



Colombia

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For further information on voluntary return and reintegration, please visit the information portal www.ReturningfromGermany.de, or contact your local return and reintegration office.

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1 Health Care

General information on health care

The Colombian health system is made up of two types of insurance schemes: contributory and subsidised, which can be accessed according to a person's payment capacity and employment status. There are also private insurances outside the social security system. Under the contributory scheme, all nationals or foreigners resident in Colombia who have a formal employment contract, public officials, and retirees or self-employed workers whose salary or income is equal to or higher than the current legal minimum wage must be affiliated as contributors. Persons affiliated under this regime must make the mandatory monthly contributions to the system and bear the cost of sliding scale fees and co-payments (these are payments made for the provision of health services and the cost corresponds to ranges established in accordance with the salary earned by the contributor). Once the payment has been made, the person has the right to be treated at hospitals, clinics, and health services (the latter are known as Health Service Providers -IPS-) and receive all the services of the Health Benefits Plan, which include health promotion, disease prevention and health recovery, access to medication and highly complex treatments. They can affiliate as beneficiaries the basic family group (affiliate's spouse or permanent partner, whether they are a same-sex couple, sons, or daughters under 25 years old provided they economically depend on the affiliate), as well as the affiliate's parents, provided they are not retirees and economically depend on the contributor, with an additional payment. Contributors can also obtain financial benefits due to

sick leave due to an illness or accident not related to their work and maternity and/or paternity leave. **The subsidised regime** seeks to cover the access to health care for people who do not have the economic capacity to pay for private health insurance or who do not earn a minimum wage and are poor or vulnerable, included in these groups:

- People classified as SISBEN A1 to C18.
- Displaced persons.
- Boys, girls, and adolescents under the protection of the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF).
- Boys, girls, and adolescents demobilized from the armed conflict.
- Indigenous communities.
- Foreign population with regular migration status without payment capacity.

Under the subsidised regime, the cost of monthly contributions, as well as the sliding scale fees, are borne by the State provided the services are included in the Health Benefits Plan. Only those who are in the Sisbén Level II category and under certain exceptions bear the cost of the co-payments (economic contributions made by the contributor when second and third level surgical procedures, consultations for non-medical and non-dentistry specialties, diagnostic imaging and second and third level clinical tests, second and third level hospitalisation and rehabilitation are required). Those who are affiliated through this scheme are entitled to receive the same health services as those affiliated to the contributory scheme,

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including emergency care, general and specialised medical consultations, dental consultations, the medication provision, and hospitalisation, among others.

If the person does not have sufficient income to be insured under the contributory scheme and does not meet the targeting requirements to be affiliated to the subsidised scheme, the Territorial Entity is responsible for ensuring access to care through the public resources provided for in the General System of Contributions, which are earmarked for service subsidies. The ordinary affiliation procedures are carried out through the Health Promotion Entity (EPS) that operates as an administrative intermediary. Find the list of EPSs at the following link

<https://www.minsalud.gov.co/sites/rid/1/ADMINISTRADORAS%20DE%20SALUD.pdf>

For more information on the affiliation schemes, please visit the following link: <https://www.minsalud.gov.co/protectcionsocial/Regimensubsidiado/Paginas/aseguramiento-al-sistema-general-salud.aspx>

Availability of medical facilities and doctors

Health Service Providers (IPS) including hospitals, clinics, and medical centres can be found in all major and intermediate cities. These are equipped to offer emergency services, routine visits, clinical



Photo: IOM/ 2019

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and more complex tests, transplant procedures, and other treatments. They are also staffed with health professionals trained in different medical specialties. There are public hospitals in rural areas; although, in certain regions there still are significant gaps in access and supply of medical services, especially in dispersed rural areas. The method of contact depends on the Health Promotion Entity (EPS) to which an individual is affiliated. The first contact may be the health secretariat of the municipality in which the individual is located. For more information: Registro Especial de Prestadores y Sedes de Servicios de Salud | Datos Abiertos Colombia

Admission to medical facilities

Contacting and obtaining information from the EPS to which the person is affiliated is recommended to learn about the network of services and the medical institutions or IPS to which an individual has access and from which they can choose, so that the contributor and their family can request medical consultations and other needed procedures. In the case of emergency care, no administrative authorisation is required between the IPS and EPS, and all health institutions (public or private) are bound to provide initial emergency care to any person who requires it, regardless of their socio-economic capacity.

