

## **Technical Note: Trade in Services in Colombia**

Trade in services in Colombia has been growing in recent years; however, its development is still very incipient. The share of service exports in Colombia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is low with respect to the regional average and to countries with similar levels of development. Likewise, Colombia's services exports corresponded to only 14% of total exports of goods and services in 2018, being the sector with the lowest participation.

The purpose of the note is to review the dynamics of trade in services, identify the opportunities and limitations that arise.

## **Nota Técnica: Comercio de Servicios en Colombia**

El comercio de servicios en Colombia ha venido creciendo en los últimos años; sin embargo, su desarrollo es aún muy incipiente. La participación de las exportaciones de servicios en el Producto Interno Bruto (PIB) de Colombia es baja con respecto al promedio regional y a países con niveles similares de desarrollo. Asimismo, las exportaciones de servicios de Colombia correspondieron a solo el 14% del total de las exportaciones de bienes y servicios en 2018, siendo el sector con menor participación.

EL objetivo de la nota es realizar una revisión de las dinámicas del comercio de servicios, identificar las oportunidades y las limitaciones que se presentan.

## Review of services trade in Colombia

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### Main findings

- **The availability of information on trade in services is the greatest difficulty faced by the Government in formulating public policy.** However, the limited information available reveals that trade in services has grown at a faster rate than trade in goods over the past two decades (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2019).
- **Colombia must add innovations and technology to the production of services.** By strengthening its production system, diversifying the domestic market, improving the logistics infrastructure and including innovation and technology in services, Colombia would be able to increase the level of value added in services, making them more attractive to international competition and reducing export costs. The country must immediately improve on problems associated with logistics infrastructure, skilled labor, product diversification, technological intensity and other variables that are holding back the participation of national services in the international market. (Cruz, 2018).
- **Trade in services in Colombian has been growing in recent years; however, its development is still very incipient.** The share of service exports in Colombia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is low with respect to the regional average and to countries with similar levels of development. Likewise, Colombia's services exports corresponded to only 14% of total exports of goods and services in 2018, being the sector with the lowest participation. (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2019).
- **By 2019, services accounted for only 18 per cent of Colombia's gross exports, 35 per cent of value-added exports and one third of foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows.** However, the share of services in exports is lower than the average for OECD countries. Colombia must generate innovation and adopt technology, based on access to knowledge, as a mechanism for generating new opportunities for inclusive growth and obtaining benefits from a more open market for trade in services (OCDE, 2019).

### Diagnostic

#### a. Institutions, governance and policy.

**The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism integrated in the year 2014 all its programs into a unique strategy called "Colombia Exports Services".** Through a set of programs, it seeks to support companies to improve the quality of the services they produce and their commercial capacity to compete in the international market. One of the programs for business strengthening is *iNNpulsa Mipyme*, which allocates resources for the development of production chains through anchor service companies or unions that lead specific projects. Through this same program, the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications, supports the strengthening of electronic commerce and the implementation of applications in MSMEs (Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo, 2014).

**ProColombia promotes services exports and works to promote Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in services.** It aims to strengthen the sector and generate exports and employment by attracting foreign investors in activities such as BPO, KPO, shared services center, software and Information Technology, tourism and health, among others. ProColombia also seeks to attract investors from capital funds, venture capital funds,

among others, that can invest in Colombian services companies. (Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo, 2014).

**With the Productive Colombia Program, the national government seeks to promote the competitiveness of Colombian companies in strategic sectors for the development of the country.** This program works with Software and IT, BPO, Nature Tourism and Health Tourism services sectors. It offers technical assistance and support to companies to adopt international production improvement methodologies, also specialized training programs and direct financing to obtain certifications required for accessing international markets (Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo, 2014).

**Specific to services sectors, within the government there are two inter-institutional coordination instances:** the Intersectoral Commission for Service Statistics and the Higher Tourism Council. The objective of the Statistical Commission is to propose strategies and actions for the harmonization of the statistical information in the services sector, ensuring the application of international good practices in the production, disclosure and transparency of information, in order to provide the Country with consistent, quality and timely statistics. The Higher Tourism Council is an articulation body between state entities whose objective is to coordinate and adopt complementary programs that benefit the development and internationalization of tourism in the country (Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo, 2014).

**Given the current and growing importance of international trade in services DANE<sup>1</sup> publishes the Quarterly Sample of Foreign Trade in Services.** It produces a series of statistical indicators which allows the country to measure its trade evolution with some detail. Information is available since 2013 for eight CABPS groupings (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, 2016).

