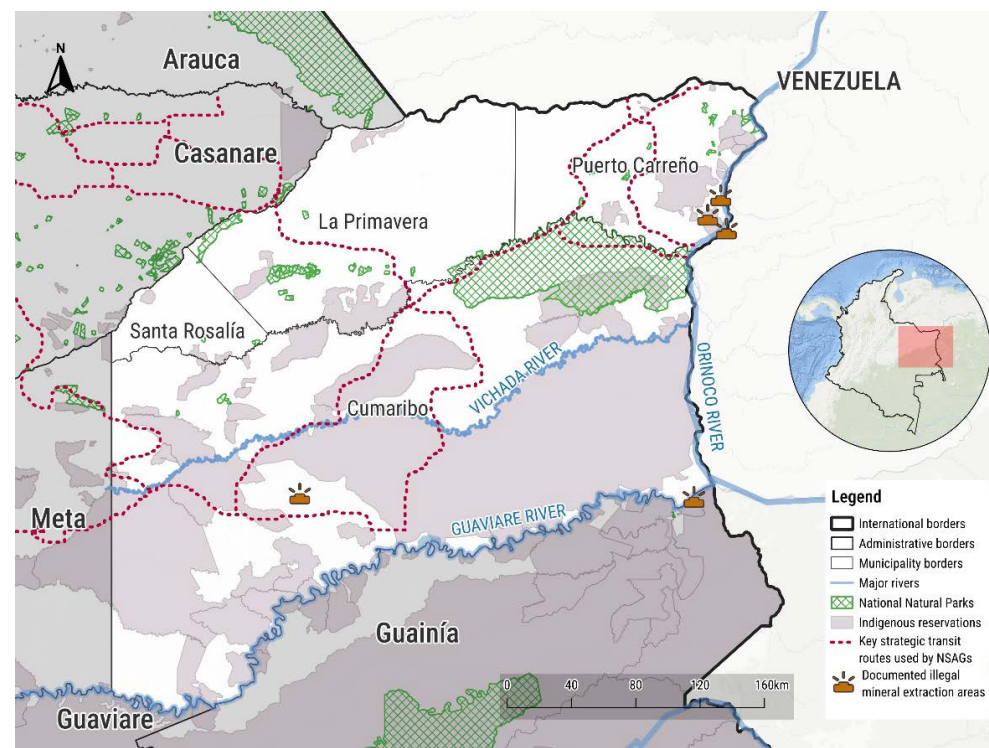


Humanitarian concerns in Vichada: anticipated impacts for 2026

KEY FINDINGS

- After the collapse of the non-aggression pact between the National Liberation Army (ELN) and Second Marquetalia (SM) in Vichada in August 2025, a territorial dispute erupted between the groups, increasing protection risks, including displacement and mobility restrictions. The impact has been most severe for riverine and border communities along the Venezuelan border.
- The 2026 elections pose high risks of armed coercion. Cumaribo remains at 'extreme risk' of fragmented violence between multiple non-state armed groups (NSAGs), creating territorial uncertainty. As in previous electoral periods, this classification highlights a volatile environment that facilitates systematic political co-optation.
- Shifting political dynamics in Venezuela are triggering spillover effects, including border closures and increased migration. This instability facilitates NSAG expansion into strategic corridors, escalating protection risks such as forced recruitment and the use of improvised explosive devices.
- Anticipated precipitation and temperatures anomalies between April–August 2026 are likely to trigger flooding (especially in June), wildfires (mostly during April–May), and localised dry conditions, affecting the health, livelihoods, and access to services of communities still recovering from the 2025 floods.
- The convergence of these factors signals an increase in the severity of humanitarian needs, with indigenous communities, children, and migrant and refugee populations facing the highest risks. The scale of the crisis is expected to surpass local response capacity, primarily affecting those targeted by systematic extortion in dispersed rural areas.

Map 1. Vichada, key contextual indicators



Sources: ACAPS using data from RUNAP (accessed 20/03/2026); Datos Abiertos (accessed 20/03/2026); HDX (accessed 19/03/2026); WB (accessed 19/03/2026); Amazon Underworld (06/11/2025 a and 06/11/2025 b); Indepaz (08/2025)

Note: mapped NSAG strategic transit routes comprise territories under NSAG control or dispute that fulfil key operational, economic, and military functions. The use of such routes extends beyond mobility and trafficking, also serving as areas of recruitment, social control, and selective violence (Indepaz 08/2025). Illegal mineral extraction symbols identify locations where the extraction of critical minerals has been recorded, including bauxite, cassiterite, coltan, copper, graphite, iron, manganese, nickel, rare earth elements, tungsten, and uranium. These activities are often situated within or near indigenous reservations and protected areas (Amazon Underworld 06/11/2025 a and 06/11/2025 b).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Aim

This report aims to analyse the potential humanitarian impacts and drivers of a deterioration in the humanitarian situation in Vichada department, Colombia, between May–August 2026, when national elections and climate events are expected to occur. The report seeks to identify the key risk factors and likely implications for humanitarian needs across sectors.

Scope

This analysis applies an intersectional approach by disaggregating population-specific needs and considering how humanitarian impacts may differ across populations based on ethnicity, gender, migration status, and age. Particular attention is paid to populations with heightened exposure to shocks, including indigenous communities, children and adolescents, and migrants and refugees. The analysis covers May–August 2026 and focuses on emerging dynamics with the potential to contribute to increasing humanitarian needs.

Methodology

This analysis is based on a review of secondary data, including over 112 reports, humanitarian and government assessments, and protection monitoring outputs relevant to Vichada’s humanitarian context. 12 key informant interviews were also conducted between February–March 2026 with humanitarian organisations, public institutions, and community-based NGOs operating in or monitoring different municipalities in the department. These interviews provided insight into risks, operational constraints, and emerging trends.

Findings from secondary sources and interviews were triangulated to identify consistent patterns and risk factors. The analysis focuses on signals of potential deterioration, sectoral impacts, and humanitarian needs.

Data on access to services is based on the 2024 Quality of Life Survey and Multidimensional Poverty Index. Municipal-level data relies on the most recent available information from 2018, which may affect interpretation of current needs.

Limitations and information gaps

This analysis is subject to several data limitations and information gaps, affecting the ability to fully assess humanitarian risks and needs in Vichada. The absence of data disaggregated by age, gender, or disability limits assessment of differentiated protection risks and sectoral impacts. Available information often provides only aggregated figures, limiting analysis of differentiated impacts on specific population groups.

There is also limited information on migrants, refugees, and LGBTQ+ populations in the department. These groups may face specific protection risks, barriers to accessing services, and impacts from NSAG actions, but available datasets and reports provide limited insight into their humanitarian situation (DP 04/12/2025).

Protection-related incidents are likely significantly underreported, particularly in relation to gender-based violence (GBV) and the recruitment of children and adolescents by armed groups. Fear of retaliation, stigma, weak reporting mechanisms, and limited institutional presence in remote areas contribute to underreporting. Reported incidents may underestimate the true scale of protection risks.

Finally, there is limited evidence regarding the humanitarian implications of the US intervention in Venezuela, which directly borders Vichada, Colombia. The lack of information constrains assessment of the potential impacts of this intervention on humanitarian dynamics in the department.

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Terminology

Non-state armed groups (NSAGs): entities not officially affiliated with the state but organised enough to engage in hostilities recognised under international law as ‘armed conflict’, often with political motivations. The following NSAGs are recognised in Colombia’s humanitarian ecosystem and mentioned in this report.

