

OVERVIEW

The departments of Meta and Guaviare have historically been affected by Colombia's armed conflict because of the presence of armed groups that seek to control strategic routes (such as Guaviare and Guayabero rivers) for the commercialisation of drugs and for irregular economies. Their geographic characteristics and the lack of state presence have made them a strategic point for coca cultivation and deforestation led by armed groups.

After the Peace Agreement in 2016, there has been a reduction in the number of people affected by displacement, threats, forced recruitments, and homicides, but the conflict and presence of armed groups, such as dissident groups of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), continue to affect communities in these departments. From 1985 to October 2021, 36% of the population of the department of Guaviare and 22.2% of the population of Meta has been affected by the armed conflict – many of them by more than one event (Victims Unit accessed 30/10/2021).

KEY MESSAGES

- The actual impact of the conflict on people living in Meta and Guaviare is not visible because of a lack of data caused by underreporting of violence and mobility restrictions, as well as threats impeding people's access to reporting mechanisms.
- Many communities are routinely affected by mobility restrictions that limit their access to basic services and livelihoods and pose protection concerns; at the same time, this situation is normalised by communities.
- An increase in mobility restrictions, confinements, and displacements over the coming months is likely because of the continued presence of different armed groups.

PRIORITY NEEDS

- **Access to basic services**, especially water, sanitation, and hygiene, as well as food. Movement restrictions limit access to crops, putting the food security of the population at risk (MIRE 06/10/2021 and 11/10/2021; OCHA 18/11/2021). Health services are also scarce and difficult to access for rural communities (KII 02/12/2021).
- **Protection of women and girls, especially from indigenous communities**. The sexual exploitation of minors from Nukak Makú and Jiw communities has increased in urban areas, where many of them arrive when they are displaced (Consejo de Redacción 13/10/2021). Data on gender-based violence (GBV) is scarce because of reporting difficulties, as well as local dynamics of traditional gender roles and the fact that talking about it is discouraged (KII 02/12/2021; KII 06/12/2021).
- **Protection of minors from recruitment**. Education is not available after ninth grade in rural areas, and adolescents are vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups in the area (MIRE 11/10/2021; KII 02/12/2021).



Map created by Action Against Hunger.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of local dynamics, humanitarian needs and the factors likely to aggravate them, and an outlook for the coming months in the departments of Meta and Guaviare. The analysis is based on secondary data and KIs.

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CONFLICT DYNAMICS

Presence of armed groups

The Gaitanist Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AGC) and FARC-EP dissidents of Fronts 1 and 7 have presence in Meta and Guaviare. The AGC is present in the municipalities of Calamar, El Retorno, and San José del Guaviare in Guaviare and in the municipality of Puerto Concordia in Meta (Pares 11/12/2020). Fronts 1 and 7 are present in both departments, controlling illicit economies and strategic routes for drug trafficking. These Fronts have alliances between them to control Guaviare, Guayabero, Inirida, and Vaupes rivers (FIP 08/08/2020). The armed group Los Puntilleros is also present in both departments. In Meta, Los Puntilleros are present in the municipalities of Puerto Cabuyaro, Gaitán, Granada, Puerto López, and San Juan De Arama, among others (Pares 14/05/2019; Indepaz 13/09/2021; KII 02/12/2021).

These groups hold a tight control over the areas they dominate, imposing norms, rules, and restrictions to mobility, regulating humanitarian access, and intimidating and threatening people in the area (KII 02/12/2021; KII 06/12/2021; KII 13/12/2021; KII 16/12/2021). There have also been cases of retaliation against people accused of collaborating with government forces (Defensoría del Pueblo 22/12/2020).

Meta and Guaviare are increasingly affected by confrontations between armed groups and government forces, as well as military operations. In 2021, three clashes were recorded in Guaviare, while several military operations were carried out in Meta against facilities used by armed groups (ACLEDD 2021 accessed 16/12/2021). Allegations that minors were killed during bombardments in Guaviare in March highlight the protection needs of children and adolescents who are recruited into armed groups (Semana 13/03/2021; Diario AS 11/03/2021). The risk of confrontations between armed groups and government forces creates fear in local communities (OCHA 18/11/2021).

