
CSSF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

Conflict-sensitive GEDSI analysis – Colombia

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Background

This is the report of the **conflict-sensitive Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) analysis for Colombia**. It builds on the recent literature review (Martin et al, 2023; Smit and Fraser, 2022; Rodríguez Gómez, 2023; Rodríguez Gómez, 2024) for the Colombia Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability and covers **equality issues** including disability rights, LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans +) rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence – including child marriage, and women’s political and economic participation. It also includes these **other questions requested by the posts**:

- **Colombia’s policies** on the above at the national and local levels. This includes how Colombia’s new Feminist Foreign Policy can be leveraged and how the Colombia Government is working on the 1325 National Action Plan, and the Comprehensive Guarantee Programme for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders.
- **Conflict-related violence**, including an analysis of internally displaced Colombian women and children; migrant women and children in the country, and those seeking to transit through Colombia; and the impact of child recruitment into armed groups.
- **Climate change effects on women and girls, persons with disabilities etc.** This has a national and sub-national perspective, with a special focus on the Amazon (Meta, Caquetá, Guaviare) and the Pacific region.

The methodology used follows the ‘How to guidance note on gender equality and social inclusion’ by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). It includes extensive literature (compiled in the References below) and a limited number of key informant interviews (of the five contacts provided, two did not have availability at the time of this analysis). The main findings will be shared at the Latin America and the Caribbean (LATAC) Gender and Equalities Network meeting.

The **current context** in Colombia is marked by political changes, coupled with heightened vulnerabilities due to renewed armed conflict and climate change. The administration of Gustavo Petro, who came into office in 2022, represents the country’s first left-wing presidency. Significant advances in the peace agenda include the highest budget allocation for the 2016 Peace Agreement implementation in the past seven years and the establishment of the Total Peace Policy through Law No. 2272 of 2022, which focuses on negotiating with politically motivated armed groups and criminal organisations. Additionally, the government’s commitment to sustainable development has led to the city of Cali being chosen to host COP16 Biodiversity (the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity), a major United Nations (UN) event centring on climate change, biodiversity and social inclusion. The potential effect of the situation in Venezuela after the contested re-election of Nicolás Maduro is to be followed up.

GEDSI analysis findings

1

Colombian policies and plans

This section examines the main Colombian policies related to gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) issues, focusing on topics such as care work and women's involvement in peacebuilding. It starts by describing the current situation of the Ministry of Equity and Equality. It then goes on to explore the Feminist Foreign Policy introduced in 2024, and addresses contributions from the 1325 National Action Plan, Total Peace Policy, and the Comprehensive Guarantee Programme for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders.

Ministry of Equity and Equality

Gustavo Petro's government created the Ministry of Equity and Equality through the enactment of Law No. 2281 of 2023, with Vice President Francia Márquez appointed to lead the ministry and its programmes. The new ministry aims to eliminate economic, political and social gaps and promote the effective enjoyment of the right to equality, the principle of non-discrimination and non-regression, as well as to defend the interests of those subjects under special constitutional protection (*Función Pública*, 2023). However, in May 2024, the Constitutional Court found that the Congress – which is responsible for the creation of this portfolio – omitted a necessary procedure related to the fiscal approval of new budgetary responsibilities for the state. Therefore, it decided that the ministry will be able to continue its functions only until 2026, but afterward, it will cease operations (El País, 2024).

Sisma Mujer was one of the organisations that advised the government not to disband the *Consejería de la Equidad de la Mujer* (Women's Equity Council) before the ministry was fully operational. With the ministry's survival now threatened, *Sisma Mujer* has asked the government to consider a 'Plan B', such as reopening the Council to ensure institutional continuity.

Política de Paz Total (Total Peace Policy)

As stated by the 'Literature review of structural violence' (Rodríguez Gómez, 2024), Law No. 2272 of 2022, which implements the Total Peace Policy, focuses on negotiating with politically motivated groups such as the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), the *Estado Mayor Central* (EMC), and the *Nueva Marquetalia* dissidents. It also aims to establish mechanisms for addressing high-impact criminal groups like the *Clan del Golfo* and the *Autodefensas Conquistadoras de la Sierra Nevada* ('the *Pachencas*'), along with urban armed groups in cities such as Medellín, Quibdó and Buenaventura.

