

EMERGENCY FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION ASSESSMENT FOR MIGRANT POPULATIONS AND HOST COMMUNITIES – BRIEF



World Food Programme

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This brief presents the findings from the first phase of a nation-wide Emergency Food Security and Nutrition Assessment (EFSA) conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) in Colombia. The assessment aims to analyse the current food security and nutrition situation for migrant populations and host communities (phase I) as well as for the national Colombian population (phase II).¹

Between June and August 2022, WFP completed the first phase of the assessment and carried out a total of 7,097 household surveys, ensuring representative samples for five key population groups – i) Venezuelan migrants with the intention to settle, ii) Venezuelan migrants in transit, iii) Venezuelan pendular migrants, iv) Colombian returnees and v) host communities. **These surveys were conducted in 13 departments and 45 municipalities with a high concentration of Venezuelan migrants.** In addition, 44 focus groups discussions were held with communities to better understand the drivers of food insecurity and how they are impacting their lives. This assessment serves as a follow-up to the previous EFSA conducted by WFP for migrant populations and host communities in 2019. This exercise was implemented by the Centro Nacional de Consultoría, Bogota, Colombia.

SUMMARY

1. The **food security situation has deteriorated for migrant populations and host communities** since WFP's previous assessment conducted in 2019.

Among the 2.5 million Venezuelan migrants in Colombia with the intention to settle, nearly 1.3 million (52%) are food insecure.

High rates of food insecurity were found among migrants in transit (73%), pendular migrants (73%), Colombian returnees (54%) and host communities (43%).

2. **About half of the households have insufficient food consumption** – most of surveyed households consume fewer than three meals a day and at least one in four households have a poor or borderline diet, meaning they rely heavily on grains and cereals and have a low dietary diversity.

3. **There are concerning levels of malnutrition among vulnerable groups.** At least a third of pregnant women are anaemic among both migrants and host communities and between 3-5% of children under five were found to be suffering from acute malnutrition.



WITH INTENTION
TO SETTLE

52% (1.3M) ARE
FOOD INSECURE



PENDULAR
MIGRANTS

73% (1.3M) ARE
FOOD INSECURE



MIGRANTS IN
TRANSIT

73% (280K) ARE
FOOD INSECURE



COLOMBIAN
RETURNEES

54% (530K) ARE
FOOD INSECURE



HOST
COMMUNITIES

43% (430K) ARE
FOOD INSECURE

1. Results of phase II for the Colombian population are expected to be shared in December 2022



BETWEEN JUNE AND AUGUST 2022

13 DEPARTMENTS
45 MUNICIPALITIES

7,097 HOUSEHOLDS
SURVEYED

44 FOCUS GROUPS
DISCUSSIONS

OVERVIEW

Colombia has experienced an unprecedented influx of migrants from Venezuela, which grew from just 39,000 people in 2015 to approximately 2.5 million as of August 2022 (solely referencing migrants with the intention to settle).² This figure is expected to rise further as the numbers of migrants entering from Venezuela continues to grow during 2022. Faced with economic hardship at home, migrants say they moved to Colombia to access basic goods and services such as food, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities (R4V, August 2022).³ According to the National Statistics Department (DANE), **six in ten Venezuelan households with the intention to settle in Colombia are monetarily poor**, more than half of which (34%) are living in extreme poverty.⁴ Many migrants find themselves living in the margins of Colombia's economy, where armed conflict, violence, socio-economic shocks, and climatic disasters have compounded impacts on poor households.

At the time of WFP's previous assessment in 2019, migrant flows from Venezuela accelerated to an all-time high and Colombia's local governments were struggling to cope with the massive demand on infrastructure and services. Initial results from this assessment in 2022 indicate that since **2019 the food security situation has deteriorated** for migrants and host communities. The COVID-19 pandemic and economic contraction has been particularly harsh for migrants working in Colombia's informal sector, many of whom are still feeling the effects of a disrupted economy - at least half of Venezuelans in Colombia and 40% of host communities say their income decreased or disappeared completely during the past year.

This situation is further compounded by the fact that global supply shocks and access to agricultural inputs like fertilizers are affecting Colombian farmers; nearly half of crop producers say their harvests have fallen this year, according to a recent assessment by the Food and Agricultural Organisation.⁵ **Surging food price inflation is putting even basic goods and services out of reach for the poor** (migrants and host community alike), who must decide between buying food or paying for other basic needs like rent. Women are particularly affected - 54% of the food insecure population identified in this assessment are women and girls.

