



HUMANITARIAN REPORT 2024

COLOMBIA

Wars have limits that must be respected

Given the multiple armed conflicts around the world today, public debate about the rules governing wars is more relevant than ever. What are the limits to wars? What can be done to prevent human suffering? Are all and any actions valid when attempting to defeat an enemy?

Real-time reporting on bombing and people having to flee their homes has led many to believe that armed conflicts are so cruel that they break the very rules of what makes us human. But this is not true. International humanitarian law (IHL), also known as the "law of war", is aimed at reducing the suffering caused by armed conflicts.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is well aware of this suffering. For more than 160 years, we have been working to assist and protect victims of armed conflict. We know about the importance of IHL in reducing the pain caused by armed conflict. That is why, in Colombia, our call for all parties to comply is more than a mere formality. Rather, it is a direct way of demanding that all parties do everything in their power to ensure that their actions affect communities as little as possible.

All parties to armed conflicts must be firmly committed to concrete actions designed to protect the civilian population, wounded and sick people, missing people and their families, people deprived of their liberty, children and adolescents, members of armed groups who have laid down their weapons, and others. Although war can be cruel, they can be much more so when IHL is not applied. IHL reduces the barbarity of war.

However that, in 2023 our teams in the field continued to witness the terrible consequences of conflicts and disrespect for IHL. They witnessed the anxiety and fear within communities. They witnessed people's daily lives being impacted by the disputes between various armed groups and they saw how this affects their access to essential services such as drinking water, health care, food, education and, in general, to dignifying living conditions.

The humanitarian situation continues to be very concerning. For instance, although mass displacement declined at the national level, it grew exponentially in some regions, even reaching a 1,000 per cent increase on the previous year. Violence against health-care services continue to prevent communities from accessing the care they need. Additionally, only during 2023 alone, we recorded 222 cases of people reported missing in connection with armed conflicts that occurred during that same year. Entire communities continue to experience the consequences of the presence of explosive devices.

We therefore welcome all efforts to negotiate solutions to armed conflicts and reduce the suffering of thousands of people. However, we must remember that, even during peace talks and even when ceasefires are in place, the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict continue to exist, and this is where IHL can be helpful.

Humanitarian concerns need to be placed at the centre of the peace talks agenda. IHL is a guide and a concrete basis for this to happen because, although it does not seek to end armed conflicts, it does have tools that can guide the parties in their dialogue in order to reduce the suffering caused by these conflicts. Proper compliance with IHL improves the protection of civilians and other affected people, and allows special agreements to be made to directly and immediately strengthen that protection. This, in turn, can help build trust between the parties. Although it is up to the parties to sign these agreements, the ICRC offers them its expertise in IHL and humanitarian affairs, acting as a neutral intermediary to help implement the agreements.

This is a hopeful moment for the country. However, there are still thousands of people suffering as a result of the eight non-international armed conflicts that, according to the ICRC's legal analysis, are taking place in the country. That is why our humanitarian work continues to be critical.

During peace talks there may be hopeful moments for the country. However, there are still thousands of people suffering as a result of the eight non-international armed conflicts that, according to the ICRC's legal analysis, are taking place in the country.

In the course of 2023, we helped nearly 150,000 people with our support projects. More than 9,000 people received support for productive initiatives and more than 23,000 benefited from access to water, basic sanitation and community infrastructure. Our confidential dialogue and expertise facilitated the release of 66 people held by armed groups.

In 2024 we will continue to reach the most remote places in Colombia. Our goal is to support people suffering the most from armed conflicts and violence. And we will continue to remind the parties to armed conflicts that war is not a free-for-all and that, even in the midst of war, we are still human.



Lorenzo Caraffi
Head of Delegation, Colombia



The human cost of armed conflicts in Colombia

The civilian population continues to bear the brunt of the war. We wish that the figures we report here for humanitarian consequences belonged to the distant past. However, these figures reflect the daily life of thousands of families, particularly peasants, indigenous people and afro colombian people.

Throughout 2023, we supported communities who had been displaced and who, scared for their lives, took the only way out they had: leaving their homes and losing everything. We also provided support to people who were determined to start or continue the search for their relatives reported missing. We helped those who, in the midst of uncertainty, were confined to their communities with limited access to basic resources.

There were no significant improvements to the humanitarian situation that communities face in the regions where we worked. Throughout the year, our field teams documented 444 alleged violations of IHL and other humanitarian norms by state and non-state armed groups. These violations included threats; sexual violence; recruitment, use and direct participation of children and adolescents in hostilities; homicides; use of explosive devices with indiscriminate effects; cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment; and arbitrary deprivation of liberty, among other violations.

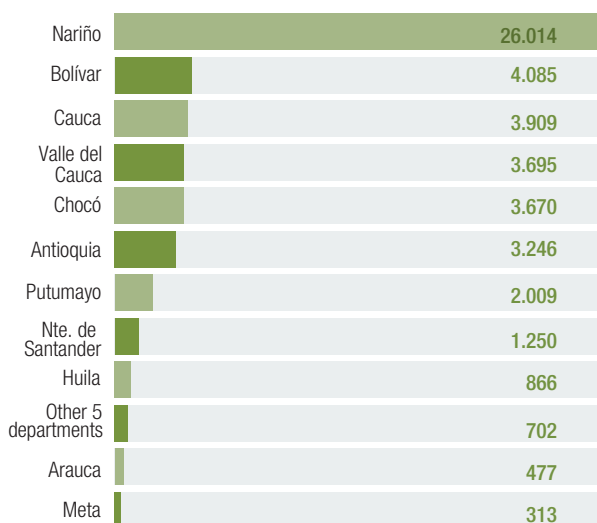
We also found non-compliance by the parties to the conflict in the way they went about hostilities. In most cases, this non-compliance took the form of a failure to protect the civilian population and their property from the effects of these hostilities.