In certain regions, the ceasefires agreed on with armed groups such as the EMC and ELN, along with the truce agreements between urban armed factions under the Total Peace Policy, have contributed positively to reducing violent actions against civilians (*Indepaz*, 2024). The 'Literature review of structural violence' (Rodríguez Gómez, 2024) has shown that these results stem from the policy's emphasis on negotiation. However, non-state armed groups still maintain territorial control over marginalised rural populations. Likewise, the review underscores that progress can be seen in the increased public participation on

the ELN negotiation process under the Total Peace Policy, as it has actively involved civil society, with significant engagement from women's and youth organisations. Authors such as Echavarría Álvarez et al. (2022) mention that to further the Total Peace Policy, it is essential to accelerate the implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement. This requires a comprehensive multiparty consensus on critical issues, such as establishing a Special Agrarian Jurisdiction and reforming electoral policies.

Additionally, *Sisma Mujer*, during an interview, raised the concern that in the Total Peace process, only the negotiations with ELN have been open to women's participation. After the critical role played by women's civil society groups during the negotiations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (NOREF, 2017), and implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement with more than 100 gender-related measures (Kroc institute, 2023), *Sisma* observed: “we're starting from scratch to demand women's participation”.

1325 National Action Plan

The elaboration of the National Action Plan (NAP) for UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 has been an ongoing effort by the women's movement in Colombia, aimed at highlighting the importance of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in the country (ABC Colombia, 2023). The *Comité de Impulso* is a shared space with women's civil society groups, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Cancillería*) and the Ministry of Equality. Important milestones include incorporating commitments related to this resolution into some local development plans, as well as its participatory formulation – which brought together more than 1,500 women and 27 feminist organisations from all regions. The NAP was supposed to be launched in October 2023 and is now delayed to October 2024. It will take a territorial, age-based and intersectional approach, and will focus on the consolidation of peace (*Corporación Humanas*, 2021). However, it remains to be seen if it will include proposals like the ones submitted by *Sisma Mujer*.

A collection of women's organisations involved in peacebuilding and advocacy processes have published this year a series of proposals to nurture the 1325 National Action Plan. The main priorities for action include: (i) approaches to feminist peace processes, with an emphasis on gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and access to education; (ii) feminist human security, promoting protection guarantees for leaders and defenders, as well as economic support to enhance participation; (iii) participation, tackling violence against women in politics, as well as parity in representation; (iv) integration in peacebuilding processes, including the justice system and comprehensive health systems for those experiencing GBV; and (v) monitoring and evaluation (*Sisma Mujer*, 2024a).

In an interview with *Sisma Mujer*, it became clear that an important gap is the disconnection between the NAP and the Total Peace process, resulting in two parallel initiatives. The organisation calls for a pathway to link them and fully include women in the Total Peace negotiations. *Sisma Mujer* has also raised these issues with the UN Verification Mission, since it has access to all the Total Peace processes. Additionally, there is concern about the continuation of the group's position as an adviser within the UN Verification Mission, after *Sisma Mujer* gender adviser finished her contract.

Feminist Foreign Policy

According to the recent interview made by *El Espectador* (2024), as well as an interview for this assignment with Diana María Parra, Counsellor for Gender Equality from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Office, Colombia will inaugurate the WPS Centre as the first in Latin America

and the Caribbean aimed at advancing UN Security Council Resolution 1325. This initiative seeks to connect governments, strengthen regional women's networks and involve academia. The ultimate goal is to develop a regional 1325 Action Plan within five years.

Ms Parra explained the initiative is built on three principles: participatory policy-making with more than 40 women and LGBT+ organisations, alignment with the Total Peace Project, and an intersectional approach. Major challenges include innovating without a predefined model, ensuring public adoption, and achieving sustainability through gender-focused institutional structures, investment projects and support from relevant organisations and diplomats.

Additionally, a significant milestone is the appointment of Arlen B Tickner as Roving Ambassador for Gender and Feminist Global Policy. In her role, Ms Tickner will aim to strengthen national capacities to advocate for gender mainstreaming in every national interest (*El Espectador*, 2024). According to an interview with Ms Tickner in *RCN Noticias* (2024), Colombia stands alongside other nations actively advancing SRHR and care work systems, even in the face of a growing global gender backlash. In the interview by *El Espectador*, Ms Diana María Parra (2024) conveyed that efforts are being made to include all relevant organisations, from the local to national levels, in policy engagement. Additionally, she argues that the Feminist Foreign Policy route aims to decentralise and integrate the policy with community-led organisations. Institutional gender diagnostics will guide sensitisation processes to highlight the importance of gender for inclusion and equality, with strong backing from Chancellor Luis Gilberto Murillo.

