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Decent Work Situations in the Cities of Bogota, Medellin, and Bucaramanga 2018-2020*

[English Version]

Situación de trabajo decente en las ciudades de Bogotá, Medellín y Bucaramanga 2018-2020

Situação de trabalho decente nas cidades de Bogotá, Medellín e Bucaramanga 2018-2020

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Colombia

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Abstract

Objective: The objective of this research is to measure the conditions of "decent work" for three of the main cities of Colombia (Bogota, Medellin, and Bucaramanga) during the period 2018-2020. **Methodology:** The different dimensions proposed by the ILO are used in reference to the necessary conditions that decent work must provide. The calculation and analysis of the behavior of the variables under study is based on information from the Great Integrated Household Survey (GIHS)) prepared by DANE. **Results:** According to indicators of income and employment, the results show an increase in the three cities' labor precarity. By city, Bogota has the best performance in terms of access to employment and social dialogue; Medellin best performs in terms of social security and job security; while Bucaramanga shows deficiencies in the four areas analyzed for the period under study. **Conclusions:** The main conclusion is that, in 2020, the year of the confinement decreed by the national government to face the COVID-19 pandemic, labor precariousness conditions increased.

Keywords: decent work; employment; labor market; economic development; informality.

Resumen

Objetivo: la presente investigación tiene como objetivo medir las condiciones de «trabajo decente» para tres de las principales ciudades de Colombia; Bogotá, Medellín y Bucaramanga en el periodo 2018-2020 **Metodología:** se hace uso de las diferentes dimensiones planteadas por la OIT en referencia a las condiciones necesarias que debería otorgar el trabajo digno. El cálculo y análisis del comportamiento de las variables objeto de estudio se realiza a partir de la información de la *Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares*, GEIH elaborada por el DANE. **Resultados:** los resultados muestran un aumento de la precariedad laboral para las tres ciudades en los indicadores de ingresos y desocupación, entre otros. Por ciudades, Bogotá posee el mejor rendimiento a nivel del eje de acceso al empleo y diálogo social; Medellín en seguridad social y seguridad en el empleo; mientras que Bucaramanga presenta en los cuatro ejes analizados deficiencias y variaciones negativas para el periodo de estudio. **Conclusiones:** la principal conclusión es que, en el 2020, año del confinamiento decretado por el gobierno nacional para hacerle frente a la pandemia del COVID-19, las condiciones de precarización laboral aumentaron.

Palabras clave: trabajo decente; empleo; mercado laboral; desarrollo económico; informalidad.

Resumo

Objetivo: esta pesquisa visa medir as condições de "trabalho digno" para três das principais cidades da Colômbia; Bogotá, Medellín e Bucaramanga no período 2018-2020. **Metodologia:** são utilizadas as diferentes dimensões propostas pela OIT em referência às condições necessárias que o trabalho digno deve proporcionar. O cálculo e análise do comportamento das variáveis em estudo baseia-se na informação do Grande Inquérito Integrado aos Agregados Familiares (GEIH) preparado pela DANE. **Resultados:** os resultados mostram um aumento do emprego precário para as três cidades nos indicadores de rendimento e desemprego, entre outros. Por cidade, Bogotá tem o melhor desempenho em termos de acesso ao emprego e ao diálogo social; Medellín em termos de segurança social e de segurança de emprego; enquanto Bucaramanga apresenta deficiências e variações negativas nos quatro eixos analisados para o período em estudo. **Conclusões:** a principal conclusão é que, em 2020, o ano da contenção decretada pelo governo nacional para enfrentar a pandemia da COVID-19, as condições de precariedade laboral aumentaram.

Palavras-chave: trabalho decente; emprego; mercado de trabalho; desenvolvimento económico; informalidade.

