

# Colombia-Venezuela Border Displacement



Need for international assistance	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
		X			
Expected impact	Very low	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
		X			

## Crisis Overview

Since 21 August, almost 1,500 Colombians have been deported from Venezuela. In addition, almost 20,000 Colombians living in Venezuela have returned to Colombia due to fear of persecution. The rapid influx of deportees and returnees has created a humanitarian crisis in the affected departments, in particular in Norte de Santander, which hosts the majority of returnees (90%).

	Norte de Santander	La Guajira	Arauca	Vichada	Total
<b>Resident population</b> (2005)	1,228,082	623,250	208,605	55,158	<b>2,155,095</b>
<b>Deported</b> (as of 9 September)	1,097	305	70	10	<b>1,482</b>
<b>Returnees</b> (as of 9 September)	18,283 (est.)	848 (est.)	718 (est.)	103 (est.)	<b>19,952 (est.)</b>
<b>Total</b> (as of 9 September)	19,380	1,153	788	113	<b>21,434</b>

## Key Findings

### Anticipated scope and scale

The rapid influx of more than 20,000 returnees from Venezuela into the already vulnerable departments along the Colombia-Venezuela border has already had a significant impact in the affected departments: Norte de Santander, La Guajira, Arauca, and Vichada. The border closure is also affecting the local economy in the departments, and may have a significant impact if the border remains closed for a longer period of time.

### Priorities for humanitarian intervention

- Shelter and NFIs assistance for the returnees.
- Protection, in particular family reunification.
- Vulnerable groups include: returnees not staying in displacement sites, children and adults who lack identification papers, and members of the Wayuu indigenous group

### Humanitarian constraints

Fuel shortages in the Colombian border region have been reported due to the border closures. While the security situation in Colombia is less volatile following FARC-EP's unilateral ceasefire, security incidents continue to be reported, in particular due to the continued presence of other armed groups.

## Crisis Impact

On 19 August, Venezuelan president Maduro closed a border crossing between the Venezuelan state Tachira and the Colombian department Norte de Santander, and in the following days several other border crossing closures followed (El Espectador 15/09/2015). The border closures came after an attack on Venezuelan soldiers earlier that week – an attack the Venezuelan president claimed Colombian smuggling groups were responsible for (BBC 27/08/2015). The deportations of Colombians living in Venezuela's border states began on 21 August, with Venezuelan officials claiming the deportations were part of an effort to fight the criminal activity and illegal trade present in the border region (The Guardian 26/08/2015).

As of 9 September, 1,482 Colombians have been deported from Venezuela since 21 August. In addition, an estimated 20,000 people have returned voluntarily, due to fear of persecution and harassment by Venezuelan security forces (OCHA 10/09/2015; El Espectador 27/08/2015). 18,000 returnees are staying in Norte de Santander department, while Arauca, La Guajira, and Vichada departments are also hosting returnees. 1,471 people have been assisted by IOM to return to other areas in Colombia (OCHA 10/09/2015). Refugees who had fled to Venezuela to escape the armed conflict in Colombia are reportedly among the deported (Colombia Reports 02/09/2015).

In Cúcuta, Villa del Rosario, and Puerto Santander municipalities in Norte de Santander, a state of emergency has been declared (Colombia Reports 25/08/2015; OCHA 10/09/2015). No one has been deported to Norte de Santander since 26 August, but the numbers have been increasing in other departments by the border (OCHA 10/09/2015). 15,176 of the 20,000 people who have returned voluntarily have been officially registered as returnees, all in Norte de Santander (OCHA 10/09/2015).

### Shelter and NFIs

Many of the returnees and deportees left Venezuela without any belongings, and trucks have not been allowed to cross the border to retrieve possessions (Colombia Reports 04/09/2015; Reuters 28/08/2015). The returnees need mattresses, sheets, blankets, and clothing (IFRC 11/09/2015). While many are staying with family and friends, and some have returned to their areas of origin, not all returnees have a house or a support network in Colombia and they may not be able to find a housing solution housing after they leave displacement sites (IFRC 11/09/2015). Reportedly, in Venezuela some of the houses in belonging to Colombians who have been deported from Venezuela have been demolished (TIME 08/09/2015).