**The services sector is key to increase the diversification of Colombian exports and the sophistication of the productive system.** In particular, knowledge-based services<sup>2</sup> are characterized by their intensive use of skilled labor and by absorbing, generating and disseminating knowledge, and in that way generators of high added value to production chains. Likewise, knowledge-based services have a great potential to generate backward linkages with other sectors of the economy and contribute greatly to the generation of value in other related activities (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2019).

**The 'Program to Support the Diversification and Internationalization of the Colombian Economy' (2019) is structured in two components, the first of which is the export promotion of knowledge-based services-SBC<sup>3</sup>.** It is going to finance: i) technical assistance on issues like productivity and export readiness, strengthening of soft capacities, generation of production chains and clusters; ii) the strengthening of some of ProColombia's export training programs; iii) commercial promotion activities designed to meet the requirements and specificities of companies in the SBC sector and prioritized by the exporters; iv) tools for the Ministry and ProColombia to provide specialized advice on the sale of state-of-the-art SBC, based on successful international experiences on policy design and regulatory improvements; v) the formulation of a detailed analysis of gender gaps in SBC activities, guiding the design and implementation of programs and public policies in this area; vi) the implementation of an information platform for SBCs (IDB, 2019)

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<sup>1</sup> Government entity in charge of producing and disseminating economic statistics

<sup>2</sup> Including: information technology and software, business process outsourcing (BPO) and knowledge process outsourcing (KPO), health services, audiovisuals, mobile applications and video games, graphic and publishing industry, and marketing and advertising.

<sup>3</sup> SBC corresponds to the activities of: (i) software and mobile applications; (ii) animation and video games; (iii) audiovisual; (iv) business process outsourcing (BPO); (v) publishing and graphic industry; (vi) advertising and marketing; and (vii) architectural design and engineering

**The Growth Pacts (“Pactos por el Crecimiento”)<sup>4</sup> is an initiative of the national Government to identify and work on the reduction of the main bottlenecks of different productive sectors, and to boost their production capacity, job creation, sales, and exports; in the service area, four different pacts were endorsed: BPO, Orange Economy, Software and IT, and Tourism.** The goal of this agenda is to increase by 2022 total production in COP 7.65 bn, USD 409 million in exports, and to generate 320,123 new jobs. Among the most relevant bottleneck identified, are the need to identify and measure the human capital gap in terms of IT, define an agenda to avoid double taxation in BPO and Software companies, and promote enabling conditions for industry, trade, and the attraction of FDI towards the Orange Economy’s main subsectors (i.e. Audiovisual, Artisanal Drinks, Cultural Tourism, ADNs) (Vicepresidencia de la República, 2019).

## **b. Trade in services**

**Colombia faces several challenges to improve the competitiveness its services exports.** Based on the A.T. Kearney Global Services Location Index<sup>5</sup>, Colombia occupies the last position in Latin America and has the following challenges that negatively affect competitiveness for the export of services: infrastructure, country risk, gaps in education, taxes and regulations (CEPAL, 2014).

**Colombian knowledge intensive services<sup>6</sup> exports have been concentrated in non-strategic sectors<sup>7</sup>.** For the period between 2000 and 2009, just 15% of exports were concentrated in dynamic sectors in which the country's market share was growing, 76% in stationary or declining sectors (their percentage in world imports was reducing and in which the country's market share was declining) and the rest in dynamic segments at the international level but in which the country's market share was decreasing (CEPAL, 2014).

**During the period 2013 to 2019, transport services and business services were the most important service sectors in cross-border sales abroad.** However, during the same period the growth of exports was modest with decreases in some years for these two subsectors. On the other hand, personal, cultural and recreational services, despite not being very representative, have gained some space within the country's exports (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas, 2020).

**Colombia's score on the Services Trade Restriction Index (STRI) in the 22<sup>8</sup> sectors analyzed shows that it has a lower score on the STRI's 46 country average in 16 of the 22 sectors.** Broadcasting (0.65), logistics freight forwarding (0.25) and cargo-handling services (0.31), are the three sectors with the highest scores relative

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<sup>4</sup> The strategy was developed within a public-private alliance - through meetings between the government and the business sector – to identify specific bottlenecks and commitments to overcome them. Overall, the Government endorsed 22 Growth Pacts, with the support and participation of 85 unions and more than 60 public sector entities. They contain a total of 832 commitments, aimed at strengthening the competitive environment, productivity, innovation, formalization, and entrepreneurship, as well as investment and internationalization of the sectors.