*This information does not show the complete picture for the country, but only the cases that the ICRC learned about directly in the course of its humanitarian work. Nor do the figures allow for variation (increase or decrease) to be analysed from one year to the next, given that several dynamic variables can affect data collection.

Mass displacement in 2023

(Of ten or more families)

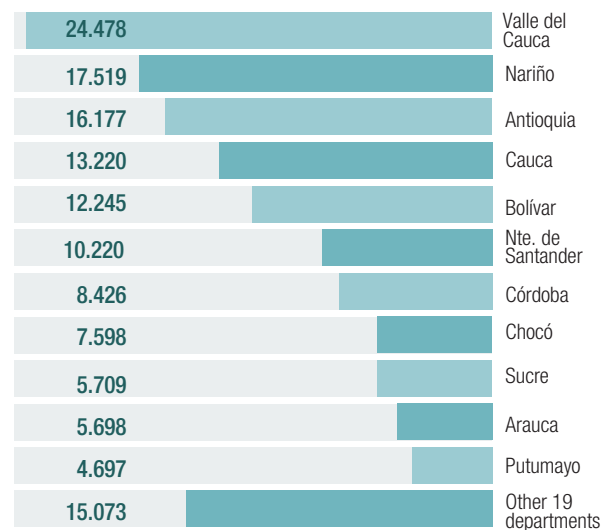
50.236 people affected



Source: Seguimiento a presuntos eventos de desplazamiento masivo y confinamiento. Subdirección de Prevención y Atención a Emergencias – UARIV

Individual displacements in 2023

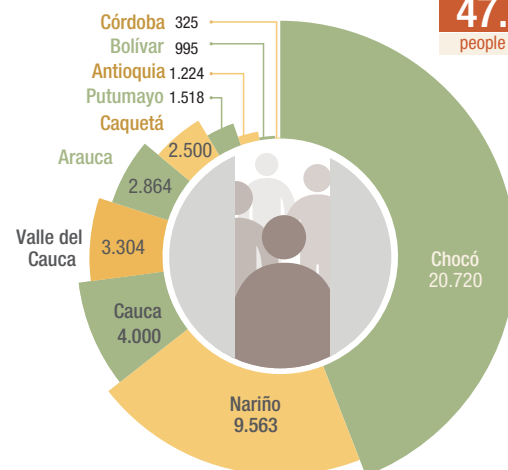
people affected **145.049**



Source: Subdirección de Valoración y Registro – UARIV

Confinements in 2023

47.013 people affected



Source: Seguimiento a presuntos eventos de desplazamiento masivo y confinamiento. Subdirección de Prevención y Atención a Emergencias – UARIV

According to official figures, 145,049 individuals were displaced, an increase of 18 per cent nationwide compared with 2022. In some territories the increase was even higher. In the department of Bolívar, the number almost doubled, with a 94 per cent increase compared with the previous year. In Cauca, the figure rose by 53 per cent. This issue tends to be less visible than other humanitarian consequences, but is nonetheless alarming, as families often abandon their homes for long periods of time or may even never return.

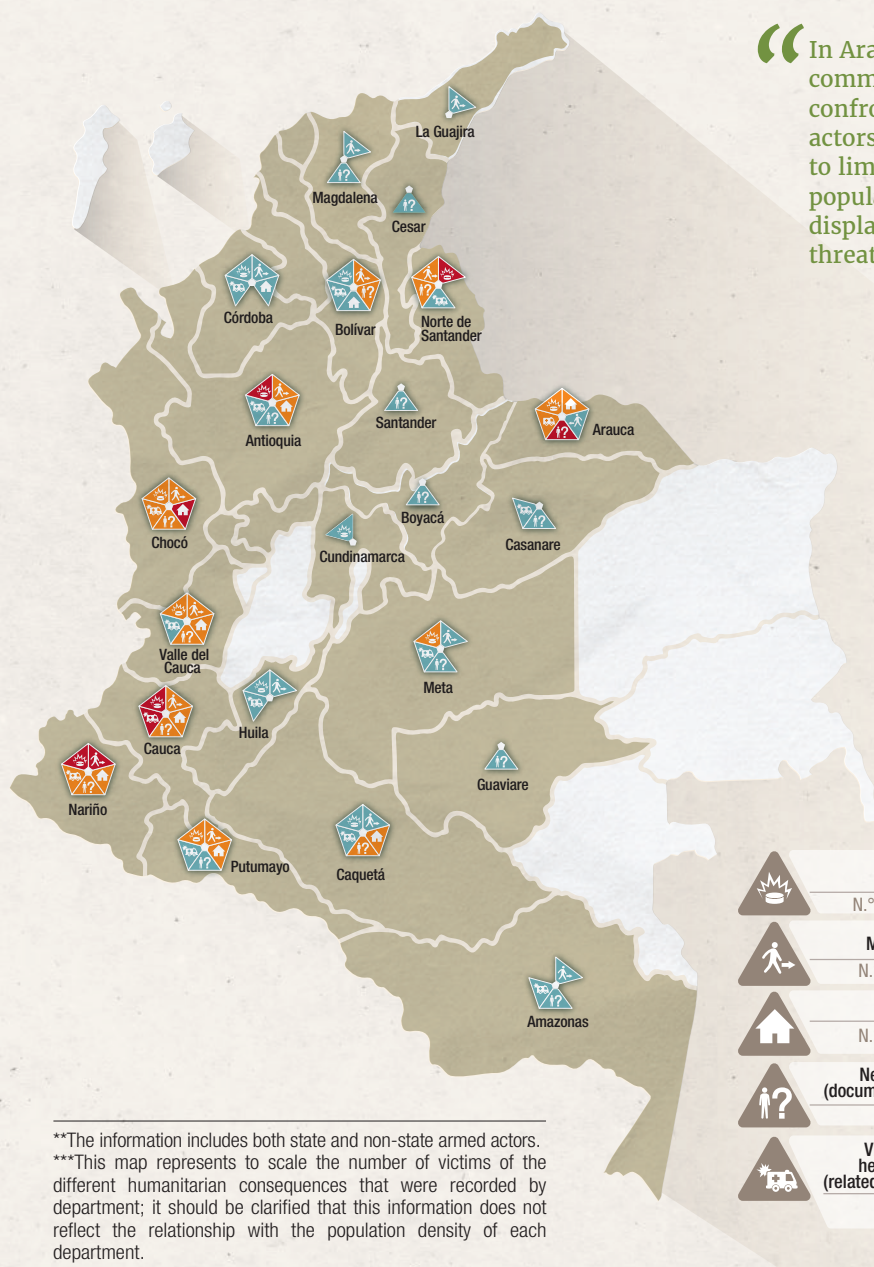
A further 50,236 people were displaced en masse, fracturing the social and cultural practices of the affected populations. For the fifth consecutive year, Nariño was the department with the highest number of people affected, accounting for 52 per cent of all displaced people.

