

COLOMBIA

Regional needs analysis: Chocó

Following the demobilisation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) as a result of the Peace Agreement with the Colombian Government in 2016, three dynamics developed in Chocó:

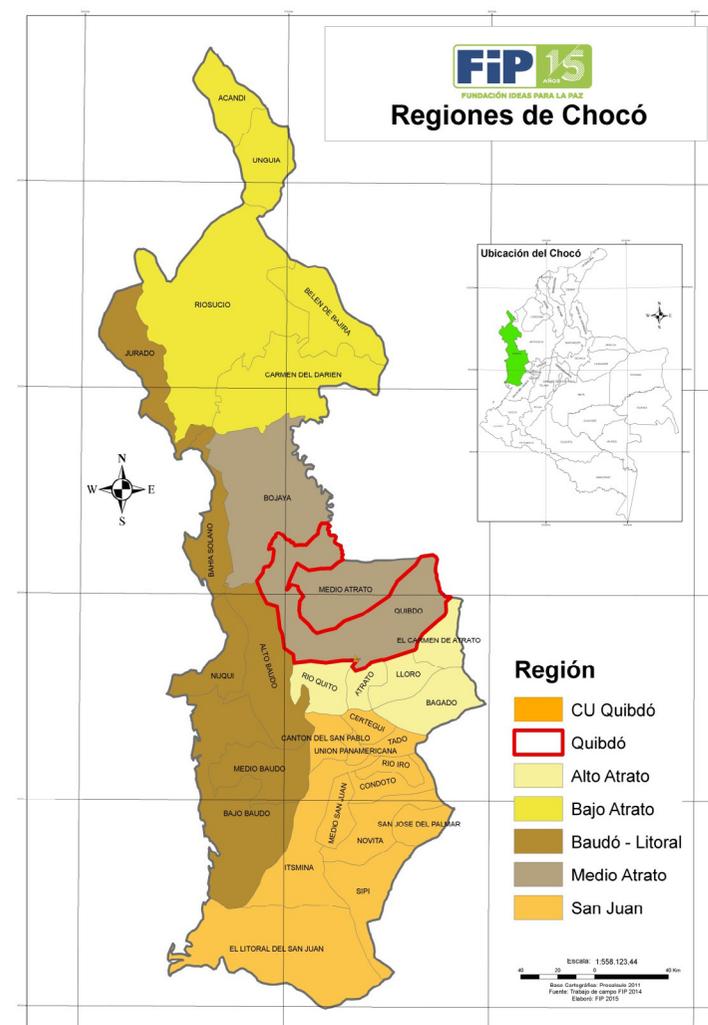
- In the south of the department, the National Liberation Army (ELN) maintained control of most municipalities;
- To the north, in Chocó's Urabá, the Gaitanist Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AGC) confronted other armed groups (such as the Virgilio Peralta Arenas Bloc, also known as Los Caparros, and the ELN) and consolidated itself as the hegemonic actor;
- In the centre of the department, territories were disputed between AGC and ELN.

In 2020-2021, these dynamics changed as the AGC tried to expand towards the centre and south of the department, provoking new clashes with the ELN. **As a result, there has been an increase in forced displacement, confinement, homicides, and other manifestations of violence against the civilian population.**

KEY MESSAGES

- In 2020, the process of expansion of the AGC towards the south of the department has caused multiple confrontations in the subregions of Alto Atrato, Baudó, Litoral del Pacífico, Medio Atrato, and San Juan. The main consequences are the confinement of populations and forced displacement.
- During confinement, populations lose access to their livelihoods (fishing and agriculture) and suffer from a lack of food security and protection. Although food insecurity is not a direct consequence of the armed conflict in Chocó, confinement aggravates it.
- Not all confinements are the result of orders from armed groups or clashes; they can also result from the presence of landmines or decisions by the community to protect its member(s).
- Indigenous and Afrodescendant communities are particularly affected by the violence in Chocó as they inhabit territories strategically located for the collection and transport of cocaine hydrochloride and carry out activities that armed groups seek to exploit (such as artisanal mining).

Map 1. Municipalities and subregions of the Chocó department



Source: Fundación Ideas para la Paz (29/07/2015).

CRITICAL NEEDS

- Food insecurity is prevalent in the department and is exacerbated during confinement and displacement.
- Access to livelihoods is affected by displacement and confinement.
- Protection is needed for minors, who are often recruited by armed groups taking advantage of poverty in the department and the closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Access to health services is precarious and worsens during humanitarian emergencies.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Methodology: The analysis in this report is based on a review of secondary sources, such as early warnings from the Ombudsman’s Office of Colombia (Defensoría del Pueblo), media reports, databases of Colombian government institutions in charge of monitoring the armed conflict, reports from think tanks, and key informant interviews (KIs) with humanitarian workers in Chocó.

