



Source: ACAPS

Methodology

ACAPS identified five risks to the humanitarian context and published an overview report in November 2021 looking at the following six months. After monitoring each risk and its corresponding indicators and reviewing any relevant developments since November, ACAPS analysts and technical experts were able to update the risk outlook, creating the basis for this risk update.

KEY RISKS FOR COLOMBIA

1. Significant changes in territorial control trigger an escalation in conflict resulting in increased humanitarian needs.

In Chocó and Valle del Cauca, shifts in control over strategic areas for irregular economies, drug trafficking, and the population, as well as clashes between the Gaitanist Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AGC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), have led to displacement and confinement.

The AGC has begun expanding into and gaining predominance in previously ELN-controlled areas in the south of Chocó department, particularly in the San Juan subregion (CIJP 19/01/2022; Pares 21/01/2022). In Valle del Cauca, the AGC took control of the ELN-dominated rural area of Bajo Calima after clashes between November 2021 and January 2022 (Pares 21/01/2022). The clashes also displaced around 870 people and confined over 1,200 in southern Chocó. Restrictions in crop access have increased the need of displaced and confined people for food assistance. There were reports of shelter needs, medical assistance needs (including psychosocial support), and protection needs for IDPs (OCHA 25/01/2022 a). In Bajo Calima, around 2,800 people were displaced to Cali, with IDPs needing food assistance, psychosocial support, and protection assistance (OCHA 25/01/2022 b). Displacements and confinements in southern Chocó and Bajo Calima are likely to increase over the next months as a result of continued clashes.

In other departments, such as Cauca and Arauca, there have been clashes between different armed groups but without significant changes in territorial control by non-state armed groups. Regardless, the humanitarian impact has been significant. In Cauca, mobility restrictions between December 2021 and February 2022 affected more than 50,000 people, causing food and fuel shortages in municipalities such as Argelia (OCHA accessed 25/02/2022; Blu Radio 11/12/2021; Caracol Radio 06/12/2021). In Arauca, the clashes displaced more than 4,000 people and affected the mobility of more than 120,000 people between January–February 2022 (OCHA accessed 25/02/2022).

2. Escalating conflict leads to a significant deterioration of humanitarian access to the affected populations.

This risk is materialising most notably in Arauca and Cauca departments, where the escalation of the conflict between ELN and FARC dissidents has significantly reduced humanitarian access.

In Arauca (Colombia) and Apure (Venezuela), clashes between the ELN and FARC dissidents started at the end of December 2021 and intensified in January 2022 (ACH 12/01/2022). As at mid-February, the escalation of violence had killed over 80 people and caused displacement in both Venezuela and Colombia. Overall, high insecurity, especially in rural areas, has constrained humanitarian response and access to information (OCHA 03/02/2022; ACH 12/01/2022 and 30/01/2022).

In Saravena, Arauca, armed groups have targeted local government buildings and attacked a human rights organisation with a car bomb (WOLA 31/01/2022; France 24 20/01/2022). They have also threatened hospitals, human rights defenders, and humanitarian workers because of their supposed alignment with whichever group's adversary (SWI 02/02/2022; WOLA 31/01/2022; France 24 20/01/2022; Semana 31/01/2022). Some medical personnel in Arauca have quit and left the region out of fear for their security (Infobae 27/01/2022).

In Cauca, clashes between FARC dissidents and the ELN have constrained humanitarian access through an 'armed strike' (a strategy that armed groups impose to control movement in an area). The 'armed strike' on 4 December 2021 affected over 50,000 people and restrained the mobility and entrance of food, gasoline, and medicine (OCHA 16/12/2021).

Finally, between 23 and 26 February 2022, the ELN held an 'armed strike' at the national level during which violent attacks were reported in multiple departments such as Norte de Santander, Santander, Cauca, Casanare, and Chocó (Insight Crime 02/03/2022).

During the 'armed strike', humanitarian missions were suspended in several departments, for example in Arauca, Vichada, and Valle del Cauca (KII 07/03/2022).

3. During the six months leading up to the 2022 elections violence against political and social leaders increases and new protests emerge, with humanitarian consequences.

