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*Subcommittee on Human Rights*

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15.2.2023

## MISSION REPORT

following the Subcommittee on Human Rights' (DROI)  
ad-hoc delegation to Colombia-Venezuela border  
from 19 to 21 December 2022

Subcommittee on Human Rights

Members of the mission:

Leopoldo López Gil	(PPE) (Leader of the mission)
Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez	(PPE)
Mónica Silvana González	(S&D)
María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos	(Renew)
Ana Miranda	(Verts/ALE)



## ***Introduction***

After being postponed several times in the past 3 years, the delegation of the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) to the Colombia-Venezuela border took place from 19 to 21 December 2022. It was the first visit of a European Parliament (EP) delegation to Colombia after the election cycle that brought to power, for the first time in the country history, a left-oriented president.

The main purpose of the visit was to assess the latest developments and their impact on migrants and refugees' rights and to discuss how the Colombian authorities, with the financial support of the international community, including the European Union (EU), are dealing with one of the worst humanitarian and migration crisis in the world.

Given the EP's strong commitment to the peace process in Colombia, the DROI delegation also focused on progress made by the Colombian government in the implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement with FARC, as well as on ongoing peace talks with other illegal armed groups.

The delegation met with several representatives of the Colombian government, Members of Congress and Andean Parliament, local authorities of Norte Santander region, and representatives of transitional justice institutions, civil society organisations and international organisations (UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF and ONU-Habitat).

During the field visit at the Colombia-Venezuela border in Cúcuta, the EP Members visited the Tienditas and Simon Bolivar bridges to assess the possible impact of the future gradual re-opening<sup>1</sup> and the remaining challenges in term of humanitarian aid. They also visited several EU-funded projects directed to support migrants, refugees and host communities.

### ***Summary account of meetings***

During their visit to Colombia, the members of the DROI delegation had open discussions with a number of stakeholders about the situation of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in need of international protection, as well as progress in implementing the 2016 Peace Agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC and the ongoing peace talks with other illegal armed groups.

#### ***1. Situation of Venezuelans in need of international protection***

##### ***• Latest developments in the migration situation of Venezuelans***

According to official figures, in February 2022, there were more than 2.5 million Venezuelans in Colombian territory and that figure was expected to rise to 3 million by the end of 2022. It is estimated that around 7 000 Venezuelans enter Colombia every day to stay or to transit to another country, although recently this influx seems to have slowed considerably as a result of the anti-COVID measures.

Several authorities and NGOs told the MEPs that the opening of the border between Colombia and Venezuela – fruit of the resumption of relations between the new Colombian administration and the Venezuelan authorities – could be an important means of providing a safe, orderly and regular route for Venezuelan migrants, rather than them having to travel via ‘green’ roads or trails, controlled by criminal gangs. The government is firmly committed to safeguarding the human rights of these migrants and refugees, adopting a similar approach to the previous Colombian administration and extending its successful decision to grant them temporary protection status.

While the migration situation has improved and the government has the capacity to deal with it, the new arrivals in Colombia still have huge humanitarian needs that have to be met. It was hoped that this would be addressed at the next donors’ conference, due to take place in March.

A mobility problem has recently arisen for Venezuelans in Latin America as several countries now require them to have an entry visa, thus preventing them from crossing land borders to join family members or return to Venezuela. The NGOs supporting Venezuelan migrants have called on the Ibero-American Network of Migration Authorities to harmonise their policies in the continent to allow regular and safe transit of Venezuelan migrants and prevent them from getting caught up in trafficking and smuggling networks, among others.

The figures at the end of 2022 show not only that there have been no improvements, but that attacks on human rights defenders have actually risen. There are fears that the situation of social leaders and human rights defenders will deteriorate further in 2023 as a result of the

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<sup>1</sup> Post-mission information: the Colombia-Venezuela border was fully opened on 1 January 2023.

territorial elections in October (mayors, governors, councillors, deputies in departmental assemblies and members of local administrative boards).



The DROI delegation was welcomed by the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francisco Coy (centre).

The Colombian Government said that it was willing to facilitate the return of Venezuelans to their country of origin, if truly voluntary. It promised that there would be no mass forced returns. However, as the IOM told the MEPs, this issue was not a priority.