ACAPS thanks the Intersectoral Emergency Response Mechanism (MIRE) consortium partners and OCHA for their input. The analysis presented in this report is the sole responsibility of ACAPS and does not necessarily reflect the position of the organisations cited.

This report was financed by ECHO.

DEFINITIONS

Mass displacements: This report defines ‘mass displacement’ as the displacement of more than 50 persons or ten households in one event (OCHA accessed 21/12/2021).

Confinements: Confinements are restrictions on the mobility of a person (or persons) in a specific geographical area for a period of time. These events are often driven by fighting between armed groups and the presence of antipersonnel mines. In some instances, armed groups explicitly prohibit movement (OCHA 15/01/2021, 21/04/2021, and 30/03/2020).

DYNAMICS OF THE ARMED CONFLICT IN THE CHOCÓ DEPARTMENT

The department of Chocó is located in a strategic position for drug trafficking and illegal mining. While Chocó has a low number of hectares of coca crops compared to other departments, this number increased by 18% between 2019–2020, reaching 1,468ha (UNODC 07/2021). Its access to the Pacific Ocean in the municipalities of western Chocó and its connections to the north with Panama through the Darién jungle, to the northwest with Urabá in Antioquia, and to the south with Valle del Cauca make it a strategic territory for the storage of cocaine hydrochloride and its distribution to international markets – mainly Central America (Ministerio de Justicia and UNODC 06/09/2015; InSight Crime 09/05/2019).

42% of the area covered by the department is illegally mined for alluvial gold, contributing approximately 42% of the total illegal exploitation of alluvial gold in the whole of Colombia (GFI, Alianza por la Minería Responsable, and Cedetrabajo 10/02/2021). Although not all illegal mining is controlled by armed groups, this activity represents an important source of finances for various criminal organisations, putting at risk of violent actions those communities that make a living from mining (Defensoría del Pueblo 06/04/2018).

After the Peace Agreement was signed in 2016, the AGC and the ELN began territorial expansion into areas previously dominated by the FARC-EP. The main areas of confrontation were the municipalities of the subregions of Alto Atrato and Medio Atrato (see Map 1). Both armed groups expanded into municipalities such as Bojayá and Medio Atrato (Defensoría del Pueblo 24/01/2018 a), Río Quito (Defensoría del Pueblo 24/01/2018 b), Río Iró (Defensoría del Pueblo 26/01/2018 a), Carmen del Darién, Riosucio (Defensoría del Pueblo 26/01/2018 b), and Juradó (Defensoría del Pueblo 27/08/2018). There were direct confrontations between the two armed groups, who fought to dominate the illegal mining and logging markets and some of the corridors for the storage and exit of drugs to the Pacific coast and to extort money from traders, transporters, and farmers. In the municipalities of the San Juan subregion in the south of the department, such as Tadó (Defensoría del Pueblo 27/02/2018), Bagadó (Defensoría del Pueblo 18/09/2018), Novita, Sipí (Defensoría del Pueblo 19/07/2019), Istmina, and Medio San Juan (Defensoría del Pueblo 23/08/2019), the ELN consolidated its power without AGC interference. The ELN's hegemonic consolidation was possible because the FARC-EP had previously made alliances with the group, thus avoiding the presence of other armed groups in the area (Defensoría del Pueblo 19/07/2019; Aponte et al. 08/04/2021).

By 2020, three dynamics derived from the armed conflicts that were developing in Chocó:

- In the north of the department, in Chocó's Urabá (Bajo Atrato subregion), the AGC managed to consolidate its hegemonic position and pushed the ELN back to some rural areas (Defensoría del Pueblo 06/03/2020).
- In the south of the department, in the San Juan subregion, the ELN managed to consolidate its dominance in the areas left behind by the FARC-EP after its demobilisation and became a hegemonic actor.
- In the Alto Atrato, Medio Atrato, Litoral del Pacífico, and Baudó subregions, the AGC and ELN tacitly divided territorial spaces, with the AGC predominating in urban settings and the ELN in rural settings (KII 12/11/2021; El Espectador 02/04/2019; Casa de la Mujer 09/12/2019). In these subregions, there were confrontations between the two groups at times.

In 2020, this scenario was transformed by the AGC's attempts to expand into the south of the department (Semana 14/02/2020). Disputes between the AGC and the ELN in the subregions of Bajo Atrato, Baudó, the Pacific coast, and Medio Atrato increased (Defensoría del Pueblo 17/03/2020 and 09/07/2020). The ELN's hegemony in the San Juan subregion was challenged by the AGC (which managed to enter through the Baudó, Atrato, and San Juan river basin) (Defensoría del Pueblo 14/05/2020 and 19/08/2021) and the dissidents of the FARC-EP's 30th front (who entered through the south of Chocó, taking advantage of their presence in Valle del Cauca) (KII 12/11/2021).