Introduction

In 1999, the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2004), under the leadership of its first director Juan Somavia, coined the term "decent work" and integrated it into four strategic objectives: the right to work, employment opportunities, protection, and social dialogue. These components contributed to the eradication of poverty, to general development, and to the sensation of personal realization by strengthening democracy. As a pillar of the social contract, work contributes to the progress of a development model that places the individual at the center of his or her integral condition and promotes multidimensional inclusion.

In 2020, the ILO published a report describing how the lack of "decent work," combined with rising unemployment and persistent inequalities, makes it increasingly difficult for people to improve their lives. This provides a broad overview of global and regional trends in employment, unemployment, labor force participation, and productivity. It also focuses its analysis and measurement on four axes that allow one to observe the problems associated with "decent work."

The first axis refers to both the quantity and quality of employment conditions by relating the sufficiency of employment to its remuneration and working conditions. The second is closely related to the collection of workplace regulations protecting workers' fundamental liberties and rights. The third component refers to the protection and social security of workers and their families. The last one outlines the importance of continuous and systematic communication and dialogue that should exist between the three actors involved in labor relations: workers, employers, and the State (ILO, 2013).

The measurement of these axes shows, by way of conclusion, the way in which, at a global level, work has deficiencies and a marked precariousness. The situation in Latin America is worsening and it is the region with the highest levels of inequality.

In the Latin American context, the Economic Commission for Latin America, and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2013) highlights the underlying need for the State to promote employment policies, both active and passive, and to create conditions that ensure well-being through "decent work." It argues that social equality and economic dynamism, capable of transforming the productive structure, are not mutually exclusive, and that the great challenge is to discover synergies between the two.

Globalization, insertion into world trade, potentialization with an emphasis on the export sector, and inclusion because of joint initiatives of private and public bodies must constitute progress and advancement toward the multidimensional development of the region. ECLAC proposes a conceptual development of some

of the most important dimensions that integrate the variables of trade, growth, and equality, and the study of new evidence and methodologies. This makes proposing policies to increase the inclusive potential of international trade and labor in the region possible.

About "decent work" and its impact on the sustainable development of societies, research that articulates different social dimensions and provides a link between these concepts and their joint interaction can be highlighted. Sánchez (2014) addresses the conceptual links between the notions of "decent work" and "sustainable development," elaborated by the ILO, with the aim of exploring the importance of these in the orientation of processes focused on growth, development, and overcoming recurring problems in Latin American societies. This work characterizes and analyzes concepts based on the dimensions considered by the subject. The author concludes that millions of people have been excluded from "decent work" and are resorting to new forms of income. Likewise, the viability of development is questioned by its lack of focus on "decent work" as its fundamental axis.

Ballesteros (2016) conducted a documentary analysis of the concept of "decent work," its dimensions, and its relationship with supply chains. The research was carried out with a methodology based on the compilation of data from various documents and interviews. Overall, the author concluded that "decent work" should be the aspiration of the 21st century because it benefits both individuals and society. This translates into an increase in the quality of life and family income, which has a positive impact on economic growth with important benefits for society.

Highlighting that the advance of technology translates to the same structural change in terms of work and its variations is important. Rodríguez (2019) lays out the reality facing the world of work in the face of the potential threat posed by the immersion of automation in the decline of "decent work." The author establishes the compatibility that converges around technology and work, and its close relationship of strengthening the objectives of *Sustainable Development and the 2030 Agenda*. In addition, it proposes as a methodology a documentary survey supported by reports and publications, which provide information on how to integrate new forms of employment with "decent work" practices. The research concludes that amplifying and strengthening the work system to avoid and mitigate collateral damage caused by technological advances is necessary. Also, it recommends contemplating the standards and regulations that center around the conditions that encompass the concept of "decent work."

