**Cerrejón coal mine**  Colombia

**Sectors:** Coal Mining  
**Active**  
This profile is actively maintained  
Send feedback on this profile

**By:** BankTrack  
Created before Nov 2016  
Last update: Aug 12 2022

**Contact:**  
climate@banktrack.org

**Project website**

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**Sectors**  
Coal Mining

**Location**  
![Map of Cerrejón coal mine](https://www.cerrejon.com/en)

**Status**  
- Planning
- Design
- Agreement
- Construction
- **Operation**
- Closure
- Decommission

**Website**  

The Cerrejón thermal coal mine in La Guajira is the largest in Latin America and one of the world’s biggest open-pit coal export mining operations. Approximately **80,000 tonnes of coal per day** is transported 150km via rail to Puerta Bolívar. During 2020 and 2021, the vast majority of Colombia’s coal exports went to the **Middle East**. Coal crushing, washing, and storage all take place at the mine, as does quality control in an on-site laboratory. Cerrejón’s steady expansion has led to the destruction of entire Indigenous and Afro-Colombian villages, while the extracted coal – **559.8 million tonnes between 2002 and 2021** – has had a massive impact on the world’s climate. The mine has been wholly owned by the giant, UK-listed mining company **Glencore** since January 2022, when it purchased the other two thirds from its **former partners BHP Billiton and Anglo American**.

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**Impact on human rights and communities**

The **mistreatment of local communities** is a longstanding issue of Cerrejón’s mining operations. Cerrejón’s promotional materials give the impression that the company is helping the communities it has displaced, but in reality, underhand tactics were used to buy off individuals and sow internal divisions. In Roche, Cerrejón paid inhabitants extra to leave the village early, but those who stayed faced **power cuts and water shortages for weeks at a time**. **FECODEMIGUA** (the Federation of Communities Displaced by Mining in La Guajira) was formed to defend community interests and demand compensation.

In 2000, **Old Oreganal was forced to move** to a Cerrejón-built, semi-urban village that could not support the displaced community’s traditionally agricultural livelihood. Villagers from the village of Tabaco were **evicted in 2001 for a Cerrejón expansion** but, 15 years later, they were yet to be resettled. Roche, Chancleta, Tamaquitos, Manantial, Palmarito, El Descanso, Caracoli, Zarahita, and Patilla are just some of the other communities that have been devastated or simply erased by the Cerrejón coal mine.

**Basic rights are casually threatened** by Cerrejón, such as access to water: In 2011, the companies then operating the mine approved expansion plans that require rerouting 26 kilometres of La Guajira province’s main river, the Ranchería. This “**P500 project**” was
vehemently opposed by locals for whom the river is their main water source and in November 2012, the project was suspended. Expansion is not off the table, although by 2021 Glencore had established a "Paris-aligned coal depletion strategy".

**Threats to Indigenous territories** are entwined into the project, which spans 69,000 hectares of Wayúu territory. The Wayúu share this land with people of African descent, farmers, and other Indigenous groups. Threats include cultural weakening, malnutrition and dehydration via contaminated water, and respiratory conditions partially attributed to breathing air contaminated with coal dust. Furthermore, **Wayúu children are already suffering** from stunted growth and a range of diseases, including chronic diarrhoea, respiratory and skin problems, vision loss, and more. From 2014-2016, these children accounted for more than 90% of childhood mortality in La Guajira, despite the Wayúu representing just 38% of La Guajira’s population.

**Poor working conditions** at the Cerrejón mine have frequently been highlighted, such as exploitation through cheaper labour, unhealthy working conditions, and 12-hour shifts. The Colombian coal workers’ union **Sintracarbón** actively represents Cerrejón miners, but pro-union workers have been reportedly intimidated or replaced with cheaper, casual workers. In 2008, **union leader Adolfo González Montes was tortured and murdered** at home in front of his children. Deteriorating working conditions prompted Sintracarbón to organise a strike in February 2013, as well as a longer, **91-day strike in 2020**.

The exacerbation of COVID-19’s regional impact hit the Wayúu people particularly hard, prompting representatives to appeal against Cerrejón and its activities to the United Nations. **Pervasive drought and respiratory problems** in the area can be directly attributed to mining activities, both of which make combatting COVID-19 much more difficult for the Wayúu.

**Impact on climate**

**Significant contributions to climate change** are being made by the Cerrejón coal mine. If the entirety of Cerrejón’s known coal reserves are burned, the resulting 13 billion tonnes of CO2 emissions would be equivalent to 184 years of Colombia’s national emissions. Global heating is already affecting Colombia: In 2013, The Council on Hemispheric Affairs said the surface of the Andean glaciers has shrunk by more than 90% over 10,000 years, with most of this happening since the Industrial Revolution.