These disputes have continued in 2021. As a consequence, the number of people affected by forced displacement and confinement has risen; some of their needs have persisted over time and even increased (El Colombiano 14/09/2021; El Espectador 28/11/2021). One sign of these disputes is the increase in homicides in the department (Figure 1). Between 2019–2020, a 19% increase was recorded, and during the first 11 months of 2021, homicides have already reached levels similar to the whole of 2020.

Coca crops are often the only means of subsistence for many communities. The army has conducted campaigns of forced eradication of coca crops that have ended in clashes with civilians who attempt to prevent the eradication. At least four farmers have been wounded by the army, and one has been killed in these clashes (Infobae 02/03/2021; Contagio Radio 03/03/2021). Some communities in Chocó have also reported that civilian population security has been put at risk by security forces' operations against the ELN or AGC (Colombia +20 12/12/2021).

Figure 1. Homicides in the department of Chocó (2014–2021)



Data source: Colombian National Police database (accessed 21/12/2021).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Natural disasters

At least 45,000 people have been affected by natural disasters in Chocó in 2021 (OCHA 30/11/2021). During the 2021 winter season, floods have caused several rivers to overflow, destroyed several hectares of crops, and affected the provision of health services (OCHA 13/07/2021 and 03/06/2021). Windstorms and floods have damaged several roads, restricting access to some communities and delaying the arrival of humanitarian aid, on which a large part of the population depends (OCHA 03/06/2021; KII 02/12/2021). High levels of rainfall in Chocó make the department prone to the occurrence of floods, gales, and landslides (Mosquera 10/10/2011).

COVID-19

Chocó is one of the departments with the lowest vaccination rates in Colombia. Less than 30% of the population has had at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine (El Espectador 21/11/2021; El Tiempo 21/12/2021). During confinement or displacement events, some people have been suspected of having contracted COVID-19, and some cases have been confirmed (MIRE 12/10/2021).

CRISIS IMPACT

Confinement

Confinement affects communities' access to livelihoods and basic services such as healthcare.

In Chocó, confinements can occur as (1) a consequence of fighting between armed groups, (2) an explicit measure of armed groups for territorial control, (3) a result of the installation of antipersonnel mines, and (4) a decision of the community to protect its territory or its member(s).

During 2021, 65% of all people affected by confinement in Colombia were in Chocó, especially in the municipalities of Alto Baudó, Bagadó, Bajo Baudó, Bojayá, and Medio San Juan (OCHA 30/11/2021). As at 13 December 2021, 23 confinements have been registered in Chocó, with a total of 37,709 people affected (OCHA accessed 13/12/2021). Table 1 shows the confinement events in Chocó organised by municipality of occurrence.

Table 1. Confinements in the department of Chocó during 2021, per municipality

MUNICIPALITY	CONFINEMENT EVENTS	PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CONFINEMENT
Acandí	1	104
Quibdó	2	154
Istmina	1	1,229
Nuquí	2	2,433
El Litoral de San Juan	4	3,172
Alto Baudó	3	5,000
Bagadó	2	5,381
Bojayá	3	5,699
Medio San Juan	3	6,525
Bajo Baudó	2	8,012

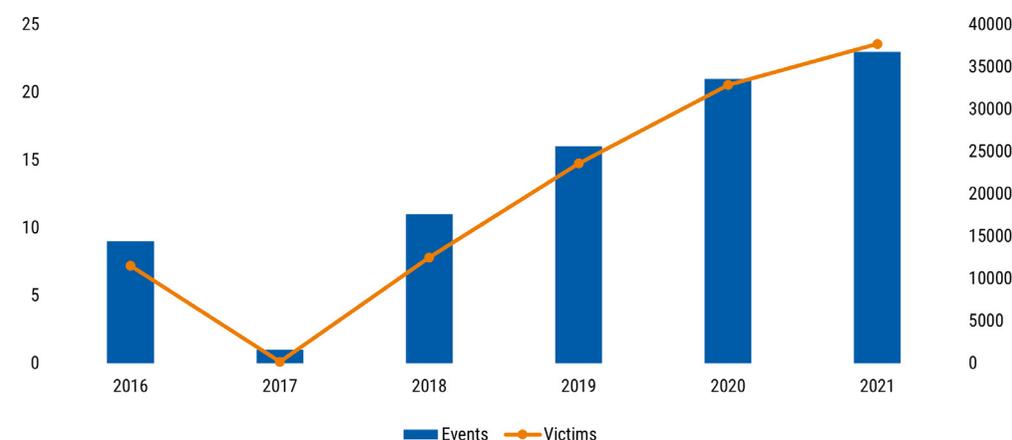
Data source: OCHA Monitor database (accessed 13/12/2021).