- **Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) dissident groups:** groups of fighters from the former FARC-EP who have opposed or disagreed with the peace process with the Colombian Government since 2016 (InSight Crime 11/03/2024).
- **Estado Mayor Central (EMC):** an alliance of various groups that used to belong to the now-demobilised FARC-EP, led by ‘Ivan Mordisco’ and ‘Gentil Duarte’ (El País 16/04/2023; InSight Crime 14/06/2024).
- **Second Marquetalia (SM):** the second (alongside the EMC) of the two alliances of armed groups that belonged to the now-demobilised FARC-EP, led by former commanders ‘Iván Márquez’, ‘Jesús Santrich’, ‘Romaña’, and ‘El Paisa’ (CORE 26/07/2021; El País 21/04/2023; EE 09/02/2024).
- **National Liberation Army (ELN):** established in the 1960s and expanding into Venezuela, operating across both countries (InSight Crime 12/01/2026).
- **Gaitanist Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AGC):** established after the demobilisation of the paramilitary group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, also known as the Ejército Gaitanista de Colombia (EGC) (Badillo and Mijares 16/01/2022).
- **The Popular Revolutionary Army of Colombia (ERPAC):** a right-wing armed group established to combat left-wing guerrillas, operating through networks in Venezuela and Brazil. Following its formal demobilisation in 2011, two rival factions emerged: Bloque Meta and Libertadores del Vichada (InSight Crime 10/03/2017).
- **Puntilleros:** Formed from the merger of Bloque Meta and Libertadores del Vichada under the command of ‘Puntilla’, controlling key drug trafficking routes from Meta to the Venezuelan border (InSight Crime 14/03/2018). However, elements of Libertadores del Vichada subsequently broke away, reconstituting as a separate splinter faction that continues to oversee cocaine cultivation, drug trafficking routes, and a network of hired killers (InSight Crime 23/03/2021).

CRISIS OVERVIEW

Vichada is in Colombia’s eastern Orinoquia region, bordering Arauca, Guainía, Meta, and Venezuela along the Orinoco River. Vichada shares a 529km border with Venezuela across Puerto Carreño and Cumaribo municipalities (Legiscomex 19/09/2025). In 2026, the department has an estimated population of 154,000, over 69.5% of whom belong to indigenous groups including the Curripaco, Piaroa, and Sikuani peoples (DANE 30/07/2025; CINEP 19/09/2025).

Low population density, dispersed settlements, and limited access to basic services characterise the territory, which is divided into four municipalities across savannah and river ecosystems: Cumaribo, La Primavera, Puerto Carreño (the department’s capital), and Santa Rosalía (OCHA 03/03/2026; IDEAM 16/03/2026).

Subsistence agriculture, livestock, and fishing are the department’s main sources of livelihood. In rural areas with limited state presence, illegal economies – including drug trafficking and coltan-linked mining – have gained prominence, particularly among communities along the Venezuelan border (GFI/CEALDES 18/12/2025; Amazon Underworld 19/12/2025). Economic marginalisation creates dependency that NSAGs exploit to consolidate territorial control. This coercive environment is currently aggravated by the 2026 electoral cycle, as NSAGs leverage existing gaps to influence local governance, further intensifying protection risks and the deprivation of essential services for civilian populations (DP 28/10/2025; OCHA 03/03/2026; Ministry of Health 31/01/2024).

On the border, geopolitical uncertainty following the US military operation in Venezuela in January 2026 could heighten risks of armed group spillover, population movement, and shifts in control over illegal economies, especially mining routes (GFI/CEALDES 18/12/2025; EHP Colombia et al. 13/01/2026). Precipitation and temperature anomalies between April–August 2026 are likely to trigger flooding, wildfires, and dry spells, further reducing access to basic needs and services, as the department is still recovering from the impact of 2025 floods (El Morichal 05/08/2025; DP 28/10/2025; IDEAM 16/03/2026).

The convergence of the increase NSAG violence during electoral periods and instability linked to events in Venezuela could trigger multiple humanitarian risks. Alongside armed violence, structural vulnerability and anticipated climate hazards are likely to drive a deterioration in humanitarian conditions across Vichada between May–August 2026.

DRIVERS

Democratic elections, NSAG influence, and repositioning

NSAGs' strategic repositioning following the August 2025 collapse of the ELN–SM non-aggression pact is a driver of this crisis. This rupture has transformed the department from a zone of relative stability into a context of intensified territorial dispute, increasing protection risks including confinement, mobility restrictions, and displacement (KII 24/02/2026 b; Cambio 06/11/2025; DP 28/10/2025). The 2026 electoral cycle (May–June) acts as a key catalyst, as NSAGs exploit institutional fragility to consolidate social control and secure illegal economic corridors through the coercion of civilians.

The breakdown of the ELN–SM alliance is driving targeted violence and mistrust among NSAGs, reinforcing efforts to impose social control over communities in order to protect strategic drug trafficking and coltan mining interests (DP 28/10/2025). Vichada's strategic geographic location has been historically affected by conflict dynamics linked to territorial disputes between NSAGs and Colombian security forces (UBPD 12/2024). The current reconfiguration, driven by coltan extraction and commercialisation, has attracted new NSAGs seeking territorial control. This expansion increases the risk of confrontations and intensifies control over civilians, including attempts to influence local governance structures (DP 28/10/2025; Semana 22/03/2025).

The 2026 presidential elections provide a seasonal opportunity for NSAGs to violently enforce political and social alignment (La Silla Vacía 07/07/2025). This influence is operationalised through specific mechanisms, including voter coercion, candidate intimidation, and the presence of armed individuals near polling areas to restrict mobility. Evidence from the 2022 electoral cycle confirms this pattern, as Puerto Carreño and Cumaribo were classified as high and medium risk because of similar dynamics of armed coercion and territorial uncertainty (MOE 25/05/2022). NSAGs leverage these periods to consolidate social control of community leaders and local registration processes (MOE 04/02/2026).

Cumaribo municipality faces the department's highest electoral risk, with an extreme risk of violence-related factors (MOE 04/02/2026; La Silla Vacía 05/02/2026). Similar patterns and NSAG dynamics are observed in neighbouring departments – Arauca, Casanare, and Meta – where atypical electoral participation suggests coercion (MOE 04/02/2026; Vichada Al Día 13/02/2026; La Silla Vacía 30/05/2025).

The 2025 imprisonment of Vichada's former governor for embezzlement significantly eroded state legitimacy and weakened administrative capacity, enabling NSAGs to substitute institutional authority through coercive mechanisms, including influencing voting behaviour during the 2026 elections (MOE 04/02/2026; La Silla Vacía 05/02/2026 and 30/05/2025; El Morichal 13/02/2026).

Electoral dynamics are also likely to reduce emergency response capacity, as administrative turnover and legal restrictions under Law 996/2005, which prohibits direct contracting and inter-institutional agreements four months before elections, limit operational continuity and flexible funding for department authorities to address displacement or climate-related hazards, particularly during May–August (Secretaría Jurídica 05/10/2022; KII 24/02/2026 c; KII 12/02/2026).

Elections also trigger movements of indigenous communities and migrants and refugees in mixed migration flows toward urban centres, such as Puerto Carreño, creating risks of political manipulation by armed and political groups, including misuse of identity registration processes (KII 26/02/2026 b; KII 24/02/2026 d; El Morichal 16/01/2026).

These movements result in temporary overcrowding and the deliberate deprivation of basic services in public spaces, as local institutions lack the staff and resources to manage the surge in needs (KII 23/02/2026; KII 24/02/2026 c). The concentration of populations is likely to increase health risks from vector-borne diseases, sanitation constraints, and exposure to mosquito, alongside protection incidents such as GBV, while exceeding the capacity of local institutions.

Political instability in Venezuela

Following the 23 January US military intervention in Venezuela and capture of its president, which forced a political transition, NSAGs used the opportunity of diminished border oversight by the Venezuelan army to consolidate their hold over strategic corridors. Such actions triggered two humanitarian consequences in Vichada: a surge in mixed migration flows through informal paths, surpassing local response capacities in Puerto Carreño and Cumaribo, and an escalation in protection risks as NSAGs moved deeper into Colombian and Venezuelan territory to secure illegal economic interests (KII 20/02/2026; La Silla Vacía 14/01/2026; InSight Crime 08/08/2025).

