fuchsia code*), *ignoring* other ways the exploitation may affect the physical and mental health of the victims (*malnutrition, anemia, hypo/hyperthyroidism, impact on the immune system due to lowered defenses, post-traumatic stress disorders, anxiety, and depression, among others*).

The absence of specialized mental health care and the limited focus on physical health underscores the need to adopt a more comprehensive approach to the care of trafficking victims, expanding the coverage of health services and including specialized care to address all dimensions of the exploitation's impact on victims' lives.

The physical and psychological effects that trafficking victims suffer may be linked not only to the trafficking experience itself but to a long chain of intersectional violence that occurred before the trafficking, resulting from social exclusion and marginalization. It would, therefore, be essential for the Ministry of Health and Social Protection to develop comprehensive health programs, free of charge, that are guaranteed to groups that require special protection on the part of the State.

Specifically relating to victim assistance, we see that this Ministry does not coordinate with local trafficking committees on the reception of victims upon their arrival in Colombia, preventing both the opportunity for immediate medical attention and the registration of the victims within the health system for those who do not have Sisben registration. (Sisben is the system that identifies potential beneficiaries of social programs in Colombia).

On the other hand, it is necessary to have health teams capable of detecting situations of human trafficking and to formulate health protocols and policies that address physical and psychological conditions from the moment of detection, during legal proceedings, and even once those are complete, involving people close to the victims. Personnel must pay special attention to cultural and gender differences, understand the form of trafficking that took place, and consider that health effects are often cumulative.



ICBF - The Institute of Colombian Family Wellbeing

The ICBF accompanies children who have been victims of various forms of human trafficking: child labor, commercial sexual exploitation, forced recruitment, and forced marriage. It also accompanies children who are victims of other abuses and violence: abandonment, sexual violence, long periods of living on the streets, and school harassment or bullying. They all go through the Administrative Process for Restoration of Rights (PARD) to receive immediate and medium-term protection and assistance services.



Noteworthy actions:

1. In 2018, the ICBF prepared and published technical guidelines for specialized care for children who are victims of human trafficking.
2. Through Decree 879 of 2020, the structure of the ICBF was modified, creating the Directorate of Children (ages six to 13) and the Directorate of Adolescence and Youth (ages 14 to 28), to provide better risk prevention in girls, boys, adolescents, and young people.
3. In 2022, it prepared and published an annex to the technical guidelines for the prevention of human trafficking.
4. In 2021, it prepared specific methodological guides to prevent child labor, street connectedness, human trafficking, the recruitment and utilization of children, and gender-based violence (with particular emphasis on sexual violence).
5. It has toll-free telephone lines (141 and 018000 91 80 80) to receive complaints and provide guidance to victims and their families.

Conclusions from CIVIL SOCIETY:

Although the ICBF has managed to benefit a significant number of Venezuelan children through its programs (*more from initial education than from access to the PARD*), the institution faces severe limitations in its capacity to guarantee the effective restoration of the rights of all children who are victims of trafficking, Colombians and foreigners alike. Another challenge is that officials lack adequate knowledge about human trafficking, which hinders timely and effective care.



Without a deep understanding of the crime and its implications, it is impossible to identify or adequately respond to the needs of children who are victims of trafficking.

Finally, we recognize the admirable role that this institution plays in guaranteeing the rights of Colombian (*and foreign*) children. Still, we believe that there are multiple areas in which ICBF should invest:

- Expanded financial and human resources and improved technical and technological, resources for a more incisive data analysis.
- More focus on prevention, with the identification of areas most at risk for trafficking, to design targeted interventions.
- Research and knowledge generation.



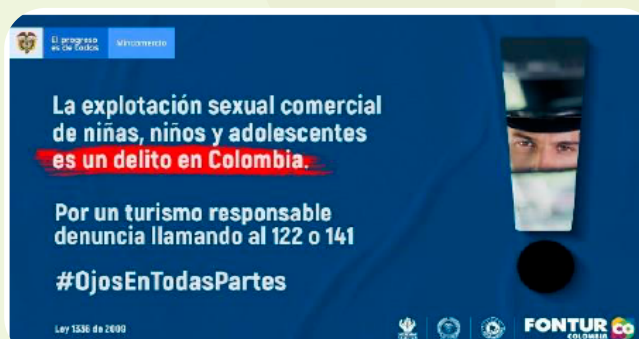
Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism

This Ministry has been called upon to respond to human trafficking due to its ability to influence the regulation and supervision of the tourism sector (Colombia is a global tourist destination). In recent years, it has led the national strategy for the prevention of CSEC in the context of travel and tourism, investing enormous resources in training and awareness-raising activities.



Noteworthy actions:

1. The #Ojosentodaspartes (#EyesEverywhere) campaign encouraged reporting through lines 141 (ICBF) and 122 (AGO). Through effective messages located in airports and other transit hubs, social networks, and tourist sites, the campaign provides the tools needed to recognize, prevent, and report the crime, showing zero tolerance for violence that threatens the lives and integrity of childhood and adolescence.





2. Every provider of tourism services must sign its code of conduct and accompanying best practices manual for the prevention of CSEC (per resolution 3840 of 2009) to join the National Registry of Tourism.

Conclusions from CIVIL SOCIETY:

Despite these awareness campaigns, we have seen no decrease in cases of human trafficking related to travel and tourism. On the contrary, we see a steady increase. The tourism sector is key in the fight against human trafficking in Colombia. The informality of tourism services and establishments, especially in the most popular cities for national and international tourism, does not favor the identification and control of trafficking or CSEC cases.

A more comprehensive approach would involve coordinated actions with hotels, travel agencies, and transportation companies:

- **Hotels, Hostels, B&Bs, and Airbnb:** Establish internal protocols that include indicators of possible trafficking cases in their various forms. Facilitate training spaces for staff, providing essential information on identifying possible cases and quickly activating care routes.
- **Travel Agencies:** Develop awareness campaigns aimed at clients and staff about the risks of trafficking and reporting mechanisms.
- **Transportation Companies:** Collaborate in the training of bus, taxi, and private car drivers (who work through apps), to identify possible signs of exploitation and coordinate with local authorities on timely intervention.





By establishing clear protocols, providing proper training, and developing awareness campaigns, these sectors can not only effectively contribute to the prevention and detection of trafficking but also promote a safer environment for all workers in the tourism industry.



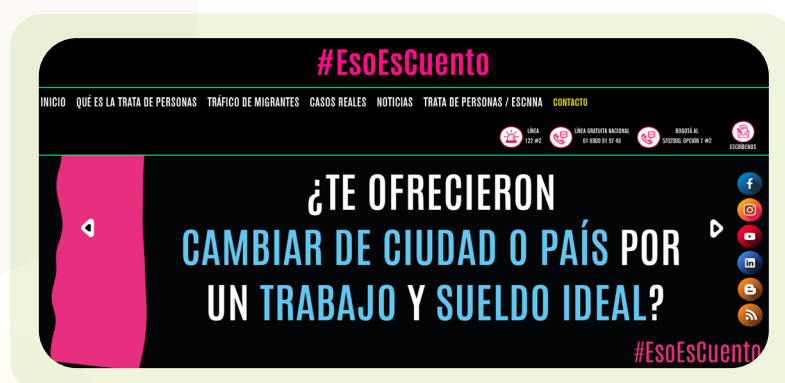
The Office of the Attorney General

Responsible for investigating complaints and enforcing the crime of human trafficking, the Attorney General's Office (AGO) is also a member of the Ibero-American Network of Prosecutors Specialized in Human Trafficking and Illicit Smuggling of Migrants (RED-TRAM), created in 2011 within the Ibero-American Association of Public Ministries (AIAMP).



Noteworthy actions:

1. **Since 2018, the #EsoEsCuento (that's a tale)** campaign aims to prevent trafficking by informing potential victims and preventing the crime, and guiding public servants who, under their functions, must be aware of this crime. Campaign materials are disseminated through forums, training, service fairs, and strategic alliances with international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and the State.



