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On the move during the COVID-19 pandemic

Information, trust and influence among Venezuelans in Nariño, Colombia

AN INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT BY INTERNEWS

COLOMBIA - FEBRUARY, 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All pictures illustrating this report are the work of documentary photographer and journalist Gerald Bermúdez. As part of the Rooted in Trust project, Internews provided grant funding to support Gerald 's work to document migration on the Colombia-Ecuador border.

The Information Ecosystem Analysis (IEA) aims to capture and study the information environment in Nariño, Colombia during the COVID-19 pandemic. **The main objective of the report is to establish an understanding of information dynamics in the context of Venezuelan refugee and migrant populations in the Colombia-Ecuador border region, taking a specific look at the LGBTQI+ migrant community.**

Through a combination of key informant interviews, surveys, extensive desk research, and COVID-19-safe focus and listening groups, carried out by our partners, Caribe Afirmativo and Fedemedios, this IEA explores trends of information demand and supply within migrant communities in Sections 3 and 4. This report analyzes their information access, needs, use, flows, and identifies means of trust and influence within the communities of Tumaco and Ipiales.

Following this research, the fifth section of this report examines the dynamics between the information supply and the needs of the community, and the effects these have on trust and behavior. The sixth and final section outlines the humanitarian response in Nariño during the pandemic and the challenges faced in getting accurate and relevant information to the communities, especially groups in vulnerable situations in Nariño.

KEY FINDINGS

INFORMATION SUPPLY

1. **Information providers have not sufficiently catered to the needs of refugees and migrants in the region, especially those in more vulnerable situations such as LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants and those with irregular migrant status.** Community leaders for Venezuelan associations have not been directly involved into the reproduction of media content but play a significant role in the production and distribution of information for communities.

2. Journalists and media platforms lack specific information on refugee and migrant rights, with information gaps on immigration status and legal rights. In addition, **lack of financing of media platforms and organizations results in the delay of information dissemination and does not ensure that the community has timely access to important legal information.**

3. The Foundation for Press Freedom (FLIP) is currently carrying out an online survey for journalists working in border regions in Colombia and the inherent obstacles and dangers they are confronted with amid COVID-19. **Identifying important physical risks around safety and well-being during a pandemic, needs to be guaranteed so that journalists can carry out their work accordingly** as well as making available information relevant to those journalists working in Nariño.

4. Two-way dialogues and coordination between the migrant community and host society do not exist. The migrant and refugee community has very low interaction with the host society which indicates exclusion and marginalization of the migrant community.

5. Refugees and migrants are active community radio listeners but struggle to participate in program creation with broadcasters. **Without participation in these programs, the unique information needs of refugees and migrants during COVID-19 are not being met through such channels.**

Two-way dialogues and coordination between the migrant community and host society don't exist

6. Political parties strongly dominate the media sector and decide what topics receive more coverage than others. Alternative media outlets usually bridge gaps in information needs, catering to smaller population groups and more localized interests and knowledge.

INFORMATION NEEDS AND GAPS

1. Migration dynamics: Tumaco and Ipiales are both transit hubs and destinations for refugees and migrants, people in transit and those who have the intention to stay. Amid COVID-19, limited mobility has converted both cities into stationary points for these communities. **There are significant gaps of information about COVID-19, its prevention and treatment, and health rights.** Refugees and migrants with irregular status expressed concerns about their eligibility to access medical services.

2. **High trust is registered in international humanitarian support, friends and family, international media and community health workers.** Low trust is registered in national and local government entities which can be traced back to inconsistent messages on the political stage and the lack of solutions for these vulnerable groups. Other reasons include institutional violence and impunity that build a lack of trust in the justice system and the authorities as well as local media that reports on it.

3. Similar to the broader migrant community, **the LGBTQI+ migrant community faces significant information gaps related to prevention, treatment, signs and symptoms of COVID-19.** In addition to not feeling sufficiently informed, the fear of stigmatization and denial of medical support has led LGBTQI+ individuals to delay pursuit of medical

treatment, putting them at even greater risk of being infected or suffering more severe symptoms. The double stigma of being both LGBTQI+ and a migrant discourages and diminishes their access to information, further marginalizing the community.

4. **Information regarding employment, education, access to humanitarian aid and local news is necessary for many refugees and migrants** living in precarious economic situations but in general, these were areas in which participants did not feel well informed.

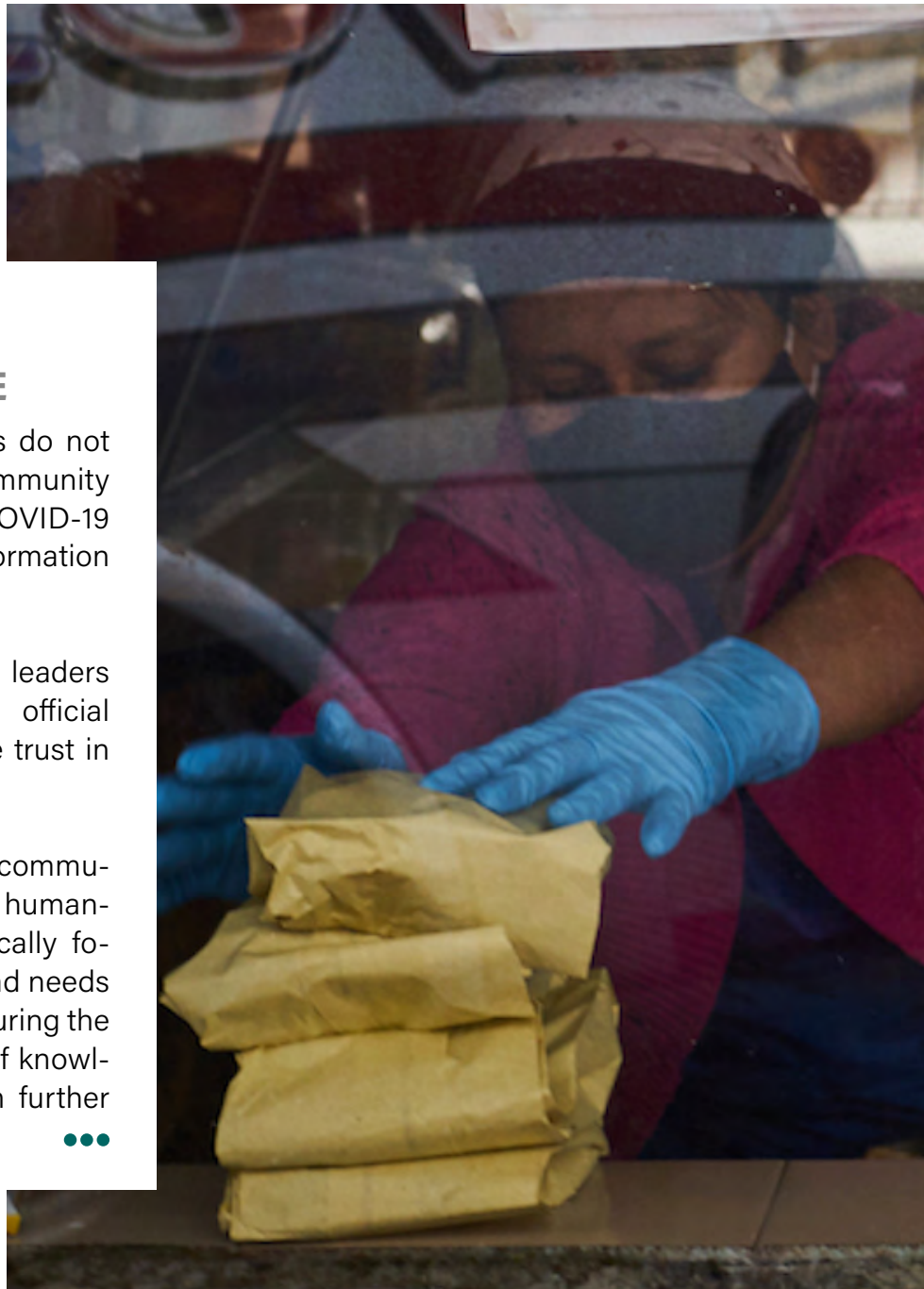
5. There is a wide variety of information channels used by the migrant and refugee community, including messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Viber, social media platforms, Youtube and community radio stations.

HUMANITARIAN COVID-19 RESPONSE

1. Humanitarian organizations do not maintain strong ties with community media platforms amid COVID-19 which indicates a gap of information flows between stakeholders.

2. Migrant and refugee leaders have limited trust towards official government bodies and more trust in humanitarian organizations.

3. Members of the LGBTQI+ community expressed the need for a humanitarian approach that specifically focuses on the vulnerabilities and needs of the LGBTQI+ community during the pandemic. The present lack of knowledge about these issues can further invisibilize their struggles.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings in this case study has led to three main categories of recommendations:

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

■ Two-way communication mechanisms are necessary to ensure the communication of information about COVID-19 between humanitarian organizations and communities in Nariño. **These mechanisms must include ways of listening to concerns, feedback, myths, and rumors about COVID-19 from the migrant community. Nariño is not only a point of transit but a point of arrival for a growing number of refugees and migrants.** Humanitarian organizations can engage with the refugee and migrant communities at migration offices or humanitarian shelters as strategic points to disseminate information.

Information should be presented in accessible formats and languages and adapted to literacy levels within different migrant groups.

■ Information should be presented in accessible formats and languages and adapted to literacy levels within different migrant groups. Especially considering the varying degrees of connectedness, refugees and migrants find themselves in, information should be distributed taking into account areas with less access to internet, in rural and remote parts of Nariño, with high instances of COVID-19 and other safety issues.

■ With rampant rumors on the rise around Venezuelan refugees and migrants and COVID-19 in Nariño, **strengthening the relationship between the host society and the migrant communities would help to dismantle prejudices and decrease the potentially dangerous stigma that refugees and migrants face.** Including refugees and migrants in local decision-making processes, such as local community group meetings, can bridge the gap between these two communities.

■ **Create media and information literacy programs for humanitarian organizations to improve rumor management on the information sharing platforms** used by communities in vulnerable situations through trainings on digital inclusion and workshops focusing on rumor tracking mechanisms by Venezuelan social media monitors. These programs should provide skillful approaches for sharing relevant information with vulnerable groups and tackling stigma in a localized context.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS AND MEDIA

■ **Improve information dissemination by increasing platform availability and engagement through work with existing platforms and trusted organizations.** InfoPa'lante, for example, is an International Rescue Committee (IRC) information project for displaced populations and refugees in several regions of the country, launched in September 2020. Estoy en la Frontera is a local digital platform in Norte de Santander to ensure migrants, refugees and returnees have information and support.

■ **Partner with radio stations that are popular among refugees and migrants to open up radio space for Venezuelan refugees and migrants** to participate in designing, writing and broadcasting radio programs about topics important to the migrant community.

■ Bridge the gap between host society and refugee and migrant society by offering local journalists' trainings and tools to combat xenophobia and spread awareness about refugee and migrant lives. **Emphasize the necessity to document the situations of refugees and migrants responsibly to avoid further reenforcing prejudice and xenophobia** and educate journalists on ways to report about refugees and migrants that shed insight into human situations of mobility amid COVID-19.

■ Identify LGBTQI+ media platforms to reinforce the messages on health communication and health services. **Health providers and organizations should partner with LGBTQI+ community-based organizations and LGBTQI+ community leaders to get messaging out through channels that are trusted,** such a social media platforms and influencers. Provide tailored health information such as links between COVID-19 and co-morbidities, such as HIV/AIDs and hormone treatment.

■ **Humanitarian organizations should focus on information and engagement campaigns regarding alternative sanitary measures and safety protocols** such as where refugees and migrants can access clean water during the pandemic and where and when gels and masks are being distributed by humanitarian organizations when social distancing is not possible.

■ **Build stronger linkages with local respected CSOs when communicating to LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants, as they offer help and support** (in its majority humanitarian) as LGBTQI+ communities do not feel safe otherwise.

Partnering with organizations that represent the LGBTQI+ community can help humanitarian organizations disseminate information through trusted information channels.

■ **Create and disseminate a public database or website where refugee and migrant communities can find all the services, assistance and advice** provided by humanitarian actors in Nariño to facilitate refugee and migrant access and awareness of the resources available to the community.

■ Provide tailored information for LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants. Humanitarian organizations should work together with CSOs, such as Caribe Afirmativo, Casa del Migrante and Fundacion Arcolris, for guidance on how to offer consultation to the LGBTQI+ community. Partnering with organizations that represent the LGBTQI+ community can help humanitarian organizations disseminate information through the trusted information channels and social media used by these communities thereby reaching a wider more inclusive audience. **It is indispensable to work with trusted information providers, trusted organizations in the regions and prominent Youtube influencers as well as social media platforms.**

HUMANITARIAN SERVICE PROVISION

■ Despite aiming for health equity, many information gaps remain when it comes to access to medical services for refugees and migrants. **Integrating community needs and voices into decision-making as well as direct field research such as this report, can help distribute resources and information more adequately among the refugee and migrant population.**

■ Humanitarian organizations require better communication strategies at strategic points of entry for the extra-regional refugees and migrants on their way to the United States or other countries. Since refugees and migrants must pass through these entry points, posters and pamphlets can be distributed to people on the move here to **fill information gaps related to shelters, health rights and legal consultations.** Messaging should also be constantly adapted to the dynamic and fast-changing contexts of migration for diverse groups.

■ Humanitarian organizations should implement initiatives to **promote LGBTQI+ inclusive education and representation, in order to equip local actors with ways to respond sensitively and appropriately to instances of discrimination and incorporate inclusive and anti-homophobic/transphobic practices into their work.** These trainings should be directed towards government officials, healthcare workers, humanitarian stakeholders, law enforcement, teachers, and workers across trades. Education about what it means to be transgender is particularly important, as the concept of gender identity is not well known to the general public.

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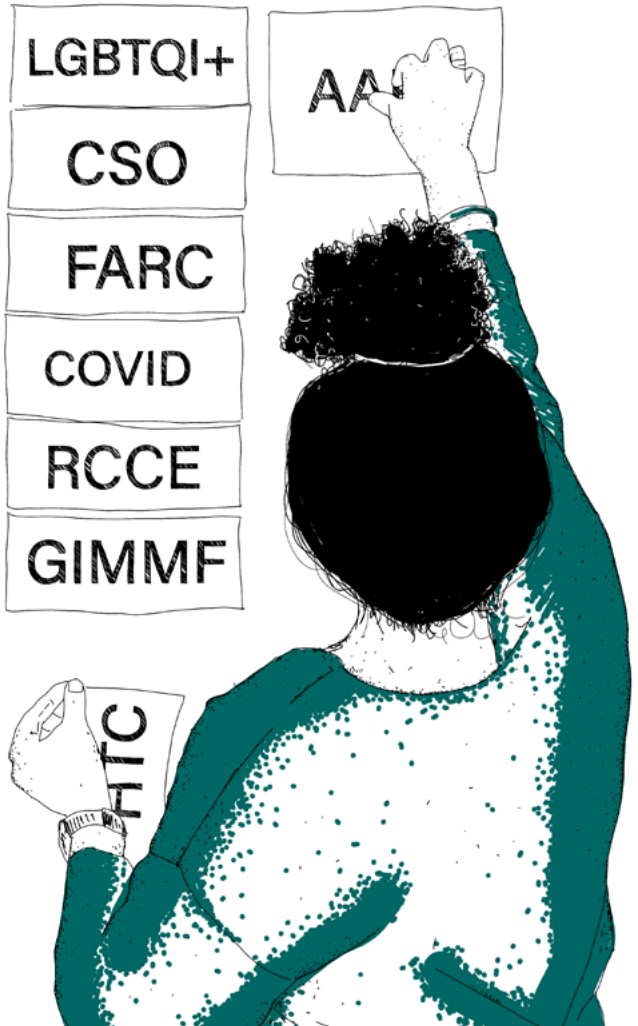
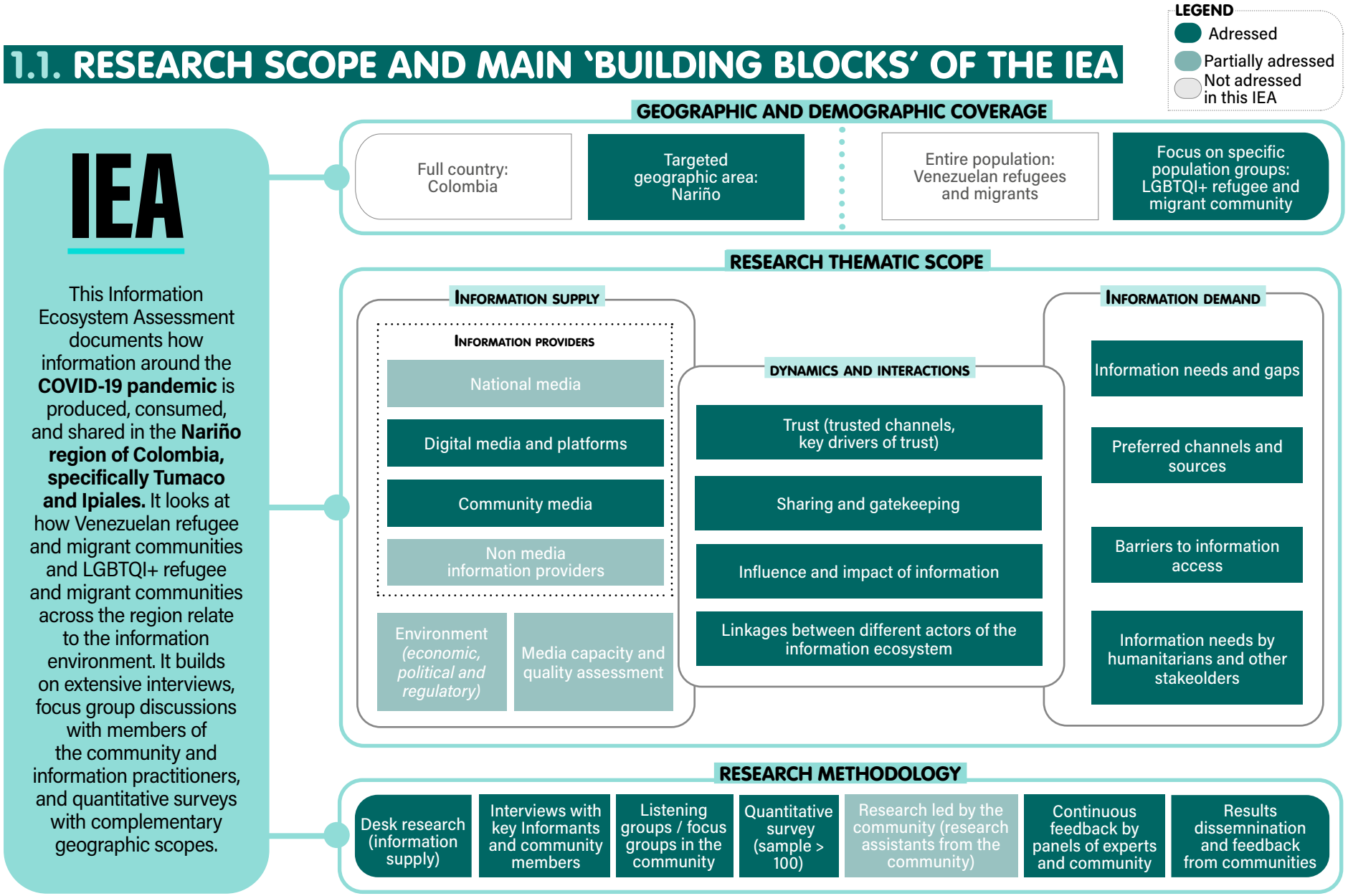
LIST OF ACRONYMS