Analysis of these figures shows that, at the national level, there was a 13 per cent decrease in this phenomenon compared with 2022. However, the problem spread to other departments such as Amazonas, Huila, Meta and La Guajira, which did not register mass displacement in 2022, but in 2023 saw more than 1,000 people affected.

In addition, in some departments there was a substantial increase, such as in Putumayo, which went from 169 people displaced en masse during 2022 to 2,009 in 2023, an increase of more than 1,000 per cent.

Displaced people face economic hardship due to the loss of their livelihoods. Particularly vulnerable communities also face the risk of re-victimization. The consequences of displacement also have a direct effect on mental health.

Humanitarian consequences in 2023 ***



Similarly, territorial disputes between armed actors and the presence of explosive devices led to the confinement of 47,013 people, a 19 per cent increase at the national level compared with 2022. The situation continues to be critical in the department of Chocó, which accounted for 44 per cent of the confined population. In other territories there was also a greater increase than the national percentage. For example, Antioquia went from 110 people confined in 2022 to 1,224 in 2023 and Cauca went from 1,615 people confined in 2022 to 4,000 in 2023. These situations generate uncertainty, fear and anxiety in the communities and hinder their access to essential resources and services such as food, water, education and medical care.

On another front, in 2023 we recorded 380 direct victims of different types of explosive devices. The number of victims of controlled detonation explosive devices decreased compared with 2022, possibly owing to the ceasefires agreed between armed groups and the government of Colombia. However, this decrease does not imply that the threat from the presence of these devices has been reduced, but rather that there is a change in their use that has a different impact on the populations.

“In Arauca and Sur de Bolívar departments, communities are caught in the middle of the confrontations. It is essential that the armed actors respect the principles of IHL in order to limit the consequences for the civilian population and thus avoid at all costs displacement, confinement, disappearances, threats and dispossession.”

Stéphanie Eller
Head of the ICRC Subdelegation
in Bucaramanga



Injury by explosive devices
N.º of direct victims***



Mass displacement
N.º of affected people



Confinements
N.º of affected people



New disappearances (documented by the ICRC)
N.º of cases



Violent acts against health-care services (related to armed conflict)
N.º of events

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Injury by explosive devices N.º of direct victims***	1 – 9	10 – 40	> 40
Mass displacement N.º of affected people	1- 999	1.000 – 9.999	10.000 – 29.999
Confinements N.º of affected people	1- 999	1.000 – 9.999	10.000 – 29.999
New disappearances (documented by the ICRC) N.º of cases	1 – 9	10 – 40	> 40
Violent acts against health-care services (related to armed conflict) N.º of events	1 – 9	10 – 30	> 30

**The information includes both state and non-state armed actors.
***This map represents to scale the number of victims of the different humanitarian consequences that were recorded by department; it should be clarified that this information does not reflect the relationship with the population density of each department.

Last year we also documented 222 cases of disappearance directly linked to armed conflicts and violence that occurred during 2023. This figure shows that disappearances continue to affect families and entire communities, with people tormented by the uncertainty of not knowing where their loved ones are or what has happened to them.

Increased violence against health-care services was also reported. Incidents include various armed actors entering medical facilities and units, putting arbitrary restrictions on the movement of medical personnel and transport, and using them by force. The intensification of this type of violence, in terms of murders, threats and deprivation of liberty among medical personnel, is alarming.

We were also concerned to note that during 2023, children and adolescents continued to be associated with armed actors. This situation requires particular attention. In many cases, these minors have been separated from their families, which has led to psychological or psychosocial breakdown and suffering, in turn affecting their dignity and full development. Not to mention the direct threat to their lives.

Sexual violence in the context of armed conflicts in Colombia also continues. Last year we documented 50 cases, which reflect only a small fraction of the huge number of victims and survivors of this type of violence. Similarly to other humanitarian disasters, although sometimes much more pronounced, sexual violence is intended to intimidate, terrorize, punish and control territories. Women and girls have been the most vulnerable to and affected by sexual violence. However, most victims and survivors do not report their abuse for fear of stigmatization, lack of guarantees for their safety and difficulties in accessing justice and reintegrating into their communities. Sexual violence has devastating consequences for victims and survivors, as well as for their families and communities, with effects on physical and mental health, as well as social and economic effects.

Confrontations between the government and armed groups decreased in 2023, while disputes between non-state armed actors intensified. This meant continued suffering for the communities that were stuck in the middle of the confrontations.