Coca crops and eradication

3% of all coca crops in Colombia are concentrated in Meta and Guaviare. Both departments have registered a significant reduction in hectares of coca crops since 2016 because of substitution of coca crops and eradication, but despite eradication, Guaviare has seen a 3.5% increase between 2019–2020 (UNODC 29/07/2021). One of the reasons is the increase of coca cultivation in protected areas such as national natural parks, forest reserve zones, and indigenous reservations (FCDS 03/08/2021; UNODC 29/07/2021).

94% of coca cultivation in Meta and Guaviare is located in protected areas, which makes control interventions difficult because these are areas of biological and cultural conservation (UNODC 29/07/2021). Coca crop substitution and eradication in these areas – particularly in national natural parks – is not possible because there are restrictions on the type of crops and agricultural activities and concerns on environmental protection (Verdad Abierta 20/10/2021; UNODC 29/07/2021).

Eradication attempts by the Government increase conflict in rural areas between the inhabitants and armed forces. Some families depend on coca crops for their livelihoods because they lack alternatives and try to prevent forced eradication (KII 02/12/2021; KII 13/12/2021). Between 2019–2021, over 17,000 hectares of coca crops in Guaviare and more than 2,770 hectares in Meta have been manually removed (Ministerio de Justicia accessed 22/12/2021).

Besides manual eradication, the Colombian Government is seeking to restart aerial spraying of crops with glyphosate, which has not been used since 2015 (CNN 13/04/2021; Sierra 16/06/2020). Glyphosate has harmful effects on people's health, damages subsistence crops and fertile land, and contaminates water sources near the communities (Antioquia University 12/05/2021; CESED 04/04/2015; Al Jazeera 28/09/2021). It thus negatively affects livelihoods and the access to water. In 2015, WHO classified glyphosate as likely to be carcinogenic to humans (WHO 01/03/2016; Greenpeace 25/11/2020; Rossi 26/04/2020; Al Jazeera 28/09/2021). Glyphosate is believed to have caused malformations and disabilities in babies born in Calamar, Guaviare (Mutante 13/09/2021).

Cocaine transit routes

The transit of cocaine made from coca and its commercialisation to foreign markets are no longer taking place exclusively through the Colombian Pacific (International Crisis Group 26/02/2021). New routes have been established in Meta and Guaviare, taking advantage of their connection to the centre of the country and their access to water sources such as the Guaviare River. River corridors with connections to Brazil are then used for commercialisation to Europe (International Crisis Group 26/02/2021; InSight Crime 11/11/2019; KII 02/12/2021).

Deforestation

Armed groups threaten communities and displace people if they oppose deforestation, aggravating the conflict in Colombia (KII 13/12/2021; OCHA 08/10/2021). Among the main causes of deforestation led by armed groups in these departments is the substitution of forests for grasslands for cattle, illicit crops, the construction of roads, agricultural expansion in non-permitted areas, and illegal logging (International Crisis Group 04/11/2021). In 2020, the departments of Meta and Guaviare ranked first and third respectively in deforested hectares at the national level, representing 35.5% of the total (IDEAM 2021).

Deforestation is also associated with a lack of income-generating opportunities. Many farmers engage in illegal logging to generate income – some of them paid by armed groups (International Crisis Group 04/11/2021).

CRISIS IMPACT

Displacement

Displacement in Meta and Guaviare is highly invisible because of a lack of data. From January–November 2021, 12 people were reported as displaced in Meta (a decrease compared to 41 in 2020) and 181 in Guaviare (an increase compared to 21 in 2020) (OCHA accessed 25/11/2021; OCHA accessed 20/12/2021). Such displacement records are likely not reflective of the actual numbers, since there is no up-to-date information on people displaced individually, and existing records are likely incomplete. It is likely that displacement, particularly individual displacement which is harder to record, is significant (KII 16/12/2021).

