

5.4. National Protection Unit (Unidad Nacional de Protección, UNP)

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Since 2012, the National Protection Unit (UNP), under Colombia's Ministry of the Interior, has been responsible for implementing protective measures for individuals and communities whose lives are threatened due to their leadership or advocacy roles. Beneficiaries include political activists, journalists, human rights defenders, social leaders, former guerrilla members of the 2016 FARC-EP Peace Agreement, and vulnerable communities. To request protection, individuals or groups must submit an application and supporting documents online or via one of the 31 regional protection groups. Each case is assessed through a risk assessment report and reviewed by the Risk Evaluation and Recommendation Committee (CERREM, Comité de Evaluación del Riesgo y Recomendación de Medidas), which includes subcommittees focused on women, individuals, and collectives such as Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. Depending on the assessed level of threat—ordinary, extraordinary, or extreme—protection measures may range from basic tools like bulletproof vests to armed bodyguards and armoured vehicles, with measures lasting one year and being subject to review.857

The Unit is reported to be hampered by a lack of timely and transparent risk analysis, differentiation for ethnic and regional variations, and protections that take into account gender.1171F858 OFPRA interlocutors indicated that the UNP is in 'crisis' due to lack of resources and corruption; while even when measures are in place they sometimes encounter logistical and practical problems, such as broken vehicles or panic buttons that do not function. 859 Other examples include mobile phones delivered to rural areas without coverage, lack of planning, or UNP monitoring or controlling those they are meant to protect.860 According to DeJusticia, the same persistent barriers remain during the reference period: insufficient funding for UNP operations, administrative delays in protection procedures, arbitrary and rigid risk assessments, inadequate security allocations, and poor coordination among state agencies.861

In 2023, UNP received approximately 64 000 requests for protection and of those, 6 000 were given protection measures.862 The UN reported that 4 000 HRDs had protection measures in place and more than 320 groups received collective protection from the government.863 Reporting in 2024, the UN indicated that emergency procedures were in place to evacuate and provide emergency protection measures to former combatants in high-risk areas; however, since the signing of the Final Agreement in 2016, 45 former combatants were killed while

awaiting protection, and 14 were killed despite having protection measures in place.[864] In 2024, 11 people were killed despite having protection in place.[865]

DeJusticia indicated to EUAA for this report that relocation of threatened leaders to major cities remained an available protection measure, administered solely by the UNP. The agency provides financial assistance and determines eligibility based on risk assessments derived from applicants' self-reports. However, significant shortcomings persist. Limited public funding restricts the number of beneficiaries, and many relocated individuals are forced to return to their regions due to the high cost of living in urban areas.[866] DeJusticia commented that the effectiveness of relocation measures in large cities—intended to protect individuals from armed groups—depends critically on the availability of sustainable livelihoods and support networks in the host location. Many are forced to return to their regions once financial assistance ends or when they cannot find viable means to rebuild their lives in the city. [867]

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  France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République de Colombie, 28 November 2024, url, pp. 24, 82, 83

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  OAS, IACHR, Observaciones Preliminares: Visita in loco a Colombia 15-19 abril 2024, url, pp. 5-6; the UNVMIC also mentions in its December 2024 reporting that the Unit still lackslack internal protocols on GBV. UNVMC, Report of the Secretary-General, 26 December 2024, url, para. 44

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  France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République de Colombie, 28 November 2024, url, pp. 83-84

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  Colombian Caravana, Report of the VIII Visit of the International Caravan of Jurists to Colombia – 2024, 2024, url, p. 11

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  France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République de Colombie, 28 November 2024, url, p. 83

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  US, CRS, Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations, 30 May 2025, url, p. 11

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  UNVMC, Report of the Secretary-General, 26 December 2024, url, para. 43

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France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République de Colombie, 28 November 2024, url, p. 83

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