Unlike previous patterns, current arrivals consist of individuals fleeing active confrontations between NSAGs. In Venezuela's Yacapana National Park, NSAG efforts to secure illegal mining interests have led to an intensified presence, escalating protection risks and causing displacement as populations are forced to seek safety in Colombian territory (KII 20/02/2026; KII 27/02/2026 b).

As populations flee the strategic repositioning of armed groups, displacement could affect all border departments (KII 27/02/2026 b). These flows are already significantly overstressing Vichada's fragile basic services, particularly WASH and health. The lack of official registration through informal crossing paths creates a protection risk, as migrants and refugees from Venezuela and indigenous communities remain excluded from formal assistance and face higher exposure to recruitment, trafficking, and labour exploitation in illegal mining sectors.

Meetings between the ELN and SM in Apure, Venezuela, to coordinate the cross-border extraction and commercialisation of minerals also aggravates protection risks for migrant and refugee populations (El Colombiano 28/04/2025). In an anticipated risk scenario, increased international military presence, specifically US forces, could trigger a defensive military response from both Venezuelan and Colombian state forces. Such escalation would likely push NSAGs deeper into Vichada in order to maintain control of strategic transit routes and illegal economy corridors, further increasing risks for civilians and limiting humanitarian access (KII 27/02/2026 b).

Without a robust institutional response, the convergence of NSAG territorial expansion and the arrival of undocumented populations in Vichada will likely result in a prolonged humanitarian crisis in which protection risks are compounded by a context with already limited access to essential services.

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Climate change and natural hazards

Vichada faces growing exposure to precipitation and temperature anomalies driven by climate change, as well as variability from El Niño and La Niña, leading to frequent flooding, landslides, and dry spells. Decades of intensive farming and livestock practices have degraded the environment, increasing vulnerability to climate shocks. Between 1985–2017, the department lost 60% of its forest cover (Vitar-Mendoza et al. 21/12/2021; MADS 22/04/2023; USAID 29/11/2023).

Anticipated precipitation and temperature anomalies between May–August 2026 are likely to trigger flooding during peak rainfall and wildfire risk season, affecting access to WASH, health, and education services across Vichada and potentially increasing food insecurity, health, and protection needs. Communities are still recovering from the severe flooding and wildfires across the Colombia–Venezuela border in 2025. This remains a critical concern as, since March 2025, over 124,000 people, primarily from indigenous, rural, and migrant and refugee communities, within the Orinoquia and Amazonia regions have been affected by river overflows and increased rainfall (OCHA 28/08/2025).

Flood risk

Precipitation forecasts anticipate about 20% above-average rainfall (25–50mm) in southwest Vichada in June, increasing flood risk at the peak of the rainy season. The same forecasts show favourable conditions for near-average or below-average precipitation in April, May, July, and August, which could increase flood risk. These forecasts provide seasonal averages, however, not rainfall distribution throughout the season (IDEAM 16/03/2026). This means rainfall could occur in short, intense episodes instead of being evenly distributed, limiting soil moisture retention and increasing the risk of flooding and landslides.

Between May–June 2025, intense rainfall affected over 11,600 people, including more than 4,700 indigenous people, 736 rural workers, and around 1,030 migrants and refugees (OCHA 17/07/2025; El Morichal 05/08/2025). Over 1,600 families were displaced, nearly 4,500 hectares of farmland were destroyed, more than 1,600 homes were

damaged, seven bridges collapsed, and multiple primary and secondary roads were destroyed (El Morichal 05/08/2025; OCHA 29/07/2025). Flooding also damaged at least 16 educational institutions, disrupting access to schooling and school feeding programmes while also restricting mobility and access to health services (El Morichal

05/08/2025). Puerto Carreño was the worst affected municipality, with around 5,200 people affected (OCHA 17/07/2025). Families still recovering from the 2025 floods have been left exposed to 2026 hazards.

Figure 1. Climate forecast matrix, Vichada (April–August 2026)

Period	Rainfall anomalies	Temperatures anomalies	Wildfire risk
APRIL 2026	● Deficit Precipitation 25% (up to 100mm) below historical averages in central Vichada	● Regular Near historical averages ($\pm 0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$)	● High Risk remains elevated because of precipitation deficits
MAY 2026	● Deficit Precipitation 50% (up to 200mm) below historical averages in eastern a western Vichada	● Regular Near historical averages ($\pm 0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$)	● High Risk remains elevated because of precipitation deficits
JUNE 2026	● Excess Precipitation 20% (25-50mm) above historical average in southwest Vichada	● Regular Near historical averages ($\pm 0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$)	● Moderate In areas receiving low precipitation
JULY 2026	● Regular Near historical averages ($\pm 20\%$, up to $\pm 75\text{mm}$) across most of Vichada	● High Between $1.5 - 2.0^{\circ}\text{C}$ above historical averages	● Moderate In areas receiving low precipitation, because of high temperatures
AUGUST 2026	● Deficit 30-40%, (75-150 mm) below historical averages (mortheastern Vichada) near average elsewhere	● High Between $1.5 - 2.0^{\circ}\text{C}$ above historical averages	● Moderate In areas receiving low precipitation, because of high temperatures

Sources: ACAPS using data from IDEAM (16/03/2026, 09/03/2026, and 10/03/2026)

Note: although this climate forecast draws on official publications from Colombia's Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology, and Environmental Studies, the reports vary depending on the availability of information. ACAPS interpreted these forecasts by aggregating monthly outlooks into the impact matrix to identify sustained humanitarian risks throughout the period.

Drought risk

Seasonal forecasts anticipate 50% precipitation deficits in May across Vichada. Following a period of above and near-average precipitation in June and July, this deficit trend is expected to resume in August, with precipitation in northeastern Vichada expected to be between 30–40% (75–150mm) below historical averages, increasing drought risks (IDEAM 09/03/2026 and 16/03/2026).

Dry conditions are likely to be compounded by El Niño, which is expected to develop by the end of September and may further suppress precipitation in October–November (NOAA 13/04/2026). Access to water and sanitation may also be limited in areas affected by rainfall deficits, increasing health risks, with pressure over already limited access to water in rural settlements compounded by outdated water infrastructure and rapid population growth in densely populated urban areas (El Morichal 03/02/2024). In 2024, Vichada experienced a severe food security crisis, largely driven by El Niño impacts on local food production and availability, specifically in subsistence agriculture (ACAPS 07/03/2024).

Wildfire risk

The combination of below-average precipitation in May and August and above-average temperatures in July and August mean the risk of wildfires is likely to remain moderate to high beyond the peak season, which typically ends in March (IDEAM 09/03/2026). From February–March 2026, Vichada's wildfire crisis escalated from a localised threat in the north to a departmental emergency (IDEAM 10/03/2026 and 10/02/2026). By 10 March, all four of Vichada's municipalities had been placed on red alert, reflecting a critical risk across the entire territory. This represented a rapid deterioration from February, when southern municipalities, such as Cumaribo, maintained in low alert (IDEAM 10/03/2026, and 10/02/2026).

As wildfire smoke can travel long distances through atmospheric circulation, its health impacts often extend beyond areas directly affected by fires (KII 25/02/2026; OPS 06/02/2025). In the first half of 2025 and the first months of 2026, wildfires in Venezuela significantly deteriorated air quality in Puerto Carreño and surrounding cities, where monitoring systems registered yellow and orange alerts for fine particles carried by winds (KII 25/02/2026; OPS 06/02/2025; Pulzo 10/03/2026). In Vichada, these conditions compounded humanitarian risks by increasing population movements to avoid

the smoke and other wildfire effects, increasing the use of temporary improvised shelters in which overcrowding, limited service provision, and exposure to violence increase (KII 25/02/2026).

