

The department of Nariño is a strategic point for drug trafficking and other irregular economies such as illegal mining and illicit crops. The three municipalities that make up the Telembí triangle (Barbacoas, Magüí Payán, and Roberto Payán) have been particularly affected by the conflict and the actions of armed groups. The changing dynamics of the armed conflict in the region and the limited response capacity have increased the needs of communities in Nariño and the Telembí triangle. At least ten armed groups are disputing territory in the department (KII 25/08/2021; Pares 02/02/2021). The conflict dynamics have significantly changed since the signing of the peace agreement between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) and the Colombian Government in 2016. Different armed groups dispute areas previously controlled by the FARC-EP. Confrontations between armed groups for territorial control increased the number of confinements, mass and individual displacements, and homicides in 2021. This trend is likely to continue.

The department is key for coca cultivation, with about 9,000 hectares out of the 143,000 hectares (or 6.2%) of coca cultivation in Colombia (UNODC 07/2020).

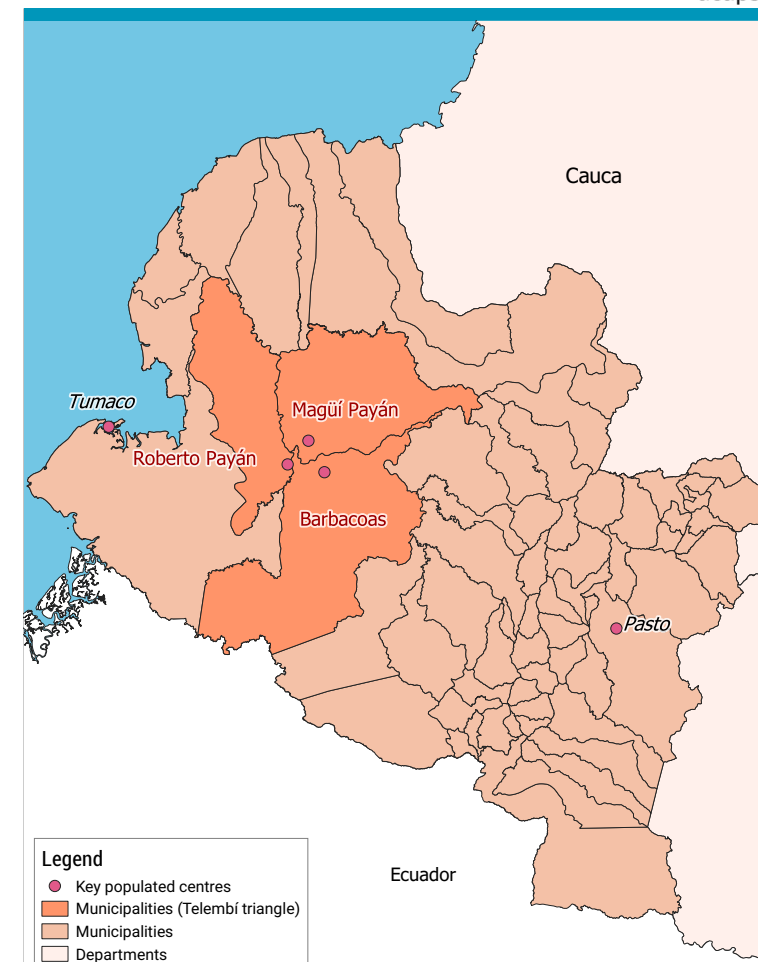
	NARIÑO	ROBERTO PAYÁN	MAGÜÍ PAYÁN	BARBACOAS
Inhabitants	1,630,592	12,667	24,705	55,633
Women	51%	49%	49%	49%
Men	49%	51%	51%	51%
Indigenous population	16%	1%	0.3%	31%
Afro-Colombian population	18%	98%	98%	65%
Urban population	48.5%	22%	36%	32%
Rural population	51.5%	78%	64%	68%
Poverty	27%	81%	85%	76%

Source: DANE 2018

KEY MESSAGES

- The increase in violent events has limited the response capacity of humanitarian organisations in Nariño and overwhelmed the response capacity of local authorities, leaving several emergencies with limited or no response.
- Forced recruitment, gender-based violence (GBV), mass and individual displacement, massacres, and selective homicides are likely to increase in the coming months as a result of the conflict dynamics in the department.
- The communities of Magüí Payán and Roberto Payán are at high risk of displacement owing to the armed groups in the area.