- **AAP**
  Accountability to Affected Populations
- **ACPES**
  Southern Journalists' Association
- **ANP**
  Nariño Association of Journalists
- **COVID**
  Coronavirus Disease 2019
- **CONPES**
  National Council for Economic and Social Policy
- **CSO**
  Civil Society Organizations
- **CwC**
  Communicating with Communities
- **DOH**
  Department of Health
- **FARC**
  Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
- **FECOLPER**
  Colombian Federation of Journalists
- **FEDEMEDIOS**
  Federation of Community Media in Colombia
- **FLIP**
  Foundation for Press Freedom
- **FNPI**
  Iberoamerican Foundation for New Journalism
- **GIMMF**
  Inter-Agency Mixed Migration Flows Group
- **HTC**
  Humanitarian Team Colombia
- **IATF**
  Inter-Agency Task Force
- **IACHR**
  Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
- **IDP**
  Internally Displaced People
- **IFRC**
  International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- **LGBTQI+**
  Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Intersex
- **OHCHR**
  Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
- **IOM**
  International Organization for Migration
- **MoPH**
  Ministry of Public Health
- **NGO**
  Non-Governmental Organization
- **NRC**
  Norwegian Refugee Council
- **RICAA**
  Rapid Information, Communication and Accountability Assessment
- **R4V**
  Migrants from Venezuela
- **SIC**
  Superintendence of Industry and Commerce
- **EPTV**
  Temporary Protected Statute for Venezuelan Migrants
- **PEP**
  Special Permit to Stay
- **UN**
  United Nations
- **UNHCR**
  United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- **UNICEF**
  United Nations Children Fund
- **WHO World**
  World Health Organization
- **WFP**
  The World Food Program



I. RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

1.1. RESEARCH SCOPE AND MAIN 'BUILDING BLOCKS' OF THE IEA



I. RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

1.2 PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

The people we seek to reach often live in diverse, noisy, risky and confusing news and information environments that present them with challenges - as well as choices - as to what information they access, what they trust and what they share and act upon. Internews undertakes Information Ecosystem Assessments (IEA) to better understand unique and localized information needs, gaps, sources and patterns of access and use. Information Ecosystem Assessments offer us an analytical framework to capture all dimensions of the relationship between information consumers and information supply. Gaining precise high-quality insights into these interactions allows us to design truly unique projects that meet people where they are to deliver information through the channels, platforms, formats or people that they prefer and trust.

Our IEA research is based on four key principles:

1- **Putting the community at the core of the research --** Internews seeks to be at the core of the communities it serves. For our IEAs, we endeavor to have the community itself do a large part of the research: we hire researchers and enumerators from the community and we rely on community members to disseminate results and gather feedback. When context truly limits our ability to do so (as during the COVID pandemic) we strive to design multiple ways to gather feedback from community members and representatives as a second best alternative.

2- **Following a human-centered research design --** We seek to develop a holistic understanding of people's information practices. We understand demand and supply in a broad sense, not narrowly focused on media outlets or traditional media actors. Our scope of analysis is defined by how people actually access and consume information and not by pre-defined categories. We strive to understand both which practices are broadly shared and what are the specific needs and behaviors of groups, especially the most vulnerable ones.

3- **Marrying qualitative and quantitative data --** We seek to combine different types of data to best understand both the supply and demand of information and how the two interact to produce a dynamic ecosystem. We go beyond traditional mapping and audience surveys. Our IEAs rely heavily on a qualitative approach: understanding information practices requires getting up close ●●●

In the constant quest of human beings to connect with information, the ways in which they consume, produce, contribute to, interact with and behave around their information supply are what makes information ecosystems dynamic, diverse and sometimes quirky and unpredictable.

and personal to people to figure out the best ways to reach them with good information.

4- **Integrating research and action --** We do not see Information Ecosystem Assessments as an "end product". They are most often the first stage of our project design, providing invaluable context and a way to build a trusting relationship with the community we hope to work with. They are always connected to recommended actions, whether our own, those undertaken by the communities or by our partners and other key stakeholders in the ecosystem.

1.3 LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

Source: Internews 2020

Informants	Collection tool	Sample	Specifics
Individuals and Communities	Interviews	6	Community members from Tumaco and Ipiales
	Focus Groups	3	Migrants and Refugees
	Survey	221	Random sampling surveys in Tumaco and Ipiales
	Listening Groups	9	Community members in Tumaco and Ipiales
Informal Representatives & Leaders	Interviews	4	CSOs
Government Authorities	Interviews	1	Secretary of Regional Government, Pasto
Media	Interviews	4	Representatives from: ■ President of FECOLPER ■ Independent Journalist specialized on Migration Issues ■ Director of the Journalist School of Tumaco ■ Director of the Association for Border Journalism Ipiales
	Focus Group	1	Stereo Tumaco
International Agencies and Humanitarian Actors	Interviews	3	International Organization for Migration (IOM), Caritas Germany, Jesuit Refugee Service

1.4 LIMITATIONS TO THE RESEARCH

The pandemic has significantly impacted the way in which communication and research has been conducted in Tumaco and Ipiales. While direct communication to several humanitarian organizations has proven very slow, firsthand information has been easy to access from community media outlets, national media and from community members themselves. Surveys carried out by partner organizations have exceeded any number of surveys carried out with refugees and migrants and LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants in Nariño ever before. Due to travel limitations, direct and on-site communication in Tumaco and Ipiales was not possible. The research focuses on refugees and migrants[1] from Venezuela and does not include extra-regional refugees and migrants[2] as a target group, as time did not allow the inclusion these groups into the field research. In addition, the research was conducted while close to 1 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants were living in the country undocumented. On February 8 2021, President ●●●

Ivan Duque announced that the country would grant temporary protection status to undocumented people granting a 10-year protection status after which they can apply for a residence visa. Under the new status, refugees and migrants will receive basic services, such as access to national health system and COVID-19 vaccination.

Other challenges of this research included:

■ Time frame limitations: the report has been produced in a time span of three months since the starting date and has therefore condensed Internews IEA methodological phases into a more simplified version.

■ Field work limitations: The sampling approach for the qualitative and quantitative data collection was purposive, due to the specific focus of the project on refugee and migrant and LGBTQI+ communities in Nariño. Respondents were selected based on a convenience sampling through the network of Internews' partner organizations on the ground. The findings can therefore only be considered as indicative; it is recommended not to make interference with the data.

■ Also, network mapping conducted in the frame of this evaluation is a pilot test with a limited number of responses and shall therefore be considered just a first step to be further developed within the future ongoing IEA efforts.

■ Quantitative surveys included refugees and migrants with a specific focus on LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants. This particular community was difficult to approach due to topics such as stigma and scapegoating of the LGBTQI+ community. We worked through a partner Caribe Afirmativo who focuses on LGBTQI+ human rights abuse to help us gain insight on needs and access of COVID-19 related information. These indicators cannot be considered representative of the LGBTQI+ refugee and migrant community as we need to take into account that responses that were offered could be affected by fear or misunderstanding of the questions, among other. ●

[1]A migrant refers to "any person who is outside a State of which they are citizen or a national, or, in the case of a stateless person, their State of birth or habitual residence." Migrant is without prejudice to the protection regimes that exist under international law for specific legal categories of people, such as refugees, stateless persons, trafficked persons and migrant workers. Refugee is strictly defined in international law as a person who is fleeing persecution or conflict in her or his country of origin. Refugees are entitled to full protection of refugee law, including protection from expulsion or return to situations of persecution where their life and freedom are at risk. Migrants in vulnerable situations as a concept has emerged to address the human rights situation of those migrants who do not qualify as refugees, but who are nevertheless in specific protection interventions. Migrants are not inherently vulnerable, but they can find themselves in vulnerable situations arising from the reasons for leaving their country of origin, the circumstances in which they travel or the conditions they face on arrival, or because of personal circumstances such as their age, disability or health status. Migrants in vulnerable situations are thus persons who are unable to effectively enjoy their human rights, are at increased risk of violations and abuse and who, accordingly, are entitled to call on a duty bearer's heightened duty of care. (OCHCR. (2017). Differentiation between Migrants and Refugees. https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Migration/Pages/GlobalCompactforMigration.aspx)

[2]Main nationalities in extra-regional migration flows in the Americas include India, Bangladesh, Nepal Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Mali, Nigeria and Somalia. Nationals of Caribbean islands, mainly Cubans and Haitians, are also often included under the 'extra-regional' label.

II. COUNTRY PROFILE

2.1 COUNTRY PROFILE INDICATORS

		Colombia
Press related index	Civil liberties *(including freedom of expression)*	37/60
	Press freedom index 2019 *(out of 180 countries)*	129
	Press freedom index 2020 *(out of 180 countries)*	↓ 130

** Source civil rights: freedom house global freedom status*
*** Source index ranking: Reporters without borders*

Freedom on the net	Obstacles to access *(0=Worst; 25=Best)*	17
	Limits on content *(0=Worst; 35=Best)*	27
	Violation of user rights *(0=Worst; 30=Best)*	23
	Freedom on the net score 2018	69
	Freedom on the net score 2019	↓ 67

** Source: Freedom house freedom on the net*

ICTs	Internet penetration rate	62.3%
	Mobile phone penetration	129.9%

** Source: United Nations Human Development Reports*

Key demographic, social and political factors	Total population (millions)	49.7
	Population in multidimensional poverty (% headcount)	5.03%
	Human development index (rank)	0.761 (79)
	Rural population (%)	19.2%
	Illiteracy rate**	5.3%
	Refugees by country of origin	79.8
	Elections	2022

** Source: United Nations Human Development Reports*
*** Literacy is understood as the ability to read and write a short simple statement of everyday life*

COVID-19	Confirmed cases	1,007,711
	Deaths	30,000

** Source: World Health Organisation https://covid19.who.int/*

LEGEND

Not free Partly free

Four years after the signing of the Peace Agreement between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Colombia continues to face multiple challenges. In 2020, at least 5.1 million people are estimated to need humanitarian assistance worldwide.[3] The escalation of conflict, particularly in isolated rural areas, natural disasters, and the arrival of refugees and migrants are some of the factors that add to existing needs. 4.4% of the country's total population (1,905,617) is indigenous, according to a national census conducted in 2018. The 2018 census also reveals that there are now 115 different indigenous groups in Colombia with 65 Amerindian languages spoken in the country. Of these 65, 5 languages have no capacity for revitalization and another 19 are in danger of disappearing.[4]

On 1 April 2020, the Colombian State militarized its border with Ecuador (departments of Nariño and Putumayo) to increase ●●●

control over more than 40 irregular crossing routes extending through 586 kilometers of border between Ecuador and Colombia. At the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, Colombian Migration officials registered 1,715,831 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia, with 13,930 refugees and/or migrants registered in Nariño.[5] A comprehensive legal frame-work does not exist on migration in Colombia: relevant standards are currently scattered across several decrees and policy documents called CONPES (National Council for Economic and Social Policy). The main option for Venezuelans in Colombia to regularize their status is the Special Permit to Stay (PEP acronym in Spanish). There is a new permit known as Temporary Protected Statute for Venezuelan Migrants (EPTV) that protects Venezuelans from involuntary returns, reduce the risks of exploitation, and allow Venezuelans to better safeguard themselves and their families.[6]

Nariño belongs to one of the regions within Colombia in which state presence is limited and only available to some parts of the department and where several armed groups compete for the control of illicit economies and trade routes to exercise control over these territories.[7] In 2020, 10% of the massacres that occurred in Colombia happened in the Nariño department, which became the 3rd most dangerous region of the country.[8] With the presence of these armed groups comes heightened violence that includes massacres to intimidate local populations.[9] Social leaders and human rights defenders are also targets of assassinations for opposing illicit economic activity and promoting the implementation of the Peace Process (which includes illicit crop substitution and land redistribution programs). COVID-19 has exacerbated the vulnerable situation for human rights defenders and social leaders as many have been left without protection arrangements.[10] Just recently, 300 Venezuelan refugees and migrants were threatened and forcibly displaced in the neighboring department of Cauca by the armed group National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación National, ELN) involved in illicit crops.[11]

[3] *Norwegian Refugee Council (2020). Colombia: An Ongoing Crisis. https://nrc.org.co/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Joint-INGOs-Briefing-Colombia.pdf*

[4] *IWGIA (2020). Indigenous Peoples in Colombia. https://www.iwgia.org/en/colombia.html*

[5] *Response for Venezuelans R4V (2020). Infografía de Refugiados y Migrantes Venezolanos. https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/infograf-de-refugiados-y-migrantes-venezolanos-gifmm-nari-o-diciembre-2020*

[6] *Migration Colombia (2020, December 11). https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/*

[7] *IACHR (2020, October 13). La CIDH expresa su preocupación por el incremento de la violencia en Colombia en territorios con presencia de grupos armados ilícitos. https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2020/251.asp*

[8] *Indepaz (2020). Informe de masacres en Colombia durante el 2020. http://www.indepaz.org.co/informe-de-masacres-en-colombia-durante-el-2020/*

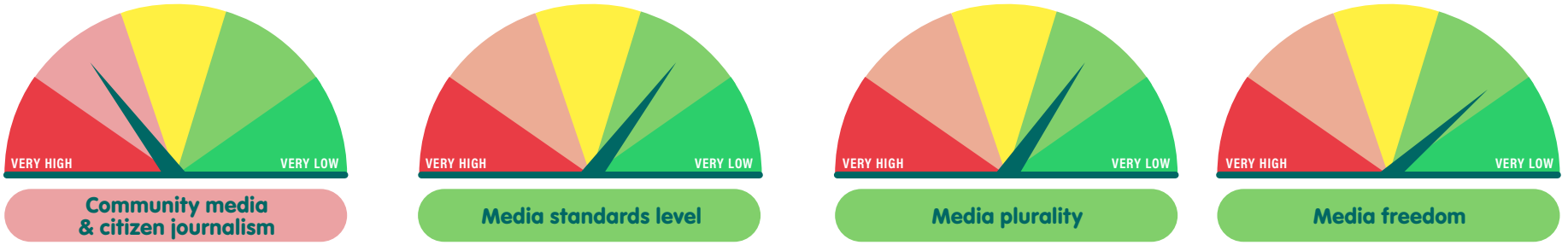
[9] *Verdad Abierta (2020b, August 23). Colombia. 93 masacres en 20 meses. https://verdadabierta.com/olombia-93-masacres-en-20-meses/*

[10] *Amnesty International (2020).Why do they want to kill us? https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR2330092020ENGLISH.PDF*

[11] *RCN Radio (2020, November 27). Venezolanos sufren doble desplazamiento por amenazas del ELN en Argelia, Cauca. https://www.rcnradio.com/olombia/sur/venezolanos-sufren-doble-desplazamiento-por-amenazas-del-eln-en-argelia-cauca*

III. INFORMATION SUPPLY: information providers landscape review

(how information is produced and distributed)



Source: Internews 2020

3.1 MEDIA PROVIDERS

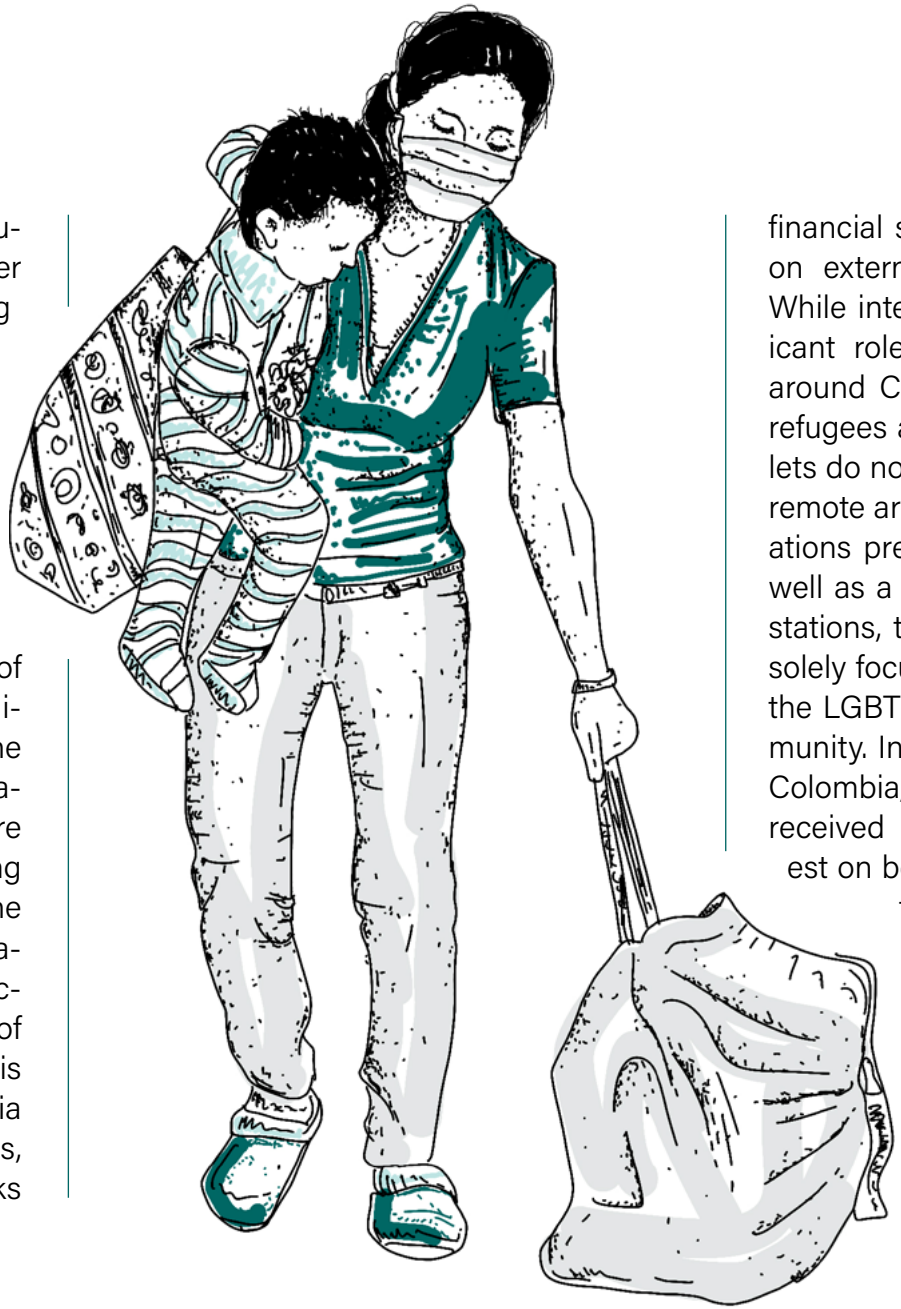
The media market in Colombia includes four national newspapers, more than five regional newspapers, 1512 radio stations covering commercial, community, and public interest programming, more than 50 public, private, regional, community, and local television channels (three national public channels, eight regional public channels) and an undocumented number of national and non-native digital media among them 650 internet portals.

