

# COLOMBIA

## Floods in Arauca department



### KEY PRIORITIES

**+9,700**

FLOOD  
AFFECTED PEOPLE

**20%**

OF THE PEOPLE  
AFFECTED BY FLOODS  
IN 2022 STILL IN NEED  
OF HUMANITARIAN  
ASSISTANCE

**RISK**

OF DENGUE AND  
MALARIA OUTBREAKS

FUNDING AND  
RESPONSE CAPACITY

- INGOs (Save the Children, Primera Urgencia Internacional)
- Equipo Local de Coordinación (comprising different organisations, including UNHCR, WFP, FUPAD, SJR, ICRC, NRC, and UNICEF, among others)
- Local government of Arauca department and municipal governments
- UNGRD

### CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

- Since the end of March 2023, rainfall has increased in the department of Arauca, located in eastern Colombia on the border with Venezuela. This increase was to be expected, as the rainy season in this department normally extends from April–November (IDEAM accessed 13/06/2023). During the first days of May, the rains increased the flow of the Arauca, Caño Caranal, Cusay, and Jordán Rivers, causing them to overflow into the municipalities of Arauquita and Saravena. The overflowing of these rivers affected more than 950 people (OCHA et al. 15/05/2023).
- The continuing rains and water level increase in the department's main rivers have led other secondary rivers, such as Caño Tigre River, to also overflow. As at 5 June, the floods had affected more than 9,700 people in the municipalities of Arauca, Arauquita, Fortul, Saravena, and Tame (OCHA et al. 05/06/2023). On 16 June, heavy rains fell for more than 12 hours, affecting the villages of Monserrate, Clarinete, Los Pechos and El Cubarro in the municipality of Arauca (Llanera 17/06/2023).
- Every year, during the rainy season, floods usually occur in the department of Arauca. In 2022, flooding affected more than 1,800 people. Of these, at least 20% (360 people) still had humanitarian needs arising from those floods as at 15 May 2023 (OCHA et al. 15/05/2023).
- The main needs that humanitarian organisations responding to the emergency and the government of Arauca have identified are shelter; NFIs; healthcare for children, adolescents, and the elderly; and WASH facilities (OCHA et al. 05/06/2023). There are 16 riverine points that require attention from the risk unit for the oncoming months, the communities are calling for a civic strike to demand a timely response from the government (La Prensa Araucana 18/06/2023; Infobae 18/06/2023).

### ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

- The rainy season in Arauca typically peaks between June–July. In August 2022, there were still municipalities in Arauca on red alert as per the Colombian Government because of the high risk of flooding. In November, there was still flooding in the department (La FM 10/11/2022; W Radio 21/08/2022). The next few months will possibly see more rainfall, leading to new floods or aggravating existing floods.
- The communities are discontent with the lack of concrete solutions from the government, particularly from the National Disaster Risk Unit (UNGRD), therefore, they have called for a strike in the affected municipalities from 20 June. This could affect public order and humanitarian access in certain areas (La Prensa Araucana 18/06/2023; Infobae 18/06/2023).

### HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

- Information on humanitarian needs in Arauca is scarce, and there is no updated information on the humanitarian needs of those affected by the 2022 floods. For the current floods, there have been no assessments of the humanitarian needs of the people in need (OCHA et al. 05/06/2023). This limits the ability of responders to target the humanitarian needs of the affected population, which are uncertain.
- Several armed groups are present in Arauca, including the National Liberation Army (ELN) and dissidents from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP). These armed groups have previously attacked humanitarian workers during active response (SWI 02/09/2021; OCHA 29/05/2023). There is currently a ceasefire between the Colombian Government and the ELN, but its protocols have not yet been made public, meaning the armed groups may impose mobility limitations on civilians (W Radio 13/06/2023).



## CRISIS IMPACTS

### Shelter and NFIs

As at 5 June 2023, the local governments of Arauca, Arauquita, Fortul, and Saravena municipalities stated needing shelter to accommodate flood-displaced people, although the exact numbers of displaced people are not known. The floods have affected more than 3,300 people from 11 villages in Fortul; almost 2,700 people in three villages and three informal settlements in Arauca; more than 2,100 people from 20 villages in Saravena; and more than 540 people in Arauquita. In the municipality of Tame, the Colombian Risk Management Unit has stated that people are affected, but there are no figures available. Not all affected people require evacuation (OCHA et al. 05/06/2023; Llanera 10/06/2023).

In Saravena, the local government has set up a community hall to shelter those affected. In Fortul, the local government has set up a shelter that can accommodate around 500 people. That said, these spaces are not equipped to house people. There is a lack of mattresses, blankets, and cooking utensils (OCHA et al. 05/06/2023; Llanera 10/06/2023).

### Livelihoods

Floods have affected cattle ranchers and farmers in Arauca. Given the impact of the floods on their farms, some have had to sell their cattle for USD 200 below the normal price. The floods mean that the animals have less space to graze and no space to rest because of the wetness of the soil, deteriorating their health. Some cattle ranchers mentioned that, given the continuous flooding that the department has suffered annually since 2018, they have had to completely abandon their activities in the cattle ranch (CONtexto Ganadero accessed 16/06/2023). Previous floods have also led to crop damage, affecting the livelihood of farmers (RNC 19/07/2021). Although there are no estimates of the number of hectares flooded in 2023, several crops are known to have been lost due to flooding (Llanera 10/06/2023). Agriculture accounts for 30% of Arauca's GDP, with the department having more than 79,000 hectares of crops, while 13% comes from livestock (IGAC accessed 13/06/2023).

### Health and WASH

During the rainy season in Arauca, the local population risks contracting diseases such as dengue fever, diarrhoea, yellow fever, and skin infections. Stagnant water acts as a vector for the transmission of some of these diseases. The lack of safe drinking water can also lead to an increase in infections and diseases as a result of ingesting contaminated water (OCHA et

al. 05/06/2023). Colombia's National Institute of Health (INS) has warned that in departments such as Arauca, increases are expected in the number of dengue cases compared to annual case numbers between 2007–2022. The peak of infections, according to the INS, is expected between May–July (RCN Radio 04/04/2023). The INS has also announced that some municipalities in Arauca are at risk of an increase in malaria cases (INS 03/06/2023).

The hospital network in Arauca department has limited capacity to serve the population. This is one of the departments with the highest perinatal and late neonatal mortality rate (19.3 per 1,000 live births), above the national rate of 12.5 per 1,000 (INS 03/06/2023). As at May 2023, health service providers had only fulfilled an estimated 43% of their responsibilities to their users (Semana 03/05/2023). As a result of violence and attacks on medical missions, some health sector officials have also resigned from their posts, further limiting health access to the population (RCN Radio 26/01/2022; EE 11/11/2020).

### Impact on critical infrastructure

Floods have partially or totally damaged at least six schools in Arauca department during the 2023 rainy season. Four of these are in Arauquita, one in Saravena, and one in Fortul. This has led to the suspension of classes or rendered some school equipment unusable, preventing children from attending school (OCHA et al. 05/06/2023).

The number of kilometres of flood-affected roads is uncertain, but farmers and ranchers have mentioned that roads connecting some municipalities are flooded or likely to collapse (Llanera 10/06/2023; Defensoría del Pueblo 28/05/2023).

## DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS

### Rainy season and urban settlements

Because of its location in a territory of flood-prone savannahs, Arauca annually produces floods in several municipalities during the rainy season. In recent years, the establishment of settlements in areas close to rivers, which are at greater risk of flooding when the rivers overflow, has led to the rainy season having a bigger impact on the population (Semana 06/08/2018). Although reductions in rainfall levels are expected in some regions of the country, the Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies has predicted rainfall for Arauca within the historical average range for the current rainy season (IDEAM 19/05/2023).



