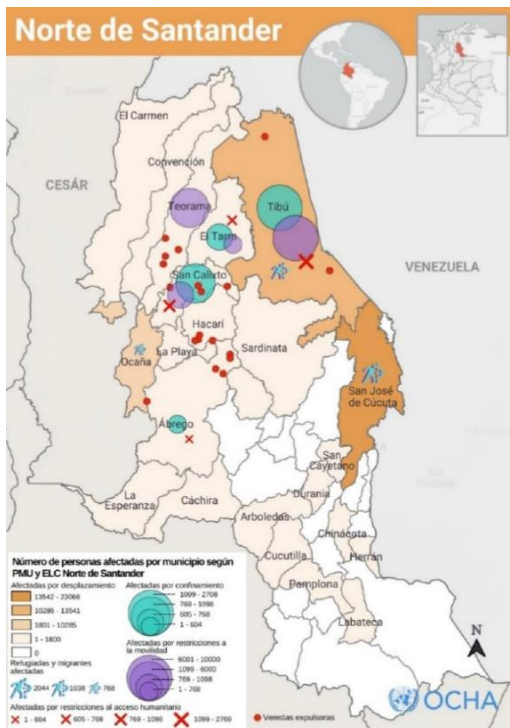


Alert note

Forced displacement in the Catatumbo region and related areas.

Completed by: Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de Colombia (IELCO)**Date completed:** February 5, 2025.**Forum:** ACT Forum Colombia**Type of emergency:** Forced displacement in the Catatumbo region and related areas.**Date of emergency (if rapid onset):** 16th of January 2025**1. The nature of the emergency**

The Catatumbo region, located in the northeastern part of the department of Norte de Santander, comprises the municipalities of Ocaña, El Carmen, Convención, Teorama, San Calixto, Hacarí, La Playa, El Tarra, Tibú, and Sardinata. The region has long been a focal point for coca cultivation, with estimates indicating more than 41,000 hectares of coca crops, while other reports suggest the figure reaches 43,178 hectares. Tibú has the largest cultivation area, covering at least 16,069 hectares, and, along with Sardinata, accounts for 63.3% of the region's total coca crops. The historical absence of state presence, particularly the lack of infrastructure for the commercialization of legal agricultural products, has contributed to the expansion of illicit economies and intensified disputes between non-state armed groups. Additionally, coca cultivation has continued to grow, driven by the resurgence of the coca market for illicit purposes.^{1,2}



Since January 16, 2025, violence in the Catatumbo region has escalated due to clashes over territorial control between two Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs). As a result, at least 80 people have died, including five signatories of the final peace agreement. However, the actual number of victims is likely higher due to difficulties in recovering and identifying bodies in conflict-affected areas. Reports also indicate multiple cases of personal injury and forced disappearances. Additionally, broader armed operations, including military deployments and hostilities by the ELN (one of the NSAGs), have further exacerbated the crisis, severely impacting vulnerable populations such as the Barí Indigenous people, social leaders, children, and rural communities^{2,3}.

The humanitarian impact has been devastating, with forced displacement reaching 53,416 people as of February 2, compared to 5,422 cases recorded throughout 2024. Those displaced have sought refuge in municipalities such as Cúcuta (24,435), Tibú (13,373), and Ocaña (10,285). Many have been accommodated in shelters, temporary lodgings, and distribution centers set up by local authorities.

Meanwhile, 31,358 people remain confined in areas such as Tibú (17,373) and Teorama (9,000), with a high likelihood of further displacement in the coming weeks. Additionally, 4,443 refugees and migrants have been significantly impacted⁴.