According to our current legal classification, based on IHL criteria, there are currently eight non-international armed conflicts in Colombia. Three of them are between the government of Colombia and the following armed actors, respectively: the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Gaitanist Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AGC) and former FARC-EP currently not adhered to the Peace Agreement (former FARC-EP).

The other five conflicts are between non-state armed actors: the first is between the ELN and the AGC and the remaining four are between the former FARC-EP, and 1) the Second Marquetalia, 2) the Border Commandos – Bolivarian Army, 3) the ELN and 4) the AGC. The ICRC recently classified this latest armed conflicts after two years observing and analysing the hostilities between the two armed actors and the humanitarian consequences.

Armed conflicts persist in Colombia, and their humanitarian impact has not been substantially reduced. Testimonies and figures on displacement; confinement; sexual violence; recruitment, use and direct participation of children and adolescents in hostilities; the presence of explosive devices and the impact they have on the civilian population; as well as violence against health-care services all highlight the need for all armed actors to respect IHL.

The reorganization of non-state armed actors and the humanitarian consequences affecting the civilian population, coupled with the historical institutional weakness in Colombia's most remote areas, mean there is still a long road to be travelled to mitigate the suffering caused by armed conflicts and violence. However, even in this scenario, communities continue to weave stories of resilience.

Classification of armed conflicts

- **Why does the ICRC classify armed conflicts?**

The ICRC classifies armed conflicts solely to fulfil its humanitarian mandate. This includes carrying out its functions under the Geneva Conventions, their Additional Protocols and the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, promoting respect for IHL and ensuring protection and support for the victims of these conflicts.

- **On what criteria does the ICRC base its classification of a non-international armed conflicts?**

The ICRC relies on IHL, which establishes two criteria for a situation of violence to be classified as a non-international armed conflicts: the armed actors must show a minimum degree of organization and hostilities between the parties must reach a minimum level of intensity. To qualify, both criteria must be met. The ICRC technically and objectively analyses whether these two criteria are met on the basis of information collected directly in the territories.

- **Is an armed actors motivation for legal classification relevant to IHL?**

For IHL, the motivation of an armed actors – whether political, economic, religious, ethnic or other – is not a requirement or element of analysis for being a party to a non-international armed conflicts or for the application of IHL. Moreover, the application of IHL to a non-international armed conflict does not grant a special status to armed actors or their members. In this sense, IHL does not permit or prevent a state from negotiating with armed actors.

The invisible consequences of explosive devices

In Colombia, the presence, use and abandonment of explosive devices in both rural and urban areas continues to leave an indelible mark on society. The cumulative consequences of these devices are varied and devastating, as they pose a long-term threat to communities. The presence or suspected presence of even a single device can confine an entire community for long periods or, at times, intermittently. This limits access to essential resources such as water sources, schooling and medical care.

There is also a risk of losing traditional practices rooted in the communities. They are forced to endure the fear and anxiety of having to travel further to avoid areas where anti-personnel mines may have been laid or where explosive remnants of war may be found. This situation is compounded by those who have made the difficult decision to leave their homes because of the constant danger posed by the presence of these devices. This exacerbates the problem of displacement in the country.

“ We are concerned about [armed actors] arbitrarily restricting mobility to communities and limiting access to basic services such as education and health. ”

Hugo Fiz, Head of the ICRC Subdelegation in Florence

The mere suspicion that these explosive devices might be present has affected communities that depend on their local economies. Fishing, hunting and access to agricultural activities, especially in peasant, Afro-descendent and indigenous communities, has been disrupted. These cumulative consequences go beyond the immediate and visible damage and reflect the complexity of armed conflicts in Colombia.

During 2023, we recorded 380 direct victims from anti-personnel mines, explosive remnants of war, dropped ordnance and controlled detonation devices. Of those people, 61 died, and the others were injured. They faced barriers to health care, long periods of physical recovery, and economic, social and psychological consequences that radically changed their lives. There was a 27 % decrease in the total number of direct victims compared with 2022, which is related to the decrease in occurrences from controlled detonation explosive devices, from 240 in 2022 to 75 in 2023.

However, this decrease does not imply a reduction in the presence, use and abandonment of explosive devices, but rather a change in their use since, at the same time, there was a significant increase in the number of victims of self-activated devices. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that our teams in the field recorded 169 cases in 2022, while in 2023 there were 184: a 9 % increase in the number of victims of this type of incident.

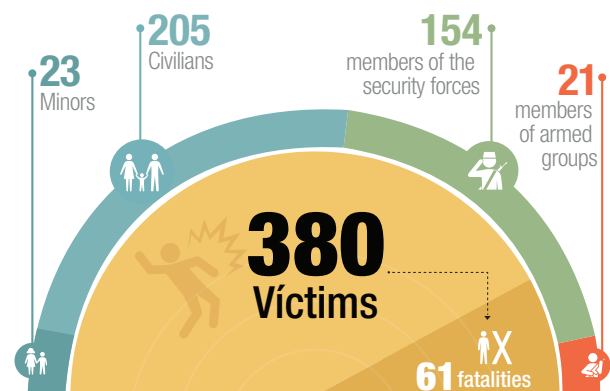
* Anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war.

The problem analysis also shows that there were new contaminated areas. This is reflected in the fact that 40 of the 73 municipalities in which explosive artifacts accidents were recorded in 2023 had no casualties the previous year.

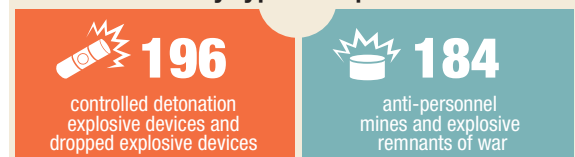
Of the total number of registered victims, 54 % were civilians, 40.5 % were from the security forces and the other 5.5 % were from non-state armed actors. This shows that affected communities continue to face significant humanitarian challenges. It is therefore imperative that all armed groups stop using weapons that have indiscriminate effects on the civilian population.