Most of the confinements took place in the municipalities in the centre and south of the department, where there are active disputes between armed groups. However, there are also confinements in municipalities in the north (such as Acandí), where there are no disputes, showing that this is also a tool used by armed groups to control the population and not just a consequence of the fighting (OCHA 12/05/2021). Nor are confinements always the result of explicit prohibitions by armed groups. On the contrary, in Chocó, armed groups often arrive in new territories through small groups that slowly establish themselves in the community without necessarily presenting themselves as part of any organisation. After some time in the territory, they then warn the community that there are antipersonnel mines they have installed, and this generates confinement (KII 12/11/2021; Defensoría del Pueblo 06/03/2020; Radio Nacional de Colombia de Colombia 01/12/2021).

There are also cases of confinements that are not the result of orders or antipersonnel mines but rather decisions of the communities to protect the life of their members: if a member has been threatened, the community may decide to stay in the territory to prevent their death. Indigenous communities tend to be more resistant to displacement, so they are more likely to be affected by confinement (KII 12/11/2021; Infobae 20/11/2021).

In Chocó, confinements have steadily increased since 2017. Between 2018–2021, there has been a 201% increase in the number of people affected by confinement. As at 13 December 2021, there was already a 14% increase in the number of people affected by confinement compared to the whole of 2020.

Figure 2. Number of events and people affected by confinement in the department of Chocó (2016–2021)

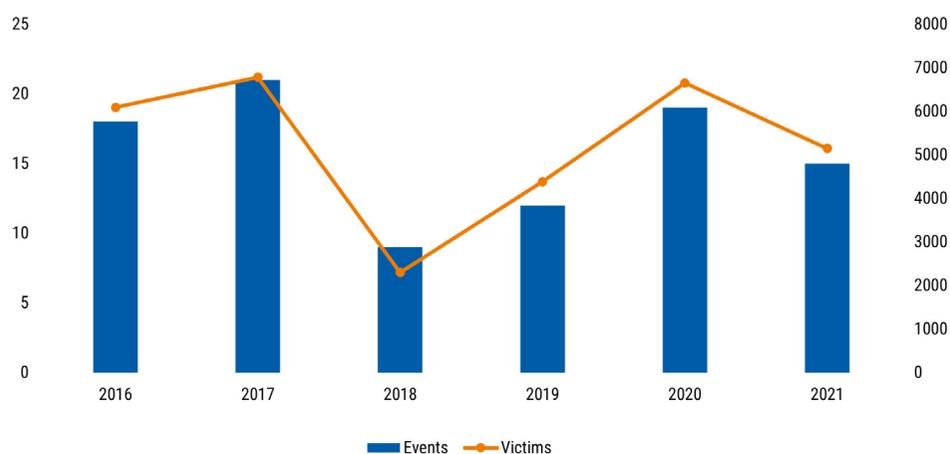


Data source: OCHA Monitor database (accessed 13/12/2021).

Forced displacement

Mass displacements: in Chocó, displaced communities often do not receive sufficient support from state institutions. As a result, communities are displaced as a last resort in situations of violence (KII 12/11/2021). Although mass displacement events have decreased between 2017 (21 events) and 2021 (15 events), the number of people affected has been increasing overall since 2018. While in 2018 at least 2,298 people were displaced in mass displacement in Chocó, as at 13 December 2021, at least 5,147 were affected (OCHA accessed 13/12/2021). As at 13 December, 2021 has seen a reduction in both the number of events (from 19 to 15) and the number of people affected (from 6,649 to 5,147) compared to 2020.

Figure 3. Events and people displaced in mass displacements in the department of Chocó (2016–2021)



Data source: OCHA Monitor database (accessed 13/12/2021).

The municipalities most affected by mass displacement are Bagadó, Istmina, and Medio San Juan. In Medio San Juan, most of the displacements were the result of several days of confinement caused by clashes between armed groups (Radio Nacional de Colombia 18/08/2021; OCHA accessed 13/12/2021). In Istmina, all registered IDPs were displaced as a result of an armed incursion by at least 100 men, who confined the population for several days (Radio Nacional de Colombia 22/09/2021). In Bagadó, there were two mass displacement events in 2021: one following the assassination of an indigenous leader on 2 March, which led to the displacement of at least 378 people (at two different times), and one caused by threats from an armed group (El Espectador 28/06/2021).

