

ifa ECP Monitor Country Report

Colombia

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1. External cultural policy objectives in geopolitical context

Colombia sits at the northern tip of Latin America and is among the thirty largest countries in the world by total area. It is one of the most populous countries in the region with 50 million inhabitants, trailing Brazil and Mexico (Statista, 2021). Colombian GDP was the 39th highest in the world in 2019 (see Table 1), making it one of the largest economies in Latin America. Much of the economic growth is attributed to mining and resource-based industries. Colombia is known as one of the world’s seventeen “megadiverse” countries, with nearly 10% of global biodiversity within its borders (World Atlas, n.d.). The country also boasts linguistic and ethnic diversity with around 68 indigenous languages and over 80 ethnic groups (Uribe-Jongbloed & Anderson, 2014). Nicknamed the “gateway to South America”, the country is regarded as a “secondary power” (Flemes & Wehner, 2012) and is well established in the international arena. It is a member of major fora including the UN and WTO, and it joined OECD in 2020.

These facts, however, rarely first leap to mind. For more than five decades, Colombia has been immersed in an armed conflict and political violence with guerrillas, dissident groups, and organised crime, which has almost stymied the country’s development. In the past few years there have been a number of positive developments, most notably the signing of the peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) guerrilla group in 2016 and its ongoing implementation (BTI, 2020). While this marked important advances towards post-conflict recovery, other paramilitary organisations continue to commit crime and serious human rights abuses. Apart from peace negotiations, the country is facing additional challenges including poverty and social inequality, and humanitarian migration from neighbouring Venezuela (HRW, 2020).

Overall, the positive trends outweigh the negative. In all fields, including culture and education, Colombia is revitalising itself. The country of Gabriel García Márquez, Pablo Escobar, Shakira, diverse ecosystems and endless coffee fields, is full of creative tension and therefore great potential.

Table 1: Country’s geopolitical and geo-economic position

| | 2019 | % change since 2015 |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Population (million) / ranking | 50.33 / 29 th | 5.93 |
| GDP (\$ million) / ranking | 323,803 / 39 th | 10.86 |
| GDP per capita (\$) | 16,077 | 20.6 |
| Cultural economy (%GDP) | 0.7 ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾ | -0.08 |
| Education economy (%GDP) | 4.18 ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾ | -0.36 |
| R&D economy (%GDP) | 0.28 | -0.04 |
| Media economy (%GDP) | - | - |

Sources: OECD, World Bank

| | | 2019 | change over 2015 | |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------|---|
| Geopolitical position | Hard power rank | 39 th (2021) | - | - |
| | World trade rank | 54 th | 53 th | ↓ |
| | Soft power rank | n/a | n/a | - |
| | Diplomacy rank | n/a | n/a | - |

Table 2: Government spending on ECP fields as a % of total outlays

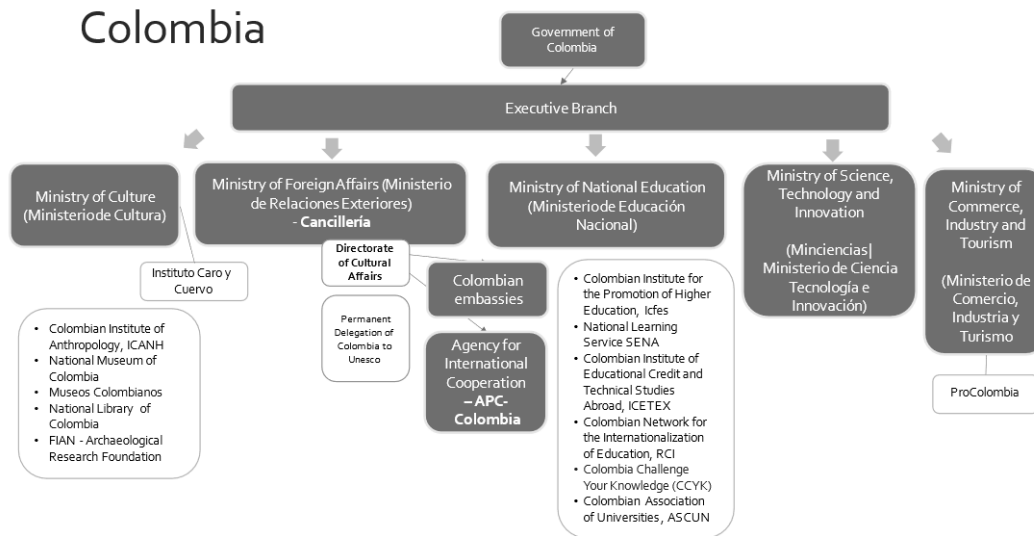
| | 2019 | % change since 2015 |
|-----------|-------|---------------------|
| Culture | - | - |
| Education | 15.98 | 0.85 |
| R & D | - | - |
| Media | - | - |