Likewise, a central theme of "decent work" is informality which, despite being one of the main limitations of high levels of decent work, today continues

to be a structural characteristic that persists in the labor markets of Latin America and the Caribbean. This is evidenced by a report published by the ILO (2019) which stated that by 2016, 140 out of the 263 million workers in the region remained in the informal sector, which confirms that these workers are not covered by social security or labor legislation, in addition to presenting almost zero training opportunities, longer working hours, and low income that do not constitute remuneration according to their productivity. According to this report, this job insecurity can also be explained by the increase in subcontracting and labor flexibility represented in forms of contracting that, although formal, affect the dignity of the worker by not having social security and income on a continuous or permanent basis. These are associated with economic inequality that makes achieving "decent work" as a project and basis for the development and competitiveness of the regions difficult.

The above statement is supported by Millones (2012), who evaluates the working conditions of Chile and Mexico through an analysis of secondary sources. It concludes that the neoliberal system in the region limits the "decent work" project, thus being a mere descriptive tool and not the promoter of a new type of work.

Colombia is not far from that situation. Although it has included the National Decent Work Policy, its results are still far from generating decent employment, guaranteeing the protection rights of workers, and formalizing the employment situation in the country. This situation of labor precariousness is the product of the reform introduced by Law 50 of 1990 to the Substantive Labor Code (CST).

The CST (1950) must have as its primary purpose "justice in the relationships that arise between employers and workers, within a spirit of economic coordination and social balance" (Decree Law 2663, art. 1). The code presents the definition of work as "all free human activity, whether material or intellectual, permanent or transitory, that a natural person consciously executes at the service of another, and whatever its purpose, provided that it is carried out in execution of an employment contract» (Decree Law 2663, 1950, art. 5).

In Colombia, several studies focus on "decent work" and serve as a theoretical and methodological guide for the development of this research. For example, Calle (2013) conducts his work through the methodological and conceptual reviews of reports on working conditions. To achieve the proposed objective, the author used the population over 15 years of age from the *Quality of Life Survey*, from which the following were taken: hours worked per week, income from the previous month, months of connection to a current job, and the time of the current contract. The type of contract and job stability faced by young people between the ages of 16 and 25 in Colombia is then considered. As a result, her research concludes that

young people tend to receive lower payment per hour worked and this worsens if they do not have a written contract. This because of the high rates of labor informality and precarious income.

Focusing the study on the Colombian case, a study applied to the city of Medellín in 2013 conducted by Gómez and Restrepo (2013) was analyzed. They built a methodology based on a literature review, with the objective of investigating the precariousness of employment in Colombia in terms of labor flexibility. As a result of the investigation, it was found that this flexibility is an instrument for the search for competitiveness and permanence of organizations, but it has resulted in a decrease in the well-being of the worker and their families. In addition, it was identified that labor flexibility occurs mostly through contracts to provide services or with a fixed term, which constitute employment as a response to the pressure to survive.

Similarly, Castro (2014) conducted a study on the gender perspective, which described the main quantitative and qualitative aspects that were generated for women workers in the informal sector, exposing the most relevant data on this phenomenon worldwide and nationally. At the same time, the legal strategies of Colombia were described to contextualize the legislative environment using a descriptive and explanatory research method. It showed how labor informality is the immediate alternative to generate income for the unemployed; however, the female sex is more likely to carry out activities of this type to fulfill their dual roles in society: to carry out a work activity and, simultaneously, attend to their family and reproductive obligations. This agrees with other works found at the Latin American level (Botello & López, 2015).

In relation to the conceptual referencing of this work, López (2020) published an article where — on data from the GIHS 2010 to 2018 and data from the RLDatos, among others — estimated employment and a set of "decent work" indicators for the national aggregate by analyzing each indicator over time and across geographic units. In turn, from the review of averages or trends for the expansion or reduction of gaps, the author concluded that, despite the advances in terms of decent employment, sufficient levels of efficiency had not yet been reached to affirm that work in Colombia is decent; this showed the significant differences between the studied territories.