Table 2. People displaced in mass displacement in the department of Chocó during 2021, per municipality

MUNICIPALITY	IDPS
Medio Atrato	45
El Carmen de Atrato	49
Lloró	53
Bojayá	75
Bajo Baudó	118
Alto Baudó	280
El Litoral de San Juan	397
Bagadó	665
Istmina	942
Medio San Juan	2,523

Source: OCHA (30/11/2021).

Individual displacements: the number of individual displacements in Colombia is highly underreported – partly because not all those who are displaced individually report their case or access an institution that monitors displacement and partly because media attention tends to focus on mass displacement. However, people are frequently displaced in Chocó, either because of threats from armed groups or because they decide to move to protect their safety (KII 12/11/2021).

SECTORAL NEEDS

Protection: The dynamics of the armed conflict and the constant presence of armed groups in the department increase protection risks for both host and displaced communities. The population is exposed to the following issues:

Insecurity for IDP returnees: returning to their places of origin often generates fear for IDPs because fighting may last several days, and the risk of further fighting remains (La FM 06/03/2021; KII 15/12/2021). Returnees are often accompanied by security forces to avoid retaliation from armed groups (RCN Radio 19/08/2021).

Recruitment into armed groups: there is widespread underreporting of recruitment, as communities often do not report it for fear of reprisals from armed groups or because, in some cases, recruitment is voluntary (Verdad Abierta 05/01/2020; Noticias Caracol 10/02/2020). Recruitment methods vary according to the armed group: while the ELN tends to conduct forced recruitment, mainly against the indigenous population, the AGC often outsources recruitment through criminal gangs in urban areas and recruits young people through job offers in rural areas (KII 12/11/2021). Some indigenous youths are recruited to stay in their communities and report to the armed groups on the activities of social leaders or social organisations and the State (Verdad Abierta 05/01/2020; KII 12/11/2021). Armed groups may also use sexual violence against women – mothers or sisters of the young men they intend to recruit – to pressure them to join (OAS 10/05/2019; KII 16/12/2021). Chocó is one of the five departments in Colombia with the highest number of registered cases of forced recruitment (El Espectador 17/05/2020).

Faced with the risk of recruitment, some communities decide to move, as was the case with 60 young people between 13–17 years of age who had to leave the municipality of Litoral del San Juan because an armed group threatened to include them in their ranks (Radio Nacional de Colombia 08/09/2021). At least 20 young people have committed suicide in 2021 because of the risk of being recruited by armed groups (AA 28/07/2021; Caracol Radio 02/09/2021).

Lack of access to education increases the risk for children to be recruited, as schools are safe spaces where they used to spend half a day. With schools closed because of the pandemic, many children are more vulnerable to recruitment attempts. Many families move to prevent their children from being recruited (KII 23–25/08/2021; InSight Crime 28/08/2020).

In Chocó, there have been bombardments against armed group camps in which children have been killed (Blu Radio 07/10/2021; Save the Children 11/03/2021). Although the Colombian Government has defended the legitimacy of these actions by pointing out that the armed groups are responsible for recruiting the children (El Espectador 08/10/2021), this highlights protection needs for minors who are recruited.

The closure of schools during the pandemic and the lack of internet connection for some families meant that many children have been unable to continue their studies. Only 13% of the department of Chocó has internet coverage, and schools do not have the means to implement measures against the transmission of COVID-19 (El Espectador 30/06/2020). As a result, there were increased recruitment opportunities for armed groups, who offered a wage to support the family in the middle of the pandemic (El Tiempo 23/06/2020; The New Humanitarian 10/09/2020).

Antipersonnel mines and explosive devices: during 2021, there have been 32 accidents in Chocó caused by landmines or explosive devices used by armed groups (Protection Cluster 12/2021). With the exception of 2020, recent years have seen an upward trend in the number

of civilian casualties of antipersonnel mines (Acción contra Minas accessed 21/12/21). Armed groups install antipersonnel mines to impede the mobility of other armed groups or to prevent government forces from accessing their areas. The presence of antipersonnel mines often leads to confinement, as it prevents populations from moving around, reduces access to crops, and puts their health at risk (Radio Nacional de Colombia 01/12/2021).

WASH: 74% of the population of Chocó does not have access to drinking water (UN 18/11/2021). In some communities, mining has polluted river water – the main source of consumption – and there is no water treatment infrastructure, so it is not possible to make it drinkable (OCHA 13/02/2021; KII 11/12/2021). Given this situation, communities often consume rainwater, which increases the risk of skin infections and other waterborne diseases (OCHA 13/02/2021).

