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Humanitarian impact in 2018 exceeded levels of recent years

By OCHA Colombia

According to Colombia Humanitarian Needs Overview – HNO 2019\(^1\) around 5.1 million people live with intersectoral humanitarian needs in several regions of the country, due to the humanitarian impact caused by emergencies within the conflict, the increase of armed violence and the occurrence of natural and anthropic disaster events. The regions where this impact concentrates are: Northeast (border with Venezuela), South (border with Ecuador), Pacific (border with Panama) and Northwest, showing the increasing need of assistance and strengthening of the presence of humanitarian and protection actors in the territories, keeping their coordination mechanisms active as a complement for State’s action.

In 2018, humanitarian impact in Colombia reached and overpassed the figures from the last five years. This vision coincides with the one from NGO Human Rights Watch, which started its annual report chapter on Colombia as follows: “The 52 years of armed conflict between the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) and the Government ended in 2016 with the signature of a Peace Agreement. However, the violence related to armed groups increased in 2018, after diminishing since FARC’s ceasefire of 2015”\(^2\).

The increase of mass displacements is a first indicator of the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in 2018. At least 33,403 people were internally displaced in 112 mass events, considering that since 2013 figures of these magnitude were not reported. Norte de Santander, Nariño, Antioquia and Chocó have been the four departments that more IDPs concentrate (92%). The peak of mass displacement events in 2018 occurred in April, month in which clashes between Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), as well as the armed strike imposed by the second group in Catatumbo region (Norte de Santander) caused at least 9,000 people internally displaced, as reported on Situation Report No. 3 published by OCHA.

The generalized violence and conflict also have had an impact on the alarming rise of vulnerable communities in several regions of the country, which have seen themselves affected by mobility constraints and restrictions to access for goods, assistance and fundamental rights. According to OCHA monitoring, at least 1,119,912 people suffered because of these restrictions (increase of 708% from 2017), especially in Nariño, Antioquia, Norte de Santander and Cauca departments. The protraction of restrictions, as well as the lack of response to needs mostly given to access restrictions related to the security situation, led to confinement situations for more than 20,600 people, being indigenous communities (62%) those who suffered most, followed by Afro Colombians with 21 per cent and peasant communities with 17 per cent.

Attacks against civilians do not cease

Besides of the mass displacements and access restrictions and mobility restrictions in 2018, the concern about other humanitarian affectations and risks associated to attacks against civilian also rose. According to OCHA monitoring, in 2018 the figures for these attacks show a 26 percent increase against 2017. An important proportion of these attacks (54%) concentrated in Nariño, Norte de Santander, Antioquia and Cauca departments; in the other hand, at least 39 percent of people affected correspond to Afrocolombians and 37 percent to peasant communities.

Threats and homicides against civilians are the most featured and frequent victimizing events; in 2018, it is to remark that the biggest share of events corresponds to unknown perpetrators, as well as the increase in the share of FARC dissidents: from 6 percent of attacks in 2017 to 11 percent in 2018. In most cases, communities and even State are not capable to identify perpetrators clearly, which also could be explained as a consequence of armed groups reconfiguration in the current scenario, which jeopardizes the effectiveness of response and justice application actions by the competent authorities.

The Ombudsman’s office pointed out that in 2018, 172 homicides against leaders were registered. The list is not over, as other profiles also make part of this population at risk, such as local spokespersons and former FARC-EP members.

*Includes unilateral actions of: EPL (5%), FARC-EP dissidents (3%), OAG (AGC/Clan del Golfo, <1%) and other armed groups (6%).
The continuity of threats and their later consequences, reflected in attempts/homicides, is other reason for alert on civilians. In 2018, 13 percent of the victims of threats were male or female social/community leaders and human rights defenders, fact that has even raised several calls for attention from both the international community and the civil society; in this respect, the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, has recently expressed his concern over Colombian leaders and defenders’ security and safety. Another latent concern corresponds to the increase of practices such as kidnapping and massacres, which had decreased in recent years.

