Despite years of continuous socio-economic progress and the signing of the 2016 peace agreement between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), Colombia experienced a considerable deterioration of its security situation during 2021. As a consequence, some 74,000 people were affected by mass displacement (a figure, which excludes individual displacements) and at least 66,000 people were confined by NSAGs. This surge in insecurity and armed violence has had serious repercussions for the inhabitants of the conflict-affected regions of the country and, by extension, has considerably hindered the access of organizations to implement humanitarian activities. A situation, which was compounded by the implications of the nationwide protest wave during 2021. According to the results of the 2021 Humanitarian Access Survey, in which over 37 humanitarian organizations participated, the main drivers of access restrictions were related to: the recommendation by communities or local authorities not to enter intervention zones (87%), access difficulties due to the lack of infrastructure and geographical challenges (74%), and social protests (55%). 71 per cent of organizations participating in the survey experienced humanitarian access restrictions and 79 per cent of them perceived an increase in the magnitude and intensity of restrictions compared to 2020. Ultimately, 26 per cent experienced direct attacks or threats, indicating a significant increase. While humanitarian actors continue to have permitted access to most of the country, the figures show a warning sign that access is becoming more difficult. The deteriorating security situation has led to an increased number of suspensions or delays of humanitarian activities and the withdrawal of staff from some territories has been recorded.

How severe have access restrictions affected the implementation of humanitarian operations?

- Very high: 3%
- High: 16%
- Medium: 24%
- Low: 16%
- Very low: 3%

How often has your organization experienced access restrictions?

- Permanently: 50%
- Frequently: 18%
- Occasionally: 16%
- Rarely: 11%
- Never: 5%

Note about the map: The severity of access restrictions, as seen on the map below, was derived by weighting restrictions related to armed conflict at 40%, geographic or infrastructure restrictions at 40%, and restrictions related to national protests at 20%.

MAIN CAUSES OF ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

| Recommendation of communities or local authorities to not enter the area | 87% |
| Access restrictions due to lack of infrastructure / environmental reasons | 74% |
| Protests and/or social unrest | 55% |
| Direct attacks/threats of NSAGs hindering humanitarian operations | 47% |
| Social control of NSAGs over communities | 39% |

Note: Due to minor adjustments of the methodology, the comparison of results is of indicative nature only. For more information, please refer to the methodology section on page 4.
The intensification of armed conflict in 2021 with the multiplication of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) has resulted in an operating environment of higher complexity for humanitarian actors. According to OCHA’s mapping of the presence of NSAGs in the country, at least 412 municipalities register the presence of one or more groups. Nearly one in two of these municipalities are contested by two or more groups - a situation that not only increases the likelihood of humanitarian impact for the civilian population, but also increases access restrictions.

Among the departments with the greatest impact on humanitarian access due to the presence of NSAGs are Chocó, Norte de Santander, Cauca, Arauca and Antioquia - departments where more than 70% of the present organizations reported restrictions due to the presence of NSAGs. These are at the same time the departments most affected by the armed conflict in 2021 in terms of people affected by forced displacement, confinement, massacres, as well as natural disasters.

The confluence of needs in these areas coupled with diminishing access due to the multiplicity of NSAGs has the potential to decrease the presence of humanitarian actors in the region, despite surging humanitarian needs. The protection of humanitarian space in these areas must therefore remain a key priority, particularly in light of the protection by presence strategy. This, coupled with an increase in the number of direct attacks and threats to humanitarian actors, reflects an increasingly complex operational environment, where access restriction mitigation measures are imperative.

In the 75 municipalities with severe restrictions live:

- 51% of all displaced persons
- 71% of all confined persons

Out of 10 organizations that participated in the survey:

- 9 experienced access challenges related to the presence of NSAGs
- 8 experienced illegal roadblocks
- 6 faced constraints due active ongoing armed combats/clashes

* Most influential factors in armed conflict-related constraints with medium, high and very high severities

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**Colombia Humanitarian Access Restrictions in Colombia 2021 - Deep Dive: Restrictions Related to the Armed Conflict**

Data as of December 2021, based on responses from partners of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT).
Levels of access restrictions per department on the basis of infrastructure/geography related restrictions.