2. **In 2022 the AGO formed a working group on the investigation and coordination for the fight against human trafficking, trafficking in migrants, and related crimes**, which coordinates investigations with local prosecutors in priority regions of the country and is attached to the Specialized Directorate against Human Rights Violations (12 offices). Among its functions is profiling criminal groups that profit from trafficking: georeferencing their areas of influence, learning the composition of illicit networks used for money laundering, and investigating their sources of financing and their assets.



Conclusions from CIVIL SOCIETY:

While the AGO has made progress in characterizing criminal groups and their areas of influence, it does not have a contextual analysis report of the criminality associated with human trafficking nor a thorough profiling of the perpetrators.

If this analysis is crucial to understanding the environment in which these groups operate and the unique dynamics that enable their illegal activities, a thorough and systematic profiling of trafficking networks could provide information on their behavioral patterns, motivations, and shared characteristics, advancing the development of more effective intervention strategies and preventive and enforcement measures that adequately respond to the structures and tactics of criminal groups.

An essential element to consider is the **sensitivity of the investigators** in charge of these cases. In our experience caring for victims, we have seen multiple cases in which victims recount a lack of empathy on the part of the officials and investigators assigned to accompany them in the legal process. They are ill-equipped to respect and understand the emotions and trauma the victims have experienced. An empathic approach would facilitate a better understanding of the victims' experiences and contribute to a more humane and effective investigation..

Lack of sensitivity during the investigation can lead to implementing practices that, although well-intentioned, are harmful to victims. For example, insensitive questions, harsh treatment, or lack of privacy during interviews can lead to revictimization (that is, an action that causes more harm). This kind of treatment can intensify victims' emotional suffering, diminish their trust in the system, and discourage their cooperation. It is vitally important to understand that the testimony of victims is essential to apprehend and dismantle trafficking networks.

Therefore, it is imperative that investigators receive training in people skills that promote empathetic communication, with approaches that offer a safe and supportive environment during the investigative process, as well as techniques that minimize emotional damage and reinforce victims' trust in the justice system.

Adopting these practices would not only improve the effectiveness of investigations but also foster an environment in which victims feel valued and supported.



The Office of the Ombudsman

The Office of the Ombudsman is responsible for legally representing the victims (*and defending the victimizers, if needed*) throughout the judicial and administrative processes and ensuring their rights are respected. The Ombudsman's Office also issues early warnings about situations that may lead to trafficking cases, identifying zones and populations at risk throughout the country. To that end, it publishes detailed reports and studies, identifying the most common modalities, the groups at the highest risk, and the main challenges.

Between 2020 and 2023, the Ombudsman's Office has handled **279 cases** related to human trafficking and has legally represented **125 victims**.

Like other institutions, the Ombudsman's Office faces budgetary limitations that make it difficult to perform its work. However, the Delegate for Women's Rights and Gender Affairs has its own resources from a separate budget and the victim care project.

Noteworthy actions:

1. **Its “gender teams”** are teams of professionals who specialize in gender and human rights issues. Their main objective is to comprehensively address complaints and reports related to gender-based violence, including human trafficking.
2. **In 2021-2022, it participated in Nomastrata**, (no more trafficking), a joint initiative between the Colombian Ombudsman's Office and Lawyers Without Borders Canada, a comprehensive response to trafficking that addressed both the causes and consequences of this crime. It focused on the areas of the country most vulnerable to this crime, such as border regions and areas with a presence of illegal armed groups.
3. **Focused on strengthening the capacities of public defenders** and other local actors in comprehensive care for victims of trafficking, this initiative included training on victim identification, legal assistance, psychosocial support, and inter-institutional coordination.
4. **Toward the end of 2023, it launched App Contigo (app with you)**, an application that aims to improve the prevention, care, orientation, registration, and monitoring of cases of gender-based violence, also allowing real-time reporting of cases of human trafficking, focused on women and the LGBTQI+ population.
5. **In May 2024, it launched the Ombudsman Observatory for the Analysis of Human Trafficking** to gather information from separate entities to place attention to victims at the center of the discussion.



Conclusions from CIVIL SOCIETY:

We believe that the human rights early warning system, conceived to warn the general public about risks of violations of their rights to life, integrity, liberty, and personal security, is not having the intended effect: the entities that formulate the recommendations do not advance the recognition of the identified risks nor coordinate actions to mitigate or avert those risks.

We celebrate the creation of APP Contigo, but we believe the existence of multiple applications to report violence (LibertApp, specifically for cases of human trafficking) could generate confusion and make data collection difficult. It would be ideal to join efforts on a single platform to have a more precise and complete vision of the problem.



Office of the Inspector General

The Office of the Inspector General (IG) is the main body of the Colombian Public Ministry. It is charged with representing citizens before the State and supervising the behavior of public officials from a disciplinary perspective. Its role includes ensuring that public servants act in accordance with the law and ethical principles.

While the U.S. Department of State officially reports that Colombian public officials have been involved in cases of human trafficking, the IG reports that it only has disciplinary powers regarding the actions of public officials (according to the decree law 262 of 2000) and that, therefore, it is not the appropriate entity to address criminal complaints, nor to report official figures on these cases (this would be the role of the AGO).

Noteworthy actions:

The #LasNiñasYMujeresNoSeVenden (girls and women are not for sale) campaign, launched in 2020 to combat human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women and children, has uncovered many cases of trafficking that were immediately referred to the Anti-Trafficking Operational Center (COAT) for registration and follow-up.





Conclusions from CIVIL SOCIETY:

What happens to public officials after they have been prosecuted and convicted of complicity in a crime? Given that the AGO receives and processes criminal complaints, what measures does the IG take in the face of this evidence? We feel that it has taken no steps in this regard.

Finally, the IG could play a more active role in preventing and raising awareness of human trafficking by collaborating in awareness and prevention campaigns. This would complement their supervision efforts and help address the problem more comprehensively.



National Police

In the eight years that we have published the Assessment, the National Police has not been timely in responding to the investigation and enforcement of trafficking, forwarding all our requests for information to the Ministry of the Interior, the coordinating entity of the National Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

The National Police has specialized groups dedicated to preventing different types of violence among citizens. However, its focus on human trafficking does not appear to be sufficient, consistent, or exhaustive: preventive actions are usually carried out only in some regions of the country and on specific dates, such as July 30 (the world day against human trafficking), but there is no permanent coverage in areas where crime has the highest incidence.





Conclusions from CIVIL SOCIETY:

The National Police is called upon to promote cooperation on human trafficking with the other actors involved in its fight (civil society, academia, private sector) to create effective controls against the different forms of the crime. To achieve this, it must begin to respond to the call made by civil society.

We believe that the National Police has valuable tools for effective preventive action: the radio station could be a useful channel for prevention campaigns, playing radio spots and educational messages and warnings throughout the country, particularly in remote areas and communities that lack access to other forms of communication.

On paper, Ministries and other government agencies share the responsibility of fighting human trafficking. However, we have seen how most of them do not have dedicated budgets, strategies or action protocols, or personnel dedicated to the issue, which worsens the inconsistency and failure of their actions.

Colombia has a solid legal framework and growing awareness of this problem, which presents an excellent opportunity to advance in the fight against human trafficking.

We have been monitoring and will continue to do so because our goal is for the State to respond quickly and diligently to the commitments it has made, starting with restitution and guaranteeing rights for the victims.

8.2 Local Governments

Local governments' roles and responsibilities have changed over the past eight years. When we began the Assessment in 2015, local committees existed predominantly on paper and did not exercise many functions in terms of prevention or victim assistance; instead, they delegated all action to the national government. Today, local governments take full responsibility for responding to human trafficking and guaranteeing victims receive support and protection.