Between 2002 and 2021, **559.8 million tonnes of coal** were exported from Cerrejón, mostly to European and North American countries. Colombia’s per-capita carbon footprint is less than a fifth of the UK’s and 11 times less than the USA’s.

**Impact on nature and environment**

**Droughts and water contamination** can be attributed to the mine, which draws approximately **2,700,000 litres of water from the region every day**. Alongside groundwater, large volumes of water are taken from the Ranchería River. These impacts cause broad environmental damage to local rivers and habitats.

### Norms & standards

**Applicable norms and standards**

- 1972 Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping Wastes and other Matters
- Alliance for responsible mining
- Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
- ILO Safety and Health in Coal Mines
- ILO Safety and health in opencast mines
- ILO Safety and health in the iron and steel industry
- International Council on Mining and Minerals (ICMM)- 10 Principles
- OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises
- Safety and Health in Mines Convention
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Feb 28 2022 | Cerrejón output jumps by 89% during 2021

Annual production at Colombia’s Cerrejón coal mine bounced back to 23.4 million tonnes in 2021, an 89% year-on-year rise following a 2020 productivity dip owing to COVID-19 restrictions and a 91-day strike, organised by Sintracarbón. Cerrejón’s 2019 production amounted to 25.8 million tonnes.

Jan 11 2022 | Glencore completes acquisition of Cerrejón coal mine

Despite stating in early 2021 that it was cutting ties with Cerrejón, Glencore has officially acquired both BHP’s and Anglo American’s interests in the coal mine. In June 2021, the UK-based company said “the progressive expiry of [Cerrejón’s] current mining concessions by 2034 is in line with our commitment to a responsible managed decline of our coal portfolio.”

2021

Feb 25 2021 | Shareholders Anglo American and BHP Group to exit Cerrejón

In order to make its operations more sustainable, Anglo American plans to exit thermal coal production by 2024. The company will exit the “Cerrejón thermal coal operation in Colombia in a responsible way and within three years”. Fellow shareholder Glencore has already announced its own exit this month, while BHP Group – Cerrejón’s third and final shareholder – intends to abandon its stake in the coming years.

Feb 4 2021 | Glencore subsidiary Prodeco returning Colombian mining contracts to state

Cerrejón coal mine shareholder Glencore has confirmed that its Colombian subsidiary Prodeco is exiting the country. As such, it will begin handing its mining contracts back to the Republic of Colombia via the National Mining Agency (ANM). Prodeco will remain in place until the formal contract relinquishment process is complete.

Jan 20 2021 | NGOs file complaint against Cerrejón coal mine before OECD

A coalition of NGOs has demanded the closure of the Cerrejón coal mine in a complaint presented to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Led by the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN), the coalition cites “serious human rights abuses and devastating environmental pollution”, including the forced displacement of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, and high local cancer and metal intoxication rates caused by environmental pollution.

2020

Dec 1 2020 | Colombia’s longest-ever coal strike ends after three months

A coal miners’ strike at Cerrejón in Colombia ended today after the operator agreed to pay unionised workers a one-time bonus of COP 10.75 million (USD 3,000). The mine will also raise salaries in line with inflation (3.8% in 2020) between 2020 and 2023. The strike was called by Sintracarbón, Cerrejón’s largest union, in response to job losses, proposed changes in benefits, and a new work schedule called the ‘death shift’. Initial demands were a 6% salary increase and health, education, and housing benefits.

2015

Mar 19 2015 | Cerrejón targets efficiency savings as coal prices slumps

The CEO of Columbia’s Cerrejón coal mine has explained that efficiency savings are now at the heart of its business strategy after a drop in the price of coal.
From 2016-2021, 33 commercial banks financed Cerrejón coal mine’s owner Glencore via loans and underwriting services totaling USD 16.027 billion. See below for more details on the banks involved.

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- **Australia**
- **Profile**
- **Website**

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31 December 2021
source: BOCC 2022

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USD 40,5 million
Total amount financing (lending and underwriting) to Glencore from 2016 – 2021
1 January 2016
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source: BOCC 2022

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Total amount financing (lending and underwriting) to Glencore from 2016 – 2021
1 January 2016
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31 December 2021
source: BOCC 2022

