FINAL REPORT

VENEZUELA REGIONAL MIGRATION CRISIS: WHO ARE THE CHILDREN MOST AT RISK?

Save the Children

An analysis of shifting vulnerabilities in the border departments of Colombia (Arauca and La Guajira)

Save the Children Colombia
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Transition International

Foreword

For over 30 years, Save the Children Colombia has been responding to emergencies related to the internal armed conflict and natural disasters. For the first time, the organisation is responding to an international migration crisis of unprecedented proportions. Since 2015, our teams have reached pregnant adolescents, mothers forced to bury their child along the way to Colombia, young adults at risk of being recruited by armed groups, and entire families who crossed the border from Venezuela with little but hope. Economic and institutional challenges, as well as repeated exposure to violence, more often than not await Venezuelans and Colombian returnees in countries to which they have fled. Girls and women in particular are most vulnerable to rights violations, compromising their safety and dignity, and leaving lasting physical and mental scars.

Save the Children is strongly involved in the humanitarian response in Colombia as well as in other neighbouring countries. Across the region, we are committed to reach every last child and to unveil the current gaps to the accomplishment of their rights. That is why we commissioned a study identifying who were the children most at risk in the context of this particular crisis, focusing on the two border departments of Colombia (Arauca and La Guajira). In our day-to-day work, we observe that migratory patterns are dynamic, and that populations sometimes present cumulative layers of vulnerability. Save the Children needed a systematic analysis of the impact of the crisis on children, including with a gender lens, with concrete recommendations to inform our programmes and that of our partners. This study documents in a much-needed way the risks faced by migrant children and shifting vulnerabilities. There is still much more to be done to assist and protect the children affected by the Venezuela crisis and their families, within Venezuela and in the countries where they have found shelter. We hope this report will be of interest to all of the actors involved in the response, so that together we can deliver more for the children and adolescents that bear most of the burden of the crisis.

María Paula Martínez
Executive Director
Save the Children Colombia

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Research Lead
Dr Luisa Dietrich
Gender Desk Coordinator
(Transition International)

Senior Child Protection Adviser
Fatuma Ibrahim
Children and Youth Desk Coordinator
(Transition International)

Transition International

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Acronyms

CERF	Central Emergency Respond Fund
CONPES	Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social (National Council for Economic and Social Policy)
CSIS	Centre for Strategic and International Studies
DD	Diaspora Democrática
EEAS	European External Action Service
EiE	Education in Emergencies
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación (National Liberation Army)
FARC-EP	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GIFMM	Grupo Interagencial sobre Flujos Migratorios Mixtos (Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows)
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICBF	Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (Colombian Family Welfare Institute)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual and Intersex
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PARD	Proceso Administrativo de Restitución de Derechos (Administrative Process to Re-Establish Rights)
R4V	Response for Venezuela
RAMV	Registro Administrativo de Migrantes Venezolanos (Administrative Registry for Venezuelan Migrants)
RMRP	Refugee and Migrant Response Plan
SC	Save the Children
TI	Transition International
UASC	Unaccompanied and Separated Children
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

Since 2014, over 10% of the population of Venezuela has left the country (3.4 million), triggering substantial cross-border outflows of people in the region. The number leaving is likely to reach more than 5 million people by the end of 2019 (UNHCR 2018). This crisis has directly affected children. As of December 2018, in addition to children in need inside Venezuela, UNICEF reports more than 460,000 Venezuelan children in need of assistance in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Panama, Peru and Trinidad and Tobago.

As the crisis continues to unfold, we lack the data to understand how different categories of vulnerable populations are affected and how they respond to pre-existing and new challenges alike. To address this gap, Save the Children (SC) commissioned a study[1] to analyse the specific impact of the crisis on children in the border departments of Colombia. The analysis adopts a gender- and age-sensitive lens, assessing shifting protection needs against the background of underlying vulnerabilities. The findings are primarily meant for SC's teams and partners who are engaged in responding to the crisis in La Guajira and Arauca. The analysis may also be of interest to other actors working on protecting children in the region in the current situation.

1
This report is the final product of a collaboration between Transition International (TI), a Europe-based consultancy firm, and Diaspora Democrática (DD), a Colombian non-profit organisation, between November 2018 and March 2019. The study was commissioned by Save the Children Colombia, present in the country for over 30 years.

The Venezuela regional migration crisis

Venezuela, once one of the richest countries in the region, is facing a severe political, economic and social crisis, resulting in food shortages, lack of access to basic services, diminished means of livelihood and increasing violations of human rights linked to the repression of dissent inside the country. The crisis is further exacerbated by economic sanctions, which mostly affect the civilian population. Since January 2019, the standoff between the Maduro government and the opposition leader, President of the National Assembly and self-proclaimed Interim President, Juan Guaidó, has intensified. Both parties have strong internal and external supporters along a highly politicised dividing line. Humanitarian assistance is a contentious topic, considered by Maduro's administration as a means to advance a regime change, despite recent progress on the opening of the country to international aid.

While tensions mount within the country, a steadily increasing number of Venezuelans are leaving. Many of them are now in Colombia, which alone hosts about a third of the total population that fled Venezuela (IOM 2018), including the highest proportion of people with irregular migration status. A large share of the population emigrating from Venezuela into Colombia are returning Colombians, reversing a decade-long movement of population. Initially characterised as 'economic migrants', large groups are increasingly living in 'refugee-like' conditions, unable to address their basic needs (food, shelter and health) and exposed to grave rights violations (e.g. recruitment by non-state armed groups and commercial sexual exploitation), in particular in the border areas between Venezuela and Colombia. The lack of a formal legal designation as 'refugees' deprives this population from the rights associated with it. Of all the groups affected, children and adolescents, in particular boys and girls on the move, face disproportionate vulnerabilities.

In the past few months, countries in the region have stepped up diplomatic efforts and measures to address the crisis, acknowledging its long-term economic and social impacts. The UN regional Refugee and Migration Response Plan for Venezuela projects an increase of population outflow of refugees and migrants with regular status of 1.9 million between December 2018 and December 2019; those with irregular migratory status will further increase this number. Challenges to meeting needs are huge and hindered by operational, legal, economic and political barriers. Exacerbating factors in Colombia include a limited state presence in border departments, already overstretched public services, the indirect impact of the 2016 peace agreement and the reconfiguration of non-state armed actors and the forthcoming local and departmental elections, which are likely to stir growing anti-Venezuelan sentiments and measures.

What this study contributes

To adequately respond to the crisis, aid actors need to articulate the different levels at which the crisis plays out, factoring in the sensitivities surrounding international interventions in the region and acknowledging the limitations of the data currently collected to map humanitarian needs, in particular of girls and boys on the move. This study is thus meant to inform SC and its partners' operational and strategic responses across the region, in a way that takes into account the specific vulnerability of children in this crisis and that adopts a dynamic perspective, looking at the most likely evolution of the situation in the coming 12 months. Components of vulnerability examined include the profile of people on the move to the conditions for border crossing (permanent and pendulum movements) and the conditions met on arrival in overburdened host departments. This analysis also engages with selected aspects of the current humanitarian response relevant to enhancing child protection programming, in particular in view of coordination-related challenges.

This qualitative research is based on evidence gathered in a two-step fieldwork process (in December 2018 and January 2019), combining targeted focus group discussions, key informant interviews and online surveys conducted with affected populations, SC staff, government counterparts and national and international humanitarian actors in the two Colombian border departments of La Guajira and Arauca.

Key findings

1
People currently fleeing Venezuela predominantly belong to the poorest and most vulnerable households, without the required travel documentation or resources to continue their journey.

2
This population faces increasing protection risks in relation to status, lack of access to dignified income-generating options and multi-layered vulnerabilities (ethnic background, sex and sexual orientation, age, isolated and unaccompanied minors, etc.).

3
An increasing number of children and their families are 'trapped at the border', in makeshift camps located in flood-prone areas and at risk of eviction, or are being 'diverted' to remote and rural locations often controlled by actors engaged in illegal trade.

4
Venezuelans on the move and Colombian returnees face an increase in child labour, often under risky and exploitative conditions; forced recruitment by armed groups, often of young male and female adolescents; transactional sex and sexual exploitation, often as survival strategies; and patterns of abandonment and neglect of children, often from single-headed or disintegrated households with numerous younger children.

5
These serious protection issues are taking place in a context of increasing direct and indirect violence, in a deteriorating social climate characterised by exacerbated xenophobic sentiments, violent competition over scarce access to basic goods and services and reconfiguration of local armed groups' dynamics.

The following categories of children have been identified as particularly at risk:

1
Children out of the education system, lacking a protective environment and being exposed to child labour, forced recruitment or engaging in commercial sexual exploitation as a means to contribute to the survival of households;

2
New arrivals who underwent traumatic events before or in the course of border crossing, possibly including sexual violence, and arriving in increasingly precarious conditions, including chronically sick and disabled children, as well as those children who care for sick and elderly household members;

3
Children of households 'trapped' in border regions with limited livelihood options, living on one meal a day and with a lack of basic water, sanitation and hygiene needs, in particular children from single-headed households (female or male) with many young children;

4
Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), access to whom is hindered by high levels of mobility and the limited reach and capacity of public protection actors to efficiently attend to the needs of this particularly vulnerable population segment.

Implications for current and future responses

1
Whether the situation in Venezuela remains as it is or evolves, population outflows can be expected to continue in the short to mid term, driven by the lack of access to basic services, insufficient livelihoods and fear of escalation of violence inside the country, with potential spikes in displacement.

2
The impact of the crisis will remain tangible in the long term, although continuing gaps in age-disaggregated data make such assessments difficult. Humanitarian responses need to combine elements of immediate relief to longer-term transformative strategies addressing the persisting constraints of inaccurate quantitative data on irregular migrations, as well as inadequate funding of public service institutions and growing anti-migrant, xenophobic sentiment.

Recommendations

Our recommendations fall under two main categories:

Advocacy

1
Raise the visibility and sense of urgency of the Venezuela humanitarian emergency, in particular for the four categories of most vulnerable children identified in this research;

2
Raise awareness on the considerable funding gaps of public services, in particular of child protection services in the border departments of Colombia;

3
Call for the establishment of permanent and simplified registration mechanisms for Venezuelans on the move and disseminate this information widely;

4
Advocate with local and department authorities to designate safe spaces for relocation of people on the move 'trapped' in irregular settlements prone to natural hazards such as flooding.

Programmatic opportunities

5
Provide education in emergencies. EiE responses that could attract older children back to school include catch-up education (or accelerated learning) and/or non-formal opportunities that allow them to continue to work. Advocate for EiE in Colombia with both donors and the Ministry of National Education.

6
Develop and implement adolescent programming. Life skills, sport and recreational activities and livelihood opportunities can counter dangerous trends. Gender-specific adolescent programming could include menstrual hygiene management, linked to WASH programming; and sexual and reproductive health care, including provision of information alongside integrated services.

7
Expand the current case management system to cover UASC. Look at family reunification but also foster care for younger children and independent living for older children. Align this with adolescent programming, advocacy for the establishment of cross-border responses and sensitisation of parents.

8
Address grave violations of children's rights. Strengthen monitoring and reporting as well as advocacy for the development of multi-sectoral programmes to counter commercial sexual exploitation and recruitment of children by armed groups/gangs. This could be linked to adolescent programming.

9
Invest in relevant government departments, particularly those that deal with child protection, education and health, which are already providing services to Venezuelans children and adolescents who have crossed into Colombia.

10
Livelihoods-related programming. Consider small-scale conditional cash grants or cash for work, and collective income-generating projects targeting needs within informal settlements, such as producing reusable menstrual sanitary pads. Explore the concepts of cash for education and incorporating community members into community kitchen projects.

11
Strengthen community-led coping mechanisms. Link different existing community resources and coping mechanisms, as well as volunteers organising efforts of Venezuelans on the move, to keep children safe while organising recreational activities. Teachers among the population in informal settlements could serve as a community resource to reduce child neglect. Consider safe child care mechanisms as a productive project or income generation option for affected populations.

12
Enhance a gender-responsive approach. Transformative gender approaches need to focus on countering the most exploitative aspects underlying vulnerability; strengthening the organisation efforts of women in informal settlements; awareness of rights and comprehensive information on basic services; and collective income-generating projects. Work on new masculinities and femininities, which could imply adopting a more household-centred approach focusing on collective income generation programmes that work towards more equitable gender relations, including redistribution of reproductive and care work.

13
Adopt a conflict-sensitive lens to context monitoring. A scale-up of the coverage and scope of humanitarian assistance delivered in the border areas will have to concurrently address the immediate and lasting impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable, adapt to the various degrees of mobility of some of the groups most at risk (including mobile services), and alleviate mounting social and xenophobic tensions in a resource-scarce environment. A conflict-sensitive approach to programming and to system-strengthening seems an imperative in this particular context.

1 Introduction

1.1 Project background

In November 2018, Save the Children (SC) Colombia in coordination with SC International hired Transition International (TI) and Diaspora Democrática (DD) to conduct a study into the Venezuelan migrant crisis using a child-centred lens. The outcomes of this will be used to help adapt programmes and strategies as the situation evolves and to contribute to on-going discussions with other organisations to develop a common understanding of the key issues and define a common response for the border region. Finally, the research will help identify entry points for advocacy efforts towards local and national Colombian authorities for coordinated action to enhance the protection of affected children and adolescents.

TI is a Netherlands-based international consultancy firm, specialising in tackling the challenges of transitions and promoting change through knowledge development, training and advisory services. DD is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the study and strengthening of the Venezuelan diaspora and the promotion of development and democracy in Latin America.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Objectives

This qualitative research aims to bridge the existing knowledge gap on the Venezuela regional migration crisis in light of the humanitarian impact on Venezuelans on the move, as well as Colombians returning from Venezuela and vulnerable host communities. Particular emphasis lies on the violation of children's rights and the differential impact on children, along the lines of gender (including gender identity and sexual orientation), ethnicity and ability/disability. It aims to complement existing humanitarian needs assessments, building on internal documents, such as the SC Needs Overview, the SC Colombia Country Strategy and the draft SC Regional Response Strategy.

1.2.2 Fieldwork conducted

This study relies on qualitative primary information gathered from affected populations in two Colombian border departments; the perspectives and experiences of SC staff in localised field missions based in Arauca (Arauca department) and Riohacha/Maicao (La Guajira department); and consultations with government counterparts, UN agencies present in those locations and other humanitarian actors – namely, national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

No research was undertaken inside Venezuela because at the time of this research SC was not operating directly in the country. This was compensated for by disseminating an online survey to civil society organisations and child protection actors inside Venezuela to gather insights into likely evolutions of the crisis more generally, and patterns in movements of movements of vulnerable groups within the Venezuelan population.

The qualitative data collection was undertaken in two separate but coordinated rounds in December 2018 and January 2019 in the Colombian border departments of La Guajira and Arauca, by two individual researchers, one from TI and one from DD. TI and DD jointly developed the tools for the key informant interviews (KIIs)[2] and the focus group discussions (FGDs).[3]

FGDs were held with different segments of the affected population, comprising both Venezuelan and Colombian nationals. These were structured first into different categories of intent: 'migrant characteristics' (in transit; pendulum migration; migrants with the desire to relocate permanently), host communities and Wayuu women;[4] and second into categories of vulnerability (including care-givers of children with disabilities; members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual and intersex (LGBTI) community).

Structured KIIs were held with SC government counterparts, UN agencies and humanitarian actors (national and international NGOs) operating in Colombia's border departments, and semi-structured KIIs with SC staff in Bogotá, La Guajira and Arauca and with members of affected communities. Other activities included visits to child-friendly spaces and the coordinated Migrant Documentation and Information Centre (Centro de Atención al Migrante) and participant observation in community activities in SC areas of operation.

In La Guajira, the team conducted a total of nine structured KIIs with 13 informants (six female and seven male). Four FGDs were held – with host community members, Wayuu women, transit migrants and migrants hoping to stay in Colombia, with 43 participants (30 female and 13 male), and semi-structured FGDs/conversations with five adolescent girls (group) and a LGBTI couple.

Explorations with SC included an inception meeting and conversations with case management, representatives of the education, child protection and cash programmes, a health specialist and the field manager. Government agencies met included Migración Colombia, the police, the Family Commissioner (Comisaría de Familia) (Maicao) and the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF)). UN agencies consulted included the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UN Women and the Ombudsperson's Office (Personería)/United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Other interviews were held with a school principal and at E.S.E. Hospital San Jose de Maicao, as well as with the Red Cross, Pastoral Social, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Samaritan's Purse (Maicao).

In Arauca, a total of nine KII sessions with 10 informants (five female and five male) were held, as well as four FGDs (host community members, migrants in transit, persons engaged in pendular migrations, and migrants desiring to stay), with 44 participants (29 female and 15 male).

Engagements with SC included visits to child-friendly spaces, as well as presentations by SC teams on health activities, cash programming, monitoring and evaluation, gender-sensitive programming, risk mapping and protection, among others. The team also met NRC (education), Pastoral Social and the Red Cross. UN agencies consulted included UNHCR, UNICEF and the Ombudsperson's Office/UNHCR. Other explorations were held with the Ombudsperson's Office and a school principal. Semi-structured KIIs were conducted with a male youth leader (of a child-friendly space) and two mothers of disabled children.

In Bogotá, four semi-structured KIIs were held (three men and one woman) with SC headquarters staff working on education, education in emergencies and protection; and one with an NRC staff member.

2 The semi-structured KII guide applied with government, humanitarian actors and SC staff was divided into four sections: 1) risks and vulnerability; 2) priority needs, humanitarian assistance and humanitarian coordination; 3) projections on migratory tendencies over the next year; and 4) recommendations.