As a methodological basis for this research, the bulletin *Situation of decent work in Mexico* published in 2013 is taken as a reference, which shows the evolution and results of the various indicators that make up the "decent work" index for Mexico. Under the descriptive analysis methodology, the variables that make up each axis are detailed: access to employment, job security, labor rights and social dialogue. Its variations are estimated, and it is determined whether there

is progress or regression in the chosen time periods. This bulletin provides the estimation methodology to calculate the data obtained for each axis according to the study cities, while highlighting how "decent work" combats labor informality to reduce social inequality (ILO, 2013).

When analyzing the background, it is evident that most of the studies reviewed to determine the methodological channel of previous works are exploratory and descriptive. There is a certain inclination for preliminary diagnoses or bibliographic review to situate the phenomenon in a particular context. The absence of explanatory studies indicates that this subject does not have sufficient research tradition and that, in this sense, there is still a conceptual gap, which has caused the slowdown in its application and the minimal intention of treatment.

In conclusive terms, both for Latin America and for the Colombian context, work is a generator of development and a basis for strengthening guarantees in terms of rights. In this way, welfare, equality, and quality of life can be achieved. The state is considered the promoter of these pillars and it is important to seek and implement public policies that have "decent work" as a cross-cutting theme, and the conditions that frame the social, political, and economic reality of citizens. Based on that, this research seeks to determine the status in terms of "decent work" for the cities of Bogota, Medellin, and Bucaramanga during the period 2018-2020 based on the calculation of the axes proposed by the ILO.

Methodology

Sources

Since the notion of "decent work" was first made known, the ILO has identified four axes or elements related to this concept: employment and income opportunities, workers' rights, social security, and social dialogue. The first axis analyzes all types of jobs performed, whether in homes, streets, factories, or companies, regardless of the type of remuneration received (in cash and/or in kind or working hours). In this sense, the indicators that can be useful for measuring this component are overall participation rates, unemployment, general pressure, underemployment, labor informality and salaried work. The second axis, related to human rights, seeks to ensure that workers perform their work with dignity, respect, equity and without discrimination; it is measured by indicators of child labor, population with a defined contract, unemployment, and gender wage gap.

The third axis concerns the levels of protection and insurance of workers, and the indicator of permanently insured workers is used to determine this. The last axis concerns the right of workers to continuous and systematic communication with their employers, using information from the GHIS on the percentage of union membership.

Therefore, to achieve the proposed objective of measuring decent work conditions in Bucaramanga, Medellin, and Bogota, the model presented by the ILO of the four axes of "decent work" is adapted. As an instrumental basis, data from the GHIS (2018-2020) administered by the National Statistics Department (DANE) is used, which provides information on each of the indicators suggested for this calculation. Initially, the calculation and analysis were performed for the years 2018 and 2019 to determine the "decent work" conditions in each of the three cities. Subsequently, an analysis was performed for the period 2019-2020, this time with the intention of observing the effect of the containment decreed by the national government to confront the pandemic of COVID-19.

Model

To determine the "decent work" indices and the behavior of the cities to be analyzed, the process was divided into two phases determined by the ILO country office for Mexico and Cuba. The first consists of calculating the indicators that correspond to each axis of "decent work" determined by the ILO, presented in Table 1 with their calculation method and unit of measurement. In this way, "decent work" levels are determined for each city.

Table 1. Process for Calculating Decent Work Indicators.

Indicator: DANE	Unit of Measure	Calculation Method
Axis 1. Access to Employment.		
Overall Rate of Labor Participation	Percentage	(Economically active population / Population 14 years and older) x 100
Unemployment Rate	Percentage	(Unemployed population / Population Economically active) x 100