Behind every statistic, there are family members who have suffered the irreparable loss of loved ones because of explosive devices. There are also those who survive and who, despite the adversities they face on a daily basis, find the strength to overcome the physical and emotional aftermath.

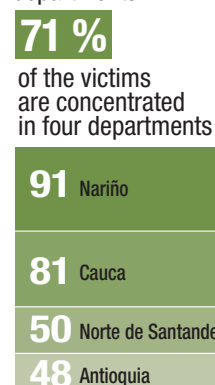
Victims of explosive devices in 2023



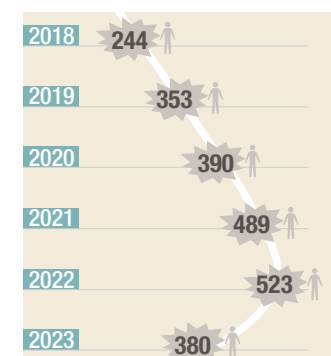
Casualties by type of explosive device



Most affected departments



Victims registered by year



Lost in a maze: the footprints left behind

The experience of having a missing family member is unique and can only be truly understood by those who have experienced it. For more than 30 years, we have been hearing from thousands of people who have had to handle the disappearance of a family member.

In 2023, we documented 222 cases of people missing in connection with the armed conflicts and violence that occurred in that year. These data confirm that this is still the reality in 18 departments, of which Arauca, Cauca, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Chocó and Valle del Cauca are the most affected, with 75 %s of the total number of documented cases.

These regions, characterised by historical and social complexities, continue to be epicentres of this problem. Data compiled by the ICRC reveal that, from the entry into force of the Peace Agreement in 2016 until December 2023, disappearances have continued, with a total of 1,476 people missing.

Territorial disputes between state and non-state armed actors not only mean that disappearances persist, but also create a hostile environment that can paralyse family members' attempts to access the institutions in charge of the search. Many families, caught between the desire to search for their loved ones and the fear of reprisals, opt for silence, which increases underreporting. In other cases, people report their family member as missing after long periods of time, when the traces of their disappearance may have been erased and finding them becomes even more difficult.

In this instance, it is worrying that, of the 222 cases registered in 2023, 49 were children and adolescents. Problem analysis highlights the vulnerability of children and youth caught up in armed conflicts and violence. The disappearance of children has a lasting psychological and psychosocial impact on communities. It is a tragedy that goes beyond individual loss and puts the future of society at risk.

These figures are only a glimpse into the reality of thousands of families, who find it difficult to access state support routes (particularly in rural areas) and who suffer the anguish of not knowing the whereabouts of their loved ones and whether they will be reunited with them alive. We reiterate our call to all armed actors, both state and non-state, to respect humanitarian norms, which establish that the disappearance of people must be prevented and all possible measures must be taken to avoid it.

“The civilian population often finds itself between a rock and a hard place, pressured by armed actors, threatened by the opposing side and suffering reprisals. The civilian population must never be involved in conflicts and must be respected at all times.”

Ignacio San-Román, Head of the ICRC Subdelegation in Medellín

We urge the state to implement the national search system and strengthen the Unit for the Search for Missing Persons [Unidad de Búsqueda de Personas dadas por Desaparecidas – UBPD], as well as the medico-legal system. In addition, we reiterate the need to guarantee the families of the missing people access to state support routes.

We at the ICRC reaffirm our commitment to continue supporting families and individuals who have searched tirelessly, and those who continue challenging the time and who will not rest until they find their missing relatives.

Disappearance cases occurring in 2023*



75 %
of the cases were concentrated in Arauca, Cauca, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Chocó and Valle del Cauca

Cases of missing people which occurred and were documented **between the entry into force of the Peace Agreement and December 2023**

1,476 cases

*These figures correspond to the cases documented by the ICRC in the course of its work, and therefore do not reflect the phenomenon in its entirety.

** This figure may vary in each ICRC publication as some disappearances are not reported during the same year of occurrence. For example, as at December 2022, we had documented 209 cases of disappearance that occurred during that same year. However, during 2023, we documented another 85 cases that occurred in 2022, making a total of 294.

Source: International Committee of the Red Cross

Worrying increase in violence against health in Colombia

Violence in the context of armed conflict has profoundly affected the physical and mental health of communities, particularly those living in the most remote areas of the country. This violence manifests itself in the form of threats, physical aggressions, deaths, sexual violence and other forms of violence. Paradoxically, health-care personnel, whose mission is to heal and alleviate suffering, have become a particular target of violent acts.

During 2023, the National Medical Mission Board recorded 511 violent acts against health care throughout the country. Of these, 140 (27 per cent) were related to armed conflicts. Most were attacks on the life and safety of medical personnel and directly impacted health assistants, nurses, psychologists, dentists, doctors, ambulance drivers and public health teams, who suffered the physical and emotional consequences of these acts.

Cauca, Chocó, Arauca, Nariño and Caquetá were the most affected. In some of these departments, entire teams of medical personnel were forced to stop working, resulting in the complete lack of health services for entire communities.

It is worth noting the increase in intensity of this violence, as reflected in the homicide of nine people – the highest figure recorded in the last five years. Five of these people were traditional healers in Cauca and Valle del Cauca. This loss not only strips indigenous, Afro-descendent and peasant communities of the ancestral knowledge of those who care for them from a cultural perspective, but also puts at risk the survival of populations that no longer have a first response option, which is sometimes the only form of health care available in their territories. In this regard, we call for respect for the life and safety of those who provide health care, including community and traditional healers, who are also protected by IHL.