Smoke from wildfires contains high concentrations of airborne pollutants generated by biomass burning, including fine particulate matter, volatile organic compounds, and nitrogen oxides, which pose significant public health risks (KII 25/02/2026; OPS 06/02/2025; El País 23/02/2026). Fine particles are particularly hazardous because they can penetrate the lungs and contribute to respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses (OPS 06/02/2025; Pulzo 10/03/2026).

Intentional fires have also been reported in the savannah ecosystem as part of agricultural land-clearing practices. Rural communities burn land based on the belief that fire improves pasture quality for livestock grazing, although the effectiveness of this practice remains uncertain and can significantly increase wildfire risks during dry, high temperature periods, especially May–July (IDEAM 09/03/2026; KII 23/02/2026).

These dynamics occur alongside broader environmental pressures linked to ecosystem degradation, including the expansion of monoculture plantations of eucalyptus and acacia across thousands of hectares of savannah, further intensifying the degradation of Vichada's ecosystem and contributing to climate vulnerability and livelihoods risks in the border region (Mutante 09/06/2025).

NSAGs and Illegal economies

In Vichada, the fragmentation of NSAGs and increasing competition over illegal economies are intensifying territorial control, driving protection risks mainly for the Barí, Baruyo, Guainay, and Mapoyo indigenous communities from Venezuela to Puerto Carreño (KII 24/02/2026 d). As multiple groups compete for strategic corridors and extractive areas, communities face heightened risks of displacement, mobility restrictions, extortion, and retaliation, particularly in remote areas with limited state presence. These dynamics are likely to further constrain humanitarian access and reduce coping capacity.

The ELN and SM maintain a presence in Vichada, influencing key illegal economies across the border. The ELN also operates from neighbouring Venezuela, engaging in gold mining and cross-border activities, while SM factions are present in the

Cumaribo and Puerto Carreño municipalities (KII 20/02/2026; Indepaz 08/2025). Since 2025, additional NSAGs, including groups linked to the EMC and smaller structures such as ERPAC, Puntilleros, and Libertadores del Vichada, have attempted to expand into the department, contributing to its fragmented context (DP 28/10/2025; El Morichal 06/08/2025; Ministry of Health 31/01/2024).

The NSAG presence in Vichada is linked to the department's strategic location for illegal economies, particularly trafficking and illegal mining. The department is part of a key corridor connecting the Orinoquia region with Venezuela and Brazil via the Guaviare, Meta, and Orinoco rivers, facilitating the movement of illegal goods (GFI/CEALDES 18/12/2025; Indepaz 08/2025). Control over these routes enables NSAGs to consolidate cross-border trafficking and exert social and economic control over riverine communities, particularly in areas with limited state presence (GFI/CEALDES 18/12/2025; CINEP 19/09/2025; UBPD 12/2024). This control is enforced through extortion, recruitment, threats, and mobility restrictions, limiting access to services and livelihoods (KII 25/02/2026).

Since 2020, illegal mining, particularly of coltan and mineral-rich sands, has become a key driver attracting NSAGs (Voragine 19/01/2026). Vichada and neighbouring Guainía department contain some of the largest coltan reserves in Colombia, primarily located in remote forest areas within nature reserves designated under Law 2 of 1959 as protected zones despite the presence of mineral resources (GFI/CEALDES 18/12/2025).

NSAGs control the extraction, transport, and fraudulent legalisation of minerals prior to international export (GFI/CEALDES 18/12/2025; Caracol 22/05/2025; Semana 22/03/2025). High demand for coltan, widely used in electronic components, creates strong financial incentives for armed groups to control mining areas. It is estimated that coltan trafficking can generate up to USD 130 million per month (approximately COP 455 billion) in international markets and about USD 45,000 (approximately COP 158 million) in illegal markets, reinforcing competition for territorial control over extraction (El Colombiano 28/04/2025; Semana 22/03/2025). This increases armed presence in extraction zones and intensifies pressure on communities via coercion, forced collaboration, and mobility restrictions.

Indigenous and rural populations along strategic river corridors are disproportionately affected by these dynamics. In areas such as Aceitico, Casuarito, La Primavera, La Venturosa, and border zones around Puerto Carreño and southern Cumaribo, communities face heightened protection risks linked to armed group mobility and territorial control (KII 27/02/2026 a; KII 25/02/2026).

Illegal mining also causes environmental damage through deforestation, riverbed alteration, and water contamination (Voragine 19/01/2026; El Morichal 06/08/2025; GFI/CEALDES 18/12/2025). These impacts reduce access to safe water and food sources, affecting health and livelihoods for communities dependent on river systems. Environmental degradation further increases vulnerability to climate shocks, reducing coping capacity in contexts of flooding or drought.

Looking ahead to May–August 2026, continued NSAG fragmentation and sustained demand for illegal economies are likely to intensify competition for territorial control. This is expected to increase protection incidents, including displacement, mobility restrictions, and threats against community leaders and civilians perceived to support rival groups (KII 20/02/2026). Confinements have already been reported since late 2025, particularly in border areas, including Aceitico, Casuarito, La Primavera, La Venturosa, Nueva Antioquia, and Puerto Murillo (KII 27/02/2026 b; KII 25/02/2026; KII 24/02/2026 b). These dynamics are likely to further restrict humanitarian access and limit access to basic services, especially in remote border areas that humanitarian workers can no longer enter, aggravating humanitarian needs.

Inadequate basic service coverage

Structural limitations affect access to basic services – such as health, WASH, and food security – in Vichada and will likely aggravate the impact of armed violence in May–August 2026. Extreme geographic isolation, high population dispersion, and limited institutional presence constrain access, both logistically and protection-related, to healthcare, water, electricity, and education, reducing communities' capacity to cope with shocks and delaying humanitarian response (KII 24/02/2026 c; 3iS/OCHA 31/07/2024).

Limited infrastructure further weakens service continuity in periods of increased demand. Puerto Carreño remains disconnected from the national electricity grid and experienced an estimated 1,986 hours without electricity in 2024, equivalent to

three months, affecting communications, food refrigeration, and health facilities (KII 02/03/2026; Mutante 09/06/2025). These disruptions are likely to limit the functioning of health facilities, water systems, and communications during periods of heightened violence or displacement. At the same time, US funding cuts in 2025 reduced humanitarian operations, widening gaps in service provision and response capacity (KII 24/02/2026 c; ACAPS 16/04/2025).

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation remains critically low, with 70.9% of households lacking improved water sources in 2024 (DANE 22/04/2025 a; Ministry of Health 13/12/2025; OECD 28/01/2026). These conditions heighten the risk of waterborne diseases, such as diarrhoea, which directly contribute to worsening malnutrition among children under five (3iS/OCHA 31/07/2024). Consequently, providing safe water remains a priority humanitarian action to address the underlying drivers of acute malnutrition in Vichada (Ministry of Health 13/12/2025).

Table 1. Access to services in Vichada, its municipalities, and at the national level

Indicator	National	Vichada	Puerto Carreño	La Primavera	Cumaribo	Santa Rosalía
% of households with electricity coverage	98.9%	43.4%	75.4%	68.5%	13.2%	68.8%
% of households with access to cooking gas	70.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
% of households with access to improved water sources	91.4%	29.1%	67.7%	84.7%	20.9%	88.0%
% of households with sewerage coverage	76.2%	0.3%	10.0%	5.0%	9.2%	1.7%

Source: ACAPS using data from DANE (24/04/2025, 30/08/2019, 22/04/2025 b, and 22/04/2025 a)

Note: Under Colombia's National Administrative Department of Statistics standards, a household is deprived of access to 'improved water sources' if it lacks aqueduct services. In rural contexts, however, households using pumped water from wells are considered to have an improved source, whereas those relying on rain, rivers, springs, or wells without pumps remain classified as deprived (DANE 22/04/2025 c).

