

THEMATIC SERIES
THE INVISIBLE MAJORITY

This thematic series addresses the gap in awareness, data and knowledge about the relationship between internal displacement, cross-border movements and durable solutions.



“STUCK IN THE MIDDLE”

Seeking durable solutions in
post-peace agreement Colombia

MARCH 2019

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Cover photo: Graffiti depicting attack helicopters hovering over Comúna 13 neighbourhood during Operation Orion in Medellín in 2002. Credit: IDMC/Chloe Sydney, November 2018

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Oswald lost his right foot in a mine explosion. He now lives in one of the many apartments provided by the government of Colombia. Photo © UNHCR/ Luisa Dörr, November 2017

SUMMARY

There were 40 million people living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence worldwide as of the end of 2017. The causes of their displacement are the same as those of refugees and they face similar obstacles to durable solutions, but they remain the invisible majority of the world's displaced people.

The relationship between internal displacement, cross-border movements and durable solutions is poorly understood, but it is clear that many refugees start their journeys as internally displaced people (IDPs), and that many refugees return to a life of internal displacement. This study, which forms part of IDMC's Invisible Majority thematic series, examines the relationship between internal displacement, cross-border movements and durable solutions in Colombia.¹

Based on more than 200 interviews with Colombian IDPs, refugees and returning refugees, this study examines drivers of displacement and onward movement within and across borders, provides a better understanding of priorities and preconditions for return, and explores obstacles and opportunities for durable solutions. It does not set out to assess the successes and failures of the 2016 peace agreement, but it does highlight a number of challenges to its implementation. The following is an overview of the key findings.

DISPLACEMENT CONTINUES DESPITE PEACE DEAL

Conflict over land aggravated by drug trafficking and illegal mining has caused mass displacement in Colombia for decades. Smaller-scale displacement has also been triggered by widespread extortion and persecution. The agreement signed by the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC) in 2016 was designed to bring decades of conflict to an end, but for many Colombians peace remains elusive. Numerous

armed groups remain active and new criminal organisations have emerged, competing to fill the vacuum left by the FARC.

REPEATED DISPLACEMENTS SPILL OVER BORDERS

More than a third of respondents said they had been displaced more than once. Multiple displacements often have different drivers, but some were forced to flee both within and across borders by relentless persecution. Cross-border movements often take place when IDPs are unable to find safety in Colombia. Around three-quarters of the refugees and returning refugees interviewed had been internally displaced before fleeing the country.

DISPLACEMENT INCREASES VULNERABILITIES

The early stages of displacement are particularly hard and can be marked by hunger and homelessness both in Colombia and abroad. Many IDPs and refugees struggle to access adequate housing, employment and services. Internal displacement to peripheral urban areas may increase people's exposure to violence, leading to further forced movements.

UNSUSTAINABLE RETURNS RESULT IN FURTHER DISPLACEMENT

Difficult conditions in displacement motivate some IDPs and refugees to return, but these movements are sometimes premature and often unsustainable. Less than a quarter of the returning refugees surveyed were living in their areas of origin, partly because of continued insecurity. Despite the promise of assistance for return and reintegration, many receive little support. Given

the challenges returning refugees face, nearly a third of those interviewed aspire to leave the country again.

IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGISLATION IS SLOW

Colombia has one of the world's most comprehensive legal frameworks on internal displacement, with sophisticated mechanisms for assistance, compensation and land restitution. The scale of displacement, however, poses a significant challenge to implementation. Only around 10 per cent of victims have so far received compensation.²

The findings of this report suggest a need for more nuanced reporting on Colombia that reflects the reality of continued conflict and displacement. Among refugees, misinformation regarding return and reintegration support may encourage premature returns. There also seems to be a gap in terms of dissemination of information regarding Colombian legislation. The refugees and IDPs who took part in this research had only limited understanding of the mechanisms available for durable solutions. Delays in receiving compensation were an overwhelming source of concern among research participants, overshadowing alternative opportunities for support.



Graffiti about forced disappearances in Medellín: Where do the disappeared go? Look in the water and the bushes. And why do they disappear? Because we are not all equal. And when will the disappeared return? Never.

INTRODUCTION

“A paramilitary group entered our village in the year 2000. They wouldn’t let us leave, but after three months we managed to escape during a battle between the paramilitaries and a group of guerrillas. The paramilitaries left, so we returned to our village. But then we heard that more fighting was coming, so we tried to flee again ... but fighting started between the guerrillas and the army, and we were stuck in the middle.” - Santiago

Selecting one story of displacement for the introduction of this report was a challenge. Santiago’s story is far from unique. Neither was this his only experience of displacement. Years after these events, he fled to Argentina after being threatened by a criminal group. He returned to Colombia in December 2016, but he continues to feel unsafe.