Venezuelan migrants and host communities remain in vulnerable conditions. Many fall outside of official social safety nets and cannot access employment due to lack of documentation. Although the Colombian government has made great efforts to grant temporary protection status (PPT) to Venezuelan migrants, the present assessment reveals that at least half of migrants with the intention to settle do not have PPT⁶ and less than 8% say they received any kind of government assistance in the previous six months.⁷

Lack of opportunities in Colombia may be pushing migrants to search elsewhere, involving risky journeys through transit routes. A regional assessment showed that Venezuelans already make up over a quarter of the growing informal migration flows through Central America - whereby eight in ten households say their final destination is the United States.⁸ Latest data from Migration Panama show the number of Venezuelan migrants crossing the border from Colombia into Panama more than doubled between May and August 2022.⁹

2. This only refers to migrants with the intention to settle, in line with figures from Migration Colombia Infografías 2022 - Migración Colombia (migracioncolombia.gov.co) and the Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows <https://www.r4v.info/es/colombia>

3. See 2021 assessment: GIFMM Colombia: Joint Needs Assessment, June 2021 Round 5 - Colombia | ReliefWeb

4. DANE 2021, Pobreza monetaria y pobreza monetaria extrema: <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/pobreza-y-condiciones-de-vida/pobreza-monetaria>

5. Data in Emergencies Hub, FAO Colombia, August 2022: Monitoring | FAO Data in Emergencies Hub

6. Official data from Migración Colombia indicate that Temporary Protection Status (PPT) has been delivered to 1.5 million people as of October 2022: Visibles - Migración Colombia (migracioncolombia.gov.co)

7. Host communities are more likely to receive assistance from the government - 26% of host communities said they had received some type of assistance from the government in the previous 6 months.

8. Rapid Assessment of Mixed Migration Flows in the Americas, World Food Programme, 2022

9. Migración Panamá, 2022, IRREGULARES_POR_DARIEN_AGOSTO_2022.pdf (migracion.gob.pa)

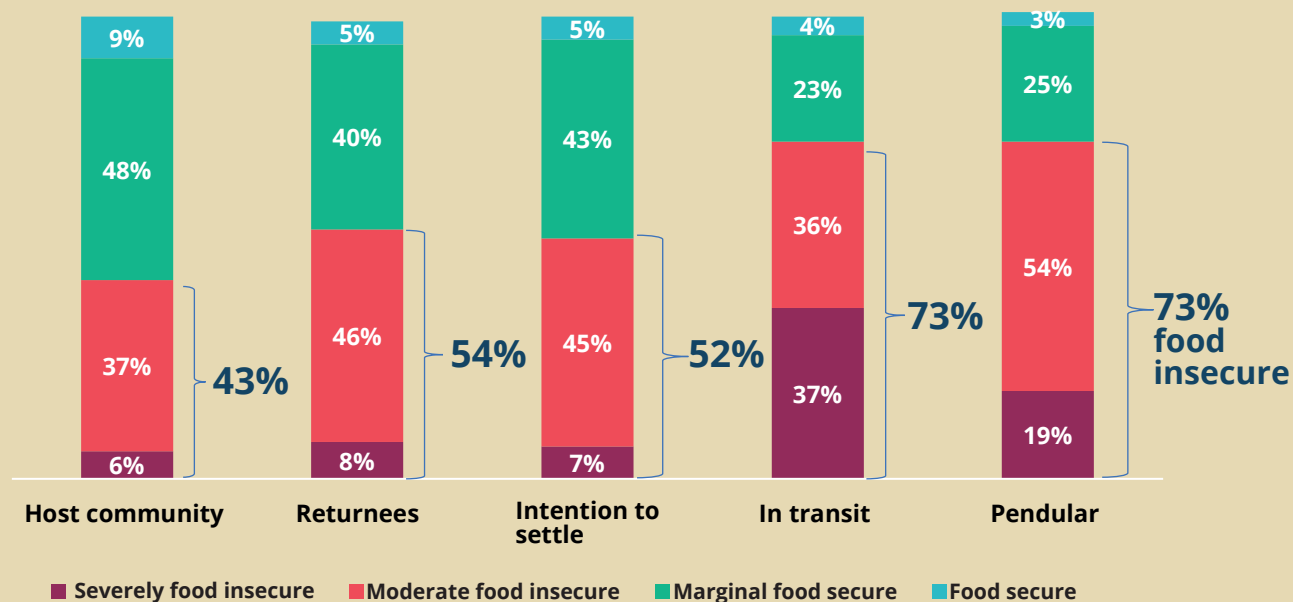
WHAT IS THE FOOD SECURITY SITUATION?

Data from the assessment reveals **all five population groups suffer from high levels of food insecurity**, particularly among migrants in transit (73%) and pendular migrants (73%) followed by Colombian returnees (54%), Venezuelan migrants with the intention to settle (52%) and host communities (43%).

A high proportion of these populations are severely food insecure (see Figure 1), indicating extreme gaps in food consumption and vulnerable sources of income. Many households live in precarious, unstable conditions and are only able to maintain regular food consumption by resorting to unsustainable coping strategies, such as selling property or possessions, or by relying on friends or community support to access food. **More than 60% of households said they had been skipping meals during the previous week and at least half said they eat just two times a day or less.**

An estimation of the total numbers of food insecure populations¹⁰ shows that migrants with the intention to settle and pendular migrants are the two most affected populations - each representing around 1.3 million food insecure people - followed by Colombian returnees (530,000 food insecure people), host communities (430,000 food insecure people), and migrants in transit (280,000 food insecure people).

Figure 1: Food insecurity levels (%) by population group



10. Total food insecurity numbers were calculated using population estimates from population estimates from the Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM); Página de GIFMM Colombia | R4V

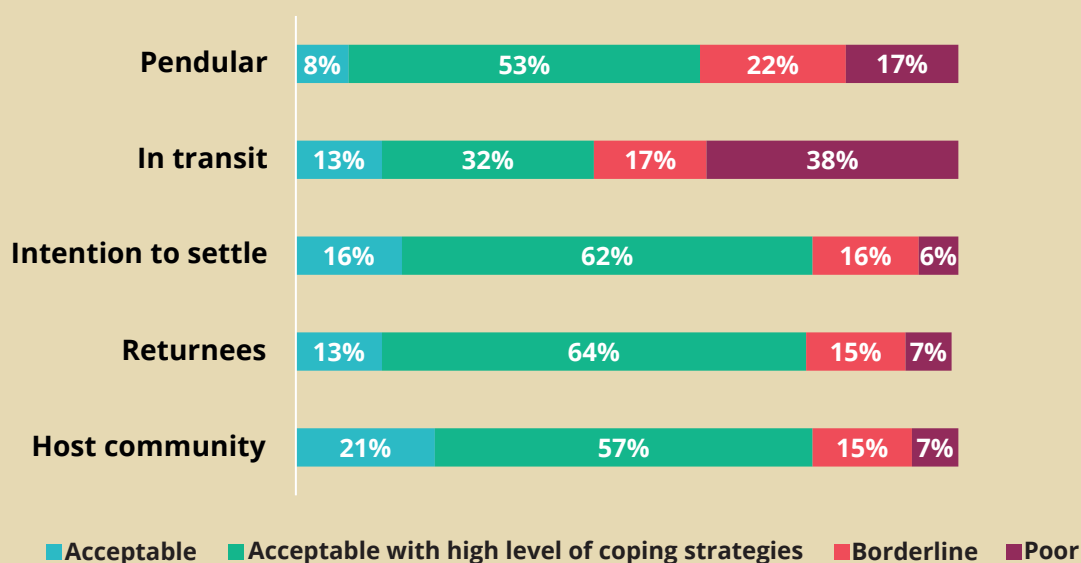
WHAT IS THE NUTRITIONAL SITUATION?

The EFSA reveals notable levels of acute malnutrition among children aged 6-59 months, which were detected in all population groups and were found to be as high as 5% among migrants in transit. At the same time, overweight is also a problem – around one in five young children are overweight or at risk of being overweight - reflecting a “double burden” of malnutrition whereby there are high rates of both undernutrition and overnutrition in the same population. This is caused by poor diets; a nutritional analysis of all population groups found that at least one in five households have low dietary diversity and more than 75% of households have insufficient consumption of foods rich in iron such as meat and fish. Poor diets are linked to the high rates of micronutrient deficiencies – the assessment found that over a third of pregnant women suffer from anaemia across all population groups. Anaemia is associated with higher risks of child and maternal mortality¹¹ and can impede child growth and development.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING FOOD

In terms of **food consumption, migrants in transit and pendular migrants reported significant gaps in accessing food** (poor or borderline food consumption at 55% and 39% respectively, as per figure 2). For both groups, the majority (70%) consume fewer than three meals a day, indicating their diets are poor in both quantity and quality.