Today, all Colombian departments and their capital cities have a Committee to Fight Trafficking in Persons and their own strategies and budgets to combat trafficking, including information campaigns and prevention and awareness-raising activities.



During these eight years, **the departments of Antioquia, Risaralda, and Valle del Cauca** and the cities of **Bogotá, Medellín, and Santiago de Cali** have stood out as the most common places of origin of victims of internal and international trafficking.

Of the **1,208 total victims** reported from 2015 to 2023, **751 cases (62%)** come only from these locations, as evidenced in the following graphs. Of these, **145 victims were foreign nationals**.

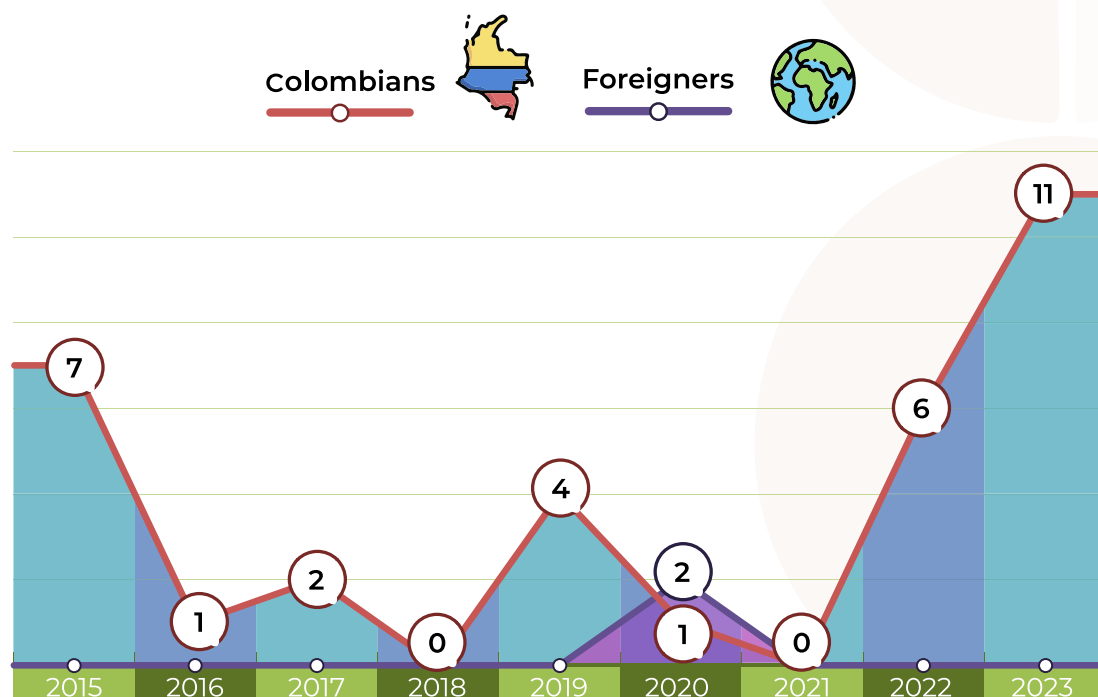
Note: If the number of foreign victims is displayed as 0, it is because nationality was not included in the response given; only the total number of victims was reported.



Antioquia Departmental Committee to Fight Human Trafficking

In charge of the Secretariat of Department Government, this Committee registers an oscillating trend over the years.

Figure 7: Number of victims (national and foreign) between 2015 and 2023



Note: Corporación Espacios de Mujer, I-VIII Balance on the implementation of anti-trafficking policies in Colombia (2015-2022). For 2023, the data is provided by the same Committee.



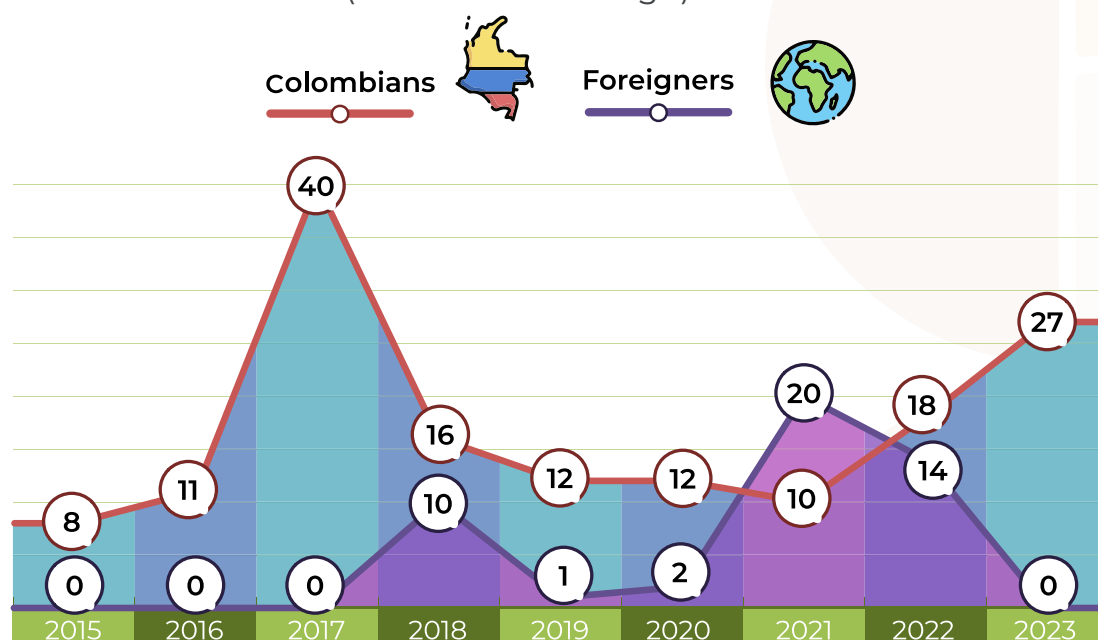


Medellín District Committee to Fight Human Trafficking

Since 2015, this committee has used *the protocol for the identification and care of women victims of human trafficking in Medellín*. In 2022, the Inter-American Development Bank awarded the committee the **Pablo Valenti Award** for implementing prevention and care protocols for human trafficking with a focus on human rights. The Protocol is currently being revised.

Medellín is undoubtedly the main municipality of origin for victims in the Antioquia department.

Figure 8: Number of victims (national and foreign) between 2015 and 2023



Note: Corporación Espacios de Mujer, I-VIII Assessment of the implementation of anti-trafficking policies in Colombia (2015-2022). For 2023, the data is provided by the same Committee.



Bogotá District Committee to Fight Human Trafficking

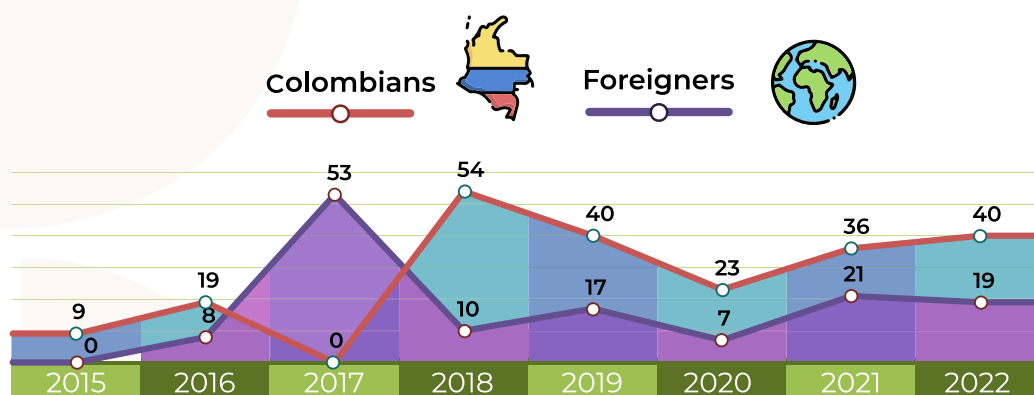
Since May 2022, Bogotá has used the *Public Policy to Fight Human Trafficking in Bogotá, 2022-2031*, a comprehensive response to this phenomenon in the Capital District, which recognizes that the city has enormous capacity for the recruitment, transfer, and exploitation of victims inside and outside the country, with a higher percentage of external trafficking. It is the city in Colombia with the second-highest number of victims captured, and it receives the most victims captured in other departments of



the country.

