



Armed Conflict and Mass Displacement in Colombia

Situation Report #1

January 22, 2025

Project HOPE is responding to the urgent health and humanitarian needs of civilians forcibly displaced by the escalating violence between armed groups in the Catatumbo region of Colombia. Families are fleeing their homes in search of safety and stability, with more than 32,000 people seeking shelter in and near the municipalities of Cúcuta, Tibú, Ocaña, and El Tarra. There is a critical need for a surge of health and humanitarian assistance as the conflict is expected to worsen.

Situation Overview

A severe humanitarian crisis has erupted following the intensification of violence and subsequent mass displacement of civilians in the Catatumbo region in Colombia's Norte de Santander department. Conflict between armed groups, including the National Liberation Army (ELN) and factions of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), has steadily increased since January 15, 2025. The violence has resulted in at least 80 deaths and the displacement of over 32,000 individuals, including approximately 1,000 people seeking refuge in Venezuela's Táchira and Zulia states. In response, **Colombia's president has declared a state of emergency and an interior disturbance**, deployed an additional 600 military personnel to the region, and reissued arrest warrants for 31 ELN leaders, effectively suspending ongoing peace negotiations.

The crisis has significantly impacted local health systems, overwhelming facilities with an influx of displaced persons in need of health services and causing shortages of

Key Highlights:

- An explosion of violence has **forcibly displaced over 32,000 people** along the Venezuela-Colombia border, including at least 1,000 individuals who have fled from Colombia to Venezuela.
- **At least 80 people have been killed** in the recent violence, with civilians reporting **armed groups going door-to-door** and launching indiscriminate attacks.
- **More than 20,000 people have fled** to Cúcuta, including roughly 769 people **temporarily sheltering** at a large soccer stadium.

Project HOPE's Impact:

- **198 hygiene kits** have been distributed to adult men and children in Convención and Cúcuta.
- **186 dignity and hygiene kits** have been distributed to displaced women and girls of reproductive age in Convención and Cúcuta.
- **195 birth kits** have been distributed to displaced pregnant and postpartum women.
- At partner health clinics, **over 1,330 people** in Cúcuta and Ocaña were **treated with medicines donated by Project HOPE.**

essential medical supplies. The Colombian Departmental Health Institute (IDS from its Spanish acronym) has declared a yellow hospital alert, mobilized response teams, and is coordinating with national and international humanitarian partners and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

There is also a concerning rise in disease outbreaks, including dengue fever, particularly in the municipalities of Ocaña and Cúcuta, increasing the need for water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) support. As more families are forced to live in overcrowded conditions, the threat of additional infectious disease outbreaks demands increased attention from humanitarian partners.

The prolonged conflict and displacement crisis is increasing the demand for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services, as families and children begin to cope with the trauma of the past week and health workers struggle with heightened workloads, shortages of supplies, and personal stress.

Addressing the needs of groups made vulnerable during this humanitarian crisis — especially children, women, and older adults — must be a top priority for all humanitarian actors to protect those most at risk. In addition, collaborative efforts between government agencies, NGOs, international organizations, and local partners will be critical to ensuring a sustainable and effective response to this ongoing crisis.

Project HOPE’s Response

Project HOPE is providing assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in both Convención and Cúcuta, working in collaboration with the Local Coordination Team (ELC), the Interagency Group for Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM), and partner organizations. The ELC, led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the GIFMM, led by the International Organization of Migration (IOM), are working together through the “back-to-back” system to address the needs of the those doubly affected by this crisis, including displaced Colombians as well as migrants and refugees, particularly those from Venezuela.



A member of Project HOPE’s team in Colombia connects people displaced by the violence to essential humanitarian services and supplies provided by Project HOPE and other partners. Photo by Project HOPE staff, 2025.

In Cúcuta, the conflict has led to the arrival of over 20,000 displaced individuals, overwhelming local resources and health systems. Temporary shelters, including several hotels and the General Santander Stadium, a large soccer stadium, have been

“What’s happening in Colombia is heartbreaking and horrifying. Our team in Norte de Santander has witnessed an influx of displaced families, including mothers traveling with multiple young children on foot.”

