

GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX 2025: COLOMBIA FACTSHEET

OVERALL GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX SCORE:

HIGH RISK

The Global Torture Index 2025 is the first analysis designed to assess the risk of torture and ill-treatment across 26 countries worldwide. This 2025 factsheet for Colombia includes an analysis of the country's overall performance, a breakdown by thematic pillars and key recommendations for driving meaningful change in the fight against torture and the promotion of human rights.

COLLABORATING ORGANISATIONS IN COLOMBIA:

Fundación Comité de Solidaridad
con los Presos Políticos (CSPP)

Coalición Colombiana
Contra la Tortura (CCCT)

El Centro de Atención
Psicosocial (CAPS)

Corporación para la Defensa y Promoción
de los Derechos Humanos Reiniciar

Comisión Colombiana
de Juristas

AT A GLANCE

Torture and ill-treatment remain serious and recurring issues in Colombia, particularly during law enforcement operations, detention and armed conflict. For 2025, the Global Torture Index classifies the country as facing a **high risk** of torture and ill-treatment, based on data collected in 2023 and 2024.

Cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment occurs frequently, especially in temporary detention centres, and **disproportionately affects youth, Indigenous and Afro-descendant individuals, LGBTQIA+ persons and migrants**. The use of excessive force during arrests and protests, coupled with sexual and gender-based violence and enforced disappearances, points to systemic abuse by state forces. Detainees lack safeguards such as independent medical examinations, timely judicial oversight and access to complaint mechanisms. Overcrowding in places of detention is at 127% capacity, with detainees lacking access to basic safeguards, while Indigenous detainees experience discriminatory treatment and cultural neglect.

Although ratification of the OPCAT has not yet been finalised, the country is in the final stages of the process, which shows an important step forward in its commitment to torture prevention. It is important to complete this step and move forward with the creation of the National Preventive Mechanism to strengthen the protection of human rights.

The State has not accepted the Committee's competence to receive individual complaints. Articles 137 and 178 of the Criminal Code still fail to reflect the full definition of torture under Article 1 of the Convention. Government engagement with civil society on implementing international recommendations is weak, and police officers and other state actors often act with impunity.

Only 26 cases of torture were officially reported in 2022, involving 38 victims, including children and adolescents, with no public information on investigations or convictions. There were 15 verified cases of torture and other abuses in 2024, including against peaceful demonstrators and journalists. Between 2016 and 2024, 1,369 killings of human rights defenders were reported, but only 222 led to convictions. In 2024 alone, **there were 191 reported killings of human rights defenders, with 89 confirmed to be linked to their work**.

Victims rarely access justice or effective remedies. **Investigations are slow, often exceeding two years, and evidence of torture is commonly excluded in court.** Victims and witnesses frequently face intimidation and retaliation. Although national laws recognise victims' rights and grant access to reparations, actual implementation is weak. Rehabilitation programmes remain limited, and civil society organisations face restrictions.

The presence of non-State armed groups and criminal organisations throughout the country and their violent strategies to maintain social control continue to impact the civilian population and undermine governance across the territory. Conflict-related violence has forcibly displaced millions, while impunity for serious abuses remains widespread. From 2019 to 2021, security forces frequently used excessive and often brutal force in response to largely peaceful protests. There is structural inequality, especially among Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, where chronic poverty remains a key driver of marginalisation and a major human rights concern.

GENERAL INFORMATION



Type of government:
Presidential Republic



United Nations Convention Against Torture:
Ratified



OPCAT ratification:
Not ratified



Population:
[53.297.529](#)



People deprived of liberty:
103,593



Prison population (per 100,000 of national population):
199



Pre-trial detainees / remand prisoners (percentage of prison population):
19.6%



Documented Detained Human Rights Defenders:
Lack of data



Alerts Issued by the Observatory for Human Rights Defenders in 2024:
6



Prison Occupancy level:
127.3%



Homicide rate (per 100.000 people):
25.4

THEMATIC PILLAR OVERVIEW



I. POLITICAL COMMITMENT

INDEX SCORE: CONSIDERABLE RISK

Colombia demonstrates limited political commitment towards combating and preventing torture. While the State has ratified the UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT), it has not accepted the competence of the Committee against Torture to receive individual complaints under Article 22. Additionally, **Colombia has not ratified the Optional Protocol (OPCAT)**. Government engagement with civil society on the implementation of the UN Committee Against Torture concluding observations is lacking.