Through our Mental Health for Medical Personnel Victims of Violence programme, we identified that 86 % of the personnel who participated in the programme presented worrying levels of psychological suffering. Among the most common symptoms are anxiety, cognitive difficulties and irritability, in addition to the individual suffering experienced by health-care workers, which limits their ability to care for others.

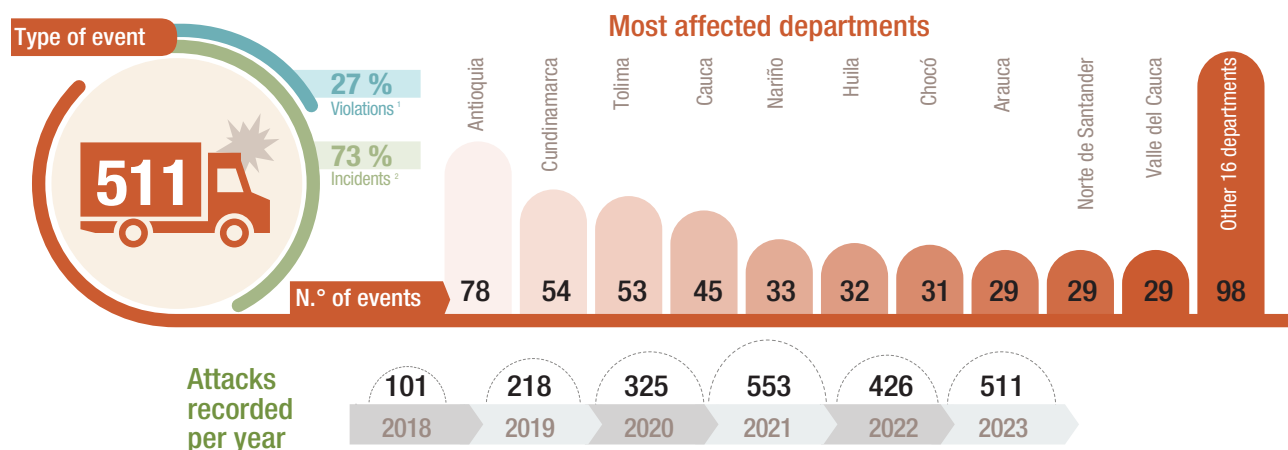
“The south-west has suffered in many ways due to armed conflict and violence. There has been displacement, the presence of explosive devices and attacks on health care. These events impact society as a whole, and that's why disrespect for IHL should not become the norm.”

Kian Abbasian, former Head of the ICRC Subdelegation in Cali

Health workers providing support to communities in areas most affected by armed conflicts and violence are guardians of life. Their work enables those who depend on their care to remain hopeful. These community care providers, traditional healers, health assistants, psychologists, dentists, nurses, doctors, ambulance drivers and health support personnel work tirelessly to heal the physical and mental wounds caused by armed conflicts in Colombia, while experiencing the threat of violence every day. They must be protected and respected at all times.

*These figures come from collected official external sources that complement the information collected by the ICRC. They may vary over time due to changes in registration and reporting systems.

Violent acts against health care in 2023



¹ Refers to attacks on health care that occur in the context of armed conflicts and are subject to the application of IHL.

² Refers to attacks on health care that occur outside the framework of armed conflicts and where national legislation and international human rights law apply.

Return to freedom: 44 years of neutral intermediation

Between 1980 – when we secured the first release of a person deprived of their liberty by an armed actor in Colombia – and 2023, we have facilitated 1,960 releases, always with the goal of returning people to their family homes.

In 2023, 66 people were reunited with their loved ones thanks to our neutral intermediation. This figure, the highest in recent years, exceeds the 63 releases we facilitated in 2022. Among those released were civilians, members of the armed forces and members of armed actors.

These results were possible thanks to our decades of experience in this area and the trust generated by the bilateral and confidential dialogue we maintain with all armed actors. We provide helpful, neutral intermediation when agreed upon by the parties. Based on our principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence, the parties allow us to receive the released people, check their state of health and reunite them with their families.

Our neutrality in conflicts does not make us indifferent to the suffering someone under the control of an armed group can experience. On the contrary. Not taking sides is what allows us to reach the most remote parts of the country with the sole objective of helping people affected by the war.

We are committed and ready to continue facilitating humanitarian operations in 2024. In this regard, we call on all armed actors to respect the work of impartial humanitarian organizations that offer protection to people in the midst of armed conflicts.



The ongoing task of raising awareness about IHL

The ICRC has been working for more than 50 years to raise awareness of IHL and its implementation in Colombia. This takes the form of efforts to position IHL as a source of protection for the population affected by armed conflicts and to promote respect for it. To this end, the ICRC has maintained an ongoing bilateral dialogue with armed groups and the State, as well as with negotiation tables within the framework of the current Total Peace policy.

In 2023, we strengthened the knowledge of more than 700 students, civil authorities, journalists and public officials in IHL and related topics. We also participated in forums, academic activities and discussion tables.

Likewise, we made efforts to include IHL and international standards on the use of force in the norms and resolutions of the military and police forces. We advised on the development of regulations and trained more than 4,700 members of the armed and security forces in different parts of the country.





J. Duque/ICRC

Rights do not end behind bars

The issue of overcrowding in national detention facilities continued to increase during 2023 and reached 24.5 per cent at the end of the year. This means that the prison population exceeds capacity by nearly 20,000 people, which has a negative impact on access to basic resources, as well as judicial rights and guarantees.

In addition, there is a shortage of prison staff, both security and technical-professional staff, and a lack of strategies aimed at their welfare and training. This hinders the dignified and humane care of detainees and prison management that complies with international standards. In addition, it affects the safety of staff, inmates and visitors.

