



Lessons learned at the Puracé House in Cauca, January 2026. Source: CRC.

Appeal: MDRCO033	Total DREF Allocation: CHF 80,000	Hazard: Volcanic Eruption	Country: Colombia
People at Risk: 40,000 people	People Targeted: 880 people	People Assisted: 880 people	Event Onset: Sudden
Operation Start Date: 05-12-2025	Operational End Date: 31-01-2026	Total Operating Timeframe: 45 days	Publication Date: 21-07-2026
Targeted Regions: Cauca			

The major donors of the Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) include the Red Cross Societies and governments of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland, as well as DG ECHO, Mondelez International Foundation and other corporate and private donors. The IFRC, on behalf of the National Society, would like to extend thanks to all for their generous contributions.

Event development

Update regarding the event's development

On 29 November 2025, the Colombian Geological Service (SGC) announced the change of the Puracé volcano activity level to Orange Alert, following evidence of a sudden and sustained increase in the volcano's internal activity. This behavior was characterized by a significant rise in the energy and frequency of seismic events associated with fluid movement, as well as continuous gas and ash emissions reaching columns over 1,000 meters high. In addition, the monitoring cameras installed in the area continuously recorded these manifestations, clearly evidencing a scenario of increasing instability and a much more active and complex internal dynamic within the volcanic system than usual.

The phenomenon developed at the Puracé volcano, located approximately 27 kilometres southeast of Popayán, in the department of Cauca. In addition to activity observed at the crater, fine ashfall was reported in several areas of the territory, particularly in the Río Negro village (Paletará district), Mina de Azufre, Agua Hirviendo, the road to Totoró, and northern sectors of Popayán. These reports confirmed that the effects of the volcanic activity extended beyond the immediate surroundings of the volcano, affecting air quality and the daily dynamics of nearby rural and urban communities. Consequently, the Municipality of Puracé declared a state of public calamity in response to the increase in volcanic activity, triggering preparedness actions by emergency response agencies for the evacuation of families located in the highest-risk areas.

The change to Orange Alert status for the Puracé volcano generated a direct and noticeable impact on the communities located within its area of influence. As the volcano's internal activity increased, emissions of fine ash and volcanic gases began spreading towards populated areas, immediately affecting air quality and the daily routines of local families. Rural sectors such as the Río Negro village (Paletará district), as well as the areas known as Mina de Azufre, Agua Hirviendo, and the road to Totoró, reported ashfall and a strong sulfur odor, raising concern among residents due to respiratory impacts and the contamination of surface water sources.

The impact also extended to the northern area of the city of Popayán, where the presence of airborne particles forced the population to adopt basic protective measures, such as covering water storage containers, reducing outdoor activities, and reinforcing the use of face masks. These atmospheric conditions, combined with the visible increase in gas and ash columns rising between 500 meters and up to 1.7 kilometers above the crater, heightened the population's perception of risk and created an environment of constant alert.

After nearly two months under Orange Alert status, the Puracé volcano returned to a lower level of instability on 22 January 2026, as the parameters monitored by the SGC indicated a decrease in the probability of a large-magnitude eruption.

Events impact

Although no large-magnitude volcanic eruption occurred during the change in the volcanic activity, the event had a significant regional impact, as the escalation to Orange Alert reflected the potential threat of a major eruption of the Puracé volcano and increased the level of risk for communities located within the area of greatest influence. Ash columns affected air quality and causing ash accumulation in inhabited areas, affecting air quality and causing ash accumulation in inhabited areas. Changes in the color of water tributaries were also reported, increasing concerns over potential health implications for the population, in addition to the stress associated with volcanic activity and continuous exposure to risk.

The situation led to the activation of the National Crisis Room by the National Unit for Disaster Risk Management (UNGRD) and to the recommendation of immediate preventive evacuation of Zone A1 (high-threat area). Approximately 70 people residing in Zone A1 were evacuated for a period of one month following the change to Orange Alert status. As part of the operational strategy, evacuation drills were also conducted with an estimated 880 people living in the highest-risk area. Authorities also emphasized the importance of avoiding access to the crater area and relying exclusively on official information due to the instability of the volcanic system.

Although necessary to safeguard lives, this measure caused a profound disruption to the daily lives of affected families, who were forced to temporarily leave their homes, crops, and livestock while facing uncertainty regarding the evolution of the phenomenon and its potential repercussions on their livelihoods.

Within this operational context, and as part of the activation of preparedness actions, the Colombian Red Cross, as a member of the National Disaster Risk Management System (SNGRD), developed its operational strategy for the implementation of early actions.



Source Information

Source Name	Source Link
1. Special bulletin of January 22 - Change to yellow alert	https://www2.sgc.gov.co/Noticias/Paginas/Boletin-extraordinario-Volcan-Purace-cadena-volcanica-Los-Coconucos-del-22-de-enero-de-2026.aspx
2. Special bulletin of November 29 – Change to orange alert	https://www2.sgc.gov.co/Noticias/Paginas/Boletin-extraordinario-Volcan-Purace-cadena-volcanica-Los-Coconucos-del-29-de-noviembre-de-2025.aspx
3. Decree 062 of December 2, 2025, Declaration of a public disaster in the municipality of Purace	https://caracol.com.co/2025/12/02/declaran-calamidad-publica-en-purace-por-alerta-naranja-del-volcan/
4. Action Plan of the Colombian Red Cross due to alert change of Puracé volcano	https://ifrcorg-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/edwin_armenta_ifrc_org1/IQBeQg380J2TQ7HLMPH7y1mzAcFzB-u6Goj6MD0_o6fnfuE?e=HPxCG7&wdLOR=cA4705CBC-1330-4B53-A6F6-39152E25C0E1



Implementation

	Sector	Activities	Budget (CHF)	Expenditure
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Early Actions

Livelihoods and basic needs

- 110 multipurpose cash transfers were provided for evacuated families (440 people) in Purace municipality, in the communities of Alto Anambío, Campamento, Chapio, Cristales, Crucero and Puloló, with a 1 per cent supplier commission. The outreach strategy for the distributions was implemented in parallel with disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities, including training sessions at temporary shelters established by the National Disaster Risk Management Unit (UNGRD). These activities supported preventive evacuations and helped foster a culture of prevention in communities located in high-risk areas.
- These activities were supported by the deployment of one Cash ENI (National Intervention Team member) from the Tolima Branch between December 2025 to January 2026 (one month) to support beneficiary registration, multipurpose cash distributions and post-distribution monitoring.
- During the post-distribution interviews, families reported using the assistance to purchase essential items such as food, medications, and tools, as well as to pay bills. These findings confirmed that the assistance helped address immediate needs and complemented the prevention and preparedness strategy implemented by National Society volunteers.

WASH

- Dissemination of key messages on water safety during volcanic eruptions was carried out in the communities of Puracé, Crucero, Alto Puloló, Cristales, and Campamento, reaching an estimate of 560 people based on census data shared by community leaders. Awareness-raising activities included the proper use of household water treatment filters, as well as the use of hygiene kits and the safe management of water storage tanks. The programme also included orientation sessions on the effects of volcanic ash on water and appropriate prevention practices.
- The WASH conditions of the shelters prioritized by the IFRC and the Colombian Red Cross were comprehensively improved through replenishment of 10 water treatment filters; replenishment of 10 hygiene kits (including plastic storage containers, trash bags, dish soap, sponges, detergent, sodium hypochlorite, disinfectant, brooms, dustpan and mops), and 10 water storage tanks with a capacity of 500 litres each. These reinforcements made it possible to reach 880 people who had been preventively evacuated by the authorities to the shelters.



Health (public)

- Refresher training on first aid was conducted for approximately 30 volunteers of the Colombian Red Cross in Popayán, Civil Defence, the fire service, and the Indigenous Council.
- Replenishment of 5,000 KN95 masks was carried out for communities located in high-risk areas, reaching 400 people who were also benefited from WASH interventions.
- Replenishment of four trauma kits was carried out, including personal protective and biosecurity supplies (gloves, goggles and masks); biomedical equipment and instruments (stethoscopes, headlamps, forceps, sphygmomanometers and thermometers); medical devices (cannulas, splints, immobilizers, syringes and tourniquets); and consumables (gauze dressings, blankets, bandages, patches, rehydration salts, saline solution and signaling items).
- Replenishment of five evacuation kits for shelters, including first aid kits, rigid stretchers, megaphones and flashlights).

CHF 65,000

CHF 51,577



DRR

- Maintenance of the telecommunications system at the Cauca Branch was carried out through the procurement of radio batteries, an HF system antenna and a solar panel.
- Deployment of one Telematics ENI (National Intervention Team member) was carried out for 15 days.
- Satellite data were recharged for the Cauca Branch to ensure effective communication with the Colombian Red Cross national Headquarters and response institutions in the department of Cauca in the event of a volcanic eruption.
- As a prerequisite for the delivery of cash transfers, volunteers provided training in physical and psychological first aid, basic concepts of disaster risk reduction (DRR), and volcanic risk awareness. This was delivered as a follow-up to the refresher training sessions that had already been conducted.



