



A. Manroy/ICRC

## Colombia 2025: A humanitarian crisis beyond numbers

When I learnt that I would begin my mission in Colombia, it was impossible not to think about everything I had to do. The challenge is great for those arriving in a country of remarkable human richness yet marked by decades of armed conflict. Therefore, my first objective was to understand that reality respectfully and without simplifying it.

Since the end of February 2026, I have taken on the leadership of the Regional Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Bogotá, with the understanding that contexts such as Colombia's require prompt and consistent responses adapted to the multiple local realities. I have also witnessed the commitment of my nearly 300 colleagues in Colombia. Their discreet and respectful dialogue with all parties to the conflict makes a daily difference in the lives of people who do not, or no longer, take part in the hostilities.

Today, this dialogue is more important than ever. The scale of this human tragedy cannot be described by numbers alone, but is reflected in the suffering of entire communities living in fear of fighting: families forced to leave everything behind in order to survive, the search for thousands of missing persons, and the shattered lives of boys and girls scarred by war. In 2025, our teams worked in a context marked by the intensification and transformation of armed conflict dynamics, including an increasing use of new technologies, such as the use of drones, with significant consequences on civilians' daily lives.

The withdrawal of humanitarian organizations and the reduced resources of those still present in the country created an added challenge in 2025, with immediate consequences across the territories. The ICRC experienced this firsthand

by having to reduce its budget for 2026 in Colombia by 30 per cent. In a paradoxical situation with global consequences, we observe that while the humanitarian needs of communities affected by armed conflict are increasing, the resources to meet those needs are decreasing.

The humanitarian situation is certainly challenging and grounds for optimism are limited. However, the humanitarian consequences of conflicts are not unavoidable. They depend on concrete decisions of the parties to a conflict, not just on how hostilities are conducted. Upholding the obligations of international humanitarian law (IHL) is fundamental to maintaining humanity during war.

IHL is not an abstract idea that can be reduced to empty words, but a framework that should guide the daily operations of all parties to a conflict, state and non-state, and must be upheld by each of its members, regardless of rank.

I would like to conclude with a clear message: Colombia is not condemned to suffer indefinitely the consequences of armed conflict. Even in times of hardship, it is possible to ease that suffering. Upholding IHL not only offers a clear path to achieve this, but also constitutes an urgent and unavoidable obligation.

Olivier Dubois – Head of the ICRC's Regional Delegation in Bogotá

# The humanitarian cost of non-compliance with IHL in Colombia

Increase in humanitarian consequences in 2025 compared with 2024

↑ 100 %

increase in individually displaced persons.

↑ 111 %

increase displaced persons in mass events.

↑ 99 %

increase in confined persons.

↑ 40 %

increase in attacks on health workers.

↑ 34 %

increase in people injured or killed by explosive hazards.

↑ 22 %

increase in new disappearances documented by the ICRC.

In 2025, the humanitarian impact of armed conflict in Colombia remained critical and manifested itself differently across regions. This situation was shaped by the intensification of hostilities, the way in which the confrontations unfolded, and how civilians were treated in areas where state and non-state armed actors were present and exercised control.

According to the Comprehensive Victim Support and Reparation Unit (UARIV), at least 235,619 people were displaced individually, 87,069 were displaced in mass displacement events, and 176,730 remained confined. In the same year, the ICRC recorded 965 people injured or killed by explosive hazards, mostly civilians. It also documented 308 new disappearances. For its part, the National Medical Mission Board reported 282 attacks on health workers in connection with armed conflicts.

Compared to 2024, these indicators point to an overall increase in the number of people affected, particularly in individual and mass displacement and in confinement, all of which have doubled

This deterioration was reflected both in visible and immediate events and in deeper, more long-lasting effects that altered civilians' living conditions. The weakening of the social fabric, prolonged restrictions on access to essential goods and services, and changes in livelihoods have had lasting effects on communities.

What happened in 2025 was not a sudden phenomenon. **Since 2018, the ICRC has observed a gradual deterioration of the humanitarian situation**, in a context marked by the persistence of several non-international armed conflicts and increasingly complex dynamics that have broadened their impact on civilians.