Despite the authorities' efforts to reduce the number of detainees in temporary detention centres, they continue to suffer prolonged stays in inadequate conditions and under the charge of personnel who are poorly trained to meet their needs and requirements.

The lack of a preventive approach to health in prison settings, coupled with insufficient access to essential services such as water, food, hygiene or sufficient space and ventilation, jeopardize the provision of timely physical and mental health care for people deprived of liberty. In particular, the lack of a comprehensive approach for people with mental health disorders, people addicted to drugs and/or users of psychoactive substances further affects their health and thus increases their vulnerability.

We therefore welcome the initiatives aimed at improving conditions in detention centres, as well as the efforts of the Colombian government to humanize the prison system through better prison management, better access to justice, and promoting knowledge of and respect for international standards related to the dignified treatment of the prison population.

Calls to action

To state and non-state armed actors

- We call on armed actors to respect IHL, whether or not there are ceasefires or peace talks. Complying with these rules reduces the suffering caused by armed conflicts. Armed actors have an obligation to respect the life and dignity of civilians and of those who have ceased to participate in hostilities.
- We emphasize the duty of these actors to respect and protect the lives of injured people and medical personnel. Injured or sick people, whether civilians or not, are protected and have the right to be picked up and cared for; likewise, each party to an armed conflict must respect and protect transportation used to evacuate the wounded and sick, health infrastructure, the transport of medical personnel and materials, and the delivery of necessary medical supplies.
- We reiterate to state and non-state armed groups the need to protect the civilian population from the devastating consequences of the presence, use and abandonment of explosive devices. They must also consider the effects of the presence of these devices on entire communities, particularly in places that are crucial for minors, such as schools and playgrounds.
- We remind these actors that they have an obligation to avoid the disappearance of people and to make efforts to prevent such disappearances. Likewise, these groups must help solve disappearances and search for persons reported missing in the context of armed conflicts, as well as respect the human dignity of the deceased.
- We urge them to respect the special protection that IHL gives to children and adolescents. The recruitment, use and direct participation in hostilities of minors is a violation of IHL and has profound consequences on their lives, their families and society.
- Humanitarian action, which is essential for the affected communities, must be respected at all times, and therefore impartial humanitarian organizations and their staff must be afforded rapid and unimpeded access.

To the ongoing negotiation tables between the state and armed groups

- We urge them to include humanitarian concerns as a fundamental point on the negotiation and dialogue agendas. We urge them to adopt special agreements on the strengthening of IHL and specific issues aimed at protecting the civilian population and others affected by armed conflicts. These agreements might be about disappearance and search; the recruitment, use and direct participation in hostilities of minors; explosive devices; protected areas; people deprived of their liberty; humanitarian access; respect for health services, among other issues.

To State institutions

- We remind these institutions of the need to take all measures to prevent violations of IHL, as well as to respond to the humanitarian needs caused by armed conflicts as comprehensively, quickly and fully as possible. We urge continued investment in plans and programmes for people affected by armed conflicts.
- We call for guaranteeing the rights of the victims of armed conflicts by strengthening the routes available for prevention and care.

On specific topics:

On the subject of health care:

- We urge parties to armed conflicts to respect and protect health-care providers at all times. Their work is to alleviate the suffering caused by armed conflicts and violence. We remind all concerned of the importance of allowing their work without any arbitrary restrictions. Access to health care must be guaranteed at all times and everywhere.

On the subject of disappearance:

- We call on the State to implement the national search system and strengthen the Unit for the Search for Missing Persons and the medico-legal system. Likewise, we reiterate the need to ensure that the relatives of the victims of disappearance are guaranteed access to, and timely care at, physical and mental health services, as well as access to justice and opportunities for their economic livelihoods.
- We call on the parties involved in the current peace negotiations to propose measures for collecting information on missing people and the location of the remains of deceased people.

With respect to people deprived of their liberty in penitentiary centres:

- We recommend that all necessary measures be taken to develop comprehensive care programmes for people deprived of liberty, with a particular focus on those suffering from mental disorders, which include a psychosocial and medical therapeutic approach, with a multidisciplinary rehabilitation component.
- We look forward to an early ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, which will allow for adequate monitoring of detention conditions.
- It is essential that the criminal justice system supports the implementation of Act 2292 of 2023 and recognizes the importance of the new alternative mechanism to imprisonment. We support this decision that favours women heads of household.

Communities tell their stories



J. Uribe/ICRC

Food sovereignty and agricultural training in the Valle del Cauca

For the inhabitants of La Cabaña, in the rural area of Jamundí, encouraging farming among the younger generations has been a challenge. That is why, together with a group of teachers, we set up this project of school gardens and livestock education with a common goal: food sovereignty of a community affected by armed conflicts.

“We used to live off agriculture. We lived on bananas, vegetable gardens and cassava. That's how this project was born.”

Eliud Mesud, Dean of Institución Educativa Gabriela Mistral [Gabriela Mistral Educational Institution], Adán Cordobés headquarters



R. Monsalve/ICRC

Recovery and handing over of three missing brothers in southern Córdoba

After 15 years of waiting, the family of Héctor, Luis and Rafael were able to give them a dignified farewell. In 2021, we recovered the bodies of these three brothers, who disappeared in 2008, in southern Córdoba. After two years of forensic identification work, we were able to hand over the bodies to their families.

“Their bodies can now rest in the village where they grew up and will be buried in the cemetery where all our bodies should rest when we depart from this world.”

Patricia Pastrana, sister of Héctor, Luis and Rafael



F. Beltrán/ICRC

A history of community ties in Arauca

In the village of La Esperanza, in Tame, we worked hand in hand with 33 farming families to improve the economic and food security of the community. We worked together to promote a pig-breeding project that has the inhabitants of this area dreaming of a future full of opportunities.