NS Strengthening

- National Society staff salaries (4.5 per cent), including the project coordinator and the administrative assistant, were covered through the operation.
- Deployment of one General ENI (National Intervention Team member) was carried out for one month.
- Follow-up visits were conducted by the National Society to support the submission of administrative and technical reports on the operation at the local level, as well as the organization of the lessons-learned workshop.
- Air, land, and cargo transportation were covered through the operation.
- Volunteers supported the implementation of CASH, DRR and WASH activities.
- A lessons learned workshop was conducted in the communities of Puracé with the participation of the Colombian Red Cross, IFRC, the departmental office of the National Unit for Disaster Risk Management (UNGRD), Civil Defence and other local authorities and institutions.
- National Society indirect costs were covered through the operation.



	Shelter	• Support was provided for the supply of essential items for the establishment of temporary accommodation. • Cash assistance was provided to affected families evacuated to temporary shelters, enabling them to purchase essential materials and pay rent and utility costs. • Five recommended temporary shelters were provided with health and WASH supplies.		
 Early Response	NS Strengthening	• Deployment of National Intervention Teams (ENI) was not carried out because the volcano alert level was lowered from Orange Alert to Yellow Alert.	CHF 10,000	CHF 0
Sub-total			CHF 75,000	CHF 51,577
Indirect Cost			CHF 5,000	CHF 5,000
Total			CHF 80,000	CHF 56,577

Total Assisted Population

Assisted Women	-	Rural	-
Assisted Girls (under 18)	-	Urban	-
Assisted Men	-	People with disabilities (estimated)	-
Assisted Boys (under 18)	-		
Total Population Assisted	880		
Total Targeted Population	880		



DREF Operation Final Report (CHF)

Date from: 5 dic. 2025 to 31 may. 2026

MDRCO033 - Colombia - Volcanic eruption

Operating timeframe: *Start date: 05-dic.-2025 End date: 31-ene.-2026*
Appeal launch date: *16-dic.-2025*

I. Summary

	Actual (CHF)
Opening Balance	0
Funds & Other Income	80.000
DREF Response Pillar	80.000
Expenditure	-54.930
Closing Balance	25.070

II. Expenditure by planned operations / enabling approaches

Description	Budget	Expenditure	Variance
PO01 - Shelter and Basic Household Items			
PO02 - Livelihoods			
PO03 - Multi-purpose Cash	17.297	17.421	-124
PO04 - Health	6.444	5.580	864
PO05 - Water, Sanitation & Hygiene	12.333	9.037	3.296
PO06 - Protection, Gender and Inclusion			
PO07 - Education			
PO08 - Migration			
PO09 - Risk Reduction, Climate Adaptation and Recovery	13.349	22.387	-9.038
PO10 - Community Engagement and Accountability			
PO11 - Environmental Sustainability			
Planned Operations Total	49.424	54.427	-5.002
EA01 - Coordination and Partnerships			
EA02 - Secretariat Services			
EA03 - National Society Strengthening	30.576	503	30.073
Planned Operations Total	30.576	503	30.073
Total	80.000	54.930	25.071

III. Expenditure by budget category & group

Prepared on 30-jun.-2026

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[Click here for the complete financial report](#)

Explain any variances or modifications to the implemented activities

A total of 80,000 Swiss francs was allocated from the DREF for the implementation of this operation. By the end of the operation, total expenditures amounted to 54,930 Swiss francs. The unspent balance of 25,070 Swiss francs will be returned to the DREF. The most notable variances between the budgeted and actual expenditures include: 1) The Puracé volcano did not erupt; therefore, the budget allocated for the early response was not spent. 2) In the WASH sector, the kits ended up being less expensive than planned; however, due to the time required for the procurement process versus the limited project implementation period, it was not possible to initiate a new procurement process to expand the scope and take advantage of the optimized resources.



Mitigation efforts and achievements.

Livelihoods and basic needs

An ENI (National Intervention Teams) volunteer specialized in Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) was deployed to lead the operational implementation of the intervention and to coordinate with the Cauca Branch and the governor of the Puracé Indigenous Council to socialize the planned cash activities. As part of the capacity strengthening process, a practical exercise on the use of Kobo and AccesRC tools was conducted with Branch volunteers. In addition, the operational capacity of the financial service provider Efecty was verified in the municipalities of Puracé, Coconuco, and Paletará to ensure its ability for cash disbursements.