Colombia's leading television networks and newspapers are run by members of long-standing political and economic elites. Two privately owned open television networks (Organization Ardila Lülle and Grupo Empresarial Santo Domingo) concentrate most of the national, regional, and local television audience creating a duopoly in this sector. The audience reach of radio media is highly concentrated and belongs to two large economic conglomerates.

According to Media Ownership Monitor[12], television is the most consumed media with a penetration of 96%. Nevertheless, radio has the highest reach with a consumption level of 77%. Independent magazines are consumed by 28% of the population, followed by newspapers with 26%. Internet comes in last with 11% of the population.

Several radio stations are led by indigenous communities where an important mission is to promote the systematization and dissemination of resources for the strategic use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Indigenous radio stations also work ●●●

to increase visibility of specific communities in respective regions and to foster a sense of value of their culture among the same groups. An important reference in the use of media by indigenous movements is the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC in Spanish) which plays a key role in strengthening the Association of Indigenous Media of Colombia (AMCIC Network). Another important network is the National System of Indigenous Information and Communication (SICO in Spanish), guided by the National Indigenous Colombian Organization (ONIC in Spanish). There are also Public Interest Radio Broadcasting systems where the Military Forces, the Army and the Police have their own radio stations with large coverage, particularly in rural areas.[13] The presence of independent and digital native media is noteworthy. Independent digital media has gained relevance in recent years, especially for niche audiences, but lacks financial sustainability and is dependent on external resources in many cases. While international media plays a significant role in information dissemination around COVID-19 related topics among refugees and migrants, these media outlets do not reach audiences living in very remote areas. Although, there are associations present throughout the region as well as a wide array of community radio stations, there are no media outlets that solely focus on refugees and migrants or the LGBTQI+ refugee and migrant community. In addition, certain rural areas in Colombia, specifically in Nariño have not received much state presence or interest on behalf of politicians so radio stations fill in the gaps of informing those who live in remote areas and may not have access to local newspapers or phone connectivity. With the presence of armed actors in several parts of Nariño, underreporting and



the control over what information is disseminated establishes clear obstacles for people who want to gain awareness or inform themselves.

Financing is often extremely difficult and government advertising can make a significant difference in an outlet's long-term existence. Due to the reliance on financing to survive as a local and independent media outlet, it is questionable whether some media avoid publishing content about sensitive issues because they fear they may lose advertising revenues, close, or face administrative sanctions. According to the Foundation for Press Freedom (FLIP) there is a lack of transparency in relation to the economic impacts COVID-19 has had on media outlets.[14] This has resulted in more difficulties to reach out for economic support as the topic is not perceived as relevant and leads to structural deficits as it becomes clear that small media outlets are not sustainable.

Due to the reliance on financing to survive as a local and independent media outlet, it is questionable whether some media avoid publishing content about sensitive issues because they fear they may lose advertising revenues, close, or face administrative sanctions.

In comparison, national media outlets are backed by significant politicians and have funding guaranteed, meaning they can cover a wide array of stories and dominate media landscapes.

Freedom of expression, as granted in Article 20 of the National Constitution, applies not only offline but also in the online world. There are no specific media or internet laws, but there is a legal framework that guarantees the fundamental rights of its citizens in the digital sphere. This is backed by Colombia's membership of the Inter-American Human Rights system. According to Freedom House, Colombia ranks as "partly free" while there are significant threats to journalists, election related disinformation, and a weaponization of copyright and defamation laws.[15]

[12] *Media Ownership Monitor (2020). Owners in Disguise. http://colombia.mom-rsf.org/en/*

[13] *Media Landscapes (2020). Colombia. https://medialandscapes.org/country/olombia/media/radio*

[14] *FLIP (2020, April 17). Más transparencia y menos autobombo deben tener las comunicaciones de las autoridades. https://flip.org.co/index.php/en/informacion/pronunciamientos/item/2500-mas-transparencia-y-menos-autobombo-deben-tener-las-comunicaciones-de-las-autoridades*

[15] *Freedom House (2019).Freedom on the Net 2019-Colombia. https://freedomhouse.org/country/olombia/freedom-net/2019*

3.2 DIGITAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Colombia has the fourth largest online audience in Latin America with the average visitor online times ranking higher than the global average. According to Alexa ranking, an Amazon company, Facebook, YouTube, and Google are the most frequently visited pages in the country. The most visited national news media is El Tiempo, which reinforces the brand power of the traditional print media.[16] In comparison, online digital media organizations cannot compare with the visitor numbers of traditional media.

According to DataReportal, in January 2020, there were 35 million internet users in Colombia (69% of the population) with more than half of the population accessing internet through their mobile phones. There were 35 million social media users with an increase of 3.4 million (11%) between April 2019 and January 2020.[17] According to the Global Web Index, most Colombians between the age of 16 and 64 use YouTube the most, followed by Facebook and then WhatsApp. One big challenge to internet access has been the implementation of internet connectivity in rural areas.

Radio stations, community organizations and advocacy groups utilize online radio and narrowcasting of audio through WhatsApp, particularly to reach areas that do not have consistent access to radio. Key informants indicated this was usual practice before the pandemic, and that these organizations report on and engage with listeners about the COVID-19 pandemic because it is an issue that is important to them. In southern Colombia (with production mostly happening out of Cali) radio / audio programs are conducted in Spanish, with some programming in the Pjiao and Nasa languages – when community members from those language groups are directly involved in programming.

The numbers mentioned are misleading as there are big differences in how people can access the Internet across the country. A digital divide between urban and rural areas continue to exist. In bigger cities, there is generally a 4G connection and if that runs out, there are free access points such as malls, restaurants, and public institutions. Many rural areas have not had much access, if at all, to internet. There have been efforts by the Government to combat this. For example, 7000, "digital kiosks" have been installed in rural areas. NetHope has employed free WIFI access points for refugees and migrants and the organizations supporting them. There are free WIFI networks that provide refugees and migrants with direct access to free resources, although many among this population are not aware of these access points.[18] Together with tech companies, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) launched a digital initiative to combat misinformation for Venezuelan refugees and migrants and displaced populations in Colombia. The platform is called InfoPa'lante and offers information on civil and legal rights, jobs, and access to healthcare, while providing a map of services and social media channels for the community to provide feedback and questions. Additionally, there is a digital platform "Estoy en la Frontera" to ensure that migrants, refugees and returnees have information and support.

Radio stations, community organizations and advocacy groups utilize online radio and narrowcasting of audio through WhatsApp, particularly to reach areas that do not have consistent access to radio.

In a regional needs' assessment among Venezuelan refugees and migrants in 15 different countries in Latin America in 2019, 70% of the informants had access to a mobile phone, 2/3 of

which having access to a Smartphone specifically. Social media remains an important source of information alongside WhatsApp and TV, which are also main channels of information. The results are not representative but indicate a pervasive use of Smartphones and social media among Venezuelans refugees and migrants. When asked which sources were least trusted, over 30% stated that they did not trust Facebook and 20% did not trust WhatsApp. This reveals how many Venezuelans are aware of the spread of fake news and advertisements on social media.[19] Easy access puts refugees and migrants at risk of being targeted by misinformation about humanitarian assistance, government efforts, or health-related measures related to COVID-19.

A study that tracked Venezuelan's connectivity in Colombia with Facebook in 2019 and 2020 revealed that there were decreases in Facebook connections in 2020 which could be a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the prioritization of spending leaving people without access to internet.[20] In 2020, a significant growth in connection in Tumaco was detected. The increase of internet connectivity among Venezuelans was higher than 100% which could possibly be due to the opening of new trochas (irregular migratory routes) along the border with Ecuador.

[16] *Alexa (2020). Digital 2020: Colombia. https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/CO*

[17] *Alexa (2020). Digital 2020: Colombia. https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/CO*

[18] *USAID (2020, July). Colombia Digital Ecosystem Country Assessment. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Colombia_DECA_Report_Spanish.pdf*

[19] *ACAPS Risk Analysis (2020, March). Crisis in Sight. Global Risk Analysis. Colombia. https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20200325_acaps_global_risk_analysis_march_2020_0.pdf*

[20] *iMMAP (2020, May 20). Colombia: Tracking the Facebook connections of Venezuelan refugee, migrant and returnee populations in Colombia. https://immap.org/product/tracking-the-facebook-connections-of-venezuelan-refugee-migrant-and-returnee-populations-in-colombia/*

3.3 MEDIA AND JOURNALIST ASSOCIATIONS AND REGULATORS

On a national level, the FLIP is a non-profit organization created to protect journalists suffering from threats in Colombia, but also has regional directors and offices within the country. Currently, the FLIP also follows and denounces violations to freedom of press in Colombia and defends and promotes freedom of expression and the right to access public information. In addition, it carries out self-protection workshops for journalists in the regions most affected by violence. Internews in Colombia also supports these efforts. FECOLPER (Federation of Colombian Journalists) is an organization with a social base and includes 29 associations of journalists and more than 1,200 members. It promotes best practices of free journalism and monitors any violation of freedom of the press, in addition to fighting for better working conditions.

In Nariño, associations include Southern Journalists' Association and the Nariño Association of Journalists (ANP) as well as the Colegio Nacional de Periodistas (National School of Journalists) which is a union of independent journalists founded in Bogota in 1957 to defend and dignify the profession with an office in Tumaco. Lastly, the Association for Border Journalism has its seat in Ipiales and promotes independent and investigative journalism. The Nariño Sindamanoy Network is a broadcasting network that represents community radio stations in the department of Nariño. The network is committed to community participation and includes 35 community stations. Community radio stations are a significant means of communication in Nariño and reach wider audiences in both urban and rural areas.

REGULATORY BODIES

Colombia's ICT sector has several regulatory bodies. As of 2019, there is a new law that eliminates the National Television Authority and establishes a convergent regulator, the Communication Regulation Commission (CRC), to oversee the ICT sector, television, and radio. The President appoints the ICT minister who oversees the telecommunications sector as well as three commissioners. The ICT minister chairs the Communication Regulation Commission (CRC) which ensures efficient service and promotes competition in the telecommunications sector. The ICT Minister also appoints the head of the National Spectrum Agency (NSA) which oversees planning, managing, and supervising the use of the radioelectric spectrum. There has been criticism against the concentration of many functions in the government and a lack of independence. ●

3.4 LOCAL RELEVANCE OF INFORMATION

Political parties strongly dominate the media sector and decide what topics receive more coverage than others. Alternative media outlets usually bridge gaps in information needs catering to smaller population groups and more localized interests and knowledge.

Among the Venezuelan refugee and migrant community, Facebook and WhatsApp are popular. Informants noted that media are producing quality programs and publications that regularly provide updates on COVID-19 using information from the national government and health authorities. These range from regular nationally broadcast messaging on radio (for example 'El Antivirus,' produced by FEDEMEDIOS, runs COVID-19 updates every hour, on the hour), to local media doing in-depth localized reporting on 'hotspot' neighborhoods, (for example, Oís Radio based in Cali). In Tumaco, there is a radio broadcasting server Mira, which is community based and has recently joined together with the organization Save the Children to broadcast COVID-19 related information for children. As radio stations and local journalists receive limited funding and communication measures are not sufficiently included into response plans for humanitarian organizations, information and news does not always have a high diffusion among all population groups in Nariño. Another significant challenge for information providers is that communities in Colombia are very localized in relation to everyday life so what happens on a dominant political level may not necessarily reach them although relevant.

Key informants report that communities living in higher levels of poverty, migrants and refugees, indigenous groups, and Afro-Colombians have been often disproportionally represented in stories about people breaking quarantine or lockdown conditions – for example, coverage of neighborhood parties. Local journalists noted that a complex barrier is the capability to produce information materials in a timely way that are appropriate to diverse contexts of different population groups, such as rural and city, refugees and internally displaced. Additionally, police and associated government departments are seen to be focusing on 'pandemic policing' (enforcement of lockdowns and movement restrictions) disproportionally on indigenous neighborhoods.

Another significant challenge in Nariño is the deliberate attempt to intimidate the media and silence them. Armed groups continuously threaten media platforms and journalists that cover their activities. Not only do these threats (that also include killings) lead to the creation of information 'black holes', but with mainstream media's linkage to the political class and business corporations, independent journalism is hindered and results in self-censorship.[21] According to an "Information Mapping" conducted by the FLIP in 2019, more than 10 million Colombians lived in municipalities where it was easier to find out what was happening in big cities than issues that were happening where they live. The armed conflict in Colombia has made journalism a high-risk profession that is characterized by intimidation, persecution and threats directly impacting local news. With no national regulations in place for social media platforms, people can post whatever they want. 'Women's Rights Online' states that women are faced with disproportionate aggressive discussions, hate speech, and cyberstalking which affects the way women respond in different ways, from blocking their attackers to withdrawing from social networks.[22] According to a study carried out by the FLIP, *"the number of social network attacks on journalists increased, especially on women who received mainly verbal attacks and stigmatization against their work."*[23] Out of 1,100 municipalities in the country, 353 have no local media and 313 have musical or entertainment media without local news. This means that more than half of Colombia's territory is an information desert.[24]

[21] *Reporters without Borders (2019). Colombia. https://rsf.org/en/colombia*

[22] *Deutsche Welle (2019, February 18). Fighting back against online culture of violence targeting women in Colombia. https://www.dw.com/en/fighting-back-against-an-online-culture-of-violence-targeting-women-in-colombia/a-47570978*

[23] *El Espectador (2018, February 9). Colombia le sigue fallando a la libertad de prensa. https://www.elespectador.com/entretenimiento/medios/colombia-le-sigue-fallando-a-la-libertad-de-prensa/*

[24] *International Journalists' Network IJ Net (2019, May). Addressing Colombian news deserts. https://ijnet.org/en/story/addressing-colombian-news-deserts*

3.5 MEDIA CAPACITY AND INFORMATION QUALITY

In key informant interviews, local journalists stated that print, digital and radio broadcasters have limited professional training on media ethics, investigative journalism, and triangulation of evidence due to lack of funding possibilities. While associations in the department do contribute to trainings, they lack sustainability due to an exacerbated financial and safety situation with COVID-19. Local journalists also revealed concerns on covering COVID-19 related topics after becoming sick with the virus. A report by FECOLPER and the International Federation of Journalists on working conditions and professional practice in Colombia amid COVID-19, indicated lower salaries for the same deliveries, prompt and unjustified dismissals, lack of compensation packages for those fired individually and in mass, absence of prevention and safety measures amid COVID-19 and, expectation of travel to different regions in the country without respect for safety measures for journalists. Because of these points, of which exist many, the ability to conduct investigative journalism and research stories without compromising the journalists' safety has been significantly reduced or deemed impossible.[25]

In 1998, the Constitutional Court declared unconstitutional Law 57 of 1985, a law that ruled the journalism profession Additionally, the Constitution guarantees the right to rectification, the Criminal Code protects against defamation, slander and label (which has been criticized by the IACHR, press freedom NGOs and journalists' associations because it contradicts the international standards on press freedom). The hostile environment against the Press may not represent official regulatory mechanisms, although regulation is carried out through death threats, irregular prosecution (the use of the criminal code to censor or silence the press) and unfair working conditions. There are no national commissions or regulatory mechanisms on a national or regional level for journalism in Colombia. The Gabriel García Márquez New Iberoamerican Journalism Foundation -FNPI- was founded by Garcia Marquez himself in Cartagena de Indias as an international center for the professional development of journalists, which has an ethics commission. Aside from this, there is no regulatory intervention which has allowed for owners of media, advertisers, and the State to bypass their responsibilities in relation to the right to report. Information is increasingly tied to special interests in Colombia. ●

[25] *FECOLPER (2020, April 27). COLOMBIA: Imponen a periodistas condiciones laborales igual o más lesivas que la pandemia Covid-19. https://fecolper.com.co/abusoslaboralescovid/*

3.6 COVID 19 INFORMATION COORDINATION MECHANISMS

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has identified restrictions on the access of journalists to press conferences and the possibility of asking questions about the pandemic in Colombia. At the beginning of the pandemic Article 5 of Legislative Decree 491, adopted on March 28, 2020, extended the time periods to respond to petitions, set forth in Article 14 of Law 1437 of 2011, that were already in progress or filed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The decree extended the time to respond to general requests.

