

4.2. Other human rights issues

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4.2.1. Trafficking in human beings

Trafficking in human beings is a prevalent issue in Colombia, with persons trafficked inside Colombia and internationally, specifically to Europe (e.g., Spain and France) and to other South American countries (e.g., Peru and Chile).570 Sources indicated that the groups often identified as being mainly affected by trafficking risks included: Afro-Colombians,571 Indigenous people, 572 women,573 children,574 individuals with disabilities,575 Venezuelan migrants,576 migrants with intentions to cross the Darién Gap,577 and LGBTIQ persons.578

In 2024, UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children (UNSRTIP), reported that migrants and refugees, in particular children and adolescents [in Colombia] who were trafficked were subjected to sexual exploitation and forced labour, such as gold mining.579 According to the 2024 Trafficking in Persons report by USDOS, in 2023, Colombian government and NGOs identified 1 273 potential trafficking victims, including 602 sex trafficking victims, 40 forced labour victims, and 631 victims of unspecified forms of exploitation.580 Traffickers used forced labour in their activities. Forced labour is prevalent in the extraction of coal, alluvial gold, and emeralds; coffee harvesting, palm production; begging in urban areas; and domestic service.581

Women and girls are subjected to sex trafficking582 with sources reporting on trafficking of Colombian women and girls particularly in densely populated cities and areas with tourism and large industries.583 Women and girls were also forcibly displaced by sexual violence. In border areas, women and girls are particularly affected by conflict-driven trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, which is used by armed actors and organised criminal groups to fund their operations.'584 In 2024, UNSRTIP documented several cases of girls trafficked for sexual exploitation by non-State armed groups, with the aim of the girls being sexually exploited by armed groups members in Chocó and Nariño.585 UNSRTIP noted that risks of sexual exploitation of men, boys and gender-diverse persons remain underreported, due to stigma, discrimination and violence, which also increases risks of trafficking and limits access to protection.586

There were also a million girls married before age 15 in Colombia, often due to decades of internal conflict, narco-culture, and poverty, with those in rural and indigenous communities having higher rates. In 2024, Colombia outlawed child marriage after a 17-year long campaign. 587 Further information on implementation in practice could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

Migrants in transit from Venezuela to Panama were subjected to disappearances, murders, and sexual violence. 588 Persons are trafficked by armed groups and criminal organisations in border areas including the Gulf of Urabá region (e.g., Apartado and Necoclí) and in the Darién Gap as reported by UNSRTIP in 2024.589 Human Rights Watch indicated that Venezuelan migrants and refugees and Afro-Colombian communities living in in departments such as Antioquia, Norte de Santander and Cundinamarca and the Capital District were particularly vulnerable to trafficking.590 The authorities lacked 'effective and immediate investigations' into these cases.591

Armed and criminal groups forcibly recruit children and youth of Venezuelan, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian descent, for combat, labour and sex exploitation. Colombian children are exploited by traffickers and forced to work in the informal sector and street vending.592 UNSTRIP recorded cases of recruitment or use of children in Antioquia, Arauca, Bolívar, Cauca, Chocó, Nariño, and Putumayo Departments.593

In 2004, Colombia ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.594 In 2005, national law number 985 was adopted, and it includes measures against trafficking in persons and standards for the care and protection of the victims.595 Fear of and risks of reprisals by armed groups and criminal organisations and limited presence of civilian authorities were identified as some factors contributing to underreporting of trafficking in persons according UNSRTIP.596 Moreover, UNSRTIP reported on lack of services and effective protection for persons, especially children.597 According to Human Rights Watch, access to legal aid, safe accommodations, long-term assistance and compensation was limited.598 While the Colombian government increased prevention efforts, deficiencies in the identification of victims, especially among migrants were reported by USDOS in 2024.599

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