Health and education access are also severely constrained. Health infrastructure is limited to a single secondary hospital in Puerto Carreño, while most rural health posts remain non-functional, aggravating the severity of access constraints (KII 26/02/2026 b; El Morichal 22/09/2025). Long travel times – up to eight hours – to access secondary education contribute to high dropout rates in rural and indigenous communities (DANE 22/04/2025 b; CINEP 19/09/2025). In contexts of increased insecurity and restricted mobility, these limitations are likely to further reduce access to essential services and increase unmet needs.

Conditions are most critical in Cumaribo, which is projected to host 74.4% of Vichada's population by 2026, the majority of whom live in rural and indigenous communities. 44.6% lack health insurance and only 11% have access to aqueduct systems (DANE 30/08/2019 and 29/02/2024). The NSAG presence and high risk of electoral violence are likely to further restrict access to services and amplify protection and humanitarian risks in this municipality (MOE 04/02/2026; KII 25/02/2026).

POTENTIAL EFFECTS ON HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

Protection

Protection risks increased in 2025–2026, particularly displacement, confinement, child recruitment, and GBV, affecting indigenous communities, children, migrants and refugees, and people in border areas and along river corridors. These risks are driven by competition between NSAGs following the breakdown of alliances, which has intensified territorial control, confrontations, and pressure on civilian populations.

The rupture, which ended a two-year arrangement of shared control over drug trafficking and illegal mining routes, triggered a reconfiguration of the armed group presence across the department (KII 20/02/2026; DP 28/10/2025; Amazon Underworld 19/12/2025). As groups reposition to secure territorial control, the likelihood of armed confrontations and displacement have increased, particularly in areas close to the Meta River where the border with Arauca is shared, and lead to Venezuela, where ERPAC and Puntilleros have been identified (KII 20/02/2026; KII 27/02/2026 b; DP 28/10/2025).

Control over river corridors is key to shaping protection risks. The Meta River functions as a strategic transport route for NSAGs, facilitating the movement of people, weapons, and goods linked to illegal economies. As a result, communities located along these routes face exposure to coercion, recruitment, and mobility restrictions (KII 20/02/2026; KII 27/02/2026 a). These dynamics are likely to persist during the outlook period as competition for control over corridors continues.

The use of drones further aggravates protection risks. NSAGs use drones to monitor populations and survey or attack rival groups, a practice not reported in Vichada before 2025 (DP 28/10/2025; KII 24/02/2026 c; KII 25/02/2026). This increases communities' exposure to violence and surveillance, while also contributing to fear and psychological distress. Fear of reprisals and distrust of institutions discourage communities from reporting incidents or seeking assistance, limiting access to protection services and increasing underreporting (EHP Colombia/OCHA 03/03/2026; KII 26/02/2026 a).

Puerto Carreño's role as the department capital and its strategic location on the border with Venezuela have contributed to its consolidation as a key transit hub for illegal mining economies. Puerto Carreño's geographic position facilitates cross-border mobility and a concentration of economic activity, increasing the presence of NSAGs in both the capital's neighbourhoods and peri-urban areas. At border points such as Aceitico and neighbourhoods such as Simón Bolívar, the limited presence of public institutions increases exposure to protection threats (KII 26/02/2026 a; DP 28/10/2025).

Protection risks are expected to worsen as regional instability linked to the US intervention in Venezuela and Colombia's electoral period contribute to increased NSAG activity. Armed groups are likely to intensify control over communities to secure territorial dominance and economic interests. In this context, by 2025, several protection risks had been identified at levels significantly higher than national averages, including incidence of sexual violence (55.17%) and child recruitment (30.47%) (ICBF 08/04/2025).

Recruitment and use of children

Significant underreporting caused by fear of reprisals, institutional mistrust, and geographic isolation mean that official figures on the recruitment and use of children remain low (KII 26/02/2026 a; KII 12/02/2026). In 2025, 86 cases of children associated with violence were recorded, although only 16 people reported these incidents and only 14 were found, further illustrating the scale of underreporting (OCHA 03/03/2026).

The gap in official statistics suggests that available figures represent minimum estimates not reflective of the real scale of recruitment in Vichada. Indigenous minors living in remote areas are particularly exposed to recruitment because of their proximity to strategic trafficking corridors and the limited institutional presence in their areas (KII 25/02/2026; ICBF 28/11/2025; MAPP/OEA 02/12/2025).

NSAGs currently employ different recruitment strategies: using social media platforms such as TikTok, WhatsApp, and Facebook to display weapons and money, providing children with positions of power among their peers, and expanding recruitment beyond areas of direct territorial control (ACAPS 05/09/2025; KII 24/02/2026 d). Since 2025, NSAGs in Vichada have introduced children to drone operation as an initial point of engagement, integrating technological training into recruitment processes (KII 26/02/2026 a). NSAGs' proximity to schools further exposes children and adolescents to recruitment and other protection risks around schools and through peer networks (LEE 09/04/2025; KII 20/02/2026).

Recruitment is also closely linked to socioeconomic conditions in Vichada, particularly in rural and border areas. In 2024, Vichada's multidimensional poverty reached 20.6% in rural areas compared to 7.4% in urban centres, and up to 50.3% among migrant and refugee populations (Ministry of Health 31/01/2024). NSAGs exploit existing economic constraints by offering small incentives, sometimes as low as COP 2,000 (USD 0.50), as well as food and school supplies. These incentives influence families' coping strategies, as recruitment may be perceived as a means to alleviate household economic stress or a driver of forced migration to avoid such risk (KII 24/02/2026 d; KII 12/02/2026). Consequently, limited access to livelihoods significantly increases children's exposure to recruitment in remote areas.

In November 2025, seven indigenous children were taken from the Cerro Vita settlement to Venezuela (KII 20/02/2026; KII 26/02/2026 a). To prevent recruitment, families are increasingly implementing coping strategies such as emergency school enrolment or individual displacement to remove children from areas of NSAG influence (KII 24/02/2026 d).

“Young people are being taken from Carreño to be trained in Venezuela, and positioned along the border. Cases include a family that paid extortion to free a minor and an indigenous community that organised collectively to recover a recruited child.” (KII 26/02/2026 a)

Gender-based violence

The presence of NSAGs aggravates risks of GBV by contributing to patterns of sexual violence against and exploitation of women, adolescent girls, and children. Between 2024–2025, reported cases of sexual violence increased 17% in Vichada, with Puerto Carreño as the municipality with the highest number of cases (Ministry of Defence accessed 18/03/2025). Although available data is limited because of underreporting, current conditions suggest a higher risk of GBV, particularly in areas with a sustained NSAG presence and territorial control.

These dynamics increase exposure to violence by imposing mobility restrictions, confinement, and control over communities, often forcing survivors to remain in unsafe environments with perpetrators. Risks disproportionately affect indigenous, migrant, and refugee populations, who face economic precarity, social marginalisation, and limited access to protection services. Notably, 77% of GBV cases in 2024 involved Venezuelan nationals, particularly exposed because of their irregular status (ICBF 08/04/2025; Ministry of Health 31/01/2024). The combination of NSAG presence, territorial competition, and limited institutional capacity is likely to increase GBV risks during the outlook period, particularly for populations already facing barriers to accessing protection and health services.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is significantly aggravated by NSAG-imposed confinement and mobility restrictions. Although often underreported or normalised within certain social and cultural practices, IPV worsens in such contexts because women are forced to remain in prolonged proximity to perpetrators. In 2024, 76% of GBV reported in Vichada occurred in survivors’ houses and 51% of survivors

lived with their perpetrators, highlighting how restricted mobility and social control increase exposure to violence (KII 27/02/2026 b; KII 26/02/2026 b; Valledupar Chamber of Commerce 12/06/2025). These patterns indicate that social control mechanisms not only increase exposure to IPV but also systematically reduce access to support services, leaving women in unsafe private spaces with limited reporting options.

