COLOMBIA

Humanitarian impacts in the municipalities along the Nariño–Ecuador border

KEY FINDINGS

- Between January 2025 and July 2026, disputes over drug trafficking and gold mining drove a severe humanitarian emergency along the Nariño–Ecuador border. Non-state armed groups (NSAGs) shifted from mass confrontations towards low-profile mobility restrictions and entrenched social control, contributing to a 74% drop in protection incidents reported departmentally between January and July 2026 and severe underreporting of violence.
- The crisis disproportionately affects ethnic groups, migrants and refugees. In 2025, Indigenous people accounted for 84% of mass displacement in border municipalities. Pendular migrants and refugees crossing informal border routes face severe risks of extortion, human trafficking, and sexual violence.
- Escalating violence by organised crime groups (OCGs) in Ecuador's border provinces is driving growing cross-border mobility into Nariño, with 19,854 migrants and refugees recorded by July 2026 (88% in Ipiales alone), straining an already-saturated humanitarian response.
- Children and adolescents face severe risks of recruitment, use, and sexual exploitation. NSAGs increasingly target boys for combat roles, surveillance, and microtrafficking, while subjecting girls to coerced domestic work, early unions, and gender-based violence (GBV).
- NSAGs systematically plant antipersonnel mines (APMs) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on rural pathways to enforce territorial control and secure smuggling routes. There is an emerging use of weaponised commercial drones carrying IEDs, which creates psychological distress and restricts civilian mobility.
- Armed group interference and fluctuating international funding constrain humanitarian access and response capacities along the Nariño–Ecuador border. NSAGs isolate rural and Indigenous communities by operating physical checkpoints, imposing river transit curfews, and planting APMs along strategic routes.
- In September 2026, the US decertified Colombia's counternarcotics performance. Combined with the new Colombian Government's policies and reinforced US–Colombia–Ecuador military coordination, this adds external pressure to the domestic shift, risking escalated NSAG violence on the border.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Aim

This report analyses the humanitarian crisis in the six Nariño municipalities bordering Ecuador: Barbacoas, Cuaspud (Carlosama), Cumbal, Ipiales, Ricaurte, and Tumaco. It examines how violence and illegal economies affect these communities, drawing on the neighbouring Ecuadorian provinces of Carchi, Esmeraldas, and Sucumbíos to understand cross-border dynamics involving NSAGs and OCGs.

The analysis covers January 2025 to July 2026 and focuses on protection risks, including mobility restrictions, displacement, child recruitment and use, and the sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and girls, alongside the shelter, livelihoods, and humanitarian access and response impacts that compound them.

Methodology

The analysis combines a review of secondary qualitative sources and datasets. Quantitative analysis primarily relies on OCHA data, complemented by data from the Unit for the Attention and Integral Reparation of Victims, Action Against Anti-Personnel Mines, Blumont, and the Ministry of National Defense for specific categories. The report also draws on 15 key informant interviews, including 12 with humanitarian organisations and NGOs operating in Nariño and three with those operating in Ecuadorian provinces bordering Colombia.

Although other areas of Nariño recorded higher numbers of affected people during the analysis period, the selected municipalities remain comparatively underdocumented, so this analysis aims to strengthen the evidence base for the humanitarian response where needs are significant, but data gaps persist.

Throughout this report, armed groups operating in Colombia are referred to as NSAGs, reflecting the terminology the Colombian Government uses. In Ecuador, equivalent groups are referred to as OCGs. This reflects each country's official classification, not a difference in their respective activities.

Limitations and information gaps

Although the report covers the period from **January 2025 to July 2026**, data availability varies by indicator. At the time of data collection, OCHA and Ministry of National Defense data was available through **July 2026**, while figures for individual displacement, threats, APM presence, and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination were only available up to **June 2026**.

The following information gaps limit the analysis.

- **Underreporting of protection impacts:** reported figures for armed attacks, confinements, mass displacement, and mobility restrictions remain low compared with historical trends (OCHA accessed 19/08/2026; ACAPS 05/09/2025). Interviewees attribute this partly to fear of retaliation and NSAG pressure not to report incidents, particularly in areas affected by peace negotiations between the Colombian Government and different NSAGs. In Tumaco, for example, pressure not to displace may result in undeclared confinement (KII 02/09/2026; KII 28/08/2026 b).
- **Underreporting of specific protection concerns:** fear of NSAG retaliation, combined with perpetrators' impunity and concerns about confidentiality when reporting to institutions, discourages survivors from reporting GBV and NSAG recruitment and use of children (KII 27/08/2026; KII 02/09/2026; KII 28/08/2026 b; HRW 24/08/2026; OCHA/EHP 07/05/2026). Some trafficking cases may also remain outside monitoring when NSAGs transport victims without contact with civic authorities or humanitarian and civil society organisations (KII 27/08/2026).
- **Uneven geographic coverage:** information on humanitarian needs and impacts remains uneven across targeted municipalities. Ipiales and Tumaco have more developed information ecosystems, potentially reflecting a higher concentration of response organisations. Reduced international funding since 2025 has further affected organisations' presence and operational capacity (KII 27/08/2026; KII 01/09/2026 a).
- **Limited information on ethnic populations:** between January 2025 and July 2026, 56% of affected people were either reported as not belonging to or had no ethnicity information available (OCHA accessed 19/08/2026). This is notable given that ethnic communities comprise approximately 80% of the territory's population, including Afro-Colombian communities (49%) and Indigenous peoples (31%) (DANE accessed 26/08/2026). Qualitative sources identify ethnic communities as among the populations at greater risk of protection incidents, but limited ethnicity data constrains the assessment of its extent (KII 04/09/2026 c; KII 28/08/2026 b; DRC 08/04/2025).