The European Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič, announced in October an additional EUR 34 million in humanitarian aid for Colombia, EUR 22 million of which will be used to support those affected by the Venezuelan crisis.

- ***Implementation of Temporary Protection Status for Venezuelans and delivery of Temporary Protection Permits***

In February 2021, the Colombian Government, led by Iván Duque, announced the creation of the Temporary Protection Status for Venezuelans (ETPV) as a humanitarian measure and to demonstrate solidarity with migrants from its neighbouring country, enabling them to regularise their situation. Rollout of the ETPV was initially slow, but sped up at the beginning of 2022. To date, 2.4 million Venezuelans have signed up to the National Registry for Venezuelan Migrants (RUMV) in order to benefit from the measure, and 1.5 million of them have already received their Temporary Protection Permit (PPT). The rest are still being processed and are the hardest migrants to reach for a number of reasons (change of city, phone number or e-mail, or problems with biometric registration).

Although many of those who met with the DROI delegation welcomed the temporary



protection status, they pointed out that Venezuelans had to meet a number of deadlines to be eligible, which thus excluded all those who entered the country after the deadlines and new arrivals.

The UN agencies indicated that there was political will to solve these issues. The UN Inter-Agency Group in Colombia provides the Colombian Government with technical and financial support for the delivery of TPPs and is calling for the deadlines to be extended so that more people can benefit from temporary protection.

The organisations working with Venezuelan migrants and refugees spoke about returned Colombians, who had lived in Venezuela and gone back to Colombia, and children of Colombians born in Venezuela without Colombian identity documents. Many of them had renounced their Colombian nationality to apply for the PPT.

- ***Challenges to the real integration of Venezuelans***

The PPT allows Venezuelans to regularise their situation and stay in Colombia for 10 years, during which time they can decide to remain in Colombia, apply for a resident's visa, become Colombian residents under the normal regime or go back to Venezuela. It is a key tool in their socioeconomic integration. In addition, it gives them access to health care, pensions, education and the financial system, and enables them to have a decent job under the same conditions as Colombians.

The UN agencies told the MEPs that real integration is the major challenge today. If the PPT is to be recognised and PPT holders are to be able to enjoy their corresponding rights, it is crucial to raise awareness of the programme within public services, banks, hospitals and schools. The PPT poses new challenges, such as the recognition of academic qualifications, access to the labour market in a mostly informal economy, influxes of people from areas lacking public services to peri-urban areas, and access to justice if their rights are infringed.

For UN-Habitat, this is the time to strengthen the 'triple nexus' approach (humanitarian, development and peace-building actions) through pilot projects on the socioeconomic integration of migrants.

Several representatives of NGOs working for Venezuelan migrants highlighted the difficulties encountered by those who have not yet received their PPT, which are similar to the difficulties facing those who do not meet the conditions for temporary protection. They do not have access to public health care or education, and are vulnerable to human trafficking and smuggling, labour exploitation and forced recruitment by illegal armed groups, among other things.

- ***Increased migration to the north***

A number of the stakeholders drew attention to a new route that is becoming increasingly attractive to Venezuelan migrants: the route to the north through the Darién Gap at the border with Panama. It is one of the most dangerous migratory routes in the world as many people lose their lives when crossing it and smuggling networks prey on those migrating. It was previously used by Haitian, Asian and Cuban migrants and is now mostly used by Venezuelans.

According to the IOM, 150 000 migrants crossed the Darién Gap between January and

October 2022, 70% of whom were Venezuelan. Recently, around 600 people have been setting out on this route every day. According to the IOM representative, this situation is due, in particular, to the decision of a US federal judge on 15 November to suspend Title 42, a rule that allows US authorities to turn away migrants crossing the US-Mexico border<sup>2</sup>.

- ***Venezuelan migrant children***

Thanks to the ‘Brazos Abiertos’ public programme, almost 100 000 children born in Colombia to Venezuelan parents have been nationalised in Colombia since the start of the migration crisis to prevent them becoming stateless.