## Conduct of hostilities and use of explosive hazards

Across various parts of the country, armed clashes intensified and, in many cases, took place in populated areas or near homes and other civilian property, exposing communities to greater risks.

In this context, many families stayed inside their homes for hours and even days to take shelter. **Civilians were injured, killed, and entire communities were confined or forced to be displaced.** Access to water, food, health care services, education and other essential services for daily life was limited or disrupted, and health personnel, who have special protection under IHL, faced situations of violence that hindered their work.

These dynamics also resulted in damage to housing, community spaces and health care infrastructure, deteriorating the communities' living conditions. This was compounded by the presence of explosive remnants of war on roads, transit areas and around homes, crops and community infrastructure, which continued to pose a threat even after hostilities had ceased.

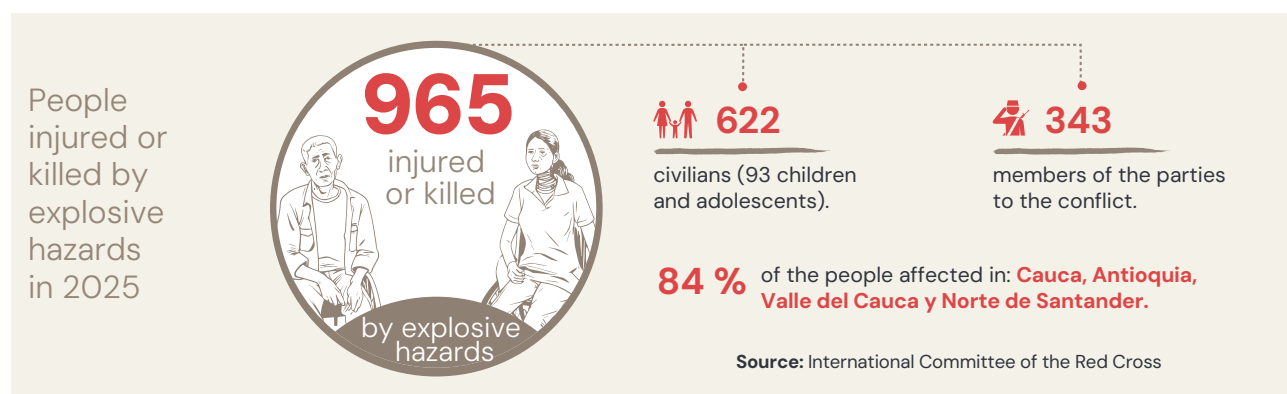
In some cases, armed actors occupied or used civilian property, which made the situation worse for the population. Several homes became uninhabitable, and those who continued to live there faced accusations or stigma.

Schools were among the most affected civilian properties. Some schools were damaged during clashes and others were temporarily used by armed actors. Explosive hazards were also found on access roads leading to schools. Such situations affected the role of schools as protective spaces, and, in many cases, teachers had to leave the schools to protect their lives.

All of the above made it difficult or impossible for children and adolescents to access education, thereby increasing their exposure to various risks, including involvement in armed conflicts.

The use of certain weapons continued to have particularly serious consequences for civilians. Of the **965 people injured or killed by explosive hazards recorded by the ICRC in 2025, 198 were affected by anti-personnel landmines, of whom 75 were civilians**. Despite a decrease compared to 2024 in cases related to anti-personnel landmines, the use of such explosive hazards continues to raise concerns owing to their humanitarian consequences.

Anti-personnel landmines can injure, maim or kill without distinguishing between parties to the conflict and civilians. Those who survive often face permanent disabilities and long-term psychological effects. In addition, the presence of such explosive hazards restricts mobility, limits access to crops, water sources and basic services, and keeps entire communities exposed to danger for extended periods of time. Given their nature and effects, the use of anti-personnel landmines is hardly compatible with the rules of IHL governing the means and methods of warfare, as established in the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, and is prohibited by the Ottawa Convention.