3 The semi-structured FGD guide was divided into four sections, contextualised to the population profile by category.

4 Members of the Wayuu ethnic group have legal rights to double nationality and freedom of movement across what is considered the greater territory of the Wayuu nation, which is divided by the border between Colombia and Venezuela.

1.2.3
Additional sources of information

Three online surveys were held, which provided another source of information for this research. First was a SC staff survey comprising 47 questions divided into five parts: staff profile; general child protection context; access to humanitarian assistance; humanitarian response: inter-institutional coordination; and dynamics and trends for the next 12 months. In total, 56 responses were collected, 61% from female respondents. The majority of respondents, 88% (49), came from SC Colombia staff (37 from Arauca, nine from La Guajira and two from Bogotá). The remaining 12% (seven respondents) came from Peru (three), Bolivia (one), Panama (one), Sweden (one) and the UK (one). The completion rate for the survey was 50% (with an average time of 31 minutes spent on it), with a consistent group of 28 respondents responding to all questions.

Second was a survey for humanitarian actors and SC counterparts operating in Colombia's border departments, comprising a total of 43 questions divided into five parts: participants' profile; general child protection context; access to humanitarian assistance; child protection coordination mechanisms; and dynamics and trends for the next six months. There were five responses, 80% from female respondents. The completion rate was only 20%, with four minutes on average spent on it.

Third was a survey for Venezuelans inside their country, disseminated through contacts established by the SC Regional Office in Panama by DD. The survey comprised 28 questions divided into four parts: participants' profile; the Venezuelan general context; one-year projections; and the evolution of diplomatic relations in the region. In total, 12 responses were collected, 67% from female respondents. Participants were allowed to remain anonymous; 25% expressed a preference to do so. The completion rate for this survey was 100%, with 41 minutes on average spent on it.

1.2.4 Limitations

There is a great deal of uncertainty as to the likely evolution of the Venezuelan migration crisis. In late 2018 and early 2019, when most of the research supporting this analysis was undertaken, the situation has been changing particularly rapidly. For example, during the fieldwork, a longer-term border closure between Venezuela and Colombia appeared highly unlikely; however, after confrontations on the weekend of 23 February 2019 around the transport of humanitarian aid into Venezuela, this restrictive measure was implemented. This also means that the research findings have to be read in the context in which the report has been written.

Within this context are high levels of polarisation, in particular in reporting by news outlets. The limited availability of in-depth analysis, in particular for the evolving situation within Venezuela, means this study has had to rely heavily on daily newspapers, news broadcasts and podcasts from across the political spectrum. Although contingency measures were taken through a systematic review of daily statements of key stakeholders and new sources, the limited local analysis available is likely to have taken a toll on the level of detail here.

The nature of the responses from the qualitative sources has also made it difficult to conduct analysis that is rooted in factual evidence. On the one hand, the affected Venezuelan population shared personal opinions and perceptions – that is to say, more anecdotal evidence. On the other hand, government counterparts and humanitarian actors refrained from speaking on behalf of their organisation, again sharing perceptions rather than evidenced analysis into the likely evolution of the crisis or triggers of change within Venezuelan stakeholders (parties, armed forces, the private sector). Meanwhile, the political sensitivity around the data collection and the importance of neutrality for humanitarian actors, linked to the significant challenges involved in operating inside Venezuela at the time of conducting this research, led the team eventually to cut short the dissemination of the online survey within Venezuela. It did this to live up to SC's standards of neutrality and to avoid exposing (potential) partners inside the country.

Furthermore, the focus on predominantly qualitative information, in the absence of representative quantitative data, made triangulation of information and validation challenging. While DD engaged in an interesting analysis of gaps and projections on migration figures, detailed cross-referencing with qualitative information was not feasible.

Moreover, the fieldwork design of deploying two individual consultants, from TI and DD, in two separate rounds of data collection to Colombian border departments, yielded valuable information on the Colombian border context but also considerable challenges to extrapolation to generate the regional perspective initially requested. Where possible, we include information from the three Peruvian SC staff survey respondents, but this is neither representative nor comparable with the levels of information gathered in Colombia. Responses came also from Bolivia and Panama but substantive parts of the survey did not match SC programming profiles in these countries.

While the researchers did not have direct access to unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), which was a particular concern of SC in the terms of reference, the team was able to capture indirect information on the particular vulnerabilities of this group from other stakeholders.

Finally, the study design was for two institutions to generate complementary perspectives on the crisis and its impact on children. This report might not capture in full the extent of the dynamic collaboration between TI and DD, and additional outputs from DD might also be of interest to the reader (available upon request from Save the Children Colombia).

2 The Venezuela regional migration crisis

Venezuela, once one of the richest countries in the region, is facing a severe political, economic and social crisis, resulting in food shortages, lack of access to basic services, diminished means of livelihood and increasing violations of human rights linked to the repression of dissent inside the country. The crisis is further exacerbated by economic sanctions, which mostly affect the civilian population. Since January 2019, the standoff between the Maduro government and the opposition leader, President of the National Assembly and self-proclaimed Interim President, Juan Guaidó, has intensified. Both sides have strong internal and external supporters along a highly politicised dividing line.

While consequences are first felt inside Venezuela, the crisis also resulted in significant migration outflows. Since 2014, more than 3 million Venezuelans have left the country. As of December 2018, more than 460,000 Venezuelan children require assistance in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Panama, Peru and Trinidad and Tobago (UNICEF 2018a). The UN interagency regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) projects that the continued outflow of Venezuelans is likely to reach more than 5 million people by the end of 2019 (UNHCR 2018). In the past few months, governments in the region have stepped up diplomatic efforts to address the crisis, acknowledging the long-term economic and social impact of the influx of Venezuelans on their countries. This section aims only at depicting the main features of the crisis, as the background against which vulnerabilities are shifting.

2.1 A slow-onset migration and displacement crisis

Venezuela possesses vast natural resources and the largest confirmed oil reserves in the world. This crisis is shaped by internal, intertwined political, economic and social factors, such as clientelism and corruption. In addition, external pressures, such as 'economic warfare' waged for years on Venezuela, have included international sanctions on state-run oil production and seizing of the country's financial assets abroad (UNHRC 2018a). Consequently, Venezuela has gone within a few years from high levels of income, infrastructure investment, education and social programming to economic collapse. The most serious impacts include food shortages, lack of medicine and diminished means of livelihood, but also increasingly grave violations of human rights, in particular those of children. Mortality figures are not comparable to those from other conflict-related humanitarian crises but the far-reaching impacts cannot be underestimated. Despite the high numbers of people on the move, until recently the visibility of the crisis beyond the region has been limited.

The predominance of political elements, such as the resistance of the Maduro government to acknowledge the existence of a humanitarian crisis,[5] including the extent of the population movement, while denouncing humanitarian assistance as an entry-point for foreign military intervention, has made conventional support inside Venezuela difficult. Humanitarian actors have either relied on remote programming through national implementing partners or kept a very low profile on a limited mandate with on-going concerns of being expelled. Only in late October 2018 did the Maduro government accept $9 million in UN Central Emergency Respond Fund (CERF) funding, which is currently being implemented by five UN agencies (UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, UNHCR and IOM).

Since 2014, successive waves of Venezuelans have left the country, starting with private business owners, professionals, students, salaried workers and self-employed people, followed by increasingly poorer households arriving into more precarious situations in neighbouring countries. The Venezuela crisis, while unfolding, has reversed a pre-existing migration pattern at the border with Colombia. Many of the people who have recently crossed that particular border are Colombian returnees, or households of mixed nationality. Meanwhile, although applications for international protection have consistently increased across Latin American countries (UNHCR 2018a), the restrictions on 'refugee' status, such as on being able to work, mean high numbers of people who may qualify for refugee status refrain from applying. The vulnerable affected population, particularly the increasing number of people 'trapped' at the borders, are yet increasingly living in 'refugee-like' conditions (ibid.).

The narrative framing is perpetuated by other traits of this crisis – namely, migrants' 'freedom of movement' (rather than being attended to in camp settings) and the (relative) 'open door policies' of different countries in the region (for those who can afford it). This not only veils the constraints of restrictive migration policies (the insistence on legal travel documents) but also largely overlooks the economic constraints the most vulnerable Venezuelans on the move face, which make free movement difficult. Meanwhile, countries in the region continue to address the Venezuelan population outflow through existing migratory frameworks, with limited temporary exemptions, which are neither commensurate to the needs of the most vulnerable nor adequate to capture people who cross the border without valid travel documentation – effectively forcing them into 'illegality'. As regional coordination is stepped up under UNHCR and IOM, concerted efforts are needed to put in place migration policies that allow for a regional response decongesting the border regions, regularising Venezuelan people on the move, alongside mechanisms to capture accurate numbers of legal and illegal migrants.

2.2 Early 2019 developments

The Venezuela crisis has been exacerbated by the swearing-in of President Nicolas Maduro for a second six-year term on 10 January 2019. Framing the May 2018 presidential elections as rigged, President of the National Assembly Juan Guaidó declared himself Interim President. Trump Administration officials and other leaders of the region and largely 'western' countries recognise Guaidó's leadership. President Maduro cut ties with the US and Colombia, after an ensuing standoff around the entry of so-called US Agency for International Development (USAID) humanitarian aid, and has temporarily closed the borders with Brazil.

While the economic and political crisis has been in a steady downward spiral, as of the end of 2018 and beginning of 2019 a significant 'game-changer' has emerged – namely, the Trump Administration has moved from campaign rhetoric and 'inherited' sanctions imposed during the Obama administration to seeking a proactive 'resolution'. Under the 'by all means necessary' rationale, which implies the consideration of military invasion, Venezuela is now squarely placed on the US foreign relations agenda, with considerable geopolitical implications. While the specific outcomes are currently uncertain, addressing the structural components of the Venezuela crisis will require long-term action. Even if the political crisis is resolved internally, economic and social recovery social costs will be high, and it is extremely unlikely that the population outflow will decrease rapidly. This means that an integrated response is needed to comprehensively attend to the multiple needs of a diverse affected population, inside and outside Venezuela, including addressing the significant backlog of people on the move who came through earlier waves as well as new arrivals.

2.3 The scale of the crisis

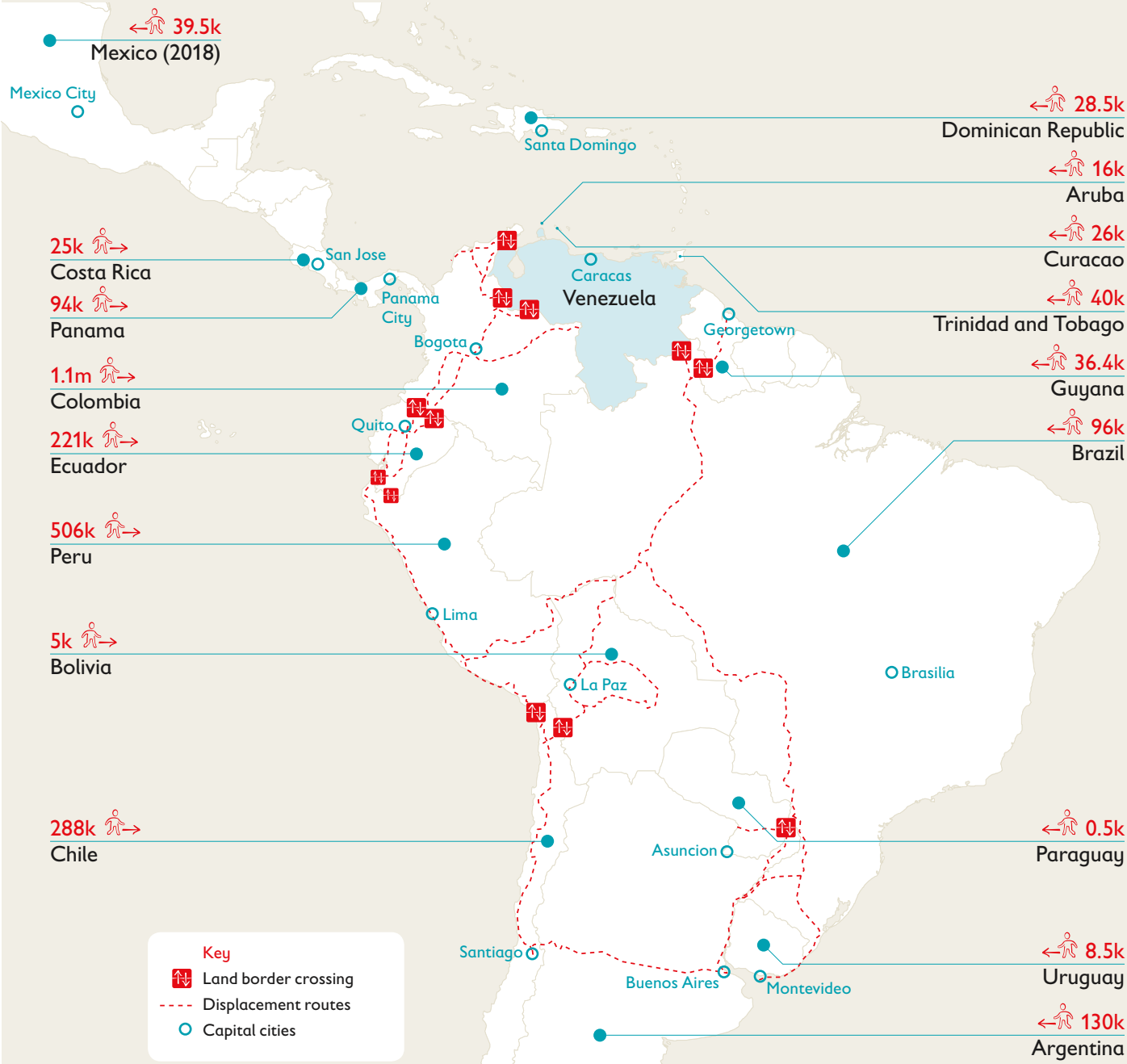
This section looks at the number of people on the move and identifies regional patterns of migration as well as the migration policies of different countries in response to the crisis. As of January 2019, the interagency Response for Venezuelans (R4V) estimates that the total approximate figure of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the world amounts to 3.4 million people, out of which 2.7 million are located in Latin America and the Caribbean (Figure 1) (UNHCR 2019).

5 The rationale being that, if the US really wanted to address the needs of the Venezuelan people, it would lift the economic, financial and oil sanctions, which have to date cost an estimated $30 billion, instead of offering $20 million in aid. 'If we had those more than $30 billion, Venezuela would be at the peak of its prosperity,' Foreign Minister Arreaza is quoted as saying (Wyss, 2019).

Figure 1
Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean (as of January 2019)

2.7m Approximate number of Venezualan refugees and migrants in Latin American and the Caribbean

3.4m Total approximate number of Venezualan refugees and migrants in the World



Sources:

R4V (Response for Venezuelans)

UNHCR, February 2019
https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/68069

The displacement flow data came from public information, official statistics (governments) and secondary sources.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used in this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

2.3.1
Current numbers

As Figure 1 shows, Colombia hosts the largest number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants – more than 1,100,000 – followed by Peru with 506,000, Chile with 288,000, Ecuador with 221,000, Argentina with 130,000 and Brazil with 96,000. Mexico and the countries of Central America and the Caribbean also host a significant number. The regional RMRP bases its planning on the assumption that 'refugee and migrant outflows from Venezuela will continue at the same pace in 2019'.

According to the R4V operational portal/platform on the situation of refugees and migrants, out of the total of 3,377,252 registered Venezuelans in early 2019, 1,464,037 have regular migration status (including resident permits) while 414,570 are asylum-seekers (2014–2018). When extracting country-specific data, the following pattern emerges: while Brazil is the only country with higher levels of asylum-seekers than of Venezuelans with regular status, this pattern reverses for the other countries in the region. Colombia is a particular point in case, as the country hosting the highest number of Venezuelans.

Table 1
Regular status migrants and refugees by country, January 2019
Source: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/platform

Country	Regular status	Asylum-seekers
Colombia	582,312	4,170
Brazil	39,771	83,893
Ecuador	98,000	13,535
Peru	282,091	167,238
Panama	61,200	10,164

A well-documented gap relates to Venezuelans with irregular migration status crossing the borders without documentation and not being systematically registered. This not only contributes to programming challenges but also renders this population segment particularly vulnerable. Irregular migratory status significantly curtails the possibility of access to basic services, including health and education, and limits or restricts the right to work. A UNHCR regional profiling exercise indicates that 68% of Venezuelans in Colombia have irregular migratory status, and 45% of Venezuelans in Ecuador (UNHCR 2018a). In its survey of 1,473 Venezuelans on the move, NRC (2018) established that 52% of respondents in Colombia, 27% in Ecuador, 8% in Panama and 2% in Brazil had irregular migratory status.

The challenges around people with irregular migration status is exacerbated in Colombia: the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that 30% of caminantes (those walking to reach other locations in Colombia or transiting the country) entered through an official border crossing, while assuming that 60% effectively entered through unofficial points (Save the Children 2018a). Looking at information from the Administrative Registry for Venezuelan Migrants (Registro Administrativo de Migrantes Venezolanos (RAMV)), 74% of those who have registered crossed the border with Venezuelan identification documents, which are required but not sufficient to legally register in Colombia, while only 7% used a passport (Terre des Hommes 2018). Another category is of people who cross through an official border crossing but stay after their visas expire (Migración Colombia 2018).