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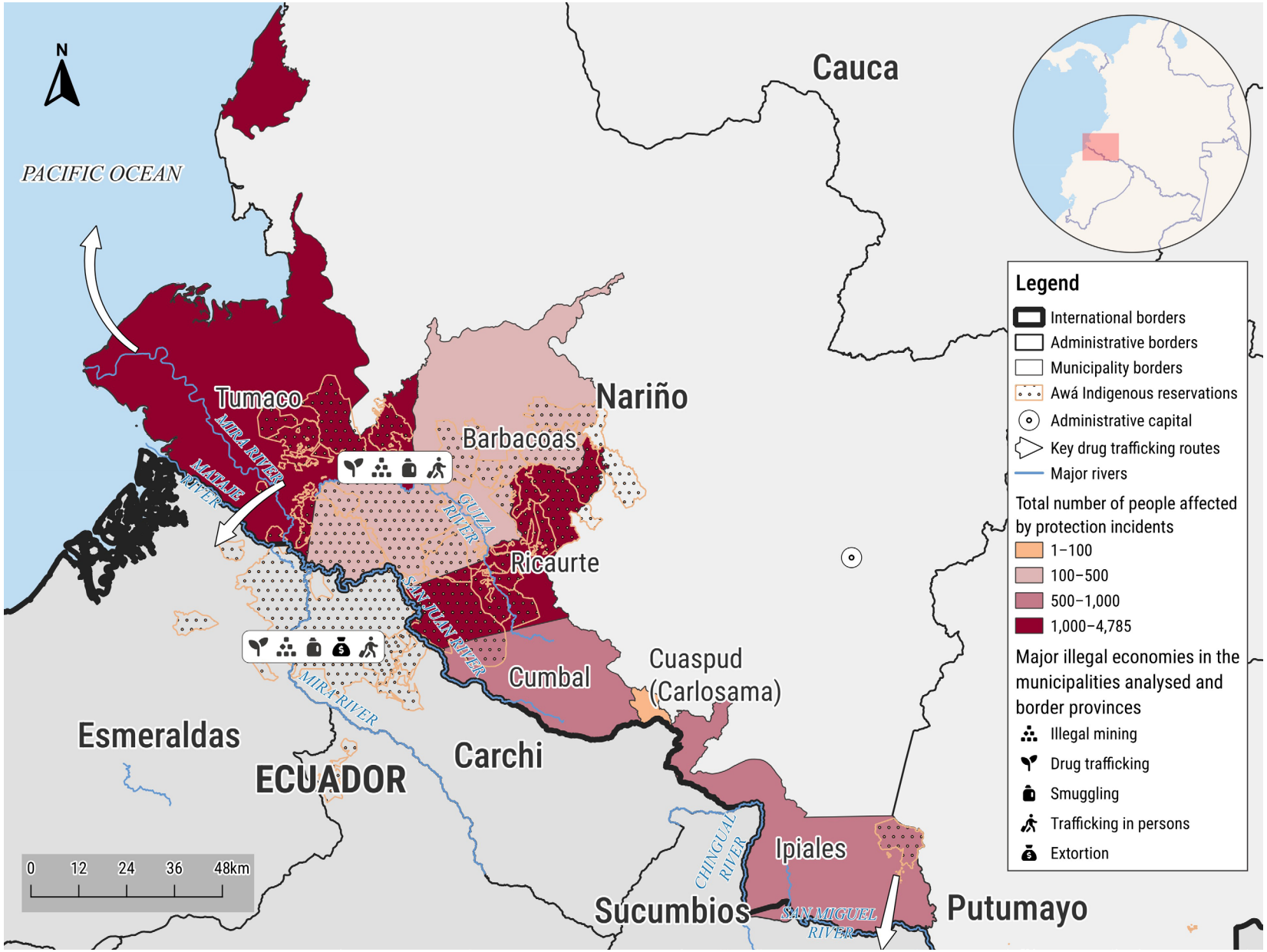


Sources: ACAPS using data from OCHA (accessed 23/09/2026); OCHA (accessed 22/09/2026); Agencia Nacional de Tierras (accessed 14/09/2026); OCHA (accessed 19/08/2026); InSight Crime (25/06/2026); WWF (19/02/2018)

CRISIS OVERVIEW

Nariño department, located in southwestern Colombia, shares a highly porous 500km border with the Ecuadorian provinces of Carchi, Esmeraldas, and Sucumbíos. The department is highly diverse and is home to seven Indigenous peoples and 75 Afro-Colombian community councils (OCHA/EHP 07/05/2026).

Between January 2025 and July 2026, this border region experienced a severe humanitarian emergency driven by the convergence of illegal economies, climate shocks such as floods, mixed migration flows, and declining humanitarian funding (OCHA/EHP 07/05/2026; DRC 14/08/2025; KII 01/09/2026 a). The border holds immense strategic value for Colombian NSAGs and Ecuadorian OCGs, who violently dispute control over critical corridors connecting the Andes to the Pacific Ocean. Key revenue drivers include cocaine production and maritime shipment, illegal gold mining, weapons trafficking, smuggling, and the extortive control of informal border crossings (InSight Crime 25/05/2026).

The dispute over these illegal economies translates into severe territorial and social control. NSAGs enforce parallel governance to the State through coercive measures, including curfews, illegal checkpoints, mobility restrictions, extortions, and threats (OCHA/EHP 07/05/2026; ACAPS 05/09/2025; Pares 17/12/2025). Consequently, while Nariño recorded over 78,600 people affected by violent events between January–July 2025, with border municipalities accounting for almost 6,700 cases, the first half of 2026 saw a sharp 74% decrease in reported cases at the departmental level. In border areas, almost 1,200 people were reported affected between January–July 2026 (OCHA accessed 19/08/2026).

According to interviewees, this statistical drop does not indicate reduced violence but an evolution in conflict tactics (KII 01/09/2026 a; KII 28/08/2026 b). NSAGs deliberately confine and threaten populations to prevent mass displacements, aiming to hide the humanitarian crisis. Fear of retaliation and distrust in institutions discourage victims from reporting, risking a reduction in services if responders read lower figures as reduced need rather than adjusting approaches to reach confined populations (KII 28/08/2026 b).

To further establish territorial control, NSAGs have introduced new warfare tactics, including the emerging use of weaponised commercial drones carrying IEDs, which creates severe psychological distress among civilians (KII 24/08/2026).

Disproportionate ethnic impacts and cross-border dynamics

Table 1. Ethnic population share (%) and total migrant and refugee population in border municipalities

Municipality	Indigenous	Afro-Colombian	Migrant and refugee
Barbacoas	13.4%	80.2%	143
Cuaspud (Carlosama)	33.6%	0.7%	16
Cumbal	35.8%	60.3%	22
Ipiales	97.0%	0.1%	17,614
Ricaurte	77.8%	1.6%	91
Tumaco	95.4%	0.1%	1,968
Total	31.1%	48.6%	19,854

19,854

Note: ethnic population shares are based on official 2026 projections, while migrant and refugee population figures are updated through July 2026.

Sources: ACAPS using data from Migración Colombia (accessed 10/09/2026); DANE (accessed 26/08/2026)

These protection risks disproportionately affect ethnic groups owing to their geographical location in areas with low state presence, particularly the Awá Indigenous people and Afro-Colombian communities who inhabit both sides of the border (OCHA accessed 19/08/2026).

These communities also do not view cross-border movement as international migration but as ancestral mobility essential for subsistence agriculture, health, and community life, making it harder to monitor (KII 28/08/2026 b). Beyond ancestral mobility, the border sees thousands of people crossing daily through the formal Rumichaca Bridge and hundreds of informal trails, including pendular migrants and refugees fleeing violence from Ecuador and Venezuela (ACNUR 02/02/2026; KII 07/09/2026).

CRISIS DRIVERS

Illegal economies and strategic corridors along the border

The reconfiguration of illegal economies and the fragmentation of armed groups into new factions are sustaining and, in some areas, increasing protection risks along the Nariño border, even as peace negotiations advance.

The Colombia–Ecuador border is one of the world's major drug transit corridors, connecting production areas in Nariño and Putumayo (Colombia) with Carchi, Esmeraldas, and Sucumbíos (Ecuador), from where cocaine can continue towards international maritime routes (Razón Pública 15/03/2026; InSight Crime 25/03/2026; HRW 24/08/2026).