Colombia: Nariño department



Date created: 28/09/2021
Sources: OCHA, OSM
www.acaps.org
The boundaries and names and designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by acaps

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CRITICAL NEEDS

- **Access to basic services** such as drinking water, electricity, health, housing, and education is very limited for both the host and displaced populations.
- **Access to livelihoods** is disrupted for people affected by displacement and confinement.
- **Protection of minors** is necessary to prevent their forced recruitment into armed groups.
- **Protection needs have increased, particularly for social and indigenous leaders.** By 29 August, Nariño had the third-highest number of massacres compared to other departments in Colombia: 24 people were killed in six massacres in 2021 (Indepaz accessed 29/08/2021; Rutas del Conflicto accessed 31/08/2021).
- **Protection needs of women and girls have increased** as a result of the conflict and the pandemic. COVID-19 restrictions forced women affected by domestic violence to live with their potential aggressors. In the first quarter of 2021, femicides increased by 400% in Nariño compared to the same period in 2020 – from two to ten cases (Fundepaz 13/04/2021).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is based on a review of secondary sources and key informant interviews (KIs). Although the focus of the analysis is on the humanitarian situation in the Telembí triangle, it is contextualised in the general dynamics of the Nariño department. For sections of the report where it has not been possible to obtain specific information for the Telembí municipalities, reference is made to information on the department in general.

CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN NARIÑO

Following the signing of the peace agreement in 2016, an increase in security in the department was expected. However, since 2018, there has been an escalation in violence caused by disputes over territories left vacant after the demobilisation of the FARC-EP. The armed conflict has increased displacement and confinement of the population (MSF 24/08/2021; El Tiempo 24/08/2021 and 20/08/2021; Semana 25/08/2021).

While the armed conflict was previously concentrated in the municipalities of the South Pacific subregion, it now extends to the Telembí triangle, Sanquianga, and Tumaco as well.

Currently, 10–15 armed groups operate in Nariño. The affected population is often unable to identify the different groups because there are so many. These armed groups compete for social, territorial, and economic control of regular and irregular economies. Illegal economies include drug production and trafficking (KII 23/08/2021; Pares 02/02/2021; InSight Crime 30/07/2021; Fundepaz 13/04/2021). No group is currently consolidating its control over the disputed areas (MIRE 28/07/2021). The conflict also extends across the border to the Ecuadorian provinces of Carchi and Esmeraldas.

Among the various armed groups present in Nariño, there are different **ex-FARC-EP** structures, including Frente Oliver Sinisterra, Guerrillas Unidas del Pacifico, and Segunda Marquetalia (Cinep accessed 24/09/2021; Fundepaz 13/04/2021). Mexican cartels have provided support to some of these groups (ICG 08/08/2019). The **National Liberation Army (ELN)** has a presence in Nariño through various fronts, such as Comuneros del Sur (InSight Crime 26/08/2020).

Though the presence of the **Gaitanist Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AGC)** in Nariño is concentrated in the municipalities of the Cordillera, they have also been operating in the Telembí triangle (DW 25/08/2021; InSight Crime 26/08/2020).

In Tumaco and the municipalities of the Nariño coast, a local group, the **Los Contadores**, is reportedly fighting the FARC-EP dissident and residual groups (Semana 06/08/2021; InSight Crime 20/02/2020; Indepaz 09/08/2020).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

The humanitarian needs of the population and access to support and assistance systems are worsened by additional factors.

