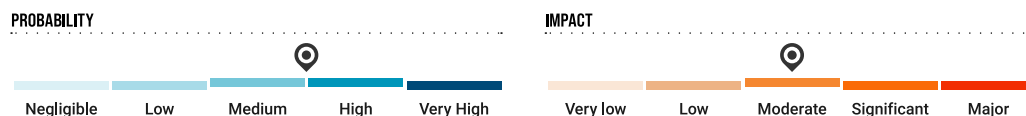


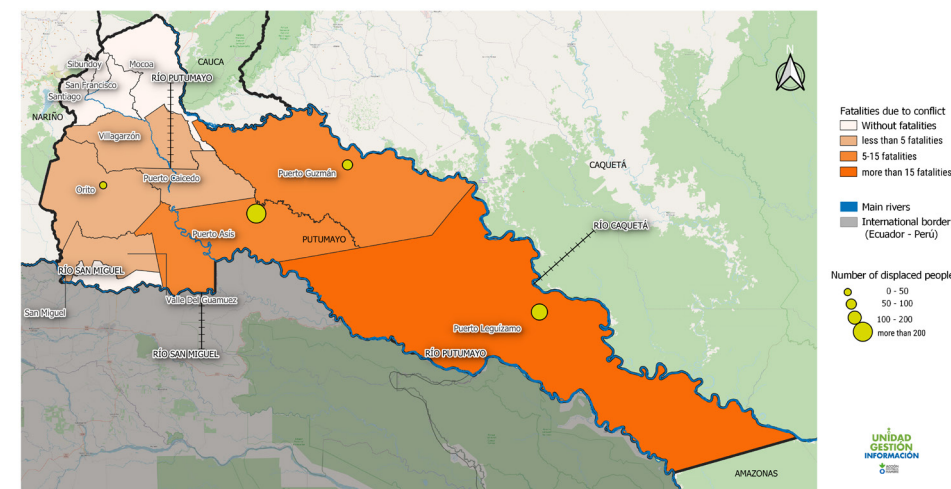
Escalation in violence between non-state armed groups in Putumayo significantly increases displacement, confinement, and protection needs



KEY MESSAGES

- At the end of 2021, there was a sudden and massive uptick in violence between armed groups and their retaliatory attacks on farmers, ex-combatants, and community leaders (KII OCHA 15/03/2022). The escalation resulted from fighting between Border Command and Front Carolina Ramírez – both Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) dissident groups – over territorial expansion to control drug trafficking. Highly likely consequences include high rates of confinement and displacement in Bajo Putumayo and increased humanitarian needs.
- The most affected municipalities in the department are Puerto Leguizamo, Puerto Asís, and Puerto Guzman. If the violence is not contained, there is a risk of conflict spreading across Putumayo.
- Security concerns limit humanitarian response. The Intersectoral Emergency Response Mechanism (MIRE) consortium has issued two internal alerts since mid-2021, as has the Ombudsman's office, but the response has been limited (MIRE 18/11/2022; Ombudsman Office 25/01/2022 and 01/07/2021).
- If this risk materialises, it will likely have a high impact in Putumayo. It might be less visible at the national level because there will be fewer people in need than in other departments.

Conflict-related violence and displacements between November 2021 and March 2022



Source: ACLED and OCHA monitor accessed 17/03/2022. See full map on page 6.

Methodology

Risk analysis is the process of identifying and unpacking potential future events that may affect individuals, assets, and the environment. Risk analysis is not a forecast and does not aim to predict the immediate future; instead, it aims to identify possible futures with significant negative humanitarian consequences.

ACAPS' risk analysis aims to help humanitarian decision makers understand potential future changes in a specific context and their humanitarian impact. If probable future developments are exposed and their impact understood, they can be included in response planning and preparedness. The methodological basis for this risk analysis is described in the [ACAPS risk analysis methodology](#) note. It is based on a secondary data review and is supplemented by interviews with experts.