Figure 2: Frequency of coping strategies of assessed groups



11. World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/data/nutrition/nlis/info/anaemia>

Although most migrants with the intention to settle, returnees and host community households have acceptable levels of food consumption, many are forced to apply several short-term coping mechanisms to attain a minimum level of consumption, such as **buying cheaper or less preferred food, reducing portions sizes, and reducing meal frequency** (see Figure 2). Most households say they spend at least half of their income on food. In focus group discussions the impact of food price inflation was frequently mentioned as a critical barrier in their ability to meet food needs.

BARRIERS TO MEETING BASIC NEEDS

The low levels of food consumption are directly linked to **socio-economic vulnerability**. **Most surveyed households (around 70%) have incomes below the national poverty line¹²**, limiting their ability to cover their basic needs. Migrants and host communities still face many barriers to economic integration, which include low education levels (half of household heads did not complete secondary school) and a lack of legal status to work (half of migrants with the intention to settle do not have the necessary documentation to work).

In focus group discussions, migrant populations expressed great difficulties in accessing dignified employment even with legal work permits and many have experienced xenophobia and discrimination. Such limitations explain why **more than one in four migrant households are resorting to emergency livelihood coping strategies** to meet basic food needs, such as begging or by accepting risky activities to earn money. This figure is slightly lower for host communities (one in five), however still considerable, revealing how host communities as well are struggling to meet their essential needs. These strategies are often irreversible and can have major impacts on a household's ability to confront future shocks.

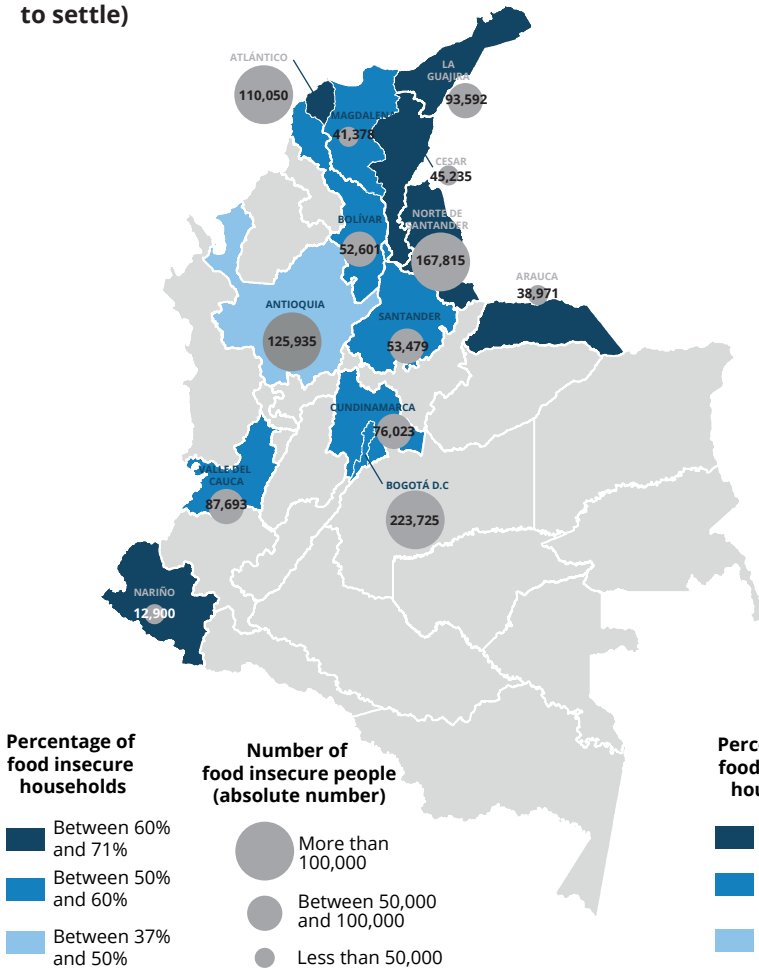
WHERE ARE THE MOST FOOD INSECURE?