UNICEF sees the resumption of relations between the Colombian and Venezuelan authorities as an opportunity to initiate, as soon as possible, family reunification programmes for families that are separated on opposite sides of the border.

However, unaccompanied Venezuelan minors crossing the Colombia-Venezuela border continue to be a major concern for the authorities, UN agencies and NGOs. It is estimated that 80 minors cross the Norte de Santander border every day. Many are unaccompanied and are therefore at risk of trafficking and smuggling by ‘coyotes’ or recruitment by illegal groups.

The authorities have a difficult task when it comes to unaccompanied minors as they have to carry out extensive searches to try to find their family members, not only in Venezuela but right across the region. UNICEF also supports substitute homes (often made up of Venezuelan migrants) that take in these children. These substitute families are generally poor and require a great deal of support to ensure that they look after the migrants properly.

- ***Colombia as a model of migration policy that must be supported***

The UN agencies pointed out that the way in which the Colombian Government had addressed the challenges posed by the migratory crisis – within a framework of fraternity and solidarity – had resulted in a series of good practices on a regional and global level that could be replicated in other scenarios. These good practices include: not depriving migrants of their freedom, looking at migration as a factor of development, protecting minors, and putting migrants’ regularisation and socio-cultural integration at the heart of the country’s migration policy.

The government authorities and UN agencies regretted that Colombia had not yet received sufficient financial support from the international community to enable it to fully address one of the world’s largest current migration crises, despite it being exemplary in how it had welcomed Venezuelans, showing great solidarity by providing them with humanitarian assistance, registration and temporary protection, and adopting integration policies. The NGOs working with Venezuelan migrants confirmed that they had very few resources so they had to double their efforts to ensure effective action.

The International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants – co-organised by Canada and the European Union – will take place in March 2023. The UN regretted that only DG ECHO from the European Commission was involved in hosting the conference given that it dealt not just with humanitarian aid but, crucially, development aid. It

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<sup>2</sup> Post-mission information: on 27 December, the US Supreme Court ruled that Title 42 would remain in force.

also underlined the importance of monitoring the implementation of the funds or loans promised by the various countries. Many of the stakeholders welcomed the Commission's announcement that it was going to send Colombia an additional EUR 34 million for humanitarian aid.

They also noted that migration from Venezuela was a regional problem, not just a Colombian one. At the Andean Parliament plenary, the MEPs had the opportunity to discuss the support provided by other countries in the region.

## **2. *State of implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement with the FARC and the ongoing peace talks with other illegal armed groups***

- ***Situation in rural areas and indigenous communities***

Many of those whom the DROI delegation met were disappointed that after the signature of the Peace Agreement – which entailed FARC demobilisation and disarmament – a vacuum had emerged in the areas it had controlled, especially in rural areas and indigenous communities, and that the Colombian authorities had not known how to fill that vacuum.

The NGOs that spoke to the delegates pointed out that, in 2017, there had been a surge in violence along the Pacific coast (particularly in Chocó). There had been a fragmentation and diversification of the illegal armed groups (FARC dissidents, criminal gangs, drug traffickers, etc.), who had seized control of the areas the FARC had vacated. The state's absence during the pandemic allowed those groups to gain a firm foothold. They imposed restrictions on the communities under their control, and threatened their leaders and human rights and environmental activists. This had resulted in more members of those communities moving away, not in huge numbers but gradual movements to informal settlements in peri-urban areas.

The Head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia confirmed that the presence of numerous illegal armed groups in the same areas increases the risk of inter-group conflicts to gain control of the territory, with the local people stuck in the middle. The NGOs noted that there had been widespread fighting the previous year, leaving 380 people dead. There were also concerns about the new trend of using anti-personnel mines in indigenous territories to force the communities to move so that those areas could be taken over and used for illegal trade.

Coca-growing has increased 10-fold in recent years, with an estimated 45 000 hectares in the department of Santander alone.

The representatives of the indigenous communities pointed out that they are also threatened by companies (especially from the mining sector) that are seeking to make profits in their territories, putting pressure on their leaders, pitting them against one other or organising misleading and biased preliminary consultations.

They stated that the communities had certain expectations about the talks between the new government and the illegal armed groups, and they were hoping to play an active role in the talks.

Finally, they were disappointed that the rural reform was far from materialising. The Head of the UN Verification Mission stated that it was important for that reform to be implemented as

soon as possible as it is a central and crucial part of the Peace Agreement.

- ***Attacks on social leaders, human rights and environmental defenders and demobilised ex-combatants***

Several stakeholders told the MEPs that the situation had deteriorated in recent months. The Ombudsman had registered 199 cases of social leaders and human rights defenders being assassinated between January and November 2022, compared to 136 for the whole of 2021.

However, the new government appeared to want to crack down on such attacks. The government mentioned its recently adopted action plan with follow-up mechanisms and roundtables on guarantees aimed at minimising the risks to those requiring protection and identifying the risk factors.

According to Colombian civil society organisations, demobilised former FARC fighters had re-entered civilian life without any security guarantees and their economic and social reintegration had posed difficulties, so they also had to deal with multiple attacks. Those difficulties were confirmed by the Head of the UN Verification Mission, which had recorded 342 assassinations of former FARC fighters between the signature of the Peace Agreement and September 2022.

Since the 2016 Peace Agreement, the Attorney General's Office has had a Special Investigation Unit (UEI) to combat criminal organisations carrying out attacks on human rights defenders and social and political movements (including reintegrating ex-combatants) involved in implementing the agreements and building peace. The UEI Director spoke to the DROI delegation about the challenges facing his team of 16 investigators looking into criminal organisations linked to drug trafficking, illegal mining and people trafficking that were responsible for an increasing number of murders, disappearances and threats. There are fears that there will be a further increase in 2023 because of the territorial elections.



- ***Implementation of transitional justice***

The transitional justice system consists of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition, the Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed to have Disappeared in the context of and due to the conflict, the reparation measures for the construction of peace, the non-repetition guarantees and, finally, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace.

The Final Report of the Truth Commission was presented in June 2022 and the Colombian Government promised to implement its recommendations.

The DROI delegation met with the President of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP). As part of its mandate, the JEP will grant amnesty to 9 000 former FARC fighters and members of the armed forces involved in the conflict. It has also identified 11 ‘macro-cases’ covering the most serious crimes carried out by senior members on both sides. Each macro-case encompasses specific types of crimes in the conflict. Two of the trials will begin in early 2023 and the first ruling is expected to be handed down before the end of 2023. These two cases relate to the 23 000 kidnappings by the FARC and the 6 700 ‘false positive’ deaths caused by the armed forces. The President of the JEP also pointed out that gender-based violence is dealt with in a number of the macro-cases, but is the specific focus of macro-case 11 on ‘sexual violence and other crimes based on the gender, sexual orientation or gender identity of victims during the armed conflict’.

The search for missing persons is very difficult as it is estimated that there are around 200 000 of them.

Through the restorative justice process, during public and televised hearings, some middle-level FARC members as well as members of the armed forces admitted to crimes against humanity and asked for forgiveness from the victims and their families. These ex-combatants were given non-jail sentences – such as participation in projects on reparation for victims – given that the ultimate goal is to reintegrate them into society, in accordance with their rights, with a view to achieving reconciliation. The President of the JEP welcomed the EU’s fundamental support for his institution in carrying out its mandate.

- ***Launch of peace talks with other illegal armed groups***

One of the priorities of the new Colombian Government is to resume peace talks, not just with the National Liberation Army (ELN), but with other illegal armed groups, too<sup>3</sup>.

The first round of talks between the ELN and the Colombian Government ended just a few days before the DROI delegation’s visit. Some European countries were invited as observers (Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Spain) and Norway was a guarantor country. The Head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia also attended the negotiations and he said that he was cautiously optimistic about the progress made.

Some EU heads of mission in Colombia felt that the new government’s peace-making efforts

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<sup>3</sup> Post-mission information: on 31 December 2022, the Colombian President announced a bilateral ceasefire until 30 June with five illegal armed organisations (ELN, Segunda Marquetalia, Estado Mayor Central, Gaitanist Self-Defence Forces of Colombia and Sierra Nevada group). However, the ELN indicated in a 3 January press release that there was still no agreement on the matter and that a proposal would be examined during the next round of negotiations.