Other types of explosive hazards also had serious effects on civilians. **765 people, 71 per cent of whom were civilians, were injured or killed by controlled detonation devices and launched explosive devices**. The impact of such explosive hazards depends to a large extent on how and where they are used, as well as on the precautions taken to limit their effects on civilians and civilian property.

The increase in the use of launched explosive devices dropped in both rural and urban areas included the use of improvised launch devices and unmanned aerial vehicles, commonly known as drones.

The use of commercial drones modified to launch explosive hazards has intensified in the context of armed conflicts in Colombia and has generated fear, uncertainty and serious harm among affected communities.

The way in which hostilities are conducted and weapons are used has direct implications for civilians and civilian property. When the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution are not respected, there is an increased likelihood that the effects of hostilities will extend beyond military objectives and affect communities, thereby amplifying both the scope and severity of the humanitarian consequences.

**The increase in hostilities in 2025 had another consequence:** In many cases, it was not guaranteed that people who died in the context of armed conflict would be recovered and entered into the state process for body identification and return to their families, which exacerbated the risk of disappearance.

## Confinement in 2025

176.730

people affected by confinement across 15 departments

57 %

of the people affected in Chocó and Norte de Santander

Source: Follow-up on suspected mass displacement and confinement events. Sub-Directorate for Prevention and Emergency Response, UARIV.

## Massive displacement in 2025\*

\*10 or more families

87.069

people affected across 16 departments

67 %

of the people affected in Norte de Santander

Source: Follow-up on suspected events of mass displacement and confinement. Sub-Directorate for Prevention and Emergency Response, UARIV.

## Individual displacement in 2025

235.619

people affected by individual displacements across 32 departments

42 %

of the people affected in Norte de Santander

Source: Sub-Directorate for Assessment and Registration, UARIV.

**IHL applies to new technologies.** Parties to a conflict must respect considerations of humanity, as well as the principles governing the conduct of hostilities and the choice of means and methods of warfare, including when they decide to use unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), also known as drones.

## Treatment of civilians

Beyond the conduct of hostilities, civilians faced different forms of violence and abuse in areas where state and non-state armed actors were present and exercised control, such as homicides, disappearances, threats, recruitment, use and participation of minors in hostilities, sexual violence and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including in situations of deprivation of liberty.

These dynamics generated conditions of pressure and vulnerability that, in many cases, forced people to leave their territories, resulting in the loss of their livelihoods, support networks and means of subsistence. Some communities were confined by armed actors, which prevented, among other things, timely access to medical care, thereby increasing risks to life and health; for example, the lack of access to prenatal check-ups for pregnant women or to yellow fever vaccinations.

Among the different forms of violence recorded, **sexual violence continued to be particularly severe, yet one of the least visible.** The available figures do not reflect the true scale of this phenomenon, partly because many victims and survivors face stigmatization, fear of reprisals, and barriers to reporting what happened and accessing care and assistance mechanisms.

In addition to rape, sexual violence includes practices such as sexual harassment, forced nudity, survival sex and sexual slavery, among others. Its effects are not limited to those who suffer from it, as they also have an impact on individuals' family and community ties, affect their physical and mental health, and alter their living conditions and social environment. In several cases, armed actors have resorted to this type of violence as a form of intimidation, punishment or show of power.

In armed conflicts, persons who do not directly take part in hostilities, or who have ceased to do so, must be respected and protected in all circumstances. **IHL prohibits all forms of violence against their life, physical integrity or dignity, as well as cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.**

## New disappearances related to armed conflicts in 2025



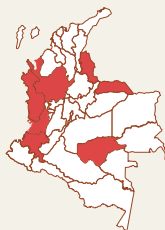
**308** missing persons\*  
in 17 departments

**226**

civilians (77 children  
and adolescents)

**82**

members of parties  
to a conflict



**85 %**

of cases in: Norte de Santander,  
Arauca, Cauca, Chocó, Antioquia,  
Valle del Cauca y Guaviare.

Source: International Committee of the Red Cross

\*This figure corresponds to the cases documented by the ICRC in the course of its work, and therefore does not reflect the full scale of the phenomenon.