2. External cultural policy: an overview

Table 3: Key ECP Statistics for Country

| | 2019 |
|---|---|
| Number of countries with ECP activities | ~ 70 |
| Total number of institutions abroad | (62 embassies and 120 consulates abroad) |
| Total number of FTE staff engaged in ECP activities | - |
| Government financial support (\$ million) | "Promotion of Colombia abroad": USD 1,906,890 ⁽²⁰¹⁵⁾ ¹ |
| Total expenditure of all ECP operators (\$ million) | - |
| Comparative ECP ranking | medium |

¹ (7,557,985,000 Colombian pesos), Source: Cuéllar (2016). Memorias al congreso 2015-2016, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores - República de Colombia.

Figure 1: Institutional map of country's ECP

Colombia's external cultural policy does not follow a strict approach. If any, there is a pattern of discontinuity. This has largely been the result of the 50-year internal armed conflict, different attitudes of past administrations, and relations with neighbouring countries and the US.

Colombian modern diplomacy started in 1991 when the first constitution was adopted. Since then, Colombia has defined itself as an ethnically and culturally diverse nation—a message which was reflected in foreign action. Early on, regional cooperation as a peace mechanism was deepened through bilateral 'neighbourhood' commissions (*comisiones de vecindad*) (e.g., Brazil, Ecuador, Panamá, Perú, Chile) and initiatives like the Andrés Bello Convention² for educational, scientific, technological, and cultural cooperation. The diplomatic action focused on promoting Colombia's multifaceted identity as a southern, Amazonian, Andean, Atlantic, Caribbean and Pacific country (Montoya Ruiz, 2017, p. 151). Cultural diplomacy has a longer tradition, at least since 1983 when the first Plan for the Promotion of Colombia Abroad was established. During the then Belisario Betancur's government, the National Council for Coordination, the Executive Committee for Cultural and Scientific Promotion and Agreements, and an Executive Committee for Image and Outreach, were also created. The Colombian Institute for Culture (*Colcultura*) under the Ministry of Education conducted further international activities, which were then continued by the Ministry of Culture (est. 1997) (Bonet, Négrier, & Zamorano, 2019, p. 39).

In the early 2000s, culture was fully recognised as an essential part of foreign policy. Then-President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010) also emphasised that peace diplomacy and conflict resolution were integral to ECP: "Colombia must open up to the world through dialogue with civil society and the academic community, and through cultural projection. The greatest challenge of Colombian foreign policy today is to effectively convey the message that Colombia is strengthening democracy and governance" (MinRelaciones, 2003). With the adoption of the Plan for the Promotion of Colombia Abroad, the country became more proficient in cultural

² The countries that make up the Organization of the Andrés Bello Agreement are: Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela.

action abroad. For instance, between 2002 and 2006, 1,932 international cultural events were held. The large diaspora abroad became another outlet for cultural projection, for example with the 2004 *Colombia Nos Une* program and the network of Colombian Students and Professionals Abroad (Montoya Ruiz, 2017, p. 69). In line with foreign policy and following the narrative of national reconciliation, the Ministry of Culture implemented specific action plans like Afro Colombia, Indigenous Colombia, Inclusive Colombia, Reconciling Colombia, Democratic Colombia and so on (Bonet et al., 2019, p. 40). Sports diplomacy, too, served its role in fostering peace and cultural exchange.

Today, Colombian cultural diplomacy is defined as a strategic tool for strengthening international relations and improving the country's perception abroad. The cultural agenda of external policy is to promote Colombia as a contemporary, innovative, diverse, inclusive country committed to the pursuit of peaceful coexistence (URosario, 2017). The approach is seen by the government as contributing to the opening and consolidation of dialogues with international actors that are strategic for foreign policy, while at the same time allowing for thematic diversification with traditional partners, as well as the creation of ties with non-traditional partners to spread Colombia's soft power.

The principal actor is the President, followed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Directorate for Cultural Affairs (see Figure 1), which is responsible for coordinating the planning and implementation of foreign policy actions in the fields of culture, education, and sport. The Foreign Office works with the relevant national entities in each area (different ministries), the Permanent Delegation of Colombia to UNESCO, and the countries in whose territory a diplomatic mission of Colombia is accredited. On the ground, the main operative arm are the Colombian embassies abroad which organise different cultural events. The Foreign Ministry has a presence abroad through 62 Embassies and 4 Permanent Missions to multilateral organizations. The joint work of these institutions seeks to reach out and obtain support from international organizations, businessmen, investors, academics, students, the media, the general population of the host country, and finally Colombian society.

The Plan for the Promotion of Colombia Abroad is a cultural diplomacy initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, which seeks to promote knowledge of the country's cultural expressions internationally. The main objectives are as follows:

- Strengthen international relations and improve the perception of the country abroad, through various cultural activities that increase foreign awareness of the expressions of Colombian diversity.
- Support the formulation, management, and evaluation of cooperation projects aimed at strengthening the technical capacities of Colombian institutions in the areas of culture, education, and sport, and to share those capacities with other countries.
- Develop actions to support the positioning of the Orange Economy in international forums.

It is important to point out that Colombia's foreign cultural policy is being handled under extreme presidentialism. Therefore, the central axis of the current cultural policy is the promotion of the "Orange Economy", which is the banner with which the current president, Ivan Duque, presented his candidacy to the businessmen and investors of the country.

The main ECP activities follow closely the foreign cooperation objectives:

- Academic mobility through the negotiation, dissemination, and follow-up of scholarships offered by other governments.
- Bilingualism promotion programs and scholarships for postgraduate studies in Colombia.
- Sports and cultural exchange programs with children and youth.
- Dissemination of Colombian culture through the teaching of Spanish: Spanish courses in 35 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, as well as in the International Agency for Southeast Asia (ASEAN).
- Support the Ministry of Sport with the aim of facilitating the participation of Colombian athletes in international arenas.
- In coordination with Colombian missions abroad, activities are carried out in the performing arts, visual arts, cinema, and audiovisual, gastronomy, literature and academia, and music.

Like Brazil, Colombia has recently focused on fostering South-South relationships, mainly with the Asia Pacific and African regions and has actively contributed to Ibero-American forums (Bonet et al., 2019, p. 40). In terms of geographic focus, Colombia has several important bilateral relations:

- USA is an ally and main economic donor. There has been a traditional relationship, with a clear hierarchy in which the USA has overseen the making.
- The EU has a long relationship, but one marked by ups and downs due to Colombia's human rights violations, and its failure to comply with the peace agreements.
- Neighbouring countries such as Chile, Peru, Mexico, Ecuador.
- Asia and the Pacific and Africa Middle East and Eurasia are all less relevant relationships, depending on the activities of embassies and consulates.

