

# COLOMBIA

## Peace deal at risk from renewed violence



### KEY FACTS

Population: **50.9 million**

**6.7 million** people in need of humanitarian aid

**5.6 million** people internally displaced (second highest figure in the world)

**1.8 million** Venezuelans hosted

**55%** of Venezuelans in Colombia facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC 3+)

**65** (of 195 countries) for capability to prevent and mitigate epidemics

**104th** (of 167 countries) for women's equality

**89th** (of 181 countries) for resilience to climate change

**3/5** score for severity of access constraints

**18%** of funding received for 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan (lowest funding rate in the world for a country HRP)

Above: Individuals observe social distancing as they queue for IRC-provided health services at a center in Cúcuta, Colombia near the border with Venezuela.

### PROBABILITY

**6** HUMAN THREAT

**8** NATURAL THREAT

### IMPACT

**4** CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE

**5** EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION

**Colombia is a new addition to Watchlist this year, rising to the IRC's countries of concern for 2021 largely due to increasing violence that threatens the 2016 peace accord as well as COVID-19's devastating impact on displaced Venezuelans and Colombian host communities.**

COVID-19 is driving both a new economic crisis and rising conflict activity in Colombia. Criminal and armed groups are seeking to exploit the pandemic to expand their influence and, unchecked, the violence threatens fragile progress made in the peace accord between the government and the country's main armed group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), to end the country's decades-long civil conflict. The economic impacts of COVID-19 are also exacerbating food insecurity, particularly for displaced Venezuelans, and are contributing to a sharp rise in xenophobia towards Venezuelans that, together with escalating violence from armed groups, sets the stage for greater social unrest and violence in 2021.

"Displaced Venezuelans in Colombia are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19's impacts on livelihoods and food insecurity and face little access to social services. Thousands of Venezuelans are returning to Venezuela. Our clients tell us if they're going to die, they would rather die in their native country. I am moved to tears by the crisis and how my team has adapted during the pandemic, helping thousands of people each day and maintaining hope. The reality is that the situation won't improve unless the international community increases its support for Colombia."

- Clara Gamiz de Luna  
Deputy Director of Programs,  
IRC Colombia and Venezuela



## HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2021

- ▶ **Armed groups are taking advantage of the pandemic to expand their reach, leading to rising violence.** Violence had already been rising in Colombia prior to COVID-19 but armed groups have exploited the disease outbreak and related restrictions on movement and stretched government capacity. These groups include dissident factions of the FARC and the country's other main guerrilla group, the National Liberation Army (ELN). Violence linked to armed and criminal groups is most prevalent in areas that were previously controlled by the FARC, particularly any that are strategic locations for illegal mining and drug-trafficking. In some places, armed groups have enforced their own "quarantines" to control populations. There was a 32% increase in the number of displacement events in the first half of 2020 ([OCHA](#)), a 113% increase in forced recruitments of children and a 63% increase in attacks on health workers and medical missions during the first three quarters of 2020 ([OCHA](#)). 68 massacres have occurred in 2020 – the highest number since 2014 ([Indepez](#)). As the national budget is stretched to respond to COVID-19, the implementation of the peace accord may be further slowed. Rising conflict would drive greater internal displacement, forced recruitments, and constraints on humanitarian access in the affected areas in 2021.
- ▶ **Lost livelihoods will drive massive increases in food insecurity.** COVID-19 containment measures eliminated livelihoods for many people given much of the population worked in the informal sector, doubling unemployment to 21.4% ([International Crisis Group](#)). Venezuelans' needs in particular are likely to deepen as nearly 60% lack regular status, which would enable legal work, and they are excluded from national systems like social safety nets. ([R4V](#)). In an IRC survey of Venezuelans at the border just two months into the pandemic, every respondent said they had lost a steady income ([IRC](#)). As a result of lost income, the number of people experiencing food insecurity is projected to double, with 84% of displaced populations at risk of food insecurity ([OCHA](#)). At the same time, the HRP for Colombia is the most underfunded in the world so far in 2020 (excluding COVID-19 intersectoral appeals), challenging humanitarians' ability to meet rising needs ([FTS](#)).
- ▶ **The economic crisis is likely to exacerbate social tensions and drive greater xenophobia towards Venezuelans.** Colombia is the second-largest host country in the world, welcoming 1.8 million Venezuelans and adopting policies early on to support their integration ([UNHCR](#)). However, IRC staff report rising xenophobia towards displaced Venezuelans and a shift in attitude against welcoming more Venezuelans in the country as the pandemic persists, which is likely to worsen as the situation deteriorates in Colombia. Social tensions could worsen in late 2021 as border restrictions and lockdowns ease and the number of Venezuelans entering Colombia is likely to drastically increase; over 200,000 people are expected to enter the country by the end of 2020 ([UNHCR](#)). Much larger movements can be expected in 2021.

### THE IRC IN COLOMBIA

The IRC supports displaced Venezuelans and host communities in Colombia. Our response includes protecting children and adolescents with psychosocial services and education, protecting and empowering women, providing access to healthcare and supporting people's economic well being. In response to COVID-19, the IRC set up mobile health clinics at four sites across the country, including at the Venezuela border, expanded cash programming and adapted existing protection and health services to enable remote assistance. In 2020, the IRC launched the Colombia instance of the Global Signpost project, [InfoPalante](#), a digital platform to help displaced populations access information on civil and legal rights, jobs, access to healthcare and COVID-19. The IRC is also in the process of building relationships with local partners at Colombia-Ecuador border. Learn more about the [IRC's Colombia response](#).