The Committee, in charge of the District Government Secretariat, has reported over the years an increasing number of victims between Colombian nationals and foreigners (predominantly Venezuelans).

Figure 9: Number of victims (national and foreign) between 2015 and 2023



Note: Corporación Espacios de Mujer, I-VIII Assessment of the implementation of the implementation of anti-trafficking policies in Colombia (2016-2022).

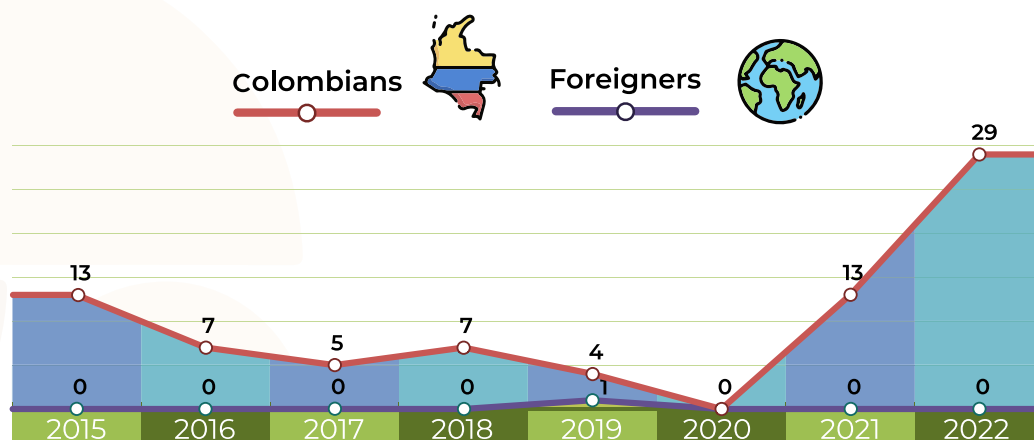


*For the **year 2015**, information on the cases handled by this Committee was provided by the Ministry of the Interior; since that year no questions were posed directly to the Committee.

*No information is provided for the **year 2023**; the most recent Assessment covers through December 2022.

Valle del Cauca Technical Secretariat Departmental Committee

Figure 10: Number of victims (national and foreign) between 2015 and 2023





Note: Corporación Espacios de Mujer, I-VIII Assessment of the implementation of anti-trafficking policies in Colombia (2016-2022).

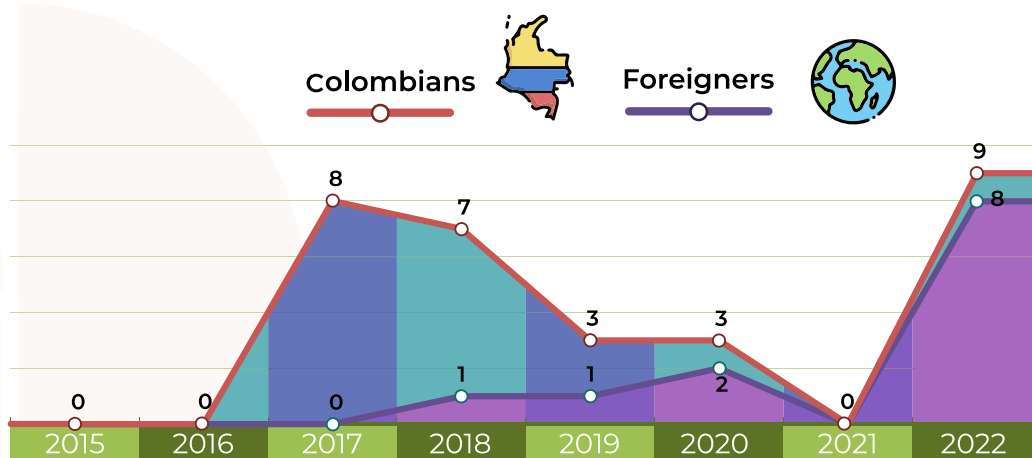


*For the **years 2015 and 2016**, information on the cases handled by this Committee was provided by the Ministry of the Interior since in those two years no questions were posed directly to the Committee.

*No information is provided for the **year 2023**; the most recent Assessment covers through December 2022.

Santiago de Cali Municipal Committee to Fight Human Trafficking

Figure 11: Number of victims (national and foreign) between 2015 and 2023



Note: Corporación Espacios de Mujer, I-VIII Assessment of the implementation of anti-trafficking policies in Colombia (2016-2022).



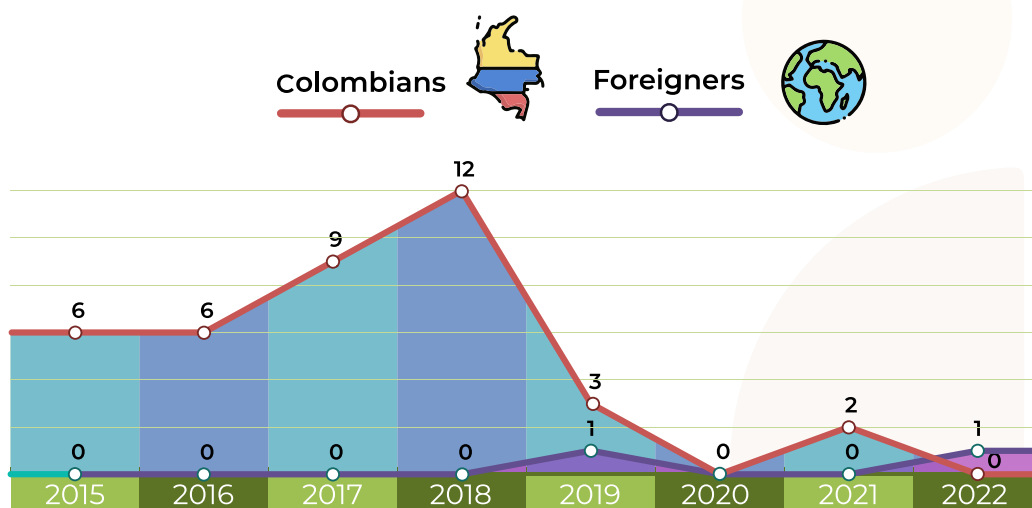
*No information was reported on the cases handled by this Committee in **2015 and 2016** because, in those two years, we raised no questions directly to the Committee. The victims tended to by the Committee were included in the data covering the whole department of Valle del Cauca.

*No information is provided for the **year 2023**; the most recent Assessment covers through December 2022.



Risaralda Technical Secretariat Departmental Committee

Figure 12: Number of victims (national and foreign) between 2015 and 2023



Note: Corporación Espacios de Mujer, I-VIII Balance on the implementation of anti-trafficking policies in Colombia (2016-2022).



*For the **years 2015 and 2016**, information on the cases handled by this Committee was provided by the Ministry of the Interior, since in those two years we raised no questions directly to the Committee.

*No information is provided for the **year 2023**; the most recent Assessment covers through December 2022.

The other committees interviewed, both municipal and departmental, do not report high numbers of cases and do not show significant activity in the fight against human trafficking.

Starting in 2020, we felt it crucial to note in the interviews of other departments (Santander and Norte de Santander, Arauca, Nariño, Bolívar, La Guajira, and Amazonas) that, due to their geographical location and social and economic dynamics, they became strategic points for human trafficking networks. *Nariño*, on the border with Ecuador, is a strategic corridor for the trafficking of migrants to the United States and other countries; *Norte de Santander*, *Arauca*, and *La Guajira*, all bordering Venezuela, are areas of heightened armed conflict and extremely fluid border crossings; *Bolívar* is the tourist region of the Colombian Caribbean, with the city of Cartagena de Indias as its capital; *Amazonas* is a geographically remote region with a strong presence of Indigenous communities.