Levels of food insecurity among migrants tend to be most severe in **Colombia's border departments of Arauca, La Guajira, Cesar, Norte de Santander and Nariño**. In these departments, poverty rates and unemployment tend to be higher and are located in areas where armed conflict can restrict movements and exacerbate vulnerabilities. Map 1 and 2 illustrate food insecurity levels by department for migrants with the intention to settle and host communities. Although departments such as Bogota and Antioquia have comparatively lower levels of food insecurity, in percentage terms, their large populations translate to a high number of food insecure households. Pendular and transit migrants tend to cluster in regions near the border and on key migratory routes, where food insecurity levels are consistently high.

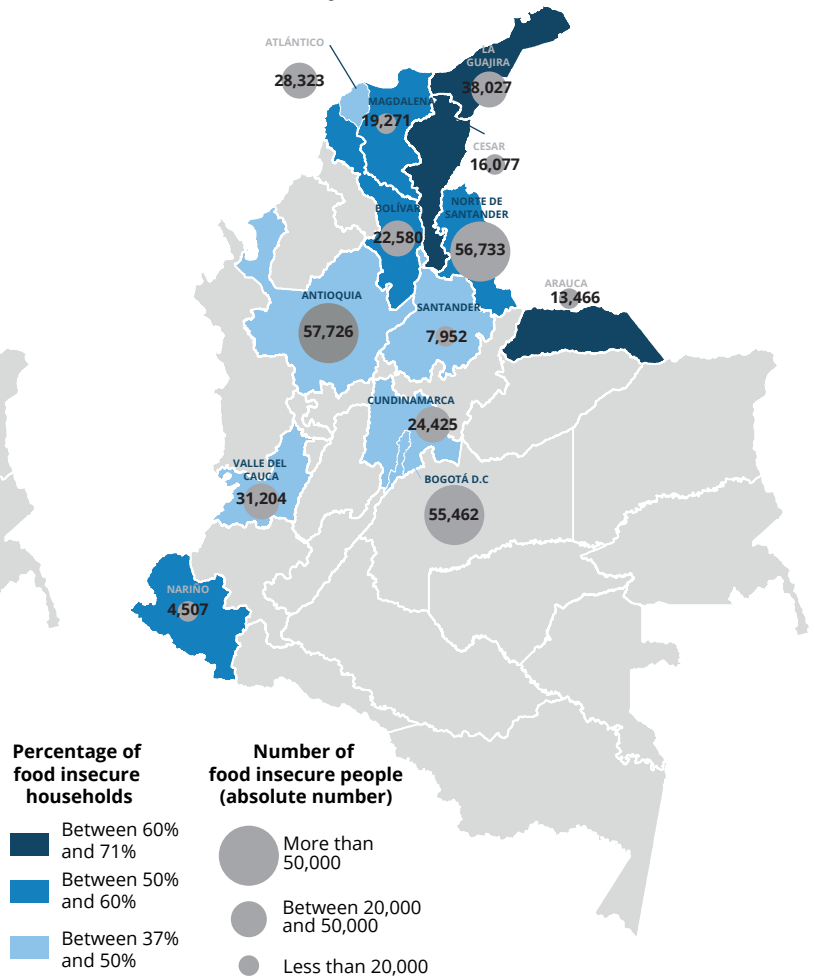
The geographic distribution of food insecurity is similar among host communities, whereby border departments reported the highest levels of food insecurity and non-border departments relatively lower levels.

12. DANE National Poverty Line – poverty line of COP 358.892 and extreme poverty line of COP 176.762.

Map 1: Percentage (%) and absolute numbers of food insecurity (migrants with the intention to settle)



Map 2: Percentage (%) and absolute numbers of food insecurity (host communities)



KEY FACTORS AFFECTING VULNERABILITY

Across all five surveyed populations, certain socio-demographic groups are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. These groups often face greater barriers in accessing employment or livelihood opportunities, which affect their ability to meet food and other basic needs. Some of these groups include:

ETHNICITY:
Food insecurity is highest among indigenous households, followed by afro-descendent groups.

GENDER:
Women-headed households face higher levels of food insecurity than male-headed households (independent of marital status).

EDUCATION:
Households where the head of household does not have formal education or did not complete primary school are more prone to be food insecure. This tendency is strongly affected by gender, whereby food insecurity is even higher among women-headed households with low education.

HEALTH AND DISABILITY:
Households headed by a person with a disability, chronic illness, or mental illness, are more likely to be food insecure.