The lacking presence of state institutions, particularly in rural areas, poses a challenge to registering cases of displacement and seeking assistance (Rosario University 2020; FIP 08/08/2020). The distance from state institutions also translates into affected people lacking knowledge about the routes for reporting individual displacement to authorities (KII 02/12/2021). In November 2021, around 120 people from the Jiw indigenous community were displaced because of direct threats and intimidation from armed groups, with an additional 44 people being displaced from the same community as a result of insecurity in the area in December 2021 (OCHA 20/12/2021). These displacements were not recognised as mass displacements because IDPs dispersed in different locations of the municipality (OCHA 02/12/2021).

Mobility restrictions

From January–December 2021, approximately 12,400 people have been affected by mobility restrictions in Guaviare and around 12,470 in Meta (OCHA accessed 25/11/2021). These numbers show a stark increase compared to 2020, when 480 people were affected in Guaviare and none in Meta. No confinements were reported in 2021.

As with displacements, there is a lack of data on mobility restrictions and possible confinements, and the true extent is likely higher than existing figures. Rural areas with little state presence or connection to more urban areas likely face barriers to reporting mobility restrictions and confinements (KII 16/12/2021). Armed groups often threaten people if they report violent acts perpetrated by them (Indepaz 13/09/2021), which is likely to further decrease the reporting of mobility restrictions.

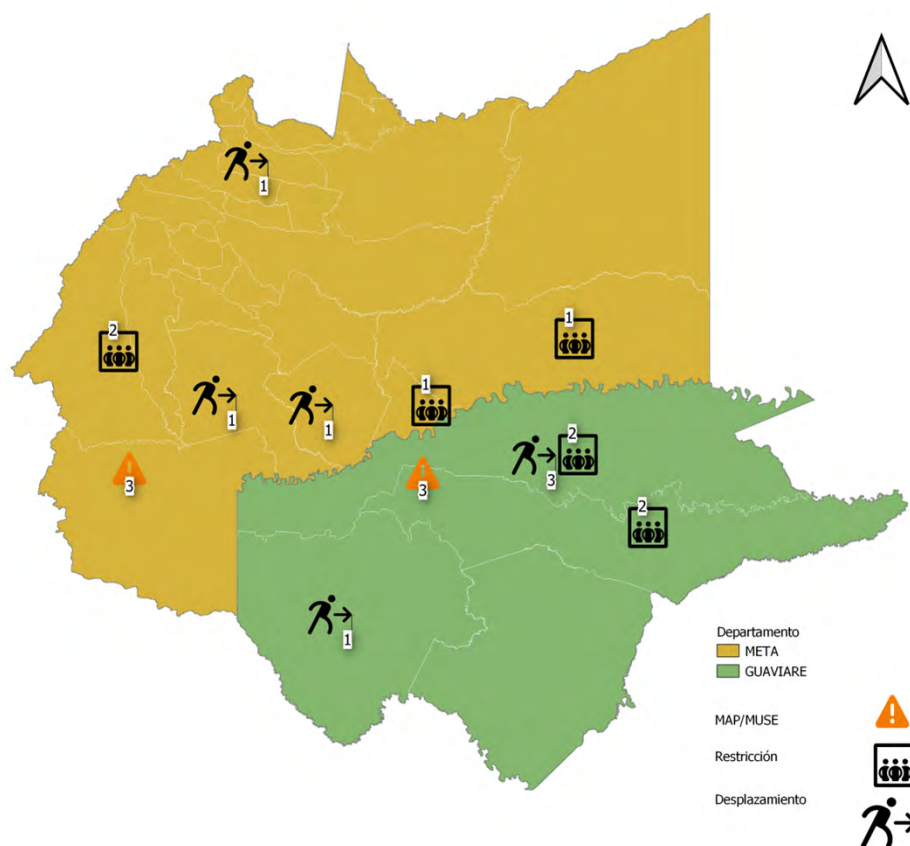
There is no information from some rural areas as a result of restrictions and inadequate security conditions to enter those areas (OCHA 02/09/2021; KII 02/12/2021).

Antipersonnel mines

Antipersonnel mines are used by armed groups in Meta and Guaviare for territorial control, to restrict people's mobility, and to protect coca crops from eradication by governmental armed forces. The detonation of mines can result in death or serious injury. In 2020, seven victims were reported in Guaviare and three in Meta. As at 31 October, four victims have been reported in Guaviare and two in Meta for 2021 (Government of Colombia accessed 21/12/2021). Mines have been installed on the banks of the Guayabero River in Meta and in population centres to prevent antidrug trafficking operations and restrict mobility (MIRE 06/10/2021).