Risk analysis is not an exact science. An event identified by one analyst as a hazard might be identified by another as a trigger for a different event that the second analyst considers the hazard. Risk analysis depends on a solid understanding of the context and on investigating the interaction of variables that cause or resist change.

Risk is a function of severity and probability. The risk posed by a potential event increases as either the expected severity of the event or the probability that it will occur increases. The probability of a risk does not need to be high for it to be of concern.

The risk presented in this report is introduced by a rationale explaining the risk and its context. The identified triggers are a series of factors and events that could contribute to the materialisation of the risk. The impact section describes the likely humanitarian consequences of the risk.

RISK

The strong presence of armed groups in Bajo Putumayo and their dispute over key corridors for drug trafficking and other illegal economies are a risk for a stark uptick in violence. An increase in fighting will likely result in:

- an increase in displacement
- an increase in child recruitment, including as fighters, informants, or porters ([KII OCHA 15/03/2022](#); [Ombudsman's Office 25/01/2022](#))
- an increase in attacks on indigenous communities and farmers
- an increase in civilian deaths and injuries, including from antipersonnel mines (APMs)
- an increase in confinements
- an increase in humanitarian needs ([OCHA 17/02/2022](#))
- a further reduction in the already limited humanitarian response and presence.

CONTEXT

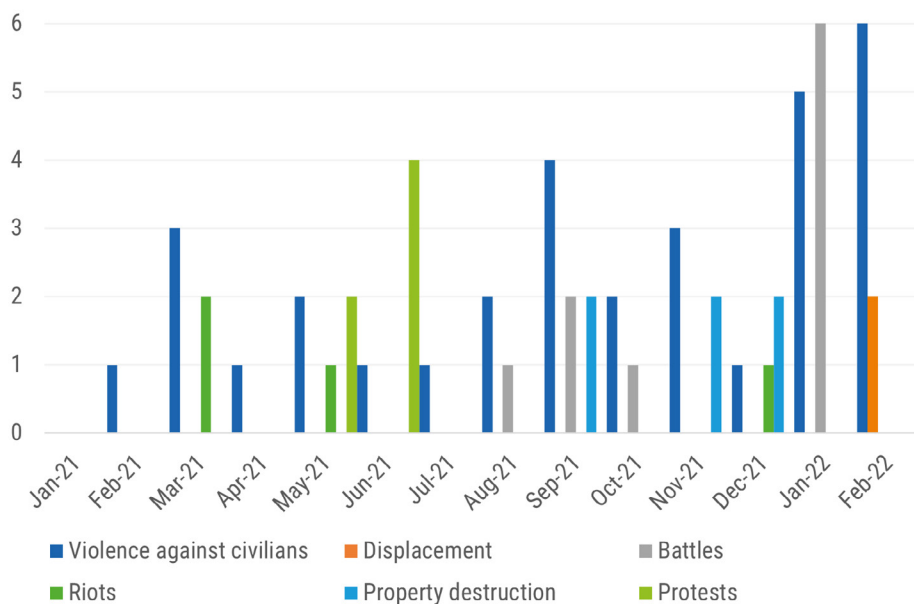
Putumayo, a department in southwest Colombia bordering Ecuador and Perú, is a strategic corridor for human trafficking, drug and arms trafficking, and resource extraction ([SWI 02/03/2022](#)). The collective Putumayo-Caquetá zone has 22,041 hectares of coca crops, making it the third-largest zone in the country ([UNODC 29/07/2021](#)). Around 348,000 people, or 0.8% of the national population, live in Putumayo. 50,694 people (18% of the Putumayo population) are indigenous, and 10,262 (4%) are Afro-Colombians ([DANE 19/01/2021](#)). Indigenous communities are especially at risk of confinement and limitations on their daily activities ([UNODC 29/07/2021](#)).

The presence of FARC-EP dissident groups in Putumayo has been growing since 2018 ([Verdad Abierta 30/04/2019](#); [OCHA 29/07/2020](#)). After the demobilisation of the FARC-EP in 2016, some ex-members and criminal groups took advantage of the power vacuum and battled over the control of coca production in the area ([La Silla Vacía 11/11/2021](#)). The strongest armed groups in Putumayo have been the Border Command (an armed group comprising former members of Fronts 48 and 32 and the local armed group La Constru), which is allied with La Segunda Marquetalia (a bigger FARC-EP dissident group), and the Front Carolina Ramírez, which is allied with Gentil Duarte (another bigger FARC-EP dissident group) ([InSight Crime 23/02/2022](#); [Ombudsman's Office 25/01/2022](#); [EE 21/10/2021](#)).

In 2021, Front Carolina Ramírez looked to expand across Putumayo, increasing fighting with the Border Command over territorial and social control ([InSight Crime 23/02/2022](#); [La Silla Vacía 11/11/2021](#)). The fighting over Yurilla, a key corridor in the Putumayo River in Puerto Leguizamo, has increased. Attempts by Front Carolina Ramírez to expand into the area and wrest control from Border Command resulted in clashes and attacks on the civil population ([Ombudsman's Office 25/01/2022](#)). The dispute is still active, with armed groups attacking civilians. Four people were killed in November 2021 and three in February 2022 ([Radio Nacional 07/11/2021](#); [Conexión Putumayo 03/02/2022](#)). The San Miguel River, which is connected to Ecuador, is also of interest to the armed groups. In March 2022, three dead bodies were found in the river; authorities suspect that armed groups are responsible ([Conexión Putumayo 23/03/2022](#)).

In 2021, over 2,300 people were displaced (mostly resulting from individual and family displacements that are not comprehensively tracked). This is a 30% increase from 2020. The main causes of displacement are fear of child recruitment, threats, and intimidation ([OCHA 18/03/2022](#)). Between November 2021 and March 2022, OCHA recorded over 493 displaced people in Putumayo. 155 people from Puerto Asís and 40 from Puerto Guzmán were displaced in February alone because of direct threats from armed groups ([OCHA 17/02/2022](#) and [01/02/2022](#)).

Violent incidents per month in Putumayo



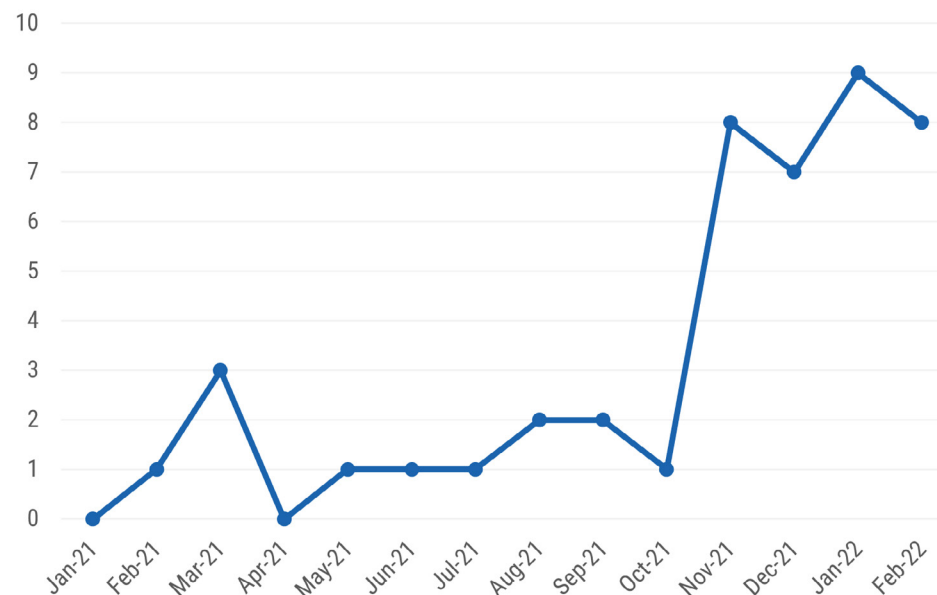
Source: ACLED (accessed 17/03/2022)

After around nine years (between 2012–2020) of no recorded confinements in the department, Putumayo registered around 300 confined people during 2021 (OCHA accessed 20/03/2022). All were indigenous or Afro-Colombian. For example, the presence of armed groups, fighting, and the assassination of community members have confined the community of Becocha Guajira (with around 100 indigenous people) since May 2021 (Ombudsman’s Office 14/02/2022 and 25/01/2022). People underreport confinements and movement restrictions out of fear of armed groups retaliating (OCHA 18/03/2022).

