

HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES 2019



ICRC



Laura Aguilera Jiménez / ICRC

Between war and indifference

The humanitarian situation in Colombia is increasingly complex as a result of the conflicts developing in the country's most remote and impoverished areas. For many inhabitants of these regions, peace never arrived and, in many cases, **security conditions have seriously deteriorated**. "In Tumaco, post-conflict is more difficult than the conflict itself," I was recently told. Unfortunately, this is not the only area in which the situation has worsened.

The reality is that in Colombia one cannot speak of post-conflict. Currently, there is not one, but at least five armed conflicts in the country: four of them between the Colombian State and organized armed groups, namely the National Liberation Army (ELN), the People's Liberation Army (EPL), the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AGC) and structures of the FARC-EP Eastern Bloc that did not join the peace process, and the fifth between the ELN and the EPL. These armed conflicts, in addition to the violence perpetrated by different groups in the countryside and in the cities, continue to affect the day-to-day life of millions of Colombians.

Furthermore, border dynamics that have clear potential for conflict and the humanitarian drama to which migrants are subject, which will probably worsen in 2019, are a serious cause for concern. **The coexistence of migration and conflict is a complicated equation** that undoubtedly exposes extremely vulnerable people to a violence that no human being should experience.

In 2019, we will continue to work to overcome the lack of response to enforced disappearances. The relatives of over 80,000 missing people in the country are still waiting for information, which comes in dribs and drabs, more than two years after the creation of the Missing Persons Search Unit was announced.

I would like to strongly emphasize that enforced disappearance is not a tragedy of the past but an unjustifiable act that is still happening today. I can say it openly: **all arm bearers in the country have used and still use enforced disappearance to sow fear** and to control populations and territories. They must understand, once and for all, that in war not everything goes. Respecting international humanitarian law is not an option. Therefore, the search for missing persons as a result of armed conflicts and the prevention of new disappearances constitute an unconditional obligation for all the groups that are or were part of these conflicts.

For the situation to change, the commitment and will of the State, of armed groups and of civil society as a whole are needed. Colombia can, and should, be a country in which fear and violence do not dominate the daily lives of millions of its inhabitants.

"We cannot speak of post-conflict: there are currently at least five armed conflicts in Colombia."

Christoph Harnisch
Head of the ICRC Delegation in Colombia



Andrés Morroy / ICRC

OUR CURRENT CONCERNS

If we could take an X-ray of Colombia that summarizes 2018, the result would be a map of regions darkened by armed conflict and violence. There is still a long way to go before we can talk about overcoming so many years of pain.



During 2018, our teams in the field observed the harsh humanitarian consequences of the combination of violations of humanitarian norms and the absence of the State in many areas of Colombia that have been affected by the violence.

The situation significantly deteriorated on the Pacific coast and in large parts of the east and south of the country where regular abuses committed against the civilian population by all the armed groups are proliferating.

Amid the reorganization of armed groups, **the violence that the country dreamed of leaving behind after the signing of the Peace Agreement of 2016 with the FARC-EP has increased.**

Two facts are a sad reminder of this trend: in 2018, the Unit for the Victims Assistance and Reparation recorded a substantial increase in mass displacements, and the number of victims of anti-personnel mines and explosive devices tripled.

This trend is compounded by a shameful list of abuses that seem to be far from over: targeted killings, threats, disappearances, sexual violence, use of minors by all arm bearers, disrespect for health workers, among other things.

Last year alone, we helped more than 170 families cover the funeral expenses of their loved ones who died in the conflict. While we will continue to support and guide victims to the best of our abilities, **the State must act diligently to put an end to this ceaseless course of violence.**

Isolated from the public debate, for Colombians who still live amid violence, the promises of a better life seem very distant. That is why it is so important that the State has an integral presence, beyond its troops, in the regions where it is most needed. Arm bearers, for their part, must ensure that their members respect civilians and keep them out of hostilities.