¹ <https://web.comisiondelaverdad.co/especiales/catatumbo/factores-persistencia.html>

² <https://www.presidencia.gov.co/prensa/Paginas/Presidente-decreta-la-conmocion-interior-en-region-del-Catatumbo-municipios-250124.aspx>

³ OCHA. (2025) DESPLAZAMIENTO Y CONFINAMIENTO EN LA SUBREGIÓN DEL CATATUMBO. (NORTE DE SANTANDER) Flash Update No. 1 (24/01/2025)

⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/colombia-reporte-de-situacion-no-01-impacto-humanitario-por-desplazamiento-masivo-y-confinamiento-en-catatumbo-norte-de-santander>

In response to the escalating crisis in the Catatumbo region, the Metropolitan Area of Cúcuta, and the municipalities of Río de Oro and González in the department of Cesar, the Presidency of Colombia issued Decree No. 0062 on January 24, 2025, declaring a state of internal commotion. Additionally, on January 23, 2025, the Governor's Office of Norte de Santander issued Decree No. 000071, declaring a state of public calamity due to large-scale forced displacement. Several local governments, including those of Norte de Santander, Cúcuta, and Hacarí, have also issued emergency decrees to address the urgent humanitarian needs arising from the crisis.⁵

2. The impact and scale of the emergency

The ongoing conflict in the Catatumbo region has led to the displacement of 53,416 individuals, a figure expected to rise in the coming days and weeks. This is due to the continued confinement of 31,358 people and persistent clashes between NSAGs and the national army. The situation has also heightened the risks of human trafficking, migrant smuggling, gender-based violence, and child recruitment. Reports indicate that at least 20 minors have been rescued from armed groups. Indigenous communities, including 23 Barí communities, as well as members of the Yukpa and Wayuu peoples, have also been significantly affected.

Humanitarian access remains severely restricted in several areas due to territorial control by NSAGs, ongoing hostilities, and the presence of landmines and explosive devices. Given the likelihood of prolonged conflict and increased displacement, immediate action is required to address urgent humanitarian needs, including:

- Emergency shelters and safe accommodation
- Access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services
- Distribution of non-perishable food and cash assistance for lodging and essential purchases
- Medical care, particularly for pregnant women, children, and individuals with chronic illnesses
- Psychosocial and pastoral support, as well as gender-based violence (GBV) prevention programs
- Educational programs to ensure continuity of learning for displaced children and adolescents.

Furthermore, comprehensive protection measures must be implemented to safeguard children and adolescents in coordination with national institutions. Psychosocial and pastoral support, hygiene promotion, and the distribution of essential hygiene and shelter kits are necessary to prevent disease outbreaks. Strengthening coordination among humanitarian organizations will help ensure efficiency, equity, and the avoidance of service duplication. Additionally, educational programs should be established to enable the continuity of learning for displaced children and adolescents until they can re-enroll in schools or return to their communities.

3. Local and national capacity

In response to the escalating humanitarian crisis in Catatumbo, multiple institutional and coordination efforts have been activated at the national and local levels. On January 17 and 18, key governmental bodies, including the Subcommittee on Prevention and Protection, the Municipal Committee for Disaster Risk Management, and the Transitional Committee on Territorial Justice, convened to assess the situation and activate contingency plans for affected populations. Additionally, the National Humanitarian Team (NHT) issued a public statement condemning the ongoing violence. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the Departmental Risk Management Committee convened on January 22, highlighting the municipalities' and department's overwhelmed response capacity and calling for national-level intervention⁶.

To strengthen coordination and enhance emergency response efforts, the National Disaster Risk Management Unit, in collaboration with the Unit for Victims, hosted a high-level meeting on January 21. This meeting aimed to evaluate the extent of the displacement crisis and assess the emergency response led by national institutions and international cooperation partners in Ocaña, Tibú, and Cúcuta. Parallel discussions were held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with international cooperation stakeholders to reinforce collective response efforts. Furthermore, on January 22, the UARIV urgently convened a national meeting to address the forced displacement crisis, emphasizing the need for international support. The

⁵ Gobernación de Norte de Santander, Balance PMU Catatumbo, Boletín número 13

⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/colombia-reporte-de-situacion-no-01-impacto-humanitario-por-desplazamiento-masivo-y-confinamiento-en-catatumbo-norte-de-santander>

following day, the government declared a state of internal disturbance in Catatumbo through Decree 062 of 2025, reinforcing national measures to manage the crisis⁶.

At the local level, the Local Coordination Team (LCT) of Norte de Santander has been actively engaged in assessing and responding to humanitarian needs. Following an extraordinary session on January 19, the LCT activated its emergency response protocols in alignment with Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). Coordination efforts with local authorities, the Ombudsman’s Office, and the Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM in Spanish) have been ongoing to ensure an integrated response for displaced Colombian and migrant populations. Since January 24, the LCT has been overseeing the deployment of at least 22 humanitarian organizations conducting a Multisectoral Rapid Needs Assessment (MIRA) in Cúcuta, Tibú, and Ocaña. The findings of this assessment will be crucial in guiding further humanitarian interventions and ensuring an efficient and equitable response to the crisis⁶.