From the perspective of women's organisations captured in the interview with *Sisma Mujer*, there is a positive sentiment towards the policy being approved, as it is well-formulated. Ambassador Tickner is working on it to position it internationally. *Sisma Mujer* also recognised the need to ensure an open and transparent process in selecting women's organisations for participation in monitoring activities. The group recommends that women's organisations should independently select their own representatives to ensure the selection process remains free from external influence.

Programa Integral de Garantías para Mujeres Líderesas y Defensoras de Derechos Humanos (PIGMLD)

The adoption of the PIGMLD (Comprehensive Guarantee Programme for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders), although not a direct commitment of the Peace Agreement, was the result of the efforts of various women's organisations in spaces convened by civil society, such as the National Guarantees Process. This process led to the development of action plans and the territorial implementation of activities. The programme has three strategies: i) strengthening women's leadership and organisations of women leaders and human rights defenders; ii) institutional adaptation of protection measures, including a gender and women's rights perspective; and iii) combating impunity and advocating for historical memory (*Sisma Mujer*, 2021).

The execution of the programme from 2019 to 2022 faced significant critiques from women's organisations, with implementation levels at only 35 per cent. They argued that it maintained a limited institutional mission to fulfil and promote the PIGMLD. During this period, the government focused on consolidating the new four-year Action Plan, resulting in a generalised delay in the programme's fulfilment (*Sisma Mujer*, 2024b).

In 2023, Petro's Government developed 12 territorial meetings in the most conflict-affected departments to start designing the action plans for each territory (*Ministerio del Interior*, 2023a). According to *Sisma Mujer*, there are two crucial challenges. The first is to expedite

progress in the next two years, since the Ministry of Interior's Human Rights Directorate has given the programme momentum, showing strong leadership. The second challenge is that the programme remains distinct from the General Guarantees Policy, and it is vital to integrate it with general policies. This is just as important as it is to integrate the NAP with the Total Peace Policy, as discussed above.

National Care Policy

The National Care Policy is the first programme in the country designed to improve the living conditions of caregivers and those in need of care. It aims to create, expand, regulate and coordinate care services and infrastructure to support the autonomy, independent living and community integration of those requiring care. It also intends to democratise caregiving and enhance institutional capacity and inter-institutional coordination mechanisms to ensure the effective operation of the National Care System (Ministerio de Igualdad y Equidad, n.d.).

However, the policy has faced criticism due to deficiencies in budgetary execution and the fact that the institutional arrangements supporting it are still in the design phase, even after two years of government implementation. The British Embassy in Colombia can offer technical assistance and share best practices from other contexts to improve the policy's effectiveness, ensuring that it fully benefits women and their families. It can also help to integrate it as a priority into the Feminist Foreign Policy.

2

Gender equality, disability and social inclusion in Colombia

This section explores equality, disability and social inclusion in Colombia. It covers disability rights, LGBT+ rights, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence (including child marriage), and women's political and economic participation. Throughout the analysis, a significant emphasis is placed on the distinct impacts faced by indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, underscoring the critical need for intersectional policies and targeted programming.

Disability rights

A 2020 evaluation of the 2013 National Public Policy on Disability and Inclusion found that socio-economic inequalities and access to education are worsened by urban–rural divides and gender inequalities, with more people with disabilities in rural areas and a higher proportion of women affected (UNPRPD et al., 2020). Intersectionality is crucial in Colombia, especially for people with disabilities affected by the armed conflict. As of 2020, among the total of registered victims, 361,601 individuals had disabilities (PAIIS, 2020). It is also important to consider overlooked groups, such as ex-combatant signatories of the Peace Agreement. A recent example is the partnership between the government and international organisations to provide comprehensive healthcare for 1,280 signatories who acquired disabilities from the conflict (UN Verification Mission in Colombia, 2024).

Gustavo Petro's Government has introduced the initiative 'Guarantees for a World Without Barriers for People with Disabilities' into the National Development Plan. It aims to improve data collection on disabilities, create inclusive educational and employment opportunities,

ensure equal access to justice, and address the intersectional oppressions faced by people with disabilities (DNP, 2022).