Disasters: the Nariño department has been affected by heavy rains, floods, and landslides since early 2021. Rainfall and floods in January affected more than 300 households in Barbacoas, Magüí Payán, and Roberto Payan (TuBarco 07/01/2021). In March, 3,451 families (approximately 12,000 people) in 48 municipalities of the department were affected by unusually heavy rains (OPS 23/03/2021). There is a high risk of flooding and overflowing of the main rivers (UNDP 06/2010).

COVID-19: the pandemic has affected the health and socioeconomic status of communities and increased humanitarian needs. Since the beginning of the pandemic, armed groups have taken advantage of containment measures to exert greater control over the population (HRW accessed 26/09/2021). For displaced people, particularly the unvaccinated, overcrowded shelters and lack of access to safe drinking water and essential hygiene items increase the risk of contracting COVID-19 (UNHCR 17/09/2021; World Bank 19/06/2020; HRW 11/05/2020). On 31 August, 1,016,790 doses of the 1,052,243 allocated to the department had been administered. There are still people (especially older adults) who do not want to receive the COVID-19 vaccine (KIIs 18–25/08/2021; Ministry of Health accessed 02/09/2021).

IMPACT OF THE CRISIS

Forced confinement

People are forced to remain within their houses or community by confrontations between armed groups, anti-personnel mines, and sometimes by armed groups prohibiting displacements (OCHA 15/01/2021, 21/04/2021, and 30/03/2020). Confinements affect people's mobility and their access to livelihoods and basic services.

In Nariño, over 4,000 people were affected by confinements between January–June 2021 (OCHA 06/08/2021), compared to around 7,000 in all of 2020 (OCHA 26/01/2021). In the Telembí triangle, Roberto Payán has been the most affected municipality in 2021 despite experiencing no confinements in 2020 (OCHA accessed 26/09/2021).

