

COVID-19

GNWP Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy and Appeal

June 2020

Country Update

Colombia

Context and government response:

As of June 6, 2020, Colombia has registered 38,027 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 1,205 deaths. The government has implemented a series of containment measures to mitigate the spread of the disease, including a national lockdown, the suspension of all national air travel, the closure of all borders, mandatory social distancing and the suspension of all in-person classes until May 31st. In early June, Colombia extended its social distancing policy, but allowed for progressive re-opening of a few economic and social enterprises. Despite the measures taken, the World Health Organization has reported on June 3rd that Latin America is now the new epicenter of the pandemic.

Summary of impact:

The pandemic continues to have a profound impact on existing gender disparities in Colombia. The government measures have aggravated women's economic inequality, particularly for informal workers, who make up 58% of employed women in Colombia. Women are also facing increased burdens of unpaid care work at home due to lockdowns and school closures. The lockdown measures have also exacerbated the risk of gender-based violence in Colombia, where daily domestic violence calls to a national women's hotline increased by 130% during the first 18 days of the national lockdown.

The government measures taken to contain the spread of the disease have had a significant impact on other vulnerable populations, including indigenous populations, internally displaced populations (IDPs), Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Colombian host communities, and low-income households. Indigenous communities in Colombia's Amazon region have little access to health facilities and safe drinking water supply systems, and are forced to travel for several days to receive medical attention. In rural and poor communities, particularly Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, the risks of the disease are amplified due to limited medical and service infrastructures.

Patients must be transferred to other regions, but due to movement restrictions, the process of transferring patients has become more difficult. Additionally, access to education in local communities is also affected due to limited internet connectivity.

Summary of impact on the Colombian peace agreement:

Although the implementation of the Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has experienced significant challenges and delays since 2016, the COVID-19 pandemic has further and directly affected its implementation process. Development plans at the municipal, departmental and national levels have slowed down or are being held virtually, and financial priorities are changing.

On March 30, the National Liberation Army (ELN) declared a unilateral ceasefire amidst the coronavirus outbreak. However, clashes were reported between ELN members and other military forces and justified according to the principle of "the right to defend ourselves". Despite calls for an extension, the ELN ended the unilateral ceasefire on May 1 and resumed military operations because of a lack of response to its ceasefire announcement by the conservative government of President Ivan Duque.

Killings of human rights defenders (HRDs) have increased during the pandemic. Due to mobility and travel restriction measures, HRDs have not been able to move freely throughout the country, allowing for easier identification and detection. Despite this, the Colombian government has reduced protective measures offered by the National Protection Unit, exposing HRDs to increasing threats.

Responses led by women peacebuilders:

GNWP's partners, Red Nacional de Mujeres and Red Departamental de Mujeres (in Cauca and Tolima) are committed to mitigating the effects of the pandemic. They are on the frontline of efforts to protect communities from the spread of COVID-19, providing distribution kits that include masks and essential care items for sexual and reproductive health. The local and national civil society networks are working with Indigenous Guards to distribute the packages, who have developed a national system of territorial monitoring of COVID-19 in Indigenous territories.

Several coalitions of national civil society organizations sent a letter to President Ivan Duque expressing concern about continued collusion between the military and armed paramilitary groups. They have also requested immediate protection, and multilateral ceasefire and differentiated action for Afro-Colombians, indigenous people, and HRDs during the COVID-19 crisis.