Indicator: DANE	Unit of Measure	Calculation Method
Overall Pressure Rate	Percentage	$\frac{(\text{Unemployed population looking for work} + \text{Employed population looking for other employment})}{(\text{Economically active population})} \times 100$
Indicator of Underemployment Due to Insufficient Hours	Percentage	$\frac{(\text{Employed population working less than 48 hours per week})}{(\text{Total employed population})}$
Underemployment Rate	Percentage	$\frac{(\text{Population that expressed the need and availability to work more hours than their current occupation allows})}{(\text{Employed population})} \times 100$
Rate of Labor Informality	Percentage	$(\text{Working population engaged in an informal occupation} / \text{Working population}) \times 100$
Rate of Salaried Job	Percentage	$\frac{(\text{Employed population receiving a wage salary or daily wage})}{(\text{Employed population})} \times 100$
Axis 2. Job Security		
Percentage of Permanently Insured as a Percentage of Employed Population	Percentage	$\frac{(\text{Number of permanently insured in the social security system})}{(\text{employed population})} \times 100$
Axis 3. Labor Rights.		
Child Labor	Percentage	$\frac{(\text{Population between 5 and 17 years old working})}{(\text{Total population between 5 and 17 years old})} \times 100$
Unemployment Rate by Gender	Percentage points	$(\text{Unemployment rate for women} - \text{Unemployment rate for men})$

Indicator: DANE	Unit of Measure	Calculation Method
Population with Defined Contract	Percentage	(Population with written, basic, permanent or indefinite-term contract / Employed population) × 100
Gender Wage Gap	Percentage	Average income of women / Average income of men
Axis 4: Social Dialogue		
Union Membership	Percentage	Total annual union membership.

Source: ILO (2019, p. 8).

The second phase consists of determining which of the three cities has the best "decent work" rates for each year of the study period. For this purpose, the minimum and maximum value of each variable must be calculated. The calculation of this difference will result in the K parameter to normalize the series considered, which allows standardizing and adjusting the indexes to obtain a common scale and thus establish parity in the calculations.

When the indicator is advantageous for "decent work," the minimum value is subtracted from the maximum value (equation 1). Alternatively, when the indicator is detrimental to the indicator, the minimum value is subtracted from the maximum value (equation 2), resulting in a negative K parameter. An example of a beneficial indicator would be the population with a defined contract: the higher it is, the better the "decent work" conditions. A negative indicator would be the informality rate, which, the higher it is, the greater the number of workers without the minimum labor guarantees.

- (1) Maximum value - minimum value = k parameter.
- (2) Maximum value - minimum value = k parameter.

Once the k parameters for each variable have been obtained, the entities (cities) are scored using equations 3 and 4, first for the variables with a positive effect and then for the variables with a negative effect:

$$(3) \frac{\text{entity value} - \text{minimum value}}{\text{parameter } k} \times 10$$

$$(4) \frac{\text{entity value} - \text{maximum value}}{k \text{ parameter}} \times 10$$

The values obtained range from 0 to 10 depending on their proximity to the maximum and minimum values; the maximum value (10) is assigned to the entity (city) with the best "decent work" indexes, and the minimum value (0) to the city with the worst indexes for the selected year. Once the K parameters for each variable have been obtained, the entities (cities) are scored to determine their impact using formulas 3 and 4. In the first case, for variables with a positive impact and in the second, for variables with a negative impact:

$$\frac{\text{entity value} - \text{minimum value}}{k \text{ parameter}} \times 10$$

$$\frac{\text{entity value} - \text{maximum value}}{k \text{ parameter}} \times 10$$

The values obtained vary between 0 and 10 according to how they lie between the maximum and minimum values. Thus, the maximum value 10 is given to the entity (city) with the best "decent work" indexes, and the minimum value 0 to the city with the worst indexes according to the selected year. The calculation of each indicator and the respective arithmetic average, the partial index of each axis is generated. To determine the city's progress or regression over time, the difference in coefficient of the last year with respect to the previous year is estimated.

Results

Calculation of Indicators by Axis for Cities and Period

"Decent work" levels were obtained for each city based on the calculated indicators.

Table 2. Calculation of Indicators by Axis for the Cities and Period.