Forced displacement

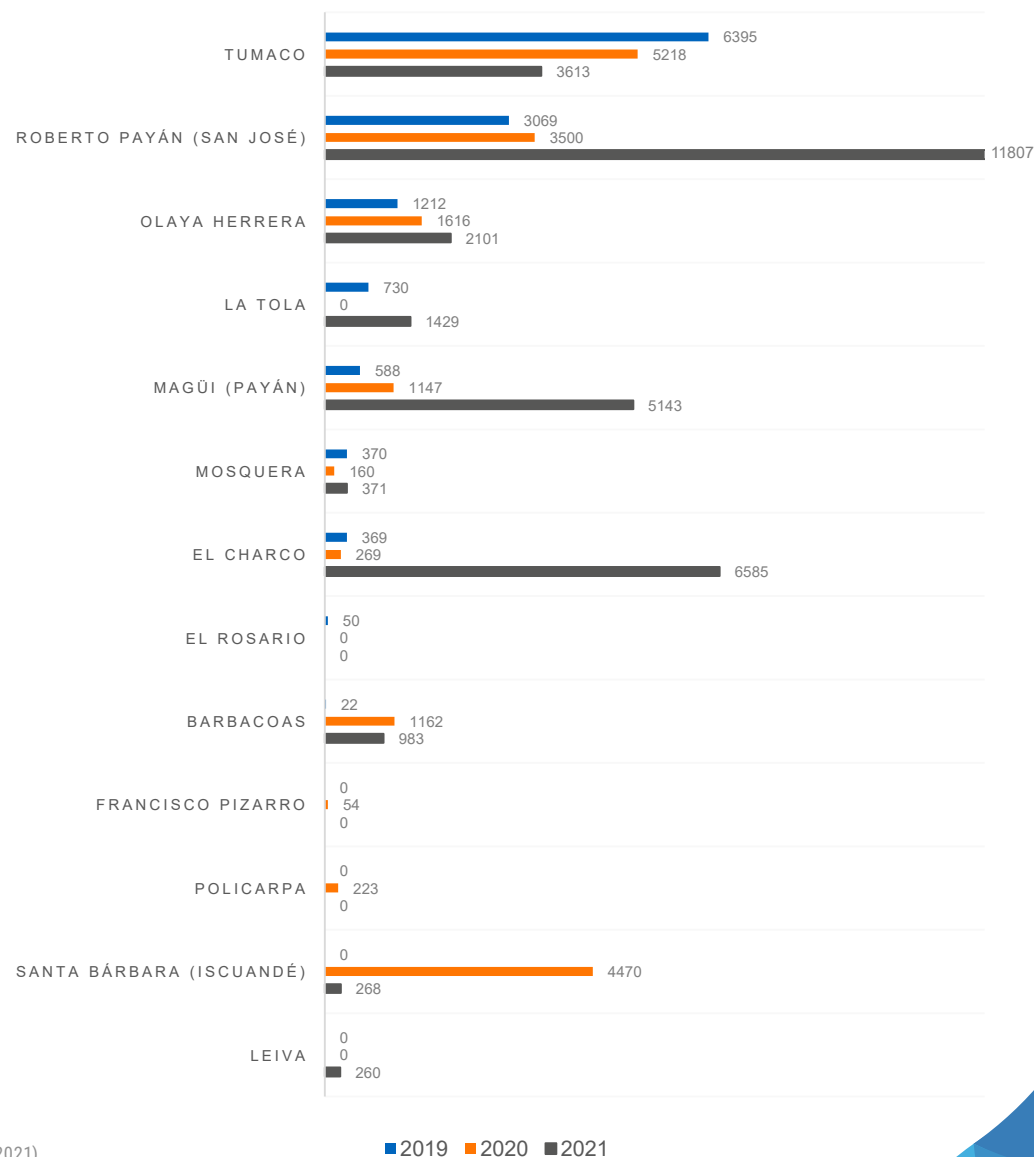
Mass displacement:¹ the Telembí triangle is particularly affected by mass displacement, registering over half of all displacements occurring in Nariño. Between January and mid-September 2021, more than 11,000 people were displaced in Roberto Payán, over 5,000 in Magüí Payán, and upwards of 900 in Barbacoas (OCHA accessed 17/09/2021). With response capacities overwhelmed in Magüí Payán and Roberto Payán, many IDPs relocated to Barbacoas and Tumaco (OCHA 06/08/2021).

In early August, over 1,000 people were displaced from the villages of Cualala, El Chocho, El Diviso, El Playón, Esteros, and La Unión to the urban centre of Magüí Payán as a result of clashes between armed groups. As at mid-September, the IDPs had not returned to their home towns (MIRE 27/08/2021; OCHA 11/09/2021 and 17/08/2021).

Individual displacement: there are information gaps regarding individual displacement as it does not receive the same attention as mass displacement. The result is smaller-scale (or even nonexistent) response. Individual displacements happen on a frequent basis; however,

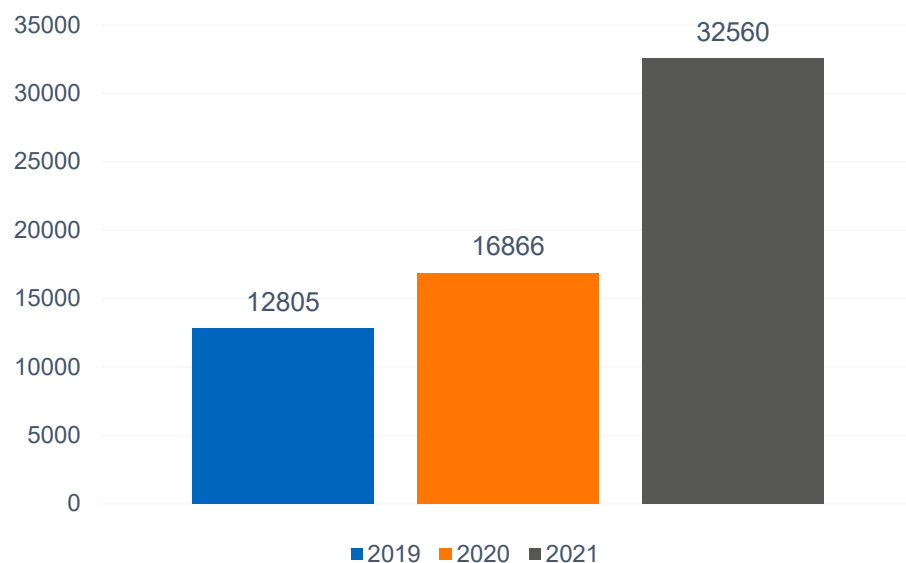
up-to-date information on their occurrence is not available (KIIs 23–25/08/2021). Of all displacement events over the last two years in Nariño, approximately 55% were individual, and 45% were mass displacements. This indicates that the figures for mass displacement do not reflect the full extent of the problem (UARIV accessed 26/09/2021).

