

DRC CONSEJO
DANÉS PARA
REFUGIADOS

DRC COLOMBIA

RAPID PROTECTION ASSESSMENT



Rapid Protection Assessment | Earthquake response Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca.



**Financiado por
la Unión Europea
Ayuda Humanitaria**

This document covers humanitarian aid activities implemented with financial assistance from the European Union. The views expressed herein should in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained in this document.

1. Methodology	3
2. Buenaventura Context	4
3. Key Protection Findings	5
3.1 Armed group control, mobility and humanitarian access	5
3.2 Housing, shelter, documentation and tenure security	6
3.3 Risk of recruitment and use of children and adolescents	7
3.4 Exploitation, GBV and harmful coping mechanisms	8
3.5 Exclusion from assistance, misinformation and risks to community leaders	8
3.6 Cumulative psychosocial impacts	9
4. Recommendations	10
4.1 State institutions	10
4.2 Humanitarian organizations	10



1. Methodology

The Rapid Protection Assessment (RPA) was conducted in Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca, between 26 August and 3 September 2026, following the magnitude 7.4 earthquake of 10 August 2026. Information was collected through seven key informant interviews (KIIs) and direct observations (DOs), with support from the ProLAC

initiative¹, as well as from organisations, community leaders and affected people. The information was triangulated with secondary sources from OCHA, UNGRD, local authorities and other sources. The findings are indicative of conditions in the locations and among the actors consulted and are not statistically representative.

1. ProLAC, iniciativa regional de gestión de información de protección que ofrece un sistema armonizado de monitoreo de protección que funcione como base de evidencia para mejorar las respuestas de protección y humanitarias efectivas y eficientes a nivel regional, nacional, y local. consulte aquí: [ProLAC](#)

2. Buenaventura Context

The magnitude 7.4 earthquake that occurred on 10 August 2026, with its epicentre in San José del Palmar, Chocó, affected 16 departments and 497 municipalities. The impacts were concentrated mainly in Risaralda, Valle del Cauca, Chocó, Quindío and Caldas, where at least 466,709 people (296,738 families) were reported as affected, including 331 deaths, 4,505 people injured, 356 people rescued and 111 people missing².

In Buenaventura, a consolidated bulletin issued by the Buenaventura District Mayor's Office initially reported 10 deaths, 174 people injured and three people missing³. By 31 August, 28 deaths and 476 injuries had been recorded. According to UNGRD's Unified Registry of Disaster-Affected Persons (RUD), as of 7 September, 31,654 families (67,591 people) had registered as affected; 9,577 homes were uninhabitable, 1,782 destroyed and 16,613 damaged⁴.

The emergency caused by the earthquake coincided with a pre-existing protection crisis linked to the armed conflict, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of the affected population in Buenaventura. In several of the neighbourhoods assessed, DRC identified a significant presence of conflict-affected households, including previously displaced families in a context

characterised by the presence of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and organised crime groups (OCGs), as well as dynamics of social control and restrictions on movement. In this context, losses of housing, livelihoods and documentation caused by the earthquake compound prior displacement trajectories and exposure to violence, deepening accumulated vulnerabilities and eroding already weakened coping capacities.



2. OCHA (2026, 9 de septiembre). Colombia: Flash Update No. 12. Actualización afectaciones por terremoto en Colombia. Oficina de las Naciones Unidas para la Coordinación de Asuntos Humanitarios (OCHA).

3. Navia, L. (2026, 15 de agosto). Balance preliminar en Buenaventura: 26 fallecidos, 433 heridos y más de 10.000 viviendas afectadas por el sismo. Noticias de Buenaventura y el Mundo. <https://buenaventuraenlinea.com/balance-preliminar-en-buenaventura-26-fallecidos-433-heridos-y-mas-de-10-000-viviendas-afectadas-por-el-sismo/>

4. Unidad Nacional para la Gestión del Riesgo de Desastres (UNGRD). Registro Único de Damnificados (RUD). Datos para Buenaventura, corte al 7 de septiembre de 2026. Disponible en: <http://201.130.16.28:8080/HOME/HOME#>. El texto actual atribuye a esta fuente las 31.654 familias, 67.591 personas y las cifras de viviendas inhabitables, destruidas y averiadas.

3. Key Protection Findings

The findings show that the earthquake has aggravated a pre-existing protection context rather than creating an entirely new scenario. The loss of housing, belongings, livelihoods and documentation, overcrowding, and disruption of services, education and community spaces

are reducing coping capacities and increasing exposure to a range of protection risks. At the same time, several key informants reported a temporary reduction in violent incidents and an improvement in humanitarian access since the earthquake.



3.1 Armed group control, mobility and humanitarian access

Before the earthquake, key informants described restrictions on access to certain communities and the persistence of "invisible boundaries" that shape movement between neighbourhoods and peripheral areas. Following the emergency, several actors reported a temporary decrease in violence, and one institutional actor indicated that humanitarian organisations had been able to access communities previously restricted by NSAGs. This temporary opening has expanded humanitarian response capacity, but access remains contingent on a context of armed and social control.

There is therefore a risk that restrictions may re-emerge as the acute phase of the emergency subsides, affecting continuity of assistance and communities' access to services and protection mechanisms. Improved humanitarian access does not, however, eliminate the restrictions that continue to shape people's movement between neighbourhoods and towards areas where institutional and humanitarian services are concentrated, particularly for people travelling from peripheral and rural areas.



3.2 Housing, shelter, documentation and tenure security

The assessment identified individuals and families who had lost identity documents and documents supporting tenure, ownership or possession of housing and land. In addition to limiting access to rights, services and assistance, this loss may aggravate tenure-related legal insecurity for households living in informal settlements and increase the risks of occupation, dispossession or unlawful appropriation of property during recovery.

This risk is particularly relevant given the prior displacement experiences of part of the affected population. In the Pampalinda and Alberto Lleras neighbourhoods, the rural communities of El Crucero, Las Brisas and La Estrella in Bajo Calima, and the Buenos Aires Indigenous Reserve, DRC identified households affected by the armed conflict, primarily people and families with a history of forced displacement. UARIV records report more than 200,487 victims of the armed conflict in Buenaventura⁴. The additional loss of housing, belongings and documentation may deepen accumulated vulnerabilities and make safe and sustainable recovery more difficult.

Several key informants reported during the assessment that the institutional response had not yet reached the rural communities assessed or the Alberto Lleras neighbourhood. In this situation, families whose homes were destroyed and who have no housing alternative have resorted to informal self-sheltering arrangements, staying in the homes of relatives or community members, in spaces set up within educational

institutions, or in tents provided as part of the emergency response. Host households reported high levels of overcrowding and difficulties sustaining these arrangements over time, while some families staying in educational institutions lacked adequate sanitation and privacy.

In the Alberto Lleras neighbourhood, people consulted reported that rainwater seeped through the tent material, flooding the interior and affecting sleeping areas and belongings. They also reported very high temperatures inside the tents, creating extremely hot conditions for residents. Several people said they did not want to move to collective shelters located far from their homes because they feared losing access to their plots and the belongings they still retained. They also reported that some shelters set up by the authorities lacked adequate basic conditions, including access to water, reducing their willingness to relocate to those spaces.

The simultaneous loss of housing, belongings and livelihoods significantly limits households' ability to rebuild their homes or independently access safer and more dignified shelter solutions, particularly among female-headed households.

In this context, continued reliance on precarious arrangements is not solely due to a lack of alternatives, but also to concerns about protecting homes, plots and belongings and to the inadequate conditions of some available

shelter options. Prolonged overcrowding and precarious shelter reduce privacy, place additional strain on family and community hosting networks, and may increase exposure to a range of protection risks.



3.3 Risk of recruitment and use of children and adolescents

The earthquake has reduced protective environments for children and adolescents through damage to educational facilities and community spaces. Key informants estimated that 35 educational facilities were affected⁵ and noted that, amid these disruptions, caregiving responsibilities are more frequently falling on family networks, other children and adolescents, or third parties. Reduced supervision and the loss of safe spaces increase exposure to violence, exploitation, child labour and family separation. In Buenaventura, this weakening of protective environments is particularly relevant

due to the presence of NSAGs and OCGs and previously documented risks of recruitment and use of children and adolescents identified by the Ombudsman's Office through its Early Warning System⁶. Education-sector actors also reported barriers to school access, retention and continuity, particularly in rural areas. The earthquake does not create this risk, but interruptions to education, limited connectivity and availability of devices, and the reduction of protective spaces may increase children's and adolescents' exposure to recruitment and use by armed groups.

5. <https://www.buenaventura.gov.co/articulos/alcaldia-de-buenaventura-destaca-avances-en-la-atencion-y-reconstruccion-tras-el-terremoto>

6. Defensoría del Pueblo. Alerta Temprana de Inminencia No. 003-21 por la situación de riesgo en el Distrito de Buenaventura. Sistema de Alertas Tempranas (SAT), 29 de enero de 2021.



3.4 Exploitation, GBV and harmful coping mechanisms

During the assessment, women reported situations in which third parties requested sexual acts or services in exchange for money, goods or other material support. While these reports do not link the incidents to humanitarian or institutional personnel, they illustrate how income loss and unmet basic needs can create conditions conducive to exploitation and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV). Family and community networks have provided a key source of protection and temporary accommodation following the earthquake; however, overcrowding and prolonged hosting arrangements are placing increasing strain on these networks.

