The crisis continues in Catatumbo

HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY

Update March 05, 2025 – UNHCR Colombia

After more than a month of clashes, which began on 16 January, the humanitarian crisis in the Catatumbo region of Norte de Santander continues to deteriorate. More than 91,483[1] people have been affected by ongoing fighting between the National Liberation Army (ELN in Spanish), the FARC dissident group known as the Estado Mayor de los Bloques y Frente (EMBF in Spanish), and government security forces. According to the Local Coordination Team (ELC in Spanish) in Norte de Santander, 57,259[2] people have been affected by massive displacements, 6,356 have been affected by individual displacements, 17,827[3] are confined, and 10,041[4] are facing severe mobility restrictions, leaving them without access to essential goods and services.

As of February 14, 2025, displaced people have arrived in 27 municipalities across Norte de Santander. Six municipalities report cases of confinement, and two have recorded mobility restrictions. Additionally, more than 1,441 people have been forced to flee neighboring departments, including Antioquia, Arauca, Bolívar, Cesar, La Guajira, Magdalena, Santander, Atlántico, and Córdoba.[5]

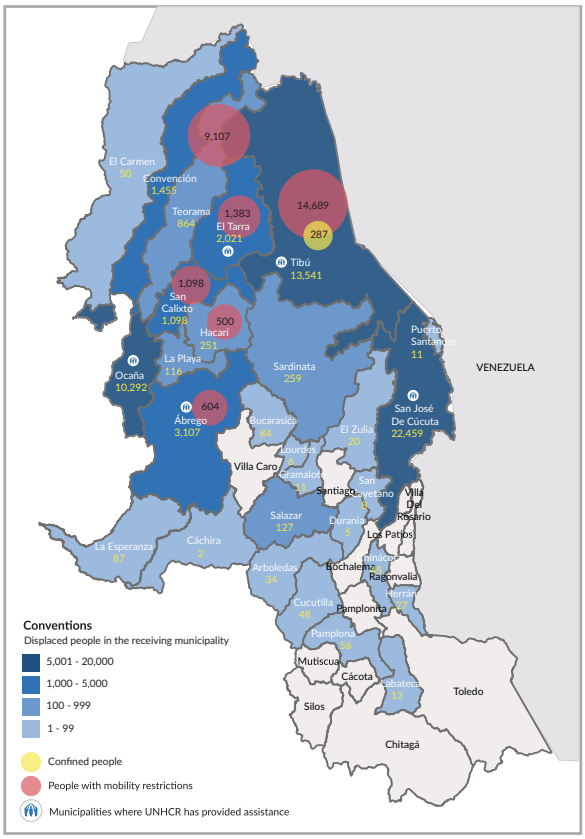
Most affected populations

- Women, children, and Indigenous peoples (Barí and Yukpa) are the groups at the highest risk.
- Human rights defenders and social leaders face systematic threats and attacks, further increasing their overall vulnerability.

> ***"I lost everything. We left with great fear. I left my little piece of land behind. My family and I were separated."***
>
> ***- Liliana****

**Name changed to protect identity.*

People Affected by Displacement, Confinement, and/or Mobility Restrictions in Catatumbo



Source: UNHCR. 2025
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Key figures

91,483	affected people
17%	of the affected people are children
57,259	people affected by massive displacements
6,356	people affected by individual displacement
17,827	confined people
10,041	people with mobility restrictions
4,737	refugees and migrants

Learn more here

[1]ELC. Date: March 5, 2025
[2]ELC. Date: March 5, 2025
[3]ELC. Date: March 5, 2025
[4]ELC. Date: March 5, 2025
[5]UNHCR Monitoring. February 14, 2025

UNHCR RESPONSE

In response to the ongoing crisis, UNHCR has mobilized humanitarian assistance and deployed field teams to provide direct support to affected communities. In coordination with national and local authorities, it has optimized the distribution of donations to reach displaced and confined individuals, ensuring the delivery of essential aid and access to protection services.

Protect

Institutional Coordination and Technical Assistance

UNHCR provides technical assistance to local institutions to strengthen the State's response in safeguarding the rights of victims of forced displacement. Additionally, UNHCR collaborates with the Victims' Unit (UARIV in Spanish), the Land Restitution Unit, the National Ombudsperson's Office, Municipal Ombudspersons, and the Attorney General's Office.