Lack of documentation makes Venezuelans on the move particularly vulnerable to exploitation, extortion, violence, trafficking, sexual abuse and discrimination and xenophobia, and, as a compounding factor in Colombia, to recruitment by criminal and armed groups (SC 2018a; UNHCR 2018a). While an increasing number of Venezuelans on the move are likely to have endured violations of their rights that would most likely lead to the application of international protection status, many refrain from applying, owing to conditions such as the length of the process, the financial costs involved and the restrictions on working and leaving the country (SC 2018a; UNHCR 2018a). This could further contribute to a distortion in official figures or a mischaracterisation of the profile of people on the move.

As the crisis evolves, there are no signs that access to legal documentation will improve. The regional RMRP assumes that the number of asylum-seekers will only continue to increase. Table 2 indicates the increase of asylum applications by country between 2016 and 2017.

Table 2
Asylum application figures in 2016 and 2017 compared
Source: Adapted from the regional RMRP 2019.

Country	2016	2017	Increase in %
Brazil	3,373	17,865	430%
Colombia	316	575	82%
Ecuador	554	1,530	176%
Panama	837	4,430	429%
Peru	3,602	20,000	455%
Southern Caribbean	66	1,834	2,679%

The regional RMRP projects that, by December 2019, the overall number of people on the move will pass the 5 million mark. A significant number of returns of refugees and migrants to Venezuela is not envisaged in the short or medium term. The major recipient countries will continue to be Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru (ibid.). This implies, building on average figures from 2018, that 5,000 people will cross into Colombia and 300 into Brazil on a daily basis (UNHCR 2018a).

2.3.2 Reasons for leaving Venezuela and decisions on migrating or staying

The different reasons for moving from Venezuela include lack of access to basic goods and essential social services, particularly health services and medicines. In addition, high levels of food insecurity and food shortages have been reported.[6] Another element relates to the lack of means of livelihoods (UNHCR 2018a). A 2018 survey (España and Ponce 2018) points to significant reductions in household income, which have increased levels of poverty, from 48.4% in 2014 to 81.8% in 2016 and 94% in 2018.[7] There has been a disproportionate increase in extreme poverty, from 23.6% in 2014 to 61.2% in 2017 (with 56% considered as recent poverty, in contrast with 30% in chronic poverty). These levels of poverty are exacerbated by hyperinflation,[8] which reduces not only incomes but also savings. In addition, threats by armed groups and fear (real or perceived) of being targeted on account of political opinions have been reported as spurring the decision to migrate (UNHCR 2018a).

When asked who is leaving, a respondent to the online survey in Venezuela stated, *'In my immediate environment, almost everyone who could left, university students, family members and friends.'*

Considerations around migrating or staying can be divided into opportunity-driven (those who can stay or can leave) and those 'forced' to take the decision (those who have to stay or have to leave). Among those who can leave, respondents in Venezuela pointed to younger, mostly able-bodied, people of productive age, such as students and professionals with some resources. Others are motivated by family reunification, increasingly including more elderly people and smaller children, who can move as a result of remittances sent from abroad.

Among those who can stay are those who have links to the government, including those who remain loyal to the regime and/or at least have access to state-sponsored subsidies. Another category is professionals who receive their salary in a foreign currency, such as US dollars, or who can rely on remittances from family members abroad. Another group is of people with the commitment to stay – as one respondent said, *'to resist'* – to support Venezuelans from within, motivated by the aim of reconstructing the country. This group includes human rights activists, teachers and university professors.

Among those who have to leave, respondents identified parents and care-givers concerned about the safety, food security and wellbeing of their children, as well as those profoundly affected by poverty, lack of access to government subsidies and the drying-up of remittances. This group also includes those who are forced to move in order to be the ones sending remittances to remaining family members in Venezuela.

Finally, there are those who do not want to leave Venezuela, often because they have been put off by experiences of abuse and xenophobia, without specific references to social or political activism. Then there are those who 'have to stay', including adults of 40 years and above who are in care roles for other family members. Another group is people with businesses that continue to generate a means of subsistence that cannot be abandoned. There are also sick people who cannot leave or have nowhere to go to or no one to join, or those lacking the physical capacity to confront the challenges of migration.

Among the most important barriers to emigration are lack of valid travel documents (passports) and other legal documentation. The challenges around obtaining such documents are well documented, and include failures in the passport system, recurrent breakdowns of the online platform, long waiting times and costly processes. Other barriers relate to the lack of economic resources to embark on an unsafe journey.

When respondents in Venezuela were asked whether they had heard of people who had left and returned, most said no. Most of those reported to have returned had stayed only temporarily or to pick up other family members. One respondent said they knew of a person who had come back with funds to identify an alternative livelihood in Venezuela. Some people, having faced too many challenges inserting themselves into the labour markets of other countries, without institutional support (there are reports of high levels of discrimination), and unable to adapt to their new situation, return in an even more precarious situation.

6 According to Caritas Venezuela (2018), 85% of households have insufficient diversity in their food intake. Among children, 65.1% have or are at risk of some type of malnutrition; 13.5% have moderate and severe malnutrition (acute global malnutrition); 17.8% have mild malnutrition; and 34% are at risk of malnutrition (they have begun to deteriorate).

7 This multi-factor study of poverty includes elements such as housing, services, standards of living, education and social protection.

8 At the end of 2018, estimated inflation for the year was 1,698,488% (http://comisiones.an.gob.ve:8080/admin/views/archivos/IMG-20190109-WA0012.jpg).

2.4 Insights on the impact of the crisis inside Venezuela, in particular on children

This section explores the impact of the on-going crisis on girls, boys and female and male adolescents in Venezuela as perceived by the 12 online survey respondents within Venezuela.

Among the most recurrent references was to the increased poverty of children, linked to a perceived increase in the feminisation of poverty. The disintegration of households has led to a higher rate of female heads of households in a state of heightened vulnerability and without the necessary means to access food for children. This particularly affects low- or no-income households, those engaged in the informal sector or those that have lost access to government-sponsored resources. This is linked to the phenomenon of 'left behind' children, as care-givers migrate with the aim of sending remittances, increasing the rates of children living on the streets and levels of neglect. The Afro-descendant population is also being hit disproportionately by poverty, as they mostly live in rural zones, with limited access to basic social services. Respondents also noted that this population experienced more violence.

Respondents reported high levels of food shortages leading to hunger and malnutrition, and referred to practices of going hungry and consuming food after its expiration date, which was deemed *'humiliating'*. They described an increase in instances of subsidised food boxes being spoiled, insufficient, failing to cover basic dietary requirements and arriving less often, particularly in more remote regions.

Lack of medication is leading to health complications and increases in preventable child deaths. Increasing exposure to contagious diseases and lack of adequate medical attention is affecting children, adolescents and adults alike. Other relevant populations facing health challenges are those with chronic health concerns, including people with HIV who are trying to access their anti-retroviral medication in Colombia. The elderly are of particular concern, as young people and adult relatives who would be caring for them have left.

In terms of the right to an adequate standard of living, respondents reported child abandonment; ill treatment and abuse of children; lack of emotional attention, as care-givers may have migrated or are too disturbed to provide proper care; and lack of access to age-appropriate recreational activities. Increased levels of violence, limited conflict management capacities and reduced peaceful co-existence will have an impact on children for the rest of their lives. Respondents stressed the emotional impact children are currently exposed to by the disintegration of the family, compounded by their lack of sense of a future.

With regard to the right to education, high levels of school dropout, owing to lack of resources, as well as a shortage of teachers, will generate challenges in accessing the formal labour market in the longer term.

There is increased vulnerability among people who depend on state institutions, including hospitals, mental health institutions, orphanages, homes for the elderly and prisons. The institutional protection system has collapsed and there is a serious lack of capacity to guarantee children's rights and abide by minimum standards of child protection among officials, although some have good intentions. The provision of services in Venezuela is based on political affiliations and the approach is based on charity rather than human rights.

When asked about gender-specific impacts, respondents indicated that girls and female adolescents had experienced various forms of abuse, including different modalities of sexual violence, such as transactional sex and commercial sexual exploitation. In addition, younger women resort to risky coping mechanisms, such as establishing a relationship with an older man or leaving the home to join a 'husband' (often there is no formal marriage) to improve their situation, which often ends in abuse and/or early and unwanted pregnancy. This further exacerbates their situation of vulnerability.

Respondents talked of a gap in information on UASC, apart from the reporting of dedicated journalists and child protection actors who have documented cases. One respondent said adolescents had been *'forced to migrate'* without their parents in search of a better future and to be able to send remittances back home. Apparently, such adolescents are mostly found in Cúcuta, which would indicate a preference for an urban destination. References to younger children of around five years old leaving on their own by another respondent could not be confirmed by Colombian child protection actors.

Other respondents pointed to the protection concerns of 'left behind children', who are particularly vulnerable. Government interventions are limited, as protection actors do not recognise the scale of the issue. This confirms one of the challenges Colombian humanitarian actors highlighted – namely, the lack of coordination between Colombian and Venezuelan governmental child welfare agencies. Another source of concern are children who find themselves in conditions of labour and sexual exploitation in Brazil; other children are 'trapped' before they reach the borders and forced to work in the (illegal) mines of Venezuela. Child protection actors on the Colombian side of the border confirmed this information, indicating that UASC had often experienced exploitation or been living on the streets before arriving in Colombia.

A largely overlooked child protection concern relates to the violation of children's rights during the actual move across the border (discussed later), related to physical and sexual violence at informal border crossings.

2.5
Disproportionate impact on Colombia: exacerbating factors

Colombia is shouldering a disproportionate share of the humanitarian crisis as a neighbouring country sharing a more than 2,000 km long porous border, characterised by many illegal crossings. While SC has already identified different groups of people on the move to address their specific needs (e.g. in transit to other countries; intention to stay in Colombia; engaging in pendulum trade), this research points to an additional category – namely, people on the move 'trapped' at the borders – who require a differentiated multi-pronged humanitarian response.

The Venezuelan crisis constitutes an unprecedented emergency for Colombia. The country has itself been immersed in one of the longest armed conflicts, adopting a peace agreement only in November 2016. It is under considerable economic pressure to finance the requirements of the peace agreement while also addressing its own pervasive levels of poverty. In this context, keeping the border open constitutes an important challenge, with a set of intertwined exacerbating factors.

2.5.1
Underfunding of border departments and overwhelmed public services

Colombia's border departments have historically been underfunded and rely on limited state presence, with human resources not able to attend to the additional needs of Venezuelan migrants. Colombia's border areas have limited productive investment and struggle with clientelism and corruption. In addition, border departments have lived through particularly violent episodes of armed conflict, experience continued presence of non-state armed actors and are characterised by illegal economies, which all lead to parallel situations of control. La Guajira is facing its own protracted humanitarian crisis (which is not formally declared) – that is, the food crisis of the Wayuu ethnic group. Arauca continues to contain non-state armed actors and see the reconfiguration of armed groups. Poverty levels in Arauca are increasing (SC 2018a), as confirmed by SC staff, one of whom said, *'Extreme poverty existed before, but the influx of Venezuelan migrants has exacerbated the situation.'*

Public investment has been scarce, with particular needs identified in terms of health, food security and nutrition. An FGD with host community members in La Guajira stressed needs related to sewerage infrastructure, water, gas, shelter, public lighting and education. The fieldwork confirms what multiple needs assessments have established: public services have largely collapsed and are characterised by slow administrative processes, rigidity and excessive formalism (Terre des Hommes 2018). Providers continue to attend to an ever-growing influx of Venezuelan migrants with the same budgets and human resources.

In addition, the border areas have seen an important decrease in cross-border economic activity, as the amount of paying Venezuelan clients has naturally gone down. Formal livelihood options are increasingly limited and levels of informal income generation, including unsafe and risky options, are getting higher among Colombian host communities. Host community FGD participants in La Guajira said, *'We lived thanks to Venezuelan costumers, due to the trade, the products Venezuelans brought, at times through contraband. The crisis has hit us very hard in the past three years. Before the situation was much better.'*

2.5.2 Defunding of the peace process and reconfiguration of armed actors

Colombia's five-decade armed conflict resulted in the highest number of internally displaced persons worldwide, at 7.3 million (SC 2018a). In December 2016, the Colombian government ratified a revised peace agreement, after four years of negotiations between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP)) and the Colombian government, which guaranteed that the group could turn into a political party and confirmed the demobilisation of 13,000 male and female ex-combatants.

In turn, the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)), the second-largest non-state armed actor, also engaged in negotiations with the government. These broke down after a car bomb killed police cadets in January 2019. This move emboldened ELN forces located in the border areas and fuelled attempts to broaden their radius of activity and to increase illegal activities (drug trafficking, cattle smuggling). Arauca has traditionally been an ELN area of operation, with the group ordering border closures, armed strikes, symbolic actions, extortion and kidnapping. In the course of 2018, there was an increase in armed activity against the civilian population attributed to the ELN, with a total of 138 incidents – an increase of 47% compared with 2017. These incidents are linked to the reconfiguration of power and disputes over territory among the various armed groups.

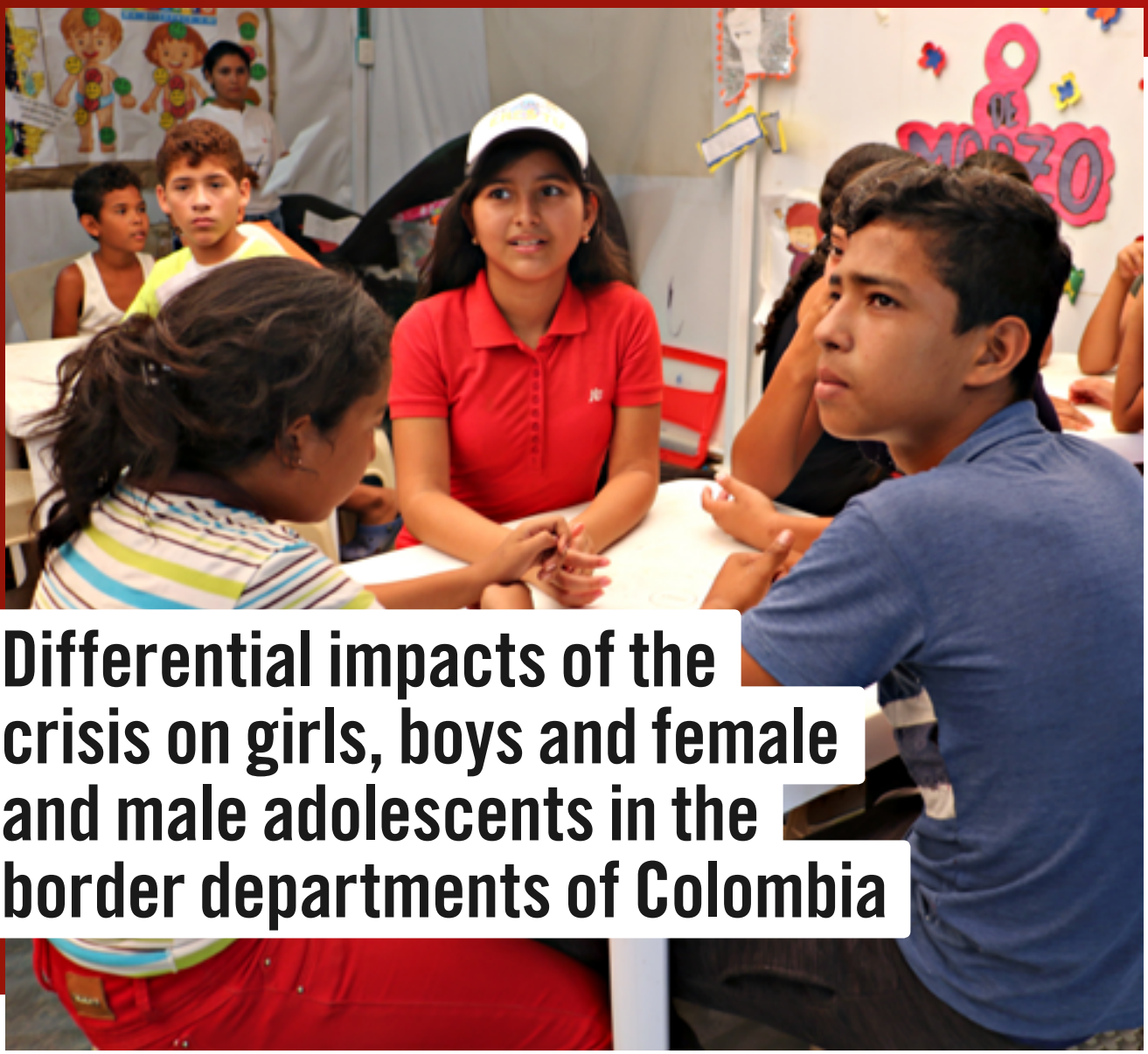
The peace agreement has been mandated at the constitutional level, despite a change in government, with the conservative politician Ivan Duque assuming the presidency. However, its continued implementation is uncertain. At the time of writing, discussions are underway around budgetary constraints in the National Planning Document, which would restrict victims' access to redress. At the same time, defunding of the peace process will contribute to the reconfiguration of armed actors and increased levels of insecurity in the border areas and throughout the country.[9]

The impact of all this on Venezuelan migrants cannot be underestimated. Short-term protection concerns include increased public insecurity and violence, including homicides, direct attacks and kidnappings. Also, non-state armed actors are expected to expand recruitment efforts, to include children and adolescents. In the longer term, lack of income generation opportunities is likely to strengthen non-state actors and increase criminal activities, which is expected to negatively affect host communities and Venezuelans alike. Consequently, defunding the peace process will boost illegal economies at the borders.

2.5.3 Forthcoming local elections linked to populist anti-Venezuelan measures

In October 2019, regional mayoral and governorship elections are scheduled in Colombia, which study participants from the humanitarian community believe will be a potential trigger for xenophobic mobilisation against Venezuelans on the move, especially those 'trapped' at the border and living in informal settlements. Among the concerns of host communities are the increasing number of Venezuelans: *'This will get worse, those of us who are originally from here will need to go who knows where and leave the Venezuelans here, there are only Venezuelans'* (FGD, host community, La Guajira). Host communities accuse governments of being too laid back and not finding solutions (ibid.). Xenophobic sentiments are fuelled not only by the media but also by elected officials. In La Guajira and Arauca, references were made to host communities pressuring for a tighter stance by the government and evictions from informal settlements. People in informal settlements in La Guajira reported being intimidated by members of the Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios (Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron), which they interpreted as an indication of forthcoming eviction.

9 For more information, see https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/location/colombia



3 Differential impacts of the crisis on girls, boys and female and male adolescents in the border departments of Colombia

This section explores the differential impact of the Venezuela crisis on boys, girls and female and male adolescents, by life cycle stage, sex, ethnicity and ability/disability.

3.1 Impacts by life cycle stage

Among children under five, the key age-responsive impact relates to unmet basic needs in food, nutrition, shelter and health, confirming gaps identified earlier. However, in this age group in particular, deprivations can take a significant toll on early development, particularly if they are prolonged. The age-specific impact in this age bracket also relates to parents and care-givers' lack of sustainable livelihoods. Young children are involved in income generation that carries along with it important child protection risks. Examples include infants being 'rented' to other people, who use them to generate an emotional response while begging in conditions unlikely to entail adequate standards of attention. In addition, younger children are taken with parents to engage in income generation, which may involve walking the streets late into the night.

Parents and care-givers are also pressured into separating from their children. For example, a host community member in La Guajira referred to the case of a single mother who was facing the difficult decision to send her three young daughters, the youngest barely three years old, to a 'boarding school' during the week in Wayuu territory to enable her to generate an income. Family separation as a coping mechanism was mentioned frequently. The director of the Family Commissioner in Maicao (La Guajira) reported a case of a Venezuelan mother leaving her three children in the Commission offices and disappearing because she could not ensure sufficient food for them. The lack of procedural and referral pathways means such cases put public officials under considerable pressure. In an FGD, host community members talked of a sexually exploited woman giving away her infant child because she could not cover its nutritional needs.

For children aged between six and 10 years, the main issue identified alongside abandonment is negligence related to high levels of need to generate a sufficient income for survival, particularly among children who live on the streets and engage in different forms of child labour (addressed above), with significant exposure to risks. With livelihoods prioritised over education, parents reported losing control over their children and being forced to tacitly accept the monetary contributions of adolescents to household expenses, at times relating to sexual exploitation. There were references to 'rebellious' children who wanted to generate an income in order to become independent from their parents, some as young as seven years old (Red Cross, La Guajira). Vulnerability is exacerbated by low school enrolment, as children not only lack the (arguably) protective space of schools but also will face significant challenges to future insertion into the labour market. SC professionals in child-friendly spaces often referred to aggressive behaviours of boys and girls in this age bracket, and teachers reported significant psycho-social effects among Venezuelan children, such as children arriving at school and crying from the beginning to the end of classes. In terms of gendered differences, SC staff said that girls appeared to have a broader set of emotional expressions, while among boys crying was not as socially accepted. This points to a need to start gender-specific interventions early.

Among children aged between 11 and 14 years, respondents referred more to child labour and exposure to risks of recruitment by non-state armed groups, particularly for boys, although girls are also recruited. Boys and male adolescents also reportedly join gangs, for the purpose of self-protection but also to seek income-generating options, and at times also related to delinquency. Child labour on the street and exposure to sexual violence is reportedly widespread and on the increase. In addition, substance abuse is reported to start in this age bracket, including aggressive behaviour, as well as isolation and not wanting to go out.

Among older adolescents (15–17 years old), lack of access to education reportedly leads to vulnerability to protection risks, particularly related to illicit activities as a means of income generation and, again, forced recruitment by armed groups. The gender differentiation is more accentuated in this age group: repeated references were made to female adolescents in transactional and commercial sexual exploitation, at times in contexts of organised crime. Study participants talked of organised structures, often headed by women, who bring female adolescents and young women from Venezuela.

Although different humanitarian sectors spoke of these rights violations, there are few formally reported cases of trafficking in women for commercial purposes. The consequences for female adolescents include sexually transmitted diseases, early pregnancy and unsafe abortion attempts as well as forced abortions. The high prevalence of xenophobic attitudes towards Venezuelans is also reported to affect adolescents more directly, resulting in high levels of depression and social isolation, as well as aggressive and violent behaviours.

3.2 Differential gendered impacts

The most significant gendered impact of the migration crisis relates to the disintegration of the household. According to the affected population, the impact hits while they are still in Venezuela, as women and men resort to different coping mechanisms before deciding to leave the country.

The different coping mechanisms relate to shifts in gender roles – namely, women assuming roles as sole household providers. Despite important changes in the past decades, this role has continued to be largely a male one. Women who have migrated reportedly find means of income generation, particularly in the informal sector, comparatively more easily than their male peers, particularly as street vendors, in domestic or care work and in prostitution.[10] Consequently, this shift in gender roles is not associated with opportunities for agency but rather with exploitation and risky coping mechanisms. In particular, women reportedly send a higher share of remittances back to Venezuela to household members left behind, leaving them in highly precarious situations while in Colombia (UN Women 2018). A SC staff member estimated that 80% of clients of money-wiring services were women, which suggests the extent to which women are assuming the responsibility for sending remittances.

This shift in gender relations also affects men, who often have been left in Venezuela assuming roles in child care. The on-going crisis also affects traditional constructions of masculinities, as not only their role of household provider is undermined but also their assumed role of protector, particularly around rights violations that occur to other household members under their care. The disintegration of the household and the psycho-social effects of pressure to generate an income are also evident in the disconnection of adults from their household, feeding into high levels of abandonment and neglect among children.

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In Maicao before the crisis there were five to seven brothels. Now there are 20–25, pulling more rural men and boys to town.

In addition to a reversal of roles among adults, there appears to be a reversal of roles between parents or care-givers and children and/or adolescents, which also runs along gendered lines. This includes young girls starting to assume domestic care responsibilities at an early age. In addition, women and adolescents are sent to work in bonded labour to other households or to take care of the elderly. In turn, young boys engage in physically demanding or risky work on the streets or with non-state armed actors.

Given the pervasive protection risks for children relating to grave violations of their rights, domestic violence is very likely to be underreported, not only between adults and children in the same household but also in relation to other, more complicated, dynamics. All affected populations made repeated reference to differences between Venezuelan and Colombian women, characterising Venezuelans as *'taking excessive care of their body'* and portraying Colombian women as more conservative. Tensions arise, particularly in bi-national families, around how young girls dress and whom they meet. Overcrowding exacerbates these situations. Often, the result is emotional mistreatment and physical violence, often by mothers-in-law, leading to stigmatisation, depression, despair and sadness among girls.

In this context, young women are reported to resort to risky coping mechanisms, such as establishing relations with older men or men with links to non-state armed actors or organised crime. This leads to early sexual initiation, often resulting in submissive relationships characterised by violence. Although these relationships cannot be referred to as 'early marriage', as they are not formalised, they generate long-lasting impacts as a result of early pregnancies[11] and sexually transmitted diseases. Consequently, high levels of young single mothers (*madre-solterismo*) have been reported. Different humanitarian actors referred to the normalisation of violence rooted in the objectification of women and girls, which affects not only Venezuelans on the move but also Colombian host communities and is likely to contribute to and exacerbate sustained levels of sexual and gender-based violence in the border regions of Colombia.

RAMV establishes that 333 people in Colombia, amounting to 0.0075% of the sample, have been registered as identifying as LGBTI. Differential impact based on sexual orientation and gender identity needs to be understood in the context of a conservative cultural context at the borders, compounded by the politicised discussion around the concept of 'gender ideology' around the peace agreement referendum, understood by conservative sectors as undermining the concept of the nuclear family, rooted in hetero-normativity. This is confirmed by the fieldwork, which uncovered a traditional mentality, characterised by attitudes between limited openness to gender diversity and outright homophobia, at times leading to violence.

Instances of harassment not only arise between host communities and Venezuelans on the move but also comprise discrimination and institutional barriers. A UNICEF staff member in La Guajira claimed that more than 70% of members of the LGBTI community had survived instances of gender-based violence (GBV). Efforts have been made to address differential needs through a social inclusion workshop but changes have been limited. Consequently, GBV against members of the LGBTI community is underreported. Meanwhile, a study participant suggested members of the LGBTI community could not rely on local authorities, or report cases, since the latter also carry out aggressions. In particular, there are significant barriers to accessing the judicial system (Pastoral Social, La Guajira). Instances of discrimination are exacerbated through prevailing stigmatisation of LGBTI population as engaging in prostitution and sex work. A gay student from Venezuela explained that he was pressured into sexual exploitation as a coping mechanism when arriving in Colombia. Study participants said that, in the early stages of the crisis, local authorities were indifferent to members of the LGBTI community exercising prostitution but targeted harassments and violent attacks had increased notably.

3.3 Differential impact by ethnicity

Colombia has constitutional dispositions in place that mandate differential assistance to members of ethnic groups. Nonetheless, considerable barriers are notable. Even though members of ethnic groups and their authorities should be consulted with regard to the impact of the crisis and the migratory process in general on their territory, this has not consistently taken place.

Wayuu ethnic group members in the northern parts of Colombia and Venezuela have legal rights to dual nationality and freedom of movement across the border. The crisis in Venezuela, in particular the militarisation of the border, is constraining the free movement of the Wayuu people. In comparison with other Venezuelans without valid documentation, it is comparatively easier for Colombian officials to formally register the Wayuu population. However, study participants underlined significant gaps in terms of trust, resulting in indigenous people refraining from denouncing sexual violence against them (UNICEF, La Guajira).

11
673 cases identified in 2018, out of which 57 were of youth from ethnic groups (CONPES Document 3950).

Meanwhile, recurrent long droughts and high levels of malnutrition have had a particular impact on the Wayuu people, considered a humanitarian crisis on its own, and one that is not receiving sufficient attentions in the context of the Venezuelan migrant crisis. Humanitarian response plans acknowledge the particular vulnerabilities of ethnic groups in terms of lack of legal documentation, food security, health and education but significant gaps in attention remain (UNHCR 2018a).

When asked who were the most vulnerable segments among the Wayuu population, participants responded those with disabilities; those without documentation; shelters with many children under the charge of one adult; and pregnant women. References were made to one woman who was responsible for 10 young children and unable to feed them all. New-borns and young children suffer from respiratory illnesses, and specialised medical services and medicine costs are a concern. A trend of rural to urban migration is evident, with many people of Wayuu origin living on the streets.

The FGD with Wayuu women referred to the important strength of the network of the ethnic group, which is characterised as a relevant protective factor, with community members rather than government actors providing income generation support or funds for transport. However, the crisis is disrupting the social fabric of the Wayuu population, which is organised in clans and in accordance with matrilineal social arrangements. Indigenous respondents said many Wayuu in Venezuela had lost their customs and practices. Particularly young male members of the Wayuu community from the Venezuelan side of the territory are reportedly coming to Colombia, disregarding matrilineal inheritance and countering local customs, increasingly resulting in tensions among families and clans: *'They usually are expected to go to their mother's territory, usually in the Wayuu rural zones they live in equidistance, but now they are starting to build their houses/shelter side by side, which constitutes a significant change. They share ranchos. Also, many families come together and this does not work like that. This generates disruptions of the culture.'* (Wayuu respondent, FGD, La Guajira).

This research was not able to discern other specific ethnic patterns. In Arauca, humanitarian actors referred to the arrival of members of ethnic groups from Venezuelan territory. For example, in October 2018, the displacement of an indigenous household from the Amazonas region was registered, for reasons not related to the migrant crisis. Members of this household were referred to the mayor's office in accordance with dedicated referral pathways for ethnic communities, which are understood to provide differential services, respecting culture and traditions. Like other public services, though, this system is overstretched, and a dedicated transitory shelter for indigenous people in Arauca is too far away for many people in need.

3.4 Differential impact by ability/disability

The barriers encountered by children and adolescents with disabilities and their care-givers are significant. Access to the health system is challenging for those without disability and thus particularly difficult for those with disabilities, especially for those 'trapped' in border departments in inadequate informal settlements.

In the case of one mother, the wheelchair of her 13-year-old son with a degenerative muscle disease broke, and she is currently unable to take him outside or to the child-friendly space. Although SC staff are addressing this household's specific need, barriers remain around the lack of basic infrastructure and the usefulness of wheelchairs on dirt roads with the forthcoming rainy season. Everyday tasks, such as going to the toilet, become a challenge without access to water. This mother is also concerned because there are no specialised services to help with the boy's particular condition, which is getting worse. In a different community, the mother of a five-year-old boy with Down syndrome and heart disease was worried about the impact on her child of the smoke from her cooking on a wood stove. In La Guajira, a Venezuelan mother of Wayuu origin without legal Colombian documentation reported challenges bringing her disabled son from Venezuela, since the family back home could not continue to support the boy.

SC staff identify and address the most pressing needs of disabled children and their households on a case-by-case basis, and the child-friendly space is considered a welcome opportunity to contribute to social integration for disabled children. Once again, the lack of vulnerability-centred data collection constitutes a barrier to comprehensively targeting these vulnerable households with integrated humanitarian assistance.

3.5 Key categories of vulnerabilities

3.5.1 Persisting categories of vulnerabilities

This section highlights key categories of child vulnerability that emerged from this research and that are likely to continue to prevail over the next 12 months, regardless of humanitarian assistance:

1
Children out of the education system, especially those who never started schooling or have multi-year gaps, lacking a protective environment and exposed to child labour, forced recruitment or commercial sexual exploitation as a means to contribute to household survival;

2
New arrivals who underwent traumatic events in the course of border crossing, including sexual violence, and arrive in increasingly precarious conditions, including chronically sick and disabled children as well as children who care for sick and elderly household members;

3
Children of households 'trapped' in border regions with limited livelihood options, living on one meal a day and with lack of basic water, sanitation and needs;

4
Children in (female or male) single-headed households, with many young children and without means to secure a livelihood;

5
Children exposed to grave rights violations in generating income for household survival, including forced recruitment, trafficking, (commercial) sexual exploitation and transactional sex and child labour.

3.5.2 Unaccompanied and separated children

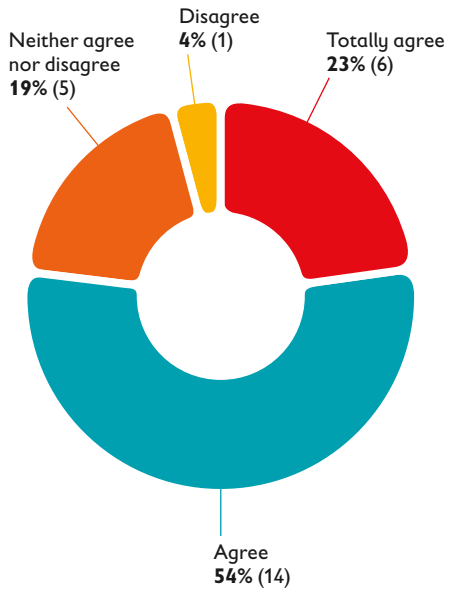
High levels of household disintegration lead to specific vulnerabilities among UASC. A key concern relates to lack of accurate information, made worse by lack of registration, because border agencies are not supposed to allow unaccompanied children across borders on their own (even if they have documentation in order). Since irregular border crossings are becoming increasingly dangerous, the risks for UASC are also expected to increase significantly. Estimates suggest more than 70% of UASC enter La Guajira through illegal routes, most arriving with extended family members (Red Cross, La Guajira). Given that Colombian legal instruments are not designed to address the needs of foreign children, information on UASC is not captured and shared at institutional level. Furthermore, lack of coordination between Colombian and Venezuelan child protection agencies makes family tracing and reunification, as well as consistent follow-up of cases, impossible.

The challenges involved in counting UASC also involve their high levels of mobility and their desire to dodge authorities, such as law enforcement officers, and avoid entering the child welfare system, as their goal is to generate an income for themselves and/or their household in Venezuela. It is also very difficult to distinguish between unaccompanied and separated children, given high levels of child abandonment and neglect.

In the light of these challenges, this research explored the estimates by different institutions and actors to assess the extent of the phenomenon. The Migrant Documentation and Information Centre in Maicao estimates a significant increase from 16 registered cases in 2017 to 57 in 2018 (Pastoral Social, La Guajira). The police in La Guajira report a decrease, which may indicate limited willingness of UASC to seek police assistance. Reported cases involved children aged six to 14, and usually they had been in Colombia for about eight days (sometimes they had just arrived and sometimes they had been in Colombia a month). In Arauca, UNICEF reported at the time of research about 15 cases.

In terms of internal estimates, the SC staff survey also asked for an estimate of UASC in respondents' area of work. While lack of precise numbers prevails and difficulties in estimating remain, those SC staff[12] who attempted a response guessed between 10 and 80 children; one staff member offered a more precise estimation of around 30 separated boys and girls and 50 unaccompanied children. Another response was that there were currently around six to seven new children arriving per week.