Illegal economies increase civilians' exposure to violence because control of drug production, illegal mining, and cross-border trafficking depends on controlling the territory and populations connecting inland Nariño with Ecuador and the Pacific. The border municipalities form part of this interconnected geography: Tumaco provides access to Pacific trafficking routes; Barbacoas and Ricaurte connect inland territories; and Cumbal, Cuaspud (Carlosama), and Ipiales connect Nariño with Ecuador, mainly through Carchi, Esmeraldas, and Sucumbíos provinces (InSight Crime 25/08/2026). By 2024, more than 31,000 hectares of illicit coca crops were reported in just Tumaco, representing the municipality with the largest coca plantations in Colombia, while NSAG expansion has been associated with the control of routes used to move drugs, minerals, and weapons (UNODC 23/06/2026; DRC 08/04/2025 and 14/08/2025).

Declining coca prices from overproduction have redirected interest towards gold mining in Barbacoas, Linares, and the Telembí Triangle, corroborated across the border in Mayasquer and El Chical (KII 02/09/2026; KII 03/09/2026 b; Infobae 12/04/2026). This reconfiguration has intensified in Guambuyaco and Abades subregions, where mineral deposits, drugs, and border routes converge, bringing previously independent mines under NSAG control and increasing armed competition for their revenue (EHP/OCHA 07/05/2026; Pares 07/04/2026). Gold moves in small quantities (30–40g) to other departments for export, making it more profitable and lower-risk than cocaine (KII 04/09/2026 b). Regardless, cocaine flows resumed after an early-year price collapse, sustained by alliances between Colombian NSAGs and Ecuadorian OCGs, including Los Lobos and Los Choneros (KII 04/09/2026 b; DP 07/10/2025; SWI 17/05/2025).

Illegal economies increasingly rely on the coerced participation of civilians. NSAGs impose local payments from timber extraction, coca leaf harvesting and processing, illegal mining, and drug micro-trafficking (KII 03/09/2026 b; KII 24/08/2026; HRW 24/08/2026). In cultivation zones, communities are offered payments of approximately USD 500 per month to coerce their participation in illegal activities, exploiting pre-existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities (Infobae 09/08/2025).

Control over criminal rents is directly tied to 'de facto governance', a term the Ombudsman's Office uses to refer to a parallel system of authority through which NSAGs regulate civilian daily life – mainly through codes of conduct and curfews, control over local trade, the co-optation of community leadership, and the provision of infrastructure or services, such as justice administration, economic relations, and land and resource use (DP 07/10/2025). Smuggling and extortion on artisanal fishing and farming further illustrate how economic diversification sustains armed control, reducing civilian mobility and access to livelihoods and assistance (DRC 08/04/2025; El Colombiano 22/01/2026; ACAPS 05/09/2025).

The same relationship is visible at the Ecuadorian border. On 13 April 2026, authorities in Cuaspud (Carlosama) in Nariño captured two alleged leaders of support networks for an NSAG, including the commission's finance chief for the structure operating along the border, illustrating how armed groups' presence in the border sustains the financing of NSAG activity (Radio Ipiales 13/04/2026). In the Cumbal–Mayasquer border area, illegal gold mining has expanded alongside armed influence, while informants reported that households across the border in Carchi may be coerced into storing drugs, weapons, and contraband (KII 03/09/2026 b).

Reliance on multiple illegal economies lets NSAGs adapt to pressure on individual revenue streams and shifts competition towards new communities and routes, generating new displacement, mobility restrictions, UXO contamination, child recruitment, and extortion, especially in the Pacific zone.

NSAG fragmentation and fragility of peace negotiations

NSAG fragmentation and reconfiguration are sustaining and increasing protection risks in Nariño's border despite peace negotiations. Two territorial peace processes were active in Nariño during the first half of 2026. One involved an NSAG negotiating with the Government focused on ten municipalities, including Barbacoas, Cumbal, and Ricaurte in Nariño department (InSight Crime 09/04/2025). The second involved a coalition of dissident groups operating across Nariño and Putumayo and the Government, particularly concerning Tumaco and the southern border area around Ipiales (El Colombiano 21/04/2026).

Although humanitarian organisations reported no official indicators of confinements and displacements during the first half of 2026, which coincided with the peace negotiations, interviewees indicated that violence continued despite reported progress on weapons disposal, territorial demining, and an agreement to substitute coca plantations with legal crops (Consejería Comisionada de Paz 09/02/2026). There is not enough information to attribute the reduction in reported protection incidents solely to the peace negotiations, as new NSAGs maintain a presence in surrounding areas and could continue causing displacement and confinement, shifting from causing massive impacts to individual ones and reducing reporting (KII 28/08/2026 b; KII 28/08/2026 a; InSight Crime 09/04/2025; Gobernación de Nariño 30/04/2026).

Repeated fragmentation, leadership changes, and territorial expansion have generated instability, while competition over strategic corridors in the Pacific is associated with increased IED use (DRC 08/04/2025; OCHA accessed 19/08/2026). On 20 April 2026, an NSAG attacked the military with explosive-laden drones in rural Ipiales, killing three soldiers and injuring two. The Government subsequently stated that the attack had broken non-aggression commitments and placed the peace process at risk, mainly for the municipalities of Barbacoas, Cumbal, and Ricaurte (Pares 24/04/2026; Gobernación de Nariño 30/04/2026).This reconfiguration heightens protection risks along the Colombia–Ecuador border (OCHA 30/03/2026).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Beyond armed violence, three factors are aggravating the humanitarian situation along the Nariño–Ecuador border: natural hazards and climate variability, WASH deterioration, and the security crisis in Ecuador. None acts in isolation; each deepens the vulnerability of populations already affected by armed conflict and NSAG control.

Natural hazards and climate variability

Environmental shocks in Nariño disproportionately affect communities already confined or displaced by armed conflict, as they are often located in dispersed territories close to crops and natural water sources. In 2025, natural hazards and armed conflict simultaneously affected almost 7,000 people in Nariño (OCHA/EHP 07/05/2026).

While heavy rains characterised 2025 and early 2026, the risk profile is rapidly shifting towards severe drought between September–December (Gobernación de Nariño 31/08/2026; OCHA 06/11/2025 and 29/01/2026). In early 2025, increased rainfall affected over 15,400 people across the border municipalities of Barbacoas and Tumaco. Floods destroyed subsistence crops and killed livestock, while landslides damaged critical infrastructure, such as the aqueduct supplying water to an estimated 500 people in Barbacoas (OCHA 20/02/2025).

By September 2026, El Niño conditions established above-average sea surface temperatures across the Pacific Ocean, which typically enhance the drier season in Colombia (NOAA accessed 31/08/2026). Forecasts indicate an over 70% probability of above-normal temperatures and severe rainfall deficits in the Nariño–Ecuador border region between September–November 2026, with 38 of Nariño's 64 municipalities (59%) at high risk (IRI accessed 31/08/2026). Tumaco faces severe threats of acute water shortages and rationing (3iS et al. 19/07/2026).

