

• COUNTRY INFORMATION FACT SHEET • COLOMBIA



GENERAL COUNTRY DATA



Surface Area: 1,141,748 km² (119 million hectares, approximately) ¹



Population (last official census 2018): 48,258,494 inhabitants ²



Population projection to 2020: 50,912,429 inhabitants



Composition of the population: 51.2% women, 48.8% men; ³ 87.58% whites and mestizos; 9.34% Afro-Colombians (blacks, mulattos, palenqueros and raizales); 4.4% indigenous and 0.006% Roma (gypsies) ⁴



Life Expectancy: 76.92 years (2017)



Economically Active Population (EAP): 27.271.056 ⁵



Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 2019: in 2019, the national GDP was USD 394,571.1 million at constant 2010 prices ⁶



GDP 2020 (trend): in the second quarter of 2020, in its original series, GDP declined 15.7% compared to the same period in 2019 ⁷

Brief Overview of the Socioeconomic Situation

Employment/Unemployment.

By September 2020, the unemployment rate of the national total reached **15.8%**, i.e. an increase of 5.6 percentage points compared to September of the previous year (**10.2%**). Global participation rate was **60.1%**, **2.7** percentage points less than in September 2019 (**62.8%**). Lastly, employment rate was **50.6%**, pointing to a decline of **5.7** percentage points compared

to the same month in 2019 (**56,3%**). ⁸

Total loss of jobs in paid care activities for women between the second quarter of 2019 and the second quarter of 2020 can be summarized as follows: **342,000** in direct care, **533,000** in indirect care and 100,000 in others, that is a total of **975,000** jobs. As for men, total loss of jobs in the paid care sector was **184,000** jobs. There are no estimates for informal care work. Several activities of the care sector were among the hardest hit by the crisis, such as domestic service and the sale of prepared meals.

A significant part of the loss of women's jobs is in the paid care sector. Compared to the same period in 2019, of the **2.5** million women's jobs lost in the second quarter of 2020, nearly one million jobs are of the paid care sector.

Care activities are essential and cannot be interrupted as life cannot be sustained without them. They include tasks relating to food, clothing, care to specific groups such as boys, girls, the elderly and people with disabilities. The substantial loss of jobs in the paid care sector indicates that these tasks are no longer contracted in the market and are probably being provided at home on an unpaid basis. When comparing August 2020 with August 2019, women increased their total weekly work hours (from **62.8** to **63.1**), while work hours declined for men (from **55,3** to **53,4**).

Inactive Population.

One of the most important phenomena in employment figures is the significant increase of the **"inactive population"**. The economically inactive population reached **16.9** million in June 2020, an increase of **2.6** million compared to 2019. Economic inactivity data are important because they qualify the unemployment figures: an economically inactive person does not demand work and, consequently, does not appear in unemployment statistics. If we include those who entered the inactive mode during the pandemic, the impact of the disease on employment has been disastrous: the unemployment rate would reach over **30%**. There are data that show that this trend is consolidating in Colombia: between January and June 2020, the number of affiliates of the subsidized health and pension scheme rose shockingly from **22.8** million affiliates to **24.3** million: one and a half million more in this short period of time.

For its part, the so-called contributory regime lost almost **900,000** members, decreasing from **22.9** million to **22** million members. ⁹

Informality.

The most recent report on labor informality in Colombia was carried out by the National Statistics Department (**DANE by its acronym in Spanish**), based on the Extensive Integrated Household Survey (**GEIH by its acronym in Spanish**) for the period June to August 2020. The proportion of those employed under informal conditions in **13** cities and metropolitan areas was **46.4%** for the moving quarter from June to August 2020. It was **47.2%** for the total of **23** cities and metropolitan areas. ¹⁰

Poverty.

As of December 2019, **35.7%** of Colombians have been experiencing monetary poverty, accounting for an increase of **1.0** percentage point compared to 2018, when poor people accounted for **34,7%**. In 2019, poverty in the municipal capitals was **32.3%**, and monetary poverty in populated centers and dispersed rural areas was **47.5%**. In 2019, of the national total, **17,470,000** people were experiencing monetary poverty.

According to studies of the Universidad de los Andes, an increase of about **15** percentage points of poverty is projected for 2020 (**7.3** million people more than in 2019), accompanied by a total drop in monthly income of **4.8** billion colombian pesos. ¹¹

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (**ECLAC**), extreme poverty will rise in Colombia, from the **10.9%** registered in 2019, to **14.3%** in 2020.