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*Includes the following operations against civilians: Intentional wounding of a protected person, forced recruitment, attack, civilian wound in war action, death of a civilian in war action, forced disappearance, torture, use of civilians as a shield, Hostage taking, sexual violence

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*Ibid. 60. “I am enormously concerned by the fact that during the report period, attacks against social leaders and human right defenders still occurred with impunity. According to the UNHCHR office in Colombia, from September 2018, seven murders have been confirmed and 22 more are in verification process. According to reports from UNHCHR, since the signature of the Peace Agreement in November 2016, 163 murders against social leaders and human rights defenders, and 454 cases in total have been informed. These murders are mainly concentrated in three departments: Cauca, Norte de Santander and Antioquia. Most homicides took place in zones abandoned by the former FARC-EP and where State’s presence is limited”.*
Concerning increase of victims of mines and armed actions

In 2018, Descontamina Colombia registered 176 APM/UXO victims, making evident, unlike previous years where peace talks occurred, a remarkable rise (209%) over 2017 (see graphic). From the total victims, at least 23 were children, 92 were civilians (130% more than in 2017 in both cases), and 84 victims correspond to Army members (394% increase over the previous year). These accidents refer to victims certified by local authorities (mostly by local speakerpersons’ offices), which implies that figures can increase as certification processes for victims occur. This scenario adds another indicator that makes evident the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, mainly in rural areas. The impact of these accidents in most cases is related to practices used by armed actors to guard against illicit crop substitution and eradication.

Under the monitoring made by the United Nations Mine Actions Services (UNMAS), another factor to take into consideration is the presence of possible new explosive devices in zones with current military demining operations (such as Nariño, Norte de Santander, Arauca, Guaviare, Antioquia, Chocó) which are registered in Descontamina Colombia database as events, which indicate that military units that operate in this area have found and destroyed such artifacts.

Nevertheless, it is important to remark that no accidents have occurred in zones with current humanitarian demining operations.

All the indicators shown above are related with the rising trend of armed actions, which increased 36 percent over 2017, with a peak in April, associated to the Catatumbo region (Norte de Santander) context. Among these actions, confrontations among non-state actors stand out, given their 143 percent increase over 2017, which shows the territorial disputes over illicit economies control in many areas, with later humanitarian consequences.

Other increases in events such as attacks against military infrastructure (97%), combats (29%) and harassments (22%) draw attention and hinder humanitarian response. OCHA’s monitoring shows that most unilateral events correspond to unknown perpetrators (19%), ELN (17%), FARC-EP dissidents (12%), and are located mainly in Nariño, Norte de Santander, Antioquia and Arauca.

http://www.accioncontraminas.gov.co/Paginas/AICMA.aspx
“Five non-international armed conflicts exist in Colombia”: CICR

Changes in the dynamics of armed groups in Colombia, make evident the existence of five non-international armed conflict, as stated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); this level of organization and intensification of the impacts demand the State to protect and assist the victim population, according to established by Geneva Conventions (respect for the International Humanitarian Law - IHL). In this sense, the conflicts identified are: i) the one that Colombian State carries out with ELN, ii) with EPL, iii) with Clan del Golfo, iv) with FARC-EP dissidents, and in addition v) the armed dispute between EPL and ELN guerrillas in Catatumbo region (Norte de Santander). This scenario poses multiple challenges, one of the most significant relates to the opacity of the activities and modus operandi of some of these groups, which hiders labors in favor of victims caused by armed conflict and other violence.

With this scenario and the fragility over the implementation of the Peace Agreement, an intensification in armed clashes and an upsurge of the armed violence are foreseen in the short-term, which would imply a continuation over the increase trend on the humanitarian impacts and affectations in several regions of the country. The void left by the FARC-EP in some territories, rear to the signature of the Peace Agreement, is one of the factors that influence the reconfiguration of armed actor, from those who decided not to be part of the process, to those who have conformed alliances, disputes or new structures with common interests on illicit economies. On the other hand, the alarming increase of illicit crops in 2017 in strategic areas is another important factor that has promoted these dynamics and the upsurge of the violence.

This situation keeps showing an urgent need for the State in making presence with protection and humanitarian response strategies for vulnerable communities, parallel to investments on development and access to rights and security guarantees, for the shortening of existing gaps.

Over 374,000 people affected by disasters in 2018

Natural disasters in 2018, particularly during the cyclic rain seasons, are the events that most consequences have left in Colombia. The National Unit for Disaster Risk Management (UNGRD in Spanish), identified affectations in 374,138 people in Colombia, 80 percent of them caused by floods, mainly in the Pacific (Chocó) and Caribbean regions (Bolívar, La Guajira, Córdoba). This year, departments on the Orinoquía region (southeast) such as Vichada and Guainía departments also registered a significant impact, with more than 35,300 people affected by floods: indigenous communities who mostly populate those areas, suffered from grave affectations in their livelihoods, health, water and basic sanitation, which led to a national level response by the UNGRD and even required the complementary action of humanitarian actors given the magnitude of the impact.

Often, rural population that live in disperse areas are the most vulnerable to suffer from this kind of events; so the physical conditions of the terrains, as well as some access restrictions challenge the diagnostic of the situation by the responsible organisms, which limits a timely and differential response for the attention of the different needs on gender, age and ethnic diversity.

