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RAPID JOINT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

POPULATION FROM LA VICTORIA, VENEZUELA WITH INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION NEEDS AND COLOMBIANS RECENTLY ARRIVED TOR ARAUQUITA, COLOMBIA, AND THEIR HOST COMMUNITIES. 27 March 2021

Context and methodology

On the 21st of March, armed clashes broke out in Venezuela, as part of a military operation carried out by the Bolivarian National Air Force against an Organized Criminal Group in the town of La Victoria, in the municipality of Paez, Apure state. **An estimated 4,501 Colombians and people in need of international protection (1,127 families)¹, fled to Colombia**, crossing the Colombian-Venezuelan border through the Arauca River through informal crossing points. The population fled to the border municipality of Arauquita, in the department of Arauca, settling in areas dispersed along the border. At least 19 locations have been identified where those displaced reside in the urban and rural areas of the municipality of Arauquita municipality.

Arauquita (Col) - La Victoria (Ven)



The municipality of Arauquita informed the National Government that it does not have the capacity to cope with an emergency of this magnitude. Furthermore, as clashes are on-going, new movements may occur in the coming days, and the arrival of more people to Arauquita, Arauca and other neighboring municipalities is expected. The response, already at capacity, is further hampered due to the remote and dispersed nature of several of the places of where new arrivals have settled.

¹ 38% Venezuelans and 17% Colombians, Information as at March 27, 2021. Source: Office of the Mayor of Arauquita

13

Organizations

901

participants
50 community groups

18

Key informants

In order to estimate the **priority needs** of the population, identify response coverage, existing gaps and operational constraints, and anticipate how the situation could evolve in the immediate future, the organizations in Arauca, coordinated the Local GIFMM with support of the ELC (Local Coordination Team, or "ELC", by its Spanish acronym), decided to launch a Joint Initial Needs Assessment (or "ECNI", by its Spanish Acronym). **On the 23rd and 24th of March, more than 20 interviewers from 13 organizations² carried out data collection in 17 population concentration points in the municipality of Arauquita.** The results are based on different perspectives: the organizations conducted 50 group discussions, involving 901 people from Venezuela in need of international protection, Colombians recently arrived from Venezuela and their host communities. In addition, the results within this report are based on direct observation, a review of secondary sources and surveys with 18 key informants, including community leaders (e.g. presidents of Community Action Boards), representatives of firefighters participating in the Unified Command Post (PMU), among others.

This rapid assessment prioritizes speed over comprehensiveness. As a result, it does not address all existing information gaps and does not replace comprehensive sectoral assessments

Population profile

According to information provided by the municipality of Arauquita, as of March 27, 2021, there are approximately 4,501 people from Venezuela who recently arrived at the municipality, including 136 pregnant and lactating women.

Key informants were requested to estimate the population coming from Venezuela residing in the different data collection points. The interviewed population estimates the presence of a larger Venezuelan population (70%), compared to the number of Colombians who recently arrived from Venezuela (30%). The population is mainly located in urban areas of the municipality such as CIC Ribera, Rivera Urban Sector and several informal settlements.

On average, each family consist of 3.9 members, according to a census conducted by the Office of the Mayor of Arauquita, local partners, and reports from indigenous organizations in the El Vigía community.

<i>Gender and age</i>	Percentage
■ Boys and girls <5	■ 13%
■ Boys and girls 6 - 17	■ 27%
■ Men	■ 27%

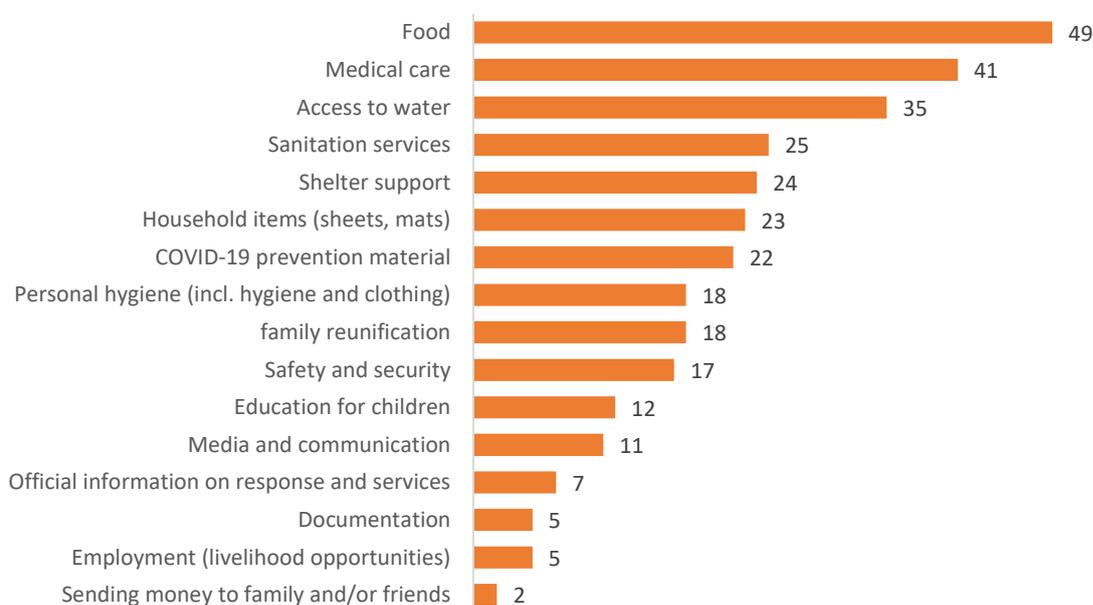
² ACNUR, Apoyar, Campaña Colombiana contra Minas, CISP, ELC Arauca, Federación Luterana Mundial, GIFMM Arauca, Intersos, NRC, OCHA, OIM, Pastoral Social, Programa Mundial de Alimentos.

■ Women	■ 29%
■ Elderly (60+)	■ 5%

Priority Needs

- In 49 of the 50 community discussion groups, around 98%, access to **FOOD** is mentioned as a priority need. According to key informants, the main barrier to accessing food is the lack of resources. Communities in the affected municipality access food and sources of income through subsistence farming and raising livestock. According to those interviewed, in general, there is sufficient food available in the markets. However, in six concentration points in rural areas, key informants mentioned difficulties in accessing markets due to their distance.

Currently, what are the main needs for the population from Venezuela in this area (# groups)?



- In 41 community groups, or 82%, access to **HEALTH CARE** and medicines was prioritized by participants as a priority need. In the Cájaro data collection point, key informants reported that there is no health service nearby. In addition, lack of supplies, personnel and the lack of documentation are the main barriers to accessing health care. The assessment teams reported the impact of the crisis on mental health, especially for children, adolescents and the elderly, a situation that is aggravated by the sounds of on-going fighting.
- Access to **WATER, SANITATION SERVICES and/or HYGIENE** was prioritized by 39 groups, or 78%. Almost all key informants, 17 out of 18, mentioned access to hygiene services and items as a major concern, especially due to the lack of infrastructure such as showers and sinks. In 42 of the 50 community groups, 85%, participants highlighted access to sanitation and hygiene products as top priorities for girls and women. Illustratively, there are more groups that prioritized hygiene items (29 groups) for girls, than groups prioritizing food (24). Key informants in seven data collection points highlighted that access to potable water is of major concern as there is no aqueduct, the water is of low quality or there is not enough water. In addition, access to hygiene products is

limited due to lack of economic resources and, in some cases, due to the distance between the community and markets. Key informants and data collection teams report a lack of biosecurity items, such as masks, alcohol, gel and soap.

- **SHELTER** support and access to **HOUSEHOLD ITEMS** are priority needs, as noted by 35 of 50 community groups. Participants primarily mentioned the need for sheets, blankets, mattress, mattress pads and pillows. At various data collection points, the data collection teams reported that there are people sleeping on the street, which is of specifically of concern due to the recent start of the rainy season. The heavy rains have complicated the shelter situation, damaging some shelters and belongings as well as increasing the presence of vectors/mosquitoes. As many fled without having time to take any possessions, community group participants also highlighted the need for clothing and footwear.
- Participants in 25 of the 50 groups mentioned that some people are facing special difficulties to meet their basic needs or to access services, especially people with **disabilities and the elderly**, who have difficulty accessing health, sanitation, and other services. At all points, people with specific needs were identified, such as the elderly, children under six months of age and people with disabilities.

Protection Risks

Due to its rapid and multi-sector nature, this assessment does not provide a complete picture of the protection concerns that the population from Venezuela with international protection needs face in Arauca. However, those interviewed reported several key risks:

- 16 community groups at four collection points indicated that **activities to promote the security situation are a priority for the host community**. At two sites in Vereda de Cájaros, data collection teams reported that the population does not have freedom of movement, given the current security conditions and the presence of armed actors.
- In three collection points, Alcaraván, La Esmeralda and Sector Urbano - Riberas, key informants reported that **people who intend to move to another areas face barriers due to the security situation**.
- Assessment teams identified risks and impacts associated with **forced recruitment**, especially for children and adolescents.
- The data collection teams reported that families fled without having time to take their **identification documents**. On the other hand, children and adolescents studying in Colombia while living in Venezuela were unable to leave with their school supplies, which may make it difficult for them to continue studying. This could further increase the risk of child recruitment.
- In addition to the security situation, the data collection teams mentioned that children and adolescents are at risk as they are residing in **close proximity to roads**.
- Additionally, key informants reported a **high risk of xenophobia**.
- Several key informants indicated that **people crossing the river into Colombia during the night, despite the physical risks involved**. According to some interviewees, the border crossing is sometimes restricted due to the scarcity of gasoline in the area, and some families have even managed to obtain fuel as a means of "payment" for transportation.
- Data collection teams report that it is likely that there are people who usually engage in **pendular movements**, moving between Venezuela and Colombia in search of sources of income and access to basic services, who have not been able to return to their homes.

