

Executive summary

Colombia has made major strides in the past two decades towards designing and delivering policies that foster gender equality. It has ratified all international treaties on women's rights, and has updated its laws to reflect those commitments. Colombia's Quota Law of 2000 establishes that women must hold at least 30% of top decision-making positions in the public administration, while its Electoral Reform Law of 2011 stipulates that women must represent at least 30% of the candidates on party lists in elections. Colombia produced a National Policy on Gender Equality in 2013. Moreover, the National Development Plan 2018-22 includes a chapter on women's rights based on three dimensions: economic, political and physical integrity, including violence against women. The country is currently implementing a ten-year plan to improve access to justice that is helping national and subnational authorities co-ordinate common goals, including the protection of women's rights.

Nonetheless, obstacles continue to hinder women's political participation and access to justice at the local level. This report considers Colombia's progress on gender equality in these two areas, with a particular focus on access to justice for women who are survivors of violence. It finds that social attitudes and uneven application of laws still act as barriers to women's political and legal empowerment, along with socio-economic factors including the recently ended internal armed conflict.

In the aftermath of decades of fighting, Colombia has one of the highest proportions of displaced people in the world. The majority of the displaced are women and children, many of them from the country's large indigenous population. To address this situation, Colombia has implemented measures to ensure gender equality in land restitution and to guarantee that victims of the conflict will not be victimised again. However, some regions are better served than others in terms of the distribution of judges, courts and tribunals, and Colombia's geography can make access to justice challenging.

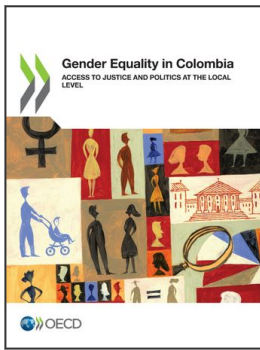
Overall, in the post-conflict era, the report finds that Colombia's efforts to foster gender equality at the national level are not always reflected at local levels, such as in the departments of Putumayo and Chocó, which are examined in detail. In terms of women's political participation, gaps remain between official policies and their implementation at both the national and subnational levels. Challenges include enforcing compliance with the Quota Law, ensuring equal access to campaign resources and the media, and promoting women's inclusion by facilitating work-life balance.

Equal access to justice can be hampered in Colombia by factors ranging from limited availability of legal and justice services in some regions to lack of knowledge among women about their rights or the pathways to justice, especially among victims of violence. Under the Ten-Year Justice Plan, Colombia is working to strengthen co-ordination between formal and informal justice services, and between the national justice system and indigenous jurisdictions. It has established various forms of alternative dispute resolution as an alternative to legal confrontation. However, the country lacks a comprehensive system that integrates information from the spectrum of formal and informal justice services, with reliable data that is disaggregated by gender. A lack of reliable data can produce inaccurate indicators on access to justice for women, and can result in weak programmes and policies to protect them, especially women who are victims of violence.

Given the interaction among the legal, political and socioeconomic dimensions of women's empowerment, the report proposes an "empowerment continuum" based on the interlinkages between empowerment and participation of women. The report also builds on the OECD's draft framework on strengthening whole-of-government approaches for tackling violence against women, highlight the role of good governance in this field.

Based on these findings, the report makes the following recommendations:

- **Incorporate the gender perspective** across the systems and processes of the national and subnational governments through gender mainstreaming across all levels of the government. Gender mainstreaming tools and mechanisms such as gender impact analysis and gender budgeting could be formalised in government institutions and processes in conjunction with enhanced resource co-ordination, capacity-building and training for staff, and accountability and oversight mechanisms in order to fully integrate the gender equality perspective in governance.
- **Strengthen sanctions for non-compliance** with the Quota Law and the Electoral Reform law. Disadvantages faced by women candidates could be reduced by enhancing the accountability of the campaign financing process, assessing the gender-disaggregated impact of political financing regulations and enforcing equal access to media. Given the role of the National Electoral Council in ensuring free and fair elections, increasing its budget and political independence, and strengthening its regional outreach, could enhance women's political participation.
- **Support public campaigns to break down gender stereotypes and foster positive perceptions of women in politics.** To increase public awareness of women's rights, advisory councils on gender equality could be created in municipalities. The National Electoral Council and the National Civil Registry should be encouraged to record cases of violence against women, in particular women candidates and social leaders. Targeted legal and policy frameworks could address barriers faced by indigenous and Afro-Colombian women in the exercise of their political rights.
- **Strengthen co-ordination to align justice services** between the national and subnational levels, and strengthen the relationship between the courts, mechanisms for alternative dispute resolution and community justice options to promote a culture of conciliation. A holistic rethink of the role and impact of different justice providers, including pro bono work by private lawyers and university clinics, could improve access to justice, as could the use of monitoring and evaluation in justice service planning. An integrated information system on all justice services, with gender-disaggregated data, would allow policy makers to improve access to justice for women. Expanding the reach of Mobile Justice Units and Mobile Victims Units, especially in rural areas, would also be helpful to women.
- **Conduct publicity campaigns on the available pathways to justice** for women, and strengthen the investigation of cases of violence against women, especially social leaders. Forensic medical examiners and local prosecutors should be available in all local Justice Houses to guarantee adequate attention to women victims of violence. Judges should be trained in gender issues, and institutions dealing with cases of violence against women should be monitored for compliance with the law. Activities aimed at educating women in the laws and mechanisms that protect their rights should be continued, especially for women in rural areas and from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.



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