IDMC estimates that more than 6.5 million Colombians were living in internal displacement as of December 2017, second only to Syria. Despite the peace agreement signed between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC) in 2016, internal displacement continues. Around 139,000 new displacements associated with conflict and violence were recorded in 2017.

Conflict in Colombia erupted in the 1960s with the formation of the FARC, the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN) and the Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*, EPL) in response to high levels of political and socioeconomic inequality and marginalisation in Colombian society and violence against local communist groups.³ Rightwing paramilitary groups emerged to oppose these guerrilla movements, operating with the tacit endorsement and in some cases collaboration of the state. Purportedly created in self-defence, paramilitary groups have also committed widespread abuses.⁴ Conflict between the security forces, paramilitaries and guerrilla groups led to displacement on an unprecedented scale, reaching an all-time high in 2002.⁵

BOX 1. ESTIMATING DISPLACEMENT

IDMC’s estimates of the stock of people internally displaced in Colombia are based on the government’s registry, which records all victims of conflict in the country. Since 2017, IDMC’s figure discounts IDPs who have overcome their displacement-related vulnerability, drawing upon assessments carried out by the Victims’ Unit which considers factors such as housing, education, documentation, and employment. Those who have only overcome housing-related vulnerability but continue to face challenges in other areas are accounted for separately, recognizing that their progress towards durable solutions does not yet constitute a complete end to displacement. As a result of this adopted approach, IDMC’s estimates are lower than official government figures.

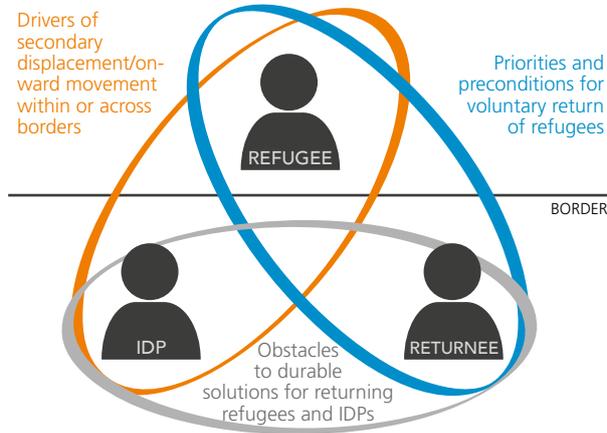
The formal demobilisation of the paramilitaries starting in 2003 and the government’s peace deal with the FARC in 2016 are significant achievements, but they have not brought a definitive end to insecurity. Many former paramilitaries have regrouped into new criminal organisations, and dissident FARC factions opposed to the peace deal remain active along with the ELN and EPL.⁷ Ongoing violence represents a significant barrier to the achievement of durable solutions, as do challenges in implementing ambitious legislation for people affected by the conflict.

Against this backdrop, the crisis in Venezuela has also led to the return of between 300,000 and 500,000 Colombian refugees and vulnerable migrants.⁸ Unable to go back to their areas of origin because of insecurity, or to address the vulnerabilities associated with their plight, many have returned to a life of internal displacement.

This study analyses the relationship between internal displacement, cross-border movements and durable solutions in Colombia. Its objectives are:

- | To examine the drivers of displacement and IDPs' onward movement within and across borders
- | To provide a better understanding of priorities and preconditions for voluntary return
- | To examine obstacles and opportunities for durable solutions for IDPs and returning refugees, and assess the risk of further displacement
- | To support policy and programming for durable solutions across the displacement continuum

FIGURE 1: Research objectives



METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was adopted, including a preliminary desk review, a hybrid survey with a qualitative component and additional qualitative interviews. Research was conducted with IDPs, returning refugees in Colombia and refugees in Costa Rica.

| Background research

A thorough desk review was conducted before data collection to gather information on the situation in Colombia and the populations in question, and to identify existing research and data on internal displacement, cross-border movements and durable solutions. A team of volunteers also conducted an assessment of progress toward durable solutions in line with the criteria set

out in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)'s framework on durable solutions.⁹

| Sampling strategy

Fieldwork locations were selected based on accessibility, the availability of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) or local partners and potential risks to researchers or research participants. Various locations in Colombia were included to enhance the diversity of the sample, with data collection taking place in Cúcuta (Norte de Santander), Medellín (Antioquia) and Soacha (Cundinamarca). Research with Colombian refugees was conducted in San José in Costa Rica.

| COLOMBIA



| COSTA RICA



Given the challenge of conducting research with hard-to-reach populations, respondents were identified through a convenience sample which combined non-probability sampling techniques drawing upon the local knowledge and social networks of researchers, partners and participants.