Early unions and coercive sexual practices linked to recruitment dynamics expose girls in Vichada to significant protection and health risks (KII 24/02/2026 b; KII 24/02/2026 d). NSAGs use relationships with girls as a form of control or recruitment strategy, increasing risks of sexual violence and exploitation. These dynamics contribute to higher rates of adolescent pregnancy, associated increased maternal health complications because of incomplete physical development, and long-term impacts on education and livelihoods. Vichada is disproportionately affected, with adolescent births accounting for 24.4% of total births in the department, above the national average of 15% (LEE 25/10/2025).

In 2025, 159 cases were registered under the Administrative Processes for the Restoration of Rights, 110 of which were sexual violence related (EHP Colombia/OCHA 03/02/2026). Indigenous and migrant and refugee children, specifically in Puerto Carreño, face heightened risks, particularly those living on the streets or exposed to begging and substance use, which increases their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse (EHP Colombia/OCHA 03/02/2026). The NSAG expansion into urban areas indicates children’s increased exposure sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly in contexts where protection services remain limited.

In 2025, there were reports of trafficking in persons (TIP) networks and sexual exploitation in Puerto Carreño, including cross-border transfers of women and girls for sexual exploitation (KII 24/02/2026 c; El Morichal 05/11/2025). In Puerto Carreño, there are severe protection concerns around girls living with HIV linked to sexual exploitation, recruitment of children with disabilities, and restricted access to sexual and reproductive health services because of NSAG control. Sexual violence is likely underreported as a result of barriers to healthcare access, confinement, and threats against communities and health personnel (KII 26/02/2026 b; DP 04/12/2025).

Indigenous girls are particularly targeted by networks linked to narcotics trafficking and illegal mining, frequently exposed to sexual violence and forced labour (Indepaz 08/2025). Most GBV incidents occur in private spaces and remain significantly

underreported owing to stigma and fear. This gap is aggravated by a critical lack of GBV response services at both department and municipal levels. Available prevention and response pathways are insufficient to cover remote areas, leaving survivors with almost no access to justice, specialised healthcare, or protection services in the face of escalating risks (KII 12/02/2026; Valledupar Chamber of Commerce 12/06/2025).

“Several mothers have been disappeared, instrumentalised, or pressured by armed groups, forcing them to flee their territories to protect their children from recruitment amid intersecting risks of sexual violence, displacement, and discrimination.” (KII 26/02/2026 a)

Social control, civilian targeting, and threats

The NSAG presence in Vichada results in persistent social control, as NSAGs impose curfews and commandeer transport routes in order to facilitate the functioning of illegal economies and control strategic transit. This control is exercised through surveillance, extortion, and forced support for armed group operations, including transportation, accommodation, and the provision of food and supplies (KII 24/02/2026 c; KII 26/02/2026 a; DP 28/10/2026).

Between 2024–2025, extortion increased by 300% in Vichada, reflecting the expansion of these practices as mechanisms of territorial control (Ministry of Defence accessed 18/03/2025). These dynamics restrict civilian autonomy, increase exposure to protection threats, and limit access to livelihoods and basic services.

Economic coercion is widespread, particularly affecting farmers, traders, transport workers, and local businesses, especially in Puerto Carreño (KII 27/02/2026 a; Semana 18/03/2025). In rural and mining areas, indigenous communities face additional risks, including forced labour, threats, and displacement linked to the control of illegal extraction sites. Communities or individuals perceived to oppose these activities are at risk of targeted violence (KII 24/02/2026 b; El Colombiano 28/04/2025; Semana 22/03/2025). These dynamics reduce access to livelihoods, increase financial pressure on households, and contribute to displacement and mobility restrictions within the department, particularly in areas with limited state presence.

Displacement, confinements, and mobility restrictions

Displacement in Vichada occurs primarily through individual movements, driven by high transport costs and the vast distances required to reach urban centres. These movements often follow NSAG threats in border and mining zones (KII 20/02/2026; KII 26/02/2026 a; El Morichal 06/11/2025). Cross-border dynamics with Venezuela generate additional unregistered flows through informal river routes, further contributing to systematic underreporting. This data gap is aggravated by a lack of state presence and fear of reprisals, which prevent displaced populations from formalising their status (KII 20/02/2026; Amazon Underworld 19/12/2025). Although underreporting makes available data limited, current conditions suggest a higher risk of displacement, particularly in areas with an increased NSAG presence and cross-border mobility.

Where mobility is not feasible, NSAG restrictions combined with high transport costs and geographic remoteness force communities into confinement, particularly in Aceitico, Cumaribo, Garcitas, and Puerto Nariño, all located along the Venezuelan border (KII 12/02/2026; DP01/09/2026; ICBF 08/04/2025). Fear of reprisal and reliance on informal routes further suppress formal documentation of both displacement and confinement (KII 24/02/2026 b; KII 26/02/2026 a). The combination of NSAG territorial control, limited state presence, and geographic isolation is likely to increase confinement risks, restricting access to food, markets, and essential services.

Between May–August 2026, protection risks are expected to intensify as geopolitical instability resulting from the US military operation in Venezuela, Colombia’s presidential electoral cycle, and NSAG territorial competition converge. NSAGs are likely to consolidate control over border areas, particularly Aceitico and Simón Bolívar, increasing civilian exposure to coercion and forced displacement (KII 27/02/2026 b). Colombia’s presidential elections create conditions in which NSAGs have historically intensified territorial and political control, raising the risk of selective violence against community leaders, mobility restrictions, and forced support for specific candidates (MOE 04/02/2026).

Escalating mobility restrictions and territorial control are expected to intensify protection risks, particularly child recruitment and GBV. In Puerto Carreño and La Primavera, NSAG competition drives displaced populations into informal settlements, where institutional protection is both insufficient and inaccessible as a result of security constraints. Consequently, risks of sexual exploitation and

recruitment of indigenous and undocumented children will likely rise (KII 25/02/2026; ICBF 08/04/2025). Fear of reprisals and institutional distrust will continue to suppress reporting, leading to the scale of these protection consequences remaining underestimated in the outlook period.

Food security and livelihoods

Since 2022, food security in Vichada has steadily deteriorated. Moderate or severe food insecurity affected 30.7% of the population in 2022, rising to 39.7% in 2023 and 42.5% in 2024, well above the national average of 25.55% and one of the highest rates nationwide (DANE 22/05/2025; El Morichal 08/07/2025). Although available data is limited, current conditions suggest a high risk of further deterioration during the outlook period, particularly in areas affected by NSAG presence and mobility restrictions.

Livelihoods in Vichada are highly constrained and shaped by illegal economies and NSAG control. Territorial disputes over trafficking routes and illegal mining have reinforced coercive economic dynamics in rural and border areas, where communities face pressure to participate in illegal activities to maintain access to land and resources (KII 20/02/2026; KII 24/02/2026 b; El Colombiano 28/04/2025). This reduces households' economic autonomy and increases dependence on unstable and high-risk income sources, such as mining, limiting access to sustainable livelihoods.

Indigenous and rural livelihoods based on small-scale agriculture, fishing, and river trade are particularly affected. Communities are increasingly exposed to exploitative labour conditions in informal mining, which is becoming a primary livelihood strategy, while receiving limited economic benefits. At the same time, NSAGs restrict access to land and alter seasonal cultivation patterns, especially on indigenous reservations such as Cali-Barranquilla, Ciare, Floresombrero, and Guaco (KII 20/02/2026; Consonante 14/11/2025; El Colombiano 28/04/2025). These constraints reduce food production and income generation.