Main Violations of Workers' Rights

Regressive measures to the working class

- The Colombian government did not take measures to address the impact of the crisis on production and social activities. It was only concerned with maintaining monetary liquidity through relief programs or rescheduling the payment of taxes, social security and other financial obligations. Iván Duque's administration accelerated the decapitalization of state-run companies that offered credit to the low-income population or to the territories, and under the figure of domestic debt used the resources of these entities to provide loans to the financial sector.

- **Decree 488** dated March 2020 transfers economic losses in the framework of **COVID-19** to workers. **Decree 518** dated April 2020 creates the solidarity income but fails to meet minimum basic income criteria and disregards the large group of workers affected by the crisis.

- **Decree 538** dated April 2020 forces medical personnel to work without guarantees and to serve during the pandemic without biosafety equipment and without decent working conditions. ¹² The decree that allocates the budget and use of the infrastructure to attend the **COVID-19** pandemic forced health workers to be available to serve during the health emergency with a temporary economic consideration, but was widely denounced by health workers for failing to pay the economic bonuses and, in general, the salaries established by law.

- Circulars **21** and **33** of the Ministry of Labor point out that employers evaluate workers' functions and the possibility of teleworking. The employer is empowered to make decisions on the flexibility of the working day, to advance holidays, modify remuneration and/or cancel extra-legal payments. ¹³

- Legislative Decree **588** of 2020 establishes the transfer of the obligation to pay pensions of a minimum salary or less from private pension funds to **COLPENSIONES** (the only public pensions entity), transferring the pension liability and guaranteeing the liquidity of private funds. In addition, the contribution rate declined from **16%** to **3%**, affecting the pension of workers that the company did not pay for two months.

- More deficiencies in the access of workers to justice: the figure of "**rigorous labor inspection**" is nothing but a preventive mechanism that does not effectively punish employers for violating labor rights during the emergency. Only **1%** of the applications filed to the Ministry of Labor for violation were penalized.

Violation of the right to collective bargaining.

We underscore the concentration of employers' measures, not so much on extra-legal and conventional benefits, but on the reduction of direct payroll obligations and/or suspension of contracts with supplier companies, also redounding in job losses. The business sector's insistence on requesting the revision of this type of benefit accumulated over decades of mobilization is escalating. This accrual of gains is in danger and requires forceful union response to not lose the protection and welfare obtained by unionized workers, which "**in and of themselves have a low total coverage of barely 300 thousand workers of the private sector among 22.2 million employed and 11 million hired throughout the economy**". ¹⁴

Significant Issues of the Context

Legal actions-complaints filed by trade unions (national and international) and by other social sectors.

Other union complaints have been: health providers, called health promoting companies (*EPS by its acronym in Spanish*) not serving users and selectively providing medicines; National Development Plan abusively dealing with transfers to health, sanitation and drinking water; banks distributing dividends while receiving low-interest loans from the central bank (*Banco de la República*); corruption by departmental and local leaders that do not deliver food to the population or buy the food with a surcharge; prison population in overcrowded conditions increasing the risk of infection; prior, free and informed consultation for environmental licenses of mining-energy projects performed virtually, without securing the participation of indigenous or Afro-descendant communities. ¹⁵

One of the most compelling denunciations of trade unions and other social organizations is the murder of social leaders and ex-combatants of the **FARC**. ¹⁶

Fatal victims of repression.

Unfortunately, we need underscore the 72 massacres in 2020 in Colombia (to November 10, 2020). ¹⁷

The Federación Nacional Sindical Unitaria Agropecuaria (FENSUAGRO), member of the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores of Colombia [CUT]* denounced that, so far in 2020, five leaders of this trade union have been assassinated just in the department of Cauca. ¹⁸

Trade Union Proposals and Initiatives

In order to protect labor rights, upon request to the Ministry of Labor, the *Unión Sindical Obrera (USO)* sought agreements with companies, legal protection actions and dialogue with the government and trade associations. More than **50** peasant organizations, including *FENSUAGRO*, delivered an open letter to the national government detailing the problems experienced during the pandemic. Limited access to credit shows that the recent special credit line announced by the national government seeks to ensure resources for large agro-industrial companies and traders, and reduces the interest rates **1.5%** and **2.5%** for medium and large producers, respectively, yet the rate is not reduced in any way whatsoever for small-scale food producers. They even point out that it actually deteriorates their credit situation.