Availability and costs of medication

Essential medications are included in the Health Benefits Plan to which people affiliated and beneficiaries of the health system have access regardless of the type of scheme to which they belong. This

plan ensures free access to antiretroviral treatment and comprehensive care for people living with HIV. However, the costs of the medication are different for each type of scheme; people in the subsidised scheme have access to medications free of charge, while for people in the contributory scheme the cost depends on the value assigned to their sliding scale fees according to their income. In the case of medications that are not included in the Health Benefits Plan and are required by medical staff to treat their patients, the request is submitted to the EPS's scientific committee. However, an electronic system has recently been implemented whereby the doctor prescribes directly through the MIPRE platform, thus avoiding administrative procedures.

Access for returnees

Eligibility and requirements: All persons who are nationals or have a valid residence permit are eligible. In the case of Colombian returnees, or those who have voluntarily returned to the country, or who have been deported or removed from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and their family nucleus qualify to be affiliated to the subsidised scheme (under Decree 2228/2017). Under different circumstances and as previously mentioned, affiliation to each type of scheme depends on economic capacity or vulnerability. To identify if you are enrolled in the Colombian Health System, consult here: <https://www.adres.gov.co/consulte-su-eps>. The contributor's family nucleus can be a beneficiary. In addition, if the family nucleus has not yet completed the SISBEN survey, the Health Service Provider (IPS) can carry out the affiliation

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registration in the Transactional Affiliation System provided the family nucleus is registered to receive the survey.

Registration procedure: To join the system, the person must identify the affiliation scheme (contributory or subsidised), choose the health promotion entities (EPS) they want to affiliate to and that is present in their city of residence. Fill in the affiliation document and attach the supporting documentation depending on each scheme. Once affiliated, the health promotion entity will notify the individual the list of offices and services that the individual has access to. Initial or primary access to health services is through a general medical or dental consultation once an appointment has been made with the Health Service Provider (IPS). In the case of medical emergencies, the individual can go to any hospital, clinic, or health centre in the country that has said service.

Required documents: Colombian ID card (cédula de ciudadanía) is required. In the case of affiliation through the subsidised scheme, certificates will also be requested to verify their vulnerability status for each case (for example, certificate from the National Planning Department (DNP) of the SISBEN level, or SISBEN certificate issued by the mayor's office or certificate of special population in cases where applicable, or documents proving their residence in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in the case of Colombian returnees, repatriated, removed or deported from that country).



2 Labour Market

General information on the labour market

Recently, DANE presented its report on the Colombian labor market for May 2025. It reported that the unemployment rate in the country was 9.0%, a significant decrease from the 10.3% recorded in May 2024. According to World Bank data, the Colombian economy grew by 0.7% in 2023, a figure lower than previous estimates. For 2024, growth was slightly adjusted upward to 1.6%, while for 2025 the World Bank projects growth of 2.4%. Regarding the labor market by gender, according to DANE data for the moving quarter May-July 2025, the employment rate was 47.5% for women and 71.3% for men. Among the data presented by DANE, it was shown that 2.7 million people earn a minimum wage, which is approximately 10.1% of workers. The minimum wage in Colombia for 2025 is 1,400,000 pesos, not including the transportation allowance.

Finding employment

The Public Employment Service Unit is an entity attached to the Ministry of Labour responsible for bringing Colombians closer to formal job opportunities in a democratic, equitable, and transparent manner, and providing employers with suitable personnel for their organisations. SENA offers free training to millions of Colombians who benefit from technical, technological, and complementary programmes that, focused on the economic, scientific, and social development of the country, strengthen the productive activities of companies and industry, to achieve more competitiveness and greater results in different markets. SENA has the following portal through which job offers can be identified nationwide:

<https://www.sena.edu.co/es-co/trabajo/Paginas/busqueEmpleo.aspx>

The Public Employment Service Unit has the following portals to identify job offers and opportunities: <https://www.serviciodeempleo.gov.co/busca-empleo> <https://www.serviciodeempleo.gov.co/empleador-y-gremios/prestadores-publicos>

Other well-known job boards are:

- <https://www.eempleo.com.co/ofertas-empleo/trabajo-empresas-privadas>
- <https://www.computrabajo.com.co>

There are private recruiters like:

- <https://www.hays.com.co/>
- <https://www.experis.co/wps/portal/experis/co/inicio>
- Jobsite ManpowerGroup ([manpower-groupcolombia.co](https://www.manpower-groupcolombia.co))

Likewise, returnees interested in labor market integration can access Prosperidad Social's "Empléate" Program, which promotes the labor inclusion of the returnee population through training, skills development, job intermediation, and post-placement support to ensure retention in formal employment. <https://prosperidadsocial.gov.co/sgsp/empleatesinfronteras/>

For those who wish to start their own business, there are productive return programs that offer guidance on developing productive projects and information on funding sources, such as SENA's Fondo Emprender.