– which were expected to improve the security situation – were making European firms somewhat more optimistic about investing in the country. This was an important factor for peace, according to several stakeholders, who believed that peace without economic and social development would be unsustainable.

### **3. *Field visits***

On the second day of the mission, the MEPs travelled to Cúcuta (Norte de Santander). They met with various local authorities to gather first-hand information on the migration situation in that department and to assess the ongoing challenges in terms of humanitarian aid and integration of Venezuelan migrants.

The Governor of Norte de Santander told them that Venezuelan migrants are still arriving – but in smaller numbers – and that it is important to maintain the humanitarian response, while promoting the integration of the migrants already in the area. His department is the epicentre of the armed conflict and there are numerous insurgent groups and criminal organisations in the border area. He underlined the importance of cooperating with the EU on both the humanitarian aspects and institutional capacity-building among local authorities and indigenous communities. The historical and fraternal relationship between Colombians and Venezuelans has made it possible to manage the humanitarian crisis in the best possible way and to set a good example. His department is focusing, in particular, on the issues affecting pregnant women and new-borns. Health care and access to education for Venezuelan children in the region's schools cost a great deal and have to be paid for by the local department, with the support of the state.

The Governor stressed that it was necessary and urgent for the two countries to open consulates and he welcomed the moves to reopen the entire border with Venezuela, in order to tackle human smuggling and trafficking, and the resumption of talks with the ELN, which had a strong presence in the department.

He expressed his serious concern about coca-growing (especially in the Catatumbo area). Norte de Santander is the department with the largest number of cultivated hectares, a figure that rose from 1 800 hectares in 2013 to 43 000 hectares in 2022. More than 20 000 families live off this crop. There are proposals for alternative crops, but it will be some time before they have any impact. In the coca trade, the Venezuelan migrant workers are frequently exploited.

The department is also giving a large boost to tourism and to coffee and cocoa cultivation in order to improve its economic development and establish sustainable peace.

The acting Mayor of Cúcuta told the MEPs that reopening the border is one of the major challenges given that 30 000 cross-border commuters – 60% Colombian, 40% Venezuelan – travel across it in both directions each day (rising to 110 000 around Christmas), mainly via the Simón Bolívar Bridge.

Firstly, the MEPs visited Las Tienditas Bridge, which had not been opened at that stage as the work had been completed just as diplomatic relations between Venezuela and Colombia were suspended. It was due to be opened on 1 January 2023. This route – with three lanes in each direction – will be aimed primarily at improving freight transport and trade between the two countries.

They subsequently visited the Simón Bolívar Bridge – officially reopened in September – to

observe the crossing dynamics at the border and to discuss the impact of the reopening with the Colombian migration authorities. The delegation had the opportunity to talk to migrants from Venezuela, who described the harsh conditions during their journeys. These testimonies left a lasting impression on the MEPs.

They also visited a project financed by the EU as part of the ‘Inclusive Cities, Communities of Solidarity’ project coordinated by UNHCR, IOM and UN-Habitat. At El Núcleo community centre in Commune 9 of Barrio Las Delicias, they met beneficiaries of this project, which focuses on development and integration of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in their host communities. It brings together 130 children from three neighbourhoods to take part in socio-cultural and sports activities (football, cheerleading, Taekwondo), enabling them to get to know one another, fight discrimination and build social cohesion. They are supervised by adults from the neighbourhood who are trained for that purpose. According to the UN agencies on the ground, it is easier to achieve integration at neighbourhood level than on a broader scale.



The delegation then travelled to San José College in Commune 6 of Barrio Trigal, supported by the EU as part of the ‘Include and Learn’ project (through the Lives in Dignity Grant Facility) to meet the educational needs of displaced children (Venezuelan or internally displaced children) and the host population. While there, MEPs met with local organisations working to support Venezuelan migrants. They underlined the need for educational and psychosocial support for migrant children, especially unaccompanied children, and guarantees of protection against forced recruitment and gender-based violence. The victims of smuggling

and trafficking for sexual exploitation also need support as they suffer discrimination in their communities.