Figure 2
SC staff survey responses to the hypothesis *More UASC will cross the border*



12
These are aggregate responses; responses were not tracked back to the department, humanitarian team or intervention location.

An overwhelming majority of SC staff (77%) agreed that more UASC would cross the border. Consequently, efforts need to be stepped up to gather more accurate information in SC areas of intervention and systematically analyse them to feed into efforts by humanitarian partners such as UNICEF and UNHCR. Other efforts need to establish how to report and address the needs of UASC, given the overstretched government institutions.

The police in La Guajira report a change in patterns of arrival: in earlier phases children arrived on their own; now they are arriving in groups. This is confirmed by other reports that in recent times UASC have arrived with acquaintances and as groups of friends and peers (Pastoral Social, La Guajira). In other circumstances, households with numerous (up to 10) children arrive, with half of them searching for a way to earn money to send to family who have stayed behind (Red Cross, La Guajira). In Arauca, two brothers arrived with the contact information of ICBF. Their parents had sent them, confident they would be placed in a temporary shelter. However, there was no space left. A respondent from ICBF explained that she could currently accept only cases involving grave violations; the rest have to wait until April 2019 (the interview was conducted in December 2018). Another element of vulnerability, not squarely fitting the category of UASC, relates to under-age parents with small children. SC staff also reported, alongside important numbers of early pregnancy, the arrival of couples under the age of 18 years with young children.

The main reason UASC come to Colombia is to search for a means of survival through child labour, largely in the informal sector. *'These children have all the responsibility on their shoulders to support access to means of survival and they come with this mentality to Colombia'* (Ombudsperson's Office/UNHCR Arauca). SC staff said UASC mostly comprised male adolescents aged 15–17 years (although some are around 12–13). The support currently provided by ICBF centres on the re-establishment of rights and the activation of referral pathways, which does not appear to be in accordance with what these children and adolescents want.

In terms of living conditions, UASC often *'live on their own, like adults'* (Police, La Guajira). It seems that many lived on the streets before making their way into Colombia. Humanitarian actors concurred that many ended up living on the streets, avoiding being picked up by the police (Pastoral Social). The challenge of this 'voluntary' separation, often with the (tacit) consent of parents and care-givers, is that they do not want to be confined in temporary shelters, and often escape.

A respondent from the Ombudsperson's Office/UNHCR Arauca shared insights into the cases of three UASC and their living conditions and exposure to risks, such as harassment and illness. Because they were children, members of the community supported them, particularly with food, or gave them small tasks, and together they shared/saved the money. Two of them had arrived with an extended family member (a cousin and an uncle) but once in the country these men would not take care of them, and the boys had not been prepared for this. Each then found another extended family member and continued onwards with their journey.

In the case of transiting migrants, children may be separated from their parents or care-givers and left with Colombian care-givers, particularly in cases of sickness. While sometimes there is a genuine desire to support the Venezuelan population and to send children to join their family once the latter is established, there were also reports of parents being tricked into leaving their children, as described earlier.

When asked to explain the main challenges of attending to UASC, SC staff confirmed the lack of accurate and reliable data and acknowledged that the numbers used in their daily work differed from officially reported data. Another gap relates to information-sharing between different entities operating on separate internal databases. Child protection services are overstretched, which limits the proactive search for UASC (SC staff reported being able to identify UASC within the school system). Another challenge relates to identifying UASC at night, when they are usually taken to the police until being handed over the next day to ICBF (Pastoral Social, La Guajira). There are also not enough temporary shelters or 'foster mothers' (*madres cuidadoras*) (ibid.). This concern was confirmed in the Migrant Documentation and Information Centre, which continues to employ referral pathways but reported that *'Today we cannot trust that all steps on the pathway are fully operational'* (ibid.).

4 Shifting vulnerabilities: an analysis of eleven factors of deterioration

This section describes the situation of mixed groups of population on the move between Venezuela and the border departments of La Guajira and Arauca, in Colombia. The phased approach to qualitative data collection adopted, with fieldwork in December 2018 (structured KIIs and FGDs) and January 2019 (complementary data collection and deep-dive into vulnerabilities identified), allowed DD and TI to conduct a first round of data coding and analysis of the multiple impacts of the crisis on people on the move, with hypotheses generated to be included in the different online surveys as a means of verification. The figures presented below correspond to the SC staff survey responses.

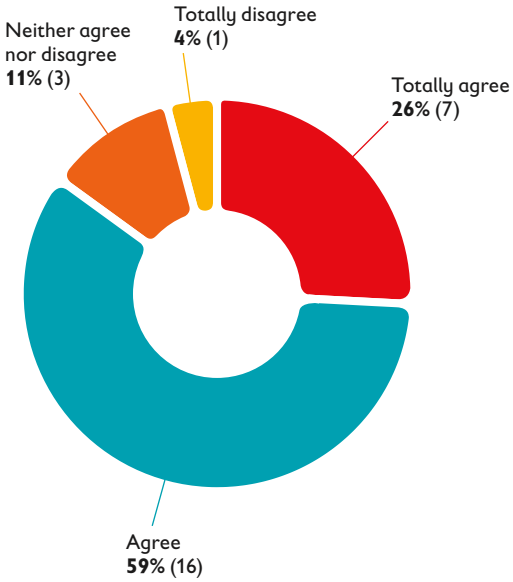
As noted in Section 1, it was difficult to conduct analysis rooted in evidence. Both the affected Venezuelan population and government counterparts and humanitarian actors tended towards sharing perceptions rather than detailed analysis into the likely evolution of the crisis or triggers of change within Venezuelan stakeholders. As a result, this section presents an analysis of perceptions, rather than an evidence-based trends analysis.

4.1
More vulnerable Venezuelans arriving in increasingly deprived states

The crisis has been several years in the making and health care deprivations and food insecurity are growing. More Venezuelans are arriving in a more deprived state, with high levels of malnutrition and chronic illnesses. Increasingly, complete families from the 'misery belts' of Venezuelan cities are arriving.

The overwhelming majority (85%) of SC staff in the survey agreed that more vulnerable people would try to join their household members outside Venezuela.

Figure 3
SC staff survey responses to the hypothesis *More vulnerable people, such as elderly people and younger children, will try to join their household members who have left already*



As complete families migrate, more elderly persons, chronically ill persons and children are on the move. In the early phases, strategic migration of young and able-bodied women and men was observed; now, family reunification is increasing (KII, Migración Colombia, La Guajira). Another trigger for the outflow of elderly and chronically ill people is the increasingly reduced access to adequate health care in Venezuela.[13]

SC staff in child-friendly spaces confirmed high levels of malnutrition, with food intake once a day being prevalent, resulting in coping strategies whereby mothers reduce their own meals in favour of feeding their own children. This situation is likely to worsen as family reunification increases, with limited access to humanitarian assistance, lack of formal documentation and increased competition over limited livelihoods.

4.2
More illegal border crossings in increasingly dangerous contexts

The continued inflow of migrants will result in more illegal crossings, as the border between Venezuela and Colombia is very porous, with about 144 *trochas*, or illegal crossing points, along its 2,200 km length (SC 2018a). These crossings are becoming increasingly risky, and will result in increased violation of human rights, in particular of children. Affected populations said this related to the increasingly proactive stance of Venezuelan border officials, armed groups and organised criminal groups operating in the border area.

Among the risks are those of migrants in precarious situations resorting to traffickers, encountering armed actors requesting a fee to cross, destruction/burning of documents, thefts and violence, in particular sexual harassment, abuse and violence against female adolescents and women. Even after crossing, informal traders face the theft, destruction and decommissioning of products smuggled across the border (including food and plastic cutlery) by Colombian law enforcement officers. These enhanced security concerns represent risks not only for migrants using illegal routes but also for pendulum migrants involved in cross-border trade.[14] FGD participants also indicated that illegal border crossing was increasingly costly.

UASC at the border were identified as particularly expose and insufficiently protected. The official number of children registered as UASC is very low; the real number is likely to be significantly higher.

13
The Venezuelan respondents also indicated that elderly people in care centres had been abandoned and left to fend for themselves, which may also have resulted in an increase of this vulnerable population.

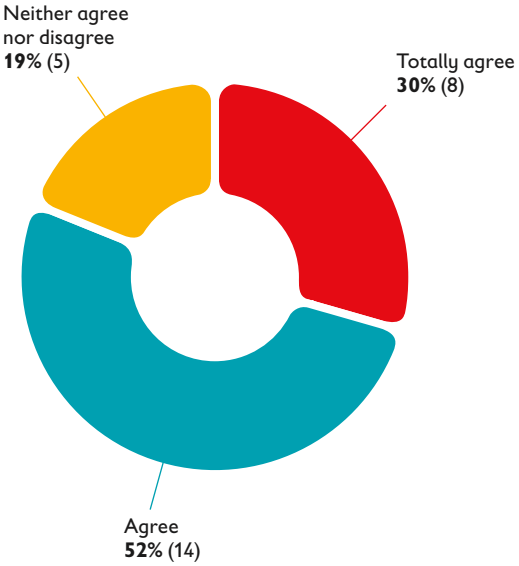
14
In Arauca, people did not make much reference to security threats crossing the border. La Guajira is more characterised by smuggling and organised crime, and increasing militarisation, emergence of new groups, shoot-outs and attacks on schools.

4.3
Moving to remote/rural areas, often controlled by illegal economies

As the border towns are becoming more crowded, more households are moving to more rural areas, where there is a limited official authority and which are often controlled by illegal economies instead.

An important majority of SC staff (82%) felt that more households would settle in more insecure and precarious locations.

Figure 4
SC staff survey responses to the hypothesis *More households on the move will settle in more insecure and precarious locations*



The Ombudsperson's Office confirms that more people are moving to rural areas, and often the only available source of income for Venezuelans with irregular migration status is related to the illegal economy. This pattern is also becoming evident in other parts of Colombia, such as around border crossings with Ecuador, where there are now reportedly 200 families working in illegal economies (SC, Bogotá). Venezuelan migrants are working for less than what Colombians will work for, displacing the Colombian 'workforce', with the potential of generating social unrest. Short-term risks relate to labour and sexual exploitation. Long-term risks include the disintegration of the unstable peace process in Colombia.

Venezuelans are also vulnerable to forced labour and sexual abuse in illegal gold mine areas such as La Pampa, a lawless region of Peru controlled by mafia groups (Dupraz-Dobias 2019).

4.4
Increase in the number of Venezuelans 'trapped' at the border

SC Colombia's Needs Overview considered the following categories: migrants in transit, population engaged in pendular movements, and migrants with the desire to relocate permanently ('vocation of permanence'). This research identified an additional and continuously growing category of people on the move (with high numbers of vulnerable children) – namely, Venezuelans and returned Colombians 'trapped' at the border. This group neither engages in cross-border trade nor has realistic possibilities of relocating to other parts of the country. A Venezuelan woman who had arrived four years ago, with four children (two from her husband's previous relationship), including an adolescent son with a degenerative muscle condition requiring a wheelchair, said her family was trapped at the border because of difficulties relocating, lack of funds, fear for the children's security and experiences of xenophobic violence.

People 'trapped' at the border are characterised by high dependence on humanitarian assistance and a tendency to resort to risky coping strategies. They live in increasingly precarious conditions, without savings and valid documentation, often in informal settlements, prone to natural disasters (flooding), where they also face evictions. Child protection risks are high, especially because children are out of school. Children show signs of neglect, as parents and care-givers are trying to secure a basic means of survival.

4.5
Increased likelihood of being affected by natural disasters: shelter and WASH

The lack of adequate shelter is evident in the different informal settlements visited in La Guajira and Arauca. Many locations are unsafe because they are wetlands or places with a high likelihood of flooding during the rainy season or when rivers rise, expected to occur starting in September/October. The informal settlements visited had no water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure. Risks to health, owing to open defecation, and risks to child protection, for example from snake bites, were evident.

Humanitarian actors such as the Colombian Red Cross in Arauca stress that the government is reinforcing flood barriers and working on infrastructure. However, they are also clear that informal settlements are considered illegal and that scarce public funds cannot be diverted to securing the wetlands to the detriment of the Colombian population, or to installing more permanent shelters. Consequently, authorisation of the installation of WASH infrastructure has also been delayed lest this result in more permanent settlement or serve as a pull factor for more migrants. The pending evictions from informal settlements are reportedly constraining the impact of unconditional cash transfers, as recipients are not keen to invest in shelters.

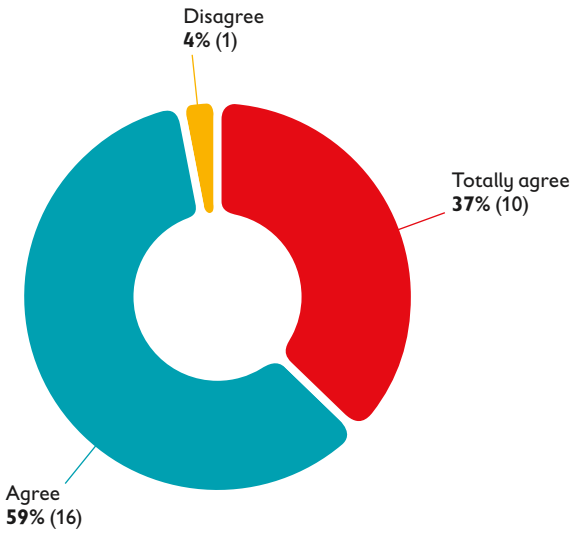
These protection concerns were also raised in the context of Peru, where strong heat waves in the northern parts of the country as well as flood risks are likely to disproportionately affect Venezuelans on the move.

4.6 Increased child labour and related exploitation

Means of survival, income generation and livelihoods are among the main concerns of Venezuelan people on the move.

A majority of SC staff (96%) agreed that cases of child labour, including the worst forms of child labour, would become increasingly common.

Figure 5
SC staff survey responses to the hypothesis *Cases of child labour, including the worst forms of child labour, will increase*



As contributing to household income takes priority over education, children search for a means of survival, almost exclusively in the informal sector. Child labour in La Guajira and Arauca takes different forms:

1
Parents and care-givers take children with them as they engage in informal activities, street vending or recycling, often in physically demanding contexts (heat, walking all day).

2
Children are sent on their own to beg, clean windshields at traffic lights, sell sweets or coffee and engage in jobs unsuitable for their age, often late at night (ICBF, Arauca). Tasks tend to be gendered, with boys engaging in physical work (carrying goods, etc.) and girls in domestic work, caring for the elderly and sick, cleaning and cooking (slave-like and 'bonded' labour).

3
Children are sent to work in agriculture or fishing, which can be dangerous. A male adolescent in Arauca fished on the river, considered a dangerous task (particularly for those who cannot swim), usually at night between 9pm and 3am. He had learned this in Colombia.

4
Female adolescents resort to transactional sex as a survival mechanism (see below).

5
Children engage in delinquency, distributing or selling drugs or contraband petrol from Venezuela (exposed to flammable liquids) or harvesting coca (as *raspachines*) in rural areas.

Being on the move, as well as lack of documentation, increases labour exploitation. In Arauca, professionals work in tasks well below their capacity and training and are often exposed to humiliating treatment (SC, Arauca). At times, children are not paid but instead receive food, other goods or a place to sleep. Engaging in informal income-generating activities also exposes them to risks of sexual violence and exploitation.

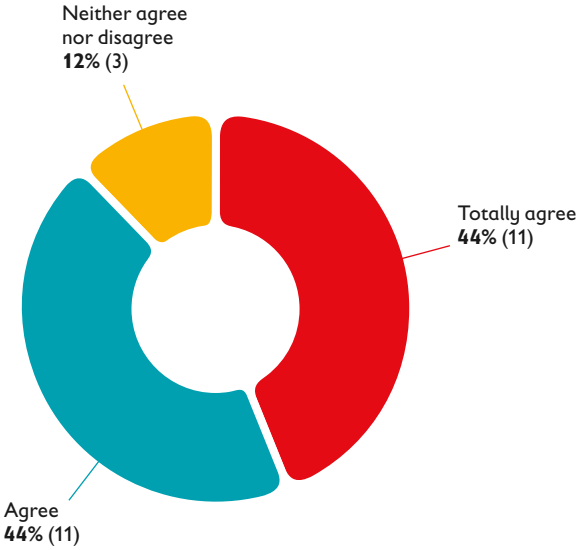
4.7 Increased forced recruitment by non-state armed groups

The inconclusive peace process is expected to result in the stepping-up of practices of recruitment of vulnerable Venezuelans, including of children. Vulnerable Venezuelans being prepared to work at a lower price than their Colombian peers will likely fuel armed groups and organised crime and is likely to have an impact in terms of short-term child protection risks as well as contributing longer term to higher levels of insecurity and violence as parallel authorities assume control and run illegal economies.

The historical absence of state authorities leads people to resort to armed actors to solve community conflicts, and also to a normalisation of violence. The underlying rationale is to operate as 'protectors' of the Colombian population. Armed and organised crime actors are reportedly pressuring migrants to go back to Venezuela or settle elsewhere. Armed groups are also demanding that landowners vouch for the Venezuelans they hire and holding them responsible if a migrant commits a crime or breaks established rules.

An important majority SC staff (88%) agreed that the armed conflict and its impacts in the border regions would negatively affect the population on the move.

Figure 6
SC staff survey responses to the hypothesis *The armed conflict and its impacts in the border regions will negatively affect the population on the move*



The recruitment of children, seen as a low-paid workforce, is likely to fuel the illegal economies in the border regions, as well as kidnapping and extortion. References were made to drug and human trafficking rings, organised crime and women disappearing, but these are not currently emerging as a public issue. Young Venezuelans are taken to more remote locations but there is a fear of reporting this, related to the lack of institutional presence and the limited strength of the authorities.

Younger children are recruited for the purposes of spying, and adolescents are engaged in smuggling, selling or distributing drugs, criminal activities and working on coca plantations. Guerrilla groups in Colombia are also known for their high levels of female participation. Often, recruitment involves grooming, which addresses the most immediate needs around food and includes promises of income, access to otherwise unattainable status symbols, such as motorcycles, or opportunities to escape abusive relationships. This means adolescents often consider their involvement 'voluntary' and creates the perception of 'joining willingly', contributing to limited reporting.[15] UNICEF Arauca has had 30 cases reported, and stressed that the number was likely higher. The extent of UASC recruitment is unknown. It is mostly adolescents who are targeted, although the Ombudsperson's Office in Arauca had been told of a case of a 12-year-old girl.

Venezuelans on the move also lack experience navigating Colombian conflict dynamics at the border and expertise on how to engage or avoid armed actors. This results in the inadvertent exposure of children and adolescents to risks as parents attempt to secure a means of survival for the family. At times, parents leave children with armed groups as a means to generate income, although it is widely known that, once within an armed group, children are unlikely to be released.

The proliferation of armed actors and the expansion of their territory and illegal economies may also restrict humanitarian access to communities, particularly in more remote and/or rural areas. Humanitarian actors reported an increase in roadblocks by non-state armed actors and criminal groups, who ask for identification and the purpose of the visit and control the movements of humanitarian staff. Although no notable incidents have been registered (among the actors consulted), this is a worrisome trend.

4.8 Increased transactional sex and commercial sexual exploitation with long-term consequences

The most pervasive child protection concerns identified in the course of field visits related to transactional sex and commercial sexual exploitation of girls (and boys, although there were limited reported cases of this). According to the Colombian Ministry of the Interior in 2018, reported cases of sexual exploitation of women tripled between 2017 and 2018 (October) (CONPES Document 3950).

Community respondents referred to different forms of child labour indirectly and directly linked to different forms of sexual exploitation. For example, one risky coping mechanism relates to transactional and survival sex of adolescents while working on the streets (such as selling coffee) for as little as 10,000 Colombian pesos ($3.20). Women selling coffee on the streets are subject to increased stigmatisation, even if they do not engage in transactional sex, and at times are exposed to intra-partner violence. In the same vein, women who sit in parks, often just to use free WiFi, may be harassed for being sex workers. Even female SC staff reported having been asked for sex.

15
In one As a proxy indicator of this 'voluntary' engagement, a case, a was reported of a girl who made her own mother received a message believed that her daughtershe had died in combat but it emerged that this was not true – the daughter just wanted, for her parent to stop the searchsearching for her.

These references indicate a larger pattern of the objectification of women and girls, which contributes to an increasingly unsafe environment, particularly at night. Particularly concerning are suggestions that increasingly younger girls are being approached, for pictures (pornography) or to be touched by mostly older men, often in exchange for food or money.

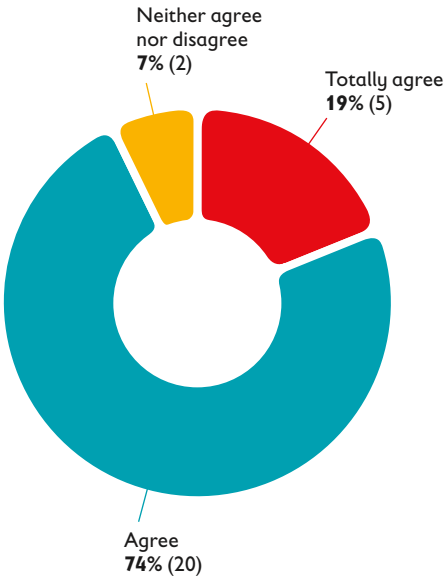
A more pervasive form of sexual exploitation relates to commercial and organised forms, involving adolescent girls trafficked from Venezuela (with the involvement of Venezuelan women) or who have started to work in brothels or bars as the only means of survival. In some cases, the owners of the establishment seize the documents of the girls (15–16 years old). In other cases, Venezuelans on the move are reportedly not even paid but instead given food and a place to sleep. While different government entities and humanitarian actors confirmed these grave child rights violations, and could point to where they were happening, the number of cases reported is very limited. The Ombudsperson's Office in Arauca spoke of the fear of reprisals among women and girls, because establishments are often run by organised crime and/or they are closely watched/not allowed to speak to outsiders.

Without dignified livelihood options, these abuses are likely to exacerbate. This is compounded by the fact that child welfare services are struggling to provide spaces to take these girls in. However, at the time of writing, ICBF in La Guajira was about to open a shelter focused on child survivors of sexual exploitation.

In light of the high levels of commercial sexual exploitation, other forms of sexual violence, for example linked to work settings, can be less visible. During the fieldwork, a case emerged of three Venezuelan waitresses, who, before getting their agreed salary, were forced to perform oral sex or otherwise be reported to the migration authorities (Ombudsperson's Office, Arauca).

A majority of SC staff (93%) agreed that pregnancies of teenagers and related consequences would increase.

Figure 7
SC staff survey responses to the hypothesis *Early pregnancies of teenagers and related consequences will increase*



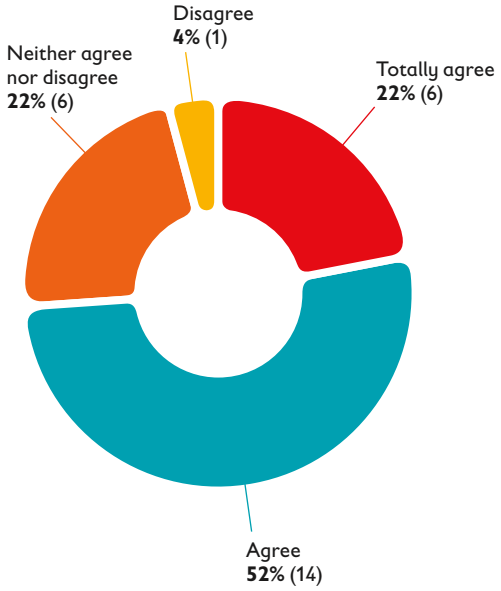
In addition to the challenges in re-establishing girls' rights, there are notable longer-term effects, such as increased levels of sexually transmitted infection, early pregnancy and (forced) abortion, as reported by different health actors and confirmed in the secondary literature (Profamilia and IPCF 2019). The different counterparts believed sexually transmitted diseases would increase, owing to limited use of condoms and lack of means to negotiate safe sex, plus lack of knowledge of partners' sexually transmitted diseases.

4.9
Increased abandonment and neglect of children

Among the most referenced child protection concerns were abandonment and neglect of children. In La Guajira, single-headed households with numerous children or children living in arrangements with extended family members, such as uncles or cousins rather than parents, are common. In this context, the risk of sexual abuse within families and by strangers is high. The need to generate an income, often walking the streets all day, means those responsible for children often leave them unattended (Red Cross, La Guajira).

The majority of SC staff (72%) agreed that the capacity of parents and care-givers to attend to and protect their children would reduce, resulting in an increase in child abandonment and neglect.

Figure 8
SC staff survey responses to the hypothesis *The capacity of parents and care-givers to attend to their children will reduce, resulting in an increase of child abandonment and neglect*



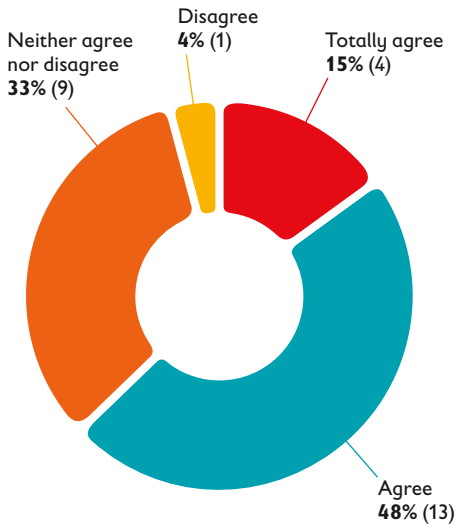
Children spend many hours alone or with their peers, exposed to risks or accidents, and often also assume the care of younger siblings (SC, Arauca). In informal settlements, they are left with acquaintances or people they have just met (Pastoral Social, La Guajira). Social workers in child-friendly spaces confirmed that parents did not pick up their children after activities (SC, Arauca). A key informant from Pastoral Social in La Guajira said that many children did not want to leave child-friendly spaces because this was the only place they felt safe. This indicates the need for safe child care – rarely mentioned in humanitarian needs assessments. However, as the above informant pointed out, these spaces must be certified, with properly trained personnel. At times, parents and care-givers (inadvertently) expose children to risks, for example when they allow their children sleep with other people, having been promised a 'bed' (Pastoral Social, La Guajira).

The conditions in informal settlements also fuel a normalisation of violence, which significantly reduces children's capacity to identify situations that are not 'normal' (Pastoral Social, La Guajira). Neglect is often seen in deficient basic hygiene (SC, Arauca). Children living on the streets represent another vulnerability.

4.10
Deteriorating social climate and increase in frequency of xenophobic attacks

It is likely that incidents of discrimination against people on the move will increase over the next year. In La Guajira, humanitarian actors acknowledge the risks and have taken concerted measures to launch anti-xenophobic campaigns, stressing peaceful co-existence. These have had a positive impact (Pastoral Social and SC, La Guajira). SC has proactively acknowledged xenophobia against Venezuelans on the move, particularly in the education system, as a child protection concern (SC 2018).

Figure 9
SC staff survey responses to the hypothesis *Relations between host communities and people on the move will get worse*



The majority of SC staff (63%) agreed that relations between host communities and people on the move would get worse. However, the proportion of staff answering 'neither agree nor disagree' (33%) was higher than the proportion totally agreeing (15%). This may relate to connections between Colombians and Venezuelans, strong family bonds, cross-border trade and community mechanisms that serve as important sources of support for people on the move, particularly in Arauca.

Nevertheless, the influx has often not only resulted in a reduction of support from host communities but also increasingly turned into rejection (SC, Arauca). In a context of advancing resource depletion, increased competition over income generation opportunities and heightened insecurity, there is the potential for increased violence. Incidents of theft and injury against Colombians are increasingly met with revenge violence, both verbal and physical, including the throwing of the belongings of Venezuelans (e.g. mattresses) into the river. A sensationalist media fuels this downward spiral using stereotypical narratives (SC, Arauca).

In informal settlements in particular, vulnerable Colombians live alongside the Venezuelan population – often internally displaced persons and others affected by the armed conflict who lived in precarious situations before the arrival of Venezuelans. This generates more stress, competition and community tension (Terre des Hommes 2018). A SC staff member in Arauca said confrontation would increase as more people have to live with the same resources.

Increased competition and the acceptance by Venezuelans on the move of lower wages have resulted in significant price dumping (FGD host community La Guajira). This also sheds light on the impact of the economic crisis in Venezuela on the Colombian border areas, which for years have based their livelihoods on Venezuelan purchasing power and trade relations and business, which have retracted significantly. Venezuelans also acknowledged this situation: *'I would like us not only to focus on Venezuelans, but also on our Colombian brothers, who have needs'* (FGD, migrants with 'vocation of permanence', Arauca).

Negative perceptions of Colombians vis-à-vis Venezuelans, as documented in this research, are based on disorderly behaviour and crime (theft); fear; *'poor hygiene'* and health-related concerns; the normalisation of *'promiscuity'* linked to sexual exploitation; and the *'decay of social norms'* and the open use of drugs (by predominantly young Venezuelans) (police; Pastoral Social; FGD, host community in La Guajira and Arauca). Other contributing factors are the perceived preferential treatment of Venezuelans, compounded by a feeling of abandonment of Colombians in the underfunded border departments. Ideologically tainted narratives around the 'socialist' mindset of Venezuelans,[16] furthering stereotypical portrayals of them as 'lazy' and 'not wanting to work', exacerbate tensions. This cultural clash helps in understanding the resistance of host communities towards unconditional cash-based interventions.

A longer-term concern is that xenophobic sentiments will be transferred from adults to children, who replicate violence in school settings, where 'competition' relates to perceived preferential treatment of Venezuelan children or the reduction of food for Colombian children (FGD, migrants with 'vocation of permanence', Arauca), a situation confirmed by the education secretary in Maicao, La Guajira.

4.11 Greater animosity among Venezuelans

The influx is also leading to animosities between new arrivals and those who arrived in previous waves and have been able to gain some stability. SC staff reported verbal and physical fights among Venezuelans, sparked by perceived injustices and competition over income-generating opportunities. An FGD participant from the La Guajira host community reported, *'They [Venezuelans] fight on a daily basis, and take out the machete. Among them there is lack of tolerance.'* Fights occur in front of children, who copy this behaviour. A SC social worker in La Guajira spoke of the desperation of earlier-arriving Venezuelans to defend the little they had. In response to the attempted theft of 1,000 Colombian pesos ($0.32), a Venezuelan man beat the suspected thief on the head. Meanwhile, Venezuelans are guarding information provided at information centres, considering this a competitive advantage, undermining previous levels of solidarity.

16 Venezuelans are reportedly not used to paying for basic public services (water and electricity), which is why the Ombudsperson in La Guajira has geared awareness-raising sessions on not only the rights but also the obligations of Venezuelans in Colombia.

5 Self-assessment of the humanitarian response in Colombia

Primarily directed at SC's decision-makers, this section engages with selected aspects of the humanitarian response relevant to enhancing child protection programming. It looks at the following three areas: 1) perceptions on the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance; 2) coordination aspects; and 3) perceptions on the strengths and weaknesses of child protection services. Data is drawn from a staff survey examining Save the Children's response in its broader context. Several of the limitations pointed out in this survey reflect structural challenges that can be of concern to other key actors engaged in the response, INGO partners and authorities both. These challenges will need to be addressed in a joint and coordinated effort.

5.1 Perceptions on the effectiveness of the humanitarian assistance

5.1.1 Appropriateness of the humanitarian assistance to the needs of children

In the SC staff survey, 54% of respondents felt that humanitarian assistance attended to the most pressing needs of children, whereas 46% believed that most pressing needs were addressed 'partially'.

First, different SC staff pointed to a gap in reliable quantitative information on the specific levels of vulnerabilities of Venezuelans, beyond formal 'migratory status'. Despite the important institutionalisation of coordination mechanisms (see below), the lack of a shared 'beneficiary' database to design complementary interventions constrains the targeting of the most vulnerable segments of people on the move. Consequently, interventions are patchy and often duplicated in some locations and absent in others.

Second, while SC protection programming has been scaled up, lack of access to basic humanitarian assistance (shelter, adequate and sufficient food, health services) undermines or at least constrains sustainable protection programming. One SC staff member talked of there being just too many needs. Consequently, parents are more interested in receiving food or cash assistance than participating in sessions on child protection aimed to empower families and communities to proactively serve as child protectors.

Third, a longer-term concern relates to access to sustainable livelihoods. Securing a means of income generation is taking priority over other needs such as education, keeping vulnerable populations in a downward spiral of unsatisfied needs and dependence on assistance, with limited possibilities of enhancing their resilience. The pressure to generate an income will continue to fuel risky coping strategies linked to child protection concerns. Compounding this, the population's high mobility is undermining longer processes such as focusing on education as a protective element or approaches that enhance social inclusion.

Consequently, while SC interventions are appropriate to address the protection needs of Venezuelan children on the move, programming will continue to be undermined by unmet basic needs, which will be exacerbated by the constant influx of new arrivals, as well as long-term challenges of absorptive capacities of the labour market – which in turn will continue to exacerbate the protection needs of children.

5.1.2
Persisting constraints

In addition, considerable structural constraints continue to affect SC's capacity to effectively implement and scale up humanitarian assistance in Colombia (and in other countries in the region).

Inaccurate quantitative data
Since this study suggests there are no signs of a reduction in the outflow of Venezuelans, or that barriers to accessing Venezuelan passports will not reduce in the short term, humanitarian actors should operate on the assumption that numbers of people with irregular migratory status will increase. In conversations with staff from the Ombudsperson Office, who are filing legal resource to register and generate documentation for Venezuelans on the move, these are lengthy processes and institutions are not likely to bridge the ever-growing gap any time soon. As long as governments in the region do not introduce a sustainable solution to allow Venezuelans on the move without documentation to access 'regular migration status', child protection concerns, including grave violations of children's rights, will continue and increase.

Inadequate funding for public policy for people on the move
While SC needs to continue to scale up its protection work, the institutional capacity of government counterparts also needs to be strengthened, in particular through adequate funding. In Colombia, the current public policy for Venezuelan migrants (CONPES Document 3950) has not brought an increase in funds. Consequently, the increasing number of Venezuelans on the move continues to be addressed with the same budget, which is likely to lead the government protection system from being overstretched to collapsing. In light of these financial constraints, recommendations to strengthen and enhance the clarity of public policy, broaden the scope of interventions to more remote and rural locations, sharpen the longer-term perspective of public policy and further invest in capacity-building seem highly unlikely to be answered.

5.2
Coordination aspects

In both Colombian border regions, interagency coordination mechanisms are operational. The Venezuela crisis response builds on extensive coordination experience developed in the course of the response to the impacts of the armed conflict in the country. However, the unprecedented scale of the crisis has also resulted in a new response structure, led by UNHCR and IOM at regional, national and department level (including a coordination mechanism across different border departments).