Armed groups have used intimidation, threats, and murder against civilians. The use of APMs and the forced recruitment of minors have also increased, resulting in confinements and internal displacement (OCHA 18/03/2022 and 29/07/2020; KII OCHA 15/03/2022). From November 2020 to March 2021, 41 civilians have been killed in homicides and six massacres (OCHA accessed 20/03/2022; ACLED accessed 17/03/2022). The escalation of violence affects not only the people of Putumayo but also migrants trying to get to Ecuador and Perú (KII OCHA 15/03/2022).

The impact of the rainy season can aggravate the humanitarian needs of the conflict-affected population. In 2021, the rainy season severely affected at least 48,000 people in the department (OCHA 18/03/2022). The 2022 rainy season has already affected many regions, with electric storms expected in Putumayo (Semana 25/02/2022).

Civilians fatalities from armed violence in Putumayo



Source: ACLED (accessed 17/03/2022)

IMPACT ON SPECIFIC GROUPS

Indigenous communities: an escalation of violence will likely affect indigenous communities. In March 2022, three children from the Awá indigenous community were killed in Puerto Asís (LasZorillas 10/02/2022; Caracol Radio 08/03/2022). In 2021, casualties included four disappeared and two killed members of the Sinoa community, with indigenous leaders threatened and displaced (Ombudsman’s Office 25/01/2022). The presence of armed groups in indigenous territories not only causes displacement but also affects the communities’ ability to maintain culturally important rituals and traditions. Access to indigenous communities is limited (ACH 19/01/2022).

Migrants and refugees: an escalation of conflict will likely affect migrants and refugees, such as by being targeted for forced recruitment. There are 9,471 Venezuelan migrants and refugees registered in Putumayo ([Migración Colombia accessed 18/03/2022](#)). The actual number is likely higher because many are not registered. To get to Ecuador and Perú, many take paths often used by armed groups and with the presence of landmines ([KII OCHA 15/03/2022](#)). Migrants, IDPs, refugees, and their children are also highly vulnerable to recruitment ([KII OCHA 15/03/2022](#)).

Children and adolescents: the conflict in Putumayo highly affects children and adolescents. They are both a target of forced recruitment and exploitation and casualties of fighting between groups. Aside from the three Awá children killed in March 2022, a baby was killed in a retaliatory attack in October 2021 ([MIRE 18/11/2021](#); [KII OCHA 15/03/2022](#)). Approximately 3,500 children do not have access to school, which increases their risk of recruitment ([OCHA 18/03/2022](#)). In 2021, at least 18 children and adolescents were forcibly recruited. This number is likely underreported and will increase as armed groups seek to grow their numbers ([OCHA KII 15/03/2022](#); [Ombudsman's Office 25/01/2022](#)).

Women and girls are vulnerable to gender-based violence and human trafficking, including sexual and work exploitation ([Ombudsman's Office 25/01/2022](#)). Such cases will likely increase if the risk materialises. Local NGOs have already reported an increase in the sexual exploitation of Venezuelan women and children ([OCHA 18/03/2022](#)).

TRIGGERS AND ASSUMPTIONS

The killing of leaders within armed groups: in January 2022, Gentil Duarte declared war on the National Liberation Army (ELN) and La Segunda Marquetalia through a written statement claiming the two groups had lost their political ideology by partnering with the paramilitary ([Semana 26/01/2022](#)). The killing of a high-ranking leader within Gentil Duarte or La Segunda Marquetalia would cause clashes between these groups in Putumayo. For comparison, in Arauca department, the killing of the ELN leader alias Mazamorro by an armed group part of Gentil Duarte led to an escalation of conflict in January 2022 ([El Colombiano 04/01/2022](#); [Crónica Uno 03/01/2022](#)).