Although national legislation criminalises torture as an independent and imprescriptible offence, its implementation remains weak. Cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment is also criminalised separately and applies broadly beyond detention contexts. **However, articles 137 and 178 of the Criminal Code fail to explicitly include acts of torture committed with the intent to intimidate or coerce a third party**, to align with article 1 of the Convention. A National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) to monitor places of detention effectively is also lacking.

The **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights** [has recently issued precautionary measures to protect individuals in Colombia from torture-related risks](#), highlighting serious ongoing concerns regarding protection from torture and ill-treatment.



II. ENDING POLICE BRUTALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Police brutality in Colombia remains a persistent and serious problem. Torture occurs occasionally, while cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment is frequent, particularly during arrests and detention in temporary facilities. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [verified 15 cases of human rights violations committed by state security forces in 2024](#). This included torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, gender-based and sexual violence, violations of personal integrity, arbitrary detention and discrimination, corruption or collusion with criminal organisations or non-State armed groups and failures to protect communities or victims.

Use of disproportionate force by law enforcement, including the use of firearms and less-lethal weapons like tasers and rubber bullets, has caused serious injuries and occasional deaths. **Discrimination by police disproportionately targets youth, ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, migrants and homeless people.** Reports indicate instances of physical and psychological torture and ill-treatment of peaceful demonstrators, human rights defenders and journalists, as well as arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances and sexual and gender-based violence, [allegedly perpetrated by police officers and members of the Mobile Anti-Riot Squad](#).

Safeguards for detainees during transfers and detentions are rarely implemented, and overcrowding in temporary detention centres is widespread. Surveillance systems in police facilities are rarely operational, weakening accountability. Investigations into torture and ill-treatment are slow, often lasting for over two years. In 2022 and 2023, human rights violations during social protests continued, though at a lower intensity. This decline may be linked to fewer mobilisations, a new national government in mid-2022 and tactical shifts by authorities. However, ongoing abuses still pose challenges to the right to protest. The campaign *Defender la Libertad: un Asunto de Todas* **recorded 703 attacks between January 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023**. There were documented cases of serious injuries, including three cases of eye injuries during protests in 2023.



III. FREEDOM FROM TORTURE WHILE DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

Torture and ill-treatment in places of detention in Colombia remain serious concerns. In practice, detainees rarely benefit from essential safeguards. Issues include: [detention of persons in unofficial locations, difficulties in providing notifications of detention and of transfers to other places of confinement, difficulties in gaining access to a medical examination, and delays in bringing detained persons before a judicial authority](#). There is no mandatory video surveillance in detention centres, and where recordings do exist, they are often not securely stored or accessible to detainees or investigators. Complaints mechanisms exist in law but are rarely effective in practice. **Victims of torture and their families often face intimidation, including solitary confinement, enhanced searches or denial of external contact.** Independent medical examinations are almost never conducted, and accused personnel are rarely suspended during investigations.

In March and April 2023, judicial inspections of several temporary detention centres in Bogotá [revealed severe overcrowding, with some facilities holding up to six times their intended capacity](#). By June 2024, the national average overcrowding rate had reached 135%. Furthermore, 97% of detainees (22,064 individuals) had been held beyond the legal maximum of 36 hours.

According to data compiled by civil society organisations, at least seven models of deprivation of liberty exist in Colombia, six of which account for 144,195 individuals in state custody. Of these, 71.8% are held in National Order Detention Facilities and 13.9% in Temporary Detention Centres. The remaining population is distributed among the Colombian Family Welfare Institute's protection services, the Adolescent Criminal Responsibility System, territorial entity prisons, and Military Detention Centres. This total does not include individuals held in Protection Transfer Centres—a police measure characterised by high turnover and short-term stays. For instance, between April 1 and June 30, 2023, 19,079 people were held in these facilities.