CHILDREN UNDER FIVE:
Families with children under five years also face significantly higher levels of food insecurity. Focus groups discussions highlighted that some families are not able to earn a stable income because they need to take care of young children.

GENDER

The present assessment highlights the close relationship between gender and food insecurity. **Food insecurity is significantly higher among households that are headed by women** (55%) compared to households headed by men (48%)¹³, reflecting the complex socioeconomic challenges that women face, and their comparative disadvantages.

Women-headed households report earning lower incomes and are more likely to cite informal work as their primary source of income - such as house cleaning or working as a street vendor - and are less likely than men to have salaried employment or to own a business. Barriers to employment can be compounded by childcare responsibilities, which disproportionately affect women and can increase food insecurity - 65% of women-headed households with children under five years are food insecure, compared to 58% for male-headed households with children under five.

This can have important health implications for vulnerable groups. For instance, most pregnant women (65%) live in a food insecure household and at least a third of pregnant women suffer from anaemia. It is important to note the **intersections between gender and other dimensions of vulnerability**, whereby certain disadvantages can co-exist and have a stronger impact on women than on men. For example, food insecurity reaches very high levels for households that are headed by a woman who is also afro-descendent (63%), indigenous (64%), has low education (64%), or has a disability (69%).

CONCLUSION

The assessment shows that there are **high levels of food insecurity among migrant populations and host communities across all departments**. Many of these households remain excluded from Colombia's formal economy and do not have access to official social protection schemes or health services. Their conditions are made more precarious by compounding factors such as violence, climate shocks, socioeconomic barriers, rising inflation, and the cost of food.

OUTLOOK

It is expected that the food security situation might worsen rather than improve over the next six to twelve months. The conflict in Ukraine coupled with global inflation trends continue to affect food prices and the cost of living, impacting most severely on low-income households who spend the majority of their earnings on food and rent. Inflation is expected to remain high, and Colombia's economic growth is forecast to slow down considerably in 2023.¹⁴ Limited access to basic goods and services - already a primary motivation for migration - is likely to compel more people to migrate. Colombia is witnessing continued migration flows from Venezuela¹⁵, trends which are projected to last into 2023.¹⁶ These factors are likely to result in **persistently high numbers of food insecure households**, among migrants and host communities in Colombia.

13. These figures only apply to migrants with intention to settle, Colombian returnees and host communities.

14. BBVA Research, Oct 2022, Colombia Economic Outlook, October 2022 | BBVA Research

15. The number of Venezuelans living in Colombia increased from 1.8 million in August 2021 to 2.5 million in February 2022 - Migración Colombia 2022, <https://migracioncolombia.gov.co/infografias/content/375-infografias-2022>

16. According to projections from the Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) 2023, prepared by the Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from this assessment support the following recommendations:

- 1.** It is critical to **maintain and expand emergency assistance** to meet the acute food security and essential needs of all five populations investigated in this exercise. Food assistance should incorporate a **nutrition lens** to make sure vulnerable groups, especially children under five and pregnant and lactating women (PLW), are able to access a nutritious diet. Without access to adequate social services and basic assistance, more migrants may be compelled to search beyond Colombia and head northwards.
- 2.** As the Colombian government continues its roll out of the Temporary Protection Status of Venezuelan migrants, humanitarian assistance should be progressively integrated with **national protection systems**. This includes supporting efforts to register migrant populations with government platforms such as SISBEN, which has the potential to greatly increase the coverage of vulnerable migrants in social safety nets.
- 3.** The assessment demonstrates that food insecurity is a major problem among **Colombian host communities**, whose situations may be similar to neighbouring migrant households and therefore **should be included in food assistance programmes**. When faced with resource constraints, **assistance should be prioritised** to the most disadvantaged groups, such as elderly, women, young children, people with a disability, and people with a chronic or mental health illness.
- 4.** Considering that food insecurity is multi-dimensional but highly correlated with a household's capacity to generate an income, it is also recommended to implement medium- and long-term strategies which facilitate the **socioeconomic integration of migrants and host communities** through capacity-building, trainings, linkages with labour markets and other support to learn new skills and create stable incomes. These strategies should be targeted especially towards groups which face greater barriers to economic integration, such as women, ethnic minorities, or people with low levels of education.

VULNERABILITY ANALYSIS AND MAPPING – VAM

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