3. Fields of ECP

3.1. Culture and the arts

Table 4: Key statistics on culture and the art

| | 2019 | 2015 |
|--|---|----------------------|
| Number of countries present | 69 (cultural events abroad) | 58 |
| Number of institutes | n/a (62 embassies and 120 consulates abroad) | n/a |
| Number of FTE staff | - | - |
| Number of artists in exchange programs (Colombian Young Talents / Jóvenes Talentos colombianos) | 31 | 34 ⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾ |

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Number of cultural agreements | 46 | - |
| Number of cultural activities abroad | 270 | 199 |
| Sports and cultural exchanges | 73 ⁽²⁰¹⁹⁻²⁰²⁰⁾ | - |
| Budget (\$) | - | USD 2 million (Colombian Young Talents) ⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾ |

The Plan for the Promotion of Colombia Abroad (*Plan de Promoción de Colombia en el Exterior* - PPCE) seeks to support the country's foreign action mainly through the network of Colombian embassies abroad. In 2019, 270 cultural activities were implemented in 69 countries in the areas of academia and literature, performing and visual arts, film, gastronomy, and music.

The country seeks to strengthen international relations through public diplomacy and culture and the arts have been one of the main instruments. A good example is the Sports and Cultural Diplomacy Initiative originated in 2011, an action derived from Colombia's international commitments from Resolution 1612 (2005) of the United Nations Security Council. The program involves young Colombian artists and athletes between the ages of 12 and 17 who visit the developed nations. Between 2019 and 2020, 73 young people participated in 8 such exchanges in a number of countries in the Americas, Asia and Europe.

Furthermore, Colombia continues to position itself as an important actor in South-South cooperation. For example, the XX Ibero-American Conference of Ministers of Culture was held at the Colombian Foreign Office in 2019. President Iván Duque has prioritized the development of the Orange economy and the objective is to stimulate the cultural industry so that by 2022 it will contribute 7% of the total GDP. With that in mind, the government has promoted the negotiation of agreements on creative industries with other countries, most recently with Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates (Barberi, 2019).

3.2. Language

Table 5: Key figures on language promotion

| | 2019 | 2015 |
|--|--------------------------------|------|
| Number of countries where courses are offered | 35 ⁽²⁰¹³⁻²⁰¹⁹⁾ | 7 |
| Number of students enrolled in Spanish courses for foreign diplomats | | |
| In-class | 981 | 399 |
| | ~ 3,050 ⁽²⁰¹³⁻²⁰¹⁹⁾ | |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Number of language promotion actions | 69 Spanish language courses (2013-2019) | 8 Spanish courses organised for diplomats and government officials |
| Number of language teachers | - | 12 |
| Number of foreign language assistants in Colombia | 194 | 148 ⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾ |
| Budget (\$) | - | USD 1,906,890 ⁽²⁰¹⁵⁾ 3 |
| Government financial support (\$) | - | USD 336,944 |

The most important language promotion tool are the Spanish language courses for diplomats and government officials. The program offers language courses to governments of non-Spanish speaking countries to train public officials in their territories. Apart from the language component, participants learn about the culture, history, and traditions of Colombia.

In 2015, eight Spanish courses were taught in the following countries: Jamaica, Ghana, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Suriname, Grenada, and Barbados with the participation of 399 students from the public administration (Cancillería, 2016). In 2019, 981 public servants took part in 22 such language courses in countries like China, Kenya, South Africa, Algeria, Kazakhstan, Turkey and more. In total, more than 3,000 foreign officials learned Spanish in this way (Barberi, 2019).

3.3. Tertiary education and science

The national government has set a goal of promoting Colombia as an attractive academic destination and increasing opportunities abroad for talented Colombian students. The main actors here are the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with its diplomatic network and the Colombian Institute of Educational Credit and Technical Studies Abroad (ICETEX). The latter started in 1953 as a government body that provided loans to cover university fees of Colombian students studying abroad. With time ICETEX also began to provide loans for students who wanted to access private universities⁴ in Colombia and currently it covers more than half of all university loans (Anzola-Pardo, 2018).

According to ICETEX data, 109 new postgraduate scholarships for foreigners were awarded in 2019. Countries with the highest participation in the scholarship programme for foreigners in Colombia were Ecuador, Mexico, Brazil, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Honduras. The higher education institutions that received the most foreign scholarship holders were: Universidad de la Sabana, Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Universidad Nacional de Colombia and Universidad ICESI (ICETEX, 2020).