2 Labour Market

SENA's Fondo Emprender provides funding for productive initiatives led by Colombian returnees through specific calls for proposals.

What is it and who is it for? It is a seed capital fund with both forgivable and repayable components, aimed at Colombian returnees (those who have lived abroad and voluntarily return to the country) who present productive, economic, or business projects, either individually or as a group. For more information, visit: <https://www.fondoemprender.com/SitePages/FondoEmprenderConv1492025.aspx>

Unemployment assistance

Severance pay (cesantías) is a social benefit that Colombian employers must pay to their employees, equivalent to one month's salary for each year worked. With Law 2466 of 2025, new modalities were introduced: employers can now deposit 8.33% of the salary monthly into the fund or, by written agreement, pay directly to the employee when the funds are allocated for housing or education. Interest on severance pay can be paid monthly or annually, as agreed. The entities that manage severance pay funds in Colombia continue to be:

- Protección: <https://www.proteccion.com/contenidos/persona/cesantias/consulta-saldo-cesantias>
- Porvenir: <https://www.porvenir.com.co/fondo-de-cesantias>
- Skandia: <https://tomemosdecisiones.skandia.com.co/cesantias-empleador>
- Colfondos: <https://www.colfondos.com.co/dxp/consulta-saldo-de-cesantias>

On the other hand, dependent or independent workers who become unemployed and have been affiliated with a Family Compensation Fund (Caja de Compensación Familiar) (categories A or B) for at least one continuous or discontinuous year within the last three years can apply to the Unemployment Protection Mechanism (Mecanismo de Protección al Cesante), regulated by Law 1636 of 2013 and updated by Law 2225 of 2022. This benefit includes:

- Contributions to the General Health and Pension Social Security System, calculated based on the current monthly legal minimum wage.
- Monetary family subsidy for dependent children, siblings with disabilities, or dependent parents.
- A financial transfer for basic expenses totaling 1.5 minimum wages, divided into three equal monthly payments.

This mechanism aims to ensure social protection and financial support while the worker re-integrates into the labor market.

2 Labour Market

Access for returnees

All Colombians, including returnees, can access SENA's training services free of charge. To participate, it is necessary to register on the official Sofia Plus platform, where available programs and their requirements are published.

Registration and Requirements:

- Create a user account on Sofia Plus with a personal email address and correct personal data (ID type and number).
- Consult each program to verify:
- Academic requirements.
- Modality (in-person or virtual), duration, schedule, and program timeline.
- Title to be awarded and course modules.

Additional Requirements for Technological Programs:

- It is mandatory to have the ICFES SNP code (it can be checked on the ICFES website if the physical report is not available).
- Valid Documents for Registration:
- Citizenship ID (cédula de ciudadanía), Identity Card (tarjeta de identidad), or Permanent Foreign ID Card (cédula de extranjería). Temporary or student permits are not accepted.

- Proof of the required academic status (having passed the last year of schooling).

SENA also offers complementary training and labor competency certification, which can be consulted on the same platform.



Photo: Unsplash/ Kevin Bluer 2020

3 Housing

General information on housing

The housing market in Colombia has shown significant adjustments in recent years.

In 2025, rental prices continue to rise moderately, with annual variations close to 8%, driven by high demand in cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali.

On the other hand, the sale of new housing has decreased, with estimated sales below 150,000 units, of which more than 70% corresponds to Social Interest Housing (Vivienda de Interés Social - VIS).

For Colombian returnees, there are programs and subsidies that facilitate access to homeownership or rental housing:

Complementary Subsidies

Some Family Compensation Funds (Cajas de Compensación Familiar) and municipal governments offer additional benefits for returnees, such as support for down payments or rent.

General Requirements

- Be a registered Colombian returnee in the Single Registry of Returnees (Registro Único de Retornados - RUR).
- Meet the income criteria and classification in Sisbén IV.
- Not have been a beneficiary of another housing subsidy.
- <https://www.minvivienda.gov.co/programa/mi-casa-ya>

Finding accommodation

In general, Colombian returnees return

to their communities of origin, so housing options are most easily identified through their family and friends networks.