The use of mines has a serious impact on the communities that live and travel through affected areas, as it limits people's livelihoods by restricting access to crops and water sources. The use of antipersonnel mines puts the lives of children and adolescents living near coca crops at risk (ICRC 2021).

Displacements, movement restrictions, and incidents with antipersonnel mines



Map created by Action Against Hunger.

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

People in need

About 215,000 people in Meta (20% of the population) and more than 37,000 people in Guaviare (41% of the population) need humanitarian assistance (OCHA 21/04/2021).

WASH

People affected by mobility restrictions and displacements face difficulties accessing sanitation services, hygiene, and drinking water.

Access to safe drinking water is highly limited. As at 2021, more than 39,000 people in Guaviare and nearly 200,000 people in Meta lack access to water, especially in rural areas (OCHA accessed 22/12/2021). Between August–October 2021, REACH completed a needs assessment in 17 out of 32 departments in Colombia, including Meta and Guaviare. In Meta, around 12% of the people interviewed, including both IDPs and host communities, obtain water from wells; 59 people out of 172 surveyed in Guaviare obtain their water from rivers and wells. The sample is representative in Meta but not in Guaviare (REACH 09/2021). The collection of rainwater is another source of drinking water (MIRE 06/10/2021 and 11/10/2021; KII 02/12/2021).

The lack of sanitation in rural areas leads to open defecation and defecation in rivers (MIRE 11/10/2021). As some people use river water for consumption, this poses health risks (OCHA 29/07/2021).

In Meta and Guaviare, the WASH response is hampered by weaknesses in the WASH infrastructure, lack of state capacity, and difficult access to rural areas (OCHA 02/09/2021 and 01/09/2021).

Food security and livelihoods

Mobility restrictions, displacements, and antipersonnel mines affect communities' access to crops. Between September–November 2021, more than 1,700 people were affected in Meta and Guaviare, mainly in the municipalities of La Macarena and Puerto Concordia in Meta and San José de Guaviare and Calamar in Guaviare (OCHA 18/11/2021). Armed groups use threats to limit access to crops, further restricting food production and income generation. This translates into unmet needs that affect the quality of life of the communities and leads to the deterioration of their livelihoods.

During the data collection completed by REACH between August–September 2021, 27% of people interviewed in Meta and 46 out of 172 people in Guaviare reported not having food in their house because of a lack of economic resources. In Meta, 12% of people reported experiencing this three to ten times in the previous month, and 13% experienced this once or twice (REACH 09/2021).

Mobility restrictions enforced by armed groups during certain hours of the day increase transportation costs, as fewer vehicles circulate (MIRE 11/10/2021; Mascolombia 28/08/2021).



Illustration by Sandie Walton-Ellery.

Shelter

Housing conditions for displaced people are inadequate in Meta and Guaviare. Shelters are built with rudimentary materials – some with dirt or mud floors – and are not suitable for living. Some IDPs live in shelters without wall, roof, and door protection or in houses with a weak structure. Houses hosting IDPs are overcrowded as a result of the high number of people displaced, the limited number of rooms in the dwellings, and the lack of internal divisions differentiated by sex or age (OCHA 18/11/2021; MIRA 29/07/2021).

People affected by mobility restrictions in Puerto Concordia and San José del Guaviare between October–November 2021 lived in inadequate and overcrowded housing. Those living close to the Guayabero River were frequently affected by clashes between armed groups and government forces; in Puerto Cachicamo, the torching of houses by armed groups was reported (OCHA 18/11/2021).