## Upholding international humanitarian law

Taken together, the facts described throughout the present report show how the failure to uphold IHL has a direct impact on the way in which armed conflicts affect civilians.

In 2025, **the ICRC documented 845 alleged violations of IHL**. This figure corresponds only to the cases known to the organization and does not necessarily reflect all situations that occurred in Colombia.

Most of the recorded cases occurred outside of hostilities. Within this group, in 45 per cent of cases the life or physical or mental integrity of persons protected by IHL were violated, including civilians and those who were hors de combat, such as the wounded, sick or those deprived of their liberty. In 12 per cent of cases, the living conditions of communities were affected through restrictions on mobility, obstacles to accessing humanitarian assistance or basic services, as well as situations that compromised the provision of health care services or the work of health personnel.

The remaining 43 per cent of cases were recorded during the conduct of hostilities, mainly owing to the failure to take precautionary measures to protect civilians and civilian property from the effects of attacks.

**Upholding IHL is fundamental to limit suffering in armed conflicts.** When these rules are not respected, suffering is exacerbated.

### Attacks on health workers in 2025

**282**

attacks across  
22 departments

**68 %**

of cases in: Norte de Santander,  
Cauca, Chocó y Antioquia.

Source: National Medical Mission Board

### Persons deprived of liberty

Deprivation of liberty, even in the context of armed conflict, entails risks such as ill-treatment and loss of family contact. Parties to a conflict must ensure the dignified and humane treatment of persons deprived of their liberty and allow them contact with their families, in accordance with the obligations of IHL and other relevant rules. Through 16 visits in 2025, the ICRC was able to interview persons deprived of their liberty, verify their conditions and treatment, facilitate contact with their families and reiterate the ICRC's readiness to continue these activities with all parties to the conflict.

# Children and adolescents in armed conflicts

The involvement of children and adolescents in armed conflicts continued, one of the most serious manifestations of which is their recruitment, use and participation in hostilities. This not only has immediate consequences on their lives, integrity and development, but also profoundly weakens the social fabric and compromises the future of entire communities.

In 2025, in five of the departments where the ICRC is present, **65 cases of missing minors related to recruitment were documented**. These cases highlight the link between the involvement of minors in armed conflicts and disappearance as a humanitarian consequence. For families, the loss of all contact with their children, without knowing whether they are alive or dead or where they are, creates profound uncertainty and prolonged suffering.

Most of these cases involved adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17. However, there were also cases involving boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 14. Moreover, 49 per cent of missing minors were girls, which shows that this issue affects both men and women.

In addition to cases of disappearance, the ICRC became aware of **58 incidents related to the recruitment, use and participation of children and adolescents in hostilities, each of which may involve one or more minors**. Although this information does not reflect the full scale of the phenomenon, it does help identify some of the ways in which the involvement of minors occurs.

Both documented cases and known facts show that these practices do not occur in isolation. Most of the time, such practices are preceded by various forms of contact with minors that create the conditions for them to take place. In 43 per cent of the situations analyzed, the first type of contact was linked to the possibility of accessing employment or engaging in a productive activity. In areas where educational, economic and social opportunities are limited, such proposals can be presented as a real alternative.

These contacts often take place in everyday settings. In 46 per cent of situations, the first contact occurred in settings such as a neighbourhood or town centre, that is, in the same places where minors live, study and socialize. In other cases, contact occurred through deception in emotional relationships or in situations marked by threats or coercion. In addition to the aforementioned contact strategies, social media is used to establish contact with minors through promises of money, recognition or power. Although the use of social media was not evidenced in the cases documented directly by the ICRC, its growing presence reflects an evolution in the ways in which children and adolescents become involved in armed conflicts.

Such dynamics occur in environments where multiple factors converge. The presence of armed actors within communities, the weakening of protective spaces such as schools, and the lack of opportunities create conditions that foster this phenomenon and contribute to its persistence.

Once recruitment has taken place, many children and adolescents are transferred to other areas of the country, causing a break with their family, social and cultural environment. This uprooting makes contact with their families difficult and limits access to protection.