On May 19, the *CUT, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia (CTC)* and the *Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT)* organized the discussion "*Response of the workers' federations to government proposals*", where the proposals disseminated by government officials and the Trade Association Board were discussed. These proposals related to work on an hourly basis, the flexibilization of hours and the suspension of payment of night hours, Sundays and holidays, as well as the postponement of the payment of the June bonus. The federations rejected these proposals and insisted on the need for the State to establish the measures required to support companies and maintain employment. ¹⁹

The **CUT**, **CTC** and **CGT** trade union federations and the two confederations of pensioners filed their lawsuits against the labor and pension reform contained in the fake Social Protection Floor. First, a complaint of unconstitutionality was filed at the Constitutional Court against Article

193, Law 1955 of 2019, National Development Plan. A lawsuit was also filed at the State Council to overturn Decree 1174 dated August 27 on the regulation of the Social Protection Floor (SPF).²⁰

According to information provided by the CUT and the CTC, the following proposals can be included: measures to protect the most vulnerable workers avoiding irregular suspensions, dismissals and non-remuneration; prohibition and penalization of public entities that suspend or terminate contracts; application of telework as the first option and work without service provision as an alternative option when telework is not possible; arrangement of flexible hours or work shifts; application of the principle of worker protection and social dialogue; suspension of the payment of public utilities for the most vulnerable sectors, recognizing water as a fundamental right; suspension of the payment of property taxes and payment of leases; suspension of evictions.

Suspension of tax exemptions for large companies; price control of medicines and of products of the basic food and hygiene basket; on behalf of the State cover the parafiscal, social security and social benefits of workers of the SMEs of the most affected sectors; basic cash transfers for independent workers, so-called “entrepreneurs, self-employed workers; reduction or flexibility of work hours for those with family care responsibilities; exceptional legislation to guarantee the salary of domestic workers; campaigns for the redistribution of care tasks, and prevention of domestic violence; guaranteed school meals for families affected by the crisis; construction of democratic policies for the migrant population.

¹ <https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/acerca-colombia-0>

² <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/demografia-y-poblacion/censo-nacional-de-poblacion-y-vivenda-2018/cuantos-somos>

³ *Idem.*

⁴ <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/demografia-y-poblacion/grupos-eticos/informacion-tecnica>

⁵ <https://datos.bancomundial.org/>

⁶ <https://cepalstat-prod.cepal.org/cepalstat/>

⁷ <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/cuentas-nacionales/cuentas-nacionales-trimestrales>

⁸ <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/mercado-laboral/empleo-y-desempleo>

⁹ <https://www.dinero.com/economia/articulo/impacto-del-coronavirus-en-la-informalidad-laboral-en-colombia/294098>

¹⁰ The cities and metropolitan areas are: Bogotá D.C., Villavicencio, Medellín; Valle de Aburrá, Tunja, Cali; Yumbo, Florencia, Barranquilla; Soledad, Popayán, Bucaramanga; Girón Piedecuesta, Floridablanca, Valledupar, Manizales; Villa María, Quibdó, Pasto, Neiva, Pereira; Dos Quebradas y la Virginia, Riohacha, Cúcuta, Villas del Rosario, Los Patios y El Zulia, Santa Marta, Ibagué, Armenia, Montería, Sincelejo, Cartagena, San Andrés.

¹¹ <https://uniandes.edu.co/es/noticias/desarrollo-regional/covid19-sus-efectos-de-pobreza-y-desigualdad-en-colombia>

¹² A survey performed to personnel of the health sector showed that the death of the two doctors and the infection of many others illustrates the absence of protection measures for health personnel: 87.7% did not have masks; 77.5% did not have protective eyewear; 89.1% did not have a face shield; 97.2% did not have a personal protective equipment, and 26.6% did not have gloves. See <https://ail.ens.org.co/noticias>

¹³ <https://www.mintrabajo.gov.co/documents/20147/0/Circular+0021.pdf/8049a852-e8b0-b5e7-05d3-8da3943c0879?t=1584464523596> Reviewed November 7, 2020.

¹⁴ <https://ail.ens.org.co/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/05/Boleti%CC%81n-No.-7-Observatorio-laboral-en-tiempos-del-coronavirus-1.pdf> Visited November 7, 2020.

¹⁵ Information obtained from the TUCA systematization with support of the Colombian CUT and CTC.

¹⁶ <http://csa-csi.org/2020/04/10/la-csa-condena-los-asesinatos-de-lideres-y-lideresas-sociales-en-colombia-y>

¹⁷ <https://seguimosenlucha.org/index.php/2020/04/29/llamamiento-internacional-para-detener-la-violencia-contra-el-pueblo-colombiano/>

¹⁸ <http://www.indepaz.org.co/informe-de-masacres-en-colombia-durante-el-2020/> Visited November 13.

¹⁹ <https://viacampesina.org/es/colombia-fensuagro-denuncia-la-grave-situacion-de-derechos-humanos-contra-su-organizacion/>

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ <https://ail.ens.org.co/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/09/Boleti%CC%81n-No.-16-OIT.pdf>



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