2018			2019			2020		
Bucaramanga	Bogotá	Medellín	Bucaramanga	Bogotá	Medellín	Bucaramanga	Bogotá	Medellín
Axis 1: Access to Employment. Indicators:								
Labor Force Participation Rate								
67,1	69,1	65,4	67.1	69	64.8	60.9	62.6	61.5
Indicator: Unemployment Rate								
8,8	10,5	11,7	10,2	10,9	12,2	18,2	17,7	19
Indicator: Overall Pressure Rate								
11,33	14,3	16,1	13,9	15,4	16,8	15,9	15,8	16,9
Indicator: Underemployment Due to Insufficient Hours								
32,29	33,2	30,4	32,1	35,8	28,9	32,4	32,7	28,7
Indicator: Underemployment Rate								
5,75	9,72	12,6	8,2	10,9	12,1	12	10,2	11,1
Indicator: Labor Informality Rate								
56,3	41,8	42	55,3	40,6	41,6	0	0	0
Indicator: Rate of Salaried Job								
98,59	99,5	99	98,4	99,3	98,8	97,6	99,4	98,5

2018			2019			2020		
Bucaramanga	Bogotá	Medellín	Bucaramanga	Bogotá	Medellín	Bucaramanga	Bogotá	Medellín

Axis 2: Job Security

Indicator: Rate of Affiliation to Social Security System

185	175	192	184	175	191	187	175	195
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Axis 3: Labor Rights. Indicator: Child Labor

1,16	0,6	1,25	1,5	1,23	1,32	0	0	0
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Indicator: Unemployment Ratio by Gender (pp)

1,2	2	3,5	1,9	2,6	3,5	0,1	3,3	0,9
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Indicator: Population with Defined Contract

38,1	51,6	52,5	39,3	53,2	53,4	40,5	53,5	55,4
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Indicator: Gender Pay Gap

78,3	86,8	85,2	81,3	82,1	83,6	0	0	0
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Axis 4: Social Dialogue: Indicators: Union or Trade Association

1,6	1,9	2,6	2,2	2,5	2,5	3,2	1,8	3,3
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Source: own elaboration with data from Great Integrated Household Survey DANE 2018-2020.

For the years 2018 and 2019, axis 1, access to employment, Bucaramanga showed progress with respect to Bogota and Medellin, due to the decrease in the rate of informality and underemployment for insufficient hours. However, by the year 2020, the city presents a setback in all the indicators of this axis and in the labor market in general. This is a result of the measures implemented by the national and municipal governments to face COVID-19, especially in unemployment, underemployment, and labor participation.

For the years 2018 and 2019 Bogota presents a positive variation in its labor indicators, especially in the reduction of informality and underemployment. By the year 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had taken affect by increasing the unemployment rate, underemployment, and decreasing salaried job, but less compared to Bucaramanga.

The decrease in access to employment axis for Medellin, in 2018 and 2019, is given by the increase in the general pressure rate and unemployment rate, it registers an increase of 0.5% and 0.7% respectively. During 2020, the labor market in Medellin was initially affected by the enacted confinement, but after the third quarter—with the establishment of the selective isolation decreed by the national government— there is a positive variation by the decrease in the underemployment and the underemployment rates due to insufficient hours.

Based on the indicator calculations, in terms of "decent work" in this axis, Bogota is the city with the best performance with an increase of 0.81 percentage points; while Bucaramanga decreased 3.52 percentage points, which indicates the deterioration in "decent work" conditions.

Briefly, "decent work" conditions related to access to employment and income show an improvement in their indicators for Bucaramanga and Bogota, but a deterioration for Medellin in 2018 and 2019, the pre-pandemic period. For 2019 and 2020, a deterioration of these conditions is observed for Bucaramanga because of the confinement, while for Bogotá and Medellín an improvement is recorded in this axis. It shows that the establishment for the third quarter of 2020 of the so-called "selective insulation" was positive for these cities.