## Dam damaged by floods in 2018

During the 2018 rainy season, Arauca experienced rainfall above the annual average. On some days, rainfall levels reached 420mm, much higher than the 300mm average (Semana 06/08/2018). As a result, the dam built to control the water levels of Arauca River, one of the main rivers in the department, broke. The lack of maintenance of the structures around the rivers accelerated its deterioration (El Tiempo 06/10/2018). Although some work has been done to fix the dam, it remains damaged, which has aggravated flooding in recent years (CONtexto Ganadero accessed 16/06/2023; Llanera 10/06/2023).

## COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

### Migration

Because of its position on the Colombian-Venezuelan border, Arauca is one of the departments with the highest presence of migrant and refugee populations. In January 2021, an estimated 14.9% (over 44,800 people) of the population in Arauca were Venezuelan citizens, making it the department in Colombia with the highest number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in proportion to its demographics (GIFMM/R4V 01/2021; DANE 02/2022). Venezuelan citizens comprise 40% of the total in informal settlements. Many of the settlements are close to rivers and more susceptible to the impact of flooding (OCHA et al. 05/06/2023). Refugees and migrants are estimated to make up at least 900 (close to 10%) of the flood-affected population, but the actual number is likely higher. Since many of these migrants have limited access to healthcare, those affected face increased vulnerability (OCHA et al. 15/05/2023 and 05/06/2023).

### Armed conflict

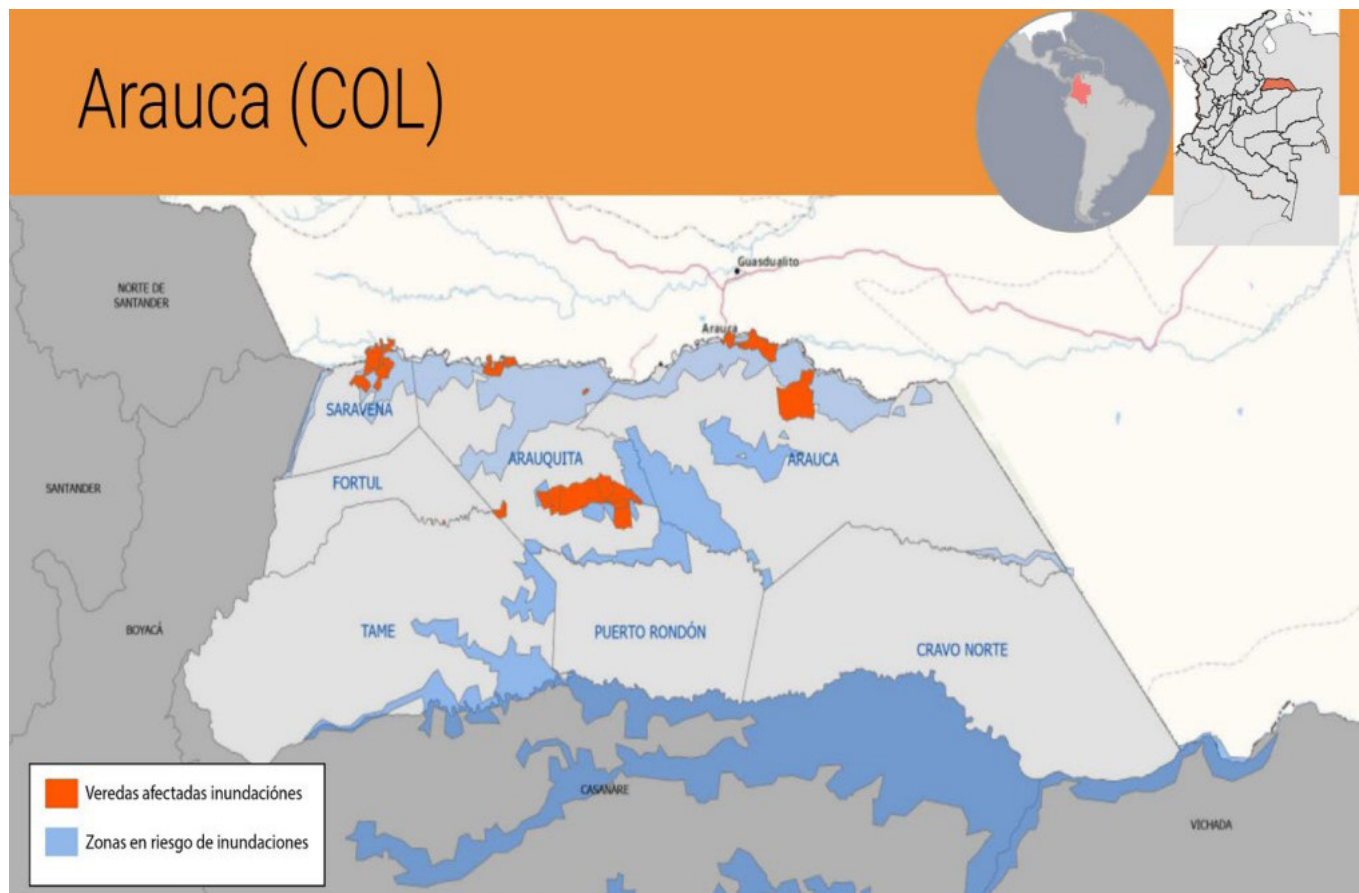
Armed groups, such as the ELN and a group of FARC-EP dissidents, are present in Arauca. Since the beginning of 2022, both armed groups have intermittently clashed in various municipalities of the department. This resulted in the displacement of at least 1,530 people in early 2022 (ACAPS 31/01/2022). While disputes between the two armed groups have subsided, in January 2023, there was renewed fighting in Araucuita. In the following months, the ELN has clashed with the Colombian army (El Tiempo 19/03/2023; Infobae 04/04/2023). These clashes have injured some civilians and displaced those trying to escape the violence (Infobae 19/03/2023).