Access to information held by the State is a fundamental right of individuals. States are obligated to guarantee this right. The IACHR's Resolution on Pandemic and Human Rights highlighted the importance of access to information in the current context and the crucial role that journalists play amid the public health emergency. There has also been concern about the dissemination of information without a scientific basis by high-level authorities in Venezuela, which could contribute to the dissemination of unreliable information and generate uncertainty in the population.[26] The same concern applies to Colombia where Venezuelan refugees and migrants might also access information provided by Venezuelan authorities through the internet.

The following research has produced a first step towards a network mapping assessment in the media sector asking informants about the intensity of their interaction with other stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic.[27] According to the responses provided in KIIs with local and regional media (see Table 2), their highest interaction was with public bodies and other media stakeholders as well as community media stakeholders. International stakeholders are ranked as mid and low interaction, indicating that communication and information between media and humanitarian organizations poses space for dialogue and collaboration. While media stakeholders rank their interaction with community media stakeholders as very high, this is limited to Colombian community media, as Venezuelan community media representatives characterized their relationship to media as one lacking strengthening, but with a potential for growth.

This table shows that main interaction nodes are with Government entities and Ministries, followed by Community leaders and Community media representatives. Simultaneously, it is noticeable that none of the respondents show key constituencies as an important stakeholder in their networks. Media outlets mentioned a lack of communication to humanitarian organizations in the access of COVID-19 related information during the urgency of protecting groups by countering misinformation about COVID-19. The demand for trustworthy and credible information runs high for ●●●

migrant and refugee populations in Nariño. Strengthening relationships with humanitarian organizations and community groups to disseminate information can ensure information reaches wider audiences.

All these findings indicate to a varied network of media outlets that can cover the connection needs for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further assessment will help to define how community representative stakeholders offer and provide an inclusive approach to two-way communication processes with communities (which in the case of media outlets are their targeted audiences) and how the gap identified with humanitarian organizations is affecting the accuracy and timeliness of information from the media. ●

[26] *OAS (2020, April). Press Release R78/20. http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/showarticle.asp?lID=1&artID=1173*

[27] *Network mapping exercise included an interlocuter survey based in two questions on the degree of interaction and the type of interaction. The research implemented 4 of these surveys. Thus, this first step is considered as a pilot test that shall be further developed in the following IEA including a thorough assessment of all network mapping features and covering a wide range of representative stakeholders from all key sectors.*

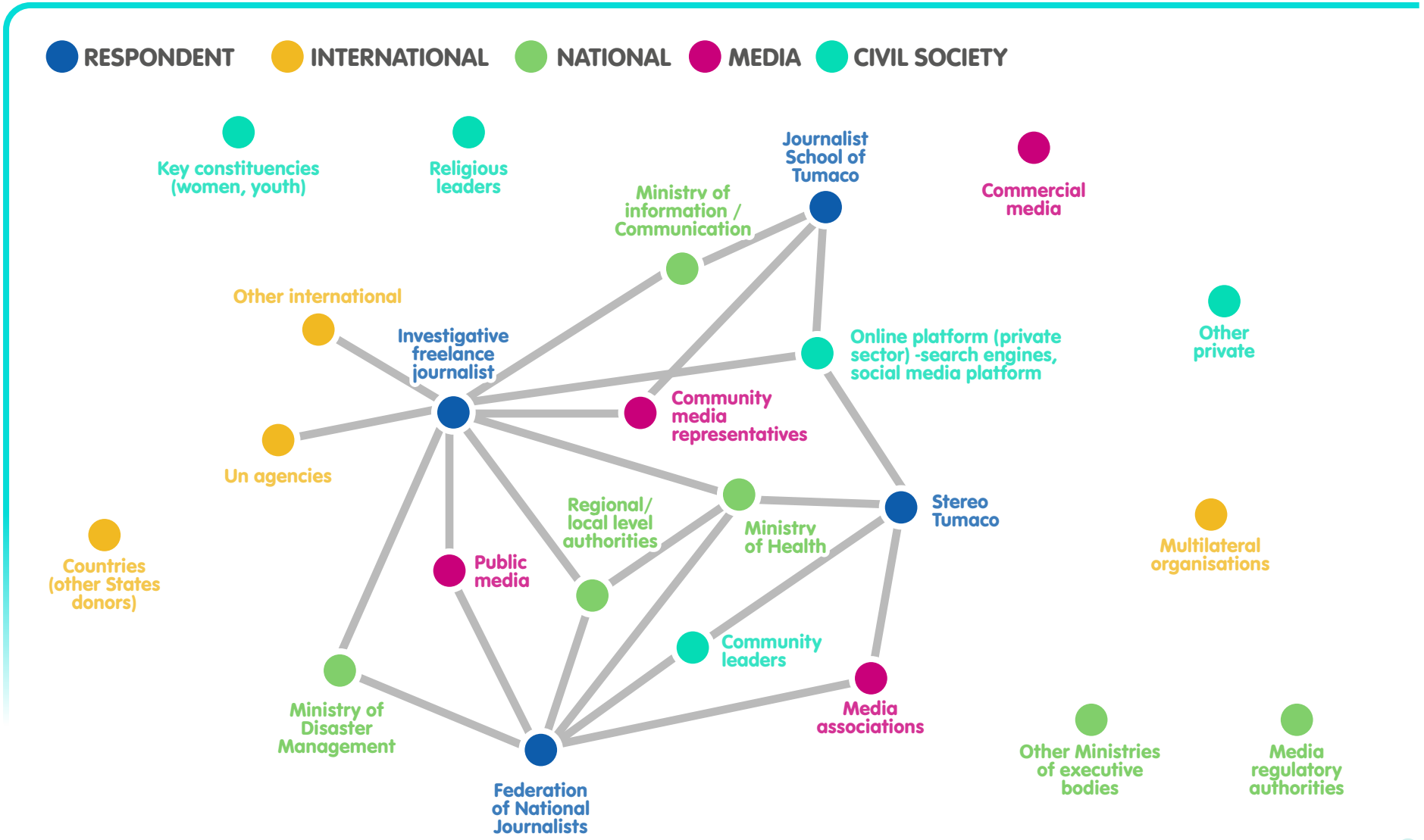
Table 2. Media outlets COVID-19 principal interaction nodes

		AVG MEDIA
UN agencies	INTERNATIONAL	2.50
Multilateral organisations (other than UN)	INTERNATIONAL	1.50
Countries (other States donors)	INTERNATIONAL	1.25
Other international	INTERNATIONAL	2.50
Ministry of information/ Communication	NATIONAL	4.50
Ministry of Health	NATIONAL	4.50
Ministry of Disaster Management (or similar)	NATIONAL	3.75
Other Ministries or executive bodies	NATIONAL	2.00
Regional/local level authorities	NATIONAL	5.00
Media regulatory authorities	NATIONAL	1.00
Other public bodies	NATIONAL	1.00
Community media representatives	MEDIA	4.75
Media associations	MEDIA	3.75
Public media	MEDIA	3.75
Commercial media	MEDIA	2.00
Community leaders	CIVIL SOCIETY	5.00
Religious leaders	CIVIL SOCIETY	1.25
Online platforms (private sector) – search engines	CIVIL SOCIETY	4.00
Key constituencies (women, youth)	CIVIL SOCIETY	1.00
Other private	CIVIL SOCIETY	1.00

Source: Internews 2020

Figure 1. Visual Stakeholder Map of Media outlets
(nodes with scored interaction over 3 in a scale from 1 to 5)

Source: Internews 2020



IV. INFORMATION DEMAND

(information communities needs most and how they access it)

4.1 INFORMATION NEEDS AND GAPS

The novel coronavirus has been a devastating gamechanger for refugees and migrants in Nariño. For those working for cash wages, with little or no savings, the complete shutdown of economic activity meant an end to income and means of sustenance. Even though humanitarian organizations have helped refugees and migrants, this has not been enough to replace ordinary livelihoods.

In surveys on information needs, 69% of the participants related their needs to COVID-19 information, treatment, and prevention. Further needs were related to employment (40%), access to humanitarian aid (34%) and access to education (22%). COVID-19 information and what facilities were available to migrant communities were considered relevant information as well as where to receive COVID-19 testing. Many also indicated that they required more information on specific topics including how to access COVID-19 tests, what to do if members of the household show symptoms, and how to protect themselves from COVID-19. Among the LGBTQI+ migrant and refugee community, access to tailored health information, such as links between •••

COVID-19 and co-morbidities, such as HIV/AIDs was considered vital. Due to hormone treatments among members of the LGBTQI+ community and weakened immune systems, curated information around health and access is of great importance.

In listening groups conducted in Ipiales, several refugees and migrants mentioned that there was a lack of accompaniment and support to access to health information and medical services. For women, health related information was linked to reproductive topics. While those with regular migratory status did receive medical attention, many of the refugees and migrants with irregular migratory status complained that access to medical care and information was not easy or possible. Women in listening groups expressed their feelings of despair on how to feed their families. One migrant stated that *"I am going to die of hunger before I die of COVID-19"* if livelihoods were not secured. In addition, participants in listening groups considered information related to employment as very important, with many not knowing where to turn in times without a stable livelihood. Women in migrant and refugee families are mostly in charge of education and health related issues that are retrieved from humanitarian organizations, according to focus groups. Participants mentioned that media platforms were not aware of these issues and did not adequately support women in their information needs. What became clear is that eviction has also been a source of despair with many refugees and migrants lacking information surrounding what their housing rights are and how to protect themselves from possible eviction.

Education and access to education has been a barrier for families in both cities. Some families stated that their children were excluded from schools because

> **"I am going to die of hunger before I die of COVID-19."**

of their irregular migration status. Venezuelan associations in Tumaco have provided educational activities for children via WhatsApp.

In focus groups in Tumaco and Ipiales, people highlighted information needs related to socio-economic consequences of the pandemic followed by healthcare, and legal issues, including mental health access and humanitarian aid. In the situation of refugees and migrants, most have lost their livelihoods and do not receive subsidies from the State or sufficient humanitarian aid to be able to live. This can be explained by the framing of information during the COVID-19 pandemic

possibly creating a bias for people to emphasize their needs that are directly related to COVID-19.

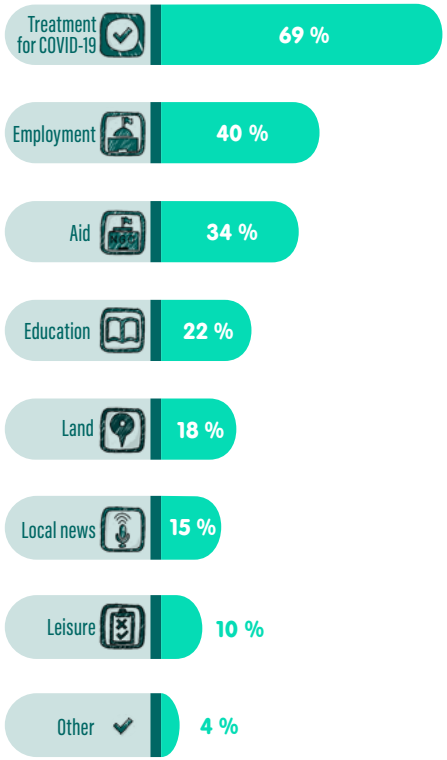
Truly little data and evidence exists on specific dynamics of extra-regional refugees and migrants and the needs of those who make them up. With more than 24,000 extra-regional refugees and migrants crossing through Colombia in 2019 and 4,000 in 2020[28], it goes without saying that further research is required to understand the information needs of this group. As for the Colombian government, the response for decades has been either turning a blind eye to the phenomenon or facilitating quick and easy movement through the country, passing the 'problem' on to another country (in this case Panama). In relation to extra-regional migration, there has been insufficient comprehensive analysis of routes, trends and protection risks, and even less so amid COVID-19 and its inherent consequences (i.e. restriction of movement and border closures in Colombia). This phenomenon, in comparison to neighboring countries, has not yet been tackled by the international humanitarian agenda or has been integrated into the national response plan.

In the situation of refugees and migrants, most have lost their livelihoods and do not receive subsidies from the State or insufficient humanitarian aid to be able to live.

[28] *Mixed Migration Centre (2020). MMC Latin America and the Caribbean. Quarter 3 2020. http://www.mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/qmmu-q3-2020-lac.pdf*

Graph 1.
Information Topics and Needs

What information do you need more of regarding the covid-19 pandemic?



Source: Internews 2020

4.2 ACCESS - CHANNELS AND SOURCES

Access to information has proven a significant barrier for many members of the refugee and migrant community in Tumaco and Ipiales. Although most information flows are received and reproduced through the internet, those who have a phone do not always have sufficient economic means to regularly buy data and access the internet. Face to face communication is strong among the refugee and migrant community and many people also rely on this form of communication to receive information they have not been otherwise able to obtain. Journalists stated that community radio stations are a significant means of information on COVID-related topics, especially in remote areas of Colombia where communities don't have access to internet. Members of the LGBTQI+ community stated Youtube as their preferred channel to access relevant information (100%). In general, Facebook, Whatsapp and Viber were considered popular channels to access relevant information for refugees and migrants.

Face to face communication was rated among the less frequent ways information is accessed. As mentioned before, the information needs of the participants in the survey are not being entirely met. This demonstrates that access to •••

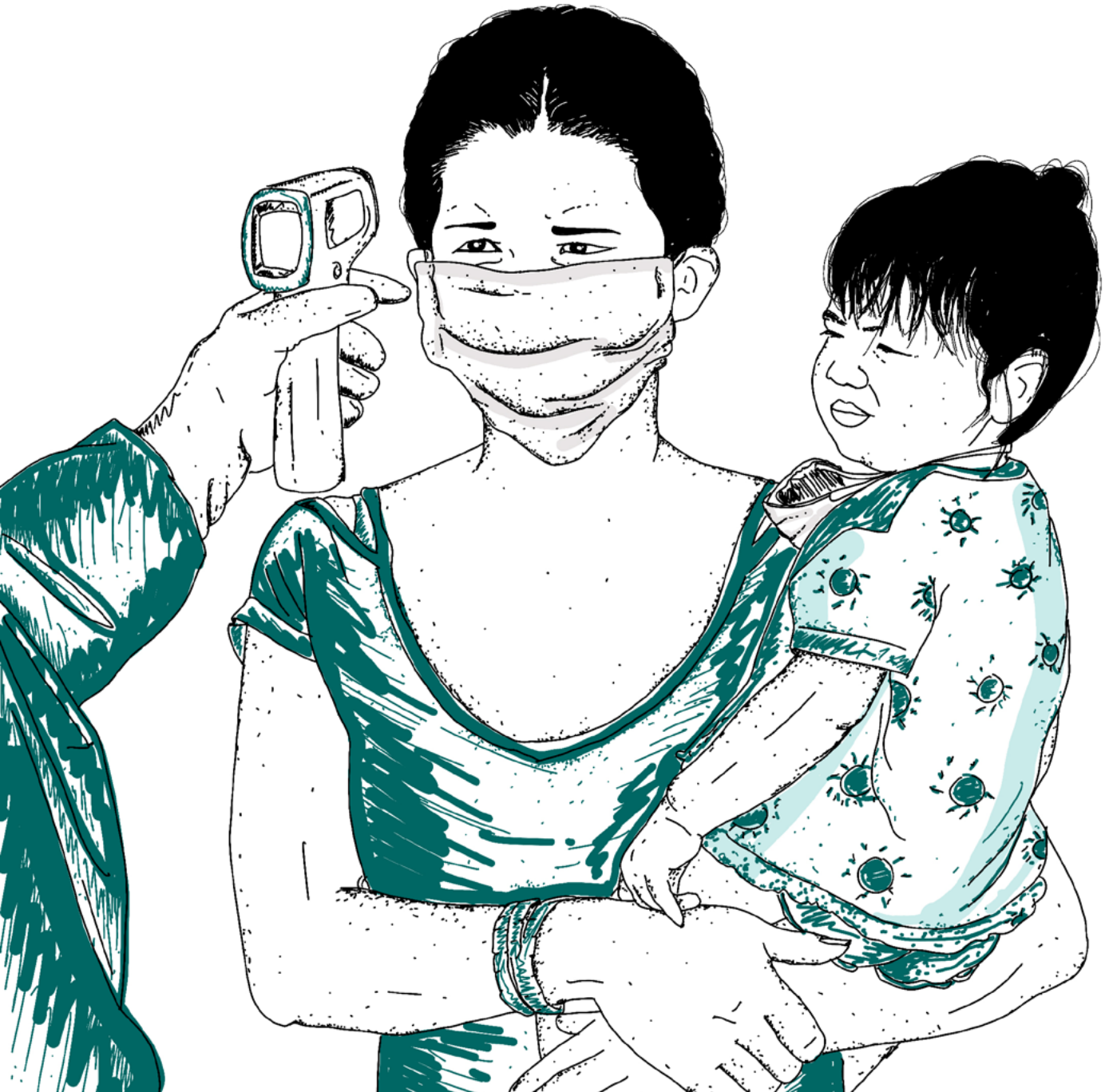
information is not covered in its totality among the migrant and refugee community, with large information gaps related to COVID-19 treatment, prevention and information.

While radio stations are well received among community members, they have not sufficiently been used as interlocutors, producers, and collaborators within a communications projects for refugees and migrants. Community broadcasters do not have a community communications program built collectively and from the needs of citizens. When asked explicitly on whether radio is a media outlet they would consider using, refugees and migrants in focus groups did show a favorable tendency to want to engage in dynamics of production of content. It was also confirmed that refugees and migrants want the opportunity to strengthen actions to promoting refugee and migrant participation.

Refugees and migrants want the opportunity to strengthen actions to promote refugee and migrant participation.

In Tumaco and Ipiales, the main language spoken among the migrant population is Spanish. During interviews, there were no encounters with language barriers, although some participants mentioned that they preferred a more localized Spanish with easier terms to understand. In the quantitative surveys, more than 80% of the participants stated that they always or normally received information in their language of preference (see Graph 3). In terms of non-media sources and their importance, community health workers were considered among the most trustworthy along with humanitarian organizations to access information.