Risks may be heightened in female-headed households when the loss of housing and livelihoods is combined with caregiving responsibilities and weakened support networks. Likewise, overcrowding observed in households and temporary shelter arrangements reduces privacy and increases pressure on family and community networks, potentially increasing intra-family and community tensions, violence and exploitation, as well as the risk of being asked to leave or of hosting arrangements breaking down. Begging was also identified as a survival strategy in response to insufficient resources.



3.5 Exclusion from assistance, misinformation and risks to community leaders

Limited information and confusion regarding eligibility criteria, procedures and pathways for accessing assistance and subsidies are generating rumours, unverified expectations and uncertainty among the affected population. These information gaps can result in exclusion from assistance and increase exposure to deception, scams, fraud and other forms of exploitation. For the Venezuelan migrant population, estimated by Migración Colombia at 3,450 people in Buenaventura⁷, barriers related to migration status, documentation and lack of information about

how to access assistance may deepen these difficulties.

Community leaders play a central role in identifying needs, assessing the situation of affected populations and coordinating assistance. Community actors reported intimidation, threats and pressure directed at social and community leaders. In a context where needs exceed available resources, participation in household identification and prioritisation processes may also expose leaders to accusations, stigmatisation or conflict arising from perceptions of favouritism

7. Migración Colombia, Migrantes venezolanos en Colombia, tablero estadístico interactivo, consulta realizada el 10 de septiembre de 2026. Disponible en: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/migraci.n.colombia/viz/MigrantesvenezolanosenColombia-Junio2024/MigrantesvenezolanosenColombia>

or inequity in the distribution of assistance. Concerns were also raised about pressure from NSAGs and OCGs to influence the identification and prioritisation of households or access to humanitarian assistance. These dynamics reinforce the need for transparent targeting criteria, diversified community engagement,

continuous context analysis and monitoring of potential unintended consequences of the humanitarian response.



3.6 Cumulative psychosocial impacts

Across the assessment, specialised actors identified significant mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) needs associated with the death or disappearance of family members, the loss of housing, belongings and livelihoods, and persistent fear of possible aftershocks. For part of the population, these impacts overlap with previous experiences of forced displacement and prolonged exposure to violence linked to

the armed conflict, which may further erode individual, family and community coping capacities. Persistent precarious shelter conditions, uncertainty regarding recovery and loss of livelihoods may prolong these impacts and increase the need for continued support. Although different actors have deployed MHPSS interventions, consulted actors reported that the coverage and continuity of available MHPSS interventions remain insufficient in relation to the needs identified.



4. Recommendations

4.1 State institutions

- Prioritise safe and dignified shelter solutions aligned with household preferences and, where possible, enabling people to remain close to their homes and belongings, while ensuring access to water and sanitation, privacy, physical safety and measures to prevent protection risks, including GBV and sexual violence.
- Organise mobile outreach initiatives for the replacement of identity documents and provide guidance on housing, land and property, accompanied by official and accessible information on criteria and pathways for accessing assistance and subsidies.
- Prioritise prevention of the recruitment and use of children and adolescents in areas with NSAG and OCG presence by reactivating protective spaces and establishing coordinated detection and response mechanisms among education authorities, ICBF and local government entities.
- Expand community-based and specialised MHPSS coverage through coordination across health, protection and education to identify people in need of support at an early stage and ensure continuity of services.
- Monitor security risks faced by community leaders involved in emergency-response activities, promoting prevention and protection mechanisms for leaders who may be exposed to threats, intimidation or pressure from armed actors.
- Integrate transparent targeting and selection mechanisms into the humanitarian response to reduce community leaders' exposure to community tensions and accusations.

4.2 Humanitarian organizations

- Apply do-no-harm approaches to prevent targeting, registration and assistance-delivery processes from generating community tensions or increasing risks for social leaders, ensuring that community engagement is conducted with more than one leader or representative.

- Strengthen prevention and mitigation of gender-based violence risks in collective shelters, community spaces and aid distribution points, including dissemination of protection messages and information on referral pathways for survivors and people at risk of exploitation.
- Maintain and reinforce prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) measures throughout the humanitarian response, including accessible and confidential complaints and feedback mechanisms and safe referral pathways for survivors.
- Implement safe spaces and protective activities for children and adolescents, with clear mechanisms for case identification and referral and coordination with specialised child-protection actors.
- Increase coverage of community-based and specialised MHPSS interventions, prioritising people experiencing bereavement, households with severe impacts, and populations with previous exposure to violence.
- Build the capacity of volunteers and community groups in psychological first aid and basic psychosocial support, as well as in providing guidance on access to referral pathways and services.
- Diversify community information mechanisms to reduce rumours and misinformation through community information sessions or official communication networks of humanitarian organizations present in the area.