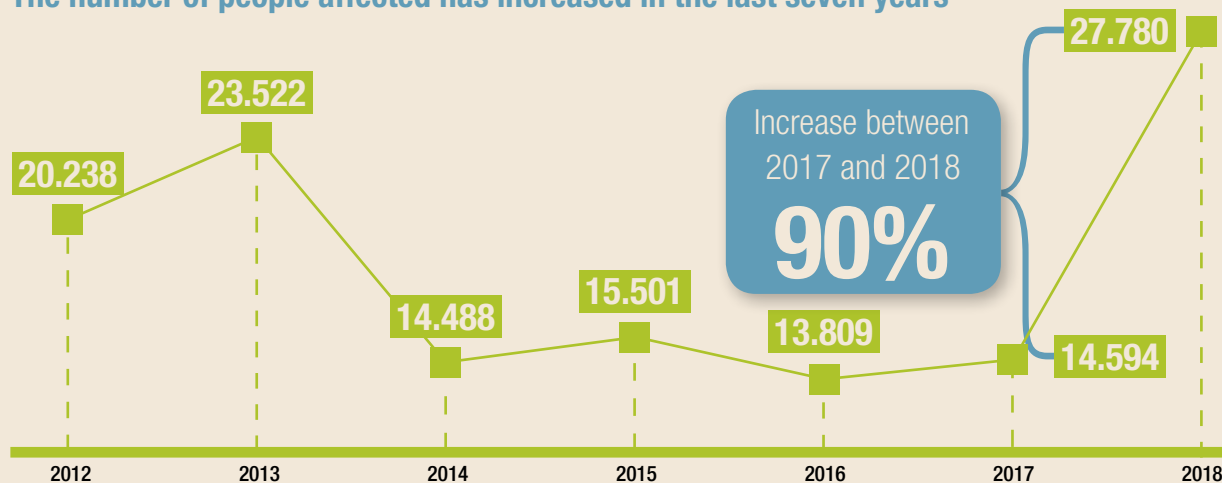
On the other hand, in 2018 we recorded abuses committed by gangs who exert social control and perpetrate various forms of armed violence in urban neighbourhoods and their peripheries. Buenaventura, Tumaco, Quibdó, Medellín, Cali and Cúcuta are six cities in which we are working tirelessly and **are witnessing the impact of the coexistence of 'old' wars and new armed groups.**

As a humanitarian organization, we remain committed to the victims, but our case-by-case support will never be enough. To keep hope from fading away, the entire country must reject persistent violations of humanitarian norms.



Mass displacement* is not a phenomenon of the past

The number of people affected has increased in the last seven years



Source: Follow up of alleged incidents of mass displacement, Sub-Directorate for Prevention and Emergency Care - UARIV

* Displacements of ten or more families.

80,000 questions

Since the signing of the Peace Agreement in November 2016, **we have documented one new case of disappearance linked to the conflict and armed violence every four days**. This enabled us to confirm that all arm bearers present in the country are still using enforced disappearances as part of their tactics. Our data represent only a small part of what is happening across the national territory and, therefore, cannot be interpreted as true figures. However, they do confirm that enforced disappearances are not a phenomenon of the past, but a terrible and unjustifiable reality of everyday life.

In 2018, we monitored more than 2,500 cases of disappearances and obtained information on the fate of 216 of these people. However, these efforts are just a drop in the ocean: the National Centre for Historical

Memory estimates that there are more than 80,000 people missing as a result of the conflict. This gap between these results and the magnitude of the problem makes it clear that the search for missing people remains Colombia's longest-standing challenge. We will probably never be able to say exactly how many Colombians have disappeared. **Hundreds of families live under threat or in conditions that limit - or completely rule out - the possibility of seeking help** from relevant state institutions.

The truth is that most cases remain unresolved while new evidence surfaces every day. Unfortunately, time is against us in the search, which is aggravated by the lack of political will for this issue to receive the importance it requires. Meanwhile, families suffer from the indifference of a society that seems to have turned its back on them.



This is the state of this family's home's roof following armed clashes in the Catatumbo region (eastern Colombia).