Graph 1: Mass displacement in Nariño per municipality in 2019, 2020, and 2021 so far.



¹ This report defines 'mass displacement' as the forced displacement of more than 50 people or ten households (OCHA accessed 26/09/2021).

Graph 2: Mass displacement in Nariño, comparison 2019, 2020, and 2021 so far.



Source: OCHA accessed 26/09/2021

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

Protection

The dynamics of the armed conflict and the constant presence of armed groups in the department increase protection risks for both host and displaced communities. The population is exposed to the following problems:

Returns: displaced communities are afraid to return to their homes as a result of continuing clashes between armed groups and the lack of security guarantees from the state. The displaced communities often do not receive the required attention in the municipal capitals or urban centres where they relocate to and must return home. Without adequate safety guarantees, communities are exposed to the risk of new displacements as a result of the continued presence of armed groups (KII 06/09/2021; OCHA 06/08/2021).

Recruitment into armed groups: there is a significant information gap regarding recruitment into armed groups, and no exact figures are available. Recruitment can be forced or voluntary. Armed groups generally use different recruitment tactics depending on the population, from offering a job and money to threatening people. In Nariño, there are specific areas where refugees and migrants are recruited. Armed groups also have strategies to convince and indoctrinate young people, especially those who have a fascination with power and weapons or desire the certainty of identity and the sense of belonging to a group (KIIs 23–25/08/2021; The New Humanitarian 10/09/2020; El Espectador 16/05/2021; FIP 08/10/2020; Fundepaz 01/03/2021).

Forced recruitment of children and adolescents: the information that exists about this dynamic is mainly anecdotal; there is no concrete data on how many children and adolescents are recruited. The information gap may exist because families do not report cases to the authorities or humanitarian agencies for fear of retaliation from the armed groups or as a result of normalising the dynamic (KIIs 18, 23, and 25/08/2021; InSight Crime 28/08/2020).

Children and adolescents are recruited to be combatants, work in illicit crops, and run errands; they can also be subject to sexual exploitation or forced labour (Defensoría del Pueblo 07/2020; Pares 11/06/2021). Lack of access to education increases the risk of minors being recruited, as schools are safe spaces where they can spend half a day. COVID-19 restrictions have limited presential classes, and as a result, many children and adolescents are more vulnerable to recruitment attempts. Many families move to prevent their children from being recruited (KIIs 23–25/08/2021; InSight Crime 28/08/2020).

Massacres:² although often related to drug trafficking, massacres in the department are also used as a means of social control through fear and as a way to threaten communities (KII 06/09/2021; Verdad Abierta 17/08/2020). Massacres in 2021 have been concentrated in five departments, following the trend of 2020. Nariño was the third-most affected department, with six massacres in which 24 people were killed as at 29 August (Indepaz accessed 29/08/2021; Rutas del Conflicto accessed 31/08/2021). Social and indigenous leaders are particularly affected. For example, in February, an Awá indigenous leader from the La Brava reservation in Tumaco was forcibly disappeared and killed, along with three other people, as a result of the failure to comply with a curfew imposed by an armed group (Rutas del Conflicto accessed 31/08/2021).