— Adib Fletcher, Project HOPE’s Senior Regional Director for Latin America, the Caribbean, and Humanitarian Response

set up to accommodate families fleeing the violence. **Our team reports that many families have fled with little to no belongings due to acute fears for their lives.**

In Convención, similar influxes of displaced people are stressing local capacities, prompting the deployment of government-led response teams and the activation of community-based health surveillance to address urgent health needs, including respiratory infections and malnutrition. **This comes after IDS has reported cases of malaria, dengue, Hepatitis A, as well as acute, moderate, and severe malnutrition in children under five years of age.**

Through our ongoing programming in Norte de Santander, and in partnership with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, **Project HOPE is distributing medicines and essential WASH supplies to IDPs in Cúcuta and Convención.** To date, our team on the ground has distributed over 400 hygiene, dignity, and birth kits

In Cúcuta, Project HOPE is providing assistance to displaced persons sheltering in the General Stadium of Santander in coordination with ESE Imsalud, a health care institution and active partner of Project HOPE's that provides primary health services throughout Cúcuta. At ESE Imsalud's service point at the stadium, Project HOPE has been distributing hygiene kits with essential items for children and adults, as well as kits with additional items for pregnant and post-partum women. Project HOPE also distributed these kits in Barrio Cundinamarca and in coordination with the Hospital Universitario Erasmo Meoz. In Cúcuta, a total of 276 kits have been distributed, including 130 dignity kits, 50 hygiene kits for adult men, 71 hygiene kits for women, and 195 kits for pregnant and postpartum women.

Project HOPE has also provided ESE Imsalud's mobile medical units with essential medications to supplement their primary health services, which include general consultations, psychological consultations, and vaccinations. ESE Imsalud's mobile medical units have provided care to 1,200 people in three days outside the stadium.



A member of Project HOPE's team in Colombia talks with a displaced mother seeking assistance in the Catatumbo region. Photo by Project HOPE staff, 2025.

In Convención, Project HOPE is supporting the needs of displaced individuals and other affected populations through hygiene kit distributions at the Centro de Convivencia Ciudadana and in the Casa Campesina. A total of 133 kits were distributed between January 21 and January 22, including 56 dignity kits, 27 hygiene kits for men, and 50 hygiene kits for children. In partnership with ESE Hospital

“People have been forced to leave everything in fear for their lives. Families have fled with just one or two bags, and they have no certainty on when they can return to their homes. As people find shelter in overcrowded areas, we are concerned about disease outbreaks and an increased strain on the local health system.”

— Adib Fletcher, Project HOPE's Senior Regional Director for Latin America, the Caribbean, and Humanitarian Response

Regional Noroccidental, Project HOPE has donated primary care medications to five shelters where health services are available to migrants in Ocaña. These medications have since been distributed to 130 people accessing health services at this location.

Rapid Assessment & Urgent Needs

Project HOPE is continuing to monitor the situation as well as the evolving needs of displaced populations as the conflict continues. As of January 22, 2025, people are continuing to arrive in Cúcuta seeking shelter, safety, and humanitarian services. The displaced population is expected to continue to increase until a ceasefire can be negotiated with the armed groups. At this time, our team on the ground knows that there is a critical need to expand services to meet urgent food security, nutrition, health, protection, shelter, and WASH needs.

Project HOPE is launching a rapid needs assessment in the municipalities of Convención, Cúcuta, Ocaña, and Tibú, in coordination with partners and local actors, to determine specific health and protection needs and identify gaps in WASH services and supply availability. In the face of acute humanitarian crises, like the one that has arisen following the conflict in the Catatumbo region, **the international community and donors must come together to support civilians**, especially in contexts like this where trusted humanitarian partners are ready and well-positioned to expand their response efforts and strengthen the community for the long run.



A member of Project HOPE's team in Colombia carries essential supplies, including hygiene and dignity kits, into Estadio General Santander de Cúcuta, a large soccer stadium in the Catatumbo region. Photo by Project HOPE staff, 2025.

“We are working as fast as possible to assess the health needs of displaced communities. Our hope is always that Colombia finds a long-term solution for peace, and that we will soon see an end to the violence.”

— Adib Fletcher, Project HOPE's Senior Regional Director for Latin America, the Caribbean, and Humanitarian Response

LAC Regional Desk
lacdesk@projecthope.org

Media Relations
media@projecthope.org

project
HOPE[®]
projecthope.org