UNHCR, as the co-lead with IOM on the Inter-Agency Border Group, which comprises 20 UN agencies and NGOs, supports the Colombian government in coordinating preparedness planning and humanitarian response efforts (UNHCR 2018a). In December 2018, the RMRP for 2019 was launched, with the objective of providing humanitarian assistance to 2,200,000 Venezuelans and 500,000 people from host communities in 16 countries.

Key informants from the humanitarian community consulted in this research participate predominantly in coordination at the departmental level in the Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows (Grupo Interagencial sobre Flujos Migratorios Mixtos (GIFMM)) and are less aware of coordination efforts at national and between national and regional level. At department level, meetings serve to inform GIFMM on new interventions, including entering new locations, identifying gaps and coordinating efforts to address specific incidents. Challenges relate to duplication of efforts and broadening the geographic scope of interventions, in particular extending coverage to more remote and rural areas. Significant security-related considerations, especially in Arauca, mean many humanitarian actors concentrate on urban locations. Any strategic consideration on the part of SC will need to take into account the reconfiguration of non-state armed actors, as well as potential limitations of access to more remote locations.

A total of 38% of SC staff members considered the regional interagency coordination platform for refugees and migrants from Venezuela to be neither effective nor ineffective, with 35% finding them to be effective.

Figure 10
SC staff survey – effectiveness of coordination mechanisms

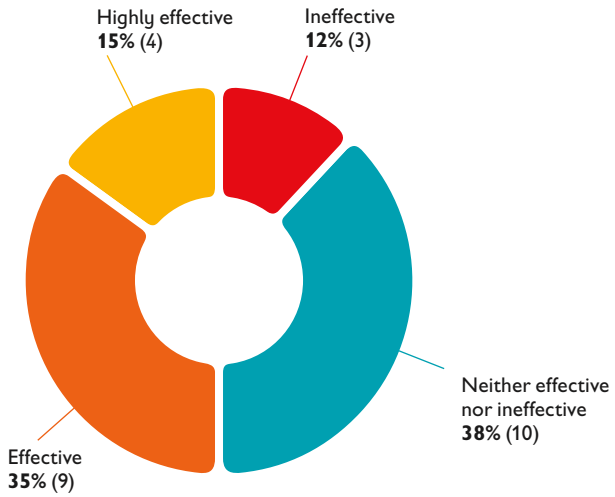
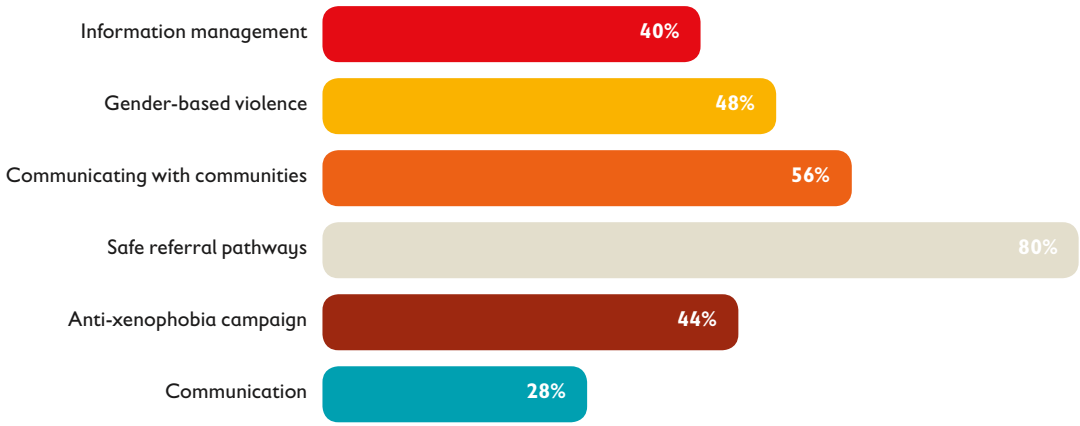


Figure 11
SC staff survey – participation in workgroups



Further probing into the strength of the mechanisms indicates that the complementary work between NGOs on safe pathways and GBV and xenophobia is particularly valued. In turn, weaknesses identified relate to a broad range of topics and the need for more efficient sharing of information, in particular to disseminate and share advances of interventions. Finally, the multiplicity of coordination spaces entails the potential to overburden SC staff, who reported having to plan and divide tasks in order to ensure presence in all of these workgroups.

Nonetheless, SC staff reported a high level of participation in all of the different inter-agency workgroups. Most participation is in referral pathways (80%), followed by communicating with communities (56%), GBV (48%), anti-xenophobia (44%), information management (40%) and communication (28%).

In terms of the key contributions of SC in these coordination mechanisms, staff highlighted conceptual support to child protection mechanisms aiming to eradicate all forms of violence against children. The particular strength of SC in meetings relates to bringing the voice of vulnerable children to these fora, enabled through direct contact with girls and boys through child-friendly spaces, case management and community mobilisation. Issues that need to be advanced include strengthened advocacy at government level and practical ways to enhance the role of community structures in child protection.

5.2.1 Access to information on humanitarian assistance

Conversations with affected populations revealed that information on available public services and humanitarian assistance is often not timely, accurate or precise. Consequently, at times, affected populations do not act on it, because of lack of transport, inability to find child care or the perceived costs of processes. However, it was also suggested that people did not follow up on information because they perceived they would not be able to access public services. Staff and affected population revealed that a significant segment of the vulnerable population (returned Colombians, mixed nationality households, indigenous Wayuu) could apply for legal documentation but had not yet done so. Affected populations, particularly those 'trapped' at the border, also want to avoid xenophobic harassment by public officials.

SC staff explore channels of communication people use to access information. Adolescents mostly use family and community networks, with word of mouth an important component. Radio, TV, social media and WhatsApp, when free WiFi is available, are also widely used. Adults also rely strongly on community leadership in informal settlements, as well as on the Community Action Committee (Junta de Acción Comunal), and community meetings.

Limited reference was made to humanitarian organisations and public service officials as a means to access information. There is thus a need to review this issue in different contexts and to identify practical means to bridge the gap between access to and effectively acting on information. Examples could include organising integrated service-specific activities closer to communities or supporting self-organisation efforts.

5.2.2 Access to public services and humanitarian assistance

The SC staff survey explores and contrasts perceptions on access of vulnerable populations on the move to both sector-specific government services and NGO services (Figures 12 and 13).

In terms of health services, 60% of SC staff indicated that access to government health services was very difficult, compared with 41% who perceived access to NGO health services to be very difficult. This confirms the prevailing gap in terms of health care, related mostly to lack of documentation.

Nobody found access to government nutrition services easy, and only 6% found humanitarian nutrition programming easy to access; most respondents found access to nutrition services difficult (50% for government services and 39% for NGO services). In terms of shelter, most SC staff lacked information on services (50% for government services and 47% for NGO services). In terms of SC's core area of child protection, access to government services was perceived to be very easy and easy by only 6% and 25% of respondents, respectively, compared with notably higher access to NGO services (33% and 28%, respectively). These figures confirm the multiple and high levels of unmet basic needs among affected populations.

Figure 12
SC staff survey – public service access

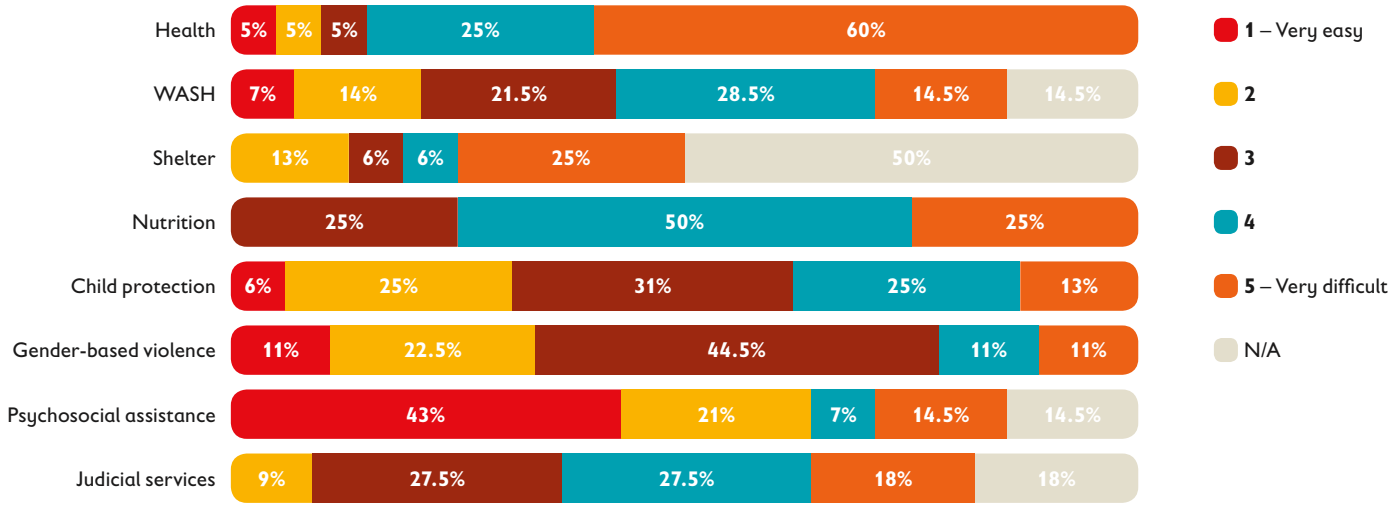
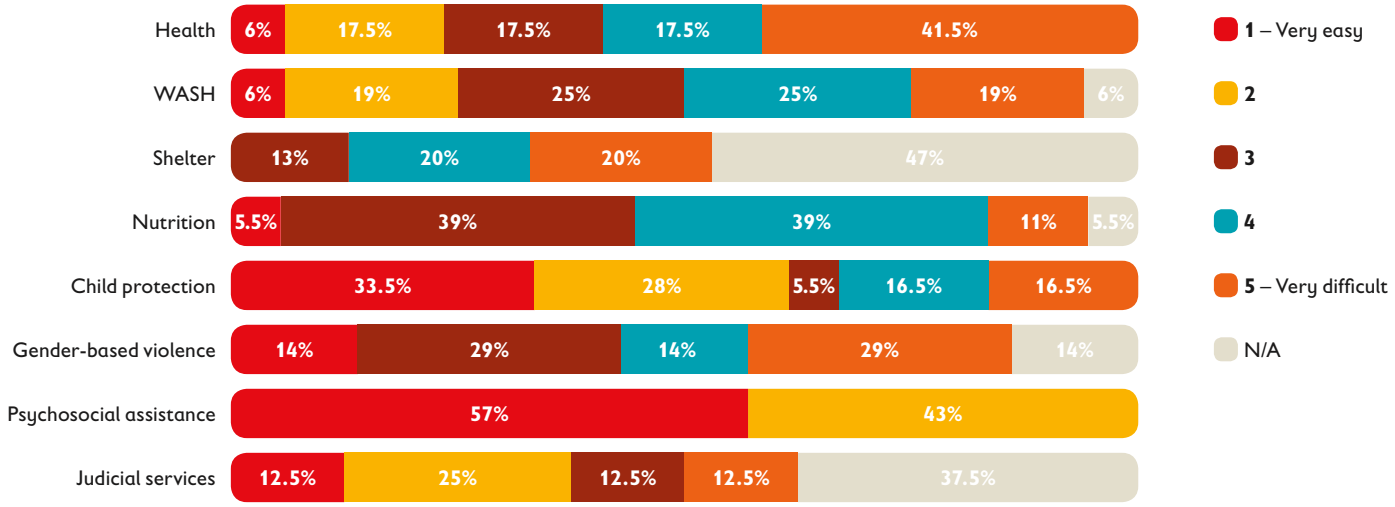


Figure 13
SC staff survey – NGO service access



5.2.3
Access to education

RAMV figures for mid-2018 indicate that 66% of Venezuelan children and adolescents in Colombia are not enrolled in the education system. DD's analysis in the context of this research suggests this percentage is higher. When comparing more recent data, from the Ministry of National Education, of the estimated number of Venezuelan children (216,563) in Colombia with the number enrolled in the Colombian school system (33,503), DD estimates that the share of out-of-school Venezuelan children amounts to 84.5%. Although the enrolment rate of Venezuelan children in the Colombian school system has increased continuously at national level, the situation is more worrying at department level. Information obtained through a freedom of information request filed with the Ministry of National Education on enrolment rates in any of the 95 Certified Territorial Entities indicates consistently low numbers of enrolment in border municipalities. More specifically, in Arauca municipality (Arauca department), 990 children are registered; in La Guajira department, 879 children are registered in Maicao and 356 in Riohacha (for more detail see DD analysis). This indicates higher levels of non-enrolled children and adolescents in the border departments, consistent with the particular levels of vulnerability of populations 'trapped' at the border. SC staff also indicated that enrolment did not necessarily imply that children consistently attended school.

In April 2018, the Ministry of National Education granted all Venezuelan children and adolescents access to the education system (Ministry of Education, Circular Conjunta 16), which is likely to increase new enrolment in 2019. However, additional barriers persist in terms of institutional gaps (over-registration, gaps in coverage) and among the population on the move (high levels of mobility, prioritisation of income generation, misinformation about the enrolment process). In addition, a considerable number of children are likely to have dropped out of formal schooling in Venezuela, which implies an important number who may not have started school or may have lost one or more years of schooling, particularly in single-headed households with many children.

There are also barriers relating to staying in education. Lack of a school uniform reportedly leads to stigmatisation by other children and thus to school dropout (SC, Arauca). Venezuelan children face constraints in terms of accessing government dispositions such as school feeding programmes: current enrolments account for only 17,274 Venezuelan children (DD analysis of Colombian Ministry of Education Diaspora Democrática, Integrated Enrolment System[17], October 2018) out of the overall 33,503 Venezuelan children enrolled in the education system. Similarly, only 862 Venezuelan children are registered as having access to school transportation (ibid.).

Our fieldwork confirmed these limitations. A respondent from the Ministry of National Education in La Guajira said the school feeding programme covered only 47% of all students in the department, and that school principals had to split the breakfast in two to feed more children. This is particularly challenging in the context of high levels of food insecurity and given that children attend school more for food than for learning, particularly in rural areas (KII, Education Secretariat, Maicao). These practices lead not only to tensions among children of different nationalities and their parents but also to shame among Venezuelans.

5.3
Perceptions on the strengths and weaknesses of protection services

A freedom of information request filed by DD with ICBF led to the provision of the following data. From 1 January 2017 to 31 October 2018, 998 children and adolescents entered an Administrative Process to Re-Establish Rights (Proceso Administrativo de Restablecimiento de Derechos (PARD)). Table 3 presents the key reasons for entering the system.

In general, the number of PARDs increased consistently between 2017 and 2018. Furthermore, six reasons account for 80% of PARD records: omission or negligence; sexual abuse; special conditions of carers; threat to physical integrity; child labour; and children living on the street. A significant increase can be observed in cases of child labour and substance abuse. DD analysis suggests that the disproportional increase in the latter may be related to the higher level of the former, with children now having resources to procure drugs.

In terms of sex-disaggregated data on PARD numbers, there has been a 303% increase (from 155 cases in 2017 to 470 cases in 2018) for female children and a 427% increase (from 99 in 2017 to 422 in 2018) for male children.

DD infers that girls and female adolescents are applying based on higher predominance of sexual abuse, whereas processes involving boys and male adolescents relate largely to substance abuse.

Looking at figures by age group also indicates a significant increase between 2017 and 2018, although increases are proportional across the different life cycles. The slightly bigger increase in reporting among adolescents in 2018, in relation to the total number of cases, could relate to the fact that more adolescents entered Colombia in 2018 or that a greater number of adolescents are exposed to risky situations.

17
Sistema Integrado de Matrícula (SIMAT), Ministry of Education, Colombia.

Table 3
Reasons for entering PARD, 2017–2018*

Motive	2017 (12 months)	2018 (10 months recorded)	Projected total (24 months including 2 months of 2018)	% of total cases	% variation 2017/18
Negligence	67	167	206	20.6	249
Sexual violence – abuse	48	175	194	19.4	365
Special conditions – carers	58	138	173	17.3	238
Threat to physical integrity	26	76	89	8.9	291
Child labour	1	84	71	7.1	8,400
Living on the streets	11	59	60	6.0	535
Malnutrition	6	56	53	5.3	940
Physical violence	17	42	52	5.2	247
Abandonment	10	42	45	4.5	420
Lost	2	17	16	1.6	840
Drug consumption/substance abuse	1	12	11	1.1	1,200
Sexual violence – exploitation	3	10	11	1.1	320
Others	4	16	17	1.7	390
Total	**254**	**893**	**998**	**100**	**351.5**

Figure 14
PARDs underway by sex
Source: DD, adapted from ICBF.

