

Earthquake in Colombia

UNHCR Response to the Emergency

August 2026

The situation in figures



7.4 magnitude earthquake

epicentre near San José del Palmar, Chocó.



494 municipalities

affected across 16 departments.



329 people

dead.



159,954+ household

affected.



31,519 houses

destroyed.



4,140 community

centres affected.



~315,000 refugees

and people in need of international protection in the earthquake-affected areas (about 10% of Colombia's 2.8 million).



2.1 million

internally displaced people historically in the earthquake-affected areas, about 30% of Colombia's 7.1 million.*



1.3 million

afro-descendant and indigenous in the affected areas.

Sources: Colombia's National Disaster Risk Management Unit (UNGRD) and UNHCR. Key-figure box, as in the source document.

*People historically displaced in the affected areas; the same person may have experienced multiple displacements.

Financial support requested

US\$5,27 M

required to **support the population hardest hit by the earthquake**, through a humanitarian response coordinated with the government and the United Nations, focused on the needs of the most vulnerable communities.

Context

On **10 August 2026**, a magnitude 7.4 earthquake struck western Colombia, with its epicentre near San José del Palmar (Chocó), affecting at least 494 municipalities across sixteen departments. According to Colombia's National Disaster Risk Management Unit (UNGRD), it affected more than 324,100 people and 159,900 families, caused 329 deaths and 4,500 injuries, and left hundreds of people missing. Chocó, Valle del Cauca, Caldas and Risaralda are among the worst-affected departments. Urgent needs include emergency shelter, housing recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction, water and sanitation, food assistance, health and psychosocial support, livelihood recovery, protection services (information and legal orientation), gender-based violence prevention and child protection, legal assistance, and the rehabilitation of essential services and community infrastructure.

The earthquake struck some of Colombia's most fragile regions, affected by armed conflict and home to large

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numbers of internally displaced people, refugees, Indigenous Peoples, Afro-Colombian communities and vulnerable host populations already facing forced displacement, confinement and violence.

The affected municipalities host nearly 315,000 refugees and other in need of international protection (over 202,000 in Valle del Cauca). In 2025, these same areas recorded more than 73,000 people affected by confinement and over 58,300 displaced by conflict. The disaster disproportionately affects historically marginalised communities: in Chocó around 75% of the population is Afro-descendant and 20% Indigenous; the affected areas are home to more than 1.1 million Afro-descendant and over 214,000 Indigenous people. Damage to homes, schools and health centres heightens the risks of family separation, gender-based violence, child protection concerns, loss of documentation and secondary displacement.

Why UNHCR?

With nearly three decades of presence and community engagement, UNHCR runs one of its largest operations in the Americas in Colombia: 14 field offices, 15 Information and Orientation Points (PAOs), four mobile units, a digital platform and a broad network of partners, reaching the most vulnerable people even in hard-to-reach areas.

Present in the affected areas since before the earthquake, UNHCR co-leads the Local Coordination Teams (ELCs) of Valle del Cauca and Chocó, and is now delivering rapid, protection-centred assistance to displaced, confined and at-risk communities.

Priority Actions

UNHCR prioritized its response to address the most urgent needs in earthquake-affected areas.

Protection. Identify and support girls, boys, women, older persons and persons with disabilities at heightened risk; monitor protection risks and refer to specialised services; reunite separated families and strengthen child protection; provide legal assistance and access to documentation; strengthen community-based protection networks and safe spaces; and provide mental health and psychosocial support.

Core relief items. Distribute relief items; deliver emergency shelter solutions; provide emergency cash assistance; and ensure vulnerable households can access essential services.

Community work. Strengthen community leadership and youth participation; promote peaceful coexistence and social cohesion; strengthen local capacities for preparedness and resilience; and expand access to information and community outreach.

Durable Solutions. Promote economic inclusion, self-reliance and livelihoods; expand financial inclusion; help displaced families integrate into host communities; and advance durable solutions for internally displaced people and refugees.



UNHCR carries out **protection monitoring, community engagement and the distribution of emergency assistance kits** to families affected by the earthquake in Chocó. © UNHCR

UNHCR's immediate response

In Cali, Buenaventura, Quibdó, Medellín and Bogotá, UNHCR supports the government-led earthquake response, sustaining both the emergency response and regular protection programmes. UNHCR takes part in the Unified Command Posts and humanitarian coordination mechanisms to ensure an efficient, complementary and needs-based response.

In Chocó, under the leadership of the Local Coordination Team, UNHCR joined inter-agency missions that delivered food assistance, hygiene kits, water and sanitation support and psychosocial support to affected families. In Valle del Cauca, UNHCR is working with the Mayor's Office of Cali to activate temporary shelter mechanisms.

UNHCR assessed needs in Buenaventura, in isolated rural communities, Indigenous territories and severely affected urban neighbourhoods such as Lleras. UNHCR is distributing 20,000 hygiene kits and 1,000 solar lamps; 30 Refugee Housing Units (RHUs). Emergency shelter kits are reaching the worst-affected communities.



For more information and enquiries:

