

Colombia



Quick facts

Number of IDPs	3,300,000–4,900,000
Percentage of total population	7.2%–10.8%
Start of current displacement situation	1960
Peak number of IDPs (Year)	3,300,000–4,900,000 (2009)
New displacement	286,000
Causes of displacement	Internal armed conflict, human rights violations
Human development index	77



At the end of 2009 there were up to 4.9 million IDPs in Colombia, bringing it alongside Sudan as one of the two largest internal displacement situations in the world. 2009 saw the opening of new fronts in Colombia's internal armed conflict. In 2008 the government's strategy to contain and combat illegal armed groups had brought a string of positive results, including a notable weakening of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). However clashes with FARC increased in 2009, and supposedly demobilised paramilitary armed groups re-gathered, and committed a significantly higher number of human rights abuses. Insecurity in urban areas and particularly in large cities, which had declined in 2008, increased again in 2009.

The continuing forced displacement of people from the countryside towards towns and cities continued in 2009. So-called "drop-by-drop" displacement, less conspicuous than mass displacement, accounted for most displacement as it had in previous years. Nonetheless, around 80 large-scale events caused the displacement of a total of 19,000 people. The groups affected were mostly indigenous and Afro-Colombian, and most were in the departments of Nariño, Chocó, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, and Antioquia. Roughly half of these mass displacement events took place in Nariño, where assassinations of indigenous people were also repeatedly reported in 2009.

The large cities of Medellín, Cali, and Bogotá were among those which received the most IDPs. In 2009, the process to improve the response of receiving municipalities continued, but it bore negligible results because of coordination and budget limitations. Insecurity in towns and cities where IDPs typically settle led to an increase in intra-urban displacement. In 2009, thousands of Colombians were also driven across borders into neighbouring Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama.

The government's estimate of the total number of IDPs and those of civil society bodies continued to move further apart. In December, the government reported that a little over 120,000 people had been internally displaced in 2009, while a reliable national monitor reported a figure nearer 290,000. Under-registration of IDPs by the government persisted, due to IDPs not declaring themselves because of fear or lack of information, and because of a high rate of rejections among those who requested it. In 2009, the Constitutional Court declared the right of IDPs to be included in the registry and directed the government to address under-registration once and for all

by launching information campaigns; by registering people displaced in previous years whose application had been rejected; by sharing information between the IDP registry and other government databases; and by registering children born to internally displaced families after the family's registration date.

IDPs' enjoyment of economic and social rights remained precarious. In 2009, the lack of sustainable livelihoods was critical, and IDPs remained significantly poorer than non-displaced populations. Almost all of them were excluded from the formal labour market: only 11 per cent of IDPs earned the already low minimum salary of \$260 per month for 2009, with the rest having to rely on informal work. As a result, internally displaced households continued to struggle to secure the basic necessities of life and only few could envisage durable solutions to their displacement.

In 2009, the government continued to privilege collective returns through a programme offering housing and livelihoods opportunities. A few thousand people returned under this programme, but they made up less than one per cent of the internally displaced population. Given the duration of the displacement of so many people, local integration in places of displacement should be supported if IDPs' settlement choices are to be respected. In general, the longer IDPs remain in towns or cities or even rural areas of displacement, the less interested they become in returning to their areas of origin.

Early in the year, the Constitutional Court upheld its 2004 ruling that the inadequacy of the response represented an "unconstitutional state of affairs", and throughout the year handed down 12 subsequent decisions obliging the government to take measurable actions in the response to IDPs. As part of this process, various government agencies drafted a comprehensive reform of land policy for discussion in 2010. There is therefore expectation that in 2010 the restitution of land, and the prevention of future dispossession in the midst of the ongoing conflict, will be addressed through legislation.

Implementation of the UN's humanitarian reform process continued in 2009, with positive results such as better information sharing and communication among international agencies. However, greater international presence on the ground was identified as necessary to prevent violations and carry out protection. Finally, the lack of a consolidated appeal process in Colombia was identified as an impediment to the quick mobilisation of international support.