Protection

Forced recruitment: in both departments, children and adolescents are especially exposed to the risk of recruitment because of the strong presence of armed groups, mainly in the municipalities of Calamar, El Retorno, and Puerto Cachicamo in Guaviare and La Macarena, Puerto Concordia, Puerto Lleras, Puerto Rico, and Vista Hermosa in Meta (OCHA 02/09/2021 and 01/09/2021). Education in rural areas is usually available only up to ninth grade (MIRE 11/10/2021). After the completion of that year, adolescents have few opportunities to finish their studies, which makes them vulnerable to forced armed recruitment (KII 02/12/2021; MIRA 27/07/2021). There are cases of armed groups offering job opportunities in palm plantations to then recruit adolescents when they arrive (El Espectador 11/03/2021).

Some families leave their communities to protect children and adolescents from recruitment (OCHA 02/09/2021). These individual displacements are difficult to record because people tend not to report, so there is little information available about their location or needs. The risk of recruitment is also associated with families' lack of economic resources and children and adolescents taking up work to contribute to the household income (KII 02/12/2021; KII 13/12/2021; MIRA 29/07/2021).

At the national level, there is an upward trend in the involvement of minors in the armed conflict. In 2020, at least 222 children and adolescents were affected by recruitment; during the first half of 2021, about 96 cases were reported (COALICO 03/2021 and 2021).

GBV: reports of GBV are scarce in Meta and Guaviare, especially from rural areas. Reportedly, communities are stopped by armed groups from talking about gender. Traditional gender roles are common and perpetuated through intimidation from armed groups and within the community (KII 02/12/2021; KII 06/12/2021).

Although the Victims Unit registered only three cases of sexual violence in the first semester of 2021, the Surveillance System of the Ministry of Health registered 56 cases of sexual violence in the municipality of San José del Guaviare alone between January–August 2021 (Consejo de Redacción 13/10/2021). Between January–September 2021, 529 cases of GBV were reported in Meta and 52 in Guaviare (OCHA accessed 22/12/2021). According to the Health Secretary Office of San José del Guaviare, between January–July 2021, there were 39 cases of sexual abuse of minors (Marandua 23/08/2021). Actual numbers are likely higher than those reported.

Girls from the Nukak Makú and Jiw indigenous communities are especially vulnerable since the loss of territory has caused their displacement to urban centres where they are survivors of sexual exploitation (Consejo de Redacción 13/10/2021; Pacifista 11/03/2020; KII 06/12/2021). Substance abuse by Jiw children, encouraged by adults as part of sexual abuse, has also been reported (La Silla Vacía 14/02/2021; Consejo de Redacción 13/10/2021; KII 02/12/2021).

In Meta, between January–May 2021, 1,773 cases of violence against women, 288 victims of sexual crimes, 11 murdered women, and 1,053 victims of domestic violence were registered (OCHA 21/09/2021).

Security of ex-combatants: since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016, 326 former FARC-EP combatants have been killed (JEP 29/11/2021) – seven of them in Guaviare and 26 in Meta.

In Meta and Guaviare, there are several Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces (ETCR) where ex-combatants have reported fears for their safety related to the presence of armed groups in the area (KII 13/12/2021). For example, around 107 ex-combatants from an ETCR in Guaviare were displaced to the Caquetá department after the incursion of an armed group (El Colombiano 24/11/2021). The incineration of ETCR vehicles has also been reported in Meta (Infobae 18/11/2021). On 17 December 2021, a humanitarian caravan moving from La Macarena (Meta) to El Doncello (Caquetá) was attacked with rifle bursts, and a truck carrying the ex-combatants' belongings was incinerated (El Tiempo 17/12/2021).

Education

Education in rural areas of Colombia is limited. In Meta and Guaviare, schools are scarce and remote in rural areas, which prevents many students from receiving an education.

There is a considerable educational gap between cities and rural areas caused by the lack of schools, didactic materials for students, and activities for adolescents (KII 02/12/2021; MIRA 29/07/2021). In Meta, the illiteracy rate in the capital city Villavicencio and nearby municipalities is under 10%, but in more rural areas (such as the municipality of Mapiripán), the rate reaches 20%. In Guaviare, the illiteracy rate ranges between 10–16% (DANE accessed 22/12/2021).