The presence and activities of non-state armed groups, recurrent clashes, landmine contamination, theft of humanitarian vehicles and supplies, and widespread insecurity have significantly limited personnel mobility and aid distribution, particularly in rural areas. As a result, gaps in the provision of essential goods, healthcare, and protection services have deepened the vulnerabilities of affected communities, especially children, women, Indigenous peoples, peace signatories, and the general population. In response, the ELC and the Protection Thematic Group have requested national-level support from the Humanitarian Access Thematic Group to reactivate the Territorial Access Group⁶.

After conducting a situation and capacity analysis, and given the critical situation and dire humanitarian needs, the ACT Forum Colombia decided to activate the ACT Humanitarian Mechanism via the Rapid Response Fund (RRF). Under this mechanism, IELCO will serve as the requesting member and will be responsible for coordinating the response with other humanitarian organizations, UN agencies, and local authorities to ensure an efficient and non-duplicative approach. Additionally, IELCO will oversee the implementation of the response. Coordination efforts will be strengthened with both current and potential responses from other ACT members to enhance the overall humanitarian response in the region

4. Key needs and gaps

According to Local Coordination Team (LCT) Leader, although various institutions and organizations are providing humanitarian assistance, displaced individuals currently housed in hotels will be relocated in the coming weeks to shelters with a capacity to accommodate between 500 and 1,000 people. However, there is currently insufficient preparation to develop training spaces on topics such as gender-based violence prevention, child abuse, conflict resolution, and other initiatives aimed at mitigating the risks in these locations. Similarly, some aspects of the response have been covered to a lesser extent than others. In this regard, according to data from OCHA, psychosocial support has primarily been provided in the city of Cúcuta.

The capacities of state institutions and organizations providing assistance in the area have not been sufficient to meet the needs of the total number of affected individuals, and an increase in this figure is expected in the coming days, weeks, and months. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen the delivery of water, essential food items, habitat kits, and hygiene kits.

To date, approximately 2,000 cash assistance disbursements have been made, but there is a lack of campaigns focused on abuse prevention and sexual education. Additionally, there is a gap in educational reinforcement programs for children and adolescents during the period of school suspension. Finally, WASH services need to be strengthened once people are relocated to the shelters.

A total of 12,500 people remain confined in the municipalities of Teorama, Ábrego, Convención, San Calixto, and Tibú, so an increase in the number of displaced individuals is expected in the coming days and weeks.

Please indicate whether you are considering:

	Indicate your intention with an X below
Rapid Response Fund (<i>intended for small and medium scale emergencies</i>)	X
Appeal (<i>intended for large scale emergencies</i>)	

5. Forum Capacity and members intention to respond

ACT Member	Geographical focus	Sectors of expertise and experience
IELCO	Cúcuta, Ocaña	Protection: Emergency case management (accommodation, transportation via Multipurpose Cash Assistance (MPC)), delivery of protection kits, hygiene kits, food and GBV care, life-saving information on safe routes, psychosocial accompaniment, safe space for children.

6. Potential responses

Since 2019, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO) has implemented various emergency projects in response to the massive influx of Venezuelan migrants. These projects have included psychosocial support, cash assistance, food distribution, protection services for gender-based violence, child protection, and health emergencies, as well as WASH initiatives and livelihood support.

With the activation of the Rapid Response Fund (RRF), IELCO and its partner organizations aim to provide protection services, including emergency case management (MPC), the distribution of protection kits, hygiene kits, food, and GBV care, as well as life-saving information on safe routes, psychosocial support, and safe spaces for children. This response is expected to reach 2,500 people over five months.

The emergency response will be carried out in collaboration with Iglesia Central (Central Church) in Cúcuta, which leads one of the main distribution centers and will be a key partner in the response. In Ocaña, the Presbyterian Church of Colombia, which has multiple locations in the area, will serve as the primary partner.