There is limited to no access to information in culturally appropriate formats for minorities and indigenous communities, with most government statements and information only being made available in one majority language. This presents a particular threat to persons with disabilities within marginalized communities, including indigenous communities and migrants and refugees who do not speak Spanish. In the case of Haitian refugees and migrants, there are linguistic and cultural challenges for the immigration and asylum systems. In Colombia, this system is weak in terms of financial and human resources and there may not exist resources to hire interpreters to conduct interviews in languages other than Spanish.



4.3 MAIN BARRIERS TO INFORMATION

Venezuelan efugees and migrants face limited access to healthcare services. The failure to implement the national response plan, CONPES, and the government guidelines create difficulties to enroll in healthcare services. Refugees and migrants stated that healthcare services were not accessible for those without papers. Migrants with a permanent residency only applied for emergency relief care but could not enroll in a healthcare service, even though legally it is their right. In this sense, refugees and migrants do require more in-depth information on their rights and changes to laws around inclusionary measures, situation that will only be exacerbated with the new EPTV. Key barriers to information highlighted in KIIs and focus groups include irregular migration status, lack of health •••

insurance, discrimination and xenophobia, fear of being reported to immigration authorities and the lack of knowledge of the law (although everyone in Colombia has a right to access basic emergency healthcare independent of their immigration status). Refugees and migrants stated that support was not always adequate to their situation and in many cases medical staff did not have knowledge of the legal framework either. When talking to Venezuelan women, it was also found that there is limited access to sexual and reproductive health services. There is specific information around healthcare needs that are not covered for women and indicate additional gaps. Surveys conducted with LGBTQI+ community members indicate that information needs related to differential approaches to health were not met. An advocate for migrant and LGBTQI+ rights specifically indicated towards information needs of LGBTQI+ persons regarding available healthcare, the availability of LGBTQI+ friendly doctors to receive aid without experiencing discrimination, and information on inclusive doctors (if any).

Refugees and migrants have adopted alternative strategies to deal with this type of situation that include self-medicating and avoiding spaces of high contagion, such as hospitals. Participants in focus groups mentioned that these barriers also led to insufficient information on how and where to access COVID-19 tests. Respondents highlighted several barriers that they face in accessing information on COVID-19, which include lack of legal documentation, lack of financial resources to pay for medical care, discrimination and the knowledge of rumors and fake news circulating on COVID-19.

In addition to severe medical barriers, many refugees and migrants simply do not have the economic means to access information via the internet. With many struggling to make ends meet, finding reliable and free of charge internet access has become a need that many cannot fulfill. With little to no access to internet and/or a cell phone, many Venezuelans at this point rely solely on those who help them, such as humanitarian organizations and local associations. In addition, refugees and migrants rely strongly on word-of-mouth communication and in person information spread from those offering assistances. Stigma around

Surveys conducted with LGBTQI+ community members indicate that information needs related to differential approaches to health were not met.

COVID-19 also contributes to how communities will respond to COVID-19, making communication vital and creating trust in reliable health services and information all the more necessary.

Access to information is also strongly influenced by the armed conflict in Nariño. Armed groups have been exercising considerable amounts of control of the population, some threatening and using force to gain control. There have been several reports where armed groups impose totalitarian control measures, such as curfews, on different neighborhoods. The "Oliver Sinisterra Front," a group that emerged from the FARC, released a pamphlet on March 22, 2020 announcing a curfew in Tumaco and threatening sanctions to those who did not comply. Another pamphlet was handed out at a later point that directly threatened civilians warning that those who did not comply would turn into military targets.[29] Measures imposed include curfews, lockdowns, movement restrictions for people, cars, and boats, opening hour limitations for stores, and lastly, banning foreigners' access to the community as well as interactions between communities.[30] The stigmatization of people identified as having COVID-19 has led to forced displacement justified as social distancing measures, with Venezuelan refugees and migrants often targeted.[31]

Stigma around COVID-19 also contributes to how communities will respond to COVID-19, making communication vital and creating trust in reliable health services and information more necessary.

There have been several reports where armed groups impose totalitarian control measures, such as curfews, on different neighborhoods.

[29] *Vivanco (2020, April). Armed Groups in Colombia Threaten Civilians over COVID-19 Measures. https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/13/armed-groups-colombia-threaten-civilians-over-covid-19-measures*

[30] *Human Rights Watch (2020). Colombia: Armed Groups' Brutal Covid-19 Measures. https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/15/olombia-armed-groups-brutal-covid-19-measures*

[31] *Verdad Abierta (2020a, May 1). La Colombia profunda vive su cuarantena entre el miedo al coronavirus y las armas. https://verdadabierta.com/la-colombia-profunda-vive-su-cuarentena-entre-el-miedo-al-coronavirus-y-a-las-armas/*

4.4 FOCUS ON VULNERABLE GROUPS

KII interviews and focus groups with community members have identified women, children and LGBTQI+ persons as population groups that are exposed to protection risks. Children can fall victim to sexual exploitation and forced recruitment in border regions and run the risk of not being fully enrolled into the school system.

Refugee and migrant women are exposed to different forms of gender-based violence (GBV) that include but are not limited to domestic violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, economic violence, and human trafficking for sexual exploitation. At the same time, women and girls are denied access to sexual and reproductive health rights and services. In focus groups, women commented on sex work as a means of income and considered access to general health care one of the largest barriers, which increased significantly amid COVID-19. While authorities have been called on to outline 'biosecurity protocols' for sex workers during the pandemic, given the close physical contact and the likeliness to contract and transmit the virus, local governments have failed to design a plan that fits their specific needs. In listening groups, women mentioned that they struggled to access emergency aid programs and COVID-19 social protection responses, putting their safety, their health, and their lives at increased risk just to survive. Not only is it important to make these services accessible, but also to increase digital literacy among women in order to be able to access information that they need. While survey results don't indicate a large gender division when accessing information, 76% of women did normally or always feel worried about rumors being spread in their communities. This indicates that women are aware of the dissemination of fake news and misinformation and consider it a high risk. In addition, members of the migrant and refugee community commented on increased sentiments of discrimination, prejudice, and resentment from the greater public where refugees and migrants are continuously scapegoated and •••

seen as the carrier of the virus. In one interview, a man spoke about the effects the border closure has had for those facing danger or persecution because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Disappearances of LGBTQI+ persons have been reported in the border region with neither authorities nor organizations following up on them. For the LGBTQI+ community, risks are escalated due to COVID-19 which pushes them towards greater economic and social vulnerability.

Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Nariño are exposed to a double impact owing to the important level of armed violence that causes forced displacement and protection issues. Those of irregular status are particularly exposed to protection issues related to sexual and gender-based violence, forced recruitment, and forced labor. Venezuelan women in listening groups expressed heightened feelings of despair and fear when crossing into Colombia due to the presence of armed groups and the recruitment of sex workers as well as the disappearance of women and girls for human and sex trafficking. Listening groups held in Ipiales with women offered space to discuss and voice trauma related experiences, gender-based violence events and protections measures and mechanisms that women felt were missing and needed. These established safe spaces were created to comprehend gender-specific needs as well as offer space for dialogue amid dire situations during COVID-19. Women criticized the medical landscape in Ipiales for not offering consultations on reproductive issues. Psychosocial consultations and gender-based mental health discussions were considered absent and women felt a lot of stigma around these topics and preferred not to talk about them with men present.

Another group that has experienced vulnerability is the Haitian refugee and migrant community. Speaking with government officials in Pasto, the capital of Nariño, the city is considered a transit point for the Haitian migrant and refugee community on the way to the northern border with Panama. This particular community usually travels in large groups and with children posing multiple challenges to protection related topics. Language barriers and cultural norms differ and increase communication obstacles between host society and refugees and migrants. With more than 200 Haitian refugees and migrants camping out in front of the Colombian migration office for months amid the pandemic, housing was provided only to a limited extent and complaints were made on behalf of authorities about sanitation measures related to the virus. Humanitarian organizations together with local government entities in Pasto provide emergency relief to the refugee and migrant population but are not equipped with cultural knowledge and language to inform and support refugees and migrants of Haitian nationality.

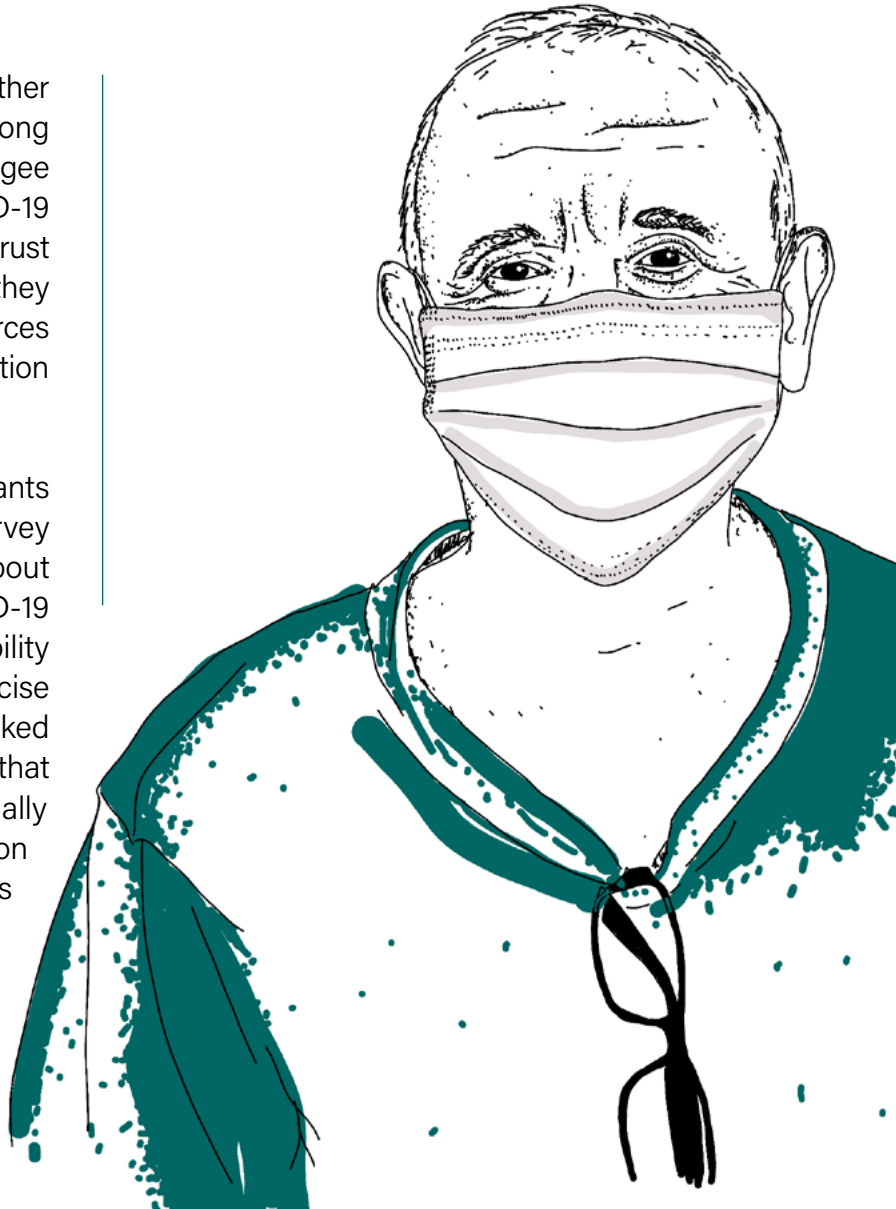
V. INFORMATION DYNAMICS

(how individual and communities interact with the information ecosystem and what do they do with the information they access)

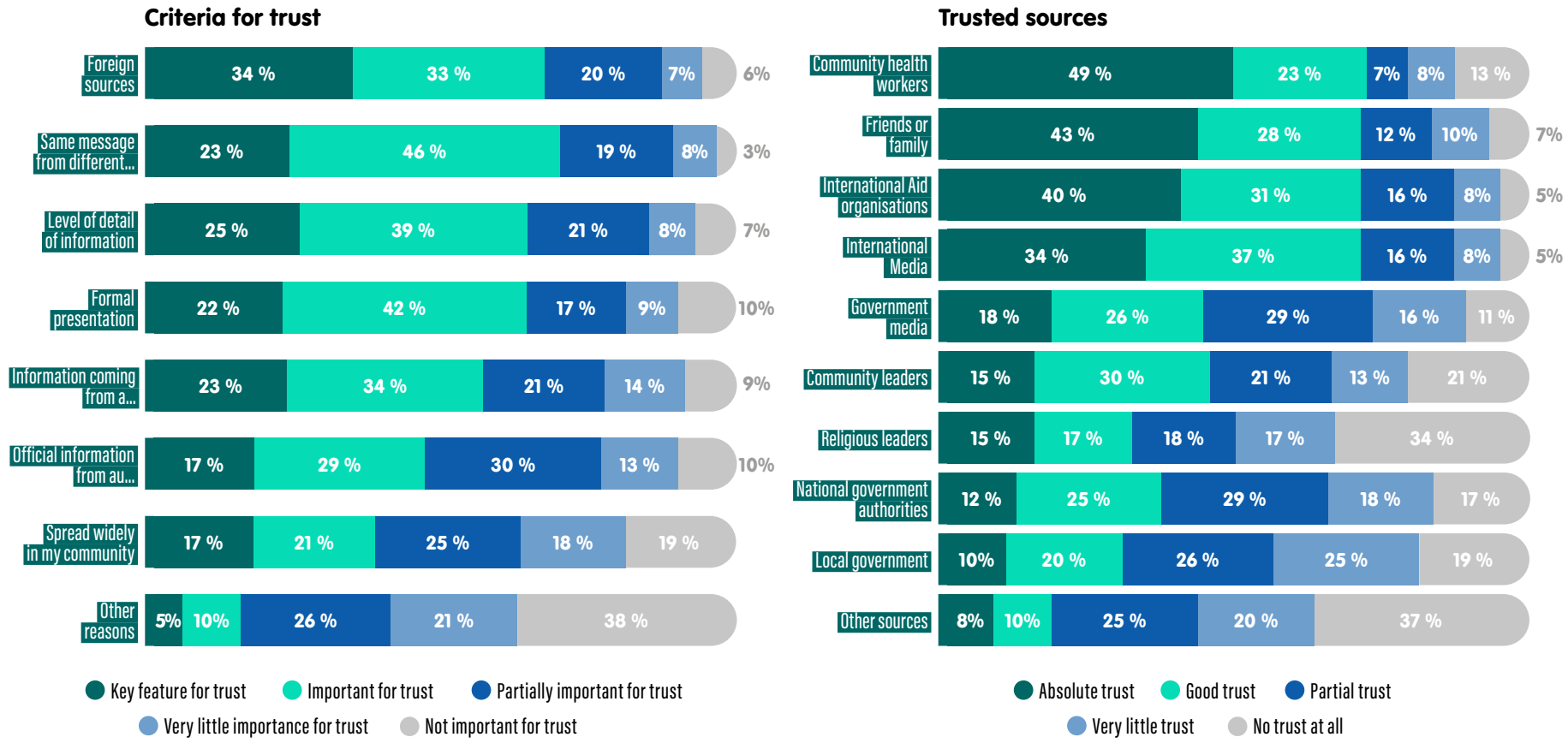
5.1 TRUST

According to results in surveys, 75% of people have good or absolute trust in international aid organizations, international media, health workers in the community, and family and friends. Less than 40% have good or absolute trust in government media but people are more skeptical of national government authorities. When asked what made sources trustworthy, refugees and migrants have higher trust in a source if they hear the same message from various sources and also if the news comes from foreign sources. The level of detail of information and formal presentation of information are considered important aspects to consider a source trustworthy. Like the findings in focus groups and KIIs (Key Informant Interviews), official information from authorities was not reason enough to consider a source trustworthy. What has become clear through the course of the IEA is that friends and family have remained trustworthy sources together with humanitarian organizations among the Venezuelan migrant and refugee community prior and amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Emerging reasons for trust amid COVID-19 are messages that they hear several times from different sources and the level of detail of the information being shared.

The majority of refugees and migrants (75%) who participated in the survey stated they normally or always worry about the spread of rumors related to COVID-19 (see Graph 3). Confidence in the ability to differentiate between false and precise COVID-19 related information was ranked relatively high with 80% indicating that they felt completely confident or usually confident in reproducing information related to COVID-19. These results indicate a prominent level of wariness when it comes to rumors and fake news while a relatively important level of confidence as well. ●●●



Graph 2. Criteria for Trustworthiness and Trusted Sources



Source: Internews 2020

Additionally, the wariness towards rumors and the fear of COVID-19 that these results indicate in combination with the high confidence in reproducing and sharing information can definitely lead to the spread of misinformation.

According to the Regional Information and Communications Needs Assessment conducted by the UNHCR and FRC as part of R4V (Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela)

in November 2019, friends and family were the most trusted source of information.[32] Humanitarian organizations are the next most trusted sources, followed by online groups of fellow Venezuelans, the Government, and institutions. Based on a rapid joint need assessment conducted by R4V agencies during the pandemic, in general, respondents from within the Venezuelan migrant population rate their knowledge on how to protect themselves from the coronavirus as 'good' or 'excellent.' In the survey carried out in Ipiales and Tumaco, only 76% felt always or normally confident to differentiate between true and false information related to COVID-19, while 73% of participants felt worried about the spread of rumors in their communities.

