COUNTRY GUIDE



AMERICAS

Colombia.

Colombia's Código Penal makes it a crime to fail, without just cause, to help a person whose life or health is in grave danger, and the Constitution lists acting with solidarity through humanitarian action as a duty of the person and citizen. Ley 720 de 2001 recognizes, promotes and regulates volunteer action and sets up a national volunteer system.

DUTY TO HELP A STRANGER
Yes

PROTECTION FOR HELPERS
None found

GIVING AND SERVICE
4 programs and laws

Is there a legal duty to help a stranger?

YES

Article 131 of the Ley 599 de 2000 (Código Penal), 'Omisión de socorro', punishes whoever fails, without just cause, to help a person whose life or health is in grave danger; the text with penalties raised by Ley 890 de 2004 states 32 to 72 months of prison. Article 95 of the Constitution also lists as a duty to act 'according to the principle of social solidarity, responding with humanitarian actions' to situations endangering life or health.

Ley 599 de 2000, Código Penal, art. 131 (Omisión de socorro) (the site does not support https) (Secretaría del Senado de la República de Colombia) Constitución Política de Colombia, art. 95 (the site does not support https) (Secretaría del Senado de la República de Colombia)

Are people who help protected?

NONE FOUND

No statute specifically protecting people who help a stranger in good faith was found in the texts reviewed. The criminal provision applies only 'without just cause', which leaves room for situations where helping is not possible, but this guide does not interpret case law.

Ley 599 de 2000, Código Penal, art. 131 (Omisión de socorro) (the site does not support https) (Secretaría del Senado de la República de Colombia)

How the government promotes giving and service

Ley 720 de 2001 on volunteer action

Article 1 states that the law aims to promote, recognize and facilitate volunteer action as an expression of citizen participation and the exercise of solidarity, and to regulate relations between volunteers and public or private entities. Article 2 applies it to formal and informal volunteer action in Colombia.

SECRETARÍA DEL SENADO DE LA REPÚBLICA DE COLOMBIA

Public support for volunteer organizations (Ley 720, art. 8)

Volunteer organizations and entities with volunteer action have the right to receive financial, material and technical support from public resources and to take part in designing public policy. The article also directs the national government to build an indicator of volunteer action's contribution to GDP.

SECRETARÍA DEL SENADO DE LA REPÚBLICA DE COLOMBIA

Sistema Nacional de Voluntariado (Ley 720, arts. 9 to 11)

The law creates a national volunteer system to promote and strengthen volunteer action through networks of organizations and the State. Municipal, departmental and national volunteer councils may be formed, and mayors, governors and the Ministry of the Interior attest to their constitution.

SECRETARÍA DEL SENADO DE LA REPÚBLICA DE COLOMBIA

Constitutional duty of solidarity (art. 95)
Article 95 includes among the duties of the person and citizen to act according to the principle of social solidarity and to take part in the political, civic and community life of the country.
SECRETARÍA DEL SENADO DE LA REPÚBLICA DE COLOMBIA

Ways to give and volunteer

Colombia has a large nonprofit sector (entidades sin ánimo de lucro) and strong volunteer networks, including the Cruz Roja Colombiana and the Defensa Civil. Many nonprofits are registered with the local Chamber of Commerce, which is the easiest way to check them.

Check a charity before you give

The national registry run by the Chambers of Commerce, where you can search by name or NIT to confirm that a foundation or association is legally registered.

RUES (Registro Único Empresarial y Social)

Give your time

Cruz Roja Colombiana: Voluntariado
The Colombian Red Cross volunteer page, with sign-up through local branches.

Defensa Civil Colombiana
The national civil defense body, which works with trained volunteers in emergencies and rescue.

UN Volunteers (UNV)
The United Nations volunteer program, which lists international and national volunteer assignments and country information.

Give money, blood or a donation

Donavida (Instituto Nacional de Salud)
The national organ and tissue donation site run by the health institute, where you can learn about donating and state your wishes.

Asociación de Bancos de Alimentos de Colombia (ABACO)
The national association of Colombia's food banks, which collect surplus food and pass it to people in need.

In an emergency or a crisis

Find A Helpline: crisis and emotional support lines in this country
A directory of free crisis and emotional support lines, run by ThroughLine. No single national line could be confirmed for this guide, so check the line you choose before you rely on it.

Before you act

- Check any foundation by name and NIT in RUES before giving, and pay only to an account in the organization's own name; be wary of fake disaster appeals on social media.
- After a disaster, give through established groups rather than strangers collecting goods or cash.
- Foreign visitors should ask their host whether their visa allows unpaid work before volunteering.

This list does not cover local community groups, animal shelters or religious charities. Checked 2026-10-28. Listing an organization is not an endorsement, and none of them has endorsed this site. Some official sites block automatic checks, so a link may need a second try.

One thing worth knowing

Colombia pairs a criminal offense for failing to help with a constitutional text that frames humanitarian response as a duty of solidarity.

What this does not mean

Translations are this guide's own. The sources are the Senate's annotated online compilations; check the Diario Oficial for authoritative text. How courts apply article 131 was not reviewed, and no donation tax rule was verified for Colombia. This is a plain-language summary of public sources, not legal advice, and it does not rank countries. No government named here has endorsed this site. Not reviewed by a lawyer. Statutes were read in public sources and may have changed. Last checked October 26, 2026.

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