Indigenous detainees face systemic discrimination, religious neglect, excessive use of isolation and restraints, [lack of educational activities, and culturally appropriate programs for rehabilitation](#). Civil society organisations are rarely granted access to monitor detention conditions independently. Internal complaint procedures are underused, and decisions are often delayed without recourse to higher authorities.



IV. ENDING IMPUNITY

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Impunity for acts of torture and ill-treatment in Colombia remains a persistent concern. **In 2022, only 26 complaints of torture were registered with the Attorney General's Office (*Fiscalía General de la Nación* (FGN)), involving 38 victims**, including men, women, adolescents and children. However, there is no public information on whether investigations were opened or if any convictions were obtained. In 2021, [Human Rights Watch](#) documented evidence connecting police to 25 protester and bystander deaths, along with numerous injuries and arbitrary arrests during peaceful protests. Even though eight officers have been charged by the Attorney General's Office, as of 2024 [none had been convicted](#).

Between 2023 and 2024, a troubling pattern of impunity persisted in detention centres, marked by a high rate of case dismissals involving serious offences such as threats, abuse of authority, discrimination and torture. Of the 1,959 cases recorded between 2013 and 2024 against members of the Police Force for incidents occurring in detention facilities, over 50% were dismissed, including five of the thirteen documented cases of torture. During 2023 and 2024, judicial efforts largely focused on offences like drug trafficking and administrative corruption, while no charges or indictments were brought for crimes that directly endangered the safety of individuals deprived of liberty.

Victims often face re-traumatisation during investigations and trials and rarely have access to psychological support. Investigative bodies seldom provide full access to relevant evidence, and protection mechanisms for victims and witnesses lack independence and oversight.

Police agents frequently discourage victims from filing complaints through threats or bribery, and retaliation against victims, their families and lawyers is common. Torture cases are regularly downgraded to lesser offences, and prosecutors frequently shift the burden of proof onto victims instead of conducting proactive investigations. Even though a specialised unit for torture cases exists, it is widely criticised for lacking independence and financial autonomy. Prosecutors who investigate public officials often face threats.

In rural areas, **civilians often lack the necessary conditions to report acts of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by armed groups**. In many cases, the absence of security and the dominant territorial and social control exerted by these groups [create a climate of fear, deterring victims from filing complaints about human rights abuses](#).

In its recent report, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) emphasised that enforced disappearances in Colombia have not ceased following the 2016 peace agreement. Instead, such incidents persist on a daily basis. **The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has issued 33 rulings against Colombia**, where it found the Colombian state internationally responsible for serious human rights and humanitarian law violations, including massacres, enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings.



V. VICTIM'S RIGHTS

INDEX SCORE: CONSIDERABLE RISK

In Colombia, national legislation recognises the rights of victims of torture and ill-treatment and aligns with the UN Convention Against Torture by including definitions of direct, indirect and collective victims. The law allows victims to seek redress regardless of whether the perpetrator has been identified or prosecuted and acknowledges a wide range of harm, including physical, emotional and pecuniary damage. However, torture and other cases of CIDTP violations are not adequately investigated, prosecuted and punished by the Colombian justice system.

Although the law grants a legal right to rehabilitation, **its implementation is limited**. Rehabilitation programmes for survivors, family members and witnesses are rated as low in quality and availability. **Temporary protection mechanisms for urgent cases also remain inadequate**.

While state institutions exist at both national and regional levels to provide victim support, they fall under executive control, raising concerns over their independence. Civil society organisations are permitted to assist in victim rehabilitation, though they sometimes face restrictions or reprisals. In practice, essential elements of reparation, such as restoring employment, reputation or public acknowledgment are only very rarely granted, limiting victims' access to comprehensive redress.

The persistence of impunity and the absence of reparations for victims remain deeply troubling, compounded by widespread underreporting and the state's limited capacity to monitor and respond to such crimes.



VI. PROTECTION FOR ALL

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Colombia continues to experience an internal armed conflict in which civilians are often forcibly displaced, witness family deaths and suffer sexual violence, including rape and forced nudity, particularly among women, children and LGBTQIA+ people.