LGBT+ rights

According to an interview with the LGBT+ group at the Ministry of the Interior, advances in LGBT+ rights in Colombia have largely been driven by judicial rulings rather than legislative processes. The 1991 Constitution established a framework of enforceability and supported individuals to demand their rights through legal channels instead of relying on institutional or legislative initiatives.

The demand from social movements led to the national LGBT+ Policy in 2018, in a context following on from the 2016 Peace Agreement. Several evaluation documents have analysed the policy's progress, included a mapping of policies at the territorial level, and have issued recommendations. The policy had an Action Plan 2020–2022, but it was criticised for lack of participation; as a result, efforts have been made to establish a system for effective participation at the national level. One concrete example can be found on the First National LGBT+ Convention in 2024. The Colombian Government, in its National Development Plan, also identified LGBT+ persons as important partners in the process of transforming governmental practices. The country has also enacted progressive laws to support the LGBT+ community, including the Trans Vote Protocol (Resolution 3480 of 2020), which aims at ensuring the civil and political rights of LGBT+ individuals (*Colombia Diversa*, 2023).

Despite these advances, significant challenges persist in both the human rights situation of the LGBT+ population and the institutional frameworks designed to ensure their protection. In 2023, there were 159 reported homicides against LGBT+ individuals. Most of those targeted are gay men and trans women, with significant numbers among Afro-descendants, migrants and human rights defenders (*Colombia Diversa*, 2024). In this context, it is crucial to highlight the unique experiences of trans women, whose life expectancy is below 35 years (Manrique Horta, 2024). These people represent most victims of violence driven by prejudice (*Defensoría del Pueblo*, 2024).

As mentioned by the representative of the Ministry of the Interior, the effective management of LGBT+ rights also remains elusive. This is because responsibilities have shifted from the Ministry of the Interior to the newly established Ministry of Equality and Equity, complicating the coordination and execution of policies. Major challenges are the need to include prevention mechanisms in Local Security Plans and for a national public institution to coordinate intersectoral efforts and collect gender-disaggregated data on this population (*Colombia Diversa*, 202).

Sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR)

Colombia has demonstrated significant progress in SRHR, including a reduction of extreme maternal morbidity, a decrease in maternal and perinatal mortality, and the establishment of comprehensive legislative and public policy frameworks on SRHR (UNFPA, 2023a). Feminist social movements achieved the decriminalisation of abortion up to the 24th week of gestation in 2022, through the C-055 Sentence (Casas, 2022). This is a contentious issue in a deeply Catholic, family-oriented society. Challenges remain in closing the gaps in access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. These reflect exclusion based on geographic location, ethnicity, age, migratory status or type of health insurance coverage. For instance, limited access to SRH services is a significant issue for migrant women, especially for women without Temporary Protection Permits (PPTs) who cannot join a Health Promotion Entity (EPS) (Mogollón, 2024).

Since Covid-19, there has been an increased reliance on midwives for childbirth in rural disconnected areas (UNFPA, 2023b). Due to their relevant role as main health and care providers in rural communities, the government launched '*Partera Vital: Comunidad Vital*', a programme that integrates traditional knowledge and public health, statistics and protection services (Ibid.).

Gender-based violence (GBV) – including child marriage

Based on 'Gender and conflict in Colombia: a literature review' (Rodríguez Gómez, 2023), in Colombia GBV varies by geography, disability, age and conflict impact. The review highlights that 50 per cent of homicides against women are linked to domestic violence and notes that, despite underreporting due to fear of re-victimisation and ongoing violence, the Prosecutor's Office has made progress in addressing intrafamilial violence. In conflict-affected territories, women face exacerbated issues such as poverty, drug trafficking, prostitution and the loss of leadership roles (Coalición1325, n.d.). According to the National Centre for Historical Memory/ *Centro de Memoria Histórica* (CNMH) (2021), conflict-related sexual violence was a significant form of violence against women under the armed conflict, with women constituting 61.8 per cent and girls and adolescents 30 per cent of those targeted. The LGBT+ community has also faced this type of violence, often used to enforce heteropatriarchal social norms. However, significant gaps persist in updating national statistics on this issue, with the most recent report on gender inequalities by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) including a chapter on gender-based violence dating back to 2020 (DANE, 2020).