During the electoral period, violence against social and political leaders has increased, and the risk of further threats and murders continues. At the same time, there have been no major large-scale protests since November 2021, although the risk of large-scale protests increases as the election dates near and discontent for social and economic inequalities rises.

Colombia will hold elections for Congress on 13 March 2022 and for the presidency on 29 May. In January and February 2022, there were 89 acts of violence, including threats and assassinations, against political and social leaders, including congress candidates, which is a 35% increase compared to the same period before the 2018 elections (MOE 01/03/2022 and 01/02/2022).

From January to mid-February 2022, 24 social leaders were killed (INDEPAZ 02/02/2022). Threats against social leaders are likely underreported because of factors such as fear of reporting and a lack of institutional response (Ombudsman's Office 17/02/2022).

People in some of the Special Transitory Circumscription of Peace (CTEP) municipalities have faced threats and experienced the buying of votes (El Tiempo 28/01/2022). Some social leaders have asked for protection from the Government during their electoral campaigns (La Silla Vacía 28/11/2022; El Espectador 21/01/2022).

The 167 municipalities corresponding to CTEP zones, especially in the Pacific Coast, are of particular concern. Both the civil society platform Electoral Observation Mission (MOE) and the Ombudsman's Office highlight CTEP municipalities to be at high risk of violence in connection with the elections because of armed groups seeking territorial and social control (MOE 24/01/2022 and 01/03/2022; Ombudsman's Office 17/02/2022).

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4. The strengthening of armed groups in Venezuela and the increase of armed confrontations in the border corridors between Colombia and Venezuela result in displacements towards Colombia.

This risk has started to materialise. Early January 2022, the FARC dissident group 10th Front and the ELN began to clash in the border areas of Arauca department in Colombia and Apure in Venezuela (Infobae 03/01/2022; Efecto Cocuyo 20/01/2022). Until late 2021, the 10th Front and the ELN had territorial division agreements in different areas in Apure and Arauca. These agreements likely broke down, possibly as a result of the 10th Front's plans to expand territorial presence (Insight Crime 18/01/2022; FIP 24/01/2022; ACAPS 31/01/2022).

The escalation of violence has displaced over 1,400 people from Apure to Vichada department (Colombia), including Venezuelans and returning Colombians (MIRE 09/02/2022). Over 570 indigenous people are among the displaced (MIRE 25/02/2022). Around 320 people were also displaced from Apure to Arauca in January–February (GIFMM 11/02/2022). People fleeing armed clashes and the risk of forced recruitment by these armed groups into Colombian territory require humanitarian assistance (Infobae 15/01/2022; Ombudsman's Office 14/01/2022; Versión Final 19/01/2022). As of early February, temporary shelter for displaced people and food assistance are needed. Health services are constrained due to the lack of medical personnel and supplies. Children have been affected by lack of access to education, and are at risk of forced recruitment by armed groups (MIRE 09/02/2022; El Espectador 07/02/2022). Clashes might continue, making displacements likely to increase in the next months.

KEY RISKS FOR COLOMBIA

5. Political instability, insecurity, and humanitarian needs in Haiti lead to more arrivals of Haitian migrants and refugees in Colombia, where they are affected by the conflict.

The risk of renewed increase in arrivals and hold-up of Haitians in Colombia has not materialised but remains a concern given that the political, socioeconomic, and humanitarian situation in Haiti continues to deteriorate. 46% of people in the country depend on humanitarian assistance. Insecurity and gang violence have been increasing since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021 (Insecurity Insight 28/01/2022; TNH 07/02/2022). Continued currency depreciation and high fuel costs are leading to high food prices, driving food insecurity (FEWS Net 31/01/2022).

Overall, the number of Haitians passing through Colombia to reach Panama has significantly decreased (France24 02/02/2022). As at January 2022, migrants from Haiti were continuing to arrive in Colombia and travelling along different routes to cross into Central America. The route via Necoclí, Antioquia department, was primarily frequented previously, but in recent months, migrants had also started trying to reach Panama via the Pacific Coast, which is more costly. As at mid-January, 100–150 people per week reached Panama through this route (Caracol 19/01/2022; Infobae 20/01/2022). In January, of around 4,400 migrants registered in Panama, some 650 were Haitians (El País 01/03/2022).