Additionally, UNHCR leads the Local Coordination Team (ELC in Spanish) and heads the Protection Cluster (GTP in Spanish), facilitating sectoral working groups on protection, violence against women and girls, childhood, education, health, WASH, and food security. UNHCR also co-leads the Interagency Group on Mixed Migratory Flows (GIFMM in Spanish).

UNHCR conducts regular visits to affected municipalities to assess needs and effectively coordinate assistance.

Special Attention to Children and Violence Against Women and Girls

UNHCR is strengthening efforts to prevent, mitigate, and respond to violence against women and girls while ensuring comprehensive protection of girls, boys, and adolescents.

Information and Orientation Centers (PAO)

As part of the national Information and Orientation Centers (PAOs in Spanish) project, UNHCR has established five fixed PAOs and one mobile PAO in Norte de Santander. These centers provide displaced people –primarily those arriving in Cúcuta and its metropolitan area from Catatumbo- with information, advice, and guidance on accessing basic rights.

Distribution of essential items such as hygiene kits, mattresses, and blankets. Cúcuta, Norte de Santander. February 2025.

Information and Assistance Pathways

UNHCR facilitates access to the National Registry of Victims (RUV in Spanish) for displaced and confined people. To date, 2,100 families (approximately 8,000 people) have received guidance on victim assistance pathways, with cases of violence against women and children referred to the relevant authorities.

Assist

Distribution of Core Relief Items

So far, UNHCR has distributed a total of 20,700 basic supplies, including hygiene kits (5,196 people assisted) and 13,384 habitat items, such as mattresses and blankets, distributed in Cúcuta, Ocaña, and Tibú.

Shelter Management

UNHCR is assisting local governments in defining and implementing temporary shelter strategies while monitoring protection conditions in hotels and other shelters. Additionally, it works alongside Pastoral Social to manage a shelter for women and children in the municipality of Ocaña.

From emergency to solutions

More than a month after the onset of the crisis, displacement continues. In response, UNHCR is supporting local and national authorities, in coordination with the National Ombudsperson's Office and other institutions, to identify early solutions to this humanitarian emergency.

These alternatives include supporting displaced families in engaging in productive activities during displacement; protecting abandoned lands to prevent potential dispossession; and coordinating with other agencies and institutions to explore options for relocation, local integration, and, when security conditions allow, voluntary, safe, and dignified returns.

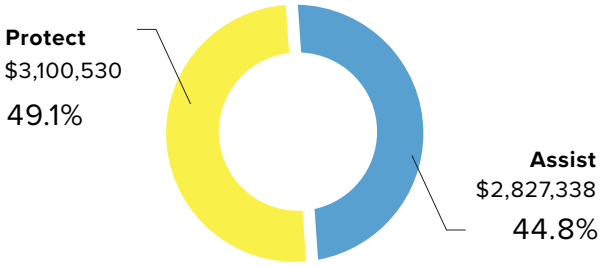
MAIN NEEDS

Despite ongoing efforts, the crisis in Catatumbo continues to escalate. Strengthening the humanitarian response is critical to addressing the needs of the affected populations. Additional funding and resources are urgently required to:

- ✓ Ensure humanitarian access to reach the most affected communities, including Indigenous peoples.
- ✓ Support the documentation of confinement cases and enhance assistance to the Public Ministry to uphold the rights of affected populations.
- ✓ Provide access to information and guidance for displaced and confined people to identify and address their protection needs.
- ✓ Guarantee access to shelters and distribute emergency items such as hygiene kits and habitat kits.
- ✓ Strengthen assistance programs and psychosocial support for those affected by the crisis.
- ✓ Support the transition toward solutions through projects aimed at helping displaced populations generate income, reducing their reliance on humanitarian aid, and preventing potential conflicts or social tensions.
- ✓ Promote the implementation of protective measures for abandoned lands to prevent potential dispossession.

Financial needs by response area

Total USD $6,13,179.42



What do people affected by the emergency in Catatumbo need?

Insecurity in the region remains a significant barrier to delivering aid, worsening conditions for thousands of displaced and confined people. UNHCR calls on the international community to step up efforts in protection and assistance for the most vulnerable populations in Catatumbo. With your support, we can strengthen the humanitarian response and contribute to the protection and recovery of affected communities.