In conflict-affected areas of Colombia, economic hardship and violence have often led families to child, early, and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU), with 23 per cent of girls and 7 per cent of boys married before the age of 18. This practice is even more prevalent in rural areas, where 40 per cent of girls marry before 18 (Girls Not Brides, 2024a). Although historically normalised and underreported, efforts since 2018 by UN agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the national government have sought to address and combat CEFMU (UNHRC, 2023). For instance, the organisation Girls Not Brides held the first Regional Convening in Bogotá, to draw up a collective, multiyear plan to address CEFMU in Latin America (Girls Not Brides, 2024b).

Women's political and economic participation

The 'Gender and conflict in Colombia review' (Rodríguez Gómez, 2023) highlights that Colombia has a vibrant feminist movement that advocates for peace, sexual and reproductive health rights, political parity, and environmental justice. However, political violence against women candidates for public office rose by 141 per cent in 2023 (Ibid.). Incipient cultural changes can be seen, with parity almost achieved in decision-making positions and the election of Vice President Francia Márquez, an Afro-descendant environmental leader¹ (Turkewitz, 2022). Despite advances in political participation, newly established institutions like the Ministry of Equality and the National Care System have been criticised for operational inefficiencies and lack of budget transparency (Vanegas, 2024).

¹ Francia Márquez is the first Afro-descendant woman to hold this position in Colombia, a country long entrenched in institutional and structural racism, as well as patriarchal dynamics.

The National Action Plan for UN Resolution 1325 is notable for its focus on community-led women's involvement in peacebuilding (*Corporación Humanas*, 2023). Historically, women's participation in peace negotiations has been low, averaging 3.6 per cent since 1982 (Céspedes-Báez and Jaramillo Ruiz, 2018). However, the FARC-EP (FARC – People's Army) process saw improved involvement due to confidence-building measures (CFR, 2017). As mentioned in the review, recent ELN negotiations have also achieved near parity in terms of women's participation.

3

Conflict-related violence

This section explores the diverse populations and types of conflict-related violence currently experienced in Colombia, with a focus on the impacts on internally displaced populations, migrants, refugees and children. Within the renewed conflict dynamics, violence and crime have assumed new forms and combinations (Kurtenbach and Rettberg, 2018). These are briefly described.

Internally displaced Colombian women and children

As highlighted in the 'Ending VAWC HD report: trends and drivers in Latin America' (Rodríguez Gómez, 2023) conflict and displacement significantly amplify gender inequalities and heighten women's and girls' vulnerability to violence. Over one-third of internally displaced women in Colombia have experienced forced sex. The report also underscored that women are exposed to greater risks of GBV, because of their increased marginalisation through displacement: economic and educational disparities, post-traumatic stress, loss of social support, financial scarcity, and loss of their job or their husbands losing work. As per the report, intergenerational effects of violence are also evident among the displaced. The ripple effects of violence span generations, with childhood exposure to domestic violence being a known risk factor for future victimisation or perpetration (Ibid.).

The signing of the Final Peace Agreement in 2016 did not end GBV. Despite a notable decrease in homicides against men during the peace talks, homicides against women remained unchanged (Ibid.).

Migrant women and children in the country, and those seeking to transit through Colombia

To date, Colombia has received approximately 3 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees (UNHCR, 2024). This population faces substantial risks both in transit and upon arrival due to conflict-related violence from various criminal groups in border regions, such as the Darién Gap and Catatumbo. According to the 'Disability inclusion Helpdesk report' No. 110 (Martin, et al., 2023), this migration has surged significantly since 2015, doubling annually from 2021 to 2022. In 2022, more than half a million people crossed the Darién Gap, most being Venezuelans, facing dangers like flash floods, dengue fever, and threats from criminal groups, including theft, sexual violence, disappearances and death.

As per the previous report (Ibid.), the migrant profile has shifted from predominantly individual men to families with children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and unaccompanied minors, with 22 per cent of those crossing in early 2023 being children. Marginalisation and gendered insecurities are prominent amid the crises of migration and

conflict. From April 2021 to November 2023, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) assisted 950 people, mostly women and LGBT+ individuals, who had reported sexual violence during their crossing.

Perpetrators of violence are in their majority men. The situation varies across territories due to the multiparty nature of the conflict and the specific dynamics of each zone. In border regions like the Darién Gap and Catatumbo, various violent non-state groups exploit these high-opportunity, low-risk environments. The groups compete for control over territories and their inhabitants, including the numerous migrants and refugees. In societies marked by patriarchal traditions, control of women's lives, particularly those of migrant and refugee women who face heightened marginalisation, is a recurrent expression of power (Zulver and Idler, 2020; Gutierrez, 2021).