**Norte de Santander:** 28% of the registered returnees in Norte de Santander are staying in displacement sites or have returned to other areas. 72% are in host communities

(OCHA 10/09/2015). Humanitarian actors are concerned that returnees staying in host communities may miss out on information on the assistance available to them, including assistance with returning to other areas in Colombia (OCHA 10/09/2015).

**Arauca:** The official displacement site in Araucuita does not have the resources to deal with the influx of returnees, and is unable to host all returnees currently present in the town (OCHA 10/09/2015).

### Protection

Family reunification is an important protection issue. In some cases, some family members have been deported while others have stayed behind, including those married to a Venezuelan partner. As of 2 September, more than 300 children still in Venezuela had been separated from one or both of their parents (IFRC 11/09/2015; OCHA 10/09/2015; Colombia Reports 02/09/2015). Returning refugees are in particular need of assistance. While no accurate numbers on the refugees who have returned are available, as of late August at least 100 deportees were registered refugees (OCHA 31/08/2015).

**Norte de Santander:** The points of registration closed on 9 September, and unregistered returnees may miss out on assistance. Some of the hotels used as shelters are reportedly located in areas with high crime rates (OCHA 10/09/2015).

**La Guajira:** Many of the children who have returned reportedly lack identification papers (OCHA 10/09/2015). Restrictions on movement for members of the Wayuu indigenous group pose a particular concern, as they live on both sides of the border (IFRC 11/09/2015).

### Education

Students studying at Venezuelan institutions have had their studies disrupted, and children who have been deported or voluntarily returned are not registered in the Colombian school system, and may not access education. Other barriers to school attendance include lack of uniforms and learning materials. Children without identification papers are at particular risk of missing out on educational activities (OCHA 10/09/2015). Venezuelan officials have announced that school children will be allowed to cross the border to Venezuela to attend school (Colombia Reports 04/09/2015).

### Food Security and Livelihoods

A shortage of food, caused by the border closure and disruption of cross-border trade, has been reported in the affected departments (IFRC 11/09/2015). Further food shortages may occur as prices rise (IFRC 11/09/2015). Livelihood support is needed for returnees who are no longer able to conduct their former livelihood activities in Venezuela (IFRC 11/09/2015).

**Norte de Santander:** People staying in host communities may not access food assistance, which will further stretch the resources of host communities (OCHA 10/09/2015). The economy of Norte de Santander is highly dependent on trade relations with Venezuela, and a prolonged crisis may have an adverse affect (Colombia Reports 28/08/2015).

**La Guajira:** The rural population in La Guajira could be severely affected by a prolonged border closure, as a large part of their food comes from Venezuela. The economy of the department is also dependent on trade with Venezuela (Colombia Reports 14/09/2015; OCHA 10/09/2015). The returnees need livelihood assistance (OCHA 10/09/2015).

**Arauca:** As of 10 September, no food reserves were available at the Arauquita displacement site. Most of the returnees had therefore left (OCHA 10/09/2015).

## Health

Health concerns include the risk of viral illnesses due to the concentration of people in displacement sites (for the current chikungunya outbreaks in the region, see Aggravating Factors), and potential risks from crossing the border through rivers (IFRC 11/09/2015). Some returnee children have presented with symptoms of dehydration, vomiting, and diarrhoea (IFRC 11/09/2015). Additional health services are needed, in particular for returnees with long-term health conditions who require permanent treatment (IFRC 11/09/2015). Psychosocial support is also needed (IFRC 11/09/2015; OCHA 10/09/2015).

**Norte de Santander:** The returnee population lacks access to information on available health services. There are not enough medical staff in the department to deal with the influx of returnees (OCHA 10/09/2015).

**Arauca:** Lack of information on available health services has been reported. Returnees who lack identification papers may encounter difficulties accessing health services (OCHA 10/09/2015).

## WASH

**Norte de Santander:** Awareness campaigns are needed to inform the returnee and host populations on the risks of outbreaks and how to prevent them (OCHA 10/09/2015).

**La Guajira:** The border closure limits access to fuel from Venezuela, which has affected water supply systems in 15 municipalities. Alternatives are needed (OCHA 10/09/2015).

## Vulnerable Groups Affected

Among the most vulnerable are:

- people who are staying with friends and family who may not be reached by assistance;
- people who have returned to other municipalities than Cúcuta, Villa del Rosario, and Puerto Santander (where a state of emergency has been declared), as they have not been registered and may miss out on assistance;
- Colombian refugees who fled the armed conflict in Colombia and have been deported or returned from Venezuela are in particular need of protection assistance;
- the influx of returnees into host communities is likely to stretch already limited economic resources; and
- members of the Wayuu indigenous group have traditionally moved freely across the border. They have so far been exempt from the border closure, but will be particularly vulnerable if this were to change – their access to food and livelihood activities may be severely affected (IFRC 11/09/2015; OCHA 10/09/2015).

## Humanitarian Constraints

A shortage of fuel – usually imported from Venezuela – has been reported in Norte de Santander, where it is only available at significantly increased prices (Colombia Reports 25/08/2015).

While security incidents involving FARC-EP has almost completely ceased since the implementation of its unilateral ceasefire in late July this year, security incidents in Norte de Santander continue to be reported due to the presence of other armed groups (OCHA 16/08/2015).

## Aggravating Factors

### Armed Conflict

Armed conflict in Colombia involving the Colombian government, paramilitary groups, and several armed groups, most prominently the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP), has been ongoing since the 1960s. More than 220,000 people have been killed and more than six million people have been internally displaced (UNHCR 12/2014; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2013). Almost 400,000 Colombian refugees were registered in other countries as of December 2014 (UNHCR 12/2014).

In recent years, the intensity of the armed conflict has diminished, and even more so in recent months – FARC-EP implemented a unilateral ceasefire on 20 July 2015.

However, insecurity persists, in particular due to the continued presence of other armed groups like the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), as well as post-demobilised armed groups (former paramilitary groups) (OCHA 16/08/2015; Colombia Reports 20/08/2015). Over the first six months of 2015, more than 2,000 people were displaced and more than 40,000 people experienced restrictions in movement in the Catatumbo region in Norte de Santander due to insecurity (OCHA 16/08/2015).

### Chikungunya

Colombia's border region is currently facing a chikungunya outbreak – a mosquito-borne viral disease. Chikungunya is not deadly for healthy adults, but children, elderly and those with underlying health conditions are at risk (IFRC 11/09/2015). Overcrowding in displacement sites and limited WASH facilities due to the influx of returnees may exacerbate the outbreaks. As of early September, 4,472 cases of chikungunya have been reported in La Guajira, 6,028 cases in Norte de Santander, 5,302 cases in Arauca, and 174 in Vichada (IFRC 11/09/2015).

## Contextual Information

The political crisis between Colombia and Venezuela erupted on 19 August, when Venezuelan President Maduro closed the border at the Simon Bolivar International Bridge between Colombia and Tachira state in Venezuela. The border closure followed an attack that resulted in the shooting of three Venezuelan soldiers and one civilian (AFP 22/08/2015). According to President Maduro, Colombian paramilitary groups were responsible for the attack, and the border closures were implemented as part of an effort to eliminate the presence of paramilitary groups in the border areas (Colombia Reports 03/09/2015).

In addition, an ongoing economic crisis has created acute food shortages in Venezuela, and Venezuelan officials have blamed these shortages on the presence of Colombian smuggling groups and the Colombian government's alleged inability in curbing these groups (TIME 08/09/2015). Illegal trade is widespread at the border, and trafficking of subsidised fuel and food from Venezuela into Colombia has been a lucrative business for smuggling groups (El Espectador 30/08/2015).

Two days after the first border closure, President Maduro declared a state of emergency in several municipalities in Tachira state, in a reported further step to limit criminal activity in the border region, and the border closure was extended indefinitely. Several other border crossings in the region have been closed since then, including a border crossing in the Venezuelan state Zulia (IFRC 11/09/2015).

On 27 August, Colombia and Venezuela recalled their ambassadors to the other country (Reuters 28/08/2015). On 13 September, Colombian officials claimed they had detected Venezuelan military planes flying over Colombian territory – Venezuelan officials denied the incident (AFP 14/09/2015). 6,000 Venezuelan troops have also been sent to the border (AFP 14/09/2015). President Santos and President Maduro are due to meet to discuss the border crisis on 21 September (El Espectador 16/09/2015).

Around five million Colombians live in Venezuela (Reuters 26/08/2015). The Venezuelan government recognises only around 5,000 as refugees, although UNHCR estimates that 164,000 Colombians in Venezuela are people of concern (UNHCR 05/2015).

### Colombia–Venezuela Relations

While relations between Colombia and Venezuela had been tense for a long time, relations between the two countries had improved in recent years, in particular after the end of Alvaro Uribe's presidency in Colombia in 2010 – who was very critical of Hugo Chávez's government (BBC 23/07/2013). Before the election of Juan Manuel Santos in Colombia, the two countries were reportedly close to war (CNN 03/12/2011). Colombian officials claimed that the Venezuelan government was supporting FARC-EP, while Venezuela saw Colombian paramilitary groups as a threat to Venezuela's national security. With the election of Santos, relations improved and strengthened. Both countries are economically dependent on bilateral trade (Gregory 05/2011). However, the ongoing economic crisis in Venezuela has caused tensions to rise again. Venezuela's President Maduro is also in the middle of an election campaign: elections are scheduled for December (Colombia Reports 29/08/2015).

### FARC-EP Peace Talks

In 2012, the latest round of peace talks between the Colombian government and FARC-EP began in Havana, Cuba. Previous attempts had failed, however as of August 2015 this round is reported to have progressed significantly (Reuters 31/08/2015). The Venezuelan government has been an important actor in the peace talks, and FARC-EP representatives have urged the two governments to resolve the political crisis to ensure the continuation of talks (El Espectador 11/09/2015).

## Response Capacity

### Local and National Response Capacity

The main disaster response actor in Colombia is the Defensa Civil Colombiana, the national civil defence (Defensa Civil Colombiana 2015). The Defensa Civil is participating in delivering humanitarian assistance to the affected population (IFRC 11/09/2015).

The main national actor for migration issues is the Unidad Administrativa Especial Migración Colombia (UAEMC). In the affected departments, UAEMC is participating with international and other national actors, in a roundtable activated by the government within Cúcuta Metropolitan Police (IFRC 11/09/2015; UAEMC 2013; UAEMC 2015).

The Ministry of Health has activated a special assistance plan for hospitals in the area. Health personnel are implementing vaccination plans. Vector control activities, including fumigation, are being delivered in the affected municipalities, to respond to chikungunya (IFRC 11/09/2015). The Colombian National Police and the Ministry of Education are also involved in response (IFRC 11/09/2015). The National Red Cross, the Alcaldía, the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF), religious institutions, Civil Defense, the Army and the Unidad Nacional para la Gestión de Riesgo (UNGRD) are helping run displacement sites (OCHA 15/09/2015; Cruz Roja Colombiana 04/09/2015).

### International Response Capacity

The Arauca Humanitarian Team and the Norte de Santander Humanitarian Team have been established as the two main international coordination hubs (OCHA 15/09/2015).