- **Cross-border climate anomalies:** El Niño conditions manifest differently across the border, creating compounding risks for Colombian refugees and pendular migrants. In Ecuador, El Niño typically enhances the rainy season (ACAPS 23/07/2023; Infobae 19/08/2026). While the Colombian Andes face drought, Ecuador's transboundary river basins in Sucumbíos face severe flow increases in San Miguel and Putumayo Rivers. Heavy rainfall and direct flooding in these

areas wash away household assets and threaten critical infrastructure, affecting communities inhabited mostly by Colombians who have only recently crossed the border to Ecuador and lack shelter (KII 07/09/2026). Simultaneously, in the coastal province of Esmeraldas, the warming of oceans presents an imminent risk of sea-level rise and severe flooding in low-lying areas of San Lorenzo canton, occurring roughly every 14 days and intensifying during the rainy season (December–May) and El Niño cycles. This environmental hazard is highly critical because these vulnerable coastal zones are precisely where newly arrived Colombian and Venezuelan refugees tend to settle, leaving them trapped between the armed violence in Colombia and climate shocks in Ecuador (KII 08/09/2026).

- **Seismic risks:** on 10 August 2026, a magnitude-7.4 earthquake in Chocó affected 15 departments nationwide. By 9 September, Nariño recorded over 329 people, 400 houses, and 40 school facilities affected by the earthquake, including the border municipalities of Barbacoas and Ricaurte (Gobernación de Nariño 11/08/2026; 3iS accessed 09/09/2026). This incident adds to needs across the livelihoods and shelter sectors already facing conflict impacts.

Water access and contamination

WASH deficiencies severely aggravate the humanitarian crisis driven by NSAGs along the border. Environmental contamination, damaged infrastructure, and natural hazards cut off access to safe water, worsening health outcomes through waterborne diseases and increasing protection risks by trapping civilians in confined areas without basic services (3iS et al. 11/08/2026 and 19/06/2026).

According to an interviewee, during the 2025–2026 droughts, rural communities in Tumaco relied directly on river water contaminated by mercury from illegal mining and chemicals from coca processing, causing gastrointestinal and skin diseases (KII 28/08/2026 b; Charkiewicz et al. 05/03/2025). In June 2026 in Jardines de Sucumbíos (Ipiales), Indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders reported failing aqueducts and a lack of safe water as their most urgent needs. UXO and mobility restrictions also prevent not only infrastructure repairs but also access for water trucking and chlorination interventions, leaving affected communities without either a fixed or an interim safe water source (OCHA/EHP 10/06/2026; KII 01/09/2026 a; KII 28/08/2026 a).

Human-caused environmental degradation further strains water availability. In 2026, wildfires have affected 60 hectares of forest in Cumbal, destroying native vegetation and worsening water scarcity and pollution (ET 27/08/2026; KII 28/08/2026 a). This directly affects municipalities such as Ipiales, which relies on the Blanco River originating in Cumbal. The river already faces severe contamination from unregulated abattoirs, dairy factories, and domestic wastewater. Consequently, in August 2026, the Nariño health department declared the water in Ipiales unfit for human consumption because of high bacterial loads and a lack of residual chlorine (HSB 07/08/2026; KII 28/08/2026 a). In peripheral neighbourhoods such as Puenes, this poor water quality has caused outbreaks of acute diarrhoeal diseases among community members, migrants and refugees (KII 01/09/2026 a).

Human mobility driven by crisis protection risks in Ecuador

Escalating violence in Ecuador caused by OCGs aggravates the border crisis by causing new migration flows into Nariño, adding pressure to the humanitarian response system. Between January 2025 and July 2026, the Ecuadorian provinces of Carchi, Esmeraldas, and Sucumbíos recorded 780 homicides (22, 561, and 197, respectively) mainly attributed to OCGs (MinInterior accessed 28/08/2026; Mindefensa 16/09/2026). This violence is anchored in contested control of cocaine, gold, and fuel trafficking routes along the border (InSight Crime 25/03/2026; KII 28/08/2026 b).

Human mobility from Ecuador to Colombia has increasingly grown, with a total of 19,854 migrants and refugees (including pendular migrants) recorded in border municipalities in Colombia, heavily concentrated in Ipiales, with 88% (17,614) of the total number, and Tumaco, with 10% (1,968), by July 2026 owing to their close location to the border and crossing paths (Migración Colombia accessed 10/09/2026). As Ecuadorian OCGs increase confrontations with Colombian NSAGs towards the control of the border, and Ecuador continues to have no legal framework recognising internal displacement, threatened families are left with limited domestic protection mechanisms, prompting border crossings for international protection (KII 08/09/2026; KII 26/08/2026; RID 11/07/2025).

Human mobility drivers vary by province of origin. In Esmeraldas, territorial disputes between OCGs over urban drug and gold trafficking corridors have led to curfews and commercial closures in San Lorenzo and Eloy Alfaro, alongside the recruitment of Afro-descendant and Indigenous girls as forced partners and rising rates of femicide and sexual violence (KII 02/09/2026; KII 08/09/2026; KII 26/08/2026; InSight Crime 25/03/2026).

In Sucumbíos, extortion, homicides, and displacement linked to illegal gold mining in river basins drive crossings through NSAG-controlled river routes, the same corridors used for cocaine transit towards Esmeraldas, where women and children face recruitment for drug and arms transport (KII 07/09/2026). Migrants from Carchi, Guayas, and Manabí report electronic asset dispossession, extortion, and recruitment threats against adolescents as reasons for departure, including GBV by Ecuadorian OCG perpetrators (KII 03/09/2026 b; KII 26/08/2026; DRC 19/02/2026).

Documented relocation cases illustrate the scale of these impacts. Following a homicide in San Lorenzo (Ecuador) attributed to an NSAG, 16 Ecuadorian and binational families were displaced to the Colombian municipalities of El Charco and 12 individuals to Ipiales in Nariño, subsequently relocated to Valle del Cauca department for protection routing (OCHA 09/04/2026; OCHA 09/04/2026 b).

The relationship is not unidirectional; Colombians from Nariño moving into Ecuador face comparable exposure to OCG violence, indicating groups' control extends across the border rather than concentrating on one side. This exposes refugee and migrant populations to the double burden of conflict and migration and increases their humanitarian needs (EHP/OCHA 06/05/2026; KII 26/08/2026).

Other countries of origin add further pressure. In 2026, Nariño is hosting migrants and refugees mainly from Venezuela but also from Chile, the Dominican Republic, and Perú, increasing the need for humanitarian shelter, food, and protection assistance in a place with an already-limited, saturated response (Migración Colombia 15/07/2026; ACNUR 02/02/2026; KII 26/08/2026).

HUMANITARIAN IMPACTS

Protection

Confinements and mobility restrictions

Table 2. Reported number of people affected by confinement and mobility restrictions, January 2025 to July 2026

	Municipality	Confinements	Mobility restrictions
1	Cumbal	0	100
2	Ipiales	469	0
3	Ricaurte	0	10
4	Tumaco	191	3,300

Affected people

0 3,300

Note: only municipalities with reported affected people are shown.

Source: ACAPS using data from OCHA (accessed 19/08/2026)

Along the Nariño–Ecuador border, NSAGs are shifting from mass confinement towards permanent, low-profile mobility restrictions. This allows them to keep tight social control while avoiding military escalation, leading official figures to fall even as control increases (DRC 19/02/2026; KII 01/09/2026 a). Confinements and mobility restrictions have become the primary instruments of territorial co-optation used to secure drug and weapon smuggling routes, protect illegal gold-mining enclaves, and prevent the advance of rival groups or state forces (ACAPS 10/07/2025; KII 03/09/2026 b). To enforce territorial control, NSAGs also systematically plant APMs and IEDs on rural pathways, water access points, and agricultural plots (DRC 08/04/2025). In 2026,

the constant NSAG presence and discovery of UXO coming from Ecuador continue to restrict communities' mobility through ancestral paths (EHP/OCHA 10/06/2026).

At the departmental level, Nariño recorded a marked increase in mobility restrictions between January–July 2025 and the same period in 2026, while confinements remained relatively stable. Confinements affected almost 1,400 people from January–July 2025, compared with over 1,100 during the same period in 2026. In contrast, the number of people affected by mobility restrictions more than doubled, from 3,600 to 7,900 (OCHA accessed 19/08/2026).

In the border municipalities of Ipiales and Tumaco, 660 confined people were reported between January–July 2025. During the same period, mobility restrictions affected 3,400 people, with Tumaco reporting the most (3,300), followed by Cumbal (100). In contrast, no confinements were officially reported in the border municipalities during January–July 2026, while mobility restrictions affected only ten people in Ricaurte – which interviewees attribute to entrenched social control and underreporting rather than a genuine drop in violence (OCHA accessed 19/08/2026; KII 01/09/2026 a; KII 28/08/2026 b). Communities are often confined before being forced to displace; when responders address these cases, only the displacement is recorded, so the preceding confinement goes unregistered (KII 28/08/2026 b).

These events disproportionately affect ethnic communities in remote border areas. In 2025, of the 660 people affected by confinement in Ipiales and Tumaco, 57% were Afro-Colombian and 43% were Indigenous. Of the 3,400 people affected by mobility restrictions in the border municipalities that year, the 100 people affected in Cumbal were identified as Indigenous, while information on the ethnic identity of the remaining 3,300 people remains unavailable, limiting assessment of the extent to which mobility restrictions affect different ethnic groups (OCHA accessed 19/08/2026). NSAGs also exercise confinements and mobility restrictions during critical political events. According to interviewees, during the first (31 May) and second (21 June) rounds of the 2026 presidential elections, multiple rural areas in Tumaco were confined for at least two weeks, with all civilian mobility strictly prohibited (KII 24/08/2026; KII 28/08/2026 b).

Recruitment and use of children and adolescents

Children and adolescents face severe recruitment risks by NSAGs along the Nariño–Ecuador border. According to interviewees, in 2026, municipalities bordering Ecuador or serving as transit corridors, such as Barbacoas, Cumbal, Ipiales, and Tumaco, are hotspots for NSAG recruitment and use (KII 27/08/2026; KII 01/09/2026 a).

NSAGs exploit economic vulnerabilities and use social media to recruit minors. According to the monitoring of local organisations, high payments for illegal crop harvesting, up to USD 160 per day, caused a spike in recruitment cases between September–October 2025 (KII 24/08/2026; KII 01/09/2026 b). In Barbacoas and Sanquianga, groups pay children around USD 1.60 to capture wild animals for cross-border trafficking as another illegal income (KII 24/08/2026). Digitally, NSAGs use platforms such as Facebook and TikTok to project power and send deceptive job offers via direct messages to children as young as 15 (KII 01/09/2026 b). In 2025, 44% of recruited children in Colombia were targeted through these platforms (HRW 24/08/2026).

The recruitment and use of children involve distinct gendered patterns. NSAGs use boys for community and military surveillance, drug microtrafficking, and the handling of explosives and drones (HRW 24/08/2026). In Cumbal and Ipiales, children selling drugs in schools on behalf of NSAGs serves as a gateway to their recruitment for combat roles (KII 01/09/2026 a). Following the increasing importance of the gold infrastructure by NSAGs to Colombia in early 2026, boys are also forced to transport heavy gold ore across 20–25m river canyons managing artisanal pulley systems (KII 03/09/2026 b). Conversely, NSAGs target girls through coercive recruitment, using gradual pressure to force them into domestic work and intelligence roles, finally exposing them to sexual violence and femicide (HRW 24/08/2026; DRC 19/02/2026; KII 08/09/2026).

Armed groups systematically relocate recruited children to prevent escapes, isolate victims, break their community ties, and increase their economic dependence on the NSAG. Of the recruited children and adolescents identified in Nariño in 2025, 51% were deployed to Cauca (OCHA 07/05/2026; HRW 24/08/2026). Because of fear of retaliation, these cases result in significant underreporting (KII 28/08/2026 b). As a coping mechanism, many families are forced to send teenagers over the age of 14 to cities such as Cali or Pasto to escape recruitment (KII 02/09/2026).

Displacement

Clashes between NSAGs over strategic corridors drive shifts in displacement dynamics across the Nariño–Ecuador border. While mass displacement decreased in early 2026, a growing trend of individual displacement indicates a shift towards targeted violence and increased social control, straining local shelter and response capacities (OCHA accessed 19/08/2026; Blumont accessed 25/08/2026).

Mass displacement

In 2025, Nariño was a primary centre of displacement in Colombia, accounting for 7.3% of the national total. The impacts were highly disproportionate for ethnic groups: Afro-Colombian communities accounted for 59% of the displaced population, Indigenous peoples (including the Awá, Eperara Siapidara, Pastos, and Quillasinga) for 25%, and rural mestizo communities for 11% (OCHA/EHP 07/05/2026).

In the border municipalities, mass displacement affected almost 1,300 people in 2025, heavily concentrated in Ipiales, Ricaurte, and Tumaco. Indigenous people accounted for 84% (almost 1,100 people) of these cases. Between January–July 2026, mass displacement fell sharply to 174 people, recorded only in Barbacoas and Ricaurte. All 174 affected people were Indigenous (OCHA accessed 19/08/2026). This decline likely reflects underreporting rather than an actual fall in displacement.

Mass displacement remains closely linked to cross-border movements. In April 2025, NSAG incursions in Jardines de Sucumbíos (Ipiales) displaced almost 190 people (38 families), who fled to urban areas, Putumayo, or across the border into Ecuador (OCHA 09/04/2025). From 16–17 March 2026, separate homicides in the Tortugaña Telembí reservation (Barbacoas) and San Lorenzo (Ecuador) triggered threats and social control measures. This forced the Indigenous Awá to disperse into rural Barbacoas and Ricaurte and led Ecuadorian families fleeing San Lorenzo towards El Charco and Ipiales, requiring immediate transfer to Valle del Cauca department for their protection (OCHA 30/03/2026).

Table 3. Reported people affected by mass displacement, January 2025 to July 2026

	Municipality	Indigenous	Afro-Colombian	Unknown/other
1	Barbacoas	0	108	0
2	Ipiales	189	0	14
3	Ricaurte	0	806	0
4	Tumaco	0	346	0

Affected people

0 806

Note: only municipalities with reported affected people are shown.
Source: ACAPS using data from OCHA (accessed 19/08/2026)

Individual displacement

In 2025, individual displacement affected over 11,100 people across Nariño. Of these, over 4,200 were in border municipalities, with Tumaco accounting for 68% (almost 2,900 people) of the border total. Afro-Colombian communities were the most affected in this area, accounting for almost 2,300 people (Blumont accessed 25/08/2026).

Between January–June 2026, individual displacement in the border zone fell to over 1,500 people. Despite a 72% drop in Ipiales, individual displacement remains significantly higher than mass displacement in the region. This trend suggests that NSAGs increasingly force families to flee individually rather than in large groups to avoid detection (KII 28/08/2026 a; KII 01/09/2026 a). Afro-Colombian communities were the most affected by individual displacement in the first half of 2026 (over 700 people), followed by Indigenous people (over 350) (Blumont accessed 25/08/2026). Available data does not disaggregate by post-displacement status, leaving whether these individuals reach host communities, informal settlements, or return shortly after fleeing undocumented – a gap for humanitarian targeting.

Escalating violence in Ecuadorian provinces such as Esmeraldas, as well as cantons such as Guayaquil and Manta, also displaced families across the border into Colombia. In 2026, a humanitarian organisation in Ipiales and Pasto received three to five Ecuadorian families monthly in their shelters, a trend that was practically nonexistent in 2025 (KII 27/08/2026). Concurrently, Ecuadorian and binational households are increasingly arriving individually in Tumaco urban centre, fleeing cross-border persecution and requesting formal refugee status (KII 28/08/2026 b).

Table 4. Reported people affected by individual displacement, January 2025 to June 2026

	Municipality	Indigenous	Afro-Colombian	Unknown/other
1	Barbacoas	127	424	156
2	Cumbal	35	0	9
3	Ipiales	98	48	249
4	Ricaurte	426	22	178
5	Tumaco	325	2	1

Affected people

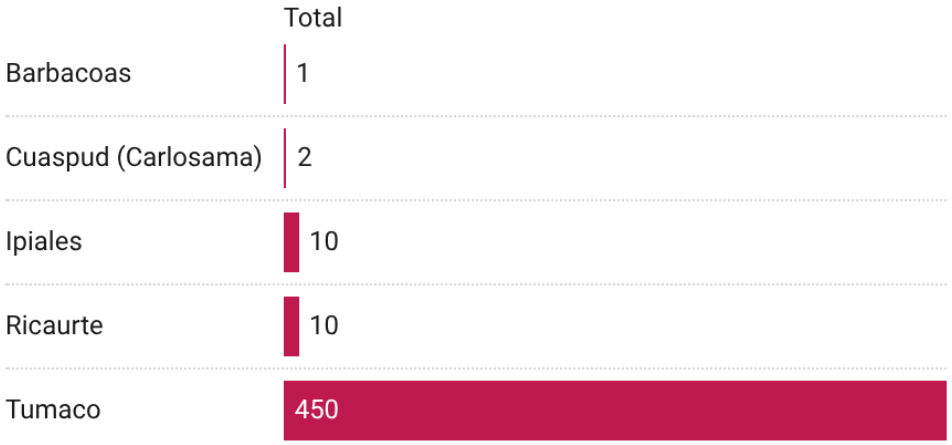
0 — 426

Note: the table presents recorded people affected by individual displacement, based on the municipality where the displacement occurred. Only municipalities with reported affected people are shown.

Source: ACAPS using data from Blumont (accessed 25/08/2026)

Social control, threats, and extortions

Table 5. Reported people affected by social control, January 2025 to July 2026



Note: only municipalities with reported affected people are shown.

Source: ACAPS using data from OCHA (accessed 19/08/2026)

While the number of people affected by social control in Nariño has declined, recorded events in border municipalities have risen and spread across a wider geographic area, indicating deepening rather than diminishing NSAG territorial control. NSAG social control is the mechanism through which they exert their power over communities to manage the territory and its illegal economies. This can be through coercive practices that persist even absent open confrontation, making it difficult to capture through event-based reporting alone (DP 07/10/2025).

Between January–July 2025 and the same period in 2026, the amount of people affected by social control in Nariño decreased by 5.4%, with two events recorded (one in Tumaco). For the border municipalities, however, an increase of 37% was registered, going from one event between January–July 2025 to six in the same period of 2026, spreading geographically to Barbacoas, Ipiales, Cuaspud, and Tumaco with one event each and Ricaurte with two events (OCHA accessed 19/08/2026).

Curfews and codes of conduct constitute the core mechanisms of control. In Barbacoas and rural Tumaco, NSAGs impose mandatory circulation hours, with nighttime restrictions tightening from 2025–2026 from around 20:00 to as early as 18:00–19:00, enforced through financial penalties and threats for non-compliance (DP 16/02/2026; DRC 28/02/2025; KII 24/08/2026). Armed groups also impose speed limits and restrictions on motorcycle helmet use for surveillance of the population moving in the territory, alongside mandatory identification cards and unofficial population censuses, often conducted in electoral periods, such as in Policarpa and El Peñol municipalities in May 2026 (ACAPS 05/09/2025; Infobae 31/05/2026; KII 24/08/2026; DP 07/10/2025).

Control also extends into private and communal life through information restrictions and surveillance. By 2026, civilians could face up to five checkpoints controlled by different NSAGs along a single corridor, where phones are inspected using cables and specialised software to extract calls, chats, and social media data. They also use drones equipped with explosives for surveillance and intimidation (ACAPS 05/09/2025; KII 24/08/2026). In Barbacoas, Ricaurte, and Tumaco, there are reported increases in threats and house-marking, alongside prohibitions on community leaders mediating on residents' behalf, weakening local protection mechanisms and reflecting broader coercion of the Junta de Acción Comunal (a community-based organisation legally recognised in Colombia to represent residents' interests) and ethnic authorities (ACAPS 05/09/2025).

Extortion functions as both punishment and a way for NSAGs to impose their own rules and social control. They charge fines of approximately USD 1,600 for those who break those rules or for settling disputes, which can force individual displacements, compounding NSAGs' economic control over food prices, fishing, and agriculture (KII 28/08/2026 b). Consequences extend to prolonged school suspensions, rural health post closures, and restricted access for humanitarian health missions, alongside psychosocial harm from constant hypervigilance (EHP/OCHA 07/05/2026; DRC 14/08/2025).

These entrenched dynamics disproportionately affect Afro-Colombian and Awá communities, leaders, and traders, who avoid reporting owing to fear of retaliation. From January–July 2026 alone, Afro-Colombian communities bore 91.6% (250/273) of recorded cases, indicating a broadening geographic and ethnic impact despite a relatively stable number of people affected (OCHA accessed 19/08/2026).

Risks of explosive ordnance (APMs, IEDs, and UXO)

Table 6. Reported APM/UXO-related events, January 2025 to June 2026

	Municipality	APM/UXO accident	Demining event	Total
1	Barbacoas	0	10	10
2	Cumbal	1	0	1
3	Ipiales	0	5	5
4	Ricaurte	0	2	2
5	Tumaco	1	21	22

Reported events

0 22

Note: only municipalities with reported events are shown.

Source: ACAPS using data from AICMA (31/07/2026)

After Cauca, Nariño recorded the second-highest number of APM and UXO events in Colombia in 2025, with at least 136 incidents. Reported events in the department decreased by 70%, from 79 between January–June 2025 to 23 in the same period of 2026. In the six municipalities analysed, the decrease was smaller, from nine to eight events (12%). Tumaco and Barbacoas accounted for all nine events reported in the municipalities from January–June 2025 and four fewer events in the same period of 2026, a 44% decrease (AICMA 31/07/2026). The decrease should be interpreted cautiously, as interviews indicate that it may partly reflect underreporting linked to fear of NSAG retaliation and increased awareness of explosive ordnance risks through mine risk education (KII 04/09/2026 c). Afro-Colombian community councils and the Awá Indigenous community are the most affected (DRC 08/04/2025).

NSAGs' use of explosive ordnance has contributed to the recontamination of areas previously declared mine-free. Although Ipiales was declared mine-free in 2021, official data recorded three APM/UXO events in 2025 and two in the first half of 2026 as NSAGs sought to secure strategic routes for their illegal economies and restrict rival movements (KII 04/09/2026 c; AICMA 31/07/2026; UIAP 07/10/2021).

IED use increased sharply in the municipalities analysed, with reported events rising from one between January–July 2025 to 16 in the same period of 2026. Tumaco accounted for ten events, followed by Barbacoas (three), Ipiales (two), and Cuaspud (one). The deadliest incident occurred in Tumaco in January 2026, when an explosion killed at least seven people and injured eight (OCHA accessed 19/08/2026).

Drone-delivered explosives are an emerging risk in the territory. Nationally, reported events involving these weapons increased by 146% between January–May 2025, with five events recorded in Nariño (ACLED 27/08/2026; UNMAS 18/06/2026). In the municipalities analysed, such attacks have been recorded in Tumaco and Ipiales (ACLED accessed 07/09/2026; UNMAS 18/06/2026). Although available quantitative data are insufficient to establish a clear trend, interviews indicate more frequent use in both municipalities (KII 24/08/2026; KII 04/09/2026 c). Weaponised drones' lack of precision creates risks for nearby civilians and infrastructure, particularly when the explosive payload reduces the drone's manoeuvrability (KII 04/09/2026 b; UNMAS 24/04/2026).

Sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and girls

Across Nariño, NSAGs increasingly use sexual violence as a deliberate instrument of social control. Between April–June 2025, 66% of GBV incidents recorded by households in Nariño were attributed to NSAG members, reflecting a broader shift towards selective, coercive violence over direct confrontation (DRC 14/08/2025; ACAPS 05/09/2025). This falls hardest on girls and adolescents and remains severely underreported.

Sexual exploitation and trafficking are concentrated in Barbacoas, Ipiales, Tumaco, and along the Ecuador border, sustained by poverty, armed control, and weakening protection capacity (DRC 19/02/2026). In 2025, Nariño authorities recorded 15 trafficking cases involving 30 survivors, concentrated in Ipiales and Tumaco; nationally, 79% of identified victims in the first semester of 2025 were women, and 43.7% of cases involved a transnational scheme beyond Colombia (Gobernación de Nariño 19/04/2026 and 08/08/2025).

Children and adolescents bear a disproportionate impact. Sexual exploitation is concentrated in NSAG- and illegal-economy-affected municipalities, disproportionately affecting girls in Barbacoas, Magüí Payán, Olaya Herrera, and Tumaco, including documented coercion for the exchange of minors by families under economic desperation (DRC 19/02/2026; Gobernación de Nariño 30/04/2026; KII 02/09/2026). Early unions involving children as young as eight years old, understood as the relationship between a minor and an adult mainly mediated by coercion, are imposed, perceived in many cases as the only protection for children from recruitment or armed violence (El Congreso de Colombia 13/02/2025; DRC 19/02/2026). This protection impact has also been observed in the border provinces of Ecuador (KII 02/09/2026; KII 08/09/2026).

The transition of NSAGs from coca to gold mining has embedded forced sexual labour and domestic servitude within mining camps, involving adolescents and sexual violence linked to recruitment (KII 02/09/2026; HRW 19/08/2026). In areas under NSAG control, adult men linked to illegal mining and coca cultivation negotiate sexual access to girls and adolescents directly with their families. In Magüí Payán, this mainly affects girls aged 8–14. In 2025, 16 births among girls aged 10–14 were recorded in Barbacoas, El Charco, Olaya Herrera, and Roberto Payán, illegal economy enclaves connected to border dynamics (DRC 14/08/2025 and 19/02/2026).

Trafficking operates through structured, transnational networks. Fraudulent job, study, and social media offers recruit young women, mostly under 25, from Antioquia, Caldas, Cúcuta, and Risaralda, moving them through Nariño towards Ecuador and Peru (KII 02/09/2026; KII 04/09/2026 b). Women and girls from the Awá Indigenous communities face heightened exposure owing to geographic dispersion in remote areas where NSAGs fight over control of the territory, which also have limited state presence. Some women and girls are also instrumentalised into domestic servitude in Ecuador (KII 02/09/2026; DRC 19/02/2026). Los Chilcos and Rumichaca Bridge (Ipiales) function as key recruitment and transit points controlled by structures including the Tren de Aragua and other OCGs, alongside informal crossings in Cuaspud (Carlosama), Cumbal, Ricaurte, and Tumaco (KII 26/08/2026; KII 01/09/2026 b; KII 28/08/2026 b).

Funding cuts have reduced humanitarian transport and shelter for trafficking-in-persons victims to minimal spaces in Ipiales, compounded by limited victim awareness of referral routes (KII 02/09/2026). Despite formal registration of six cases

(ten people) of trafficking in persons in early 2025, severe underreporting persists owing to border porosity and fear of retaliation (KII 27/08/2026; Gobernación de Nariño 08/08/2025).

Shelter and livelihoods

Violence imposed by NSAGs is generating compounding shelter and livelihood needs across Nariño, as collapsing humanitarian capacity intersects with sustained economic disruption, leaving affected households with diminishing coping options. Most displaced and confined people initially rely on relatives, community support networks, or municipal public spaces, communal halls, and school residences, which face severe overcrowding, lack of privacy, and precarious hygiene conditions (OCHA 06/11/2025 and 16/07/2026).

International funding cuts have drastically reduced available formal shelters in the department: Ipiales' capacity fell from eight to two, Pasto's four shelters closed entirely, and capacity also declined in Tulcán (Ecuador), leaving single male victims, migrants and refugees, and older adults particularly unattended in the border region (KII 02/09/2026; KII 08/09/2026; KII 28/08/2026 a). Shelters, mattresses, blankets, mosquito nets, and kitchen items, alongside technical support for safe temporary spaces, remain urgent needs, compounded by recurring climate shocks (e.g. floods, windstorms, wildfires) that destroy housing and require pre-positioned emergency kits and evacuation planning (OCHA 08/08/2025; 3iS et al. 19/06/2026).

Livelihoods are similarly eroding under combined armed and economic pressure. Combat, extortion, and landmine/explosive contamination have paralysed agriculture, fishing, artisanal mining, and trade, forcing people to abandon land, crops, livestock, and tools (OCHA 06/11/2025; DRC 14/08/2025).

NSAG-imposed mobility restrictions and river curfews prevent traditional activities, such as night fishing and piangua collection, an activity primarily carried out by Afro-Colombian women along the Pacific Coast, who therefore bear a disproportionate share of this income loss, while volatile coca prices and mining disputes further destabilise rural income (DRC 14/08/2025 and 08/04/2025).

Families adapt to these limitations by shifting cultivation to less isolated areas or adopting household gardens, but prolonged income loss is driving crisis-level coping. Out of households monitored in Nariño from April–June 2025, 47% reported indebtedness, while 37% reduced daily food rations, alongside asset sales. This economic desperation increasingly acts as a protection risk factor; once the initial emergency assistance, which typically covers only 15–20 days, is exhausted, families face growing pressure towards premature, unsafe returns to areas with active clashes and landmine contamination, fuelling displacement and revictimisation cycles (DRC 14/08/2025 and 08/04/2025; KII 03/09/2026 a).

Current areas where livelihood assistance gaps persist include agricultural inputs, tools, animal health brigades, and community food production projects, as well as multipurpose cash assistance to mitigate emergency needs and support local socioeconomic recovery (OCHA 06/11/2025 and 05/09/2026).

Humanitarian access and response

Humanitarian access and response capacity vary across the six municipalities analysed as humanitarian funding constraints evolved significantly during the analysis period. In 2025, the dismantling of USAID led to sharp cuts in US humanitarian contributions to Colombia, reducing the operational capacity of humanitarian responders nationwide (ACAPS 16/04/2025).

In 2026, a partial recovery had occurred at the national level, with the US resuming humanitarian financing channelled through OCHA and USD 195 million allocated across 32 projects involving 21 stakeholders (CBPF accessed 11/09/2026). That said, information on how this recovery has translated into response capacity specifically in the border municipalities of Nariño remains limited (KII 02/09/2026; KII 28/08/2026 a).

Humanitarian access constraints

NSAGs control road and river movement in several rural areas. In Awá Indigenous reservations in Barbacoas, Ricaurte, and Tumaco, NSAGs operate checkpoints where they inspect luggage, documents, and phones to identify people, goods, or information of interest to the groups. People can generally continue their journey if they do not raise concerns during these checks, but NSAGs have also prevented some movements without providing a clear reason (KII 28/08/2026 b; KII 24/08/2026;

DRC 14/08/2025). Curfews also prohibit road and river traffic after 18:00, limiting humanitarian organisations' ability to reach communities and deliver assistance (KII 24/08/2026; DRC 14/08/2025).

Explosive ordnance further constrains access in rural and border areas. APMs and UXO are present along roads connecting Barbacoas with Ricaurte and Samaniego, as well as along the Barbacoas–Junín and Tumaco–Junín–Ricaurte routes (KII 28/08/2026 b; DRC 08/04/2025). In a border municipality, an organisation supporting APM/UXO response cannot conduct demining because of difficult terrain and NSAG hostilities. This limits efforts to reduce the risks posed by explosive ordnance and further restricts access for communities and humanitarian personnel (KII 04/09/2026 c).

In Ipiales, the rural areas of La Victoria and Jardines de Sucumbíos face active hostilities, mine recontamination, and strict NSAG control, limiting humanitarian access (KII 04/09/2026 c; KII 27/08/2026; OCHA 09/04/2025).

Humanitarian response

Humanitarian response capacity has declined despite continued needs, with gaps in shelter, assistance for migrants and refugees, health services, and humanitarian transport (KII 02/09/2026; KII 28/08/2026 a; KII 01/09/2026 a; EHP/OCHA 07/05/2026).

In Ipiales, assistance is concentrated in the urban centre, reflecting the municipality's role as a major border entry point. Six of the eight temporary shelters previously operating in Ipiales have closed, reducing the availability of shelter and protection services.

Migrants and refugees also have limited information on available assistance, with weak mechanisms for communicating where and how to seek support (KII 02/09/2026). Humanitarian transport to move people away from the border has almost completely ceased, while food assistance has also decreased substantially (KII 28/08/2026 a; KII 02/09/2026). Colombians may face additional limitations, as remaining humanitarian assistance in the border municipalities increasingly focuses on migrant and refugee communities (KII 01/09/2026 a).

In Ricaurte, demining constraints limit the response largely to mine risk education and victim assistance (KII 04/09/2026 c). Organisations also provide health and child protection services but operate under highly volatile security conditions (OCHA 30/03/2026). Tumaco has the broadest humanitarian response among the municipalities analysed, with NGOs providing protection, WASH, health, and education services (KII 27/08/2026).

OUTLOOK

Over the next six months, the humanitarian situation along the Nariño–Ecuador border is likely to deteriorate, largely shaped by how NSAGs respond to the national government's security policy. Since taking office on 7 August 2026, the Government has ended the Paz Total negotiation framework and shifted towards an approach centred on military pressure over dialogue with armed groups (ET 05/09/2026).

How these measures materialise remains uncertain, as no detailed implementation timeline is available; however, negotiations with Ecuador and the US on counternarcotics cooperation are already underway, and the Government revoked the resolution banning aerial glyphosate spraying of coca crops in late August 2026, planning to resume fumigation using bioherbicides to comply with Constitutional Court rulings (Infobae 28/08/2026; EE 16/09/2026). With the negotiation framework dismantled, competition between newly arriving NSAGs and groups formerly in talks is likely to intensify displacement – already continuing at lower visibility during the negotiations – with a resurgence expected in Awá territories, the group already most affected. Individual displacement is expected to remain high across scenarios in rural Barbacoas and Ricaurte (KII 27/08/2026; KII 28/08/2026 b).

The end of dialogue, combined with renewed aerial spraying over coca-growing corridors in Nariño and Putumayo already contested for gold mining and cocaine transit, is likely to intensify territorial disputes as groups defend crops and routes against both fumigation and rival expansion. Spraying may also harm nearby licit crops and expose populations to health risks, adding livelihood and protection pressures in areas with limited state presence (Uniandes 18/12/2020; La Silla Vacía 11/09/2025).

This confrontation is compounded by tightening bilateral counternarcotics cooperation. The September 2026 US decertification of Colombia's anti-drug performance and reinforced military coordination between Colombia, Ecuador, and the US signal a possible increase of joint military forces on the border sustaining external pressure that NSAGs are unlikely to yield to, potentially escalating violence,

including drone-borne IEDs, in response (Infobae 28/08/2026; EE 16/09/2026). This escalation is expected to be concentrated in Tumaco and Ipiales, where such attacks are already recorded (3iS et al. 11/08/2026).

Complex mobility dynamics will compound the crisis. An increasing flow of Ecuadorian families and binational households fleeing violence and extortion is arriving in Nariño hubs, such as Ipiales and Tumaco (Migración Colombia 15/07/2026). Simultaneously, Colombian civilians will continue seeking international protection across the Ecuadorian border. Tighter border controls are unlikely to stop these flows; instead, they may push crossings towards more dangerous informal routes, increasing exposure to trafficking networks, particularly for women and girls.

Between late 2026 and early 2027, El Niño is projected to aggravate humanitarian conditions. In Nariño's Andean ecosystems, severe rainfall deficits and high temperatures may worsen water scarcity and trigger forest fires (3iS et al. 19/06/2026). Coastal and Amazonian border areas instead face flooding and sea-level rise. The greatest risk lies where climate shocks overlap with active armed disputes, as in rural Tumaco and the mining areas of Cumbal, leaving communities exposed to two simultaneous crises with reduced capacity to cope.