Gender-based violence: women victims of conflict experience protection risks such as threats, killings, torture, enforced disappearances, sexual exploitation and abuse, and forced pregnancies and abortions (UN Women accessed 26/09/2021). GBV has increased as a result of the containment measures implemented by the Government to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. The confinement increased the risk for women to cohabit with their potential

² There are different definitions of 'massacre'. In this report, the term refers to the killing of three or more people in one event (UNHCHR 09/03/2000).

aggressors and restricted access to essential protection, justice, and health services for GBV victims. In the first quarter of 2021, femicides in Nariño increased by 400% (from two to ten cases) compared to the same period in 2020 (Fundepaz 13/04/2021). There is underreporting of GBV, either because many women are afraid to report or because there are not enough resources for assistance (KIIs 06/09/2021).

Legal assistance: IDPs need access to legal assistance to understand their rights, present their case to Colombian authorities, and be recognised as victims of the armed conflict (MIRE 27/08/2021; OCHA 17/08/2021).

Water, hygiene, and sanitation

Access to WASH services and infrastructure is limited, especially in rural areas of Nariño. In 2018, 75% of households in Magüí Payán lacked basic sanitation services and safe access to water. In Barbacoas, the percentage was 65%; in Roberto Payán, it was 24%. All Telembí municipalities had figures above the departmental average of 10% (DANE 2018).

Communities often rely on untreated rainwater, leaving them vulnerable to bacterial diseases. This is particularly problematic in the context of COVID-19, as hygiene practices such as handwashing cannot be carried out correctly (KIIs 18, 23, and 25/08/2021). IDPs often resort to consuming untreated water as they face difficulties accessing safe drinking water. In overcrowded IDP shelters, residue management is also an issue (MIRE 27/08/2021).

Health

Access to health services is limited, especially in the rural areas of the Telembí triangle. Services are concentrated in the municipal capitals and population centres, and transportation is limited. Access to examinations and specialised medical care is very limited (KII 18/08/2021). There is low coverage of sexual and reproductive health programmes, as well as health promotion and maintenance.

Lack of access to drinking water and inadequate sanitation conditions have led to diseases, including respiratory infections and acute diarrhoeal disease (GIFMM 21/01/2021).

There is limited psychosocial care and accompaniment to meet the emotional and mental health needs of the victims of displacement and confinement (MIRE 27/08/2021; KII 18/08/2021; El Tiempo 24/08/2021).

Shelter

As a result of mass displacements in the Telembí triangle, shelters have been set up in schools, colleges, and family homes, but they are not sufficient to meet the needs of IDPs. Response capacity is very limited, and the shelters are overcrowded and with inadequate

living conditions (El Tiempo 24/08/2021; KIIs 23–25/08/2021; MIRE 27/08/2021). Shelters set up in schools can disrupt the provision of education. Many families affected by displacement are afraid to return to their homes as they do not have accompaniment or security guarantees from the state, so they remain in temporary shelters for extended periods (Infobae 04/07/2021).

Food security and nutrition

The eradication of coca crops and the lack of substitute crops in part of the department could affect the livelihoods of farmer, indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities, as many rely on the crops as a source of income (OCHA 06/08/2021).

IDPs in the Telembí triangle frequently face difficulties in meeting their food needs. They risk losing their crops as they are away from their home for extended periods and unable to tend their fields. The loss of crops may have a long-term effect on household food security if they eventually return home (MIRE 27/08/2021).

In Barbacoas and other municipalities of the department, indigenous Awá people have lost livelihoods and sources of income as a result of the contamination of rivers, the lack of fertile land for agriculture, deforestation, and restrictions on mobility caused by the armed conflict. Illicit crops and illegal mining in the area also affect agricultural production (GIFMM 22/01/2021).

Education

Access to education in Colombia has been particularly affected by COVID-19 restrictions and the closure of schools. Study during the pandemic is especially difficult for students who do not have access to the internet or educational materials for learning at home (World Bank 24/07/2020). This affects the long-term learning progress of students even when they return to school.