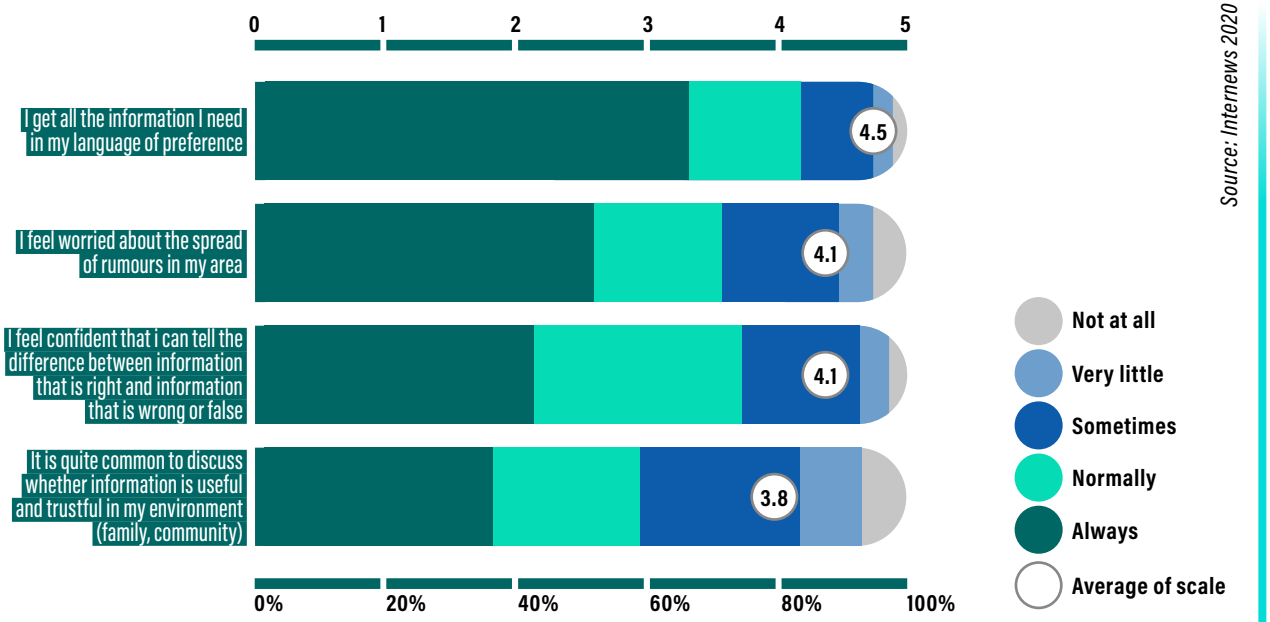
Information gathered from qualitative fieldwork revealed an elevated level of communication in relation to COVID-19 and related topics as discussed among Venezuelan community members. It is especially important for refugees and migrants to be able to identify community leaders to receive accurate and trustworthy information. Both in Tumaco and Ipiales, the community members have an important level of trust in community leaders and rely on them to access information related to their specific situation. These results are contrary to the survey results in which community leaders did not rank as highly as other stakeholders. In order to provide more precise insights and conclusions, additional data is required. This surely encourages community approaches and community engagement in the dissemination of COVID-19 related information. On the other hand, many hinted towards a lack of trust in local and national authorities which is reinforced by strained relationships between Colombians and Venezuelans. With xenophobia on the rise, it is not surprising that mistrust is perceived towards the dominant society.

The specific community leaders also see themselves as responsible for verifying information relevant to the community and making sure that people receive unmanipulated information. Most individuals that were interviewed stated that they relied on community leaders to verify information and perceived the information as valid and acted accordingly. It was also stated that information should be shared and reproduced by word of mouth so that valuable information can reach the migrant population that is not necessarily connected to the internet or phones. Within the LGBTQI+ migrant and community population, community leaders were considered trustworthy sources (58%) although main sources for COVID-19 related information were family and friends together with health providers.

[32] *Response for Venezuelans R4V (2020). Infografía de Refugiados y Migrantes Venezonalos. https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/infograf-de-refugiados-y-migrantes-venezolanos-gifmm-nari-o-diciembre-2020*

Graph 3. Drivers and barriers to information

Please give your scoring from 1 (not at all) to 5 (always) to the following statements



Source: Internews 2020

5.2 TRANSMISSION

Refugees and migrants have noted that COVID-19-related information is direct. Many with internet access commented on considerable amounts of information and rumors circulating in WhatsApp groups. When it comes to actual information reproduction, it is noticeably clear that community leaders are those responsible for analyzing and verifying information. Nevertheless, sharing and reproduction is also carried out among the community, as demonstrated in the graph below. While more than 70% of the communities are worried about rumors and false information being spread around COVID-19, more than 75% considered themselves well or absolutely equipped to detect rumors and false information and a higher likeliness of information reproduction. 60% of the community shared information and discussed trustworthiness of information with families and friends. While reproduction is high, a high percentage of participants worry about the information circulating. In focus groups, community members and community leaders indicated they faced difficulties because of the bulk of different information, and delays in information reproduction and verification. Information retrieved from organizations, such as IOM, UNHCR and Doctors without Borders is considered trustworthy and helpful. Information received from larger humanitarian organizations was not questioned as much with communities more prone to sharing.

5.3 INFLUENCE

In Ipiales and Tumaco, all those spoken with during the focus group were fully aware of how to practice social distancing and wash hands to avoid getting COVID-19. Health protocols are delivered in a pervasive manner by all humanitarian organizations, the national government, social media, media networks and community members.

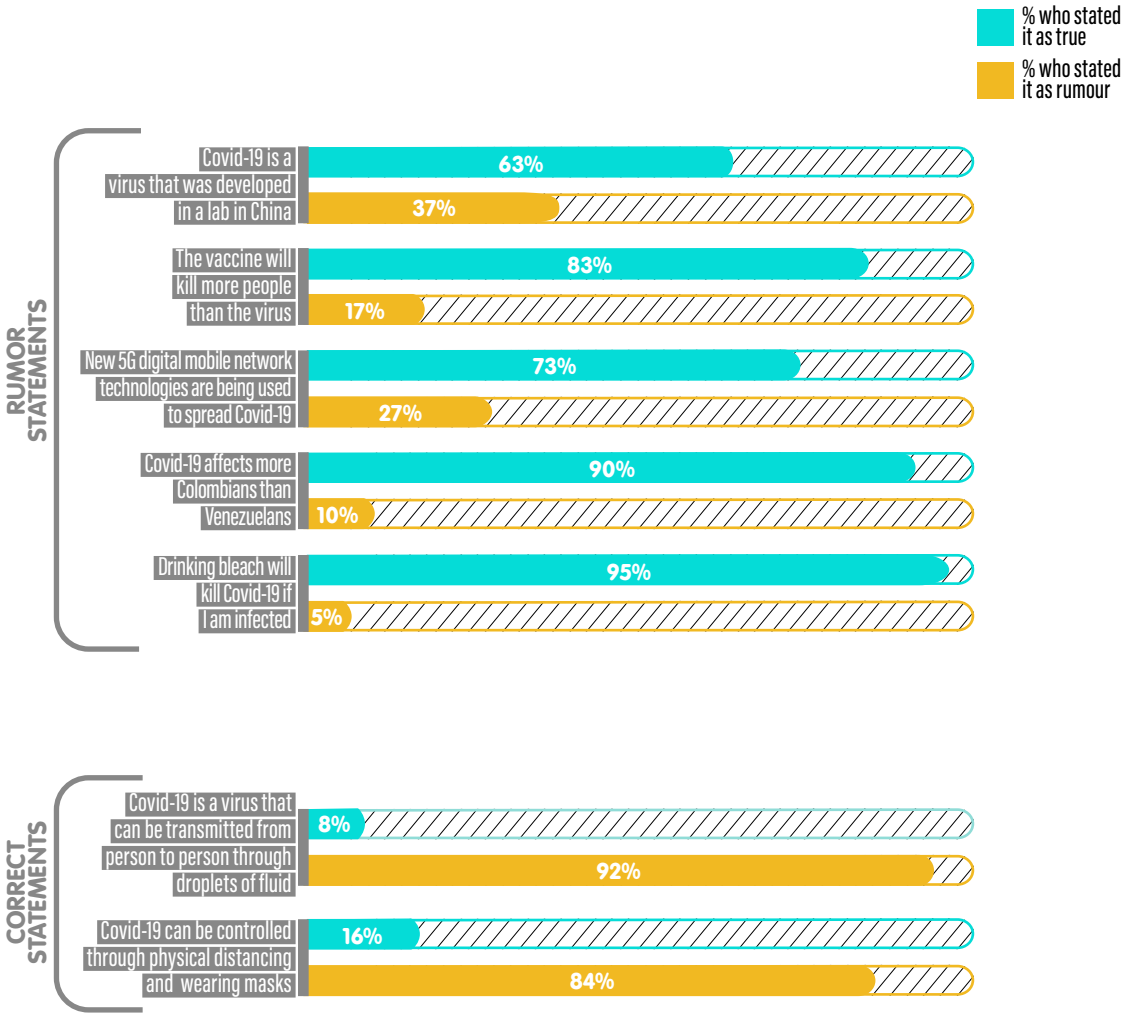
In focus groups, participants stated that information related to COVID-19 was spread faster through WhatsApp groups among the Venezuelan population. While everyone understood how to follow lockdown guidelines and social distancing measures, many preferred to avoid hospitals. Social distancing policies and an economic downturn for many has translated into food insecurity, poverty, and homelessness amid COVID-19. In focus groups, participants emphasized their dire situations and how to confront these monumental challenges of survival. While participants acknowledged the current restrictions due to the pandemic, they voiced their despair when receiving constant updates on the situation in Colombia due to the impact these restrictions have. While there is a wide array of online and offline platforms for information dissemination, information that is precise and concrete using localized language across stakeholders is a key driver. The manner in which messages are conveyed to the public is critical to capture the attention and understanding of those to which the message is directed.

The shift to online platforms and information dissemination has further isolated many among these population groups without consistent access to internet.

Some also mentioned that the shift to online platforms and information dissemination has further isolated many among these population groups without consistent access to internet. Although the trust in humanitarian organizations is high, Venezuelan refugees and migrants did not trust the COVID-19 tests 100%. This is especially the case in Tumaco where information provided by health facilities and humanitarian organizations is not considered sufficient by communities.

Source: Internews 2020

Graph 4. Identifying rumors and fake news



5.4 IMPACT ON KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICE

In Nariño, there have been consistent and repetitive lockdowns due to the COVID-19 outbreak with the region entering into high contagion risks. While fieldwork has indicated to more general understanding of compliance of health protocols, mask-wearing and social distancing, there are significant gaps in how information is changing people's beliefs and behavior around the virus. More than 82% of survey respondents are aware of preventative measures in their daily life to avoid COVID-19 infection, including frequently washing hands with soap and practicing personal hygiene. 92% are aware of the necessity of staying indoors, avoiding going out unless necessary, and physical distancing when outside. Despite high levels of ●●●

awareness, 50% of the informants stated that they changed and adapted their behavior after receiving COVID-19 related information while the other half don't feel that they have changed their behavior after receiving COVID-19 related information. Community members in Tumaco are less inclined to follow preventative measures because the general population does not comply with social distancing or prevention practices, such as wearing a face mask. People also find discomfort in wearing face masks in hot weather or are not wearing them properly.

In both Tumaco and Ipiales, rumors that spread within the community, by word-of-mouth and social media, result in misperceptions that create social tension and lead to the practicing of harmful behaviors. Refugee and migrant communities, for example, voiced their concerns of going to hospitals if symptoms surfaced, claiming that home and traditional remedies can also 'do the trick.' While the communities acknowledge the existence of the virus, there is a general disbelief whether lockdown measures and existing numbers of infected people reflect a daily reality.

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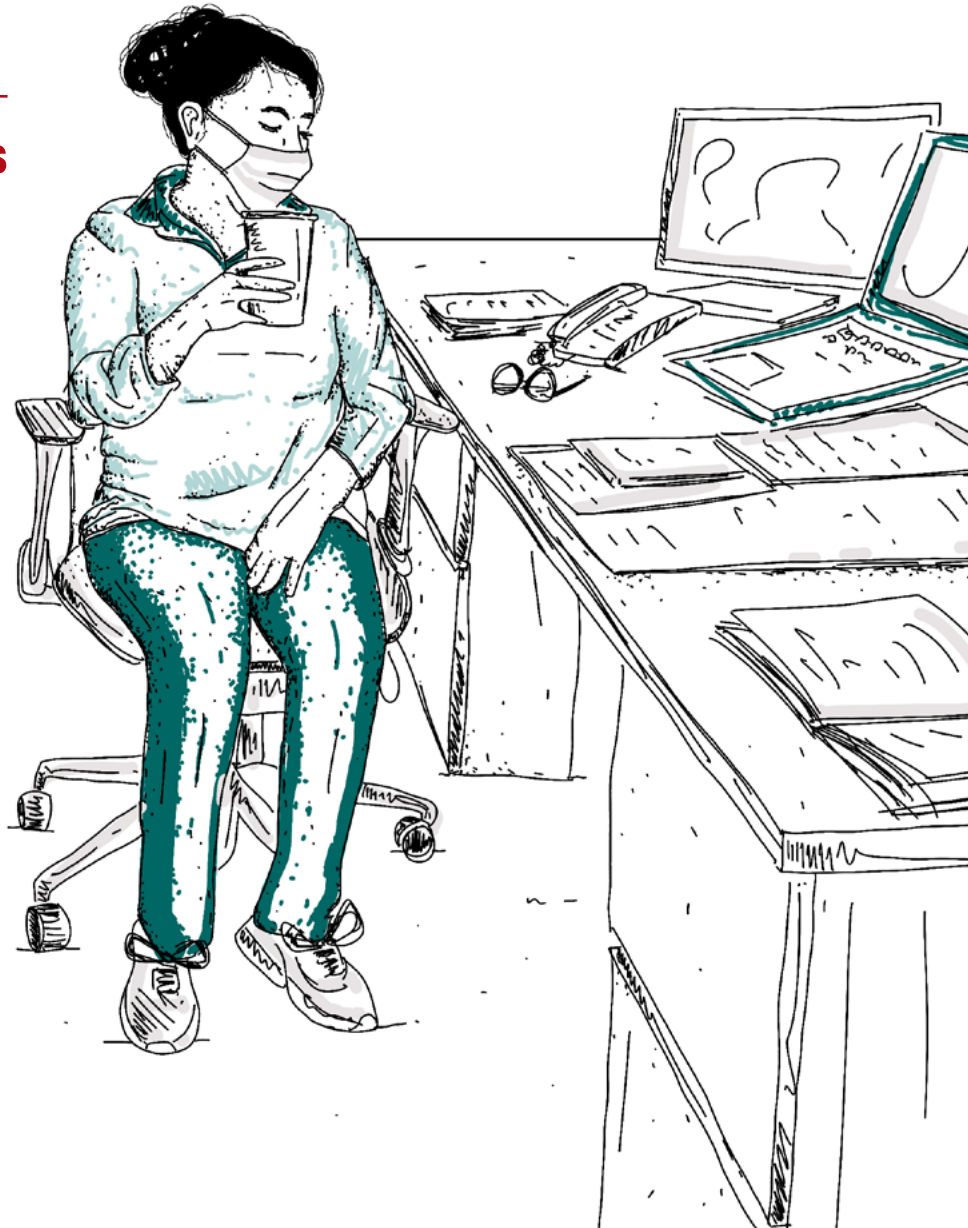


VI. HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND INFORMATION

6.1 NATIONAL COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN

In April 2020, as a response to COVID-19, the Colombian government released a 6-point plan to care for refugees and migrants during the pandemic which focused on groups in the most vulnerable situations and follows guidelines from international organizations, including UNHCR, IOM, WHO and the OHCHR[33] and included the following points:

1. Responsible and humane management of the border

2. Guaranteed access to health services

3. Adaptation of cooperation programs for the care of migrants

4. Attention to the migrant population

5. Focusing programs on high impact points

6. Greater coordination and information

Point 6 includes the provision of platforms to share available service channels so that refugees and migrants can find information and seek care.[34] The Colombian government has established a platform that offers available services for refugees and migrants, especially useful in the border region. There are several hotlines for different international organizations and humanitarian organizations with links on information to refugee and migrant needs.[35] In addition, multiple measures were announced to expand Venezuelans' access to health insurance and ensure that Venezuelans, like Colombians, have access to COVID-19 testing and treatment. In practice, the reality looks quite different with many Venezuelans with irregular migration status experiencing exclusion from accessing health services. Although well intended measures were initiated on behalf of the government, they have not resulted in expected effects for a number of reasons, such as poor communication strategies on health rights, legal risks, fear around deportation and arrest, and stigma around migration and COVID-19 in general. The Colombian government has a Twitter account that is used for prevention information concerning COVID-19 and to report cases. There is also a COVID-19 website that tracks cases throughout the country and offers information around rumors that are circulating, actions, questions, and feedback.[36] Conflicting information between local and government information related to COVID-19 has been mentioned both by humanitarian organizations as well as CSOs.

Following the declaration of a state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the inherent impacts of the crisis, a COVID-19 Response Plan together with the Humanitarian Country ●●●

Team (HCT) and the Inter-Agency Mixed Migration Flows Group (GIFMM) was created to identify potential risks related to COVID-19. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, threats and attacks against humanitarian organizations and medical missions are posing an additional access challenge, as armed groups use the crisis to exert territorial and social control[37] leading to higher numbers of victims of confinement, forced displacement, and reduced humanitarian access.[38] Humanitarian agencies have shifted their response to refugees and migrants to adapt to the COVID-19 response, sending aid and equipment to local health services, working with the Regional Health Institute (ITS), increasing provision of houses to enable safer lockdown conditions, and providing personal protective equipment and hygiene items.

The public health crisis caused by COVID-19 makes clear that many of the measures implemented have disproportionate and discriminatory impacts on marginalized groups, including migrants, refugees and LGBTQI+ persons. According to the GIFMM, in October 2020 there were 14,317 Venezuelan migrants in Nariño.[39] The uncontrolled humanitarian crisis because of the closure of the border left thousands of migrants "trapped" in Colombia, many of whom were living in the streets or in improvised and overcrowded shelters, making it difficult to maintain social distancing standards and constant washing of hands. These shelters on streets and highways have become an object of discrimination and stigmatization. According to the GIFMM, only 69 migrants and refugees have been diagnosed as positive with COVID-19 in the Nariño region.[40] Currently, lockdowns and curfews have returned with a spike in COVID-19 deaths in Colombia. President Ivan Duque recently announced the new permit EPTV that grants temporary legal status to more than 1.7 million Venezuelan migrants and allows migrants to register with the Colombian government to stay in the country for 10 years and work legally.