Illiteracy is related to the lack of education coverage in rural areas, where students must travel long distances to reach schools (KII 02/12/2021), but also to mobility restrictions imposed by armed groups and the risk of forced recruitment. These are causes for school dropouts. Guaviare is among the five departments with the highest dropout rates in Colombia (BanRep 02/11/2021). Dropouts can also be associated with links to networks of microtrafficking, drug addiction and child prostitution, displacement of parents to other departments, and formation of youth bands (Pacto Colombia con las Juventudes 2019).

In 2020, dropouts increased during the pandemic because of economic difficulties, with many students abandoning their studies to contribute to household income (BanRep 2021).

Schools in rural areas often have deficient infrastructure, with some lacking drinking water (El Espectador 11/03/2021; Semana Rural 27/05/2020).

Health

Armed conflict aggravates the physical healthcare needs of people affected by displacements or mobility restrictions. Among the main illnesses reported in the communities are respiratory infections, acute diarrhoeal diseases, and gastrointestinal and dermatological diseases, often associated with inadequate WASH conditions and endemic diseases (MIRE 06/10/2021 and 11/10/2021).

Communities affected by mobility restrictions and living in rural areas of Meta and Guaviare face barriers to accessing medical care because of a lack of medical personnel and infrastructure (MIRA 27/07/2021 and 29/07/2021). Health services are concentrated in the municipal capitals of the departments, such as Puerto Concordia in Meta and La Macarena and San José de Guaviare in Guaviare (KII 02/12/2021; KII 13/12/2021; MIRE 06/10/2021 and 11/10/2021). It is difficult to receive rapid medical attention in case of accidents, and the distance and transportation costs pose challenges for routine services such as disease monitoring and prenatal care.

Mental health: women's, children's, and young people's mental health is affected by the armed conflict (El País 16/04/2021). In Meta and Guaviare, traditional gender roles dictate that women's responsibilities are framed around household chores and childbearing (KII 02/12/2021; KII 06/12/2021); men can travel to urban areas, but women are more restricted. Inequality, violence, and lack of self-determination have contributed to women developing feelings of hopelessness and depression (KII 02/12/2021).

Children are mentally affected by armed confrontations and conflict and experience fear of armed groups and military forces. Adolescents and young people feel disorientation and hopelessness because of the lack of higher education programmes, which makes them prone to recruitment by armed groups (MIRE 11/10/2021; KII 02/12/2021).

Ex-combatants are also affected as they feel persecuted and anxious about facing a difficult process of reincorporation into civilian life after their militancy in armed groups. There is limited access to doctors and even more limited access to mental health professionals (KII 02/12/2021).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Flooding

Floods caused by heavy rains in both departments affected more than 19,000 people in the first half of 2021, resulting in displacement (OCHA 02/09/2021 and 01/09/2021). In May 2021, floods affected eight municipalities in Meta and Guaviare (Cabuyaro, Fuente de Oro, Puerto Lleras, Puerto López, San José del Guaviare, Uribe, Villavicencio, and Vista Hermosa). The floods damaged houses and belongings and reduced access to drinking water, affecting approximately 7,373 people (including 69 indigenous households) (OCHA 13/05/2021). This recurring phenomenon has affected infrastructure and the development of communities in the area and constrains the response from humanitarian actors. In 2021, floods have increased compared to past years because there were two rainy seasons (KII 06/12/2021). In November 2021, La Niña affected more than 297,000 people in eight departments in Colombia – among them, Meta (OCHA 30/11/2020).

In Meta and Guaviare, natural disasters are also a result of indiscriminate deforestation and extensive cattle ranching. Constant transit of animals in these areas leads to soil compaction that affects water flow through the soil and structural stability, causing surface erosion and landslides (Mongabay 17/01/2017; International Crisis Group 26/02/2021). The disappearance of endemic trees and the transformation of ecosystems has been one of the causes behind the rapid advance of these disasters (IGAC accessed 22/12/2021).

COVID-19

In October 2021, over 120 people in Cachicamo, Guaviare, presented COVID-19 symptoms but treated the illness with homemade remedies because of mobility restrictions (MIRE 11/10/2021). As at November 2021, there have been 5,153 cases of COVID-19 in Guaviare since the beginning of the pandemic, with only six cases in November (Minsalud 29/11/2021). By 7 December, 77,784 doses of vaccines were administered in the department (Minsalud accessed 09/12/2021). In San José del Guaviare, communities tend not to use facemasks because armed groups restricted their use (MIRE 11/10/2021).