The country reports a high rate of sexual violence, **with over 40 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, and a partner violence reporting rate of more than 4 per 1,000 women.** However, victims rarely receive effective protection, such as access to shelters, medical assistance or legal and psychosocial support. The Ombudsman's Office released its 2024 report on human rights protection, highlighting alarming levels of violence against women. Between January and October 2024, 745 femicides were recorded, including 44 girls and 11 trans individuals. However, **less than 25% of femicide investigations result in convictions.** Furthermore, 26,605 cases of intimate partner violence were also reported from January to September 2024.

According to data from the National Institute of Legal Medicine, in the year to April 2024, there were reports of 19,192 cases of sexual abuse against minors, an average of 53 cases per day.

Enforced disappearances continue occurring both in the context of ongoing armed conflict and in broader settings, **such as forced recruitment of children by non-state and criminal armed groups, in the case of migrants.** Estimated numbers range from 121,768 to 210,000, while it is known that many cases remain unreported.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is still practiced, particularly among some indigenous communities, with minimal state measures to prevent it and no shelters for girls fleeing the practice. Child labour, including its worst forms, is practiced. In 2023, 10% of children and adolescents in Colombia between the ages of 5 and 17 were engaged in child labour.

The Constitutional Court of Colombia declared that 71 Indigenous Peoples are at imminent risk of physical and cultural extinction. Forced evictions and displacements occur frequently, and indigenous communities regularly suffer violations of land rights, often without judicial accountability. These challenges for Indigenous populations include the expansion of illicit crop cultivation, cultural erosion, the co-optation of community leaders and other forms of pressure that significantly weaken their capacity to defend their rights and territories.

In 2024, 72 verified allegations of massacres were registered, with 252 victims. On 16 January 2025, the ELN launched an offensive against the FARC-EP's dissident *Frente 33* to reclaim territory in Catatumbo, North Santander, targeting civilians through killings, assaults, abductions and enforced disappearances. Clashes and abuses by both groups have displaced over 56,000 people, marking one of Colombia's largest mass displacements in decades.

Cases of gender-based violence are prevalent in the context of armed conflict. Armed actors carried out recruitment of girls, sometimes as young as twelve, punished women's rights defenders and LGBTQIA+ persons. In 2024, there were 216 cases of recruitment or use of children by non-State armed groups. There were also cases of trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls, including Venezuelan migrants and refugees, in establishments controlled by non-State armed groups.



VII. RIGHT TO DEFEND AND CIVIC SPACE

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

The situation for human rights defenders (HRDs) and civic space in Colombia remains extremely dangerous and restrictive. HRDs face a wide range of [threats](#), including stigmatisation, criminalisation, [attacks](#) and [violence](#), often fuelled by public officials, media narratives and private actors. Persistent structural issues, such as the internal armed conflict, illegal armed groups and **the failure to fully implement the 2016 peace agreement, further exacerbate the risks for human rights defenders**. The criminalisation of human rights defenders and social leaders persists, as illustrated by the case of Afro-descendant activist [Milena Quiroz, who has endured death threats, arbitrary detention and stigmatisation](#). For the past eight years, she has been subjected to ongoing legal proceedings intended to punish and delegitimise her advocacy work. In 2024, there were [191 allegations of the killing of human rights defenders](#); of which in 89 cases, it was verified that there was a link between the human rights defenders in question and their work.