Territorial expansion: disputes over strategic corridors would drive increasingly widespread and violent conflict over Yurilla and San Miguel River.

Shifting alliances: armed groups in Putumayo respond to economic instead of political interests, and alliances may opportunistically shift or grow ([Ombudsman's Office 25/01/2022](#); [CORE 26/07/2021](#)). Because of Putumayo's strategic location and value in the drug trade, violence is unlikely to decrease and is instead likely to escalate. Another issue is the presence of Mexican and Balkan cartels in the area whose interests and alliances with armed groups put communities living near rivers and illicit crops at risk of armed violence ([EE 08/12/2021](#)).

ANTICIPATED SCOPE

The disruption of normal activities, including livelihoods, resulting from conflict will likely affect up to 130,000 people – corresponding to the population in the most at-risk municipalities of Asís, Puerto Caicedo, Puerto Guzmán, and Puerto Leguizamo – at different levels ([DANE 19/01/2019](#); [Ombudsman's Office 25/01/2022](#)). Conflict will likely confine, displace, or restrict the mobility of rural residents in Puerto Leguizamo (up to 16,000 people) since the armed groups have demonstrated a high interest in the area ([Alcaldía de Leguizamo 29/05/2020](#)).

IMPACT

Displacement: if the risk materialises, it could displace people from disputed areas, such as Yurilla and the San Miguel River, in the following months. The displacement of individuals or families will likely increase, with numbers likely underreported. The main needs of displaced people in Putumayo are shelter, provisions (blankets, sleeping bags, cooking utensils), drinking water, food, and access to healthcare services, including mental health support and biosecurity kits to prevent COVID-19 infection ([OCHA 17/02/2022, 01/02/2022, and 30/12/2021](#)).

Confinement: conflict could result in the confinement of a significant proportion of the indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in Putumayo (90,251 people) at any given moment in 2022 ([OCHA 18/03/2022](#)). They are particularly at risk of confinement because the areas they live in are used for illicit crops, and indigenous communities often prefer to stay than leave their lands. Confinement would prevent people from accessing healthcare, education, water, and food supplies ([OCHA 18/03/2022, Semana 09/03/2022](#)). Confinements would also imply an invisibility of violence, constraints on communities from performing their rituals and traditions, and the risk of increased gender-based violence cases ([Ombudsman 25/01/2022](#); [OCHA 18/03/2022](#); [Cerosetenta 25/11/2020](#)).

Homicides against civilians suspected of supporting one group or another will likely increase. Armed groups will likely use the massacre of civilians to spread fear in communities ([Ombudsman's Office 25/01/2022](#); [Colombia.com 29/12/2021](#)).