8.3 Civil Society Organizations

Civil society in Colombia has played a fundamental role in the fight against human trafficking. With its diversity of approaches and specializations (from direct attention to victims to public policy advocacy), organizations have contributed significantly to the identification, prevention, and support of victims of this crime, not only complementing government efforts but expanding and reinforcing their response in many cases.

Local and international NGOs specializing in different areas are on the front lines in the protection of minors; care for the migrant population; prevention, awareness, and training in at-risk communities; the provision of direct care services for victims; advocacy to improve public policies and strengthen the legal framework; carrying out investigations and documenting cases to generate evidence and enhance visibility; and establishing alliances with international organizations to strengthen their capacities and expand their scope.

- **Prevention:** Through awareness campaigns, educational workshops, and community programs, organizations inform the population about the risks and realities of trafficking, as well as the rights of victims and the resources available to them. Prevention aims to reduce people's risk for exploitation, empowering them and strengthening their protective factors.
- **Comprehensive support for victims:** Comprehensive support for victims of trafficking includes interdisciplinary services that help victims recover from trauma and reintegrate into their family, work, social, and community environments.
- **Capacity building:** The training of professionals, public officials, community leaders, volunteers, and others, is the foundation for an effective fight against human trafficking and ensuring an effective response in different regions.
- **Political Advocacy:** Political agendas must promote laws and improve existing regulations to guarantee victims' rights. Highlighting urgent needs and providing recommendations based on practical experience contributes to a strong and coordinated response to trafficking.
- **Monitoring and research:** A detailed and accurate view of the dynamics of human trafficking - in the different regions of the country and contexts in which it occurs - is possible only through studies that examine the magnitude of the problem, emerging trends, and deficiencies in the current institutional response.



Since 2021, we have chosen to include the voice of Colombian civil society in the Assessment. We have included new organizations and those with a long history, organizations that have collaborated with Espacios de Mujer on prevention and victim assistance, and organizations that participate in the Colombian Alliance of Civil Society Organizations against Human Trafficking. **We have highlighted that, in spite of its important work, civil society faces various challenges, mainly due to limited financial resources** (which complicates the sustainability of its programs), limited institutional recognition (which limits its capacity to influence), combined with the complexity of the crime itself (which requires the constant adaptation of intervention strategies).

In Colombia, not many organizations focus specifically on trafficking. Most of them do so through prevention, education, and the training of public officials. Few organizations provide victim assistance through psychosocial support, or do targeted research, or back strategic litigation to see that human rights are respected.

8.4 International organizations

International organizations support national governments' fights from a global perspective. In Colombia, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) play crucial roles in securing resources, sharing technical expertise, and coordinating efforts.

These agencies focus mainly on providing technical assistance to Colombian institutions to strengthen the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of human trafficking. They channel financial resources into projects and programs, especially in areas such as victim assistance, prevention, and institutional capacity building; promote the adoption and application of international standards in the fight against trafficking, such as those established in the Palermo Protocol; facilitate coordination between national and international actors, promoting the exchange of knowledge and best practices. Finally, they monitor progress and challenges in the fight against trafficking in Colombia and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs.

We have always believed that eradicating human trafficking will result from collaboration between all actors involved, *primarily* the government, international organizations, and civil society. However, we cannot ignore that most of the formal agreements on human trafficking are established by the government with international organizations. Among the reasons given by the State: the availability of financial resources and significant technical capacity to manage funds and large-scale projects, extensive experience and specialized knowledge in the fight against trafficking worldwide, the State's pronounced legitimacy in fighting trafficking, the specific mandates and regulatory frameworks that guide its actions, guaranteeing that funded projects are aligned with



international standards and contribute to achieving global objectives.

And what about civil society?

In many cases, national legal frameworks limit the government's ability to sign agreements directly with civil society organizations, but these organizations play a fundamental role in implementing said agreements. **Civil society organizations (CSOs) are usually in charge of executing projects at the local level, reaching the most at-risk communities, and providing more personalized assistance to victims.** Bureaucratically speaking, they are more agile and flexible than government entities, able to respond quickly and effectively to urgent situations.

Despite the limitations, coordination between the government and civil society organizations is vital to ensure that prevention and victim assistance and protection programs are effective.

So, how do we respond?

Simplifying administrative procedures would allow CSOs to participate in projects financed by State and international organizations and *guarantee transparency and accountability* in the management of funds allocated to the fight against trafficking.



9. Successful strategies from civil society





Many actions have been taken against human trafficking in Colombia, but actions are meaningless without results.

That is why we ask ourselves:

- **What are the strategies that will help us have an impact?**
- **What are the activities that lead to positive and lasting changes for victims?**

The good news is that we do have examples of successful strategies.



When we talk about **trafficking victim assistance**, we consider it successful when victims have their rights guaranteed and can access education, employment, and a quality of life that does not force them to return to a situation of exploitation. It is a success when they can access sufficient resources for themselves and their children to have a decent life. All this involves their psychological, physical, and emotional stabilization, recovering their lives.

The **Metamorphosis project** supports this process. Through writing and art therapy, victims of trafficking find a way to begin to heal their wounds and rebuild their lives. Starting to heal after experiencing human trafficking is not easy, but it is not impossible. Metamorphosis covers three phases of writing: birth (nacer), suspension (suspender), and rebirth (renacer). In each phase, survivors tell the stories of their lives before, during, and after the trafficking.





“I thank all these women who joined me in my process, and me, for allowing myself to be in it. I am calm, it no longer hurts me so much, and I say so much because I know that it is a forever process, which I must take charge of throughout my existence, but I am moving forward with a lot of strength.” Olga*, Metamorphosis Project

In order to heal, victims need inter- and multidisciplinary support, which includes individual attention, therapeutic support, group activities, and, potentially, financial support. This process is certainly important, but it will not achieve its intended results if the victim is unable to meet their most basic needs: food and housing. **Espacios de Mujer**, active since 2004, is dedicated to its mission of supporting victims of trafficking for a time so that they can reintegrate into their family, social, and community environments and start or change their life goals. The goal is emotional healing. These activities are financed through international cooperation: UN agencies and NGOs and international agencies from the United States and Europe.



La Muralla soy yo (I am the wall) is **building protective environments** for children against trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. **Fundación Renacer** (Foundation Rebirth) developed this initiative in 2008 in Cartagena and has since replicated it in Barranquilla, Leticia (Amazonas department), Santa Marta, and La Guajira. La Muralla soy yo has become the city's official campaign: the people of Cartagena identify with the project so much that people working in the city's tourist areas wear T-shirts with the slogan. A success: when private projects become public strategies.



In terms of **political advocacy**, the NGO **CreSer** of Bucaramanga prepared a booklet about creating a citizen oversight office to control the approach to human trafficking at the local level. The proposed oversight office is now a formalized entity within the Bucaramanga Mayor's Office.



The **Marcela Loaiza Foundation** in Cali recognizes the importance of **victims' participation** in social activism and the world of art and culture to complete their social reintegration.



“It is a way for [survivors] to regain their strength, their ability to believe in themselves and live again, transforming the guilt of that experience into an opportunity, a learning experience for other people. Through activism, they affirm that they want to be part of the change and tell their story”.



Red Tamar highlights the value of **collaboration between religious and secular institutions** throughout the country. This network raises awareness in religious institutions' training spaces; forms support networks between secular and religious people, provides victim services and support for survivors, and supports active searches for victims.



Valientes Colombia created the ObservatorioESCNNA (CSEC Observatory) to advance understanding of the crime and ensure efficient and effective responses to eradicate the factors that precipitate trafficking and predispose children to trafficking in Colombia and around the world. They also developed the **ten keys** to inform the media about CSEC.