Impact Host Community

Key informants reported that, due to the unprecedented nature of the current crisis, the community was not prepared for this crisis. However, community group participants and key informants underlined the widespread solidarity of the Colombian communities in the municipality. 43 of the 50 groups, or 86%, **described the relationship between the host community and population from Venezuela with international protection needs** as 'good' or 'very good'. Only at the Casa Campesina data collection point did participants mention that children have felt discriminated against.

“ *Community group participant:*

Very good, there is a good relationship, they have supported us, they have supported us with medicine and clothing. ”

Key informants mentioned that the event has had an impact on these communities, especially on their perception of security. The current priority needs for host communities **are access to food, medical care and housing support**. Participants of the discussion groups have a similar perspective: food, health care and housing support are the priority needs for the communities they are hosted by. In addition, participants prioritized **water and sanitation for host communities, as well as biosecurity elements to prevent COVID-19**. The assessment teams highlighted the increased risk of COVID-19 infection due to the overcrowding in many displacement sites.

Intentions and posible developments

In the vast majority of the community groups, 40 out of 50 groups, 80% of the participants indicated that they **intend to stay in the municipality of Arauquita**. Some said they will stay until they are provided with guarantees to be able to return to Venezuela. In the remaining groups, participants indicated that they would return to Venezuela as soon as possible. In general, participants reported that at least one member of the household will return temporarily to verify the condition of their house and belongings.

Are most people expected to stay at this location for the next two weeks?



The most important reason for fleeing to Arauquita is i) its proximity to La Victoria, ii) the presence of a network of family or friends, and iii) security reasons. Various assessment teams mentioned that it is

likely that part of the population, if unable to return to Venezuela, will move to another area in Colombia to find access to basic services and sources of income.

<i>Why did you choose this settle in this location?</i>	Groups (n=50)
■ The location is nearby La Victoria	■ 34
■ Network of family and/or friends	■ 17
■ Safety and Security	■ 9

14 of the 18 key informants expect more people to arrive from Venezuela in the next two weeks due to the continued fighting. Before the recent crisis, the population in La Victoria and surrounding areas was estimated at 33,000 people.

11 of the 18 key informants believe that the situation will worsen in the next two weeks, in view of the possible arrival of additional people and specifically if there is not enough aid to cover the needs.

Humanitarian response and access

In seven data collection points, key informants and/or data collection teams reported that there is a response from private entities, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, especially in terms of humanitarian assistance through the delivery of food, hygiene kits and health services. Despite the rapid response by the PMU, by the Office of the Mayor, and humanitarian organizations, at almost every data collection point there is evidence of **how response capacities are overstretched**. At the Alcaravanes, key informants indicated that there had been no response at the time of data collection. At the remaining sites, there is no information available on the coverage of the response.

Additionally, the data collection teams reported that in some rural sites there are **access constraints that could hinder a possible humanitarian response**. For example, due to flooding from rains, the access road to Peralonso and Cárjaros has been limited. For security reasons, the team has been unable to access Bayoneros.

Information gaps

- **Other municipalities in Arauca:** Early warnings have been raised in municipalities such as Tame and Saravena regarding the possible arrival of population from Venezuela affected by the armed actions in La Victoria. Data from secondary reports are available, but situation should be monitored in case of a significant increase in the affected population.
- **Disaggregation:** There is no disaggregated data on the the Colombian and Venezuelan population, which makes it difficult to have a much more accurate picture of the proportion and characteristics of the population.

- **Protection risks:** Several participants expressed fear or mistrust when answering the survey questions. As such, protection concerns are likely to be underreported.
- There is a need to identify unaccompanied or separated children and adolescents, as well as to identify the risks and effects associated with forced recruitment.

To address the information gaps, it is recommended to

- Strengthen monitoring of protection risks and needs. **Standardize the process of data collection**, through joint processes with the Government. A such, monitoring systems have been established at different points identified by the institutions and humanitarian organizations.
- Continue **constant monitoring together with the institutions in municipalities such as Tame, Saravena and Arauca**, in order to identify key developments and risks.

Organizations Participating



In coordination with:

