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MEXICO

Displacement due to criminal and communal violence

There are currently several situations of internal displacement in Mexico. Possibly the largest has been caused since 2007 by the violence of drug cartels and the government's military response. This has caused displacement in the states of Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Durango, Guerrero, Sinaloa and Michoacán.

This displacement has been little documented, and more comprehensive studies of its scale and impact are needed. Three cases of mass displacement reportedly caused the displacement of some 3,000 people; otherwise the violence has caused gradual displacement which has been reported only rarely. However, a research centre which documented displacement in Ciudad Juárez found that up to 220,000 people had left their place of residence in the area over three years as a result of the violence, of which about half reportedly remained in the country as IDPs. A private consultancy report cited by several media sources has suggested that the violence has internally displaced 1.6 million people in the last five years; however the report is not publicly available and the basis of the figure is unknown.

People fleeing drug-cartel violence have often not found security in their place of displacement. Another main challenge has been the physical and legal protection of their housing, land and property. Some IDPs have lost their identity documents as a result of their sudden displacement, and have subsequently been unable to access social services. While no proper assessments of IDPs' access to basic necessities have been conducted, it has been generally assumed that they support themselves or rely on extended family networks.

The longest-running situation of displacement was caused by the Zapatista uprising in 1994 in the state of Chiapas. Indigenous communities that support the Zapatista movement have continued to be displaced and have also caused the displacement of people not aligned with the Zapatista movement, and recent estimates have suggested that between 9,000 and 24,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) remain in protracted displacement.

In Chiapas and in the neighbouring states of Oaxaca and Guerrero displacement has also been caused by religious tensions within indigenous communities. Meanwhile, in Oaxaca, indigenous triqui communities have also been displaced by attacks by paramilitary groups. IDPs in all these states have limited access to livelihoods, and there have been no initiatives to restitute their land.

The government has recognised and taken some steps to address the protracted displacement following the Zapatista uprising. The other smaller situations in Chiapas and its neighbouring states of Oaxaca and Guerrero have received much less attention. In this context, an internal displacement bill proposed in 2011 by the government of Chiapas, and a decision by the Mexican senate to provide more funds to support indigenous IDPs, have been notable developments.



Source: IDMC
 More maps are available at www.internal-displacement.org

Introduction

As of November 2011, there are several ongoing situations of internal displacement in Mexico. The most recent and possibly the largest has been caused by large-scale criminal violence associated with drug cartels—which effectively amounts to internal armed conflict (Vité, 2009)—which reached unprecedented levels after the government launched a military crackdown against cartels in 2007. This displacement has been scarcely documented, but the limited information available suggests that large numbers of people in areas most affected by drug-cartel violence have steadily abandoned their homes to seek safety elsewhere. The violence has been most intense and displacement most evident in recent years in the states of Chihuahua and Tamaulipas, and to a lesser extent Michoacán, Durango and Sinaloa.

The longest-running and most clearly-identified situation of displacement followed the politically-motivated Zapatista uprising of 1994 in the state of Chiapas. In Chiapas and in the neighbouring states of Oaxaca and Guerrero, displacement has also been caused in recent years by religious tensions between Protestant and dominant Catholic communities, and also by violent competition for natural resources, including (particularly in Guerrero) land intended for the growing of illegal crops.

Displacement due to drug-cartel violence

Background and causes

In the country's northern states, fighting between different drug cartels, and between cartels and government armed forces, has caused an increasing number of casualties. Since President Felipe Calderón assumed office in 2006, over 49,000 soldiers have been engaged in a military offensive against the drug cartels. While 21 of the most dangerous drug lords have been captured or killed and 120 tonnes of cocaine have been

seized (Government of Mexico, 2011), this surge in troop numbers has prompted more violence as the cartels have battled to gain control over entire territories (including urban areas). A government database published in 2011 suggested that 35,000 people had been killed as a result of the violence since 2007 (Presidencia de la República, 2011). However, reports based on files from prosecutor's offices around the country have proposed a higher total of 50,000 deaths, and this figure has been widely used by the media (Proceso, 2011; Zeta, 2011; Vanguardia, 2011). These figures do not identify the number of people among those killed who were not associated with the armed groups.

Violence against "transmigrants" from Central and South America crossing through Mexico aiming to arrive to the United States has been more visible than violence against Mexicans, in part because of the atrocity of the crimes. In 2010, a mass grave with 72 bodies of transmigrants was found in the municipality of San Fernando in Tamaulipas, and in 2011, eight other graves with 59 bodies were found in the same municipality (CNN, 2011). A migrant who managed to escape reported that they had been killed for refusing to work for the cartels.

Threats and attacks against journalists have been widespread; according to the Organization of American States (OAS) and the UN special rapporteur on the freedom of expression, 83 media workers have been murdered since 2000, making Mexico the most dangerous country in the Americas to practice journalism (OAS, 2011; UN 2011). The attacks have prompted self-censorship throughout the country, and media outlets in the states most affected by violence have fallen silent, with many journalists refusing to report on stories relating to drug cartel operations. The targets have extended in 2011 to include people posting opinions or information in online blogs or sharing them through Twitter (The Economist, 2011).

Surveys show that people have little faith in the capacity of local governments and police forces

to ensure their security (Monitor Mitofsky, 2011). In numerous municipalities, local government officials have fled after receiving threats of assassination or reprisals for their actions against cartels. Perpetrators of attacks have rarely been brought to trial, with police departments understaffed, under-resourced and often accused of corruption and collusion with the cartels (New York Times, 2011, 2011b). The presence of armed forces has failed to make up for this, and the number of complaints of human rights violations committed by the armed forces has increased threefold since 2006 (Sedena, 2011). The army itself has admitted that its actions put civilians at risk (CNN, 2011).

Scale of displacement

Overall estimates of the scale of displacement caused by drug-cartel violence are incomplete, and much more needs to be done to gather national figures.

Information is available through various media on events in which large groups of people have fled together, but not on the gradual displacement of populations. Large-scale displacements have been recorded in Tamaulipas, Michoacán and Guerrero. In Tamaulipas, up to 400 people were displaced from Ciudad Mier in 2010. In Michoacán, up to 2,000 were displaced following confrontations between cartels in 2011. In one event in the municipality of Coyuca de Catalán in Guerrero in 2011, around 100 families fled the community of La Laguna because of the presence of armed groups vying to control timber resources (La Jornada, 2011). In total, these large events have displaced roughly 3,000 people.

It is much harder to establish the scale of gradual displacement. Research in some locations has provided insights into displacement there. In 2010, researchers at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez estimated that 220,000 people had abandoned Ciudad Juárez and its surroundings since 2007 as a result of the violence, of which half had reportedly remained in the country as

IDPs. This figure was extrapolated from the results of a survey which asked whether and why family members had left their place of residence in the previous months (UACJ, December 2010).

IDMC's publication of a paper on displacement which referred to the Juárez estimate spurred interest in displacement and prompted the publication of further figures. A private consultancy firm estimated in 2011 that 1.6 million people had been internally displaced as a result of the violence and insecurity in the past five years (Parametría, 2011). The estimate has been repeatedly cited but the report was not public as of late 2011, so its methodological basis is unknown. A reference to the same study cites a figure of 700,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) between June 2010 and June 2011 (Emeequis, 2011).

Patterns of displacement

Instances of mass displacement have been recorded in Tamaulipas, Michoacán and Guerrero states. In Tamaulipas, fighting between the Zetas Cartel and the Cartel del Golfo to control trafficking routes has caused continuing insecurity. In November 2010, the Zetas announced that any inhabitants who remained in Ciudad Mier would be killed, and as many as 400 people who had not already been able to leave fled to the nearby town of Ciudad Miguel Alemán, where they took shelter in a community hall. Schools in Ciudad Mier closed down, and local community leaders reported a complete absence of state institutions.

In the state of Michoacán in May 2011, a confrontation between the La Familia Cartel and its offshoot the Caballeros Templarios caused the displacement of up to 2,000 people from the localities of Pizándaro, Vicente Guerrero, Purépero and Paredes Dos (AFP, 2011). People were displaced to the nearby locality of Buenavista Tomatlán, where they found refuge in a local church hall.

In June 2011 in Guerrero, intimidation and violence by people (possibly associated with drug cartels)

seeking to control timber resources and cultivate illegal crops in the Sierra region led to the displacement of up to 100 families from the community of La Laguna in the Municipality of Coyuca de Catalán. The families were displaced to the small locality of Puerto Las Ollas, where they remained as of November (Terra and La Jornada, 2011).

Additionally, in the rural locality of El Tiro in Sinaloa, after harassment and assassinations by armed individuals associated with the Beltrán Leyva criminal organisation, about 80 families fled their homes to the larger town of Concordia (Animal Político, 2011).

In the other states where cartels operate, displacement has not been as evident because it has not involved the movement of large groups, but rather individuals or families. However, the widespread violence, direct threats and extortions have continuously forced people to abandon their place of residence. Apart from the gradual forced migration documented in the Juárez area of Chihuahua, observed patterns of depopulation quantified by census data published in 2011 have shown people moving from the places facing the highest levels of violence (Enfoque, 2011). Specific cases and testimonies gathered by civil society organisations and journalists have corroborated this (Turati, 2011; Caravana de la Paz, 2011; Emeequis, 2011; El Universal, 2010).

Cases of displacement have been identified in various localities in Guerrero, Michoacán, Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Durango and other states. People have moved either within towns, from rural to urban areas, or between urban areas (Interview UACJ, 2011). Violence and threats have also forced small business owners in urban areas to close down their businesses and leave (Fundación Mepi, 2011).

In 2011 in Veracruz, the scale of threats, violence and extortion by the Cartel del Pacífico and the Zetas Cartel has grown significantly (Milenio, 2011). Testimonies gathered by members of the

Caravan for Peace (Caravana de la Paz) have shown that they have led to displacement in the state (LA News Dispatch, 2011; Caravan for Peace, 2011).

While a partial picture can be formed of where people were displaced from, information on the places they have fled to is scarcer; nonetheless scattered data has started to emerge in specific locations. For example, the Social Protection and Employment Secretariat of the state of Querétaro, just outside Mexico City, reported in October 2011 that at least 60 per cent of new arrivals looking for work had fled violence in northern states (Milenio, 2011).

Protection issues

Information is limited on the protection issues that people displaced by the violence face. What little there is indicates a number of trends.

Firstly, people fleeing threats to their physical security do not necessarily find the safety they seek. People fleeing violence have reportedly continued to confront criminal violence in the place they fled to. For example, those fleeing from Valle de Juárez around Ciudad Juárez have fled to the south-eastern part of Juárez, where armed violence is also intense. Small business owners fleeing to Veracruz have also been attacked by cartels there (Fundación Mepi, 2011).

IDPs have struggled to protect the housing, land and other property they have left behind. Homes abandoned by displaced people, particularly in Chihuahua, have been destroyed or vandalised (El Universal, 2010). There are no specific mechanisms to ensure physical or legal protection of this property.

Thirdly, people have lost their personal documentation as a result of their sudden displacement. It was reported that a group of 79 people displaced from Guerrero who lost their identity documents were not able to access social benefits provided by local authorities (Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad, 2011). A complaint was

brought to the Mexican National Human Rights Commission, who acted quickly to help them obtain documents (Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad, 2011).

Fourthly, no assessments of IDPs' access to the basic necessities of life have been conducted. It has generally been assumed that they support themselves or that they rely on extended family networks. However, IDPs have reported losing their livelihoods, often based on agricultural production but also on small businesses, and falling into poverty (Caravana para la Paz, 2011).

Displacement due to political and religious tensions

Background and causes of displacement

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* or EZLN) rose up in Chiapas State in 1994 against Mexico's entry into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The EZLN resisted the Mexican army for two weeks, and the conflict went on to claim the lives of around 1,500 people (Lopez y Rivas, 2002). The San Andres Accords of 1996 promised political participation, conservation of natural resources, and recognition of the right of indigenous peoples to determine appropriate development avenues (ASS, 1996). However, the Accords have not resulted in opportunities for the indigenous populations.

Indigenous communities in Chiapas supporting the Zapatista movement have continued to be threatened or attacked by neighbouring communities affiliated to some of the political parties in Mexico, including the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). In September 2010, Zapatista families in the community of San Marcos Avilés in the municipality of Chilón were displaced for over a month. In June 2011, the same groups renewed their threats against the Zapatista families (La

Jornada, 2011). Long-standing land disputes between Zapatista-affiliated communities have also continued to cause displacement, and people aligned with the Zapatista movement have also caused the displacement of others who did not support the movement (Rebón, 2001).

In neighbouring Oaxaca and Guerrero states, conflicts within communities due to religious intolerance have also led to displacement. Religious minorities have been perceived as a threat by the dominant Catholic majority. According to the government of Oaxaca, around 15 clashes due to religious intolerance are reported yearly (Diario de Oaxaca, 2011).

Scale and patterns of displacement

Immediately after the Zapatista uprising in 1994, a coalition of local NGOs counted over 17,000 IDPs, most of whom had fled the EZLN or the army in rural areas and headed to the nearest towns. Another respected NGO calculated that 12,000 people were internally displaced after a counter-attack by the army in 1995 (Centro Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, 2003; Martinez, 2005). In total, according to figures cited by reliable sources up to ten years after the uprising, up to 60,000 people were displaced in total (UNOHCHR, 2003; CNDP, 2005; CDI, 2004).

The state government of Chiapas has not issued an official estimate of the number of people who remain displaced in the state. A decree which it issued in 2011, to establish the Inter-Institutional Commission for Peace to prevent displacement and support IDPs, cites a figure of about 9,000 displaced people. However, the decree also mentions that, taking into account new claims for support by people recently displaced, 4,800 families (about 19,000 people) are displaced in the state (Poder Ejecutivo de Chiapas, 2011).

UNDP estimated in 2010 that 6,000 families, or about 24,000 people, were still living in displacement; most of them were indigenous people who

had lost their land after being displaced, and were living in precarious conditions in urban areas or among landless communities (UNDP, 2011).

Overall, figures for displacement in Oaxaca and Guerrero are difficult to compile, as the events that lead to displacement are generally scattered and different entities gather information inconsistently. For most incidents there are no figures on the number displaced. Furthermore, many of these conflicts are intra-communal, which means that information does not always reach outside sources or media.

In Guerrero, the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (*Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas* or CDI), reported in 2009 that at least 1,500 people had been displaced by more than 50 clashes caused by religious reasons in various districts (La Jornada, July 2009).

According to the CDI, around 20 religious disputes in Oaxaca in recent years have led to the displacement of two dozen families, who still live in displacement (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2011).

Finally, attacks by two paramilitary groups against indigenous *triqui* communities in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca have led to the killing of 27 people in recent years and the displacement of *triqui* families. As of October 2011, a group that declared itself to be an autonomous community reported that its members had not been able to return to their land because the paramilitary groups still controlled it (Municipio Autónomo de San Juan Copala, 2011). There are no available estimates of their number.

Protection issues

Most of the IDPs displaced after the Zapatista uprising have not achieved durable solutions. They have not had their land restituted to them or received compensation for its loss, even though

most were members of indigenous groups with an acknowledged special attachment to their land. According to recent assessments, most IDPs living in towns have low-paying jobs in the informal market (UNDP, CNN 2011). While this is a widespread problem in Mexico with roughly half of the Mexican workforce working informally (OECD, 2011), this means that the livelihoods of indigenous and other IDPs who previously depended on agriculture have become more insecure due to their displacement.

Not much is known about the situation of people displaced by religious and political conflicts or by violence over economic resources. According to the Civil Protection Unit of Guerrero state, families displaced from La Laguna have received housing, medical attention, and food items from the local government. (Terra, 2011).