The consequences of this involvement go beyond family separation, as these include the loss of life plans, psychological effects, exposure to sexual violence, as well as injuries, mutilations and deaths in the context of hostilities. **The proximity to war exposes minors to particularly serious risks.**

In this context, the rules of IHL are decisive. **In Colombia, persons under the age of 18 enjoy special protection and must not be recruited or used in hostilities.** Likewise, property intended for their protection, such as schools, must be respected and not used for military purposes.

## **IHL applies to the use of new technologies in armed conflicts.**

Digital environments present opportunities to promote respect for humanity, but they can also increase risks for civilians and, in particular, for children, adolescents and persons deprived of their liberty. Parties to conflicts must uphold the principles governing the conduct of hostilities and the obligation to ensure humane treatment in such environments.

# ICRC humanitarian action

In 2025, ICRC humanitarian work benefitted 121,180 people\*

5.128

instances

of guidance and/or assistance to people affected by armed conflicts.

3.598

integrantes

members of the state security forces and authorities were trained in international humanitarian law and international standards on the use of force in the framework of human rights, as well as in the prevention of sexual violence.

89

members

of armed groups participated in IHL sessions on the protection of civilians, the Medical Mission and deceased persons, among other topics.

512

bilateral

and confidential dialogues were held with parties to the conflict to raise concerns about upholding IHL and human rights, related to the conduct of hostilities, humane treatment, protection of children and civilians, sexual violence and the use of force, among others.

19.846

people gained access to safe water and benefitted from the rehabilitation of health care and education infrastructure to strengthen their protection against the effects of armed conflict.

11.072

people were supported with food and essential items during mass and individual displacements, and confinement.

24.913

people benefitted from humanitarian actions of the Colombian Red Cross, thanks to collaborative work and cooperation with the ICRC.

8.280

people whose livelihoods were affected by armed conflict received support to strengthen their productive mechanisms.

1.890

people benefitted from community activities to reduce their exposure to risks.

747

people received physical and mental health care and support, including people who were injured, sick or living with disabilities.

350

journalists were trained in IHL and in tools for responsible reporting in contexts of armed conflict.

22

people held by armed actors regained their freedom in humanitarian operations facilitated by the ICRC.

\*A person may have received more than one service.



## Calls to action for parties to a conflict

- **Parties to armed conflicts** should take all feasible precautions to avoid or minimize the effects of hostilities on those who do not, or no longer, take part in them, as well as on civilian property. This entails avoiding the conduct of hostilities in populated areas and refraining from using means and methods of warfare with indiscriminate effects that cause excessive damage and superfluous or unnecessary suffering.
- **Humane treatment must be guaranteed** in all circumstances. Persons who do not take part in hostilities, or who have ceased to do so, must be respected and protected in accordance with IHL. Parties to a conflict are obliged to comply with and enforce these rules. Their observance is essential to preserve human dignity and limit suffering.
- **We reiterate our call** on all parties to the armed conflicts in Colombia to respect the special protection that IHL confers on children and adolescents. No person under the age of 18 should be recruited, used or involved in hostilities under any circumstances. To protect minors from war is to safeguard their physical, psychological and social integrity. Schools and the spaces where children grow, learn and develop must be preserved as what they are: safe and protective environments for children.
- **No one should go missing**, and no family should have to endure the uncertainty of not knowing what happened or where their loved one is. Preventing the disappearance of persons is an obligation imposed by IHL on all parties to armed conflicts.
- **We reiterate our call** on all parties to armed conflicts to respect the life and dignity of persons deprived of their liberty. All persons deprived of their liberty must be treated humanely in all circumstances and protected against violence, ill-treatment and any form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Ensuring dignified detention conditions, access to health care and contact with family members is an obligation under IHL.

---

Since 1863, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has worked to relieve suffering and preserve human dignity during war and armed violence. We deliver life saving aid across front lines, strive to reconnect families, advocate for humane treatment of detainees and urge compliance with international humanitarian law to keep civilians safe, including online.

---