



Colombia: Impunity for Trafficking and Violence Against Women and Girls

To: The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Subject: Complaint regarding Impunity for Trafficking and Violence Against Women and Girls in Colombia

Submitted by: [Women's Platform for Action International](#)

1. Introduction

The Women's Platform for Action International respectfully submits this complaint to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) regarding ongoing and systematic failure of the Republic of Colombia to prevent, investigate, and prosecute trafficking and violence against women and girls, particularly against migrant, refugee, and internally displaced women and girls.

Despite Colombia's ratification of core human rights treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Palermo Protocol, and the Inter-American Convention of Belém do Pará, state response remains inadequate. Structural discrimination, institutional corruption, and lack of protection mechanisms contribute to widespread impunity for crimes involving trafficking, sexual exploitation, and femicide.

2. Impunity for Trafficking and Violence Against Women and Girls

Colombia continues to be a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking, particularly for sexual exploitation and forced labor¹. Despite its progressive definition of trafficking in persons which uses only the verbs and the purpose, results or rescues and prevention are minimum. Apart from victims of armed conflict, forcefully displaced and vulnerable women, migrant women from Venezuela are among the most targeted, often recruited through false job advertisements, romantic coercion, or under economic desperation, then trafficked into organized prostitution rings or domestic servitude, both in Colombia and abroad.

Cases on impunity for trafficking and violence against women and girls include:

- **Transnational Trafficking Network Dismantled (July 2024)**²: In July 2024, Colombian authorities, in cooperation with Mexican counterparts and INTERPOL, dismantled a criminal trafficking ring operating in Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali, which was recruiting Colombian and Venezuelan women under false promises of modeling or waitressing jobs. Victims were trafficked to Mexico and the United States for sexual exploitation. While the operation led to nine arrests, over 60 victims were identified. However, many survivors were not officially recognised as trafficking victims, received no psychosocial or legal support, and were re-traumatized during investigations.

¹ <https://2021-2025.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/colombia/>

² <https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2024/Mexico-and-Colombia-dismantle-transnational-sex-trafficking-ring>

- **Recruitment and Exploitation of Venezuelan Migrant Women (Ongoing)**³: NGOs and UN agencies report persistent trafficking of Venezuelan women and girls, especially along the Cúcuta-Bogotá corridor⁴ and then towards Peru⁵ and North America. Women are targeted at border crossings or refugee settlements, then transported to brothels, webcam studios in urban centers or mining areas⁶. Many report sexual violence, confinement, and economic coercion.⁷ The Colombian state has not established a dedicated mechanism to identify these victims or guarantee access to justice, healthcare, or reparations.
- **Legalization of the exploitation of prostitution via Ministry of Equality**: This ministry set up during the present presidency period, has created a Direction of Sexual Paid Activities⁸, effectively legalizing pimps and traffickers which are criminalized under Criminal Law. Meetings with webcam studios and platforms⁹, acceptance of international livecamming events¹⁰ and other administrative initiatives, also legalize this multimillion businesses that result in recruiting, harboring and receiving persons for the purpose of prostitution of others and other forms of sexual exploitation, like pornography. There are at least 400.000 women used in webcamming¹¹. Women are recruited as girls for this business, and suffer grave forms of violence¹², also used in prostitution. Little has been investigated in relation to induced suicide, disappearances, femicides¹³ connected to these victims.

Government led initiatives to legalize trafficking for the purpose of reproduction: In 2023 the Ministers of Justice and Health presented a bill to legalize gestational surrogacy¹⁴. The Constitutional Court and Supreme Court of Justice ask for legislation of surrogacy, due to at least 8.435 suits against maternity in Colombian Courts¹⁵, which reflect the vulnerable women of the country are being trafficked for the purpose of reproduction, also called "reproductive tourism".

³ Nagle, L. E., & Zarama, J. M. (2022). Taking Responsibility under International Law: Human Trafficking and Colombia's Venezuelan Migration Crisis. The University of Miami Inter-American Law Review, 53(2), 1–102. HYPERLINK

"<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.jstor.org/stable/27273127&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1753362080995565&usg=AOvVaw14JN2b4jb7bd55iGtcGE1m>"<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27273127>

⁴ <https://www.elespectador.com/investigacion/el-tren-de-aragua-detras-de-la-explotacion-sexual-de-migrantes-de-latinoamerica/>

⁵ <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/women-ensnared-tren-de-aragua-criminal-web-peru/>

⁶ See this report sent to UN Special Instruments and CEDAW Committee:

</15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCEDAW%2FCSS%2FVEN%2F52709&Lang=en>