Communities often do not have waste management systems in place, so open defecation is common (Ministerio de Salud 10/2015). This is aggravated by the absence in several communities of sanitary facilities – even in schools and official institutions (MIRE 12/10/2021). This practice increases the risk of contracting intestinal diseases (PAHO 19/11/2019).

While clashes between armed groups do not directly cause problems related to hygiene and sanitation, they do aggravate the situation. Temporary shelters (usually improvised shelters) where IDPs are hosted are often overcrowded, there is no sewage system, and the water is not fit for human consumption. As Chocó has high levels of rainfall, humidity deteriorates sanitary facilities and can create conditions in which certain diseases flourish (KII 02/12/2021; KII 12/11/2021).

Health: in Chocó, access to healthcare is limited for a large part of the population. In March 2020, there were a total of 27 intensive care unit beds and six hospitals with the capacity to perform highly complex operations in the whole department (with a population of around 520,000 inhabitants) (Semana Rural 30/03/2020). Some municipalities have only one health centre, and some communities can take up to two days to access one – up to three days to reach a hospital in Quibdó – because of the lack of adequate transport routes (ConsultorSalud 04/03/2015). Hospitals often do not have the necessary equipment to function at full capacity, and medical workers are often paid late (El Espectador 11/02/2021).

Chocó is endemic for malaria, and because of its climatic conditions, skin diseases and diseases derived from poor water management are frequent (INS 11/2015). There are often musculoskeletal disorders from agricultural work and mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and post-harassment stress that go untreated because of the lack of specialists and psychologists in medical centres (KII 02/12/2021).

Some healthcare in times of emergency is provided by humanitarian organisations present in the department, but deployment to many of the rural territories can take up to three days (KII 02/12/2021).

Shelter, NFIs, and education: as a result of the multiple mass displacements in the department, IDPs often arrive at the homes of relatives or acquaintances or at temporary shelters. However, these temporary shelters often do not have sufficient capacity to accommodate everyone, resulting in overcrowding. This means that displaced families do not have sufficient access to goods such as blankets, clothing, food, hygiene items, and cooking utensils (Radio Nacional de Colombia 07/09/2021 and 22/09/2021).

Some of the shelters have been affected by the rainy season and have lost part of the shelter structure. Some people are sleeping on the ground, as beds and blankets have been damaged (MIRE 12/10/2021). This leads to the use of other buildings, such as churches and schools, which are not suitable for large influxes of people. The use of schools as shelters also disrupts access to education (El Colombiano 21/01/2021). Only 17% of households in the department have internet access (DANE 02/09/2021), so face-to-face is one of the only opportunities to access education. In the face of prolonged travel, education again comes to a standstill.

Many schools, even without being used as shelters, are dilapidated, without sanitary facilities, and far from communities. Transit to schools can be dangerous if they are in areas where armed groups are present (MIRE 12/10/2021).

Livelihoods: during periods of confinement, people are unable to access their livelihoods, and their ability to access humanitarian organisations is restricted (ELC 12/2020). As a result, communities' food security is affected because they are unable to access their crops. One of the coping mechanisms is to reduce the number of meals per day. Fishing is almost entirely disrupted, as it is an essentially nocturnal activity. During night-time curfews, communities are left without access to their livelihoods (KII 12/11/2021).

Food insecurity and nutrition: Chocó is one of the departments in Colombia with the highest levels of food insecurity: over 67.1% of its population suffers from some level of food insecurity (Ministerio de Salud 2015). In 2017, while the under-five mortality rate caused by and associated with undernutrition was 4.6 per 100,000 children in Colombia, it was 27.6 per 100,000 children in Chocó (INS 20/04/2018). This situation is aggravated by the high levels of poverty in the department: about 64% of the population in Chocó lives in poverty (DANE 29/04/2021), and this is one of the departments with the highest unemployment rates in Colombia (Ministerio de Comercio 11/2021; Semana Rural 03/07/2020). The lack of road infrastructure for the commercialisation of cultivated products affects the livelihoods of rural communities, especially farmers and indigenous people (OCHA 13/02/2021).

There is a link between food insecurity and armed conflict, as clashes between armed groups and the presence of landmines prevent the population from accessing food sources (crops, fishing, or hunting) (SDGF 2017). Events caused by violence, in particular forced displacement and confinement, have further affected people's access to food. Forced displacement occurs

on a larger scale in rural areas, affecting the livelihoods of the agricultural population and limiting access to and availability of food. Confinements affect people's access to farmland, which reduces agricultural capital and food diversity and increases food insecurity (GPC 12/2021).