[33] *Government of Colombia (2020). Acciones tomadas por el Gobierno. https://coronaviruscolombia.gov.co/Covid19/acciones-del-gobierno.html*

[34] *Government of Colombia (2020). Acciones tomadas por el Gobierno. https://coronaviruscolombia.gov.co/Covid19/acciones-del-gobierno.html*

[35] *Estoy en la frontera (2020). Estoy en la Frontera. https://estoyenlafrontera.com/*

[36] *Ministry of Health (2020). COVID-19. https://d2jsqrio60m94k.cloudfront.net/*

[37] *OCHA (2020, August 27). Colombia. Impacto Humanitario en Nariño. Informe de Situación No. 1 (27/08/2020). https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Colombia%20-%20Impacto%20Humanitario%20en%20Nariño%20-%20Informe%20de%20Situación%20No.%2001%20%2827-08-2020%29.pdf*

[38] *HTC (2020). Covid-19 Response Plan. Summary. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/covid-19_response_plan_-_summary.pdf*

[39] *GIFMM (2020b, October). Nariño Situación COVID-19 (Octubre 2020). https://reliefweb.int/report/olombia/nari-o-situaci-n-covid-19-octubre-2020*

[40] *GIFMM (2020b, October). Nariño Situación COVID-19 (Octubre 2020). https://reliefweb.int/report/olombia/nari-o-situaci-n-covid-19-octubre-2020*

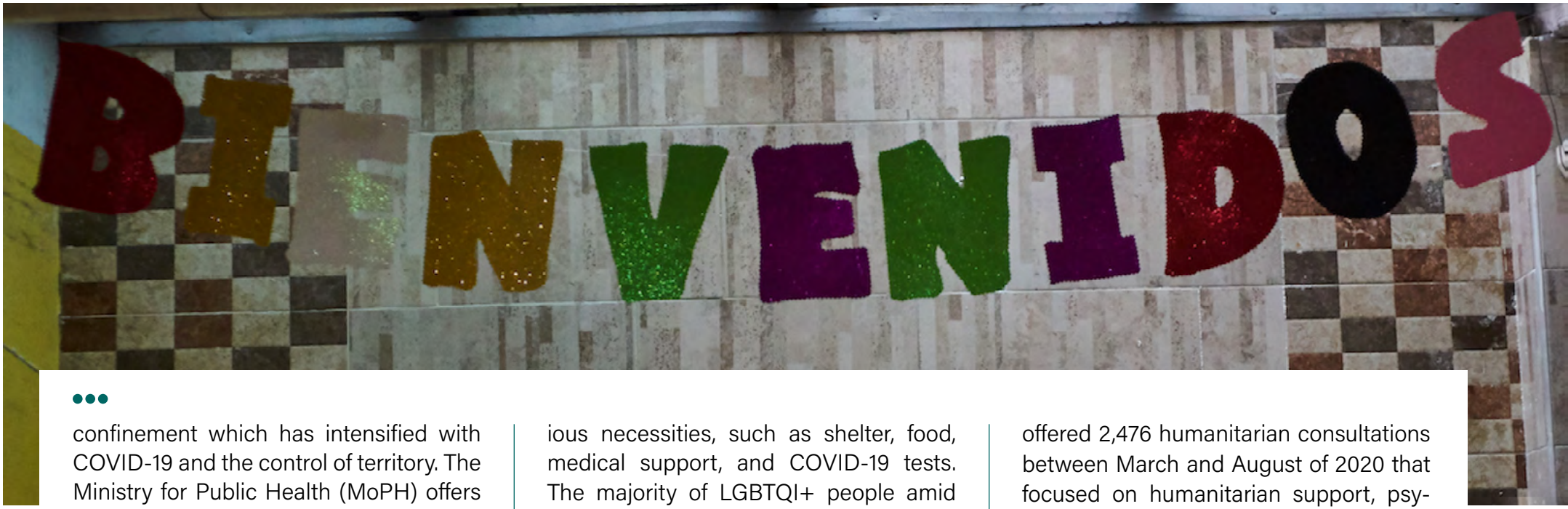
6.2 HUMANITARIAN ACTORS ACTIVE ON COVID RESPONSE

At an international level, the leading humanitarian actors are the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with sub offices in the Nariño region. Other leading actors are the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Médecins Sans Frontiéres (MSF), the Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, the Jesuit Service for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Heartland Alliance International, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Pastoral Social, Acción Contra el Hambre and the World Food Programme (WFP). These organizations partner together with local actors in the response to COVID-19. CSOs and NGOs play a key role in bridging the gap between international and national actors.

A Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) has been developed to support and complement national authorities and responses in Latin America and the Caribbean alongside the regional efforts of the government to respond to the influx of refugees and migrants in Colombia. The 2020 response involves a longer-term, planned approach that includes but is not limited to immediate assistance and protection. It should consider activities that bridge the gap between the humanitarian emergency response and longer-term perspective to build resilience at the individual level and the institutional level.[41] The GIFMM works together with the Government of Colombia and is composed of 56 members at the national level. It has expanded its network of local coordination platforms to cover 11 departments. The GIFMM has also supported the national and local governments on the progressive expansion of services in territories with more limited resources.

CSOs and NGOs play a key role in bridging the gap between international and national actors.

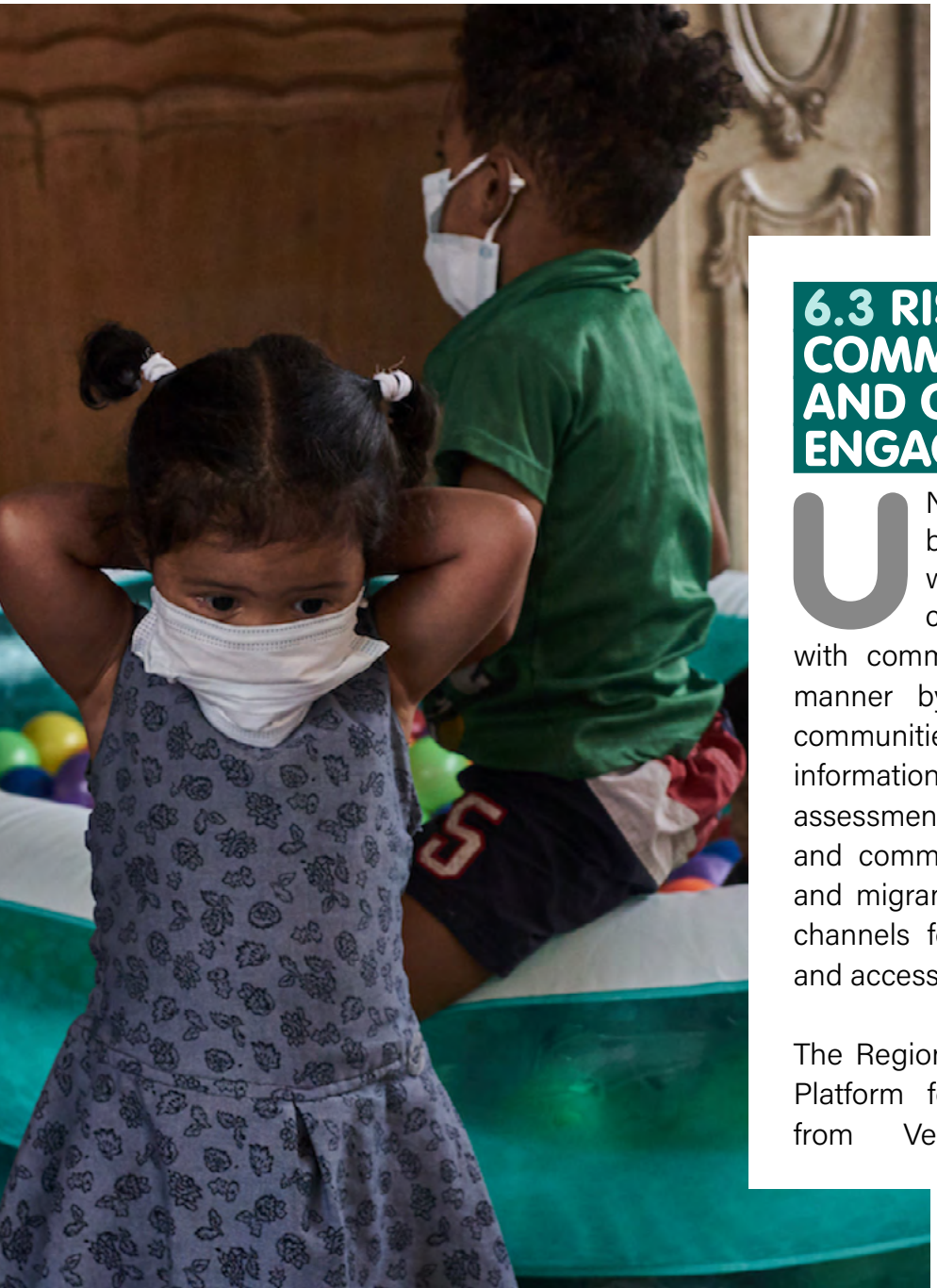
The Local GIFMM Coordination Team of Nariño and the Thematic Protection Group in Nariño together with local authorities have offered a first humanitarian response as well as accompaniment to several municipalities along the Pacific Coast. They assist in monitoring armed conflict and armed violence, humanitarian emergencies, and human rights violations. Both groups also assist in monitoring mobility restrictions and •••



confinement which has intensified with COVID-19 and the control of territory. The Ministry for Public Health (MoPH) offers medical assistance to migrants and refugees as part of a plan with the IOM, where emergency relief and protective measures are implemented to safeguard against the spread of the disease. This especially applies to the border region between Ecuador and Colombia. The Government has set up a website that includes different categories of information and recommendations related to COVID-19. It also offers phone numbers for psychosocial support as well as a list of different humanitarian organizations providing various necessities, such as shelter, food, medical support, and COVID-19 tests. The majority of LGBTQI+ people amid COVID-19 have turned to CSOs (civil society organizations) for help and support (in its majority humanitarian) because they do not feel safe otherwise. This finding emphasizes the need to build stronger linkages with local respected CSOs when communicating to LGBTQI+ migrant and refugees, which is currently not the case. A report by Caribe Afirmativo (a significant CSO that advocates for equal rights for the LGBTQI+ community, documents cases of abuse, and trains police and policy officials on human rights) has offered 2,476 humanitarian consultations between March and August of 2020 that focused on humanitarian support, psychosocial support, HIV/AIDS consultations, and judicial consultations. Support from local governments was characterized by LGBTQI+ persons as insufficient and, in some cases, non-existent.[42]

[41] *GIFMM (2020a). Refugees and Migrants Response Plan 2020. Pp 67-86. https://reliefweb.int/report/olombia/rmrp-2020-regional-refugee-and-migrant-response-plan-refugees-and-migrants-0*

[42] *OHCHR (2020, May 17). COVID-19: The suffering and resilience of LGBT persons must be visible and inform the actions of States. https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?LangID=E&NewsID=25884*



6.3 RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

UNHCR and its partners have been developing alternative ways of communicating with communities (CwC – engaging with communities in a two-directional manner by collecting feedback from communities in Colombia). A regional information and communication needs assessment helps to identify information and communication needs of refugees and migrants as well as prioritize main channels for information dissemination and access to communities.

The Regional Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) includes UNHCR, IOM, different UN agencies, international organizations, donors, financial institutions, and civil society to create a coordinated response to COVID-19. Varied materials are being compiled to identify gaps and needs and avoid duplication in recommendations. Different sectors of the R4V focus on guidance, resources, and materials to support national platforms.

The WHO and national authorities' have disseminated messages adapted to different formats that are more accessible to communities. The World Health Organization and Pan American Health Organization (WHO/PAHO) messages have been disseminated as part of national campaigns such as Somos Panas. Social flyers have been developed in Colombia to inform Venezuelan communities about decision and service provision modalities •••

offered by UNHCR and are shared through WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, among others.

Community networks and leaders, such as Venezuelan associations, continue to engage with communities through WhatsApp and mobile phone communication. UNHCR has organized virtual focus groups with community members to define the best ways to disseminate information, raise awareness and produce relevant materials. It is worth noting, however, that the very communities at the core of the programming strategies are not invited to participate in the decision-making processes that directly impact the course of their lives. When it comes to community engagement and inclusion, humanitarian organizations could take the extra step to actively include migrants and refugees in decisions made about their lives.

The assessment indicates insufficient communication mechanisms between the different stakeholders to ensure precise and direct information is provided to community members.

Participants in focus groups explicitly lacked communication mechanisms with humanitarian organizations and often times were not sure what stakeholder to turn to for specific needs. For people who reside in or who are passing through remote areas and rely solely on community radio stations, accessing information was difficult to impossible.

Though still in pilot phase, the research team has taken a first step towards a network mapping assessment of the humanitarian sector asking informants about the main nodes of interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic.[43] According to the responses provided in the interviews and reflected in the table below humanitarian organizations' main nodes of interaction are peer international organizations and public bodies. As demonstrated in the graph below, the assessment indicates insufficient communication mechanisms between the different stakeholders to ensure precise and direct information is provided to community members. While organizations maintain strong interaction levels with other humanitarian organizations, community members and media outlets are left out of the conversation.

The accuracy of the assessment hinges on the number of respondents to the survey and so far, no inference from the findings can be applied to the whole humanitarian sector. Nonetheless, it is so far truly relevant how two local organizations do not refer to key influential stakeholders to be in the loop of their COVID-19 information response. This demonstrates the need for bridging these two sectors in the regions and boosting links to media that has been designated as potential trusted influencers of the communities.

[43] *Network mapping exercise included an interlocuter survey based in two questions on the degree of interaction and the type of interaction. The research implemented 3 of these surveys. Thus, this first step is considered as a pilot test that shall be further developed in the following IEA including a thorough assessment of all network mapping features and covering a wide range of representative stakeholders from all key sectors.*

Table 4.
Humanitarian organisations principal interaction nodes

		AVG HUMANITARIAN
UN agencies	INTERNATIONAL	5.00
Multilateral organisations (other than UN)	INTERNATIONAL	5.00
Countries (other States donors)	INTERNATIONAL	4.00
Other international	INTERNATIONAL	5.00
Ministry of information/ Communication	NATIONAL	4.50
Ministry of Health	NATIONAL	5.00
Ministry of Disaster Management (or similar)	NATIONAL	4.00
Other Ministries or executive bodies	NATIONAL	2.00
Regional/local level authorities	NATIONAL	5.00
Media regulatory authorities	NATIONAL	1.00
Other public bodies	NATIONAL	1.00
Community media representatives	MEDIA	2.50
Media associations	MEDIA	2.00
Public media	MEDIA	3.50
Commercial media	MEDIA	3.00
Community leaders	CIVIL SOCIETY	3.00
Religious leaders	CIVIL SOCIETY	1.00
Online platforms (private sector) – search engines	CIVIL SOCIETY	4.00
Key constituencies (women, youth)	CIVIL SOCIETY	1.50
Other private	CIVIL SOCIETY	1.00

Source: Internews 2020

Figure 2. Visual COVID 19 stakeholder map of humanitarian organisations
(nodes with scored interaction over 3 in a scale from 1 to 5)

Source: Internews 2020

6.4 RUMOR TRACKING AND COMMUNITY FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

A greater risk for populations in vulnerable situations is the risk of becoming susceptible to misinformation and fake advertisements of assistance. In the case of Nariño, it is vital to respond to the 'infodemic' that exacerbates discrimination and affects access to services and basic assistance for the communities in vulnerabile situations.

Some humanitarian organizations have community feedback mechanisms integrated into their programs and conduct listening activities to understand community needs and priorities. These are not mainstreamed or shared among all humanitarian organizations in Nariño and interviews reveal that not all humanitarian organizations have feedback platforms. There is no coordinated or centralized rumor tracking or community feedback mechanism for humanitarian organizations and the government response to COVID-19. Interviews indicate concerns from humanitarian organizations about inconsistencies from the government in relation to COVID-19 information and a lack of prioritization in communication strategies developed and carried out by humanitarian organizations and the government. FEDEMEDIOS carries out hourly COVID-19 related broadcasts for the community, allowing community members to call and ask questions. While the broadcast allows for audience engagement and participation, it is certainly not sufficient to cover all questions and concerns from around Nariño, much less the entire country.

Within in the framework of the R4V, the Communicating with Communities (CwC) Working Group has been key in the roll-out of the Regional Information and Communication Needs Assessment in Nariño. The interagency working group co-led by UNICEF and the IFRC was created to provide regional coordination on CwC, outreach, and engagement initiatives to strengthen Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) practices at the inter-agency level. The R4V promotes increased use of WhatsApp and Facebook groups, online pages, and apps with the view to reduce top-down approaches from humanitarian organizations and increase digital literacy among individuals so they can 'fact check' and build trust in particular information sources. ●

It is vital to respond to the 'infodemic' that exacerbates discrimination and affects access to services and basic assistance for the communities in vulnerable situations.

6.5 IDENTIFIED GAPS IN INFORMATION NEEDS AND PROGRAMMING

There are obstacles to documentation, census, and registration of affected communities due to the limited capacity of the institutional response and complementary actions in Nariño. Internal displacement is under-registered, and the extent and nature of confinement are difficult to document, quantify and characterize.[44] The response to affected populations is difficult and delayed due to lack of information of the situation in many areas with armed group presence. There is a significant lack of coordination between community media and humanitarian organizations, with the latter using its own communication channels to distribute relevant information, but not considering community radio and the pervasive reach they have in more remote areas in Nariño and among distinct groups in society.

Another notable concern is the topic around so-called protection spaces due to interplay between hostilities and the pandemic. In the first trimester of 2020, over 12,000 people have been displaced and more than 43,200 people have experienced confinement at the hands of armed groups.[45] Armed groups are exercising their control on communities, forcing confinement or displacement, threatening human rights defenders, and reducing humanitarian access.

There is currently no publicly available, comprehensive, cross-departmental multi-sector needs assessment that is representative of the entire population which means that all conclusions drawn are solely based on smaller-scale assessments with limited representation. In rural areas, there is little information available about the impact of government measures, particularly regarding the supply of essential goods. In general, access to public services for the LGBTQI+ community is affected by discrimination and stigma. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Venezuelan LGBTQI+ persons have been confronted with effects of double discrimination, first due to their migration status and second due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. In Ipiales for example, LGBTQI+ migrants reported situations of discrimination in shelters administered by Pastoral Social, surely leading to greater situations of exclusion and possible avoidance of shelters on behalf of members of the LGBTQI+ migrant community. When speaking to Venezuelan led associations in both Tumaco and Ipiales, humanitarian aid and support was not considered sufficient. While humanitarian support ●●●

is widespread with several organizations present and involved in emergency relief both in Tumaco and Ipiales, migrant and refugee clearly stated their lack of sufficient support. Migrants and refugees in Tumaco complained about a lack of communication with the organizations, not knowing who to turn to when in doubt and despair. Generally, there was a lack of knowledge on what kind of relief support exists in the city and the organizations responsible for the distribution and information supply. In addition, the IOM did not involve itself in communication campaigns to migrants although the organization is well respected and has a wide array of relief programs tailored to the migrant and refugee community.