Risk and impact by droughts on the first semester 2019

Even though most of the natural disaster events correspond to floods, concern for 2019 is centered on the impact of El Niño season. Colombia Environment First Minister informed that almost 90 percent of the rivers of the country report grave problems related to the reduction of their water levels given this drought cycle. Similarly, the Water National Study for 2018 already points out that 391 municipalities of Colombia (35%) are at risk of suffering from water shortages. This situation, in addition to the conflict events that can cause double affectation, keep all alert levels of humanitarian organisms.

At least 1.9 million refugees and migrants present humanitarian needs

The affectation caused by the mixed migratory flows of population arriving from Venezuela also has place in the analysis. In the Colombia HNO 2019 chapter on migrants and refugees, around 1.9 million people were identified with needs, according to some profiles (intention of staying permanently, in transit and pendular migrants), as well as Colombian returnees and host communities that receive these different migrant profiles. According to data from Migración Colombia, the national migration authority, by December 2018 at least 1.174.743 Venezuelans lived in Colombia (695.496 regularly and 479.247 irregularly), particularly concentrated in Bogotá and Norte de Santander, Antioquia, La Guajira and Atlántico departments.

The exposure of these people to the risks and impact of the conflict and the armed violence in Colombia is a matter of concern; in this way, the latest report from Refugees International (RI), states that “(…) much of these undocumented Venezuelans do not find another option but to work for the criminal armed groups -which recruit them for coca crops, drug transport or sexual exploitation. Definitely, the influx of Venezuelan refugees and migrants seems to be exacerbating the Colombian intern conflict, as it fosters illicit activities of the armed groups, as coca production. At the same time, Colombian armed conflict poses great dangers for Venezuelans who arrive.”

9  https://sostenibilidad.semana.com/medio-ambiente/articulo/phenomeno-de-el-nino-se-demoraria-hasta-abril-generando-desabastecimiento/42572
Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) Colombia 2019: Key figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL POPULATION</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PEOPLE FORCIBLY DISPLACED (1985-2018)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45.5M</td>
<td>8M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN NEED OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (2016 - 2018)

- 5,1M

**By Group**

- **Girls and Boys (Under 18):**
  - 2,1M (41%)
  - 1.0M Girls
  - 1.1M Boys
- **Adults (18 to 59):**
  - 2.5M (49%)
  - 1.3M Women
  - 1.2M Men
- **Elderly (Over 59):**
  - 0.5M (10%)
  - 0.3M Women
  - 0.2M Men

**Total Male:** 2.5M

**Total Female:** 2.6M

**Vulnerable Groups**

- **Indigenous:** 293K
- **Afro-Colombians:** 992K

Source: HNO 2019
# The Humanitarian Response Plan

## At a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Objective 1</th>
<th>Population in Need</th>
<th>Operational Presence: Total Implementing Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To save and protect lives</td>
<td>5.1M</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Objective 2</td>
<td>Target Population</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To prevent and mitigate protection risks</td>
<td>1.3M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Objective 3</td>
<td>Requirements (US$)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To ensure early recovery and lasting solutions</td>
<td>192.3M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## People in Humanitarian Need

- 5.1M people in need

## Internally Displaced Persons

- 409k internally displaced persons

## People Affected by Mass Displacement

- 54k people affected by mass displacement
**Map 1:** Access restrictions due to armed violence

**Map 2:** APM/UXO victims (Descontamina Colombia)

**Map 3:** People internally displaced in mass events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th># People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Nariño</td>
<td>402,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Antioquia</td>
<td>350,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Norte de Santander</td>
<td>150,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Cauca</td>
<td>96,237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Arauca</td>
<td>71,662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,119,912</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OCHA cutoff date 09 January 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th># People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Nariño</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Norte de Santander</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Antioquia</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Guaviare</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Arauca</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>176</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Descontamina Colombia cutoff date 31 Jan 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th># People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Norte de Santander</td>
<td>14,108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nariño</td>
<td>9,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Antioquia</td>
<td>2,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Guaviare</td>
<td>1,164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>33,403</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OCHA cutoff date 09 January 2019

**KEY FIGURES**

- **No. IDPs in mass events Jan – Dec 2018 (OCHA)**: 33,403
- **No. People with Access restrictions Jan – Dec 2018 (OCHA)**: 1,119,912
- **No. Attacks against civilians Jan – Dec 2018 (OCHA)**: 1,927
- **No. People affected by Natural Disasters Jan - Dec 2018 (UNGRD)**: 374,138

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