The overarching goal is to present Colombia as a quality academic destination, form international alliances, and strengthen the capacities at home. The international education cooperation mainly follows through academic exchanges and scholarship programs. In this way, bet-

³ Source: Cancillería (2016). Promotion of Colombia Abroad - Executive Summary Report 2015.

⁴ Undergraduate tuition fees at top private universities like the Universidad de los Andes can exceed USD\$13,000 per year (Carroll, 2020).

ween July 2019 and July 2020, there were 47 mobility schemes for Colombians abroad and for foreign students in Colombia. Another cooperation channel is the joint commissions and mechanisms of bilateral and multilateral relations. Colombia has more than 25 framework agreements with other countries in cultural, educational, and sports cooperation. One example is Colombia's participation in the Education and Culture groups of the Pacific Alliance, as well as academic and student mobility programs within this integration platform (Barberi, 2019). Other forms of internationalization include the mobility of foreign language assistants (more than 700 attendees to date), as well as guest professors (Fellows Colombia) program which encourages the mobility of foreign experts to Colombian HEIs and research centres (more than 600 experts) (Briñez, Gomez, War, Betancurt, & Isaza, 2020).

In 2018, the Colombian HEI landscape is marked with privatization: almost two thirds of 86 universities are private, as well as the majority of the 134 university institutions, 48 technological institutes, and 30 technical training institutes. While this fact opens debates around education quality and equity, it is nevertheless true that several Colombian universities rank prominently in international rankings. Ten Colombian institutions feature the Times Higher Education 2019 Latin America rankings compared with 37 Brazilian, 20 Chilean, and 13 Mexican ones. In the QS 2020 global ranking, 12 Colombian universities made the list, including the top-ranked Universidad de los Andes, the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, and the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. Most of these top-tier institutions are private (Carroll, 2020). Overall, there is an imbalance between the outbound and inbound mobility rates: in 2018 there were 4,764 visiting students in Colombia, a stark contrast to 46,631 Colombians studying abroad. The top destinations for outbound students were Argentina, US, Spain, Australia, France, and Germany. Inbound foreign students were received in Colombia primarily from the region: Venezuela, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru (UNESCO).

Table 6: Key figures on tertiary education

| | 2019 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|
| Number of countries | - | - |
| Number of universities / colleges | 86 universities, 134 university institutions, 48 technological institutes, 30 technical training institutes | 81 universities, 121 university institutions, 51 technological institutes, 35 professional technical institutions ⁽²⁰¹⁴⁾ |
| Number of students | | |
| Number of internationally mobile students | inbound: 4764 ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾ outbound: 46,631 ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾ | inbound: 4323 outbound: 35,108 |
| Number of students at trans-national higher education (TNE) | n/a | n/a |
| Number of government scholarships awarded | 109 postgraduate scholarships for foreigners ⁵ | 116 ⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾ |

⁵ In the general call, 50 scholarships were awarded (46%), in the call for Colombia-Ecuador Reciprocity Scholarships, 37 (34%) scholarships were awarded to Ecuadorian citizens, and in the Pacific Alliance Postgraduate scheme, 22 scholarships (20%) were awarded to Ecuadorian citizens. ICETEX (2020)

| | | |
|---|--|-------------------------|
| (Colombia Government Scholarship) | 864 scholarships for Colombian students abroad | 716 ⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾ |
| Number of international experts hosted by the Colombian Higher Education Institutions | 1,804 | 1,389 ⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾ |
| Budget (\$ million) | - | - |
| Government financial support (\$ million) | - | - |

Table 7: Science & Research

| | 2019 | 2015 |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Number of countries | - | - |
| Number of institutes | - | - |
| Number of researchers / staff | - | 2,767 foreign researchers |
| Number of projects | - | 914 (int. cooperation) |
| Number scientists in exchange programs Program Passport to Science / "Pasaporte a la Ciencia" | 90 | - |
| Budget (\$) "Pasaporte a la Ciencia" | USD 5,471,012.18 ⁶ | - |
| Government financial support (\$ million) | - | - |
| Number of countries | - | - |

Colombian HEIs are the main drivers of internationalization. According to 2015 data, 2,767 foreign researchers in 161 HEIs formed parts of the research groups, and 914 projects were developed with international cooperation (Henao & Velez, 2015). In the field of science and research, the main decision-making body is the Department of Science, Technology, and Innovation (*Sistema Nacional de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación – SNCTI*), previously known as *Colciencias*. It focuses on promoting the internationalization of research and innovation.

