

COP16 | Peace with nature

# The link between climate change, biodiversity loss, and forced displacement

2024

Colombia is a country highly vulnerable to climate change emergencies and biodiversity loss. The 2023 report presented to the United Nations Climate Change Convention (UNCCC) indicates that 100% of the municipalities in the country have some type of risk associated with global warming.

Emergencies associated with natural phenomena have been increasing. The rise in wildfires, windstorms, floods, droughts, and surges not only causes more displacements, it also **disproportionately affects communities internally displaced by armed conflict**. These communities are often located in high-risk areas, such as informal urban settlements and remote rural areas.

## key figures



**351 k**

people displaced due to disasters in 2023<sup>1</sup>.



**405 k**

people affected by disasters in the country in 2023<sup>2</sup>.



Indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples are present in 40% of the 62 protected areas in the country, which corresponds to 12.5% of the national territory<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)

<sup>2</sup> National Unit for Disaster Risk Management (UNGRD in Spanish)

<sup>3</sup> Management Report. Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development

## CONTEXT

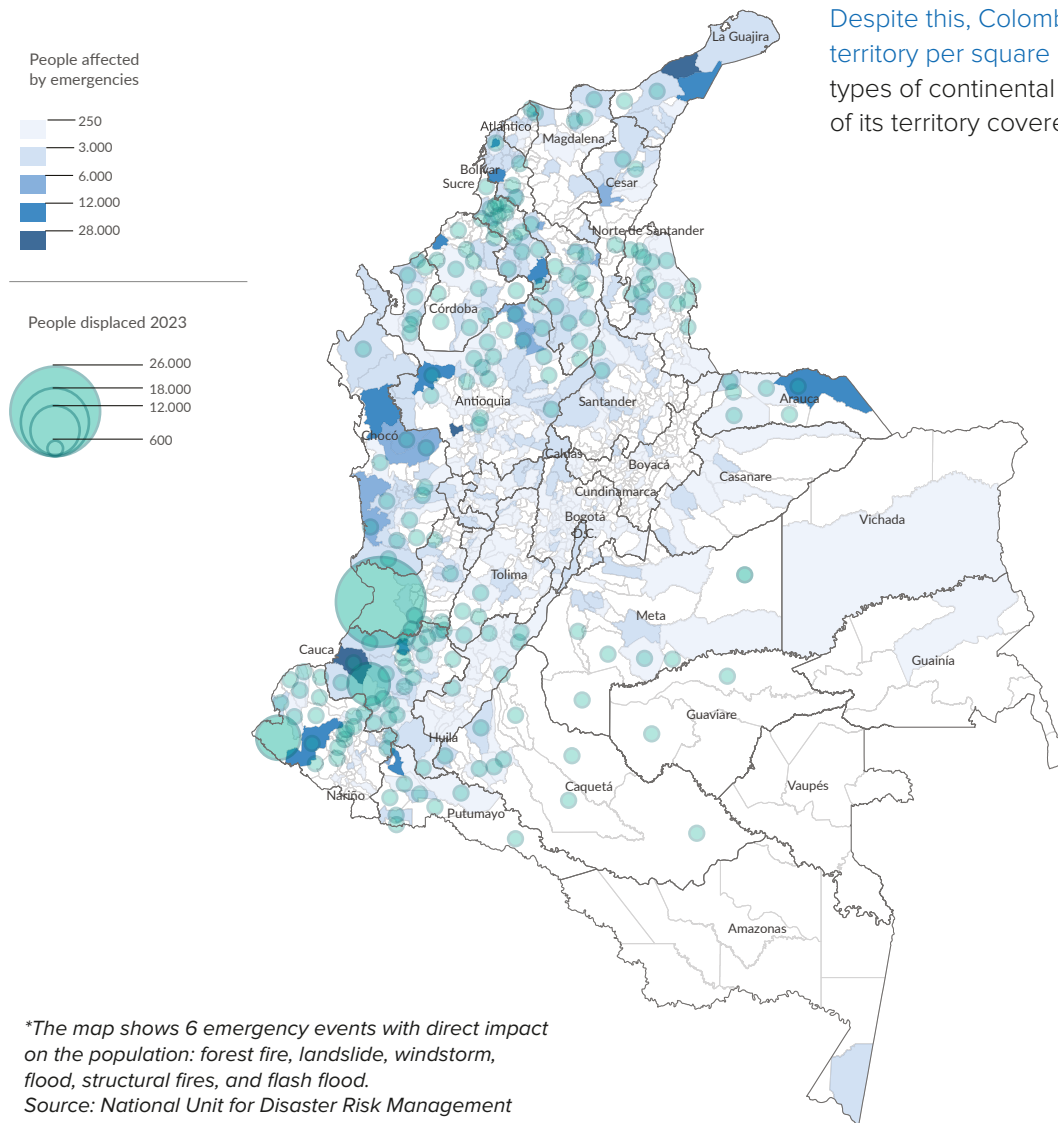
Forced displacement due to disasters is becoming more frequent in Colombia.

Currently, there are legislative initiatives aimed at developing a legal and public policy framework to protect communities affected by environmental factors. In 2024, the Constitutional Court of Colombia, through Decision T-123, recognized that internal forced displacement can also occur due to these factors, including those related to climate change. The Court asked the Congress and the Government to develop a public policy with a differential approach to address these issues. It also indicated that

the State must create an administrative registration system to recognize the situation of displaced persons and organize the institutional response, among other measures.

The link between forced displacement, climate change, and biodiversity loss is most evident in the collective territories of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. These communities have historically seen their rights violated by armed conflict and violence, land dispossession, extensive agriculture and livestock farming, deforestation, and mining, among other activities that have disrupted the integrity and environmental balance of their territories.

Map 1 | **People affected by emergencies\* and internally displaced population due to armed conflict**



According to the Humboldt Institute, biodiversity in Colombia has decreased by an average of 18%. Despite this, Colombia remains the most biodiverse territory per square kilometer in the world, with 311 types of continental and marine ecosystems, and 53% of its territory covered by different types of forests.

📍 **100%**

of the municipalities have some degree of risk due to climate change.

📈 **59%**

of the municipalities will have medium to very high risk due to climate change by 2040.

📈 **25%**

of the municipalities will have high to very high risk due to climate change by 2040.



“ *The climate emergency is punishing displaced people three times: it tears them from their homes, it compounds their crisis in exile and destroys their homeland, preventing them from returning. This harsh reality highlights the way the climate emergency exacerbates displacement and human suffering.* ”

**Filippo Grandi**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.



In 2021, UNHCR launched its **Strategic Framework for Climate Action** globally, aiming to address climate change as a cause of forced displacement and to find durable solutions.

**23**  
million  
people

annually are displaced from their homes due to the increase in the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, such as abnormally heavy rainfall, prolonged droughts, heatwaves, and cyclones.

UNHCR operates sustainably to mitigate negative impacts on the environment.

It promotes the inclusion of environmental and sustainability criteria in procurement processes, assistance, work with partners, among other activities.

In the Darién region, traversed by the passage of refugees and migrants, the Community Council of the Río Tolo Basin and the Southern Coastal Zone (Cocomasur) promotes forest conservation and species protection, as well as intergenerational transfer to preserve their knowledge and traditional practices.



**Cocomasur** was the first collective territory in Colombia to issue carbon credits. UNHCR supports the strengthening of this community.

UNHCR's actions in Colombia in favor of environmental protection and its communities focus on:

1

**Promote the guarantee of the rights of people displaced by environmental factors:**

UNHCR supports institutions and authorities in developing a legal and public policy framework.

It supports and strengthens the leadership of community organizations, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples, so they can participate in the formulation of public policies and the legal framework, and become leaders in the environmental protection of their territories.

STORIES

**Esneda Saavedra**

Leader of the Yukpa indigenous people



“

For our Mother Earth, the water, the air, the trees, the fish, and the birds, for everyone, let us be one voice and, united, protect life, the well-being of our children, and all humanity that inhabits this planet.

”

*Esneda Saavedra, senior human rights advisor of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), is one of the leaders of the cross-border Yukpa indigenous people. © UNHCR/Marina Calderón Calderón. 2024*

# 2

Promote solutions for internally displaced persons and host communities through the preservation and rehabilitation of the environment, the increase of climate resilience, and disaster preparedness.

UNHCR supports institutions by providing humanitarian assistance to displaced communities in disaster situations. It supports communities in preserving and rehabilitating the environment, promotes the legalization of informal human settlements and land formalization, as well as access to water and sanitation services.

## EMBLEMATIC CASE

## Guardians of the Mangrove



**1997.** Displaced persons arrived in the municipality of Turbo and began to inhabit the settlement now known as Pescador 1 y 2.

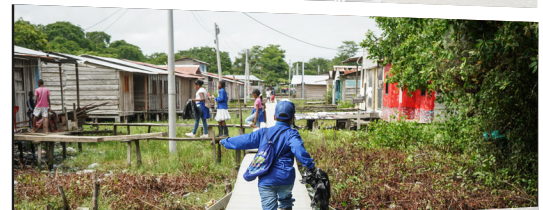


**2018.** UNHCR began an intervention that included livelihoods, strengthening leadership, prevention, and protection of rights.



**2018.** The process of legalizing the settlement began, aiming to provide access to services and improve living conditions.

**2021.** 51% of the neighborhood was legalized. The family of Miguel Barrientos, among others, received property titles.



But the houses built in the mangrove area could not be legalized because it is a protected area. Today, part of the community is exposed to pollution and the degradation of the mangroves, which can cause damage to the ecosystem.



**2021.** The Guardians of the Mangrove committee was created to protect the environment, mitigate the effects of climate change, and prevent new displacements.



**Guardians of the Mangrove** today raises awareness in the community, works with local institutions, seeks resources and partnerships.

All to promote the conservation of the mangrove.

**2023.** With the support of UNHCR, Guardians of the Mangrove applied to the Environment and Climate Action Innovation Fund, and won!



With the resources received, it promotes the protection of people, generates livelihoods, cares for the environment, conducts clean-up campaigns and community activities, while becoming a self-sustaining entrepreneurship.