<sup>5</sup>A.T. Kearney Global Services Location Index (GSLI) is an index that analyzes and tracks the contours of the offshoring landscape in 55 countries across three major categories: financial attractiveness, people skills and availability, and business environment. More information: <https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8179851-at-kearney-2017-global-services-location-index/>

<sup>6</sup> The following economic activity sectors are defined as knowledge-intensive services: High-tech knowledge-intensive services, Knowledge-intensive market services (excluding financial intermediation and high-tech services), Knowledge-intensive financial services, Other knowledge-intensive services. More information: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Knowledge-intensive\\_services\\_\(KIS\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Knowledge-intensive_services_(KIS))

<sup>7</sup> Service sectors whose international demand does not increase, and sectors that are stationary or declining.

<sup>8</sup> Computer services, construction, legal services, accounting services, architecture, engineering, telecoms, broadcasting, motion pictures, sound recording, commercial banking, insurance, air transport, maritime transport, road transport, rail transport, courier, distribution, cargo handling, storage and warehouse, freight-forwarding and customs brokerage.

to the STRI average. Legal services (0.17), accounting (0.18) and architectural services (0.17) are the three sectors with the lowest score relative to the STRI average (OCDE, 2019).

**Colombia has several horizontal and sectorial measures that restrict services trade.** For example, there are some limitations to the movement of natural persons seeking to provide services on a temporary basis. For instance, contractual services suppliers may only stay in the country for 6 months on their first entry permit. Also, Colombia maintains restrictions to the acquisition of land and real estate by foreigners along the coast and frontier areas. With regard to some sectors, the country maintains some important restrictions for example in broadcasting, freight forwarding and cargo handling services. (OCDE, 2019).

**The service sector in the economic development of several countries, including Colombia, has increased significantly in the years 2000 - 2013 representing a larger share of the country's economic activity.** Trade in services has proven to have a positive effect on economic performance. It offers a wide range of possibilities for improving employment and its quality, innovating, smoothing economic cycles, attracting investment and promoting integration into production chains, as well as diversifying the country's production and export composition. (López & Muñoz, 2016).

**Colombia's domestic service sector contributes to 22.8% Value Added (VA) of total exports.** The external value added in Colombian exports is much lower than the national one, and the one with the highest contribution is that of the service sector. Comparing with other Latin American countries, the service content of Colombian external sales is low and much lower in the case of services coming from abroad. This result could be indicating a lower degree of sophistication of Colombian external sales compared to those of other countries in the continent, as a higher service content in a product is directly related to its degree of sophistication (Esguerra & Ulloa, 2016).

**Appropriate service sector reform can reduce income inequality through various channels.** The transition to a knowledge-based, service-oriented economy has increased the importance of human capital for enterprises, and shortages of skilled workers have become a major problem for businesses. This problem has contributed to a widening of the income gap between skilled and unskilled workers. In Colombia, wages for workers with tertiary education increased at an annual rate of 5.5 per cent between 1990 and 1995, when a comprehensive reform package was implemented, including liberalization of trade in goods and privatization. However, high levels of protection in services through poorly designed privatization programs have displaced resources from unskilled labor-intensive industries, reducing their demand by widening the income gap between educated and uneducated citizens (United Nations Statistics Division, 2003).

**The services associated with the Orange Economy analysed by DANE can be classified into three groups.** The first one refers to computer and advertising services items, which represent a dominant position in the total amount of exports and in the diversity destination markets. The second group is made up of licenses to reproduce and distribute audio-visual, architectural and engineering services products. This group has managed to reach a considerable number of markets but still have potential growth in terms of total amount exported. Third and finally, there is the group of licenses that reproduce and distribute computer programs and audio-visual and related services, whose participation in the global market has been weak (IDB, 2019).

**There is a clear list of key factors that have incidence in the growth and market access of Orange Economy sectors.** They are the regulations associated with the protection and use of intellectual property, some specific tax incentives and access to credit and financial resources for content production. There are also other relevant issues like the regulation associated with professional services and some cultural issues (IDB, 2019).