These are the main portals to find housing in Colombia: <https://www.ciencuadras.com> <https://www.metrocuadrado.com/> <https://fincaraiz.com.co/> <https://www.mercadolibre.com.co/c/1> inmuebles

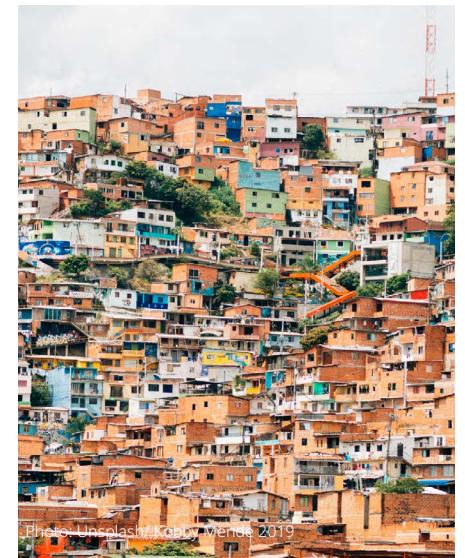


Photo: Unsplash/ Kobby Wende 2019

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Access for returnees

There are no exclusive shelters for Colombian returnees, so many people rely on family or friend networks. However, when they face situations of violence or vulnerability, they can access humanitarian resources in comprehensive care centers.

Shelters in Bogotá

The Mayor's Office of Bogotá offers Shelters (Casas Refugio) intended for women who are victims of domestic violence or armed conflict. There are currently four shelters for domestic violence and one focused on armed conflict violence, with support for their families for up to four months.

Comprehensive Care Centers

Public and district organizations manage spaces where returnees can access humanitarian aid, guidance, and protection pathways:

CIAM – Comprehensive Care Center for Migrants (Bogotá, Los Mártires district): Attends to migrants and returnees daily, *Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

Offers guidance on health, immigration procedures (including the Single Registry of Returnees), legal advice, psychosocial support, food, connectivity, employment, and distribution of humanitarian aid.

Integrate Centers (Centros Intégrate):

These are free service points that offer support to migrants, returnees, and host communities.

Coordinated by the Ministry of Equality and Equity together with local authorities, these centers facilitate access to basic rights, guidance, and services that promote inclusion, par-

icipation, and coexistence, always with a focus on dignity and empathy.

Locations of Integrate Centers:

- Barranquilla: Calle 52 No. 55 – 75, Barrio Montecristo
- Cartagena: Carrera 49 No. 31B – 125 (Next to UNITECNAR), Barrio El Líbano
- Santa Marta: Carrera 24 No. 14 – 70, Barrio El Jardín
- Maicao: Calle 11 Carrera 20, Old San José Hospital
- Riohacha: Calle 12 No. 13 – 25, Barrio Libertador
- Cúcuta: Avenida 7 No. 5 – 01, Centro Comercial Las Mercedes, Office 431, Barrio Latino
- Bucaramanga: Calle 29 No. 15 – 33, Module 3-4
- Arauca: Carrera 24 M18 – 80, 8th floor
- Soacha: Carrera 9 No. 11A – 21, Soacha Centro
- Medellín: Carrera 49 No. 58 – 40, Barrio Prado
- Cali: Avenida 2D Norte No. 24 – 128, Barrio El Piloto

Jurado: Barrio Pueblo Viejo, sector la playa

Bogotá: SuperCADE CAD: Avenida Carrera 30 No. 25 – 90, Centro Administrativo Distrital (CAD), Torre B

SuperCADE Engativá: Tv. 113 No. 66 – 54, Barrio Marandúa

SuperCADE Suba: Avenida Calle 145 No. 103B – 90, Portal de Suba

4 Social Welfare

General information on housing

The Comprehensive Social Security System in force in Colombia was established by Law 100/1993 and brings together in a coordinated manner a set of entities, rules, and procedures to which individuals and the community may access with the main purpose of ensuring a quality of life that is in accordance with human dignity, which is part of the Social Protection System together with policies, rules, and procedures for labour protection and social assistance. Social security is a set of measures that society provides to its members with the purpose of avoiding economic and social imbalances that, if not resolved, would mean the reduction or loss of income due to contingencies such as illness, accidents, maternity, or unemployment, among others.

Under Law 100/1993, the Social Security System in Colombia is divided into four components:

- General Pension System.
- General System of Social Security in Health
- General System of Occupational Risks.
- Complementary Social Services (Colombia mayor).

In general, the person must make 4% health and pension (employee); 8.5% health and 12% pension (employer)

Pension system

Colombia's General Pension System aims to provide protection against the risks associated with old age, disability, and death by granting pensions and

benefits established by law, while also seeking to progressively expand coverage to the population that still lacks a pension system. Currently, the system comprises two main regimes.

The first is the Average Premium Solidarity Regime with Defined Benefits, managed by Colpensiones, in which members or their beneficiaries receive an old-age, disability, or survivor's pension, or a predefined indemnity, as stipulated by regulations.