Table 3. Behavior of Axis 1 Based on the Coefficients during the Study Period.

Axis 1. Access to Employment.						
	2018	2019	Variation	2019	2020	Variation
Bucaramanga	5,42	5,83	0,41 ↑	5,83	2,31	3,52 ↓
Bogotá	6	6,33	0,33 ↑	6,33	7,14	0,81 ↑
Medellín	3,47	3,35	0,12 ↓	3,35	3,41	0,06 ↑

Source: own elaboration with data from Great Integrated Household Survey DANE 2018-2020.

For the dimension of the second axis, employment security, Bucaramanga presents a positive variation for 2019 with respect to Bogota and Medellin. That city shows a better performance in social security affiliation. This was due to the null variation presented that considered Bogota with the worst performance in social security.

In 2020, the figures show a negative variation for Bucaramanga as the social security variable decreased with respect to 2019. It may be attributed to the pandemic and its implications at economic, political, and social levels for the measures implemented by the authorities. Alternatively, Medellin showed the greatest job security, with higher coverage in all the periods analyzed compared to the other two cities.

Table 4. Behavior of Axis 2 Based on the Coefficients during the Study Period.

Axis 2. Social Security						
	2018	2019	Variation	2019	2020	Variation
Bucaramanga	5,98	6,03	0,05 ↑	6,03	5,9	0,13 ↓
Bogotá	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medellín	10	10	0	10	10	0

Source: own elaboration with data from Great Integrated Household Survey DANE 2018-2020.

For Axis 3, in 2019, Bucaramanga presents a negative variation with respect to Bogota and Medellin. It is mainly explained by the variables of child labor and unemployment ratio by gender. Its behavior was substantially worse than the figures for the other two cities.

In 2020, the behavior of Medellin reflects a positive impact on the axis due to the reduction in unemployment ratio by gender and the increase in the population with a defined contract, even in the context of the contingency as labor market experienced precarious conditions.

Thus, Bogota presents the best performance at the level of labor rights, and it is configured as the city with the best performance in the axis for 2018 and 2019, due to variables such as the lowest rate of child labor and a high rate of population with a defined contract By 2020, Medellin ranks first in this axis,

thanks to the fact that it has the highest rate of defined contracts and a low difference in unemployment ratio by gender compared to Bogota.

Table 5. Behavior of Axis 3 Based on the Coefficients during the Study Period.

Axis 3. Labor Rights.						
	2018	2019	Variation	2019	2020	Variation
Bucaramanga	5,34	5	0,34 ↓	5	2,5	2.5 ↓
Bogotá	6,48	8,01	1,53 ↑	8,01	2,19	5,82 ↓
Medellín	2,97	4,16	1,19 ↑	4,16	4,375	0,215 ↑

Source: own elaboration with data from Great Integrated Household Survey DANE 2018-2020.

Within the indicators of Axis 4, Medellin presented a negative variation in terms of union and trade union membership during the 2019 period, in contrast to the growth of this variable for Bucaramanga and Bogota.

For 2020, Medellin rebounded in this indicator, which presents the highest rate of union membership with 3.3%, representing a growth of 0.8%, as does Bucaramanga, which leads the ranking and stands at 3.2%, with an increase of 1%. This represents a setback compared to the figures for Medellin.

Thus, it can be inferred —according to the data collected, calculations and subsequent analysis— that Bogota can be considered as the city with the best performance during 2018 and 2019 at the axis level, according to the performance in each of the indicators that make up each division. By 2020, this perception leaned toward the city of Medellin.

The worst indicators in 2018 are for the city of Bucaramanga, while Medellin is the worst in 2019. In 2020, while Bucaramanga and Medellin showed progress in reducing the impact of the crisis, Bogota's impact on the axes fell back a considerable amount.

Table 6. Behavior of Axis 4 Based on the Coefficients during the Study Period.