10 CLAVES PARA INFORMAR SOBRE LA EXPLOTACIÓN SEXUAL CONTRA NIÑOS, NIÑAS Y ADOLESCENTES

PACIFISTA !

Los medios de comunicación tienen una responsabilidad enorme a la hora de cubrir casos de violencia sexual, sobre todo si las víctimas son niños, niñas y adolescentes. PACIFISTA contactó a expertas que conocen el tema y construimos un decálogo para registrar este tipo de agresiones, dirigido a periodistas y medios.

1. Los derechos de las niñas, niños y adolescentes siempre están por encima de una noticia.

2. Cubrir este tipo de violencia requiere de un enfoque de derechos humanos, de género y claros.

3. No existe la prostitución infantil, la pornografía infantil ni el turismo sexual. Siempre se debe hablar de explotación sexual de niños, niñas y adolescentes.

4. Es revictimizante usar fotos de niños y niñas escondidos o debajo de su agresor. Otro tipo de ilustraciones son un mejor recurso para acompañar estas notas.

5. Las narrativas sensacionalistas y el uso desproporcionado de adjetivos son malas prácticas, pues convierten estos delitos en un espectáculo.

6. Es importante saber cuáles son los delitos relacionados con explotación sexual contra menores de edad y sobre todo, sus derechos.

7. Documentarse bien y conocer el contexto en el que se desarrollan estos crímenes es indispensable.

8. Hay que cuidar la privacidad e intimidad de las víctimas y de sus familias.

9. No olvide brindar información sobre las rutas de atención en casos de violencia sexual contra niños, niñas y adolescentes.

10. Para asegurar un buen cubrimiento, hay que consultar con expertas/os que orienten al medio acerca de la mejor manera de hacerlo.



There are many more examples of successful CSO strategies that we have not addressed in detail here. Our intention is not to ignore those efforts but rather to illustrate, very broadly, how organizations effectively participate in the fight against this crime, providing valuable lessons and models that, when replicated or adapted to other contexts, can strengthen this fight.



10. Challenges to effectively fighting human trafficking in Colombia





Why is it so hard to end human trafficking in Colombia if so many people are fighting this crime?

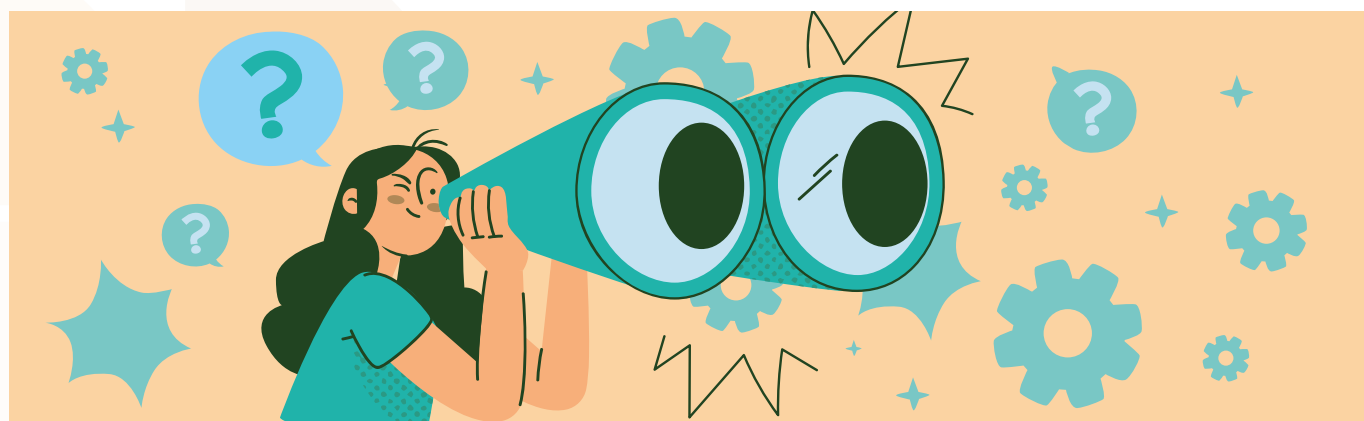


Human trafficking is a complex crime because, like a chameleon, it adapts and transforms to evade combat and prevention. Institutional deficits, such as the lack of effective coordination between government entities (the Police, the AGO, Migration, etc.), require constant training for public officials and greater investment in financial and human resources.

Internal human trafficking has one more problem, which is its identification and subsequent quantification; these victims are often less visible and have less access to protection services.

Eradicating human trafficking is not just a goal in Colombia: every country suffers from this violence, so its solutions transcend national borders.

What can we do?



10.1 Underreporting

Underreporting is a significant challenge in the fight against human trafficking. Despite efforts to boost visibility and improve institutional responses to the crime, many cases stay hidden and never reach the authorities, masking the true magnitude of the problem and making it difficult to identify and support victims. Another factor of invisibility is the lack of information about the appropriate mechanisms to report a case. Victims typically do not report what happened. And why not? Because, in many cases, the perpetrator is someone they know: a friend, a neighbor, an uncle, or even their romantic partner. Furthermore, in many cases, the victim feels ashamed of having been deceived and does not talk about what happened to anyone, not even to their own family.



Let's put ourselves in the victim's shoes:

“ I received an incredible job offer, and I need to travel to another country. How sad that I must part from my family! But, I am also going to leave everything that has not worked out for me, and that has caused me suffering in Colombia, and I am going to an exotic and wonderful place. [...] In the end, I was tricked and exploited...I returned to Colombia.

Am I going to admit what happened to me? Or will I feel ashamed and too sad to tell the world what happened to me?



Another reason why victims rarely file complaints is they do not believe they will get justice or restitution from the State. This raises the question: *why make the effort to report, relive the story, potentially anger the trafficker and risk retaliation against them or their family? Why go through all this if nothing will happen to the perpetrator and the victim will not receive restitution?*

This concern is undoubtedly valid. In 20 years of anti-trafficking work and supporting victims, Espacios de Mujer has only seen one case in 2020 in which a victim of external trafficking secured justice and modest financial compensation.

For the victim, verbalizing the exploitation they experienced means acknowledging their own suffering and identifying as a victim; accepting and speaking about what happened is the first step for a victim to identify as such. Therefore, it is very important that victims feel encouraged to describe their situation.

In Colombia, proactive victim identification is very limited. A case comes to light only when the victim or their family reports it to the State or approaches an organization for help and participates in the full process that the State or organization sets in motion.

In a proactive identification model, we all take on the responsibility to identify and assess risks before they become realities, preventing the serious consequences of not doing so. We are all called upon to be agents of change and to anticipate risks or minimize their impact.





Meanwhile, the limited capacity of reporting systems exacerbates the problem. Deficiencies in data collection mechanisms, lack of coordination between government entities, and lack of specialized resources together prevent an accurate and exhaustive record of trafficking cases. Without adequate infrastructure for data collection and analysis, it is difficult to get a clear view of the scope of the problem and respond effectively.



10.2 Misreporting

When we talk about reporting and registering cases, we can also discuss the misregistration of cases due to the ignorance of many public officials on the subject and the lack of continuity in the roles of those who are knowledgeable on this subject.

Every four years in Colombia, local and national elections put in place new public administrations throughout the country, and with each new administration comes a drastic change in personnel. In these conditions, it is challenging to retain any knowledge gained in the previous administration and to keep cases moving through the legal system. Ignorance of this issue can lead an officer to report a case of trafficking as “induction into prostitution” or “pimping” when it is actually a different crime: not against a person’s sexual liberation but against a person’s autonomy and freedom. The ignorance and resulting *misregistration of cases* can also lead to revictimization: Formal interrogations and *abusive* lines of questioning cannot be considered assistance that victims need.