From the beginning of the pandemic until November 2021, Meta reported 89,995 cases (8,463 cases per 100,000 inhabitants). In November 2021, 274 cases were registered (26 per 100,000 inhabitants) (Minsalud 29/11/2021) 1,090,173 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered as at 7 December (Minsalud accessed 09/12/2021).

Government containment measures against COVID-19 in 2020 impacted farmers with a rise in transport costs and increased inequality in food security for people in rural areas (OCHA 31/01/2021). During mandatory preventive isolation, communities in Guaviare also faced limitations in accessing resources for subsistence, receiving medical care, purchasing toiletries

and food, and attending school. Armed groups took advantage of the limited institutional supply and the conditions of vulnerability to strengthen their armed structures (MIRE 29/07/2021).

AFFECTED POPULATIONS

Indigenous communities

In Meta and Guaviare, there are 13 indigenous communities, including the Sikuni, Nukak Makú, and Jiw. Indigenous communities are affected by armed conflict, the loss of territory leading to displacement, sexual exploitation, and the consumption of psychoactive substances (KII 02/12/2021). The Nukak have been forcibly displaced from their territories as a result of deforestation: the Nukak area lost 1,122 hectares to deforestation for the cultivation of coca (El Ciudadano 15/12/2021; Cerosetenta 22/04/2020).

The Sikuni and Jiw communities in Meta reported threats, intimidation, and sexual abuse (OCHA 01/09/2021). The Nukak communities have been severely affected by respiratory illness and the lack of medical services (Marandua 07/07/2021; OCHA 01/09/2021). There are no medical centres in the vicinity of these communities, and the closest ones are remote and in bad conditions. Local institutions lack knowledge of the differential approach needed to work with the communities (El Espectador 07/09/2021). Social stigma often leads to indigenous people not practising their traditions (MIRA 29/07/2021).

Campesinos (farmers)

According to NGOs present in Meta and Guaviare, homicides of farmers and social and indigenous leaders have increased since August 2021 (KII 02/12/2021). In 2021, 162 social leaders have been murdered in Colombia (Indepaz 02/12/2021). Many farmers in Meta and Guaviare have become environmental leaders to try to protect the territory from deforestation by armed groups or large companies, which puts them at risk of threats and being killed (Cerosetenta 22/04/2020).

Farmers have also been affected by confinements, internal displacement, and threats by armed groups (KII 02/12/2021). Their health is likely to be affected if aerial sprayings are implemented (KII 02/12/2021; Mutante 13/09/2021).

Women

Data about women, how they are impacted by the conflict, and GBV is limited and not reliable because of barriers to reporting (KII 02/12/2021; KII 13/12/2021). Women are vulnerable to sexual abuse from both governmental armed forces and armed groups. Indigenous communities fear to leave women alone because of past incidents of sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the army (KII 13/12/2021; MIRA 27/07/2021).

Children and adolescents

Children and adolescents accounted for more than 55% of the people affected by armed conflict through recruitment, displacements, threats, and homicides in Guaviare and Meta in 2020 (Victims Unit accessed 22/12/2021). During the first semester of 2021, about 240 children and adolescents in Meta and 46 in Guaviare were affected by displacements, threats, and homicides (OCHA 02/09/2021 and 01/09/2021), though actual figures are likely higher given underreporting.

Refugees and migrants

The migrant and refugee population from Venezuela is potentially exposed to the conflict in Meta and Guaviare, particularly if they live in rural areas. According to official figures, there are 19,437 Venezuelans in the department of Meta and 856 in Guaviare (Migration Colombia 10/2021). Most of them reside in urban areas. There is no information available on how many Venezuelans live in rural areas or what their conditions are.

Currently, there are no migration offices or headquarters of any organisation focused on this issue in the area, so data and support for this population are limited and intermittent (KII 02/12/2021).