Departments most affected by humanitarian access due to geographical conditions are Norte de Santander, Chocó, Arauca, Antioquia, Nariño and Vichada, as well as the overall Amazonas region.

There is a correlation between geographical obstacles and the presence of NSAGs, who use difficult-to-access territories as a form of strategic defense. Thus, not only the population faces a double affectation, but also humanitarian actors in terms of access, generating situations, where the people most in need are also the least accessible.

Compared to 2020, there was an increase of 46% in access restrictions due to geographical factors. This may be due to the increase in natural disaster events compared to 2020, with a predominance of landsides and floods that hindered transportation.

The national protest, which began on 28 April 2021 and had a high intensity for over two months, led to severe access restrictions and disruptions of humanitarian operations. 55 per cent humanitarian actors reported restrictions related to this cause, especially due to their impact on the supply chain as a consequence of the persistence of road blockades across the country for a prolonged period of time. This lead to the cancellation and/or temporary suspension of humanitarian missions for at least 13 weeks in the Pacific, Orinoco and Amazon regions.

In addition, attacks against humanitarian missions and particularly medical personnel increased significantly.

OUT OF 10 organizations that participated in the survey:

- **6** had obstacles due to lack of road infrastructure
- **6** were able to access areas but at very high costs
- **5** faced constraints due to dependence on waterways
- **9** had restrictions due to increased security risks in general
- **8** experienced constraints due to supply chain disruption(s)
- **6** were restricted due to protest-related roadblocks
**FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The findings of the survey show that peripheral areas of the country, particularly the Pacific Coast, the Amazonas region, and the border area with Venezuela exhibit the highest affectation. These areas coincide with the zones with the greatest numbers of humanitarian needs. Of particular concern are regions, predominantly populated by indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, as they exhibit high access restrictions related to the armed conflict as well as to geographical obstacles/lack of infrastructure.

More than half of the INGOs and UN agencies experienced restrictions. The impact was of a similar level with no difference between the type of organization.

In contrast, and due to their structure not comparable with other participants, all of Colombia’s 15 Local Coordination Teams and Local Humanitarian Teams experienced access restrictions.

**Humanitarian Access Restrictions Reports 2021**

- Restrictions on the transit of agencies
- Restrictions due to the presence of explosive devices
- Military operations or hostilities impeding transit
- Threats, violations against humanitarian personnel or interference in humanitarian activities
- Physical environment

**BETWEEN 2020 AND 2021,**

**THERE WAS A 71% increase in the total number of access restrictions reported to Local Coordination Teams and monitored by OCHA.**

**IN 2021,**

**THERE WERE AT LEAST 19 EVENTS of interference with humanitarian action and threats against staff, an increase of 111% compared to 2020.**

*Information reported to OCHA through Monitor*

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**METHODOLOGY**

Humanitarian access is the ability of humanitarian actors to reach crisis-affected populations, as well as the ability of affected populations to access humanitarian aid and services. For this reason, the Humanitarian Access Working Group (HAWG) of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in Colombia, composed of NGOs and UN System Agencies, conducted for the second time since 2020 a survey to analyze the magnitude of these restrictions during 2021, considering underlying factors such as: armed conflict, geographic or infrastructure limitations and restrictions related to the national strike.

In total, 37 partners participated in the survey (INGOs 32%, UN Agencies 18%, national NGOs 16% and LCTs/LHTs 34%), covering all 32 departments of the country. For the current survey, Local Coordination Teams/Local Humanitarian Teams were included, which in turn led to a more comprehensive mapping of humanitarian access throughout the territory, but simultaneously illustrates a significant change in the methodology. A comparison of results of 2021 with results of 2020 is therefore only partially possible. Nevertheless, the overall compounding trend has been confirmed by members of the HAWG.

It is important to mention that most of the humanitarian organizations participating in this survey operate in the Colombian-Venezuelan border region, as well as in the Pacific departments. This uneven geographical presence of participating organizations almost inevitably leads to more restrictions being reported in departments with a high number of organizations. This means, conversely, that restrictions on humanitarian access might be reported to a lesser extent in departments with a smaller number of organizations. This geographical bias was mitigated by weighting reports based on the number of organizations with a presence in each department.