

Protection is needed as situation deteriorates in the Pacific Region of Colombia

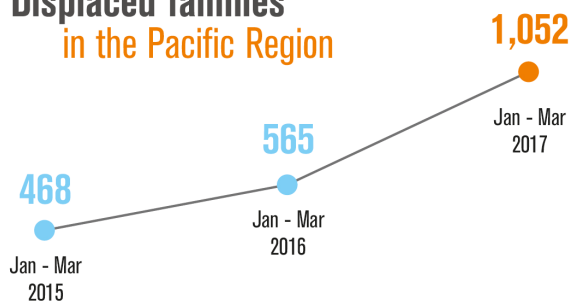
Despite the Peace Agreement between the Government and the FARC-EP, forced displacements keep growing in Colombia. Violence continues to uproot thousands of people and local governments lack resources to secure protection to all vulnerable population. Colombia's humanitarian situation should not be overlooked¹.

Displaced people 2017 (Mass displacements)



With the FARC guerrillas likely to begin disarming, this should be a time of hope; instead, for communities living along the Pacific Coast of Colombia it is a moment of concern. The Protection Cluster is deeply concerned with the increasing levels of internal displacement, which affect several communities, particularly in the Chocó, Cauca, Valle del Cauca and Nariño departments in Colombia's Pacific Coast. In these areas, there has been a 96% increase in the number of displaced persons compared to the previous year.*

Displaced families in the Pacific Region



¹ The Colombia Protection Cluster, led by UNHCR and NRC. Written by Alvaro Sardiza (UNHCR) and David García (NRC). Illustration, Marcela Olarte (NRC).

* All figures correct as of March 31th, 2017 according to UNHCR.

Fighting for territorial control, in the Colombian Pacific Coast region, Arauca and Norte de Santander, has displaced 4,202 people (1,133 families). Most of the population has been displaced in the Pacific Region, 3,812 people (1,052 families)*. During all 2016, UNHCR recorded 11,363 people (3,068 families) by mass displacement events by violence in the Pacific Coast region.

Non-state armed actors are adapting to the new situation arising from the Peace Agreement. Other irregular armed groups have increased their actions in the shadow of the FARC-Colombian Government ceasefire, and the clashes between these groups are the main cause for the latest humanitarian needs. According to OCHA 63%² of massive displacements in this area are a consequence of armed fighting.

Afro-Colombian communities and indigenous people have been particularly affected by this violence, which is endangering their survival.

These two ethnic groups account for 47% and 25% respectively of the total population massively displaced in Colombia in 2017*. Historically, ethnic groups account for 10% and 3% respectively of the 7.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Colombia³.

These communities are being further marginalized, threaten and displaced. Mobility and access to basic food are being restricted as a consequence of land mines presence and control by non-state armed groups. Children and women are at risk of forced recruitment and sexual gender-based violence.

The Protection Cluster, composed of UN agencies as well as international and national non-governmental organizations (INGOs/NGOs), fills an important gap in

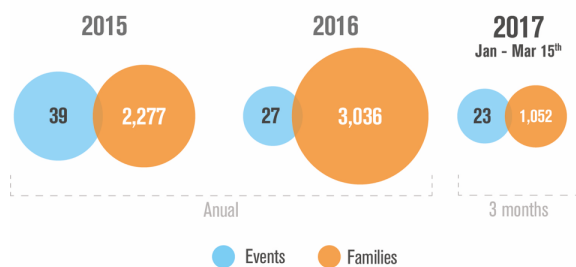
² This information is derived from OCHA's figure (2,818 displaced people in the Pacific region) between January 1st and March 10th, 2017.

³ Based on trends, OCHA estimates that the proportion between mass displacement and individual displacement in Colombia is one to nine. See: HRP Colombia – 2017.

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.

INGOs and UN Agencies have been providing shelter kits, hygiene kits, protection, education in emergencies, as both local and national capacities for response have been overwhelmed by the magnitude of the emergencies. In the same region, these organizations have been assisting unattended indigenous communities by providing humanitarian assistance hygiene and household kits, wash, livelihoods and education.

Mass Displacements in the Pacific Region



In the areas where these new groups manifest their presence, the population is alarmed over the possible struggle between different armed groups to exert territorial, economic and social control over the areas previously under FARC control. Whether this might translate is an increase of the risks and human rights violations is an issue of concern.

As voiced by the Local Protection Clusters, the assistance to the communities is currently fairly limited. An efficient humanitarian assistance scheme first requires the proper activation of the contingency plans of the local authorities to respond to the emergency, and a well-functioning registration mechanism. Moreover, adequate humanitarian assistance should be delivered to attend the population needs, mainly shelter, food, education and health, with a particular emphasis on psychosocial attention, due to the fear and instability generated in the communities.

The Protection Cluster welcomes the Peace Agreement and the peace-building efforts. However, a sudden reduction in humanitarian assistance and protection could jeopardize the safety and well-being of newly displaced as well as vulnerable communities, and hamper the transition to peace.

CLUSTER RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Protection Cluster believes that **humanitarian assistance and protection programs are essential to maintaining stability and to 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. Donors should continue supporting protection activities and address **durable solutions for the displaced population** that still struggle to meet their basic needs, particularly, **food, water, health and access to education**