The second is the Individual Savings with Solidarity component, managed by the new entities that replaced the

Access for returnees

Eligibility and requirements: SISBENs are the channel through which the State can ascertain the needs and capacities of households, and based on it, the social programmes determine whether a person is eligible for a given benefit. Those who determine the conditions of eligibility, permanence, or exit from a social programme are the entities that manage the programmes and not SISBEN.

The requirements to join Sisbén are:

- Be over 18 years of age.
- Be a resident of the family that will request the survey.
- Have a valid ID document.

Registration procedure:

The person must register through the following page: <https://sisbengov.com/afiliarse-al-sisben/>

Required documents: Only a valid ID document is required.

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Pension Fund Administrators (AFPs). It is based on savings from contributions and their financial returns, complemented by solidarity mechanisms to guarantee a minimum pension and contributions to the solidarity fund.

The current eligibility conditions for receiving a pension under Law 100 of 1993 are:

- Meeting the minimum age of 62 years for men and 57 years for women.
- Accrediting the required number of weeks of contributions:
- 1,300 weeks under the Colpensiones regime.

In the individual savings component, having sufficient capital to finance a pension above the minimum wage or, alternatively, having contributed at least 1,150 weeks to access the minimum pension guarantee.

Starting in 2026, the required contribution weeks for women will gradually decrease, reaching 1,000 weeks by 2036, in both the average premium regime and the individual savings component.

Although the pension reform approved in 2024 proposes a four-pillar system and structural changes, its implementation is currently suspended pending constitutional review. Therefore, the rules established under Law 100 remain in effect.

Vulnerable Groups

According to the Ministry of Health, the Ten-Year Public Health Plan addresses populations acknowledging their socio-cultural, economic differences, where they are at in their life journey and specific conditions or situations so that policies, programmes, and projects related to their health consider said differences in the search for equity in health. This includes addressing the population grouped thus:

- Based on life journey: boys, girls, adolescents, youth, adults, and older persons.
- Populations in specific conditions or situations: Ethnic groups, populations with disabilities, and victims of the armed conflict.

From the point of view of inclusion and job opportunities, SENA informs that vulnerable populations are subjects of special protection by the State and are comprised of those persons who, due to their physical, psychological, social, cultural, political, or economic condition, deserve a positive State action to achieve real and effective equality.

Vulnerable populations characterised in SENA's institutional applications include Victims of Violence (Includes those Displaced by Violence), Persons with Disabilities, Indigenous People, Vulnerable Youth, Adolescent in conflict with Law, Women Head of Household, Blacks, Afro-Colombians, Raizales, Palenqueros, Persons undergoing the Reincorporation and Reintegration process, Ado-

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lescents demobilized from Organised armed illegal groups, Older Persons, Adolescent, workers, Rom People. On the other hand, the National Planning Department, through its Vulnerability Assessment, presents this topic from two perspectives:

1. Vulnerable populations due to special conditions of "defencelessness."
2. The proposal of models for estimating vulnerability associated with risk in three dimensions: health, education, and livelihoods. The purpose is to be able to establish the population that should be subject to public policy and the possible indicators to be used.

The Colombia Nos Une Program

Access to this program is obtained by registering with the Unique Registry of Returnees (RUR), the official mechanism in Colombia created to register Colombians who have lived abroad and

Access for returnees

Eligibility and requirements: By freely and voluntarily choosing a pension manager and filling in the form for joining or updating the General Pension System. If you are an employee, said form must also be signed by your employer.

Registration procedure:

COLPENSIONES - access through the following link: <https://www.colpensiones.gov.co/educacion/publicaciones/3535/afiliacion-electronica/>

AFP de Colombia - Individual Savings Through the following link: <https://www.rankia.co/blog/pensiones-iss-cesantias/4097486-cuales-son-afp-colombia#:~:text=En%20Colombia%2C%20existen%204%20AFP,Colfondos%20Pensiones%20y%20Cesant%C3%ADAS>

Required documents: Affiliation documents can be viewed through the portals indicated in the previous point.



Photo: Unsplash 2021/ Fernando Trivino

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wish to return to the country, in accordance with Law 1565 of 2012, known as the Return Law.

This registry allows returning Colombians to access support plans and benefits provided by the law, including tax incentives and support programs to facilitate their socioeconomic reintegration. Registration in the RUR does not consider the individual's migration status abroad when issuing the certificate that accredits them as returnees and grants access to these benefits.