Within the operational component, the socialization and registration of beneficiaries through the AccessRC tool was implemented as a pilot initiative, using a previously designed survey to identify impacts and needs. This exercise included testing in rural areas with limited connectivity, including the use of satellite technology such as Starlink, with the objective of assessing the feasibility of the tool in hard-to-reach contexts.

Preventive evacuation exercises and training sessions on first aid and disaster risk management were conducted in the designated shelters. These actions were complemented by training sessions on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), strengthening community-level capacities and preparing the settings for the implementation of multipurpose cash transfers. The distribution and collection process was carried out over four days. Finally, post-distribution monitoring surveys were conducted to assess the effectiveness of the intervention.

At the end of the operation, volunteer capacities in cash transfer programmes were strengthened through the development of specialized training workshops. At the community level, preventive actions were promoted through MHPSS training processes and the implementation of an evacuation drill, contributing to the strengthening of local capacities for a more timely and appropriate response in the event of a potential escalation of the emergency.

Likewise, community preparedness for the efficient use of available resources was encouraged, promoting more dignified evacuation conditions. The preventive evacuation exercise not only made it possible to assess the response capacity of the communities, but also helped consolidate institutional trust, strengthen social cohesion, and promote community ownership of risk management actions, progressively overcoming the initial resistance identified during the process.

At the conclusion of the operation, 110 cash transfers were distributed to families who had evacuated to temporary shelters, reaching an estimated 440 people based on the household composition in the prioritized area.

WASH

Considering the situation caused by ash emissions from the Puracé volcano, anticipatory actions were prioritized in four temporary shelters and one community facility: Alto de Michabala, Cristales, Campamento, and Crucero de la Mina. These actions included the delivery of two community water treatment filters, two community hygiene kits, and two 500-litre water storage tanks, as well as one set of each of these items to the Puracé Indigenous Council. In addition, self-care sessions were conducted, and key messages on safe water use, personal hygiene, and basic sanitation were disseminated to 140 families (560 people).

The actions under this component were aimed at strengthening the capacity for water storage and treatment at the sites where people potentially evacuated due to volcanic activity would be accommodated, considering the risk of contamination of water supply sources, as well as providing essential items to support the implementation of community-level hygiene practices.

As a result, capacities for access to water, sanitation, and hygiene were strengthened in four strategic sites prioritized for the accommodation of families potentially requiring evacuation. Likewise, supplies for the hygiene of community spaces and solid waste management were provided, contributing to the prevention of contamination risks. This was particularly relevant considering that the use of shared community spaces increases the risk of exposure to diseases associated with the consumption of water lacking adequate quality and safe storage conditions.

Shelter

As part of the humanitarian response to communities located within the areas of influence of the Puracé volcano, the Colombian Red Cross implemented a set of actions aimed at the protection, assistance, and early recovery of the affected population, with particular emphasis on evacuated families accommodated in temporary shelters.

In addition, the Colombian Red Cross delivered supplies to strengthen evacuation processes and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) conditions in four prioritized temporary shelters. This intervention sought to improve sanitary conditions, reinforce hygiene practices, and support evacuation procedures. As a result, the temporary shelters had the capacity to accommodate evacuees as follows: Puracé sports center (60 families or 360 people), Campamento (38 families or 228 people), Anambío (33 families or 198 people), and Cruce de la Mina (14 families or 94 people), for a total capacity of 880 people at the end of the operation.



These actions were carried out in coordination with local authorities and other humanitarian actors, reaffirming the Colombian Red Cross's commitment to providing comprehensive, timely, and needs-based assistance to communities affected by the volcanic emergency.

DRR

Optimization of critical infrastructure: A technical assessment of the Puracé Indigenous Council repeater station, located at the former mine site, was conducted. After deficiencies in coverage and stability were identified, a high-gain antenna (4 American-made dipoles) was installed, and the coaxial cable system was completely replaced. This improvement strengthened communications in hard-to-reach areas within the Indigenous territory, as well as in the city of Popayán.

Equipment readiness: A preventive technical support session was carried out at the Puracé Indigenous Council headquarters. Specialized personnel from the Colombian Red Cross verified and calibrated the operating parameters (frequency and power) of 64 handheld radios belonging to the community network, guaranteeing their immediate operability.

Local response capacity: The Cauca Branch was equipped with a basic laboratory kit (specialized tools and measuring equipment). This acquisition eliminated dependence on third parties and enabled autonomous and timely corrective maintenance and emergency installations.