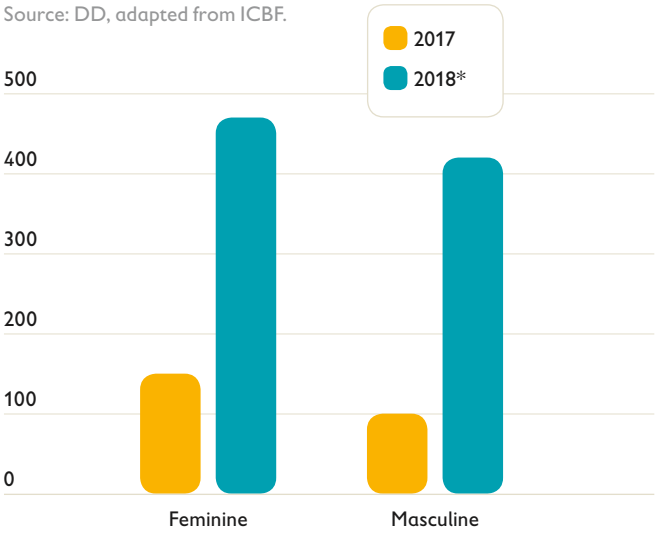
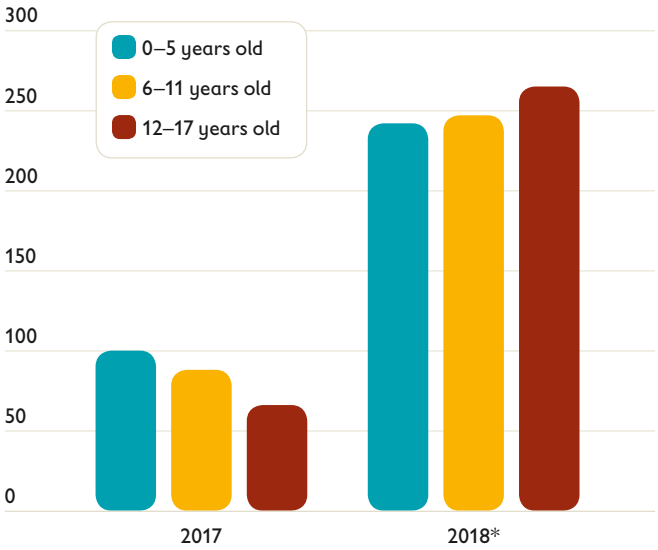


Figure 15
PARDs underway by age group
Source: DD, adapted from ICBF.



*Note: Given that the statistics provided by ICBF extend only until 31 October 2018, the trend shown in the first 10 months of 2018 was continued and projected to the end of December to obtain an approximate record for the entire of that year.

Finally, in terms of PARDs per department, overall ICBF reports very low numbers across Colombia (cases addressed through humanitarian organisations are not registered in these numbers). Given the levels of under-funding of border departments and the socio-economic reality, this reveals the limited institutional capacity of ICBF in these departments to deal with the cases referred to it. In La Guajira, a total of 63 cases have been opened – nine in 2017 and 54 in 2018; in Arauca, a total of seven cases have been registered – three in 2017 and four in 2018. For more information, refer to the full DD report.

The remainder of this section looks at SC staff perceptions of available protection services in their areas of intervention, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, including case management, child protection referral pathways and GBV referral pathways.

5.3.1 Case management

In the SC staff survey, 75% of respondents said case management services existed in the intervention location, 18% said 'partially' and 7% said none existed.[18] Among the strengths identified were the capacities of SC case management interdisciplinary team and the previous experience and qualifications of professionals, and the use of tailored protection pathways for each case. In addition, the security and confidentiality protocol in place is implemented in a structured manner. Among the weaknesses are limited coverage, particularly in rural areas, and the overstretched capacities of institutions required to intervene. Some institutions mandated to address child protection concerns either do not act or do not act in an adequate manner. Some staff reported gaps in terms of coordination between state entities and challenges in timely follow-up.

5.3.2 Child protection referral pathways

A total of 82% of SC staff said child referral pathways were operational in their area of intervention; 18% said they were partially in place.[19] In terms of strengths, staff referred to the existence of a judicial framework to guarantee child protection (although not necessarily for non-Colombian children) originating from previous interventions responding to the needs of children affected by the armed conflict. Furthermore, SC staff highlighted the growing presence and impact of NGOs and the broadening of the scope of services offered. In terms of weaknesses, SC staff stressed that, despite having knowledge on how to manage cases, institutions were overstretched and did not have the capacity to respond to the broad needs of the people on the move resulting from the Venezuelan crisis. Gaps in coverage of comprehensive child protection services were highlighted recurrently. A specific reference was to the need for timely activation of protection pathways relating to rights violations and sexual abuse of children, including commercial sexual exploitation.

5.3.3 Gender-based violence referral pathways

In terms of existing GBV referral pathways, 39% of SC staff said these were in place; another 39% said they partially existed; and 21% said they did not exist. Among the strengths identified was the differential and needs-based attention offered to survivors of GBV. Peruvian respondents referred to conducive partnerships with the Casa de la Mujer and the Secretary of Social Development, to work in a coordinated manner on both prevention and mitigation of GBV, in particular sexual violence. Meanwhile, some institutions have limited financial means, and teams of professionals are too small for the scale of the emergency. In addition, SC staff stressed the need to strengthen capacity to attend to cases, alongside concerted efforts to disseminate information about their existence and the services provided. SC staff also referred to the larger issue of the normalisation of violence, and the fact that the objectification of women fuels violence and that interventions need to focus not only on mitigation but also on prevention.

18 The two negative responses were from Peruvian respondents and the third Peruvian respondent opted for 'partially'.

19 Out of the three Peruvian respondents, two said such referral pathways were in place and one said 'partially'.

6 Conclusion and recommendations

As the Venezuelan migrant crisis continues to evolve, challenges relate to addressing the needs of the most vulnerable segments of the 2.7 million Venezuelans in the region (particularly those with irregular migration status) but also those of the 1.9 million new arrivals expected to arrive in host countries until December 2019, mainly in Colombia. The three overarching challenges are as follows:

1
There is a need to shift the narrative from 'economic migrants' to a legal denomination that captures the conditions of a significant proportion of Venezuelans on the move. Host countries will need to coordinate and adapt their migratory frameworks based on the provision of valid travel documentation in order to reduce the numbers of Venezuelans with irregular migratory status, and expand temporary legal stay mechanisms with permanent means to regularise their status.

2
Concerted efforts are required to capture 'regular migrants', 'asylum-seekers' and 'irregular migrants' and to develop shared databases that more consistently document levels of vulnerability.

3
Given the limited absorptive capacity of host governments, a two-pronged humanitarian approach is required: stepping up support to institutions providing basic services, particularly related to child protection, to enhance rapid response capacity; and increasing the scope of interventions of national and international NGO, including to cover more rural zones, while adapting them to reach the most vulnerable child population.

The following sections recommend advocacy-related interventions, identify opportunities for humanitarian scale-up for SC and put forth strategic considerations for the next funding cycle.

6.1 Advocacy recommendations

Raise the profile of the Venezuela humanitarian emergency, internally and externally: There are no indications that the outflow from Venezuela will decrease within the next 12 months. Even in the event of the outflow remaining at steady levels, new arrivals will arrive in more vulnerable conditions, without the required documentation. Particular emphasis should be given to children 'trapped' at the border, with high levels of vulnerability.

Raise awareness of the considerable funding gaps of public services: In the Colombian context, despite the existence of a public policy to address the multiple and complex humanitarian needs, its implementation is not consistently or adequately funded. Improving sector coordination and referral pathways will be of limited impact if rising demands cannot be met. Advocacy efforts on funding need to focus on the interconnectedness of different emergencies in the context of Colombia: the inconclusive peace process, the food crisis mainly affecting the Wayuu population in La Guajira and people on the move from Venezuela. This latest emergency can be used as an opportunity to strengthen institutionalisation, as well as to contribute to more government spending and to address the limited presence of authorities.

Call for the establishment of permanent registration mechanisms to regularise the status of Venezuelans on the move: The urgent establishment of permanent and simplified (one-time) registration mechanisms to regularise the status of Venezuelans is required, particularly focused on sex- and age-disaggregated data and vulnerability-centred registration. Timely and accurate information on how to access these mechanisms needs to be widely disseminated and simplified.

Shift the categorisation of Venezuelans from one of 'economic migrants': This generalisation fails to capture the heightened levels of vulnerability of people living in 'refugee-like' conditions, particularly those trapped at the border. A conceptual shift is required for governments to consider alternative registration mechanisms to reduce levels of undocumented people without access to public services.

Enable local authorities to designate places to settle or allow for safe relocations: As well as on Venezuelans on the move, advocacy efforts need to focus on Colombians returning, particularly from wetlands and flood-prone areas. The pressures of pending evictions undermine cash-based interventions geared towards shelter improvement. In addition, adequate basic WASH hardware needs to be considered.

6.2 Opportunities identified

Provision of education in emergencies (EiE): There is an urgent need to initiate EiE, especially in the border regions, to avoid a whole generation of Venezuelans from missing out on education, with serious consequences for their development and that of Venezuela. EiE responses that could attract older children back to school include supporting catch-up education (or accelerated learning) and/or non-formal opportunities that are flexible enough to allow them to continue to work (in decent work) at the same time. In addition, EiE may help address overcrowding in schools, dropouts and non-attendance. SC as the global co-lead of the Education Cluster and as an agency that provides EiE in many humanitarian settings is well positioned to advocate for EiE in Colombia with both donors and the Ministry of National Education.

Development and implementation of adolescent programming: Significant numbers of adolescents, both girls and boys, from Venezuela are now living and working in the border areas of Colombia as well in other parts of the country. Girls get involved in survival sex, sometimes with the knowledge of their parents/families; boys are drawn into illegal/criminal activities led by gangs and armed actors. Programming on life skills, sport and recreational activities and livelihood opportunities will help counter this dangerous trend. Gender-specific adolescent programming could include menstrual hygiene management, to enhance access to reusable menstrual sanitary pads, linked to WASH programming; and sexual and reproductive health care, including provision of information on the reproductive cycle alongside integrated sexual and reproductive health services, such as those being implemented under the health pillar in La Guajira.

Protection of UASC: Since it is envisioned that the number of UASC will increase, and given that UASC are most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, expanding the current case management system to areas where significant numbers of UASC are located is a priority. Identification and documentation will be a first step in addressing the protection needs of UASC. Responses may include family tracing and reunification or placement, but also exploring complementary approaches, such as encouraging a move to urban alternative care, which may entail foster care for younger children and independent living for older children.

A UASC case management approach will enable a more holistic response. Information from this research indicates that the majority of UASC are adolescents and hence responses should be seen in the light of adolescent programming. It is also important to advocate for the establishment of cross-border responses. Another element is extensive sensitisation of parents so they do not leave their children with people they do not know, as abuse and exploitation is known to happen in such situations.

Addressing grave violations of children's rights: Formal reporting is very low and institutional reporting capacities are weak. Measures to prevent and respond to grave child rights violations depend on the availability and quality of the available data. Currently, SC in Colombia is not well positioned to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children or forced recruitment, given its 'static' interventions in informal settlements (rather than in urban centres or more remote rural areas where illegal economies are located). It is often easier in the evening or night to identify children in these circumstances, after formal SC office hours, when security and the duty of care with regard to staff cannot be guaranteed.

Strengthening measures for monitoring and reporting as well as advocacy for the development of multi-sectoral programmes will help counter commercial sexual exploitation as well as recruitment and use of children by illegal armed groups/gangs. This could be linked to adolescent programming, in the knowledge that prevention of recruitment by armed groups will require different measures and approaches, which must take into account the complexities of engaging with non-state armed actors. At the strategic level, SC must reflect on the extent to which it is prepared to engage with such actors.

Interventions that do not engage non-state armed groups could involve collective productive projects geared towards self-subsistence in informal settlements (see below); strengthening institutional capacity to attend to the needs of children in commercial sexual exploitation (the ICBF shelter in La Guajira) before stepping up referral activities; and introducing adolescent programming, in particular enhancing knowledge around the reproductive cycle, family planning and safer sex. These rights issues are linked to lack of access to dignified forms of stable income generation and will be linked to the strategic decision to expand cash-based interventions (including the challenges involved) and start livelihoods programming. Given that both child protection risks are likely to increase over the next year, internal SC discussions are required that will enable the development and implementation of appropriate multi-sectoral responses.

Investing in the relevant government departments: Given that several Colombian government departments, particularly those that deal with child protection, education and health, are already providing services to Venezuelan children and adolescents who have crossed into Colombia, it is important that these be supported with additional funding so they can expand/scale up services. It would also be worthwhile to invest in the capacity development of staff so they can provide quality services.

Livelihoods-related programming: While a comprehensive and sustainable livelihoods programme is beyond SC core competencies, steps have been taken to start multi-purpose cash grants, which will be closely monitored for learning purposes. At the same time, smaller-scale conditional cash grants or cash for work schemes focused on informal settlements and/or geared towards self-subsistence could be considered. Concrete activities could centre around waste management and WASH hardware (pending departmental authorisation). Another field to explore, given the significant numbers of children out of school, relates to cash for education schemes. Smaller-scale collective income-generating projects targeting needs within informal settlements could be envisaged, such as the production of reusable menstrual sanitary pads. Furthermore, the positive impact of comedores or community kitchens has been highlighted as reducing tensions between informal settlements and bordering host communities. Cash for work, productive projects and seed funding could help incorporate community members into the delivery of these services, in particular care-givers of smaller children. The networks based in Colombia reportedly provide financial support to start up businesses to sell products on the street.

Strengthening community-led coping mechanisms and resilience: Given the high levels of child neglect reported, different existing community resources and coping mechanisms, as well as incipient organising efforts of Venezuelans on the move, could be linked, to keep children safe while organising recreational activities. Furthermore, teachers among the population in informal settlements could serve as a community resource to reduce child neglect. In the same vein, SC staff in child-friendly spaces reported instances of parents not showing up to pick up their children after activities, stressing that some people mistook the SC intervention as conventional 'child care'. It is clear that other safe child care mechanisms are required; this could constitute a productive project or income generation option for affected populations.

Enhancing self-organisation in informal settlements: Levels of self-organisation among Venezuelans, returning Colombians and Colombians affected and displaced by armed conflict are limited, although individual initiatives and networks are emerging. However, there are security concerns here, with completion between individuals reportedly undermining or threatening host community leadership. At the same time, precautions need to be taken in the wider context of Colombia's emergence from armed conflict, which has been characterised by continuous threats, attacks and the assassination of social leaders.

Enhancing a gender-responsive approach: While an increased number of women are now sole income providers, this often relates to undignified and exploitative work, including prostitution and sex work. Women heads of households with family members still in Venezuela also send most of their earnings as remittances, leaving themselves in vulnerable positions. Transformative gender approaches would focus on countering the most exploitative aspects underlying vulnerability; strengthening the organisation efforts of women in informal settlements; awareness of rights and comprehensive information on basic services; and collective income-generating projects. Gender-specific adolescent programming could focus on self-esteem, body awareness and information on the reproductive cycle, as well as more general sexual and reproductive health information. Gender-mixed interventions could counter the objectification of women and girls and highlight gender-specific protection risks. SC staff in Arauca recommended working on new masculinities and femininities, which could imply adopting a more household-centred approach focusing on collective income generation programmes that work towards more equitable gender relations, including redistribution of reproductive and care work. The shift in gender roles has reportedly left many men feeling disempowered. In some contexts, discussion groups and meetings among men have helped voice their concerns.

Recommendations for future research: This study has identified two opportunities for further research. First, SC staff said they would welcome a practical compendium or case study-centred resource that captures examples of and learning from complex case management in the border departments of Colombia. A concrete case shared as an example involved a Venezuelan minor without documentation who is eight months pregnant and suffering from intense bleeding. This initiative could be done in-house, through a short survey to identify the most notable cases, with follow-up for more detailed information and paths taken, as well as a collective collaborative exercise around learning.

A second recommendation relates to mostly male adolescents (14–17) who cross the border, sometimes with extended family members, often with the consent of their parents, in search of income generation opportunities, who often end up in exploitative and risky child labour. They often shy away from officials, do not often go to child-friendly spaces and spend their time working or looking for work. The recommendation is to engage in a longer-term process of trust-building before embarking on a more adolescent-led programme design that is participatory and collaborative in nature. This could include a participatory video or photo project, or similar, to elicit the perspectives, experiences, needs and capacities of UASC.

6.3 Strategic considerations

This section identifies potential strategic consideration for SC decision-makers and their partners.

Expand the scope of interventions with a dynamic and forward-looking approach: The needs of the different vulnerable communities in the two border regions considered in this research are evidently far to be met. A scale-up of the coverage and scope of humanitarian assistance delivered in these areas will have to concurrently address the immediate and lasting impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable, adapt to the various degrees of mobility of some of the groups most at risk (including mobile services), and mitigate mounting social and xenophobic tensions in a resource-scarce environment. Adopting a conflict-sensitive approach to programming and to system-strengthening seems an imperative in this particular context.

Scale up humanitarian interventions in current locations with additional programming: Priorities here include 1) implementing an EiE response, including catch-up education and accelerated learning, in informal settlements; 2) developing comprehensive gender-responsive adolescent programming around life skills and recreational activities, as well as livelihood opportunities; 3) tailored programming to identify UASC and address their protection needs, through dedicated research; and 4) proactive engagement in preventing and mitigating grave violations of children's rights.

Expand geographically to Cúcuta, Norte de Santander: The current Colombia Country Strategy suggests scaling up in Cúcuta, through an additional field office. This would likely require a shift towards addressing the different migration pattern of caminantes, who mostly use the formal border crossing as a primary port of exit from Venezuela. Interventions would need to adapt to address high mobility, provide integrated information and child-friendly spaces on highways and distribute 'winterisation' kits. Given financial constraints, it may be better to prioritise scaling-up in areas where SC is already operational.

Expand to other regions of Colombia closer to the border with Ecuador: While scaling-up in existing areas of SC intervention should be prioritised, experiences gained in addressing the needs of 'trapped' populations in the Colombia–Venezuela border areas could help in reaching a similar demographic on the Colombia–Ecuador border, given the presence of SC across the Colombian territory.

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Save the Children

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Save the Children International
St Vincent's House
30 Orange Street
London
WC2H 7HH
United Kingdom

+44 (0)20 3272 0300
www.savethechildren.net

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