The Inter-Sectoral Commission for Return is the authority responsible for verifying the requirements to access the RUR, approving applications, and deciding on the inclusion of returnees in the registry. Additionally, the registration process involves verification and subsequent certification, which activates a support pathway led by Colombia Nos Une to assist in the reintegration of returnees. <https://www.colombianosune.com/retorno/RUR>

The Referencing and Opportunities Centers for Return (CRORE) in Colombia are offices staffed by advisors from the Colombia Nos Une Internal Working Group of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They provide guidance and referrals to returning Colombians to access services related to entrepreneurship, employment, education, health, paperwork, and other support services within local entities.

La Office of the Presidential Advisor on Equity for Women , refers in its website to the following institutions and organisations that provide support to women:

- RutaPacífica 2229145/2229146 coornacional@rutapacifica.org.co rutapacifica@rutapacifica.org.co
- Cra. 35 No. 53a-86 Bogotá
- Sisma Mujer 2859319 direcccion@ sismamujer.org Cra. 13 No. 33 – 74, Oficina 304 Bogotá
- Corporación Casa de la Mujer 2218785 / 2229176 c o o r d i n a -cion@casmujer.com
- Cra. 35 No. 53a - 86 Nicolás de Federmán Bogotá
- Red Nacional de Mujeres / CIASE 805 1246 presideejecutiva@ciase.org comunicaciones@ciase.org Dg. 40A No. 14-75 Bogotá
- Corporación Humanas / Centro Regional de DDHH y Justicia de Género
- 2880364 adrianaben-jumea@ yahoo.com aben-jumea@humanas.org. co Cra 7 No. 33 - 49 Oficina 201 Bogotá
- Iniciativa Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz - IMP 2485453 - 2485608 logistica@mujeresporlapaz.org Cra 20A No. 72 - 09 Piso 3 Bogotá
- Red de Educación Popular entre Mujeres de Latinoamérica y el caribe REPEM LAC 2874720 repem@repem.org
- Dg.43 Bis No.15- 71 Piso 3 Bogotá
- Casa de la Mujer Trabajadora 7513994 casa.mujer. trabajadora@gmail. com
- Cll. 41 No. 20-09 Bogotá
- Católicas por el derecho a decidir 3272465eliana.rvivas@gmail.com Dg. 43bis No. 15-71 p 3 Bogotá Corporación Centro de Apoyo Popular - CENTRAP 2455437centrap47@gmail.com Cll. 47 No 6-11 Of 201 Bogotá
- Red Nacional de Mujeres 4 6 5 1 2 1 2 beatrizquintero@cable.net. co beatrizquinterog@etb.net.co Cll. 54 No. 10-81 Piso 5 Bogotá
- A SOCI ACIÓN INTERNACIONAL HEROÍNAS DE LA FUERZA PÚBLICA - HEROÍNAS 3505954966 2692964 national.miners@gmail. comCra.47No.94-44 Bogotá

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Note: Effective access depends heavily on the citizen's administrative, territorial, and informational capacity, which continues to constitute a structural barrier.



5 Education

General information on education

The Colombian education system comprises: early childhood education, preschool, basic education (five years of primary and four years of lower secondary), upper secondary education (two years, culminating with the high school diploma), and higher education. The Political Constitution (Article 67) establishes that education is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 15, including at least one year of preschool.

In 2025, public school enrollment exceeds 7.4 million students, while private school enrollment is around 1.7 million, with an approximate distribution of 80% in public institutions and 20% in private ones. The majority of students (75%) are in urban areas, while 25% are in rural areas.

For early childhood, the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) provides comprehensive care through institutional, community, and family-based modalities, ensuring care, nutrition, and pedagogical activities for children under five years of age. Families can consult programs and requirements at: <https://www.icbf.gov.co>

Links to Education Secretariats – Major Cities

- Bogotá: <https://www.educacionbogota.edu.co>
- Medellín: <https://www.medellin.gov.co/educacion>
- Cali: <https://www.cali.gov.co/educacion>
- Barranquilla: <https://www.barranquilla.gov.co/educacion>

Cost, loans, and stipends

Public education in Colombia is free, covering preschool, primary, and secondary education up to the age of 18, as well as 11th grade. It refers to a right of an individual, a public service that has a social function and it is the responsibility of the State to regulate it, as well as to exercise supreme oversight and supervision of the educational service to ensure its quality, the fulfilment of its objectives, and the best possible moral, intellectual, and physical education of students. It is also stipulated that adequate coverage of the service must be ensured and ensure for minors the necessary conditions for their access to and permanence in the education system.

ICETEX continues to be the state entity responsible for promoting higher education in Colombia through educational loans, scholarships, and international opportunities.

Basic requirements remain in effect:

- Be a Colombian citizen.
- Be admitted to a technical, technological, or university program registered with the Ministry of National Education (MEN).
- Study at an institution with an agreement with ICETEX.

