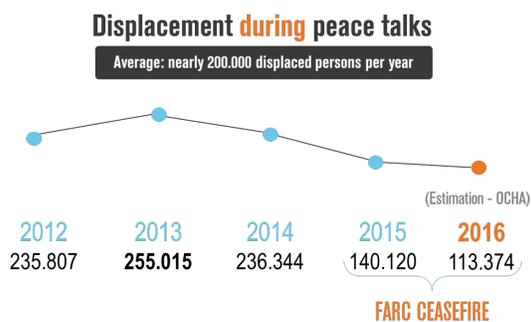


COLOMBIA: AN ONGOING HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Humanitarian challenges continue in Colombia. Continued commitment is needed from the international community. A sudden reduction in humanitarian assistance could jeopardize the safety and well-being of vulnerable communities and harm the transition to peace.

The protection cluster members¹, active partners of the Humanitarian Country Team in Colombia, would like to draw attention to the continued humanitarian needs and humanitarian situation caused by the internal armed conflict and on-going violence in Colombia.

Implementation of the peace process and on-going violence is creating a perilous situation in Colombia. Despite reduced new internal displacement this year, 4,9 million (2017 Humanitarian Response Plan “people in need”) still depend on humanitarian aid, most of them women and children affected by the conflict. It is therefore vital that the international humanitarian community does not prematurely withdraw its support. While development efforts will be needed to overcome the impact of decades of war, it is critical not to make the mistake of interrupting humanitarian aid and protection efforts before alternative and sustainable mechanisms are in place. **A sudden reduction in humanitarian assistance could jeopardize the safety and well-being of newly displaced as well as vulnerable communities, and harm the transition to peace.**



The peace accord between the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP represents a remarkable opportunity to find durable solutions for millions of people affected by the conflict. However, there are

many gaps to close, barriers to overcome and uncertainty regarding the way forward.

Nevertheless, we strongly welcome the efforts by the parties to the conflict and believe that it is in the victims' interest that this historic agreement be implemented. This is a remarkable opportunity for Colombia to finally overcome the historic displacement crisis and start the road to recovery and durable solutions. However, it will take time to effectively implement the agreement on the ground, given the difficult geographic access, local institutional weaknesses and fragmentation, and lack of trust after decades of war. A sustained and long-term approach is needed from all actors, including humanitarian organizations, for successful achievement in the transition period.

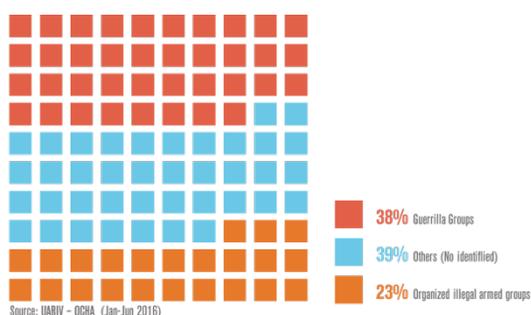
Uncertainty over the implementation of the peace process and on-going conflict have been preventing vulnerable communities from accessing basic services – including clean water, food and education. There are also very serious protection concerns in areas such as Choco, Cordoba, Nariño, Norte de Santander and Putumayo, where the emergence of new non-state armed actors is leading to serious humanitarian and protection needs; such as killings, forced recruitment of children, mobility restrictions, forced displacement, gender based violence, limited access to water and sanitation and to education, among others.

In the aftermath of the new agreement and during the initiation of concentration of FARC forces it has become clear that several splinter groups are emerging out of the peace process. In areas, such as Guaviare, Meta, Caquetá, Nariño and Choco it now seems likely that splinter groups will remain after FARC have disarmed. Even more concerning,

¹ This paper is based on a report agreed and produced by: NRC, ACF, DKH, APS and LWF and It has the

adhesion of the protection Cluster members. Written by Christian Visnes - NRC Country Director).

clashes between FARC and splinter groups have been reported in Nariño, Guaviare and Caquetá. In relation to this in recent days (January 2017) a major massive displacement has occurred in Tumaco. In this sense, the peace agreement does not yet represent a definitive end to the violence in Colombia. Clashes between these non-state armed actors are likely to continue and to cause forced displacement. Despite the FARC declared ceasefire in 2014, according to OCHA projections more than 100.000 persons had fled from January to November 2016, mostly women (57%).