The State does not contribute reliable information and qualitative data. That is to say, we may get basic data on the victims, but we do not always know exactly what happened to them. Perhaps we know their sexual orientation or gender identity, their origin and destination, but we do not know how or why they were trafficked. This information would improve our understanding of what trafficking is and how we can prevent it.



10.3 Inconsistency

Since 2007, Colombia has employed a National Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2007-2012, 2016-2018, 2020-2024), a comprehensive policy that aims to combat this crime and guarantee human rights for victims through prevention, investigation and enforcement, and victim assistance and protection. However, the strategy is mis-sing consistent action. In the eight years of the Assessment, we have identified



many gaps between what the laws dictate and the services provided, starting with the inadequacy of the allocated budget, nationally and locally, which usually goes to the salaries of people who carry out prevention activities and victim assistance services.

Local anti-trafficking committees operate with great difficulty, focusing on awareness-raising activities like workshops and the replication of national campaigns. The implementation of the victim care route *falls short* due to limited financial resources and a lack of coordination among its members, leaving almost all responsibility to the committee's coordinating office.



10.4 Normalization

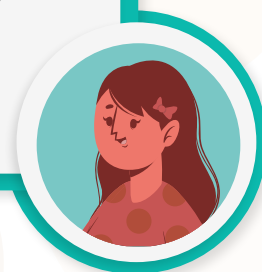
Another difficulty in combating human trafficking in Colombia is the normalization of this kind of violence and other human rights abuses.

We have become so accustomed to seeing and hearing about *difficult* situations and living conditions that they often no longer draw our attention, and we do not report them. Seeing a child on the street begging or working on a construction site, seeing a woman abused or hurt in her workplace, or a man confined to a farm where he works every day at all hours are scenes that have become normal in a society in which work culture prevails, regardless of the conditions of that work.

A woman victim of trafficking and Venezuelan migrant assisted by Espacios de Mujer summarizes the situation with this reflection:

“They were exploiting me in a restaurant in Medellín, but looking around I realized that all the other people who worked there were in the same conditions as me. They were Colombians. So, I thought: if they don't say anything and they get used to all this, can I rebel?”

The answer was no and I continued in those conditions.”





The eradication of human trafficking requires not only legal and political action but profound cultural change, including motivation and a sense of responsibility on the part of the public to report cases. Only through constant awareness-raising and a firm stance against any type of abuse or exploitation can we achieve a real impact in protecting victims and building a more just and equitable society.



10.5 From Victim to Victimizer

In the experience of Espacios de Mujer, caring for more than 200 victims of trafficking over 20 years, the typical pattern until around 2015 was that the traffickers were strangers to the victims. They were men and women who presented themselves directly or indirectly to the victims in their work or community environments, offering desirable jobs, inside or outside the country, with fabulous earnings.

In the last ten years, it has become increasingly common for victimizers to be someone the victim knows: a friend, a neighbor, or a family member (*complicating the reporting and punishment of the crime since reporting a neighbor is much more complicated than reporting a stranger, due to the implications of continuing to live in the same neighborhood*). Common in both instances is that the victimizers always offer the victim a chance to fulfill their dreams or meet their needs (traveling, having a job, starting an intimate relationship, buying an expensive consumer product, etc.). The dream of merely leaving the neighborhood or country to say that they have traveled and experienced something different discourages people from seeking reliable information and making informed decisions.



Another increasingly frequent occurrence is that the victims themselves become victimizers: they *acquire* freedom from their captors if they find another person to replace them, assuming the "debt" that they had with their captors. *That is, the victim buys their freedom by selling another person.*

Furthermore, that person who becomes a victimizer, a trafficker, has no interest in reporting that they were a victim of trafficking. They are afraid to do so because they could, in turn, be reported by the person they recruited to take their place. This fear perpetuates the cycle of exploitation from victim to perpetrator.

Throughout the world, this is undoubtedly a very effective recruitment strategy.



Alana is a 26-year-old woman. At the start of 2022, her economic situation led her to trust a woman of about 32 years old, who approached her at the entrance to her daughter's school. She got to know her over three months, gained her trust, offered her a job, and took her to Ecuador, where Alana wound up being exploited for forced labor. Her traffickers kept her under constant surveillance, not allowing her to leave or contact her family. Over time, she became one of the "guardians" of the place, in charge of controlling other victims and ensuring that they did not try to escape.



Alana was never suspicious of this person. She saw her as just another mother at school, so she told her about her financial difficulties.



10.6 Recidivism

Once a person has experienced trafficking, the expectation is that it will be an isolated event and will never happen again. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

Human trafficking is the result of systemic and structural factors that do not go away when the victim escapes the situation; that is, a victim of trafficking may find themselves again in the same situation as before, pre-trafficking, since the factors that led to their experience have not changed. The victim may manage to escape captivity and exploitation, but they are likely to return to poverty, discrimination, unemployment, domestic violence, or an unstable home.

Their circumstances could even be worse than before since the victim may have lost what little they previously had, heightening their vulnerability to trafficking.

If a victim of trafficking does not receive adequate support, they will very likely leave again,



despite knowing the risks

However, not all of Colombia is prepared to provide this type of help and support: the anti-trafficking committees do not have a presence throughout the country (they are mainly in the capital cities of departments), and there are regions where there is no effort in prevention because *no cases are recorded*. In these cases, it is very likely that a person who has been a victim of trafficking decides to try a new experience because “*maybe this time, things will go a little better for me.*”



Clara arrived to the care process visibly frustrated and angry. She says that, since her return to Colombia, she had not received support from any organization and the lack of basic elements, such as food, had her worried. She says that she had recently returned from Greece, where she had been rescued in a police raid and repatriated to Colombia. She said that she had gone through difficult situations during her time abroad, including conditions of forced labor and exploitation, and although she had managed to escape, this was her second time facing a situation like this, given that her family could lose their house due to financial problems.



10.7 So, where are we going?

At this point, we hope you have been able to get an idea of what human trafficking is like in Colombia. You have likely felt some indignation, but we trust no desperation.

The bad news is that we still have many challenges and much to do in the fight against human trafficking, but the good news is that we have greater knowledge of the actions we need to take to ensure lasting change. Although there are aspects that disappoint us and show the gravity of the problem, there are also elements that give us hope and encourage us to move forward. Recognizing both the difficulties and the opportunities for change is fundamental to staying motivated and committed to the fight against human trafficking.



10.8 What disappoints us?



In 2016, we felt the need to prepare the first Assessment to inform Colombians about the fight against human trafficking in the country since the State was not doing so. What little information we had was produced by academia, civil society, or international organizations. The State provided (and continues to provide) predominantly quantitative data (number of cases, origin and destination of victims, age and sex, the form of trafficking – and not all data were complete) without detailing the circumstances that allowed the trafficking to take place or reporting on the victim's conditions after their rescue and during the victim assistance process. Official reports excluded important variables such as gender identity or migration status in cases where the victim was of foreign nationality.

Synthesized information limited the comprehensive understanding of the problem and the effectiveness of responses, and, for us, it was essential to have a report that not only provided quantitative data but also addressed the qualitative dimensions of the phenomenon, allowing us to design strategies that are more informed and sensitive to the realities of the victims.

Over the last eight years, we have seen many discouraging realities; the push and pull factors at the root of this crime have not changed, and, in fact, the number of victims has only increased. To clarify, these factors do not operate in isolation but intersect with each other to create an environment that is conducive to trafficking. The factors that drive trafficking are economic (the search for cheap labor), social (cultural and social norms that perpetuate gender inequality, discrimination, and exploitation), and criminal (links to other criminal activities such as drug trafficking, extortion, and money laundering).

Among the push factors, we highlight poverty and inequality, armed conflicts and natural disasters, and lack of educational opportunities, employment, and basic services, all of which destabilize communities, produce an environment conducive to



exploitation, and generate chaos that traffickers take advantage of.