Holman Arias / ICRC



Rebeca Lucía Galindo / ICRC

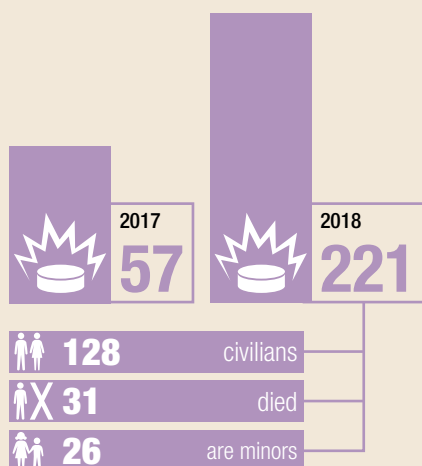
Crisis in the prison system

Given the lack of structural changes in Colombian prisons, in 2017 we began to draw public attention to the prison crisis facing the country. Unfortunately, in 2019 we have to acknowledge that not enough progress has been made.

Overcrowding, poor access to health care, few re-socialization projects and the deplorable conditions of many prisons are just the tip of the iceberg.

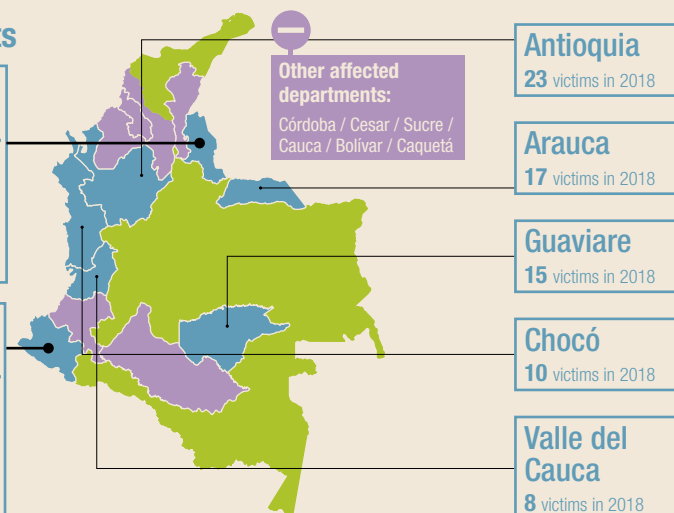
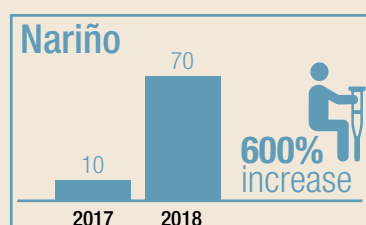
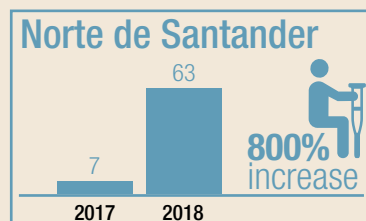
We will continue working hand in hand with the authorities to promote a penitentiary policy that helps to ensure that the rights of prisoners are respected. However, without a clear political will and as long as disproportionate punitive stances remain, it will be difficult for the country to achieve a coherent and effective regulatory and institutional framework.

There is a worrying increase in the number of victims of anti-personnel mines and explosive devices



Source: ICRC

Most affected departments



THE CHALLENGE OF MIGRATING WITH DIGNITY

Migrants arriving in Colombia become part of the vulnerable population affected by conflict and violence.

Migrating should not endanger anybody's life or dignity. However, the conflict and violence that occur along borders or on the migration route pose additional risks for those who come to the country in search of a better life or international protection.

The needs of migrants are urgent, in particular access to health care, hygiene and water. Along the route, they are exposed to multiple risks – such as extortion, labour or sexual exploitation, abuse and physical and psychological threats – as well as the presence of armed groups. Some people have lost contact with their relatives; others were separated on the road.