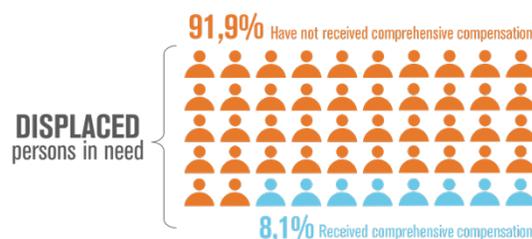


The dynamics of armed conflict and other forms of violence are in flux. Armed actors are adapting to the new situation arising from the peace agreement between the Government and FARC-EP. Other irregular armed groups have increased their actions in the shadow of the FARC and the Colombian Government bilateral ceasefire. Clashes between these new groups is causing the majority of new humanitarian needs. This is likely to continue while ELN (National Liberation Army) is to start peace negotiations with the Government, as these actors are competing for territorial control and illicit economies in regions previously controlled by the FARC-EP.

The protection cluster, composed of UN agencies and international organizations fill an important gap in response, identifying and assisting people in remote areas with little or no state presence. Municipalities affected by the conflict lack the capacity and resources to implement the country's strong legal framework for responding to the IDPs crisis and frequently fail to provide IDPs with sufficient assistance. Furthermore, there is a need

² 70.4% of the displaced population did not receive any immediate assistance before the registration at the victim's registration system (RUV). Comisión de

to provide a rapid emergency response in case of displacement and mobility restrictions as the authorities frequently fail to respond in a timely and integrated fashion². The main gaps in protection are related to gender based violence, forced recruitment and use of children, in addition to risks related to weapons contamination. Moreover, the psychological impacts are devastating, making psychosocial assistance vital.

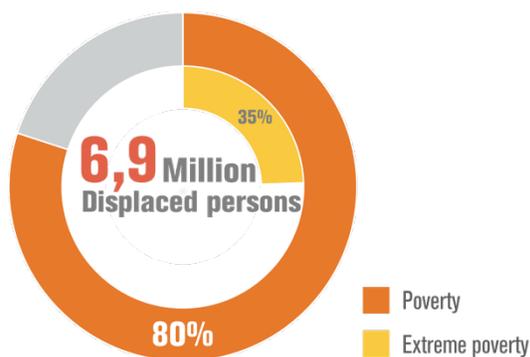


In the province of Choco more than 15,000 people, mostly indigenous and afro-colombians, have suffered internal displacement, coupled with flooding during 2016. INGOs and UN Agencies have been providing shelter kits, hygiene kits, protection, education in emergencies, as both local and national authorities have been largely unable to access the remote rural communities. In the same region, we have been assisting indigenous communities left unattended after a natural disaster that contributed to a malaria epidemic, providing humanitarian assistance through hygiene and household kits, wash, livelihoods and disaster risk reduction. Both due to a lack of access to authorities and due to threats, increasing numbers of affected people do not register as internally displaced. The lack of registration means no assistance is received from the national response system, an important gap that international humanitarian organisations continue to struggle to bridge.

The conflict dynamics are changing but continue to impact the most vulnerable such as indigenous and afro-colombian communities. Addressing the humanitarian consequences of this violence is key to achieve an effective peace implementation. In order to do so we need to secure continued and

Seguimiento y Monitoreo al Cumplimiento de la Ley 1448, 2015.

efficient but mainly neutral and impartial access to basic services. This should be ensured with agile funding instruments, solid needs-based programs and involvement of stakeholders in all parts of the country. A sustainable peace can only be achieved if extreme vulnerabilities, still widespread among conflict affected populations, are effectively overcome.



Despite achieving a new agreement and confirmation by the congress the protection situation remain very serious in the regions affected by the conflict. In the weeks following the deal a series of assassinations of community leaders have occurred, showing the persistent lack of protection of vulnerable population. At the same time, the state's ability to respond to new emergencies is being debilitated due to emergency response funding being reduced by Colombian government, and relocated to the peace process. This coupled with reducing funding and capacity of the international humanitarian actors is threatening to leave important humanitarian and protection needs unmet. Further reduction in humanitarian funding would have a very serious negative impact on the international humanitarian community's ability to respond to existing and new humanitarian needs in Colombia. In the fragile period while the peace agreement is implemented it is essential to ensure that humanitarian needs are met to prevent destabilisation of the situation on the ground.

CLUSTER RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The protection cluster believes that **humanitarian assistance and protection programs are essential to maintain stability and support the Government of Colombia in progressing and implementing the Peace Accord.** The protection cluster will continue advocating for the implementation of life-saving programs across Colombia, specially for women and children affected by conflict.
2. While we remain optimistic about the prospects for a sustainable peace in Colombia **the shift from a humanitarian to a developmental paradigm will be a long term process.** Support for humanitarian and protection programs therefore should not be reduced until adequate systems are in place to ensure the needs of vulnerable communities are met.
3. **Stability and peace implementation programs must address the humanitarian needs of the population,** particularly in hard-to-reach areas where protection cluster organisations are the primary service providers.
4. The future EU trust fund, aimed at supporting the peace process, should include a focus on protection and addressing **durable solutions for the displaced population** that still struggle to meet their basic needs, particularly **access to education, water and sanitation and livelihoods.**