In the most conflict-affected areas, the closure of schools and lack of alternative educational activities reduce students' access to protective spaces and increase the risk of forced recruitment (InSight Crime 28/08/2020; KII 23/08/2021).

In Nariño, the income of households is very low. A large part of the department is rural, and at harvest time, many students work in the fields to contribute to the household's income. Some students do not return to school. Social status influences access to and retention in the education system in the department. Despite the national policy of free education, children and adolescents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds more frequently drop out of school in the department. The forced displacement of families also contributes to school dropouts (Gobernación de Nariño 10/2021).

Affected populations in the Telembí triangle and Nariño department

Afro-Colombians: 98% of the victims of mass displacement in Magüí Payán and Roberto Payán are Afro-descendants (OCHA accessed 17/09/2021).

Indigenous communities: indigenous communities in rural areas of the Telembí triangle are affected by the conflict, confinements, and forced displacement. In April 2021, a significant number of people from the Awá community of Pipalta Palbí Yaguapí in Barbacoas were displaced as a result of the clashes between armed groups (OCHA accessed 17/09/2021).

As at 17 September, 5,435 people from indigenous communities had been victims of the conflict in 2021, with Tumaco being the most impacted municipality (OCHA accessed 26/09/2021). Different communities have been affected, including indigenous people from the Piguambi Palangala reservation and the rural areas of the Telembí triangle. In the first six months of 2021, 1,438 people from the Awá community were affected by violence in Nariño (OCHA 06/08/2021).

Campesinos (farmers): campesinos, especially in the Cordillera region, are also affected by confinement events. There is an information gap concerning the degree to which they are affected (Cinep accessed 30/08/2021; KII 23/08/2021; El Nuevo Siglo 03/04/2021).

Migrants and refugees: at the end of June 2021, there were 14,500 refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the department, 43% of whom had irregular migration status (GIFMM 27/08/2021). Some Venezuelans fall victim to the armed conflict, and some join armed groups because they are either forcibly recruited or working in irregular coca cultivation or other conflict-related activities (KIIs 18, 23, and 25/08/2021). There are no exact figures on how many migrants and refugees are affected by these dynamics.

There is anecdotal evidence that Haitian and Ecuadorian migrants are also affected by recruitment by armed groups (KIIs 18, 23, and 25/08/2021).

RESPONSE CAPACITY

There are 37 humanitarian organisations in the local coordination teams and National system of attention and integral reparation for victims (SNARIV) in Nariño (KII 25/08/2021). The increase in clashes between different armed groups and the humanitarian emergencies they trigger exceed the response capacity. It is difficult to identify people in need of humanitarian assistance as a result of the conflict (OCHA 06/08/2021).

There are also barriers to registering and collecting data on conflict-affected communities, which negatively affects response capacity. Local governments do not always have the financial, operational, or technical capacity to respond to significant crises and often exhaust the resources they budget for emergency response (OCHA 06/08/2021; KIIs 25–23/08/2021).

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Access constraints in the Telembí triangle and Nariño department limit humanitarian organisations' ability to reach the affected populations and respond to their needs. In conflict areas, affected people have limited access to humanitarian aid, basic goods, and services. Access constraints also affect people's mobility within communities and their ability to travel to their fields or markets, which has implications for their livelihoods.

Security: clashes between armed groups have caused a decrease in humanitarian space and access. Special permission from armed groups is required to enter certain areas (KII 25/08/2021). There are not always security guarantees for the entry of public administration officials or humanitarian organisations. Armed groups use anti-personnel mines in the department, restricting people's ability to enter the area and hindering communities' mobility and access to basic services and their crops (CICR 20/02/2021). In Nariño, 17 people were victims of explosive devices in the first quarter of 2021. Anti-personnel mines are used as a military strategy and to protect illicit crops (CICR 05 2021; KII 25/08/2021).

