

# Colombia

## Overview

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29%

Population below international poverty line

€209

per month

National minimum wage

€400

per month

Rural living wage

16%

Agricultural workforce

7%

Agriculture share of GDP

5

very high

Risk to workers' rights

## Context

Colombia has a population of roughly 50 million people,<sup>[1]</sup> with one fifth of the population living in rural areas<sup>[2]</sup> and the remaining 80% living in urban areas<sup>[3]</sup>. Agriculture, forestry and fishing make up just over 6% of the country's GDP<sup>[4]</sup>, with 16.6% of the total workforce employed in the agricultural sector.<sup>[5]</sup> As of 2018, 28% of Colombia's population lives under the established World Bank poverty line of \$5.50 a day.<sup>[6]</sup> In addition, Colombia ranked among one of the top 10 worst countries for workers in 2019 on the ITUC Global Rights Index.<sup>[7]</sup>

It is estimated that there are 2.7 million farmers in rural Colombia and that approximately 45% of them, mostly small and medium farmers, live in poverty. A large majority of small farms not only function as subsistence farms, but also play an important role in Colombia's total national agricultural output.<sup>[8]</sup> Many small farms in Colombia are located in the countryside, which contributes to low technology transfer and limited access to market. Coupled with long-lasting armed conflict, these barriers have made the development of a sustainable and competitive agricultural sector a key focus in reinforcing food security in Colombia for many years. <sup>[8]</sup>

The top produced commodities in Colombia are sugar cane, fresh cow milk, palm oil fruit, potatoes and rice.<sup>[9]</sup> Colombia's top export products in terms of quantity are bananas, green coffee, palm oil, refined sugar and raw sugar.<sup>[10]</sup>

# Wages

## Minimum wage

The minimum wage in Colombia is 908,526 Colombian Pesos (209 EUR) per month as of January, 2020.<sup>[11]</sup> By law, every worker must receive at least this government-mandated minimum wage. A transportation subsidy of 106,454 Colombian Pesos (25 EUR) per month is also mandatory for employees making less than twice the official minimum wage. Workers are legally allowed to work 6 days a week, with the Colombian Labor Code specifying that a working day cannot exceed 8 hours.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Living wage

The **Global Living Wage Coalition** has developed a Living Wage benchmark for the Caribbean coast of Colombia based on the Anker methodology, focusing on the banana sector.

The estimated living wage for a family of 4 with roughly 1.6 workers is 1,717,518 Colombian Pesos (400 EUR) per month.<sup>[13]</sup> This benchmark is focussed on banana growing, coastal regions of Northern Colombia.<sup>[14]</sup> Many banana workers currently receive a living wage, or close to it, especially unionized workers covered by collective bargaining agreements. Since bananas are harvested year-round, providing consistent workloads, most of the workers have indefinite contracts and high job security. Even so, it is important to pay attention to the payment system. Workers are not paid for the time worked but for the task completed which can lead to significant fluctuations in daily wages.<sup>[15]</sup>

# Working conditions

## Freedom of association

Colombia is one of the ten worst countries in the world in terms of workers' rights, ranking a 5 out of 5 on ITUC's Global Rights Index, meaning that workers have no guarantee of rights.<sup>[7]</sup> Colombia is the deadliest country in the world for workers and union members. In 2018 alone, 34 trade union members were murdered in Colombia.<sup>[7]</sup> Of these murders ten were members of FENSUGARO, the agricultural sector union. Additionally, the authorities have failed to provide adequate resources to investigate and prosecute these crimes. Therefore trade unionist and their families remain unprotected and under constant threat.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Land rights

Colombia has the second highest rate of unequal land distribution in South America after Paraguay. Inequitable access to land is a main cause of rural poverty, which can be seen in Colombia with more than half of rural households living in poverty.<sup>[16]</sup> Approximately 80% of the land in Colombia is in the hands of only 14% of the population. Similarly, 40% of Colombian territory is somehow controlled by multinationals, involved in agriculture, the production of biofuels, forestry, or mining.<sup>[16]</sup> This shows that, so far, the fight to reduce the concentration of land tenure in Colombia, has not been successful.

## Child labour

The minimum age for official employment in Colombia is 15, and 18 for hazardous work. Nonetheless, prohibitions against child labour are largely ignored. In the formal sector, labour inspectors enforce child labour laws, however, the majority of child labour, roughly 80%, occurs in the informal economy. In 2017, according to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), 7% of children in Colombia from 5 to 17 years old worked, and 44% of them in agriculture, forestry and fishing.<sup>[17]</sup> The worst forms of child labour in agriculture are observed in the coffee, sugarcane and coca plantations, reporting that children from 11 years old are forced to cultivate and harvest cocoa.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Gender

Gender-based violence is highly pervasive in Colombia.<sup>[19]</sup> Access to resources and justice for survivors of gender-based violence is low.<sup>[20]</sup> Additionally, it is extremely difficult for women to gain

access to land.<sup>[16]</sup> Many rural women lack education and training, and are often unaware of their legal rights meaning that they are typically excluded from land titles and deeds, which hinders participation and decision-making in agriculture.<sup>[15] [21]</sup>

## What's happening

### RESOURCE

#### [Update 2021: Living Wage Benchmark, Caribbean coast of Colombia](#)

Update of the living wage estimate for the Caribbean coast of Colombia, focussing on banana farmers. Global Living Wage Coalition, 2021.

### RESOURCE

#### [Task Force for Coffee Living Income](#)

Framework for measuring the living income gap with a focus on Colombian coffee producers to assess effective sourcing and pricing practices to close the gap. IDH, 2019.

### RESOURCE

#### [Tracking living and minimum wages in the banana sector](#)

A report commissioned by the World Banana Forum in May 2015 with information for 9 banana producing countries.

### RESOURCE

#### [Living Wage Benchmark, Caribbean coast of Colombia](#)

Living wage estimate for the Caribbean coast of Colombia, focussing on banana farmers. Global Living Wage Coalition, 2020.

## Footnotes

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