Tomás Méndez / ICRC

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In the field, we witness the struggle experienced by entire families, by single people, by people with disabilities and even by unaccompanied minors who undertake long and exhausting journeys. **The fact that many migrants do not have documents makes them more vulnerable – especially if they are minors** – and creates greater difficulties for their protection and for access to basic rights and services, such as education or health.

The State is responsible for meeting the needs of migrants, returning Colombians and receiving communities. Care for this population is particularly necessary in areas affected by conflict or armed violence.

Colombia is making a significant effort, but it is not an easy task due to the magnitude and complexity of the phenomenon. It is an issue that requires the support of the international community, as well as close cooperation between all the recipient countries and organizations with experience of this problem, in order to ensure orderly, safe and secure migration and to guarantee the protection of migrants' rights.

WHAT IS IN OUR SUITCASE?

Strength

“The girl died in my arms,” says Moisés when he recounts the most difficult part of his route in Colombia. As they were walking through the páramo of Berlín (Norte de Santander), the granddaughter of one of the migrants with whom he was travelling died of hypothermia. Today, he works as a volunteer in a shelter that takes in up to 200 people per day.



Laura Aguilera Jiménez / ICRC

Family

On the road, many migrants lose contact with their families. For two weeks, Aura was unable to speak with her daughter who is sick in Venezuela. Alongside the Colombian Red Cross, we help them to make international calls, provide access to Wi-Fi and help them charge mobile phones.



Rebeca Lucía Galindo / ICRC

Solidarity

Bismary is a migrant and offers free haircuts to his neighbours in one of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods of Cúcuta. Despite the fact that her youngest son is bullied at school because they are Venezuelan, her greatest joy is that her son is one of the top students. “I always tell him to feel proud,” she says.



Rebeca Lucía Galindo / ICRC

Courage

Luisa, a migrant who was tricked and all the money she was carrying stolen, says that she was also offered 35,000 pesos for sexual services. Despite all the difficulties, she found the courage to keep going thanks to her three young children who remained in Venezuela.



Laura Aguilera Jiménez / ICRC

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

“Every day we hear shooting over there, shooting over here. You have to lock your children in the house.”

María Emilse, a displaced indigenous person in Chocó.

A proud neighbourhood



“Surrounded by violence, one has no future.”

Yanith, a displaced person from the rural area of Antioquia.

The first aqueduct



In the rural area of El Bagre, Antioquia, water sources are contaminated with mercury and other mining waste. The majority of its inhabitants have been displaced from other parts of the region and, with their help, we built the first aqueduct in the area, which today relieves the thirst of 700 people.

Javier is one of many who is convinced that sports and education help to keep young people away from violence. We accompanied them in the process of building stronger community ties in the El Progreso neighbourhood of Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca.

Nine years of waiting



At the beginning of 2018, we published the story of Eva’s struggle to recover the remains of her son Gilberto, who had been missing for nine years. A few months later, our teams managed to recover the body. “I watched them do the exhumation. Removing a loved one from the earth like cassava is very painful, but I was able to withstand it. Today I won’t cry. The tears I was going to shed have already been shed,” she said before the funeral.



“I thought I was never going to dance again. That’s why I was happy when I received the prosthesis, which enabled me to do so.”

Diomedes, survivor of an anti-personnel mine accident in August 2018. We donated a prosthesis to replace the wooden leg that he had carved for himself, and helped him to access to the public health care system.

Help for Catatumbo



The Catatumbo region was one of the hardest hit by armed activities in 2018. In the municipalities of Hacarí and Sardinata we helped more than 2,000 people cope with the emergency. However, many needs persist.

Campaign for the disappeared



When the campaign #AquíFaltaAlguien (#SomeoneIsMissing) was launched in several parts of the country in 2018, we once again emphasized the importance of accelerating the search for missing persons. “Because you do not forget those you love,” said Gilma, grandmother of Eliana, a young woman who disappeared in Norte de Santander 12 years ago.

A team on fire



They live in the Potrero Grande neighbourhood of Cali and they got together to play basketball. We gave them sports wheelchairs and training to become the ‘Renacer del Fénix’ (‘Phoenix Rising’) team. In September 2018, it was a joy to see them win their first local championship for people with disabilities.

