

Alert note

Colombian Migration Crisis

(13 July 2022)

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Forum: ACT Forum Colombia

Type of emergency: Migration crisis

Date of emergency (if rapid onset): protracted migration crisis

1. The nature of the emergency
The migration crisis is a regional protracted crisis that widely impacts the LAC, with specific humanitarian challenges for migrants in transit, such as the ones predominately observed on the border between Colombia and Panamá. It is worth mentioning, that migrants in transit are among the most vulnerable, whose humanitarian needs are neglected the most, due to the lack of visibility, the endurance of their journey (many of them have crossed oceans and whole continents to reach the U.S as their final destination) and, the high under-reporting.
2. The impact and scale of the emergency (please include your source of information)
According to OCHA, in 2,021, 126,675 people crossed the border between Colombia and Panama through the Darien Gap ¹ . This figure is similar to the official report provided by the Servicio Nacional de Fronteras de Panamá (Senafrent): 134.000 people arrived in Panamá, from which 29,000 were children ² . Notwithstanding high under-reporting, local authorities and national and international NGOs located in the area have identified that many people from several countries chose the Darien Gap as a viable migration route, despite the great challenges imposed by the geography of the place and the conflict dynamics present in the territory: In the first three months of 2022, 13,425 people crossed through the Gap—at a rate of more than double when compared with the 5,622 people who crossed in the same period in 2,021 ³ . As per the Colombian Ombudsman in his last field visit to Necoclí (Antioquia) in June 2022, the dire humanitarian situation is driven by mixed migratory flows, that sum up more than 19,000 refugees and migrants (about 25% of them are children ^{4,5}) coming from Haiti, Cuba, Venezuela, and some African countries, who are stranded in the municipality of Necocli seeking to reach Central America and the US. Some other trends identified by the Ombudsman and UN agencies such as UNICEF are as follows: i) migrant profile has changed as most of the migrant population stagnated come from Venezuela, extremely impoverished as many of them come from countries as far as Chile on foot, by bus and lack the resources to sustain themselves and pay the high cost of crossing the border; ii) the increase of migrant families with children, in comparison to 2,021 when the predominant demographic group migrating were young male individuals ⁶ and, iii) the most concerning trend, the increase of non-accompanied children. According to UNICEF, the number of non-accompanied children has increased twofold in 2,022 with 169 children aged 0 to 17 years and 41 children aged 13 to 17 years ⁷ , who are more vulnerable to human trafficking, exploitation and, use and forced recruitment by illegal groups. Up to date, 5,000 children have crossed the border since January 2,022 ⁸ .

¹Rapid Needs Assessment conducted by HIAS in Necoclí from the 13th to the 16th of December.

² <https://www.defensoria.gov.co/es/nube/comunicados/11040/Defensor-del-Pueblo-adelantar%C3%A1-visita-a-Necocl%C3%AD-para-revisar-situaci%C3%B3n-de-ni%C3%B1os-migrantes-no-acompa%C3%B1ados-Derechos-Humanos-Defensor%C3%ADa-Del-Pueblo-Defensor-del-Pueblo-Carlos-Camargo-Refugiados-Migrantes-Atenci%C3%B3n-Humanitaria.htm>

³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/filling-gap-humanitarian-support-and-alternative-pathways-migrants-colombias-edge>

⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/panama/more-91000-migrants-have-crossed-darien-gap-way-north-america-year>

⁵ <https://www.sfchronicle.com/news/article/Panam-m-s-ni-os-migrantes-cruzan-el-Darien-17253675.php>

⁶ <https://www.defensoria.gov.co/es/nube/comunicados/11040/Defensor-del-Pueblo-adelantar%C3%A1-visita-a-Necocl%C3%AD-para-revisar-situaci%C3%B3n-de-ni%C3%B1os-migrantes-no-acompa%C3%B1ados-Derechos-Humanos-Defensor%C3%ADa-Del-Pueblo-Defensor-del-Pueblo-Carlos-Camargo-Refugiados-Migrantes-Atenci%C3%B3n-Humanitaria.htm>

⁷ <https://www.defensoria.gov.co/es/nube/comunicados/11040/Defensor-del-Pueblo-adelantar%C3%A1-visita-a-Necocl%C3%AD-para-revisar-situaci%C3%B3n-de-ni%C3%B1os-migrantes-no-acompa%C3%B1ados-Derechos-Humanos-Defensor%C3%ADa-Del-Pueblo-Defensor-del-Pueblo-Carlos-Camargo-Refugiados-Migrantes-Atenci%C3%B3n-Humanitaria.htm>

⁸ <https://www.sfchronicle.com/news/article/Panam-m-s-ni-os-migrantes-cruzan-el-Darien-17253675.php>

The humanitarian situation has worsened for refugees and migrants as well as host communities: local authorities are overwhelmed, transportation prices are dramatically increasing, public and social services are collapsed (mainly healthcare and WASH services), the creation of illegal migration routes and changes in socio-cultural dynamics that trigger negative coping mechanisms, mainly in adolescents who are dropping out school to seek irregular sources of income and the local economy is turning into a dollarization process where migrants are charged more and in dollars instead of Colombian pesos. Besides, the government of Panama only allows the entry of 500 people daily, contributing to the stagnation of refugees and migrants in the neighboring towns. This kind of restriction fosters the creation and use of irregular crossing points controlled by illegal groups and, subsequently, the deepening of the vulnerabilities and protection risk for the migrant population and host communities. Likewise, this restriction pushes many migrants to opt for alternative transportation means, namely irregular vessels that transport migrants in perilous conditions that already have caused casualties: on the 11th of June in the Urabá Gulf it was reported the sinking of a boat transporting 29 people. As result, 3 women and 1 child were drowned⁹.