The 'Ending VAWC HD report: trends and drivers in Latin America' (Smit and Fraser, 2022) highlights that migrant and refugee women in Venezuela have documented the most frequently occurring types of violence, including physical violence (35 per cent), verbal violence (25 per cent), psychological violence (11 per cent) and sexual violence (10 per cent). For instance, this group is more prone to human trafficking with sexual purposes, prostitution and sexual violence. Migrant women in Colombia face heightened marginalisation due to a lack of support networks, misinformation about available public services and rights, and fear of deportation (Zulver and Idler, 2020).

The gendered insecurities of Venezuelan migrants are further complicated by limited data on gender-based violence, particularly in border areas (Ibid.). The recent Venezuelan elections on 28 July 2024, which saw Nicolás Maduro extend his presidency, may result in increased migration and social unrest. This will affect migration flows to Colombia (Sabatini and Farsari, 2024).

Impact of child recruitment into armed groups

The recruitment of children by non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and organised crime groups has been a persistent issue throughout Colombia's armed conflicts. This problem intensified after the 2016 Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP, driven by competition for control over illegal economies and territories. In rural areas, where armed groups are more active, child recruitment is particularly prevalent. In urban areas, organised crime groups are the main culprits (ACAPS, 2023). Some of the most visible recruiting armed groups are the FARC-EP dissidents led by Iván Mordisco, the ELN and the *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia* (Manjarrés, 2024).

The impacts of such recruitment are profound, affecting children's physical and psychological health, education, and prospects. Issues include criminal records, disrupted education, difficulty reintegrating into society, family displacement and social stigma. Child recruitment will likely rise through the first half of 2025, driven by escalating armed confrontations, stalled peace negotiations, and the growing number of impoverished migrants and refugees in Colombia (ACAPS, 2024).

Major factors contributing to child recruitment include multidimensional poverty, lack of state presence and lack of connectivity. Marginalised populations, including indigenous, Afro-Colombian and rural communities, are disproportionately affected by this problem as they predominantly reside in conflict-affected territories. Recent data indicates a 58 per cent increase in child recruitment from July 2022 to June 2023 (Ibid.).

4

Climate change effects on women and girls, persons with disabilities, and displaced people

This section explores the intersection of climate change and conflict, highlighting how these dual crises affect women and girls, persons with disabilities, and internally displaced people (IDPs). It also focuses on the Amazon and the Pacific regions.

Climate change, conflict and post-conflict development in Colombia are deeply interconnected. Conflict weakens resilience to climate impacts and accelerates environmental degradation, while climate change hinders post-conflict development and increases the risk of renewed conflicts (SIPRI, 2022). Socio-economically marginalised groups, including subsistence farmers, indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations, and IDPs, are particularly at risk.

Women and girls

Colombia has implemented CONPES 4080 – Public Policy for Women’s Gender Equality (2022), which aims to guarantee the full enjoyment of rights for Colombian women and address discrimination. This policy also acknowledges the disproportionate impact of climate change on smallholder farmers, who are predominantly women and ethnic communities (DNP, 2022).

However, climate change impacts and security issues continue to significantly affect Colombian women and girls. Gradual climate changes lead to food and economic insecurity due to reduced soil productivity and water scarcity. Women migrating because of climate hazards often face higher levels of gender-based violence, forced marriage and sexual exploitation. Indigenous women view extreme climate events as threats to their cultural rights and bodily autonomy, as they perceive their bodies and the environment as a unified entity (DCAF, 2022).

Despite these challenges, an abundance of literature highlights how Colombia’s legacy of natural resource-induced conflict, gender-responsive peace agreements and climate vulnerability provide valuable insights for addressing the climate–gender–conflict nexus. Initiatives to enhance women’s leadership and technical capacities in natural resource management and community conflict resolution are on the rise. These recognise women not only as victims or combatants but as influential partners in peace processes (GIWPS, 2021). What is missing from this literature is a warning against a reductive approach that sees women as the ones who must solve climate and security problems.

Persons with disabilities

The physical and access barriers faced by persons with disabilities are exacerbated during conflict, disaster emergencies and climate change effects. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2024), approximately 3 per cent of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Colombia have some type of cognitive or physical disability. Nevertheless, most disability data registers and programmes are undertaken in urban settings, leaving behind the most at-risk groups – as rural areas are often the most affected by climate change, migration and conflict (DiDRRN, 2022).