Most of the interviews in Colombia were conducted in attention points of the government's Victims' Unit (UARIV), where large numbers of people congregate daily to process requests for assistance and compensation. In Costa Rica, support was provided by the Association of International Consultants and Assessors (*Asociación de Consultores y Asesores Internacionales, ACAI*), which identified and recruited research participants among former project beneficiaries. Some returning refugees inscribed in Colombia's registry of victims were interviewed by phone based on contact details provided by NRC.

Every effort was made to maximise the diversity of sample by including participants of different ages, gender and socioeconomic background. To protect their identity, participants' names were not recorded during data collection. All names provided in this report are fictitious.

| Data collection

Data collection took place in November 2018. Interviews were conducted by research assistants using KoboToolbox, developed by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative for research in challenging environments. Ahead of data collection, the research assistants were trained on the objectives and wording of the survey, use of the software, and qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques.

The survey questionnaire was organised into five sections. The questions varied somewhat depending on the type of respondent, but were as standardised as possible to enable comparison across the different population groups. The five sections covered were:

- | Demographics: respondents' personal characteristics, including age, education level and marital status
- | Displacement: an overview of causes and journeys undertaken
- | Conditions in host communities: including living conditions, economic opportunities, access to services and security
- | Conditions in communities of origin: including living conditions, economic opportunities, access to services and security
- | Durable solutions: barriers, opportunities, personal aspirations and access to mechanisms

The research assistants were also asked to make notes of any stories shared by respondents to supplement the survey findings with extra qualitative data. This resulted in more than 150 pages of rich narratives that shed light on the variety and complexity of displacement trajectories and experiences.

A total of 198 surveys were carried out, and a further 10 participants took part in purely qualitative interviews.

Five semi-structured interviews were also conducted with local authority officials and NGO staff.

TABLE 1: Survey observations

Population	Surveys	Qualitative interviews
Returning refugee	49	1
IDP	124	1
Refugee	25	8
Other	-	5
Total	198	15

LIMITATIONS

The research findings offer a valuable snapshot of respondents' knowledge, experiences, attitudes and aspirations, but the sample is not representative. The results presented are valid only for the research participants, and should not be extrapolated to Colombia's displaced population as a whole. In other words, to say that X per cent of the refugees who participated in the survey were internally displaced before leaving Colombia does not mean that the same percentage of all Colombian refugees were previously internally displaced. As such, this report provides few statistics and relies primarily on respondents' qualitative narratives.

Given the nature of the sampling, there is also a risk of bias in the findings. Because the majority of interviews in Colombia were conducted in Victims' Unit attention points, the survey focused largely on registered victims requesting support. It did not capture IDPs not seeking support, perhaps because they felt they had sufficient social and financial capital. Similarly, the majority of interviews in Costa Rica took place with Colombians who had at some point turned to ACAI for support, meaning that those who arrived with significant financial resources or strong personal networks are under-represented in the sample.

Nor is the survey likely to include IDPs who have opted against signing up to the victims' registry, for reasons including security concerns, lack of information or access constraints. Refugees who have returned through unofficial channels and chosen not to join the registry are also unlikely to be captured in the sample.

DRIVERS AND TRIGGERS OF DISPLACEMENT

Conflict in Colombia originated in high levels of inequality. The country has made significant progress since guerrillas first took up arms in the early 1960s. Based on purchasing parity rates, gross national income per capita has increased by more than 200 per cent since 1990.¹⁰ The country's human development index has also increased from 0.592 to 0.747, putting it in the "high" category.¹¹ The proportion of the population estimated to be living under the national poverty line decreased from almost half at the start of the millennium to just over a quarter in 2017.¹²

Despite these improvements, the 2018 World Inequality Report states that inequality remains stubbornly high.¹³ The urban-rural divide is particularly acute. Belying national averages, 36 per cent of the rural population still lives under the national poverty line, compared with 15.7 per cent of those living in urban areas.¹⁴ Rural communities also face greater challenges in terms of access to public goods and services. Less than half the rural population is thought to have access to rubbish collection.¹⁵

Land distribution is another marker of inequality, and continues to be a significant point of contention. One per cent of landholdings concentrate more than 80 per cent of land.¹⁶ This has been exacerbated by widespread land dispossession of rural communities during the armed conflict. According to Colombia's agriculture ministry, "around 6.5m hectares (16m acres) of land, including some of the most fertile, was stolen, abandoned or forcibly changed hands in other ways between 1985 and 2008 as a result of the conflict".¹⁷

The illegal drug trade contributes to displacement as armed groups vie for control of plantations and trafficking routes. There have been significant eradication efforts, but rural poverty increases communities'

dependence on coca cultivation, which is often the most lucrative opportunity for income generation in otherwise marginalised areas.¹⁸ "In the Catatumbo region, it's the only way to make money," said Luciana, a former coca farmer. Pressure on behalf of non-state armed actors to cultivate coca has also led to threats, assassinations and displacement. Comprehensive rural reform is one of the core components of the 2016 peace agreement, which also considers the problem of illicit drugs.¹⁹

These underlying drivers result in a wide range of threats that trigger displacement.²⁰ Many research participants were displaced by armed groups seeking to seize control of their land, or as a result of armed confrontations between groups. Some were persecuted and received death threats for attempting to bring crimes to justice, others for their perceived affiliation to armed groups or political parties or because of their sexual orientation. Extortion and fear of forced recruitment were also common triggers of displacement. The following section examines these factors in more detail.