National and international response

Faced by what is effectively an internal conflict against drug cartels in the last five years (Vité, 2009) the government has yet to acknowledge the existence of displacement related to this violence. While the government's military strategy to combat the cartels has led the violence to increase, it has had no plan to address the results of its intervention, including the resulting displacement.

In 2011, no protection mechanisms are in place. There are no mechanisms to monitor or report displacement, to ensure the physical or legal protection of property left behind by IDPs, or to enable them to integrate in the place of displacement or settle elsewhere. Nor has the government sought support from international agencies such as UNHCR in setting up a response which accords to international standards. For its part, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs stated in October 2011 that the UN is concerned by violence and displacement in Mexico,

and is ready to assist if the government requires it to do so (El Universal, 2011).

The government response to internal displacement in Chiapas has remained insufficient despite some belated initiatives. Thousands of people displaced more than a decade ago have still not achieved a durable solution, and they have continued to be excluded from participating in decisions affecting their own interests (USDoS, 2011). Its response to situations of displacement caused by religious tensions has been inconsistent and managed only at the very local level.

In a country with a strong economy – Mexico has been a member of the OECD since 1994 – and significant institutional capabilities, political will rather than capacity has been lacking. However, a visit by the Representative of the UN Secretary-General (the RSG) on IDPs in 2002 created pressure for support to those still displaced by the Zapatista uprising. Eventually, this led the CDI, a body created and funded by the federal government to support indigenous peoples nationally, to create a programme to combat the poverty of displaced indigenous people (CDI, 2006). The programme was initially supported with a budget of \$2.2 million in the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Hidalgo and Nayarit. In 2010, the budget was reduced to \$1.5 million although the needs identified had not decreased. The funds have been used to buy land for 150 internally displaced families and to provide support to 500 families; however, an evaluation of the project did not specify the type of support or the outcomes achieved (CONEVAL, 2011). A coordination group which it created in 2008 has had little impact.

Efforts were revived in 2010 to provide targeted support for IDPs in Chiapas. The state government put in place the Inter-Institutional Commission for Peace to “create conditions that will lead to conflict resolution, provide minimum standards of living and basic necessities of life [for IDPs], and compensate them for abuses perpetrated against

them, within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals” (Poder Ejecutivo de Chiapas, 2011). In April 2011 the Senate signed a motion to give the CDI a stronger mandate for its IDP programme (Punto Crítico, 2011).

In October 2011, the state government presented a bill on internal displacement to the state’s congress. The bill, drafted with the support of various UN agencies and civil society in Chiapas, was expected to be adopted by early 2012. If adopted, it would be the first law on internal displacement in the country. In 2004 a bill proposing that a paragraph on the protection of IDPs be added to the text of Mexico’s constitution was rejected by the federal congress.

International agencies have acted in support of IDPs where present in a development role. As part of its 2009-2012 strategy for the development of indigenous peoples, UNDP included a programme to promote the integration of indigenous IDPs in their places of displacement. No specific outcomes are described in UNDP’s 2010 report on the programme, but in September 2011 UNDP confirmed its commitment to supporting IDPs (UNDP, 2010 *and* UNDP, 2011).

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) was established by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 1998, upon the request of the United Nations, to set up a global database on internal displacement. A decade later, IDMC remains the leading source of information and analysis on internal displacement caused by conflict and violence worldwide.

IDMC aims to support better international and national responses to situations of internal displacement and respect for the rights of internally displaced people (IDPs), who are often among the world's most vulnerable people. It also aims to promote durable solutions for IDPs, through return, local integration or settlement elsewhere in the country.

IDMC's main activities include:

- Monitoring and reporting on internal displacement caused by conflict, generalised violence and violations of human rights;
- Researching, analysing and advocating for the rights of IDPs;
- Training and strengthening capacities on the protection of IDPs;
- Contributing to the development of standards and guidance on protecting and assisting IDPs.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org

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