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN CHOCÓ

Indigenous communities: while only about 11% of the population of Chocó identifies itself as indigenous (Ministerio de Salud n.d.), the indigenous population represents 66% of all people affected by confinement in the department (KII 12/11/2021; GPC 12/2021). Indigenous communities are often affected by confinement because the protection of their land is paramount, and displacement is only considered as a last resort (ACNUR 2009). Since 2017, at least 16,217 indigenous people in Chocó have been affected by forced displacement, and 13,446 have suffered confinement (Unidad para las Víctimas accessed 13/12/2021).

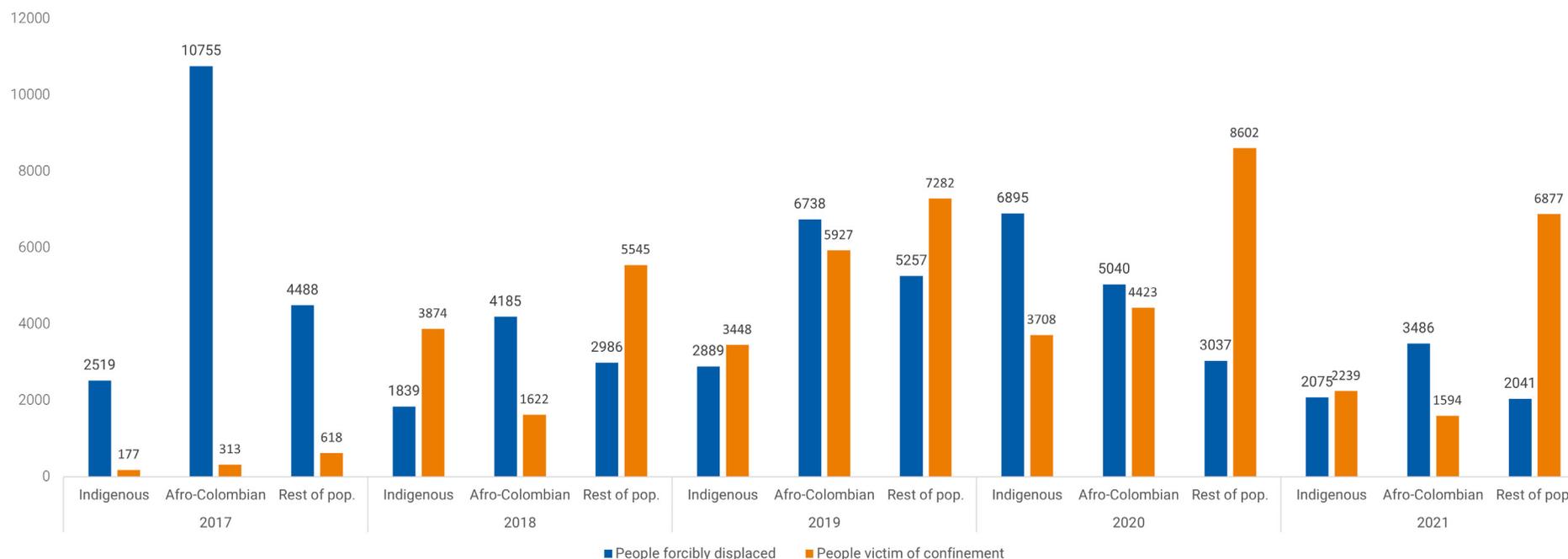
The indigenous population sometimes does not communicate in Spanish but in their native language, so it is necessary to involve translators to facilitate communication with the local population (MIRE 12/10/2021).

Afro-Colombian population: 73% of the population of Chocó identifies itself as Afrodescendant. In 2021, this population represents 34% of all people affected by confinement in the department. Since 2017, at least 30,204 people identified as Afro-Colombian have been forcibly displaced, and 13,879 have suffered confinement (Unidad para las Víctimas accessed 13/12/2021). Afro-Colombian communities in Chocó have historically lived from traditional and informal mining. This means that many of them are victims of extortion by armed groups trying to control the illegal mining market (FLM 18/07/2016).

Migrants and refugees: there are two migration dynamics in Chocó. On the one hand, the department hosts around 788 Venezuelan migrants and refugees (UNHCR accessed 13/12/2021). While this is not a large number compared to other departments in Colombia, armed groups have taken advantage of their presence to recruit them. Underreporting of these figures is also possible, since some of them are not registered in state databases. Some Venezuelans work in the cultivation of illicit crops. Some Venezuelan women are forced into prostitution and human trafficking networks (KII 12/11/2021; Defensoría del Pueblo 14/05/2019).

On the other hand, because of its connection to Panama through the Darién jungle, Chocó is used as a transit route to the United States for people on the move from Cuba, Haiti, and some African countries. Although these groups tend to pass mainly through Urabá Antioquia, anecdotal evidence suggests that armed groups in Chocó have also recruited some of these migrants and refugees (KII 12/11/2021; La FM 20/10/2021).