## ***Conclusions***

During this three-day intensive programme, the DROI delegation succeeded in gathering sufficient information to give them an overview of the current situation at the border between Colombia and Venezuela. The delegation held meetings with a range of institutional and social actors involved in the migration response.

During these meetings, the MEPs praised the exemplary efforts of the various Colombian Governments to grant temporary protection status to the Venezuelan migrant population in the country, which would give them access to social services and foster their economic and social integration. They emphasised the huge generosity and solidarity of the host communities, local authorities and NGOs towards the Venezuelan people. They also spoke openly to the stakeholders about their concerns regarding a number of human rights challenges:

- The urgent and real integration of migrants into Colombian society, with the additional goal of preventing them from migrating further via more dangerous routes, such as the Darién Gap at the Panama border.
- The high number of unaccompanied children crossing the border, which makes them vulnerable to a number of risks, such as forced recruitment by illegal armed groups or a lack of access to education and health.
- The trafficking and smuggling of migrants, in particular girls and women for sexual exploitation and labour exploitation.
- The difficulties encountered by the various local actors when promoting respect for human rights along the border.
- The increase in illegal crops, supported by migrant and indigenous labour.

The MEPs stressed the need for the international community, including the EU, to step up its support for these integration efforts. They called on the international community to actively participate in, and contribute to, the donors' conference in March 2023 and to make good on the unfulfilled promises from previous summits.

As regards the peace process in Colombia, the MEPs stressed that women, ethnic groups and victims of the conflict should be invited to take part in the recently launched peace talks with illegal armed groups. In this context, they reiterated their concerns about the human rights situation in conflict areas and condemned the rising violence against human rights and environmental defenders, as well as social and indigenous leaders. They urged the Colombian authorities to step up and guarantee their protection and security. The MEPs also underlined the urgent need for the authorities to investigate and hold accountable the perpetrators of these murders – thereby demonstrating their commitment to fighting impunity – and they welcomed the progress made on transitional justice.

They were adamant that human rights, the rule of law and justice should remain at the heart of the EU's priorities in its relations with Colombia and should thus be reflected in its bilateral aid to the country.



### ***Suggestions for further action***

- Organise as soon as possible a DROI information session on this mission, ensuring that all participating members can attend (including the DEVE standing rapporteur for humanitarian aid and the INTA standing rapporteur for EU agreements with Andean countries) and inviting members of the Delegation for relations with the countries of the Andean Community (DAND).
- Continue monitoring the humanitarian situation in Colombia – especially at the Colombia-Venezuela border – and the progress made in applying the Peace Agreement and in the talks with the illegal armed groups. Consider organising an exchange of views on further action with the Humanitarian NGO Forum in Colombia (due to visit Brussels in March 2023), the President of the JEP (due to visit Brussels in April or May 2023) and the recently appointed Colombian Ambassador to the EU, Jorge Enrique Rojas Rodríguez (in Brussels since January 2023).
- Write to the President of the European Commission, with a copy to the Commissioners for Crisis Management and International Partnerships and the VP/HR, requesting that the International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in March 2023 be used not just to call for additional funds for humanitarian aid but also to support Colombia's efforts to improve the integration of migrants and to promote the 'triple nexus' approach (humanitarian, development and peace-building actions) to its projects in the country.
- Continue monitoring the situation regarding violence against political, social and indigenous leaders, and organise an exchange of views with human rights NGOs, the Ombudsman and the Special Investigation Unit (UEI) of the Attorney General's Office.

### **Annexes**

- Press statement
- Final programme
- Final list of participants



## **Press statement**

# Colombia: efforts to integrate Venezuelan migrants and consolidate peace to be praised and further supported

**Press Release**

22-12-2022

DROI

*A cross-party delegation of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights visited Bogotá and the Colombia-Venezuela border from 19 to 21 December.*

During their three-day visit in Bogotá and Cúcuta, Members of the European Parliament held numerous meetings with representatives of the Colombian government, Members of Congress and Andean Parliament, local authorities of Norte Santander region, and representatives of transitional justice institutions, civil society organisations and international organisations (UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF and ONU-Habitat). The aim of the visit was to address in a comprehensive manner the measures adopted by the Colombian government affecting Venezuelans in need of international protection.