**Latin America's participation in world services markets is still limited and generally in segments of low or moderate technological complexity and that are not strategic in terms of the global activities of the corporations that dominate the value chains.** Three aspects deserve to be highlighted as threats or weaknesses in the region: i) the lack of clear patterns of specialization, ii) at the moment, it seems that the

subsidiaries of transnational companies have the greatest possibilities of inserting themselves as exporters of services, and iii ) Some evidence suggests that the operations of the subsidiaries of the transnational companies that are developing service export activities in Latin America generate few externalities and linkages with the economies where these operations are carried out (López, Ramos, & Torre, 2009)

**In several Latin American countries there is a fairly intense services exports dynamic explained by some competitive advantages.** Some countries in the region are already considered among the possible locations available, for example, to offshoring business processes or install shared service centers. In general, Latin American nations present competitive labor costs, human resources with appropriate qualification levels, but usually limited in terms of their availability, volatile macroeconomics and institutions, relatively modern ICT infrastructures and some advantages in terms of time zone (important factor for the development of online jobs) and cultural affinities - these last two conditions in comparison with Asian countries fundamentally. In some cases, the geographical proximity factor plays favorably, although this proximity is only relevant for certain types of operations (López, Ramos, & Torre, 2009).

### c. Tourism

**Domestic tourism in Colombia follows a pattern of intraregional rather than interregional tourism.** Among the reasons for this is the distance between regions, the mountainous geography and the precarious road development between regions, which translates into longer times and higher costs. Additionally, another factor that has had an influence, is the persistent perception of insecurity when traveling to certain areas of the country, which results in a tourism concentrated in the most populated areas (Álzate & Espinal, 2018).

**Between 2012 and 2013 the most dynamic branches<sup>9</sup> in the tourism sector were food and beverage supply services, land transport services, real estate services and housing rental services.** The contribution of the tourism sector to economic growth has shown a significant growth. Between 1991 and 2005 the contribution of tourism to economic growth was always below 0.16%, while between 2012 and 2013 the contribution of tourism was 1.386%. (Brida, Rodríguez, Mejía, & Zapata, 2017).

**The receptive tourism policy in Colombia is directed towards an improvement in the indicators of competitiveness, based on the specific advantages and potentialities of the country<sup>10</sup>.** Tourism policies are not only made up of their objectives and functions, but also require tools or actions aimed at the execution and fulfilment of these policies. Thus, as the tourism policy and improvement of competitiveness, in addition to the tools for the promotion of the tourism sector tend to the improvement and proper functioning of the sector when considering issues of management, quality, safety and hygiene, education and training of human talent, development of strategic infrastructure and tourism facilitation (Benavides, 2015).

**The number of studies and research related to tourism in Colombia show a growing trend associated to its growing economic importance.** For the period between the years 2007 - 2013, there was a continuous growth in the number of publications on the topic of tourism in Colombia. This was linked to the good performance of this sector in the country throughout this period as the number of international visitors doubled. It is interesting to note that 33.33% of the authors' total affiliations were associated with Colombian universities, and 66.67% were associated with foreign universities (Collazos, 2015).

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<sup>9</sup> It refers to the different branches of the tourism sector according to the Tourism Satellite Account (CST for its Spanish acronym) of Colombia.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Colombia is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, has great cultural and gastronomic wealth, a good geographical location, among other conditions.

**The inflows of international tourists to Colombia: i) are concentrated in 20 emitting countries<sup>11</sup>, ii) their largest share is of Colombians living abroad, iii) accelerated in the last 5 years due to a remarkable increase in foreigners' arrivals, and iv) explains the evolution and growth of international travel.** The authors estimate, using gravity equations and panel data models for the period 2001-2017, that arrivals depend positively on the size of the economy of the emitting countries, the volume of bilateral trade, the size of the Colombian population living abroad and the infrastructure in hotels and accommodation establishments; and negatively, on the distance to Colombia and on the perception of internal security (Rivera, Acosta, Sabogal, Uribe, & Niño, 2019)

**The percentage of informal jobs in the tourism sector is around 53% of the total occupied.** This informal employment is associated with vulnerable conditions, low social security coverage and other employment benefits, lower levels of income than those formal, low productivity, among other limitations (Leguizamón, 2015)

**Organizational innovation in tourism companies is one of the keys to Colombia's positive tourism development.** Improving the performance of a company, reducing transaction costs, increasing labor satisfaction and productivity, reducing supply costs, among others, are objectives that are achieved through organizational innovation. The direction and management of the company and the direction and management of marketing and sales are the most significant aspects in the organizational innovation of tourism companies. In order to maintain positive developments in tourism, empirical analysis of innovation in its enterprises will make it possible to better understand the growth of the sector, (Collazos, 2016).