Table: Population of Meta and Guaviare

2021	GUAVIARE	META
Total population	88,940	1,072,412
Black, Afro-Colombian	3,970	21,985
% of departmental black, Afro-Colombian	4.5%	2.1%
Indigenous population	8,612	22,792
% of departmental indigenous	9.7%	2.1%

Sources: DANE 09/10/2020; OCHA 01/09/2021

RESPONSE CAPACITY

Meta and Guaviare have a shared Local Coordination Team (ELC), with limited response capacity because of the size of the departments. The shared ELC comprises nine UN agencies, six international NGOs, three local NGOs, and three observers (OCHA 01/09/2021). Institutional presence and capacity is weak, with gaps particularly in WASH, protection, and food security (OCHA 02/09/2021).

Most of the information is collected by NGOs, since they have direct contact with community leaders and a relationship based on trust (KII 02/12/2021). Nonetheless, many communities in this area are reluctant to present claims about displacements, confinements, and violence in general, as they have normalised the situation (KII 13/12/2021).

Population's coping mechanisms: the communities have developed negative coping mechanisms such as saving groceries for cases of mobility restriction imposed by armed groups. They have also normalised violence and tend not to report the actions of armed groups (KII 13/12/2021).

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Organisations have limited access to conflict-affected areas because of armed groups' actions such as restrictions to mobility. Local communities prevent NGOs from entering when it is not safe, and organisations sometimes have to pass through checkpoints (KII 02/12/2021; KII 13/12/2021). The difficulty of collecting information in rural places hinders responsiveness. In some areas in the lower Guaviare, organisations are prohibited from entering by armed groups, so the needs of the population there are unknown (KII 02/12/2021).

Besides security obstacles, floods are another factor that prevents humanitarian organisations from entering some areas (KII 06/12/2021). There are no suitable land routes for the transit of vehicles as roads are frequently affected by rains (MIRA 29/07/2021).

Information about areas that NGOs have not been able to access is acquired through conversations with the communities, so it is very limited and not comprehensive (KII 02/12/2021). The REACH Multi-Sector Needs Assessment conducted between August–September 2021 did not produce representative data for Guaviare.

OUTLOOK

Conflict: it is highly likely that the presence of armed groups will persist in Meta and Guaviare. Control of the population through restrictions and the imposition of rules will likely continue, and the increasing trend of people being affected by mobility restrictions and displacement is likely to continue (KII 13/12/2021).

It is likely that an increasing number of communities facing mobility restrictions will experience confinements. It is also likely that many such events will not be registered because of barriers to reporting (KII 13/12/2021). Many humanitarian needs will likely be unmet as a result of lack of reporting and low response capacity (KII 06/12/2021).

Electoral period: the campaign for the May 2022 presidential elections in Colombia may have repercussions in both departments since it has already increased the presence of governmental armed forces. This could increase tension between governmental forces and armed groups (KII 02/12/2021) and lead to more intimidatory actions, restrictions to mobility, and threats from armed groups. Fear among the population could discourage them from voting.

INFORMATION GAPS

Mental health: there is no systematic information available about the mental health impacts of the conflict.

Nutrition: the most recent data from governmental institutions on the two departments is from the 2015 National Survey on the Nutritional Situation (National Institute of Health 16/07/2019). There are reports about the capital cities but not of the other municipalities of the departments. NGOs have acquired data about nutrition from the communities, but there is no rigorous information from local and governmental institutions, which prevents an informed allocation of resources and effective management of governmental projects (KII 06/12/2021).

GBV: data on GBV is limited, partially because communities are intimidated not to talk about gender issues (KII 02/12/2021; KII 06/12/2021). Recent publications indicate that the majority of GBV survivors belong to indigenous communities; because of language gaps, cultural differences, and misinformation, there are not many complaints on their part (Consejo de Redacción 13/10/2021; Pacifista 11/03/2020; El Tiempo 04/07/2020).

Individual displacements: there is no information on individual displacements in rural areas. There is also a lack of data about the number of people who leave their homes because of the conflict, as the collection of this information occurs in urban areas, and people do not report for the lack of knowledge of the existing reporting mechanisms.

Population needs: because of security restrictions and the presence of armed groups, the conditions and needs of some rural populations are unknown.