Members paid tribute to the government's exemplary efforts to give temporary protection status to Venezuelan migrants in the country, which will guarantee their access to social services and foster their economic and social integration, while noting the challenges. They underlined the great generosity and solidarity shown by host communities, local authorities and NGOs towards the Venezuelan people, and discussed the human rights issues that different local actors face when promoting respect for human rights along the border. They also shared their concerns openly on a number of human rights challenges:

- the urgent and real integration of migrants in the Colombian society, also so they do not seek to migrate further through more dangerous migration routes, like the Tapón del Darién at the Panama border.
- the high number of non-accompanied children crossing the border which expose them to different risks, such as recruitment by illegal armed groups or not having access to education and health.
- the trafficking and smuggling of migrants, in particular of girls and women for sexual exploitation, and for labour exploitation.

While in Cúcuta, Members conducted a field visit to Simon Bolivar Bridge to observe the crossing dynamics at the border and discuss the impact of the re-opening. They assessed the remaining challenges in term of humanitarian aid and gathered first-hand information from the local and regional authorities. They visited and were impressed by several EU-funded projects directed to support migrants, refugees and host communities. The delegation could dialogue with migrants from Venezuela. Members underlined the need for the EU to enhance its support to those integration efforts and called on the international community to actively participate in and contribute to the dedicated Solidarity Conference in March 2023.

Given the European Parliament's strong commitment to the peace process in Colombia, the delegation seized the opportunity to evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement, as well as initiatives taken in this field by the government. Members underlined that women, ethnic groups and victims of the conflict must participate in the peace dialogue processes recently initiated with illegal armed groups. In this context, they reiterated their concerns on the situation of human rights in conflict areas and condemned the increasing violence towards human rights and environmental defenders, social and indigenous leaders. They urged the Colombian authorities to increase and guarantee their protection and security. Members insisted on the urgent need for the authorities to investigate and hold perpetrators accountable for these killings and thus underline their commitment to fight impunity. Members took positive note of progress in the field of transitional justice.

Members strongly stressed that human rights, rule of law and justice must remain at the heart of the EU's priorities when it comes to the Union's relations with Colombia and should be reflected in its bilateral assistance to the country, notably towards human rights defenders and transitional justice.

### **Background**

*The delegation of the Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament was led by Leopoldo LÓPEZ GIL (EPP) and included Juan Ignacio ZOIDO ÁLVAREZ (INTA Standing Rapporteur on EU Agreements with Andean Countries, EPP), Mónica Silvana GONZÁLEZ (DEVE Rapporteur on Humanitarian Aid, S&D), Maria Soraya RODRÍGUEZ RAMOS (Renew Europe) and Ana MIRANDA (Greens/EFA).*

**AD-HOC DELEGATION OF THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS (DROI)  
TO COLOMBIA VENEZUELA BORDER  
19-21 DECEMBER 2022**

**MONDAY, 19 DECEMBER 2022 - BOGOTA (MIGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS)**

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| 09.15 - 09.45 | Briefing with Ambassador <b>Gilles Bertrand</b> , Head of EU Delegation to Colombia<br><i>Venue: EUDEL (Auditorium)</i>  |
| 09.45 - 11.00 | Round table with civil society organisations working on migrants and refugees' rights<br>Confirmed NGOs: Ayuda en Acción, Centre for Human Rights of Andrés Bello Catholic University, Venezolanos en Barranquilla, Humanitaria Colombia, Mahuampi<br><i>Venue: EUDEL (Auditorium)</i>   |
| 11.30 - 13.00 | Official Welcome in the Plenary of the Andean Parliament (15 minutes)<br>Side meeting with Senator <b>Gloria Ines Florez Schneider</b> , Chair of the 2nd permanent constitutional commission (covering Foreign policy and immigration)<br><i>Venue: Oficina del Parlamento Andino, Avda. Caracas #70A-61</i>  |
| 14.45 - 16.15 | Meeting with Representatives of UN agencies (ACNUR, IOM, UN-WOMEN, OCHA, UNICEF)<br>Focus: Support to Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants<br><i>Venue: EUDEL (Auditorium)</i>   |
| 16.30 - 18.00 | Meeting with civil society organisations (fight against impunity, justice, reconciliation and peace, indigenous and Afro-Colombians rights, fight against inequalities, women's rights)<br>NGOs confirmed: Lutheran World Federation, Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz, Coordinación Regional de Pacífico Colombiano<br><i>Venue: EUDEL (Auditorium)</i> |
| 18.30 - 19.15 | Meeting with EU Heads of Mission<br><i>Venue: EUDEL (Auditorium)</i>   |
| 20.00         | Cocktail reception offered by DROI Delegation<br><i>Venue: Hilton Hotel (Carrera 7 No. 72-41)</i>  |