The combination of the NSAG presence, territorial control, mobility restrictions, and limited institutional capacity is likely to increase constraints on food availability, access, and stability during April–August 2026. Impacts are expected to be particularly severe for riverine communities, smallholder farmers practising self-consumption and subsistence agriculture (predominant in Vichada), and refugees, migrants, and indigenous communities facing higher social and economic vulnerability (El Cuarto Mosquetero 09/08/2025).

Control of corridors along the Guaviare, Meta, and Orinoco rivers restricts markets and humanitarian access, particularly to fertile riverbanks, and reduces fishing areas among riverine communities. Limited access to farmland could hinder farmers' ability to sow in April and manage crops during the May–July growing season, likely resulting in below-average harvests from August 2026. Alongside subsistence maize and palm oil harvesting, Vichada produces about 15% of Colombia's soybeans and 9% of corn (USDA accessed 24/03/2026).

The impact of insecurity on food production is likely to be compounded by erratic or insufficient precipitation, affecting both subsistence and cash crops such as rice, corn, and palm oil (ACAPS 07/03/2024). Agriculture may also be affected by restrictions because of the wildfire risk, which can disrupt traditional land-clearing practices (IDEAM 10/03/2026 and 10/02/2026). These combined shocks are likely to increase dependence on external food sources.

Increased extortion, disruptions to river transport, and restrictions on access to agricultural and fishing areas are expected to further reduce already limited income opportunities and disrupt both market access and prices, constraining both physical and financial access to food. At the same time, increased reliance on illegal economies may deepen exploitative labour conditions and economic vulnerability among indigenous and rural households (DP 31/10/2025). These patterns, while not fully captured in official data, point to a likely increase in food insecurity, particularly on indigenous reservations with limited access to markets, assistance, and public services (KII 26/02/2026 b; KII 20/02/2026).

As a result of the combination of risks, the border municipalities of Puerto Carreño and Cumaribo are expected to face increased food insecurity given their border location and high concentration of dispersed rural and indigenous communities, increasing these areas' exposure to armed group mobility and territorial control dynamics (KII 24/02/2026 c; KII 23/02/2026). Cumaribo hosts an estimated 74.4% of Vichada's population, 95.5% of whom are indigenous and 89.1% of whom live in rural areas, making it a municipality highly dependent on agriculture and fishing (DANE accessed 09/03/2026).

Table 2. Food security statistics for Vichada, its municipalities, and at the national level

Location	% of households experiencing moderate to acute food insecurity	Prevalence of acute and severe undernourishment per 100 children under five (2025)
National	28.1%	0.5
Vichada	30.7%	1.2
Puerto Carreño	29.9%	3.7
La Primavera	24.1%	0.3
Cumaribo	31.9%	0.9
Santa Rosalía	31.4%	0.8

Source: ACAPS using data from INS (accessed 11/03/2026); DANE (04/07/2023)

Education

Access to education in Vichada is increasingly constrained by security risks and structural gaps. Since 2025, the presence of NSAGs has contributed to higher dropout rates and children's exposure to protection risks such as recruitment and use, child labour, and exploitation. Children travelling to school often pass through areas with an armed group presence, and recruitment activities are reported near or within educational spaces (KII 24/02/2026 d; KII 27/02/2026 a; LEE 09/04/2025). As insecurity increases, families may become more reluctant to send children to school, reducing attendance and limiting access to education and school-based services (KII 24/02/2026 b; LEE 12/06/2025 and 25/10/2025).

In 2026, these risks are likely to intensify as the demand for school places increases. This demand is driven by parents' concern that out-of-school children remain unsupervised while caregivers work, significantly increasing their exposure to NSAG recruitment (KII 24/02/2026 d). Limited school capacity may prevent out-of-school children from accessing these services, however, potentially increasing dropout and triggering displacement of families seeking available school places.

Enrolment in schools located in areas affected by recruitment decreased in 2025, as children have been increasingly recruited and used by NSAGs or encouraged to associate with them, including being taken across the border to Venezuela. The presence of NSAGs in or near schools, as well as the use of children within recruitment dynamics targeting peers, contributes to a deterioration of the protective environment schools are expected to provide, increasing absenteeism among students and teachers and, in some cases, disrupting the continuity of education services (KII 24/02/2026 b; KII 27/02/2026 b; KII 26/02/2026 a).

Table 3. Education statistics for Vichada, its municipalities, and at the national level

Indicator	National	Vichada	Puerto Carreño	La Primavera	Cumaribo	Santa Rosalía
% of the population who are illiterate	7.1%	35.1%	15.7%	14.7%	26.0%	14.6%
% households with children not attending school	1.8%	27.1%	10.4%	8.1%	21.1%	6.0%
% of students behind the expected grade for their age	22.0%	35.0%	26.1%	25.0%	47.3%	25.4%

Source: ACAPS using data from DANE (22/04/2025 b, 22/04/2025 a, 31/01/2020)

Note: the indicator 'households with children not attending school' refers to cases in which a person belongs to a household where at least one child aged 6–16 does not attend school (DANE 22/04/2025 c).

WASH and Health

NSAGs' increasing presence and territorial control are likely to further deteriorate WASH and health conditions during the analysis period. Armed groups use and exert control over rivers as key transport corridors for illegal economies, restricting communities' ability to safely access water sources for drinking, cooking, and hygiene. This control can limit when and where communities collect water and increase exposure to contaminated sources. At the same time, expanding illegal mining activity is likely to worsen contamination of both surface and groundwater with mercury pollution, further reducing the availability of safe drinking water (KII 23/02/2026; Consonante 14/11/2025).

Reduced access to safe and sufficient water increases the risk of waterborne diseases, particularly among underserved and malnourished populations in remote rural areas. Vichada already shows severe conditions: it has the second highest prevalence of moderate and severe acute malnutrition in children under five in Colombia (1.22 per 100), almost three times the national rate (INS accessed 11/03/2026). Within the department, Puerto Carreño recorded the highest prevalence nationwide in 2025 (3.66 per 100), disproportionately affecting indigenous communities (INS accessed 11/03/2026; ICBF 08/04/2025). These figures indicate a critical baseline, suggesting that additional shocks could rapidly worsen health outcomes.

The combination of above-average precipitation in June and above-average temperatures in July–August will further compound the risk of waterborne diseases, such as acute diarrhoeal illnesses, and vector-borne diseases, such as dengue and malaria, across areas receiving excess rainfall. The dengue risk was already high across Colombia in March 2026, and Vichada recorded a 64% increase in cases in 2025 compared to national reporting trends in 2024 (El Universal 07/01/2026; Dengue Visual Atlas accessed 18/03/2026).

The wildfire risk is likely to persist beyond the March peak season, driven by below-average precipitation in April, May, and August and above-average temperatures in July and August. This will continue to pose risks of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, particularly for older people, children, and those with pre-existing conditions.

Hydrological instability from precipitation excess or deficit may also affect river transport and critical road infrastructure, potentially disrupting mobility and access to essential health services already affected by NSAG restrictions and social control (IDEAM 10/03/2026 and 10/02/2026). Increased NSAG clashes will likely lead to overcrowding in informal settlements in Puerto Carreño, increasing the risk of disease outbreaks and placing additional pressure on already limited health services.