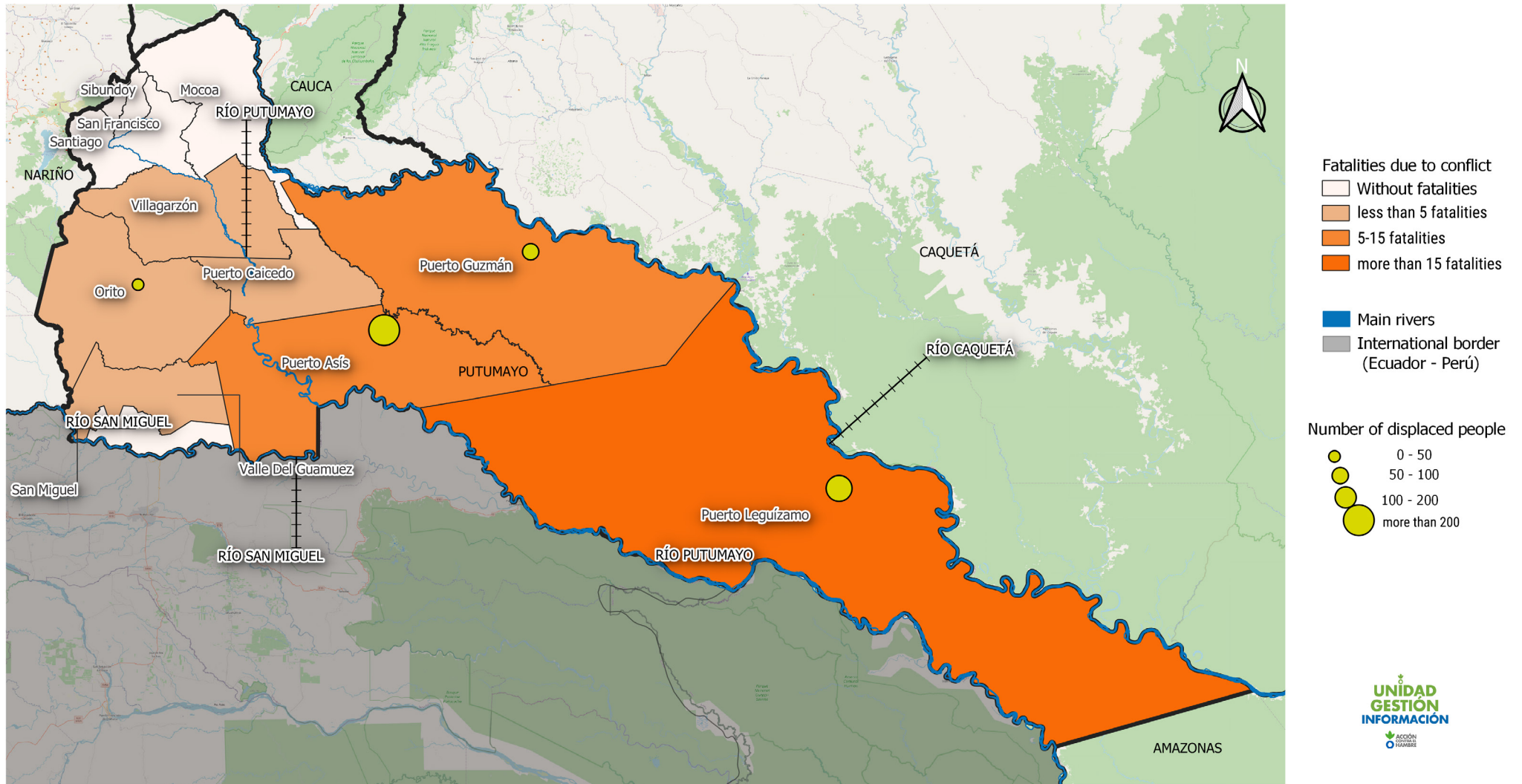
Antipersonnel mines: according to NGOs and UN agencies in Putumayo, armed groups have used APMs to control Putumayo's riverbanks and illicit crops ([OCHA 18/03/2022](#); [KII OCHA 15/03/2022](#)). Putumayo had previously seen a decline in incidents involving APMs, so the installation of new APMs is concerning. Migrants and IDPs may be less aware of the presence of APMs, making them more vulnerable.

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Humanitarian needs: floods and landslides during the 2022 rainy season will likely affect water access, along with access to shelter and food. In 2021, the weather affected more than 48,000 people (13% of Putumayo's population) (OCHA 18/03/2022). If the risk materialises and humanitarian access remains limited, people will be at high risk of lacking drinking water and experiencing food insecurity (ACH 19/01/2022). There would be a significant health risk to people living in rural areas given the remoteness of health centres. The escalation of conflict would also limit access to education by preventing children from going to school.

People affected by the increase in conflict in Putumayo are unlikely to receive humanitarian aid because of security constraints.

CONFLICT-RELATED VIOLENCE AND DISPLACEMENTS BETWEEN NOVEMBER 2021 AND MARCH 2022



Source: ACLED and OCHA monitor accessed 17/03/2022.