Updates you should know:

- Credit lines with a differential focus for vulnerable populations, victims of the conflict, returnees, and ethnic communities.
- Programs for partial or total loan

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forgiveness for those who graduate and complete social service.

- Strengthening of international scholarships and agreements with foreign governments.
- Application is 100% online through the official portal: <https://www.icetex.gov.co>

If you are a returnee or migrant, you can access loans and scholarships by meeting the general requirements. Furthermore, some calls for applications include special lines with a social inclusion focus, which may grant you additional benefits.

Approval and verification of foreign diplomas

For diplomas and certificates obtained abroad, in Colombia there is a process of validation of degrees. This is the recognition process that the Ministry of National Education carries out on a higher education degree awarded by a legally authorised institution in the country of origin. This recognition allows acquiring the same academic and legal effects in Colombia as the degrees awarded by Colombian higher education institutions. The validation of undergraduate degrees awarded abroad takes six months. This time may vary depending on the characteristics of the academic programme to be validated and the validation criteria applied. More information can be obtained through the following links: <https://www.mineduacion.gov.co/portal/convalidaciones/Convalidaciones-Preescolar-Basica-yMedia/356933:Convalidaciones-deEducacion-Prescolar-basica-y-media>

Further Education and Training

SENA (National Training Service) offers the best technical and technological training in Colombia. Through different careers and complementary courses, people interested in these courses will be able to perform trades and jobs required by Colombia's productive sectors. SENA also has a virtual platform called SOFIAPlus, which allows anyone to access a complementary training programme. In this portal people can find a virtual search tool, with which they can visualise the available courses offered in different fields. <http://oferta.senasofiaoplus.edu.co/sofia-oferta/> All training processes offered by SENA are free of charge and ensure the appropriate tools for people to enter the labour market.

Access for returnees

Registration procedure: ICETEX is the state entity that promotes higher education through the granting of student loans and their collection, with its own resources or those of third parties, to the population with lower economic possibilities and good academic performance. It also facilitates access to educational opportunities offered by the international community to improve the quality of life of Colombians and thus contribute to the economic and social development of the country.

The requirements can be found on the following website: <https://web.icetex.gov.co/pregrado.html> There are other institutions such as COLFUTURO and FULBRIGHT COLOMBIA, which offer scholarships for Colombians in different fields. More information can be accessed through the following links: <https://www.colfuturo.org/> <https://fulbright.edu.co/>

6 Children

General information on children and infants

In Colombia, access to basic social services such as health and education is fundamental to ensuring the well-being and comprehensive development of girls, boys, and adolescents. Returning families should prioritize enrolling in these systems, as they are the gateway to guaranteeing rights and reducing vulnerabilities.

The Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) leads the comprehensive protection of children, offering programs in nutrition, violence prevention, early childhood care, and protection against risks. Families can consult information and access services at: <https://www.icbf.gov.co>

Furthermore, the mayoral offices of major cities offer complementary programs for children:

- Bogotá – District Secretary of Social Integration: Programs for nurseries, school meal programs, and early childhood care. <https://www.integracionsocial.gov.co>
- Medellín – Buen Comienzo: Comprehensive early childhood care and educational support. <https://www.medellin.gov.co>
- Cali – Secretary of Social Welfare: Services for childhood and adolescence, including school meal programs. <https://www.cali.gov.co>
- Barranquilla – Secretary of Social Management: Early education and child protection programs. <https://www.barranquilla.gov.co>

Ensuring enrollment in the educational system and access to health-care not only protects rights but also contributes to social inclusion and family stability. Returning families can also visit the Centros Intégrate in major cities for guidance on available support pathways and programs.

Girls, boys, and adolescents may return with one of their parents or even alone in order to reunite with their legal representatives or guardians in Colombia. This process involves the development of additional coordination procedures among IOM Germany, IOM Colombia, legal representatives, guardians, extended family members, and, in some cases, the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF).

Access for Returnees

Registration procedure: Most of the processes only require the direct intervention of the parents, or of the persons who have parental authority over the minor. In specific situations, involving the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF) is suggested to receive precise information on the steps to be taken with the different State institutions and to ensure the protection of the minor.

Registration procedure: The Ministry of National Education has established a minimum annual hourly requirement to ensure basic learning: 800 hours for preschool, 1,000 hours for primary education, and 1,200 hours for secondary and upper secondary education, in accordance with Resolution 1730 of 2004.

In Colombia, there are two academic calendars:

6 Children

- Calendar A (February to November), mandatory for public institutions.
- Calendar B (September to June), used by some bilingual private schools.