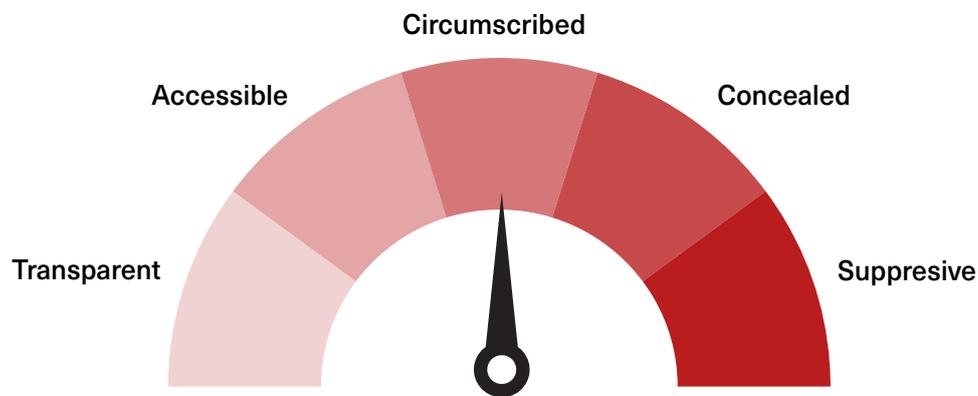
Although there have been some improvements under the current government and the new Attorney General, criminalisation persists, especially at the local level. HRDs frequently face judicial harassment through defamation lawsuits, strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) and accusations under vague legal provisions. **Surveillance, cyberattacks and online harassment by state actors are common**, yet investigations into these violations are rare and lack transparency. In 2024, the National Protection Unit [provided enhanced protection to 4,683 defenders](#). According to the Attorney General's Office, **of the 1,369 killings of defenders that occurred between 2016 and 2024, 222 convictions have been secured and 229 cases are in the trial stage.**

The state often uses vague labels like 'enemies of the state' to criminalise peaceful dissent. Peaceful assemblies are legally protected but often restricted in practice, with frequent incidents of arbitrary arrests and physical violence against HRDs monitoring protests. Despite regional mechanisms issuing urgent measures, the state's implementation has been largely inadequate. Killings, torture and threats against HRDs remain very frequent, forcing many into exile. Colombia continues to be the most dangerous country in the world for human rights defenders, with the highest number of killings in 2023.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Global Torture Index rates the access to information and transparency available in each country when measuring and assessing the risks of torture and ill-treatment. It considers the availability of information, as well as the obstacles faced by civil society organisations in collecting data and their ability to access it. Data access must be guaranteed in every society, both in law and in practice, to ensure state transparency and accountability. It enables organisations, journalists and individuals to request information on public bodies, protocols and statistics on human rights violations. This indicator reflects the challenges in accessing information within a country, with each country and territory assigned a rating as Suppressive, Concealed, Circumscribed, Accessible or Transparent.

Colombia's score is **circumscribed** based on our evaluation of its current level of transparency and access to information.



ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE IN COLOMBIA: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Index includes 5 recommendations for Colombia, taken from the [Index webpage](#), which will serve as references in upcoming editions to monitor achievements within the anti-torture movement.

1. Recognise the competence and right of the Committee against Torture—under Article 22 of the UN Convention against Torture—to receive and consider claims made by victims of torture, cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.
2. Investigate all allegations of torture, ill-treatment, excessive force and other human rights violations committed by police forces. Ensure that those responsible are prosecuted in regular courts, with penalties matching the seriousness of their actions, and provide full reparations to victims.
3. Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and involve civil society in designing the National Preventive Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture, ensuring it has sufficient resources, unrestricted access to all places where people may be deprived of their liberty, and the ability to work without fear of threats or reprisals. Strengthen the Ombudsman's Office to carry out regular monitoring of all places of deprivation of liberty.
4. Implement a comprehensive system for the registration, communication and support of victims of institutional violence, strengthening documentation and transparency. Ensure the system captures complete and accurate data, including detailed information on the victim's profile, the official under investigation, and the context of the event, as well as aspects related to the status of criminal and disciplinary investigations. Also consider the level of reparation and care provided to the victim, ensuring adequate support for their recovery.
5. Ensure that human rights defenders, social leaders, and journalists can carry out their work in a safe and conducive environment for the defence of human rights, guaranteeing the proper functioning of the protection mechanism, as well as impartial investigations, the punishment of those responsible and full reparations for defenders who have been victims of murder and attacks for carrying out their work.



FURTHER RESOURCES

For further information, the complete 2025 Torture Index—including detailed data visualisations, FAQs, the methodology, and more—can be accessed on our website: <https://www.omct.org/en/global-torture-index>. Should you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at tortureindex@omct.org.

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