MORE REASONS TO BE AT YOUR SIDE

These are the results of one year's work, frequently carried out in conjunction with the Colombian Red Cross.

In 2018,
our humanitarian work had an impact on the lives of

186.000 people

28.800 people



affected by conflict and violence enjoy better sanitary conditions, access to water and infrastructure.

3.000 people



have a higher economic income thanks to professional training, support in finding jobs, or resources to help strengthen their businesses.

6.200 people



living in areas affected by explosive devices learned how to mitigate the risk of accidents and to prepare contingency plans.

2.500 relatives



of missing persons continued their search with our financial support and guidance.

216 cases



in which information was obtained on the whereabouts of missing persons, thanks to our support. Of these, 49 were found alive.

1.300 wounded



and sick people received access to health care services.

1.700 people



including migrants, relatives of the disappeared and survivors of sexual violence received psychological and psychosocial care.

6.880 victims



received food, money or agricultural supplies to cope with emergencies.

840 people



with disabilities saw improvements in their conditions thanks to our physical rehabilitation programmes.

124.500 migrants



and inhabitants of host communities received humanitarian aid and better access to health care, water, hygiene and education.

4.100 prisoners



benefited from our work in prisons, such as monitoring and improvement of infrastructure, water and health care.

10 people



who were being held by armed groups were reunited with their loved ones.

45 bodies



of missing persons were recovered and handed over to the authorities for identification.

1.850 members



of the police force and prison authorities were trained in international standards on the use of force and humanitarian norms.

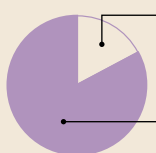


Laura Aguilera Jiménez / CIRC

In Colombia

we are a
team of

365 humanitarian workers



17% of 29
different
nationalities

83%
Colombians

Our budget in
2018 was

87.37 billion Colombian pesos



We have completed 155 years of work around the world and 50 years of work in Colombia



We arrived in Colombia in March 1969. The first thing we did was to visit the country's prisons and to promote better conditions in them. Eleven years later, we inaugurated our first headquarters in Bogotá. Since then, we have expanded our field of action and today we have 13 offices in the areas most affected by conflict and violence.

The achievements of this humanitarian work over the last five decades would not have been possible without the country's confidence in our role as a neutral, impartial and independent organization. To all Colombians, thank you.



Dolier Bregnard / Archivo ICRC

Since 1983, we have visited over 11,800 Colombian prisons and other detention centres.



William Torres

In 1994, we began to dialogue with armed groups in Colombia. This has allowed us to disseminate humanitarian norms and ensure they are adhered to by all parties to the conflict.

During the toughest times of the conflict, we sometimes felt that we were not able to meet all the needs of the victims.

However, we managed to...



Boris Hegar

1,780 people who were being held by armed groups got their freedom back thanks to our neutral role.



Boris Hegar

provide help in over

1.800
mass
displacements



support

1.860
victims of
anti-personnel mines



improve

essential services for almost
500.000
people



care for over

152.000
patients
through mobile health care units



Archivo ICRC

We have received 14,000 tracing requests for missing persons and we have recovered the bodies of 200 people.

The greatest reward is looking back and knowing that we have given our very best.

Milestones

We maintained a neutral role in incidents such as the siege of the Dominican Republic Embassy (1980) and, more recently, in the peace talks between the Government and the FARC-EP that began in 2012.

In addition, we have cared for the victims of several massacres, such as those of Salado (2000) and Mapiripán (1997). We also recovered the bodies of the 11 provincial deputies of the Valle del Cauca hostage crisis (2007) for identification and subsequent return to their families.

However, most of our work never features on the news. Our greatest reward is the support and recognition from the anonymous Colombians who see in the Red Cross a symbol of hope.



ICRC

We are the International Committee of the Red Cross

We help people around the world affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence, doing everything possible to protect their dignity and relieve their suffering, often alongside our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners.

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