The armed conflict in Arauca has affected humanitarian assistance in multiple ways. In 2020, Arauca was one of the eight departments with the most attacks on medical missions, including vehicle thefts, attacks on aid workers, and attacks on medical staff (Comisión de la Verdad 24/02/2022). In 2022, Arauca was once again one of the most constrained departments for humanitarian organisations (ICRC 22/03/2023). On 9 June 2023, all the workers in a medical mission were kidnapped after receiving a false emergency call from a village in Arauca. A ransom was then demanded for their release (La Voz del Cinaruco 09/06/2023). The presence of armed groups limits the humanitarian response in this context.

## FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

- Local governments, including the mayors' offices in Arauca, Fortul, and Saravena, as well as the governor's office in the department of Arauca, have offered NFIs and materials for the reconstruction of damaged structures (OCHA et al. 05/06/2023). They have also conducted health brigades on the prevention of communicable diseases during the rainy season (Llanera 11/06/2023).
- Organisations such as Primera Urgencia Internacional and Save the Children have delivered hygiene kits and NFIs to some of the affected communities (OCHA et al. 15/05/2023).
- The Local Coordination Team has expressed that there is still a lack of food for affected people, emergency education for children with suspended classes, and shelter and WASH facilities for evacuees (OCHA et al. 05/06/2023).
- On 15 and 16 June, a dialogue was held between the communities and the National Disaster Risk Unit (UNGRD), but the director of this institution did not attend, so no concrete solutions have been found to the flooding and the risk of it increasing in the coming months (La Prensa Araucana 18/06/2023; Infobae 18/06/2023).

## VILLAGES AFFECTED OR AT RISK OF FLOODING AS AT 5 JUNE



Source: OCHA et al. (05/06/2023)