Royal Bank of Canada (RBC)
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<td>Uncategorised</td>
<td>USD 473,5</td>
<td>Total amount financing (lending and underwriting) to Glencore from 2016 – 2021</td>
<td>1 January 2016</td>
<td>31 December 2021</td>
<td>source: BOCC 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Société Générale</td>
<td>USD 708,2 million</td>
<td>Total amount financing (lending and underwriting) to Glencore from 2016 - 2021</td>
<td>1 January 2016</td>
<td>31 December 2021</td>
<td>source: BOCC 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Chartered</td>
<td>USD 508,1 million</td>
<td>Total amount financing (lending and underwriting) to Glencore from 2016 – 2021</td>
<td>1 January 2016</td>
<td>31 December 2021</td>
<td>source: BOCC 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Société Générale**
France
- Profile
- Website
- Details

**Standard Chartered**
United Kingdom
- Profile
- Website
- Details

**Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC)**
Japan
- Profile
- Website
- Details
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Date end</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncategorised</td>
<td>USD 433.0 million</td>
<td>Total amount financing (lending and underwriting) to Glencore from 2016 – 2021</td>
<td>1 January 2016</td>
<td>31 December 2021</td>
<td>source: BOCC 2022</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Toronto-Dominion Bank (TD Bank)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBS</td>
<td>USD 484.2 million</td>
<td>Total amount financing (lending and underwriting) to Glencore from 2016 – 2021</td>
<td>1 January 2016</td>
<td>31 December 2021</td>
<td>source: BOCC 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UniCredit Group</td>
<td>USD 605.2 million</td>
<td>Total amount financing (lending and underwriting) to Glencore from 2016 - 2021</td>
<td>1 January 2016</td>
<td>31 December 2021</td>
<td>source: BOCC 2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cerrejón coal mine is owned by the Anglo-Swiss multinational commodity trading and mining company, Glencore. The mine was an equally-owned joint venture between Glencore, Anglo American, and BHP Billiton, until Glencore bought out its partners in January 2022.
A PHP Error was encountered
Severity: Warning
Message: Invalid argument supplied for foreach()
Filename: project/companies.php
Line Number: 11
Backtrace:
File: /home/btwebhost/www/btc3/application/views/sections/project/companies.php
Line: 11
Function: _error_handler

Line: 366
Function: view

Line: 106
Function: lv

Line: 161
Function: view

File: /home/btwebhost/www/btc3/application/controllers/Main.php
Line: 332
Function: content

Line: 321
Function: require_once
## Function: require_once

A PHP Error was encountered

**Severity:** Warning

**Message:** Invalid argument supplied for foreach()

**Filename:** project/companies.php

**Line Number:** 11

### Backtrace:

- **File:** /home/btwebhost/www/btci3/application/views/sections/project/companies.php
  - **Line:** 11
  - **Function:** _error_handler

- **File:** /home/btwebhost/www/btci3/application/helpers/easy_helper.php
  - **Line:** 366
  - **Function:** view

- **File:** /home/btwebhost/www/btci3/application/views/sections/project/pdf.php
  - **Line:** 106
  - **Function:** lv

- **File:** /home/btwebhost/www/btci3/application/libraries/sections/Dodgydeal.php
  - **Line:** 161
  - **Function:** view

- **File:** /home/btwebhost/www/btci3/application/controllers/Main.php
  - **Line:** 332
  - **Function:** content

- **File:** /home/btwebhost/www/btci3/index.php
  - **Line:** 321
  - **Function:** require_once

---

A PHP Error was encountered

**Severity:** Notice

**Message:** Undefined property: stdClass::$sponsor_comp

**Filename:** project/companies.php

**Line Number:** 30

### Backtrace:

- **File:** /home/btwebhost/www/btci3/application/views/sections/project/companies.php
  - **Line:** 30
  - **Function:** _error_handler

- **File:** /home/btwebhost/www/btci3/application/helpers/easy_helper.php
  - **Line:** 366
  - **Function:** view

- **File:** /home/btwebhost/www/btci3/application/views/sections/project/pdf.php
  - **Line:** 106
  - **Function:** lv

- **File:** /home/btwebhost/www/btci3/application/libraries/sections/Dodgydeal.php
  - **Line:** 161
  - **Function:** view

- **File:** /home/btwebhost/www/btci3/application/controllers/Main.php
  - **Line:** 332
  - **Function:** content

- **File:** /home/btwebhost/www/btci3/index.php
  - **Line:** 321
  - **Function:** require_once
A PHP Error was encountered
Severity: Warning
Message: count(): Parameter must be an array or an object that implements Countable
Filename: project/companies.php
Line Number: 30

Backtrace:
File: /home/btwebhost/www/btc3/application/views/sections/project/companies.php
  Line: 30
  Function: _error_handler
  Line: 366
  Function: view
  Line: 106
  Function: lv
  Line: 161
  Function: view
File: /home/btwebhost/www/btc3/application/controllers/Main.php
  Line: 332
  Function: content
  Line: 321
  Function: require_once