Most recently in 2020 and with the creation of the new Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation, Colombia has outlined a national science diplomacy strategy. According to this document, 9 nodes will be created in strategic countries (mostly border areas with Brazil, Panama, and Peru). Apart from that, the plan is to improve collaboration between the scientific diaspora and the Colombian scientific communities within international mechanisms, and

⁶ Resources earmarked for the 70 *Pasaporte a la Ciencia* programme beneficiaries to advance their studies abroad. ICETEX (2020).

capacity building in science diplomacy. Here, too, the South-South cooperation takes precedence, taking into account Colombia's new role in the region after being accepted into the OECD in April 2020 (Soler, 2021).

4. Challenges and future outlook

As a fragile post-conflict society, Colombia is in a situation where any long-term government plan, including ECP, could be abruptly stopped in its tracks. Nonetheless, as Colombia moves towards peace and economic maturity, the country has the opportunity to use external cultural policies as a tool to gain more credibility and a more prominent seat at the international table. Although it was previously considered that the image of Colombia abroad was negative, there are many indicators that suggest otherwise. For example, in 2018 the number of foreign tourists has doubled compared to three years prior, and foreign direct investments and Colombian exports have reached historic highs in the last decade (Cancillería, 2021).

Colombia's external cultural policy has structural elements that have remained immutable over time, such as the primacy of presidentialism in decision-making, without any counterweight from other state institutions. This is linked to a profound ideologization of the action plans, the increase in the levels of corruption in the delegation of jobs to consulates and embassies, and finally to a weak international projection tending towards a domesticated foreign cultural policy. Under the current government, this policy has been responsible for establishing a closer relationship with the United States, not only in actions but also in ideologies, locking the doors to establishing relations with other countries both in the region and in other hemispheres. There are no articulated and executable action plans, nor are there any monitoring of the actions carried out or their budgets.

However, Colombia has different strengths that would allow it to have a more effective cultural foreign policy. Since 2017, with the signing of the peace agreement with the FARC guerrillas, the country has received the support of different international organizations interested in achieving and promoting peace. Thanks to the various activities carried out in conjunction with these organizations, the country has managed to create a good investment climate as well as to increase its tourism economy. On the other hand, the relevance, size, and organizational level of the Colombian diasporas abroad are very useful tools for the achievement of cultural plans. Regarding this aspect, it is worth noting that Colombian consulates in international hubs such as Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Sao Paulo, Shanghai, Sydney, Toronto, among others are great power centers with high potential to achieve results in ECP actions (Cancillería, 2021).

Perhaps one of Colombia's most important opportunities is its strategic position on the continent. For this reason, many countries are interested in strengthening ties and building bridges of action. For example, South Korea, China, Turkey, Morocco are non-traditional allies that have expressed interest in the country. The country has also been gaining importance in the region, thanks to economic growth and the migratory situation of recent years.

Colombia, on the other hand, has a great biological and ethnic diversity and has gained worldwide recognition in areas such as literature, sports, food production, and music. Thanks to this, the country has enough raw material to establish an interesting and attractive foreign

cultural policy. However, Colombia is still facing a number of challenges domestically, which it must resolve before it can strengthen its foreign cultural policy.

Confidence-building in the region is another factor to be re-established because although relations with most countries have been calm, the tension with Venezuela in recent years as well as the great militarization of the borders have created tension on the edges and the region. Finally, there is the challenge of involving the country's communities as an active part of internationalization processes, generating growth and respect for cultural processes. It should seek to be a more active player, strengthening ties with non-traditional countries and opening more to the international community.

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