Figure 4. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian people forcibly displaced or victims of confinement (2017–2021)



Source: Unidad para las Víctimas (accessed 13/12/2021).

RESPONSE CAPACITY

In Chocó, there are 27 humanitarian organisations that are part of the Local Coordination Team. There are 13 UN agencies, eight international NGOs, four national NGOs, and nine observer or allied organisations. The response capacity of the State is overwhelmed by humanitarian emergencies, so in several sectors (such as health and WASH), it is these organisations that implement humanitarian response (KII 02/12/2021). The number of humanitarian emergencies resulting from violence and natural disasters has overwhelmed the institutional response capacity of the State and compromises the ability of humanitarian organisations to respond adequately (ELC 12/2020).

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Access constraints affect the ability of humanitarian organisations to reach affected populations and respond to their needs in the department of Chocó. They also influence the ability of affected people to access humanitarian aid, as well as their mobility within their communities (including access to markets or basic goods), with implications for their livelihoods.

Security constraints: Although NGOs can generally carry out their activities without major interference from armed groups, some organisations have been stopped and questioned by armed groups at checkpoints. In Chocó, no cases of direct violence against personnel have been recorded (KII 12/11/2021; KII 02/12/2021; OCHA Monitor accessed 21/12/2021), but security concerns sometimes lead to humanitarian organisations refraining from accessing affected communities. This can be a result of active fighting, presence of armed groups, and communities advising humanitarian organisations not to enter because of insecurity (KII 12/11/2021; KII 02/12/2021).

Geographical and climatic conditions: many communities in Chocó can only be reached by air or river transport because of the poor conditions of unpaved roads. Map 2 shows that, with the exception of Quibdó, there are very few paved roads in the department. Air transport is expensive, so river transport is usually chosen. However, during the summer, rivers are dry, and transportation becomes difficult (KII 02/12/2021). Humanitarian response can take days to reach remote communities. During the rainy season, flooding caused by the rise of some rivers can also block access roads to certain municipalities (Caracol Radio 14/11/2020).

Access to aid by populations in need: clashes between armed groups – mainly in the municipalities of Istmina, Medio San Juan, and Litoral de San Juan – have remained intense throughout most of 2021 (El Tiempo 17/08/2021). During these clashes, non-combatant residents are often confined to their homes and left without mechanisms for complaints and institutional attention since there is no way to verify the confinements and activate assistance. In some cases, the confinements have only been confirmed after one or two months, during which time the populations have remained without any assistance (KII 12/11/2021).

OUTLOOK

Disputes between armed groups over control of territories in central and southern Chocó have not ended. It is likely that they will continue until one armed group manages to consolidate its hegemonic position or until there is some distribution of territory. The main consequences of these clashes are confinement and forced displacement.

In 2022, as it is an election year, violence against social and community leaders may increase. During 2021, homicides, displacements, attacks, and kidnappings against these leaders have already increased compared to other pre-election years (MOE 13/11/2021). It is possible that the trend will continue or increase in 2022.

Prolonged confinements or repeated confinements in the same area are likely to increase food insecurity because of the long duration of livelihood disruptions. The use of antipersonnel mines by armed groups is likely to increase, restricting access to crops and posing a safety risk.

In the context of the territorial expansion of armed groups and their control over the population, forced recruitments will likely continue, including of minors. This would lead to increased protection needs and individual displacements.

INFORMATION GAPS

Individual displacement: the only data on forced displacement handled with any degree of confidence is related to mass displacement. As it is often not reported, many individually displaced people cannot access assistance (OCHA accessed 21/12/2021; KII 15/12/2021). In the case of Chocó, there is no reliable data on the number of individual IDPs, so underreporting prevents an understanding of the magnitude of the humanitarian emergency.

Gender-based violence: despite several allegations of sexual violence against women in the context of the conflict in Chocó, little evidence has been collected to understand this issue in the region (OAS 10/05/2019; Humanas 11/09/2019; CIVP, Foro Interétnico Solidaridad Chocó, and Viva la Ciudadanía 11/11/2019). There are few efforts to systematise information on gender-based

violence. There are also few complaints because survivors are afraid of being assaulted and/or because they are not aware of the reporting routes (KII 16/12/2021; KII 13/12/2021).

Migrants and refugees affected by armed conflict: as Venezuelan and Haitian refugees and migrants do not always have regular migration status, access to humanitarian assistance for those who are affected by the conflict is also likely to be limited. There is little data available on how many refugees and migrants are affected by the conflict, for example by forced recruitment.

Map 2. Map of roads in the department of Chocó



Source: Instituto Nacional de Vías (accessed 21/12/2021).