Internally displaced people (IDPs)

Climate change has added an increased vulnerability to the most at-risk communities living in conflict-affected areas. Many displaced Colombians live in informal settlements near major urban areas, which are exposed to disasters and lack the resources or capacities to develop emergency planning. A recent survey found that 318 of 557 disaster-affected municipalities are under de facto non-state armed groups' control (SIPRI, 2022).

The Norwegian Refugee Council estimates that nearly 800,000 Colombians depend on humanitarian aid due to climate change impacts (Balasundaram and Tower, 2023). Disaster-related displacements have surged to their highest level in over a decade, with heavy rain-induced floods causing nearly all the 281,000 recorded internal movements. In response, Congress passed Law No. 15 of 2024, prioritising climate-displaced individuals for housing, health and education services, and establishing a national register system to ensure their protection. This law sets a significant precedent for addressing the needs of climate-induced migrations in Latin America and globally (Ibid.).

It is also crucial to assess these phenomena at the sub-regional level, as conflict conditions and climate change vulnerability are significantly shaped by the ecological and social characteristics of specific territories. The following sections provide an overview of the Amazon and Pacific regions.

The Amazon region

The Amazon region has been a strategic corridor for illegal economic activities, as well as for non-state armed groups' socio-political control, since the beginning of the 20th Century. The **Meta** department has been affected by the coca economy since 1996, as well as intensive livestock and deforestation practices that attract not only big land tenants but also non-state armed groups. These illicit crop economies are emblematic of the war–peace continuities and environmental issues experienced in Meta (Neira Niño, 2019; Parada-Hernández and Marín-Jaramillo, 2021).

In **Meta**, women's organisations have significantly contributed to peacebuilding and environmental protection through initiatives like '*Meta con Mirada de Mujer*', which coordinates leaders, promotes political advocacy, supports sustainable development projects, and aids sexual violence survivors. The peasant community, including the National Peasant Association of Colombia (ANUC) and displaced groups, remains influential, while the youth sector, supported by various NGOs, has become a dynamic force in promoting peace and sustainability (LIMPAL, 2022; UNDP, 2010). Initiatives like *Mascapaz*, supported by the European Fund for Peace in Colombia, promote payments for ecosystem services to communities in Caño Curia. They have played a crucial role in incentivising the protection and restoration of hydrologically significant forests within **Meta** (Instituto SINCHI, 2022).

In other departments of the Amazon region, like **Guaviare**, similar environmental conflicts are exacerbated by forced displacement, land appropriation and state absence due to the ongoing armed conflict. The department, a major coca producer, faces deforestation driven by both coca cultivation and extensive cattle ranching, leading to disputes over land and displacement of local communities (Larrea Mejía et al., 2022).

Community forestry initiatives in **Guaviare** have successfully reduced deforestation by 37 per cent (Amaya, 2023), serving to counterbalance the effects of climate change in the department. An exemplary initiative is a programme developed by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) Colombia and *Tropenbos*, where women in areas like Calamar monitor and analyse ecological data. This contributes to conservation efforts and educates their

communities on restoring forests' biodiversity (WWF, 2023). These efforts are also a way of granting women different sources of access to productive resources beyond coca production, while at the same time promoting sustainable practices in the territory (Parada-Hernández and Marín-Jaramillo, 2021).

Despite these achievements, challenges persist. For instance, some REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) projects aimed at generating carbon credits have sometimes proven counterproductive. In Jocu Bucuro Apuro, Guaviare, the overlap of multiple carbon projects has resulted in unintended profits, raising concerns about the due diligence applied to these schemes (CEDE, 2024).

Since the collapse of the Caguán negotiations in 2002 and the conclusion of the first phase of Plan Colombia (2000–2006), which focused on controlling armed groups and illicit crops in the southern region, **Caquetá** has been largely neglected in terms of national security. Today, this Amazon region garners attention primarily for similar environmental concerns to the ones in Meta and Guaviare (Prada and Durán, 2022).

Caquetá's history of settlements by families from Huila, Tolima and Antioquia, included women often being treated as tradable commodities. The armed conflict brought further suffering, with women facing forced displacement, sexual violence, torture and killings. Despite these hardships, women's organisations have developed resilience mechanisms and asserted their political agency, while advancing mitigation efforts in Caquetá. For instance, initiatives like *Corpomanigua* aim to restore the social fabric and women's lives, while preserving native seeds and promoting sustainable soil practices (Rutas del Conflicto, 2023).