Health

As part of the operation, a refresher training on first aid was conducted for 36 participants, including volunteers from the Colombian Red Cross Cauca Branch, as well as personnel from the Colombian Civil Defense, Popayán Fire Department, and representatives of the indigenous council. This activity strengthened local capacities for initial emergency response while promoting interinstitutional and community coordination. In addition, 5,000 KN95 masks were distributed to communities located in at-risk areas.

Furthermore, five trauma kits were delivered to strengthen first aid response capacities. Likewise, five evacuation kits for shelters were provided, contributing to improved preparedness and emergency response capacity in the prioritized community spaces.

National Society Development

For the implementation of the different project activities, the Colombian Red Cross national Headquarters received support from the Cauca Branch, which made both staff members and volunteers available for the operation. Likewise, a volunteer from the La Guajira Branch was deployed as General ENI (National Intervention Team member) and a WASH Delegate for a one-month period in order to strengthen the operational response in the field.

On behalf of the National Society, follow-up and monitoring visits were conducted, accompanying the Cauca Branch in its participation in the Emergency Operations Center and in visits to the communities located within the area of influence of the Puracé volcano, as well as during the distribution of relief items in the Temporary Shelters.

As part of the closure and institutional strengthening process, a lessons learned workshop was conducted, during which each of the communities where temporary shelters had been prioritized was visited in order to discuss key topics, experiences, and opportunities for improvement.

For the implementation of the project activities, the Colombian Red Cross national Headquarters relied on the support of the Cauca Branch, which provided staff and volunteers for the implementation of actions in the Puracé municipality, contributing to an efficient, coordinated implementation aligned with the needs of the territory.

For this operation, the Colombian Red Cross mobilized a volunteer from the La Guajira Branch, who served as an ENI delegate with a focus on Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH). This support was essential in strengthening field actions, contributing to operational activities, needs assessments, the promotion of safe hygiene practices, and technical support for the implementation of WASH interventions in the Cauca Branch. His participation helped enhance response capacity, ensuring more effective, coordinated interventions aligned with established humanitarian standards.

Lessons learnt and challenges

WASH

- Resistance to voluntary evacuation, associated with families' attachment to their homes, fear of losing their belongings and livelihoods, and the initial perception of shelters as inadequate spaces for temporary stay. In addition, a normalization of risk was observed, as communities have historically coexisted with volcanic activity. This has influenced a lower perception of risk regarding environmental changes and a strong territorial attachment, reflected in deep ties to their homes, land, livelihoods, and livestock, which generated resistance to leaving the territory.
- Sociocultural factors that hindered the adoption of preventive practices, particularly in communities with limited prior experience in evacuation processes and cohabitation with other families in temporary shelters.



- Pre-existing negative perceptions of shelters, which were viewed as spaces lacking adequate conditions of comfort, safety, and dignity for temporary accommodation, particularly for children, older people, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities.

Multipurpose Cash

- The Unified Registry of Affected Persons (RUD) was not available; therefore, the identification of beneficiary communities and families was carried out by the Cabildo authorities in accordance with the defined prioritization criteria. This process required a high level of coordination and community validation.
- Significant communication barriers were identified, including the lack of mobile phones among beneficiaries, devices without access to applications such as WhatsApp, and low or nonexistent network coverage in several areas. As a mitigation measure, direct communication channels were established through community leaders and, in some cases, through the use of radios, which required adjustments to coordination timelines and dynamics.
- During the implementation of the multipurpose cash component, only one financial service provider with an active framework agreement was available, which limited the operational capacity for the cash disbursements. This situation caused delays in delivery timelines and reduced daily coverage at payment points. As a lesson learned, the importance of having multiple pre-qualified financial service providers was identified, especially in emergency contexts, in order to diversify payment channels, expand service capacity, and ensure a more agile, timely, and efficient disbursement of resources to beneficiaries.

Telecommunications

- The procurement of most of the equipment through a local supplier that met the required technical specifications enabled a rapid response to the needs identified in the field.
- Strengthening the Branch capacity in telecommunications tools allows for a rapid response in deploying emergency communication stations, as well as supporting the preventive maintenance of systems.

Temporary shelters

- Logistical limitations in volcanic emergency contexts: The geographic conditions and the evolving nature of the risk posed challenges for the timely delivery of supplies and the continuous strengthening of shelters.
- Need for sustainability of actions: Maintaining improvements in sanitation and hygiene conditions requires continued access to supplies and ongoing support to communities and shelter managers.
- Addressing changing needs: The evolution of the emergency requires constant adjustment of the humanitarian response in order to address emerging priorities of the affected population.



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