“I would like to see La Esperanza as an important pig producer, with lots of farms, up-to-date health records and, hopefully, a pig-exporting company.”

Javier Aguilar, project beneficiary



J. Uribe/ICRC

Vegetable gardens create a safe environment in the department of Meta

With our help, over 300 students from the Centro Educativo Río Duda [Río Duda Educational Centre] in Brisas del Duda learned the skills needed to plant school vegetable gardens and grow avocados. With this project, small entrepreneurs contribute to the sustainability and food security of their families and communities.

“You learn a lot of things in the garden that you never imagined you'd learn.”

Angie Rubio, student at Río Duda educational centre

Learn more about these stories by scanning the QR code



Activity results

These figures reflect the efforts and ongoing work of our teams on the ground to help people affected by armed conflicts and violence.


*A person may have received more than one service.


In 2023, our humanitarian work benefited around **150.000*** people

Victims of armed conflicts


 **999**
educational tools and pieces of furniture were delivered to areas affected by armed conflicts and violence.

 **23.250**
people have better sanitary conditions, access to water and community infrastructure.

 **1.161**
people who were injured, sick or had a disability and victims accessed physical and mental health services and physical rehabilitation.

 **13**
health facilities were supported with furniture, medicines and medical supplies, which helped nearly 17,000 people to receive emergency care.


 **27.105**
people affected by armed conflict had improved economic security after receiving food and support for productive and income-generating activities.


 **457**
victims and survivors received support, counselling, physical and mental health care, emergency and income-generation support.

Victims and survivors of sexual violence

Missing people


 **31**
bodies of missing people were recovered and handed over to the authorities for identification. In addition, we conducted another 12 search attempts.


 **201**
relatives of missing people obtained information on the whereabouts of their loved ones thanks to our support. Of these, 141 people were located alive.

 **1.164**
family members received counselling, psychological and psychosocial care, economic resources, training and support to obtain employment or strengthen their businesses.




Victims of explosive weapons

 **14.904**
people living in areas affected by the presence of explosive devices learned how to mitigate the risk of accidents.


 **214**
community contingency plans were developed to build response tools for communities affected by the presence of explosive devices.

 **255**
victims benefited from economic support.


 **109**
victims received health care.


 **132**
survivors had access to wheelchairs, prostheses and other physical rehabilitation items.

People deprived of their liberty

 **56**
people with disabilities received 79 assistive devices, such as prosthesis, wheelchairs and other orthopedic elements.

 **34.400**
people deprived of their liberty benefited from 43 visits we made to 16 prisons.

 **300**
people have improved accessibility spaces for people with reduced mobility, such as toilets, showers and washing areas.

 **1.100**
judges received training to strengthen their knowledge of respect for the rights of people deprived of liberty and alternatives to imprisonment, in a joint process with the Superior Council of Justice and the Judicial School.




ICRC listens to you channels

 **1.400**
people were assisted through our "ICRC listens to you" channels. They received humanitarian guidance and support.

 **1.600**
calls were made to people who benefited from our work to obtain their comments and suggestions, and thus adjust and improve our response.

More of our work:

 **66**
people held by armed actors were released in humanitarian operations facilitated by the ICRC.


 **649**
cases were submitted to armed actors to enquire about the whereabouts and fate of missing people.

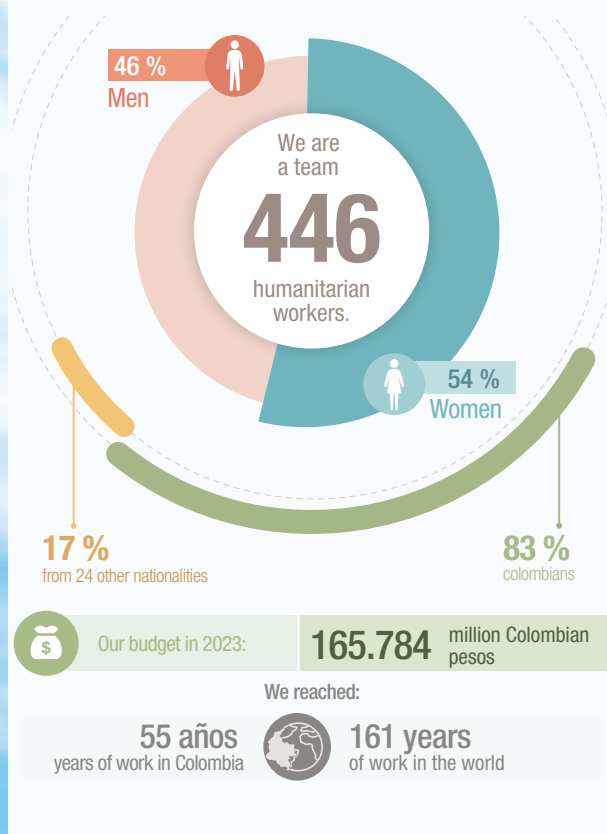
 **49.258**
calls, Wi-Fi access and battery-charging services helped migrants and victims of armed conflicts contact their loved ones.

 **4.747**
members of the security forces and authorities received training in international standards for the use of force, IHL and other humanitarian norms.

 **486**
members of civil authorities, state institutions and the academic sector received training with a focus on IHL.

Work with the Colombian Red Cross

 **44.552**
victims of armed conflicts and other situations of violence benefited from the humanitarian action of the Colombian Red Cross, which received technical and financial support from the ICRC.



We help people around the world affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence, doing everything we can to protect their dignity and relieve their suffering, often with our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. We also seek to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

People know they can count on us to carry out a range of life-saving activities in conflict zones and to work closely with the communities there to understand and meet their needs. Our experience and expertise enable us to respond quickly, effectively and without taking sides.

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