The Pacific region

Deforestation and illicit crop cultivation are likewise critical issues in the **Pacific** region of Colombia, intersecting with the ongoing armed conflict. In the **Chocó** department, illegal economies led to the destruction of 65,961 hectares of forest between 2016 and 2021 (*El Tiempo*, 2023). Armed groups, such as the ELN and EMC, have exploited the absence of effective state institutions to establish their governance structures. The Total Peace Policy has been criticised for its inefficiency in addressing security concerns in conjunction with initiatives like the *Plan de Garantías de Seguridad* (Valencia and Carrejo, 2024).

To combat deforestation, REDD+ projects have been implemented in Afro-descendant communities in **Chocó**. These initiatives have been effective in reducing deforestation and curbing illegal cropping in historically exploited areas (CEDE, 2024).

According to ABC Colombia, for years, alerts by the Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities concerning the urgency of problems in the **Atrato** region were met with indifference by the Colombian Government. Yet this is an area where community leaders are active and strong in the defence of the rights of their communities. To peacefully defend their territory, they established links with a range of national and international NGOs, as well as academic institutions. In doing so, they achieved a landmark ruling from the Constitutional Court giving bio-cultural rights to the Atrato River (the most important river in Chocó). This ruling, along with a similar one from a court in New Zealand, set a global precedent on the rights of rivers. The Colombian court acknowledged the inherent interdependence between the environment and communities in the **Atrato** region and ordered the government to take a series of measures to protect the Atrato river, and to combat illegal mining and deforestation in the territory. This precedent reiterates the right to free, prior and informed consent for ethnic communities. It should be noted that in May 2021,

G7 (Group of Seven) climate and environment ministers expressed their “*grave concern that the unprecedented and interdependent crises of climate change and biodiversity loss pose an existential threat to nature, people, prosperity and security*”.

In October 2024, the city of **Cali** will host COP16 Biodiversity, a significant UN event that focuses on climate change, biodiversity, social inclusion and governance. The conference, themed ‘*Paz con la Naturaleza*’ (‘Peace with Nature’), will highlight the region’s biodiversity and its connection to peace, featuring discussions on the roles of ethnic women and youth in post-conflict conservation efforts (COP16, 2024). This event represents a crucial opportunity for the Pacific region to enhance its governance and showcase its cultural and environmental significance. Notably, a faction of the EMC has pledged not to disrupt COP16, demonstrating its commitment to peace (DW, 2024).

Recommendations

Based on the GEDSI findings in the report, the authors present four important recommendations for the British Embassy in Colombia:

Support the wide distribution and effective implementation of the first Colombian National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325. The NAP for UNSCR 1325 is critical for advancing women's roles in peace and security in Colombia. The British Embassy can contribute by providing targeted support, such as training workshops, funding for local women's organisations, and facilitation for international exchanges of best practices. While supporting the NAP in its own right, it is also important to encourage the integration of its goals with broader peace efforts, like the Total Peace Policy, to ensure cohesive and inclusive peacebuilding processes.

Advocate with the Colombian Government for improved data collection and targeted interventions for persons with disabilities in areas affected by climate change and conflict. The British Embassy can provide technical support to the National Administrative Department of Statistics and implementing entities from the Colombian Government, following internationally recognised disability guidance for data collection and ensuring disability-inclusive approaches in climate adaptation and humanitarian responses. Here, the priority should be rural areas affected by conflict, disasters and/or climate change.

Promote gender-responsive climate initiatives that recognise women's leadership, while ensuring that they are not solely responsible for solving climate change challenges. Women in Colombia, as well as many rural and indigenous communities, play crucial roles in climate adaptation and natural resource management. However, it is essential that climate action frameworks do not place the burden of solving these issues solely on them. The British Embassy should support initiatives that support women as equal partners in climate solutions, alongside men, and ensure that climate policies are inclusive, equitable and do not perpetuate gendered expectations. This can be achieved by supporting balanced community-led initiatives and learning from good practices, such as the alliances created for the Atrato River landmark ruling.

Enhance the protection mechanisms for displaced and migrant populations in climate-vulnerable regions. Climate change is driving displacement in Colombia, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Displaced and migrant populations often settle in precarious conditions, which lack resources for resilience against further environmental shocks. The British Embassy should focus on reinforcing local and national systems that provide comprehensive support, including housing, healthcare and legal protections for climate-displaced populations, with an emphasis on inclusive and equitable access.

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