



Protection Messages for Donors & Member States **COLOMBIA** February 2022

Based on recent analyses from the Colombia Protection Cluster, these messages highlight priority protection issues and gaps in the country and reflect the rapidly evolving protection trends. This document has a national scope and builds on the Colombia Protection Analysis Update developed in December 2021¹ which focused on the Departments of Chocó and Norte de Santander. Further national level protection updates are under development and will be published in March 2022.

Renewed violence in several areas of Colombia and severe protection risks associated both alert for the reactivation of the internal armed conflict in the country. In 2022, the National Protection Cluster (NPC) estimates that 4.6 million Colombians are at risk of rights violations, including 2.4 million at severe risk while living in areas directly affected by the conflicts. Violations include forced recruitment, use of girls, boys and women for sexual exploitation, sexual violence as a tactic to exert control over communities, as well as killings, violence, coercion and intimidation as strategies by non-state armed groups to expand territorial control. Their indiscriminate use of explosive ordnance has also spread to an increased number of municipalities, and this year is expected to lead to almost half a million people facing protection risks – doubling the 2021 numbers.

Key Messages

1. Active internal conflict in Colombia is increasing protection incidents in particular areas of the country.
2. Multiple crisis are taking a heavy toll on civilians in Colombia, disproportionately affecting community leaders, as well as rural, indigenous and afro-Colombian communities.
3. Conflicts are driving forced displacement inside the country, and refraining return movements.

Urgent Actions Needed

1. Scale-up of protection response visibility and funding, based on NPC and sub-national protection analysis.
2. Support for protection actors to regain humanitarian access and promote protection by presence strategies in areas under non-state armed groups control.
3. Protection risks and needs to be addressed through integrated area-based protection interventions that respond to the differentiated needs of each population and are fully funded by flexible streams.
4. Continued investment in the strengthening of the operational capacities of protection actors responding to the crisis, including national and international NGOs and UN agencies.

¹ GPC, <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/2021/12/10/colombia-protection-analysis-update/>

Key Issues & Urgent Protection Needs

1. Scale-up the protection response for the most affected populations in Colombia. With the rise of human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law, it is urgent that the protection response in Colombia is prioritized by the international community, and resources increased.

Since 2018, the humanitarian situation in Colombia has worsened due to the impact of multiple overlapping crises: (I) new dynamics of violence within the internal armed conflict, (II) disasters exacerbated by climate change and environmental degradation, (III) the repercussions of the Venezuelan migration crisis and other mixed migration flows, and (IV) humanitarian needs after the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016 between the Government of Colombia (GoC) and the FARC-EP hoped to put an end to the ongoing war, but today, the internal armed conflict is far from over in the country. ICRC recognizes that there are currently **five ongoing non-international armed conflicts** taking place in Colombia, considered as such given territorial control, intensity of the conflict and level of organization of the armed groups.² The former FARC-EP represented a well-organized non-state armed group that controlled vast areas of the country. However, their withdrawal, combined with the lack of an effective introduction of GoC Civil Authorities, has led to the reorganization and articulation of a multiplicity of armed groups – namely the ELN, EPL, AGC and the FARC dissidents. The power vacuum triggered in-fighting among these various factions who fought to consolidate and/or expand their areas of control. The internal armed conflict continues to have a devastating impact on the lives of civilians, particularly in rural areas along the Pacific Coast and along the border with Venezuela.
- The multiplication of internal conflicts has resulted in increased violence against former combatants, community leaders, human rights defenders, as well as indigenous, afro-Colombian and rural communities. Among these groups, girls, boys, women, LGBTQ population, and persons with disabilities have been disproportionately affected by the conflict. As of November 2021, the number of attacks against the civilian population increased by 31% compared to the same period in 2020.³ The National Protection Cluster (NPC) estimates that **4.6 million Colombians are currently at risk of facing violations of human rights** as a direct consequence of internal armed conflicts. Among these, **at least 2.4 million Colombians are at severe risk of facing human rights and IHL violations in 2022**, as they live in municipalities most affected by armed conflicts and/or in territories under control of armed groups. Violations include forced recruitment, use and utilization of girls, boys and women as informants and in sexual exploitation networks, sexual violence as a deliberate tactic to exert control over communities, as well as killings, violence, coercion and intimidation as part of the strategies exercised by non-state armed groups to strengthen and expand their territorial control.
- In 2021, at least 57,787 people were confined⁴ by non-state armed groups actions, including clashes, threats and the use of explosive ordnances to protect their illicit economies. The curtail of freedom of movement disproportionately affected rural, indigenous, and afro-Colombian communities. Through this tactic of **confinements and obstacles to the freedom of movement** imposed by armed groups, civilian populations experience severe limitations and impediments to their access to livelihoods, health, education, and food.