School breaks include Holy Week and

one week in October, as established by Decree 1373 of 2007. Private schools have autonomy to define their own academic calendar, provided they comply with the minimum hourly requirement.

Returning families can explore educational options and complete enrollment processes through the official platform: <https://www.mineducacion.gov.co>



Photo: Unsplash/ Alejandro Ortiz 2019

7 Contacts

Migración Colombia Colombian Migratory Authority Calle 26 # 59-51 Edificio Argos, Bogotá https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/	UNHCR Agencia de las Naciones Calle 71 # 12-25, Bogotá https://www.acnur.org/	Comité Internacional de la Cruz Roja Calle 96 # 11B-37, Bogotá (57) 1 3138630 https://www.icrc.org/es/
Grupo Mundial sobre Migración ACNUDH Department of the Americas Calle 113 # 7-45, Torre B Oficina 1101, Edificio Teleport www.ohchr.org	Plataforma de Coordinación Interagency for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela https://www.r4v.info/es/colombia	Defensoría del Pueblo Carrera 9 # 16-21, Bogotá www.defensoria.gov.co
National Civil Registry Avenida Calle 26 51-50 - CAN, Bogotá https://www.registraduria.gov.co/	Policía Nacional de Colombia National security Carrera 59 # 26-21, Bogotá https://www.policia.gov.co/	ICBF Colombian Institute of Family Welfare Calle 57 #8-69, Bogotá https://www.sena.edu.co
SENA National Training Service Calle 57 # 8-69 Bogotá https://www.sena.edu.co/es-co/Paginas/default.aspx	DIAN National Directorate of Taxes and Customs Carrera 8 # 6C-38 Edificio San Agustín, Bogotá https://www.dian.gov.co	Fundación Scalabrin Non-governmental organization supporting immigrants Calle 56bis # 35-47, Bogotá https://scalabrinianoscolombia.org/
Transporte en Bogotá Terminal Diagonal 23 # 69-60, Bogotá https://www.terminalde-transporte.gov.co/	Ambulance Dispatch Centre - Mayor's Office of Bogotá Ambulance service Cra 8 # 10-65, Bogotá 123 https://bogota.gov.co/mi-ciudad/salud/servicio-de-ambulancias-en-bogota	Ministry of Health and Social Protection: Governing body for health policy, access to the health system, care for vulnerable and returnee populations. www.minsalud.gov.co
Ministry of Labor: Employment, labor formalization, labor inspection, and access to social security benefits. http://www.mintrabajo.gov.co	Department for Social Prosperity (DPS) Cash transfer and poverty reduction programs (Renta Ciudadana, Colombia Mayor, etc.). http://www.prosperidadesocial.gov.co	Ministry of Housing, City and Territory: Access to housing programs and subsidies for vulnerable and returnee populations. http://www.minvivienda.gov.co

8 At a glance

Measures to be undertaken before return

- Health:** Bring with you any documents that can verify specific health situations. Be aware that access to health services does not include immediate access to specialists, and this can lead to significant delays for important medical treatments.
- Education:** It is important to keep in mind that, although basic education in Colombia is free, available school places are granted as people go through the registration process. If you would like your children to have the opportunity to attend classes in a nearby school, consider their school opening calendars and the administrative processes involved for the corresponding enrolment.
- Documentation:** Many ID documents can be renewed before the National Civil Registry or, as with other documents, through public notaries. It is advisable for people to keep scanned copies of their documents, so that they can be reissued more easily if they are lost or damaged.
- Access to employment:** It is advisable to seek advice from SENA and the channels made available by the government for job search and possible job placement. The guidance services offered by SENA are free of charge. Avoid companies or job placement companies that ask for money, promising to achieve results that may not be fulfilled.

Measures to be undertaken immediately upon arrival

- Migración Colombia shares relevant information for people arriving in Colombia, from the point of view of documentation, among others, and even though some health measures are constantly under review, and some may eventually be removed, consider the following: Check with your airline on the status of your flight. The verbal statements will be stored in Migración Colombia's system.
- Additionally:** Check that you have your documents at hand, as well as the address where you are going to stay in Colombia. Make sure to fill in the declaration form of the National Directorate of Taxes and Customs (DIAN) properly.

9 Virtual Counselling

Assistance for Migrants in Colombia

The Virtual Counseling Project is implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Germany. Migrants residing in Germany who are considering returning are offered virtual counseling on return and reintegration by IOM staff in Colombia. The local IOM staff in Colombia can be contacted in Spanish and English via online messaging.

This service aims to empower migrants to return with dignity by informing them about various return and reintegration options, as well as about available assistance programs.

Contact Marcela at IOM in Colombia

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