**Colombia currently ranks 55th out of 140 economies in the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI). It climbed seven places from the 2017 ranking.** Colombian tourism improved or remained in the same position in 10 of the 14 pillars of the index: price competitiveness, environment and sustainability, infrastructure and air transport, land and port infrastructure, availability of ICTs, safety, health and hygiene, labor market, prioritization of tourism and international openness. This score translates into a growing supply of tourism services and in a more sustainable development of the sector (World Economic Forum, 2019).

**Tourism is one of most affected by the COVID-19 related crisis.** The tourism sector is going to be very affected by the health emergency in view of the significant reduction in travelers and expenses associated with tourism. It is estimated that the loss is equivalent to 20.1 trillion pesos, which could represent 1.5 percent of Colombia's GDP in 2020. The country's departments that will be hardest hit by the failure to receive the largest number of foreign tourists are Bogotá-Cundinamarca, Nariño, Bolívar, Antioquia, Valle del Cauca and San Andrés and Providencia (Vanegas & Camacho, 2020).

## Policy recommendations

**From the experiences in Latin America and the Caribbean it has been observed that commercial presence is, in many countries, the best way to internationalize** as it: facilitates the generation of strategic alliances with local companies, and access to distribution channels and service provision; boosts the generation of technology exchanges and transfers and strengthens the development of the national industry; generates export culture of services through business awareness (Prieto, 2003)

**The first concern should be to ensure that the instruments and support programs are effectively available to the exporters of services that need them and to reinforce efforts to integrate service exporters into the country's formal economy.** Regarding the instruments and programs, they should be cost

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<sup>11</sup> In 2017 the most important were: United States, Brazil, Mexico, Panama, Argentina, Spain, Chile, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Canada, France, Germany, Costa Rica, England, Italy, Switzerland, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico.

efficient, its quality should be evaluated, their impact measured, and their relevance ensured (ie. export promotion agencies offices and programs) (Prieto, 2003)

**To advance towards achieving a better insertion of Latin America in world services markets, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the first key issue is the training of human resources, the second the maintenance and improvement of the ICT infrastructure and the third, the need to maintain predictable and friendly regulatory frameworks.** Recognizing the heterogeneity of the countries of the region, the quantity and quality of training of human resources, reinforcing the skills and knowledge required for this type of activities, is essential. For public policy, the granting of special incentives to attract investments in these sectors would only be justified if those investments generated some type of externalities regarding human resources training, knowledge spills or linkages with local companies (López, Ramos, & Torre, 2009).

### Policy recommendations for tourism

**The contribution of tourism to growth in Colombia is very uneven when analyzed at the regional level. Future research should integrate data from tourism satellite accounts for the different regions** of the country, to identify the contribution of tourism to growth in each region, as it is very uneven. This would result in an integration not only of the direct impacts of the specific industries on per capita GDP growth, but also of the indirect and induced effects of this analysis (Brida, Rodríguez, Mejía, & Zapata, 2017).

**There is a technological challenge in the transformation and preservation of tourist destinations.** Given the complexity of tourism, one of the greatest challenges facing the sector is the incorporation of new technologies into its production chain. Thus, it is essential to clearly formulate a policy of technological development or its import, allowing both the transformation of the tourist destinations and their preservation (Benavides, 2015).

**To be competitive in tourism, it is necessary to involve factors such as sustainability, quality of service and marketing strategies.** The aim is of improving the provision of tourist services especially of the hotel sector. In Colombia, it is evident that there are some policies and strategies that seek this objective but, in many cases, they are omitted by some government institutions (Serrano, Montoya, & Cazares, 2018)

**Improvements in the formalization of the tourism sector will generate employments with job security and impact its productivity and the quality of its services.** To overcome the high levels of informal employment in tourism, it will be necessary to make more visible the benefits of formalization, simplify the tax system, extend tax benefits to MSMEs and aim to consolidate the productive chain of the tourism sector. (Leguizamon, 2015).

**Four mayor policy recommendations for the tourism sector in Colombia.** The country i) has to improve its tourism infrastructure including in the quality of hotel facilities in some regions and the transportation infrastructure; ii) cannot ignore the social, economic, political, technological and environmental changes that tourists demand at the time of hiring services (e.g. elderly population specific needs; iii) must define market niches for exploiting competitive related sectors like health services, and iv) must take into consideration and evaluate the negative impacts of mass tourism as for natural resources depredation, traditional culture erosion, overcrowding and the impact on social fabric (Rivera, Acosta, Sabogal, Uribe, & Niño, 2019).

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