For eight years, we have addressed the complex management of international migration, in particular the mass emigration of Venezuelans, and the obstacles to gaining access to an effective health system, an inclusive educational system, and the guarantee of dignified work. Violence, armed conflicts, drug trafficking, and corruption continue. Human trafficking takes advantage of these vulnerabilities.

Women and girls, men and LGBTIQ+ individuals continue to leave the country because the country does not give them reasons to stay. They leave even when doing so carries significant risks, indicating an urgent need to address the underlying causes of this rapid and uninformed migration.

In the era of globalization and digital communication, the ease of connecting and sharing information has brought down the barriers that once forced people to learn and reflect before traveling or embarking on new opportunities. Today, a tendency to make decisions hastily and without due caution has expanded vulnerability to human trafficking, as criminals take advantage of the lack of caution and the speed with which connections can be established online. The testimonies of the victims who have come to Espacios de Mujer in the last 8 to 10 years confirm this reality. Many of them have reported that they were recruited through social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Tinder, Tik Tok and WhatsApp. The world today is more open to opportunities but more open to abuse of trust and exploitation as well.

Finally, despite the numerous obstacles detailed throughout this document that darken the outlook, our fight continues relentlessly. The complexity of the problem and the numerous situations that make it worse do not discourage us but rather drive us to redouble our efforts. We remain committed to this cause, convinced that only through perseverance will we achieve our goal: eradicating human trafficking.



10.9 What gives us hope?

Despite the frustration we may feel - because we feel powerless in the face of what we see daily - we cannot deny that there are many examples of positive actions that inspire us and give us hope.

The joint work between the Interagency Committee, local anti-trafficking committees, civil society organizations, international organizations, and the victims themselves shows that the more we join forces, the more change we see. The committees, both at the national and local levels, have enabled the Government to strengthen its collabo-

ration with civil society, and since 2020, we have noticed a significant change towards a more collaborative attitude.

Human trafficking has become a **priority in the government's political and social agendas**, which is reflected in a significant increase in the budget allocated to combating this crime and protecting victims. This has allowed the implementation of more effective policies and greater visibility of the problem in the public sphere. As the State allocates more resources and commits to the cause, it makes information more readily available and accessible to the general population. This dissemination of knowledge, both through awareness-raising campaigns and through digital platforms and media, provides Colombians with crucial tools to identify, prevent, and report risks of trafficking.

Efforts to build **institutional capacity** continue. The creation of inter-institutional networks facilitates coordination, information exchange, and resource optimization. At the same time, specialized training for the authorities charged with addressing, investigating, and prosecuting this crime significantly improves the quality of investigations, strengthening the State's response.

Protection and support for victims have expanded. New specialized care centers have emerged to provide safe spaces and comprehensive victim assistance services. These centers have begun to implement reintegration programs that seek to rebuild the victims' lives and complete their reintegration into society, giving them the tools they need to overcome the effects of their exploitation and begin new chapters in their lives.

International cooperation continues to be a fundamental force that drives and streamlines actions against human trafficking. Colombia's active participation in international platforms has facilitated the exchange of experiences, information, and best practices with other countries facing similar challenges. This knowledge exchange has enriched national strategies and led to the adoption of more innovative and effective approaches. Furthermore, the technical and financial support provided by international organizations and governments has been crucial to strengthening Colombian institutional capacities, enabling the implementation of programs and projects aimed at preventing, investigating, and punishing this crime, as well as protecting and supporting victims.

We finish with the answer to the initial question:
Where are we going? The answer is clear: We go forward.

We will continue fighting for a **Colombia free from human trafficking**. We will continue our awareness and prevention work and keep advocating for the adequate allocation of resources to victims so that their voices are heard. We will continue our commitment to national and international alliances to strengthen our actions and broaden



our impact. We will continue to support the Colombian State and continue researching so that all of Colombia understands the reality of human trafficking.

We know that the path to a Colombia free from human trafficking is not easy. Building a nation where the dignity and the rights of all people are respected and protected requires the commitment and collaboration of each citizen and resolute action from the State.

We invite you to join our cause. Together, we can make a difference!



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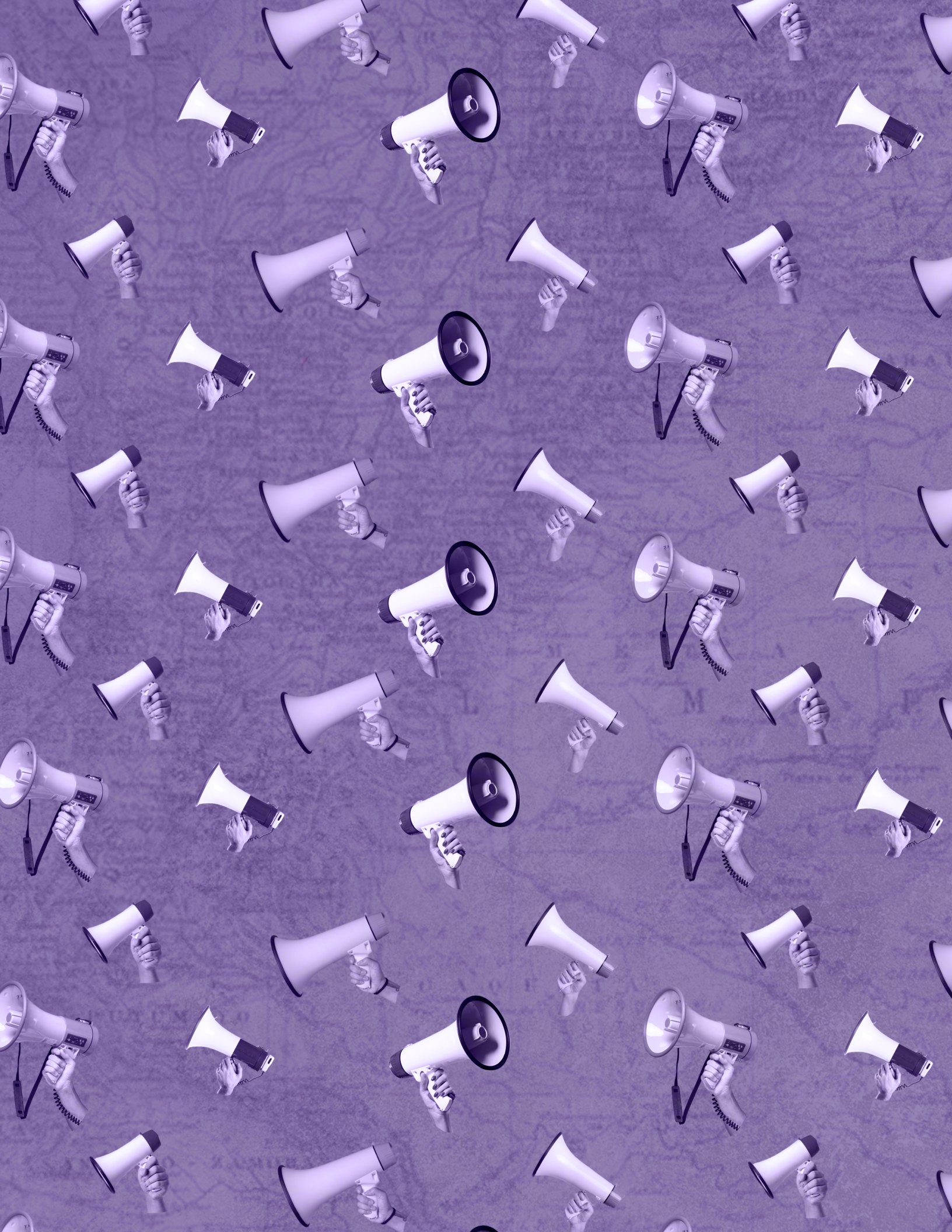
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IX Balance. Analysis of the Implementation of Anti-Trafficking Policies in
Colombia 2015 - 2024

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