Axis 4: Social Dialogue						
	2018	2019	Variation	2019	2020	Variation
Bucaramanga	0	10	10 ↑	10	9,33	0,67 ↓
Bogotá	3	10	7 ↑	10	0	10 ↓
Medellín	10	0	10 ↓	0	10	10 ↑

Source: own elaboration with data from Great Integrated Household Survey DANE 2018-2020.

Conclusions

The concept of “decent work” implies having productive work opportunities with a living wage, ensuring social security and protection for workers and their families, being inclusive in organizational structures and decision-making processes that affect workers, and providing equal opportunities and dignified treatment for men and women.

However, this is not reflected in the cities studied, as labor flexibilization results in precarious employment. This precariousness is evidenced by high rates of indicators such as informality and underemployment due to insufficient hours. This translates into a limiting factor for economic growth, as it generates a negative distribution of income, wages below the minimum living wage and the loss of labor benefits such as vacations and the insurance that the formal labor market provides.

Another significant variable is the unemployment rate, which maintained a constant two-digit behavior except for 2018 in the city of Bucaramanga, which presented 8.8%. This phenomenon, due to an evident lack of labor supply, is a clear limiting factor for "decent work," since it reduces household demand for goods and services and thus directly affects supply, which leads to low levels of production.

The gender pay gap also shows very large figures, which can be explained by multiple reasons. One of them could be the decrease in salary in a job position when it is occupied by a woman, behavior that goes against the principle of "decent

work" on equal opportunity and treatment between men and women. This has become a fundamental right to equal pay by gender and has been recognized since 1919 by the ILO.

In terms of union membership, it is particularly noticeable that the rate varies between 2% and 3%, which is the percentage of union members out of the total number of employees. This is a derisory figure that demonstrates the lack of social dialogue for the construction of improvements, since workers should enjoy adequate protection in relation to their employment in situations that seek to undermine their freedom of association. However, because of labor precariousness in terms of temporary hiring—which does not favor affiliation and in turn affects the labor integrity of the worker—there is evidence of a general rejection of participation, which is rooted by labor flexibilization that leads to persecution and social stigmatization. This undermines the negotiation processes they intend to carry out and directly affects employee rights.

These factors are the main reasons why the country's main cities do not have an optimal, or at least a minimum, level of "decent work." It is necessary that workers' rights are established and fully complied with, starting with hiring and decent wages that guarantee equality and a legal framework for labor protection. Working conditions are becoming increasingly precarious, not only in Colombia but around the world; statistics and studies confirm this. Access to employment becomes an odyssey, job security becomes increasingly volatile due to crises and economic conditions. Likewise, labor rights are violated due to the lack of policies and control that jeopardize their quality. This can be seen when reviewing statutes that cover the worker or projects that provide incentives from the congress. Improvement of conditions is practically null, without overlooking the union affiliation, whose purpose is to build substantial improvements but does not occur in most of the occasions.

However, the effect of the pandemic in 2020 should be noted. The Colombian government implemented a series of measures to contain the spread of the disease, establishing the mandatory preventive isolation of all people living in the national territory. These measures excluded certain economic sectors considered essential, such as: health care and services, the production of basic necessities, banking and financial services, childcare and assistance, the production of pharmaceuticals and cleaning products, and the provision of communications and public services, among others. The consequences of these mitigation policies negatively affected labor market indicators and deteriorated "decent work" conditions for the city of Bucaramanga. The opposite was the case in the cities of Bogotá and Medellín, where the selective isolation decreed by the government as of the third quarter of that year apparently managed to reverse this situation.

As a recommendation, encouraging the promotion of public policies from central governments is proposed. This can make the social problems faced by the labor market visible, and then its precariousness—which is becoming increasingly acute—can be addressed. In addition, reducing the tax burden on small and medium-sized companies would allow the creation of formal jobs within the framework of "decent work". This would decrease the rate of labor informality, increasing the employment rate, welfare, and quality of life of workers and their households.

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