Operational and access constraints may lead to a further deterioration in the health system's capacity. Risks to functioning health infrastructure, such as the main referral facility at San Juan de Dios Hospital, may reduce service availability for populations affected by conflict and climate shocks (La FM 03/01/2025). At the same time, access restrictions and geographic isolation are likely to aggravate untreated conditions in rural and indigenous communities, including severe anaemia cases reported in indigenous reservations in Cumaribo (MIRE+ 10/10/2025). This combination of reduced service availability and increased health needs is likely to worsen overall health outcomes during the outlook period

Table 4. Health statistics for Vichada, its municipalities, and at the national level

Indicator	National	Vichada	Puerto Carreño	La Primavera	Cumaribo	Santa Rosalía
% of the population experiencing barriers to accessing healthcare services	2.9%	2.6%	7.2%	9.6%	5.4%	14.9%
% of population without medical insurance	6.0%	17.1%	28.3%	30.4%	44.6%	24.2%
% of births to mothers aged 10–19 as a percentage of total births (2024)	15.0%	24.4%	23.1%	25.6%	24.9%	26.8%

Source: ACAPS using data from DANE (22/04/2025 b, 22/04/2025 b, 31/01/2020, and 06/02/2026)

Note: the indicator 'population experiencing barriers to accessing healthcare services' refers to cases in which a person belongs to a household where at least one member reported a health issue within the 30 days prior to the survey that did not require hospitalisation, but for which the person did not visit a doctor or healthcare centre (DANE 22/04/2025 c).

HIGH-RISK POPULATIONS

A high percentage of Vichada's population live in rural areas (80.6%) and belong to indigenous communities (69.5%), implying a high rate of geographic isolation and subsistence reliance. Cumaribo is a primary hotspot, with 96.6% rural and 89.3% indigenous inhabitants facing extreme risk. The concentration of over 10,000 migrants and refugees in Puerto Carreño strains urban infrastructure and service delivery (DANE 18/07/2025).

Table 5. Demographic statistics for Vichada, its municipalities, and at the national level

Location	Total population (2026 projection)	Migrant and refugee population	% rural	% indigenous
National	53,399,171	2,845,187	24.1%	4.8%
Vichada	154,190	11,271	80.6%	69.5%
Puerto Carreño	24,697	10,662	24.6%	27.2%
La Primavera	10,694	376	40.0%	19.9%
Cumaribo	114,650	164	96.6%	89.3%
Santa Rosalía	4,149	69	38.8%	25.4%

Source: ACAPS using data from Migración Colombia (accessed 10/03/2026); DANE (18/07/2025 and 30/07/2025); DANE (accessed 09/03/2026)

Indigenous communities

Indigenous communities in Vichada face the department's highest convergence of humanitarian risks, with protection, nutrition, health, WASH, and livelihood needs likely to deteriorate between May–August 2026 as conflict dynamics, illegal economies, and climate hazards intensify across their territories. These risks are compounded by confinement and food insecurity in geographically isolated reservations facing structural marginalisation.

The Ombudsman's Office identifies indigenous communities across all four municipalities as among those most exposed to armed violence, confinement, displacement, and mobility restrictions, with risks particularly acute in border and riverine areas characterised by weak state presence, including La Mayera, Selva de Matavén, and territories of the Cubeo, Curripaco, Piapoco, and Piaroa peoples (DP 28/10/2025; El Morichal 06/11/2025). In 2025, approximately 700 indigenous people living across more than 30 settlements in Puerto Carreño lacked effective measures to guarantee adequate living conditions and protect their fundamental rights (Senate 29/05/2025).

Illegal coltan mining financing NSAGs has expanded into indigenous reservations without prior consultation, driving coercion, labour exploitation, environmental contamination, and the erosion of traditional governance among Curripaco, Puinave, and Sikuni communities (GFI/CEALDES 18/12/2025). Limited livelihood alternatives and pressure from NSAGs also force communities to engage in extraction activities, contributing to displacement and confinement, while reinforcing cycles of violence linked to the control of natural resources (GFI/CEALDES 18/12/2025).

Structural deprivations aggravate the impact of NSAG dynamics on indigenous communities. In October 2025, the Constitutional Court ordered structural measures to protect rights to life, food, water, and health for indigenous children in seven communities in Vichada, highlighting the severity of pre-existing gaps (DP 31/10/2025). Livelihoods and food systems closely tied to land increase vulnerability to NSAG-imposed access restrictions, directly affecting food availability and income. At the same time, language barriers limit access to information, services, humanitarian assistance, and institutional support, increasing exposure to coercion and reducing access to protection mechanisms (KII 24/02/2026 d).

Migrants and refugees

Migrants and refugees, particularly Venezuelans and indigenous populations who constantly move across the border, face heightened humanitarian risks as a result of overlapping legal, economic, and protection-related vulnerabilities. By August 2023, Vichada hosted 11,445 Venezuelan nationals, 95% of whom were concentrated in Puerto Carreño (Ministry of Health 31/01/2024).

Although 80.4% of migrants and refugees had initiated the Temporary Protection Permit process, persistent barriers to regularisation limit access to formal employment, healthcare, education, and protection services, increasing reliance on informal and precarious livelihoods and exposure to exploitation (Ministry of Health 31/01/2024).

Cross-border instability is likely to further aggravate these vulnerabilities in 2026. Sudden changes in NSAG territorial control, violence in Venezuela, or shifts in border governance may trigger unregistered or emergency movements into municipalities with limited absorption capacity. These movements are likely to increase pressure on already overstretched WASH and healthcare services, contribute to overcrowded informal settlements, and heighten risks of secondary displacement, exploitation, and limited access to assistance. In this context, migrants and refugees are likely to face increasing barriers to accessing protection, livelihoods, and essential services during the May–August period (DP 28/10/2025).

Children

Children in Vichada are likely to face heightened protection and humanitarian risks, as climate-related shocks and NSAG activity interact with limited institutional capacity. Such limited capacity already constrains response to increasing needs, with priority child and maternal services reaching only 20.1% compliance in 2025, the lowest among the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) regional offices, indicating reduced ability to respond to increasing needs (ICBF 28/11/2025).

Children are likely to face overlapping risks, including recruitment, food insecurity and malnutrition, and reduced access to essential services and education. Recruitment and use of children form part of NSAG social control strategies and are likely to increase as more groups attempt to expand into Vichada. Indigenous,

rural, migrant, and refugee children in high-risk municipalities – such as Cumaribo, La Primavera, Puerto Carreño, and Santa Rosalía – will likely require increased protection measures (DP 28/10/2025).

Children, particularly from indigenous communities, already face significant deprivations in food, safe water, health, and living conditions, increasing their vulnerability to cumulative humanitarian impacts such as undernutrition and disease (DP 31/10/2025). Children without civil registration face additional exposure, as lack of formal identification limits access to institutional protection (KII 24/02/2026 d).

These risks are likely to intensify between May–August 2026. Increased NSAG activity, electoral tensions, and climate-related access constraints may further disrupt education and service delivery while increasing children’s exposure to recruitment, exploitation, and psychosocial distress. These effects are likely to be most severe in rural and border areas, where institutional presence remains limited and access to services is already constrained (El País 23/02/2026).

Other populations at risk

Rural households, riverine communities, and women are also exposed as a result of specific dynamics observed across Vichada, particularly NSAG control of river corridors such as the Guaviare, Meta, and Orinoco, which restricts mobility and access to markets and services (Indepaz 08/2025; CINEP 19/09/2025). Rural communities in dispersed areas, particularly municipalities such as Cumaribo and riverine zones, face increased isolation, limiting access to livelihoods, healthcare, and food, particularly during floods and wildfires (Ministry of Health 31/01/2024).

Individuals whose livelihoods depend on transport, small-scale agriculture, cattle raising, or extractive activities are at heightened risk of extortion and coercion in areas linked to strategic routes and illegal economies, reducing income stability and increasing reliance on illegal economies (DP 28/10/2025; Indepaz 08/2025; CINEP 19/09/2025).

Women face additional risks, as territorial control and limited institutional presence restrict access to healthcare and protection services while increasing exposure to GBV, primarily linked to confinement and displacement (DP 04/12/2025). These risks are likely to intensify between May–August 2026 as a result of conflict dynamics and climate-related access constraints.