3. Local and national capacity

The emergency response is currently being coordinated by Municipal Authority (Office Mayor) and has established a Unified Command Group to tackle this migration crisis in March 2,022. Some organizations such as Red Cross (by providing health services through a Mobile Unit), Pastoral Social (which has a permanent presence in the area), UNHCR, and NGO Coordination Board have agreed upon some coordination activities to identify key points of attention and communication sharing. Moreover, the Office of the Attorney-General (La Personería) has coordinated with the above-mentioned organizations and the IOM to follow up on the work and services offered by each organization through a mapping of actors and care routes in the territory to facilitate and strengthen the current services referral mechanism. On the other hand, a local Grupo Interagencial sobre Flujos Migratorios Mixtos (GIFMM)¹⁰ has been set in Necoclí since May 2,022 with two permanent professionals. To ensure that the humanitarian response is well-coordinated and complementary, the ACT Forum Colombia will take part in meetings with all relevant sector stakeholders and establish an open line of communication with crisis-affected people and communities to ensure a humanitarian response based on participation and feedback.

4. Key needs and gaps

The uncontrolled migration in the town of Necocli has created a state of crisis in which local authorities are not enabled to provide a proper humanitarian response. In terms of **Health**, many migrants reported respiratory-related illnesses, skin infections, physical injuries, and post-traumatic stress, among others. Many expecting mothers do not have access to healthcare facilities, being forced to give birth in perilous conditions. Most of the migrants have reported not being vaccinated against COVID-19. **Shelter** conditions are precarious: migrants live in poorly constructed and overcrowded places, without proper WASH facilities, where up to 8 people share the same room and struggle to maintain basic hygiene. For women and girls, these places are not suitable, especially for menstrual hygiene. **Protection** issues identified by the MIRA are the following: i) No access to life-saving information on migration routes, SGBV prevention, and related care services, shelter, among others; ii) one out of three families mentioned to have encountered non-State armed groups during their journey, have experienced abuse of power by the national army and the exacerbation of violence by the Panamanian authorities; iii) more than 80% of refugees and migrants are exposed to attacks, robbery, and SGBV (three people declared have been subject of sexual abuse); iv) family separation during their journey through the Darien Gap; v) migrants are highly vulnerable to be used, utilized and forced recruited by organized criminal groups, mostly children; and vi) sexual exploitation of girls and women. Regarding **Nutrition and Food Security**, most people reported having two meals per day on average. Venezuelan migrants are the most vulnerable group as they are approaching the border, their income depletes dramatically, which led a dire situation where there struggle to find income sources, and, by extension, purchase nutritious food as prices have been raised by distortions in the local economy (the unprecedented migration inflow).

⁹ <https://www.defensoria.gov.co/es/nube/comunicados/11042/Defensor-del-Pueblo-advierte-cambios-en-din%C3%A1micas-migratorias-en-la-zona-del-Urab%C3%A1-Dari%C3%A9n-Necocl%C3%AD-Defensor%C3%ADa-derechos-migrantes.htm>

¹⁰ The Inter-Agency Group on Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM in Spanish) was established in late 2016 in Colombia. It is co-led by IOM and UNHCR. It functions as a coordination space for the response to the refugee and migrant situation in Colombia. It has 75 members, including UN agencies, international and local NGOs, and the Red Cross Movement.

Please indicate whether you are considering:

	Indicate your intention with an X below
Rapid Response Fund (<i>intended for small and medium-scale emergencies</i>)	
Appeal (<i>intended for large-scale emergencies</i>)	X

If you indicate an intention to launch an appeal, the secretariat will activate an Emergency Steering Committee meeting within two working days on receipt of this alert.

Capacity details of forum members with the intention to respond are given below.

ACT Member	Geographical focus	Sectors of expertise	Support required	Estimated Budget range
Fundación de Diaconia PAZOS	Necoclí, Antioquia	Emergency response	Financial	USD 400,000

5. Potential responses

Fundación de Diaconia PAZOS (FunPAZOS) is an active member of ACT Alliance, with a sound experience in emergency response that has operated two RRFs, one with the Venezuelan population in Barranquilla (Atlantico) and the other landslide with victims in Dabeiba (Antioquia), with optimal results in both interventions. FunPAZOS has a team of professionals in Protection, WASH, Shelter, and Food Security. For this appeal, FunPAZOS will work closely with CORSOC, an organization that has a history of more than 30 years of operating in the country, and in recent years its humanitarian action has been recognized by organizations such as TearFund at the national level. Moreover, FunPAZOS will seek to establish and/or consolidate partnerships with local and international NGOs such as World Vision, an organization recognized worldwide for its humanitarian capabilities, and its interventions are backed by the high standards that are recognized in the national humanitarian architecture. DKH and LWF are two ACT members who have always supported FunPAZOS and are committed to providing further support for an eventual appeal.

In Necoclí (Antioquia) there is a pressing need to provide immediate assistance to minimize loss of lives and protection-related risks and ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are covered first. Local members have envisaged providing humanitarian relief through the adaptation of a temporary shelter that meets the habitability conditions. It is also expected to provide humanitarian assistance in food security (delivery of CVA), WASH (delivery of hygiene kits), and Protection (including SGBV and Child Protection, through psychosocial support and the strengthening of the local referral mechanism). As this is a protracted crisis, the aim is to implement a one-year operation with a fund of USD400,000. During this year, coordination and synergy with local organizations and authorities to strengthen protection and risk management systems will be sought in order to find durable solutions for both the migrant population and the host community. For this intervention, it is expected to reach 2,000 migrant families.