² ICRC, <https://www.icrc.org/es/document/cinco-conflictos-armados-en-colombia-que-esta-pasando>

³ OCHA Colombia, Humanitarian Impact & Trends, November 2021

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/20211228_infografia_impacto_tendencia_humanitaria_nov_2021_vf_0.pdf

⁴ *Ibid*

- In 2021, a total of 541,749 persons have been affected by the **impact of disasters**⁵ – both of natural and anthropic origin – increasingly exacerbated by severe effects of climate change as well as by environmental degradation caused by illicit economies fueling the conflict.
- As of November 2021, the number of people affected by **forced displacements** in Colombia has increased by 196% compared to 2020⁶. By this same date, only 26% of this newly displaced population have returned to their areas of origin, as security conditions have not yet been guaranteed.⁷ Furthermore, Colombia currently hosts 1.84 of the 6 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees who left their country since 2018⁸, making Colombia the second largest host country in the world. The number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees who are affected by the internal armed conflict in Colombia continues to increase, significantly aggravating their vulnerability and humanitarian needs. Concurrently, increasing mixed migration flows across the country have also exposed populations on-the-move to heightened risks within the new dynamics of violence.
- The **impact of the pandemic** has resulted in a deepening of existing humanitarian needs. The reduced presence of state and humanitarian actors during the pandemic created significant voids which organized crime and non-state armed groups took advantage of to expand their territorial reach, particularly throughout rural areas. Across the country, the pandemic has also resulted in an increase of multidimensional poverty, intensifying the needs of populations who were already in vulnerable situations, including women working in informal markets. This was coupled with a reduction of services available to victims of violence, abuse and exploitation, including GBV survivors.

2. **Support is needed for protection actors to regain humanitarian access and operational presence to assist affected communities in hard-to-reach areas, mitigate risks, respond to rights violations and contribute to seeking solutions.**

In view of the increased protection risks forecasted for 2022, it is critical to regain and promote greater humanitarian access through protection by presence interventions in territories under non-state armed groups control. These actions should be aimed at directly supporting the most affected communities, particularly those living under confinement, to strengthen their local protection networks and capacities in order to mitigate the threats and risks posed by armed groups and the new dynamics of violence.

- With 4.6 million Colombians living in the areas most affected by conflict and/or armed group control, it is essential that humanitarian actors work side by side with affected populations through **community-driven programs**, including community self-protection mechanisms and interventions, as well as longer-term protection initiatives that aim to consolidate and support solutions addressing the effects of ongoing rights violations. Strengthening protective environments at the family, school and community levels will be crucial to reduce existing risk levels of violence, abuse, exploitation and the neglect of girls, boys and adolescents in communities living under armed group control. This includes coordinated actions among humanitarian and local stakeholders to provide community-based responses to the protection needs of children and adolescents, with special emphasis on the prevention and response to sexual violence, as well as child recruitment and use by armed groups. Urgent support is needed to continue strengthening comprehensive child protection case management services, including specialized MHPSS interventions.

⁵ National Risk Management Unit, UNGRD November 2021

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ GIFMM-R4V, Venezolanos en Colombia, February 2022

<https://www.r4v.info/es/document/r4v-america-latina-y-el-caribe-refugiados-y-migrantes-venezolanos-en-la-region-febrero-1>

- Non-state armed groups throughout the country continue to use **gender-based and sexual violence as a tactic to exert and enforce control over communities** and expand their territorial presence, reinforcing sexual exploitation trafficking networks as well as driving populations into forced displacement. Moreover, the humanitarian crisis, coupled with the feminization of poverty aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic, have further heightened GBV risks for affected populations. It is a key priority of the protection response to continue supporting local actors, service providers and stakeholders in the most affected communities to prevent, mitigate and adequately respond to GBV risks through community-driven initiatives and protection by presence strategies, particularly for the 2 million women and girls estimated to face severe, extreme, or catastrophic risk of GBV in 2022.
- Colombia is **one of the most explosive ordnance contaminated countries** in the world. New contamination has been reported in 50 municipalities in 2021 as numerous armed groups fight to control territories and protect their illicit economies, significantly escalating the use of explosive ordnances throughout the country. In 2022, the Mine Action Area of Responsibility (MA AoR) estimates that 479,805 people will need humanitarian assistance as a result of explosive ordnance contamination, doubling the number of people in need and witnessing a sharp rise in the number of municipalities with critical and catastrophic severity risk levels compared to 2021. Against this backdrop, it is urgent to increase the implementation of mine action activities, particularly humanitarian demining, explosive ordnance risk education (EORE), and victim assistance in the mine-affected areas.

3. Strengthened integrated protection response is key. The NPC and its partners fulfil critical gaps in the protection response across the country, complementing and/or strengthening the actions of both national and local authorities in areas with limited presence or response capacity.

- Donors can support protection response in Colombia by utilizing the NPC, Areas of Responsibility (AoRs) and Sub-National PWGs' **protection analyses**⁹ that are being regularly developed to leverage and address the worsening humanitarian situation.
- Donors should continue **strengthening the operational response capacities of protection actors** responding to the crisis, including national and international NGOs and UN agencies, as well as the protection coordination structures at both national & sub-national levels.
- Given the two distinct humanitarian response architectures activated in Colombia – the HCT and Cluster system led by OCHA as well as the R4V response led by UNHCR/IOM – response activities are often implemented along the lines of the Colombian internal armed conflict or the response to the Venezuelan migration crisis. However, a comprehensive protection response in Colombia requires that **all protection risks and needs are addressed through integrated area-based protection interventions** that respond to the differentiated needs of all people at-risk in a given territory. Support is needed to strengthen and promote integrated and/or flexible funding streams that allow protection partners to respond to the multiple existing crises through an area and needs-based approach.

⁹ Protection Analysis Updates, December 2021, <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/2021/12/10/colombia-protection-analysis-update/>