## TUESDAY, 20 DECEMBER 2022 - CUCUTA (BORDER) FIELD VISIT

- 11.00 - 11.45 Meeting with **Silvano Serrano Guerrero**, Governor of Norte de Santander  
*Venue: Regional government office (Gobernación)*
- 12.15 - 13.40 Working lunch with **Hidela Benítez**, acting Mayor of Cucuta  
*Venue: Restaurante Ank, calle 15 #3e-52 caobos*
- 14.10 - 15.10 Field visit to the Simon Bolivar Bridge (border check point) accompanied by Ministry of Foreign Affairs / Migracion Colombia
- 15.50 - 16.30 Field visit to meet refugees, migrants and host communities in the frame of the EU funded action "Inclusive Cities, Communities of Solidarity"  
Coordinated jointly by UN Implementing partners: UN Habitat, IOM, UNHCR.  
*Venue: Comuna 9 Barrio las Delicias, Salón Comunitario el Núcleo*
- 17.10 - 18.15 Round table with civil society organisations working on migrants and refugees' rights, addressing humanitarian assistance, access to education and labour market, social insertion and support to women and girls.  
*Venue: San José College, Commune 6, Barrio Trigal (supported under the EU-funded action Include and Learn – Lives in Dignity Grant Facility)*

**WEDNESDAY, 21 DECEMBER 2022 - BOGOTA (JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS, PEACE AGREEMENT)**

- 08.30 - 10.00 Meeting with Vice Ministers of Foreign Affairs, **Mr. Francisco Coy and Ms. Laura Gil**  
*Venue: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Cancilleria), Palacio San Carlos, Calle 10 No. 5-51*
- 10.30 - 11.30 Meeting with **Roberto Carlos Vidal López**, President of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) established by the Peace Agreement  
*Venue: Cra 7 # 63 – 44*
- 12.00 - 13.00 Meeting with **Carlos Camargo**, Ombudsman  
*Venue: Calle 55 no.10-32, piso 7*
- 14.30 - 15.30 Meeting **Carlos Ruiz Massieu**, Special Representative of UN Secretary General and Head of the UN verification Mission in Colombia  
*Venue: Calle 95 no. 13-35, sala piso 8, Torre B. Justo*
- 16.00 - 17.00 Meeting with officials of the Special Investigation Unit (*Unidad Especial de Investigación*) of Attorney General's Office supported by the EU  
*Venue: Attorney General's Office*
- 17.00 End of the programme



### Final list of participants

MEPs	Group	Country
Leopoldo LÓPEZ GIL ( <i>Chair of the Delegation</i> )	EPP	Spain
Juan Ignacio ZOIDO ÁLVAREZ ( <i>INTA Standing Rapporteur on EU Agreements with Andean Countries</i> )	EPP	Spain
Mónica Silvana GONZÁLEZ ( <i>DEVE Standing Rapporteur on Humanitarian Aid</i> )	S&D	Spain
María Soraya RODRÍGUEZ RAMOS	Renew Europe	Spain
Ana MIRANDA	Greens/EFA	Spain
<b>EP Secretariat</b>		
Nicolas Joel DAVID	DEVE	Administrator
Angela HRINCESCU	DROI	Assistant
<b>Political group advisers</b>		
Juan SALAFRANCA	EPP	Deputy Secretary-General
Itziar MUÑOA SALAVERRÍA	Renew Europe	Adviser
Raphaël FISERA	Greens/EFA	Adviser