Geographical and climatic conditions: many locations in the Telembí triangle are difficult to access because they are remote or lack adequate transportation and infrastructure. Some places require several days of travel on a combination of different means of transport (KIIs 18, 23, and 25/08/2021). Heavy rains cause flooding, landslides, and damage to roads, making it difficult to access the affected places and communities (Gobernación de Nariño 2018).

INFORMATION GAPS

Communities in rural areas: there are information gaps about the situation of communities in rural areas, especially concerning confinement and mobility restrictions. This is because armed groups limit municipal administrators' ability to access affected areas. The information gaps make it difficult to assess the needs of the communities (OCHA 28/07/2021).

Gender-based violence: GBV tends to be underreported in the department, especially for women whose intimate partners are members of armed groups. They are often victims of violence but do not report it either because they are unaware of the referral routes or afraid of being assaulted and/or threatened.

Migrants and refugees: Venezuelan and Haitian refugees and migrants are affected by the armed conflict in Nariño. As they do not always have regular migration status, their access to assistance may be restricted. The infrastructure and the capacity to respond to the displaced Colombian population is limited. Government institutions and municipal bodies responsible for assisting the displaced population do not have the means to assist the foreign population as a result of lack of funds and personnel or because they do not know the institutional route for assisting the migrant and refugee population and registering them as victims (KIIIs 18, 23, and 25/08/2021; Dejusticia 04/10/2020; El Espectador 04/08/2021; GIFMM 10/09/2021).

OUTLOOK

The humanitarian emergency in the department and in the Telembí triangle is expected to continue or worsen in the coming months.

Factors likely to affect the situation in the coming months are:

Armed conflict: the presence of various armed groups, their struggle for power, and their different tactics of repression, control, and intimidation are expected to continue. The lack of state presence, its limited response capacity, low budgets, and an acute humanitarian situation make it difficult to adequately respond to events (KIIIs 18, 23, and 25/08/2021).

Electoral period: protests and violence against leaders in connection with electoral campaigns may compound humanitarian issues. Armed groups may carry out or increase their threats and attacks against the population, public forces, or infrastructure.

Rainy season: in the coming months, rainfall may increase and reach levels above the historical average. For the November–January period, it is estimated that there will be increases in rainfall of between 10–40% throughout the Pacific region (IDEAM 20/09/2021). Heavy rains may generate further displacement, cause severe damage to infrastructure, and create limitations in access to basic services or humanitarian assistance. As a result, sectoral needs may increase (Gobernación de Nariño 01/06/2021). In areas affected by rains and floods, food security may become a problem as a result of crop losses (Gobernación de Nariño 12/2020).

Anticipated impact

Increased displacement and confinement: as a result of the high level of conflict, an increase in displacement and confinement is anticipated in Nariño and the Telembí triangle. In July, the Ombudsman's Office issued an alert (code 015-21) for the risk of forced displacement in Magüí Payán and Roberto Payán owing to the presence of armed groups (Defensoría del Pueblo 30/07/2021).

Impediments to the safe return of the displaced population: given the conflict increase, it is likely that there will be many IDPs whose return to their communities will be impeded by the continuation of fighting or the presence of armed groups in their places of origin. IDPs returning home may lack security and dignity. A large number of IDPs, many of them located in urban centres, will have medium- to long-term humanitarian needs, and response capacity may be overwhelmed. Unable to return to their communities, the displaced people will have limited access to basic services and livelihoods.

Increased humanitarian needs: given the potential increase in displacement and confinement and the impediments to the safe return of the displaced population, it is likely that there will be an increase in humanitarian needs in the Telembí triangle and the department. As a result of mass displacement and fighting between armed groups, the population may not have access to their livelihoods, which may affect food security. Protection needs may also increase as there are no security guarantees for the displaced or host population.

This report has been funded by ECHO.

Colombia: Nariño department



Legend

- Key populated centres
- Municipalities (Telembí triangle)
- Municipalities
- Departments