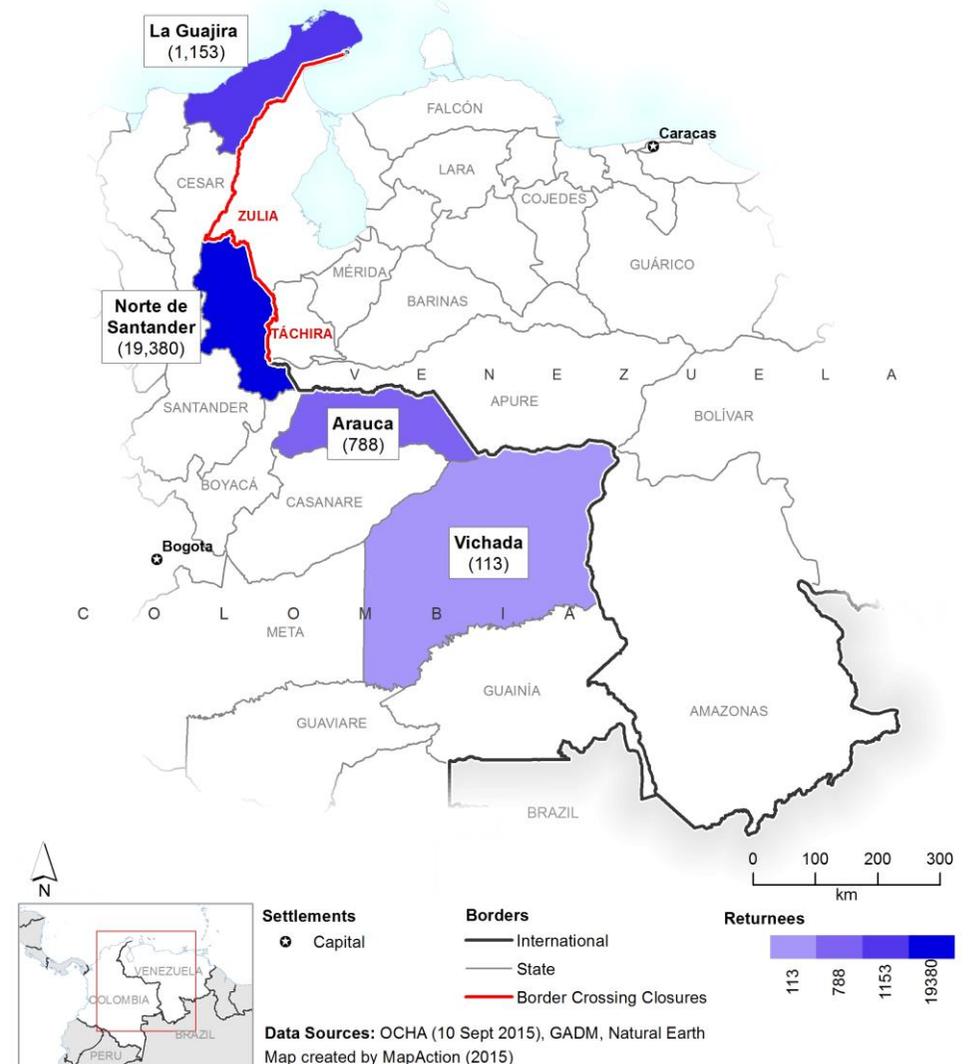
IOM is present on the ground (IFRC 11/09/2015). WFP is on the ground and preparing assistance at the request of the Government of Colombia (WFP 02/09/2015). UNFPA is collaborating with. Other organisations in the affected areas include the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) (OCHA 15/09/2015). A delegation of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is also in the country (REDLAC 14/09/2015).

## Information Gaps and Needs

- No international actors have a permanent presence in Vichada department: information on the needs of the returnees in this department is therefore very limited (OCHA 10/09/2015).
- Limited information is available on the needs of returnees outside of displacement sites, including those who have returned to their areas of origin and those staying with family and friends.

## Map of Affected Area

### Colombia and Venezuela: Overview



## Key Characteristics of Host Population

Key indicators	Norte de Santander	La Guajira	Arauca	Vichada
Total population (2005)	1,228,028	623,250	208,605	55,158
% population in rural areas (2005)	23%	45%	32%	62%
Population density (pop. per sq. km) (2005)	56.7	29.9	8.8	0.6
Female population (2005)	51%	55%	55%	49%
Male population (2005)	49%	45%	45%	51%
State capital & population (2005)	Cúcuta (587,676)	Riohacha (167,865)	Arauca (75,557)	Puerto Carreño (10,032)
Pop. with unmet basic needs (2005)	30%	65%	35%	67%
Sewerage coverage (2005)	78%	38%	69%	6%
Under-5 mortality rate (2005) (deaths per 1,000 live births)	27	43	28	34
Primary education coverage (2003)	68%	102%	73%	52%
Secondary education coverage (2003)	45%	50%	37%	24%

Sources: Knoema 2015; Citypopulation 2013 ; Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística 2015 ; Knoema Colombia 2015.