⁷ Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially of women and girls on her visit to Colombia in 2023 -

<https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/60/Add.1>

⁸ <https://www.vicpresidencia.gov.co/prensa/Paginas/Charlotte-Schneider-Callejas-asumio-la-direccion-para-las-mujeres-en-actividades-sexuales-pagas-del-Ministerio-de-Igualdad.aspx>

⁹ <https://www.infobae.com/colombia/2024/10/08/revictimizacion-o-busqueda-de-bienestar-duras-criticas-al-ministerio-de-la-igualdad-por-la-mesa-de-dialogo-sobre-actividades-sexuales-pagadas/>

¹⁰ <https://lalexpo.com/>

¹¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2kmgx011o>

¹² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/12/09/colombia-labor-violations-sexual-exploitation-webcam-studios>

¹³ <https://www.infobae.com/colombia/2024/12/07/mujer-que-se-postulo-para-ser-modelo-webcam-en-bogota-fue-asesinada-y-encontrada-en-un-potrero-tras-ser-abusada-sexualmente/>

¹⁴ <https://www.camara.gov.co/sites/default/files/2023-02/P.L.E.345-2023C%20%28SUBROGACION%20UTERINA%29.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/cortes/maternidad-subrogada-cascada-de-demandas-refleja-boom-del-turismo-reproductivo-en-el-pais-3471429>



These examples illustrate institutional impunity, inadequate survivor protection, and systemic discrimination based on sex, ethnicity, nationality and migration status. The impunity for trafficking and violence against women and girls violates the following rights:

- **Right to Life, Safety and Security:** Trafficked and exploited women are not protected despite repeated patterns of abuse. Femicide rates, furthermore, remain high, in violation of the Inter-American Convention of Belém do Pará, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 6) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (Articles 2, 6 and 12).
- **Freedom from Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment:** Victims of trafficking and exploitation are subjected to rape, confinement, and psychological abuse, in violation of the provisions under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination.
- **Right to Non-Discrimination:** Migrant women face intersectional discrimination and neglect in access to justice and services, in violation of Articles 1 and 2 of CEDAW and Article 26 of the ICCPR.
- **Right to Access Justice and Effective Remedies:** Victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation are often not legally recognised as victims, which results in systemic failure to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators. Investigations are frequently delayed or dismissed, contributing to widespread impunity. These failures violate the right to effective remedy under Article 2(3) of the ICCPR, Article 6 of CEDAW, which obliges States to take all appropriate measures to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution.
- **State Obligation of Due Diligence:** The state's failure to prevent trafficking and to investigate and prosecute those responsible demonstrates a lack of due diligence in addressing violence against women. This is in violation with Article 6 of CEDAW and the obligations under the Palermo Protocol.

3. Our Call to Action:

We respectfully request that the Commission on the Status of Women:

- Urge the Colombian government to take immediate steps to:
 1. Establish a national identification and support mechanism for trafficking victims, including migrants and refugees.
 2. Strengthen anti-trafficking units, ensure independent investigations, and prosecute all perpetrators without delay.
- Call for independent monitoring and reporting mechanisms, in partnership with women's rights organisations and survivor-led networks.
- The Colombian government must formally recognise trafficked and sexually exploited women as victims, and provide access to shelter, medical care, legal assistance, psychosocial support, and residence protection when needed.



- Strengthen prosecution of traffickers, pimps, corrupt officials, and criminal networks, including through regional cooperation, and end the culture of impunity that enables organised and transnational trafficking rings.
- Adopt Legal Reform based on the comprehensive analysis and conclusions offered by UN Special Rapporteur on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, using abolitionist perspective legislation and policies¹⁶: Abolitionist Model:
 1. Criminalise the purchase of sexual access to persons and the organisation or facilitation of prostitution (including online webcamming, other business models and apps).
 2. Decriminalise women in prostitution, and offer comprehensive exit and reintegration programs including trauma healing, housing, education, healthcare and income alternatives.

Recommend the prohibition of trafficking for the purpose of reproduction, euphemistically called gestational surrogacy, as it clearly uses vulnerable women and girls, produces great harms to them, and the children born from this arrangement against basic human rights.

Colombia's failure to address impunity for trafficking and violence against women and girls results in widespread violation of women and girls' fundamental rights. The cases presented are emblematic of broader, entrenched patterns of abuse, calling for urgent international scrutiny and redress.

We thank the Commission for considering this submission.

Susannah Sjöberg
Secretary General

¹⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5648-prostitution-and-violence-against-women-and-girls-report> and https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/women/sr/activities/position-paper-exit-programs-lessons-implementation-women-prostitution-1-en_1.pdf