The government has also considered accelerating degree validation of Venezuelans with medical backgrounds which could be a crucial step in the response to COVID-19. The decree was announced on March 24, 2020, but medical professional associations protested the decree, and it was not implemented. The government's commitment to validate medical cre-dentials for Venezuelans to work as doctors and nurses can be considered a positive and productive step towards not only integrating Venezuelans into Colombian society but also supporting the already under-staffed medical system in Colombia.

[44] *IDMC (2020). Colombia. Country Information. https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/olombia*

[45] *HTC (2020). Covid-19 Response Plan. Summary. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/covid-19_response_plan_-_summary.pdf*

VII. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – Towards a healthier information ecosystem

7.1 KEY FINDINGS ON THE INFORMATION LANDSCAPE AND COMMUNITIES' INFORMATION PRACTICES

Foundations to build upon to improve information ecosystems in Nariño

■ Information in language of preference is not considered a barrier for Venezuelan refugees and migrants. 100% of the participants in surveys and focus groups receive information in their language of preference. Additional languages should be considered when working with extra-regional migrants.

■ Social media is widely used by migrants and allows for rapid information distribution of government and media content. Costs to access social media, however, remain a barrier as many refugees and migrants do not have the economic resources to buy internet packages regularly and therefore rely on WIFI access points.

■ The Ministry for Information and Communications Technology is strengthening connectivity in the department of Nariño. Tech companies and together with the Red Cross have launched a platform with relevant information for Spanish speaking migrants in Nariño.

■ Community leaders are in an influential position and able to connect people within the community and provide a focal point when remote management is necessary. Training community leaders and setting up guidelines on what ethical journalism and social responsibility imply will equip community leaders with tools to disseminate as well as verify precise information for communities.

■ High trust is registered in international humanitarian support, friends and family, international media and community health workers. As radio stations are widely accepted among community members and programs have begun development, linkages between media platforms and organizations should be encouraged for wider information dissemination.

■ LGBTQI+ migrant and refugee communities don't feel that they have adequate access to health rights and information around COVID-19.

Areas of improvement within the information ecosystem in Nariño

■ COVID-19 precautions do not take into account livelihood and shelter situations of refugees and migrants where social distancing and washing hands is not always possible. COVID-19 communications responses must adapt to these situations and offer solutions in alignment with the real situation that refugees, and migrants are confronted with. Campaigns need to be strengthened among media platforms and humanitarian organizations in order to guarantee information on distribution centers is reproduced in a timely manner.

■ Media journalists remain under-capacitated in trainings and underfinanced when it comes to trainings and content production on COVID-19 related content for refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations.

■ LGBTQI+ migrants felt that they were disproportionately affected by lack of COVID-19 related information and health rights, resulting in the further marginalization of those already living in vulnerable situations.

■ Information gaps are partly a result of organizations not strategically including radios as part of the communication and community engagement strategy. As radio stations are considered trustworthy information sources, linkages between stakeholders need to be further strengthened.

■ Humanitarian organizations only focus on Spanish speaking migrants excluding migrants that speak other languages, causing them to face more barriers in accessing information.

■ Refugees and migrants face challenges while accessing WIF, which they noted as a significant barrier to receiving information related to their situation and their needs.

Opportunities to bridge information gaps and address health equity

■ Implement and develop of information strategies and adapt those strategies to different migrant profiles (regular, irregular, on the move, population interested in becoming residents) in order to bridge gaps in information needs. The lack of media outlets that cater exclusively to migrants offers space for improvement.

■ Fund and support migrants and refugees to develop media developed for migrants using trusted and preferred platforms, such as community radios and Whatsapp groups.

■ Information and communication technologies and platforms have the potential to play a crucial role in helping migrant and refugee populations gain access to quality information on how to navigate the health system, how to obtain information on accessing healthcare services, and strategies available to contain the spread of COVID-19. Access to health access and equality is the most pressing topic that migrants are worried about.

Threats to the information ecosystem in Nariño

■ The presence of armed groups and the imposing of regulations amid COVID-19 creates fear and uncertainty among civilians, refugees, and migrants in vulnerable situations and increases barriers to accessing information on topics that are relevant as confinement is imposed.

■ COVID-19 is posing threats to the LGBTQI+ movement-building and

organizational survival. There is a fear that work will be set back by years because activities can no longer be implemented which result in not meeting donor expectations. However, LGBTQI+ organizations continue combatting misinformation and the lack of coverage of LGBTQI+ rights by collaborating with Internews and journalists in the region to offer trainings for responsible journalism on LGBTQI+ migrant and refugee rights.

LGBTQI+ organizations are combatting misinformation and lack of coverage around LGBTQI+ rights by collaborating together with Internews and journalists in the region to offer trainings of responsible journalism on LGBTQI+ migrant and refugee rights.

■ Extra-regional migrants face language barriers when trying to access COVID-19 information and access information related to shelters and migration routes. While humanitarian organizations are aware of the presence of extra-regional migrants, there are no programs or projects that directly tackle information needs and language barriers.

■ Low trust is registered in national and local government entities which can be traced back to inconsistent messages on the political stage as well as a lack of providing solutions for these particular groups of vulnerability. Bridging the gap between Venezuelan communities and the host society is of great importance, especially because of the xenophobic discourses, exploitation, human rights abuses and violence that the refugee and migrant community encounters.

■ Rumors and misconceptions are still rampant. According to surveys, 1/5 of Venezuelan refugees and migrants believe that vaccines will kill more people than COVID-19 itself. Surveys also demonstrate that physical distancing and masks are not considered measures to prevent the virus among 16% of participants. Fears around vaccines is not novel but requires the emphasis on engagement, understanding and responding to the beliefs behind rumors.

7.2 KEY FINDINGS ON HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND INFORMATION DYNAMICS

Foundations for the improvement of the humanitarian response

■ Key messages from the WHO and national authorities should be adapted to more accessible formats for communities. High levels of trust in humanitarian organizations and low levels of trust in authorities mean that humanitarian organizations need to ensure that the information they provide is relevant, up to date and contextualized.

■ Migration hotlines exist for migrants on the border and are necessary so that migrants and refugees can access different information sources to receive direct support and information on how to navigate their situations.

■ The Red Cross launched a platform with relevant information for migrants in the border region. The Red Cross is widely accepted among migrant communities and as a trusted source and can support bridging the gap of information needs.

Significant challenges to humanitarian responses in Nariño

■ Reality of services provided to migrants and refugees differs from what humanitarian organizations have portrayed indicating there are definite gaps in information. Migrants and refugees emphasized lack of communication with several organizations on-site as well as discriminatory practices that discourage those most in need from seeking help and support. The level of high trust in humanitarian organizations can be understood through the lens of high distrust towards government bodies and local governments. The idea that foreign entities can provide sufficient support to migrants can stem from xenophobic tendencies on behalf of the host society and the general exclusion of migrants and refugees in Colombia.

■ Communication with municipalities, government bodies and humanitarian organizations is not carried out in a timely manner which delays assistance for communities in vulnerable situations.

■ A large population of Venezuelans may fall through the cracks of public health surveillance due to their undocumented status and fear of discrimination as irregular migrants. Access to health rights is a perceived information gap on behalf of the community.

■ Links between humanitarian actors and community media platforms are not strong. This is a clear gap of communication and information dissemination to wider audiences.

■ There is a lack of data base sharing of information about humanitarian support and emergency relief. Data is collected by organizations and is not shared with the migrant community. Data sharing mechanisms are not sufficiently present. ●●●

Opportunities for humanitarian stakeholders to adequately address the situation of migrants amid COVID-19

■ Set refugee and migrant communities in vulnerable situations as the focus and forefront of projects to directly engage with them about needs and gaps in information and services.

■ Community media is widely accepted and allows for future creative and alternative information campaigns to reach populations in marginalized and vulnerable situations.

■ The Colombian government's commitment to integrate Venezuelan health professionals in the response to COVID-19 by validating medical credentials is an important opportunity. It will serve as a representative step towards integrating Venezuelan professionals into the workforce and encourage more inclusion of the migrant population into the host society. It can also impact the inclusion of migrant-related information into mainstream channels.

Threats to the implementation of rapid responses and misinformation in Nariño

■ Measures restricting movement currently do not protection for trans and gender non-conforming persons. Law enforcement officials should be instructed and trained not to discriminate against this population as discrimination and stigma impact how members of the LGBTQI+ community access information and result in misinformation.

■ Dire need for information puts migrants and refugees at risk of being targeted by misinformation about humanitarian assistance, government measures or health-related measures in relation to COIVID-19.

■ Movement restrictions for communities in Colombia mean little or no access to necessities, such as health facilities, education, crops, and public transport. Decrease in or limited presence of humanitarian actors due to presence of armed groups and food insecurity will rise. These factors result in higher levels of misinformation as information access is strongly limited.

■ Protection issues related to sexual and gender-based violence are more likely if there is an expansion of armed groups and COVID-19.

■ The circulation of COVID-19 related rumors that fuel xenophobic tendencies, question the reality of the virus and challenge the reach of information for the migrant community.

■ LGBTQI+ persons are subject to discrimination or fear retribution for seeking healthcare. Lack of access to health services imply a heightened risk due to lack of HIV/AIDS medication and hormones. There have been cases in which LGBTQI+ migrants have been declined entry into shelters due to their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. These specific barriers exclude the LGBTQI+ community from receiving support and threatens the community in healthcare delivery and social security.

7.3 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Participation and Engagement

■ Community-based organizations must be involved in the design and implementation of policies and programs responding to this public health emergency, to ensure that the needs of different populations are sufficiently considered and that measures will not exacerbate already existing inequalities and marginalization. The inclusion of LGBTQI+ migrant communities is critical to the success of the interventions.

■ Two-way communication. Community members mentioned many times that they wanted to share knowledge and communicate with each other as well as stakeholders. Ensure that there is space to listen to concerns, feedback, myths, and rumors about COVID-19 as well as communicating about the virus. Humanitarian organizations need to adapt responses based on what communities hear, including misinformation and closing the feedback loop.

■ Community leaders and other influential figures should speak out against stigmatization and hate speech directed at the LGBTQI+ people in the context of the pandemic.

■ Ensure that migrants and refugees have knowledge of free WIFI networks available to them to potentiate higher information access. Develop campaigns around WIFI access points that directly target migrant communities and work together with humanitarian organizations, migration offices and community radios to offer information on the location of the WIFI networks.

Risk Communication

■ Create mechanisms and networks together with social media platforms, such as Facebook as it is a widely used platform among the refugee and migrant community. Platforms such as Facebook can partner with humanitarian organizations to target migrant population users and disseminate information related to COVID-19 as well as offer spaces to influencers and groups share and reproduce information.

■ Create and promote listening, engaging and sharing perception data among humanitarian organizations and media platforms to disseminate information and incorporate feedback. The information gaps related especially to COVID-19, employment and access to medical aid indicate and emphasize the importance of humanitarian organizations and media platforms/local journalists working together on information responses.

■ Extra-regional migrants and refugees on the move towards North America require strategic information access points. This group does not intend to stay anywhere for longer than necessary making the flow of COVID-19 information difficult.

■ Share narratives of those who have had COVID-19 to amplify the specific experiences of those who have been affected by COVID-19. Marginalization and stigma around those who are or have been infected detracts from promotion about the importance of prevention, lifesaving actions and treatment.

Humanitarian Service Provision

■ Humanitarian organizations need to adopt measures that guarantee same access possibilities for LGBTQI+ persons to public health services, safety, and assistance as there are clear information gaps related to these topics. Migrants and refugees felt that they weren't as well informed around housing, livelihoods and LGBTQI+ inclusion, meaning that communication around these topics need to be strategized.

■ Shelters, support services and other measures to address gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic should take steps to include the LGBTQI+ population.

■ It is necessary to provide support to civil society associations that offer assistance that humanitarian organizations have not been able to offer, such as psychosocial support, networking, information on transportation routes, access to health-care services, COVID-19 restrictions, and while doing so, strengthen mobility justice.

■ There is a significant lack of coordination between community media and humanitarian organizations, with the latter using its own communication channels to distribute relevant information without considering community radio and the pervasive reach it has in more remote areas in Nariño and among distinct groups in society. Media financing issues must be addressed and providers that are widely accepted by migrants to create programming for and by migrants should be supported.

■ Support funding for organizations that commit to the migrant population and offer trainings for presenters and journalists on responsible reporting on migrant issues.

Inclusion can bridge the gap between stakeholders and improve communication mechanisms in the region at a decision-making level.

■ Community-based organizations must be involved in the design and implementation of policies and programs responding to this public health emergency, to ensure that the needs of different populations are sufficiently considered and that measures will not exacerbate already existing inequalities and marginalization. The inclusion can bridge the gap between stakeholders and improve communication mechanisms in the region at a decision-making level.

■ Community radios offer opportunities at a regional level to incorporate participatory narratives of local life into information dissemination. They require strengthening with other stakeholders, especially humanitarian organizations to cater to demands for trustworthy and credible information.

■ Health rights are not being adequately transmitted and there is a large gap in access to information about COVID-19. Many members of migrant communities are not fully equipped with information on prevention of the virus and how to implement safety protocols.

■ Intensify efforts of stakeholder mapping and work with existing community leadership and community radios to pass on COVID-19 related information as people are more likely to follow the example of leaders and trusted platforms. Save the Children has created a platform called "Children's MIRA" to report on COVID-19 from a children's perspective.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS

Information Ecosystems during COVID-19 Trust, influence and connectivity for people on the move in Nariño, Colombia was funded by a grant from **USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)** to support the Internews' **Rooted in Trust** Project.

First and foremost, we would like to acknowledge our partner organizations, **Caribe Afirmativo and Fedemedios** without whom this work would not have been possible. We extend our gratitude to **Radio Internacional** and **Stereo Tumaco** who, together with **Caribe Afirmativo**, conducted the quantitative fieldwork and provided support in qualitative fieldwork during the pandemic. We would like to extend further gratitude to **Javier Medina** (Casa del Migrante) and **Wilson Castañeda** (Director of Caribe Afirmativo) for their contributions as expert panelists and their guidance through the three draft phases of the IEA. Many thanks to Internews colleagues **Irene Scott, Justin Auciello, Julie Langelier** and **Stijn Aelbers** for their reviews and advice along the way.

Natalie Tines (Internews, Research Coordinator) is the Research Lead for Rooted in Trust Colombia and the author of the report. **Claudia Julieta Duque** (Rooted in Trust Project Lead) led the baseline drafts and provided research support, guidance and continuous feedback during the phases of the IEA report writing. **Gabriela Christie** (Program Officer) reviewed, edited and supported the finalization of the report. **Joaquin de la Concha** (Internews, Global Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning Lead) designed the visualizations and guided the writing of the first two drafts. **Pierrick Judeaux** (Internews, Global Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Security Operations) oversaw the last phase of the draft and the report in its final stages through publication and feedback phases. **Nadia Asendorf** (Global Data Analyst) supported in the analysis and visualization of the quantitative data.

Nektaria Malousari created the graphic design, as well as formatted the report.
Ganaëlle Tilly created the sketches of the report.

Photo Credits – *Through a small grants program, the Rooted in Trust project supported the work of documentary photographer and journalist Gerald Bermúdez in Colombia, examining migration on the Colombia-Ecuador border. All of the acknowledgements for pictures go out to him.*

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The content of this report does not necessarily reflect the views of Internews or any of its funders.

ANNEXES

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LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

	Institution	Name (Position)
International Organizations	OIM JESUIT REFUGEE CARITAS	Diana Varela, Coordinator for Migrant based projects Nariño Carlos Estrella (Coordinator Jesuit Refugee Council) Christine Grawunder (Coordinadora de Proyectos)
Government Authorities	Natalia Santacruz	Secretary of Government Pasto
Media Sector	National School of Journalists, Tumaco FECOLPER Independent Journalist specialized on Migration Issues Association for Border Journalism Radio Tumaco	Carlosama Eduardo (Journalist) Adriana Hurtado (National Director) Mario Lopez Anabell Pontoja Magaly Arboleda
CSO	Casa del Migrante Association of Venezuelans ASOVENZ Colonia Venezolana de Nariño COLVENZ ASOVIFU Migrantes por el Mundo	Javier Medina, director of association Gabriel Lema, representative Josue Ferret, representative Community leader Community leader
Community	Dayana Paz Member of the LGBTQI+ Member of the LGBTQI+ Member of the LGBTQI+	Community member Community member Community member Community member

FIELDWORK OVERVIEW

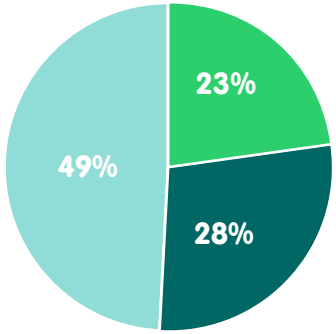
Information collection tools (survey and interview questionnaires) can be made available upon request

Quantitative Research

Conducted by	Fedemedios	Caribe Afirmativo
Method	Purposive Sampling	Purposive Sampling
Areas	Tumaco and Ipiales, Nariño	Tumaco and Ipiales, Nariño
Sample Size	119	101
Gender Split	See graph below	See graph below
Age Split	See graph below	See graph below

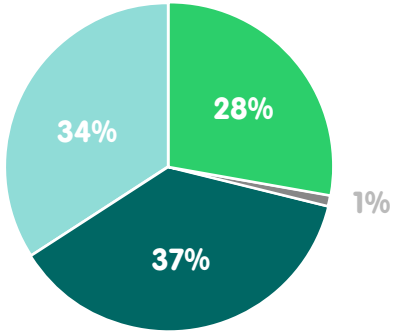
AGE

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35+



GENDER

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say



LANGUAGE

- Español

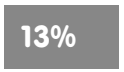
EDUCATION LEVEL

College, University or higher

Secondary/High school education

Vocational education

Primary/Elementary education



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COLOMBIA - FEBRUARY, 2021