DISPOSSESSION

Competition between armed groups to control territory, particularly for coca cultivation and drug trafficking but also for illegal mining, has caused widespread displacement in Colombia.²¹ Luciana was displaced by guerrillas and paramilitaries fighting over control of coca plantations. Daniela's land, rich in gold, was first taken by the ELN and then later seized by paramilitary groups. Gabriela, who comes from an emerald-mining area, lost her father and brother to the armed group that took control of their territory.

In some cases, entire villages have been forced to leave by armed groups looking to take control of an area.



Jose harvests cocoa on his farm in Isla de la Amargura, Caceres, Antioquia, Colombia. He benefits from a USAID programme that aims to give farmers in coca-growing areas alternatives to the illegal drug trade. Photo: USAID/Thomas Cristofolletti, February 2015

Mateo recalls: “One of my brothers refused to leave, and eight days later they killed him.” Victoria’s neighbour was another casualty. “She was an elderly lady, and she chose to die rather than leave her land and experience displacement.”

In order to nominally legalise transactions, rightful owners such as Mateo are sometimes forced to sell their land at ludicrously reduced rates. “I had my cattle, some good cows. We cultivated plantain, maize, coffee and sugar cane. We had about 200 hectares. They only gave me 300,000 pesos (less than \$100),” he said.

FORCED RECRUITMENT

Fear of forced recruitment has also led to displacement. Martina fled after an armed group attempted to enlist her 12-year-old son. Lucia managed to escape after

being forced to work as a cook for the guerrillas. “If you didn’t obey, they killed you and left your body in the street to be eaten by dogs,” she said. Refusal to cooperate could indeed have dire consequences. The FARC massacred Alejandro’s entire family in front of the residents of their village for having resisted recruitment.

Girls are also sometimes “recruited” for other purposes. Jimena fled her village at the age of 12 because she was afraid of being abducted on her walk to school. Sara’s 16-year-old daughter was taken by paramilitaries earlier this year and brutally raped. Her aggressors told her to return the following night or be killed. Sara managed to flee with her daughter, and is now seeking psychological support.

EXTORTION

Extortion by criminal organisations and armed groups was another common cause of displacement among research participants. Samantha owned a furniture shop in Bogotá and was subjected to illegal taxation known as *vacuna*, which translates as “vaccination”. After two years of increasing charges and mounting levels of debt, the situation became unsustainable and they decided to flee. Business owners are not the only people affected. Emma said she had to pay *vacuna* to travel along certain routes and even to enter her neighbourhood.

Non-payment is not an option. Maria José was paying *vacuna* for her business but eventually ran out of money. She was told that if she did not leave the area, her children would be killed in retaliation. One of Sebastián’s friends was also killed for refusing to pay.

PERSECUTION

| Combating impunity

Efforts to bring perpetrators to justice are likely to result in displacement. When Sebastián reported his friend’s assassination, he was persecuted and had to flee his home. Julieta tried to find out who had murdered her brother, and the armed group responsible gave her 72 hours to leave. Nicolás, whose parents were taken by the FARC when he was a child, was eventually declared a target because of his efforts to uncover the truth. Diego, whose father was also taken by the FARC, suffered a similar fate. “I realised I was about to go down the same path as my father,” he said. “A friend told me to flee because they were planning to kill me.” He was only 12 at the time.

Illegal armed groups’ efforts to ensure impunity for their crimes often involve the persecution of witnesses. Samuel was threatened after witnessing an assassination. Benjamin witnessed the ELN abduct two children and was able to alert the police in time to rescue them. He soon received word the guerrillas were planning to kill him, and was forced to flee abroad.

| Perceived affiliation

Perceived affiliation to one party to the conflict or another is a common cause of persecution and displace-

ment. Daniel remembers a guerrilla fighter threatening him because of his known support for government forces. “He told me that if I didn’t leave within 72 hours, he would cut off my head with his machete and display it at the entrance to the village as a warning to others,” he said. Joaquín, who had already been displaced twice by guerrillas, was later persecuted by paramilitaries. “They told us we had to leave the area. They accused us of collaborating with the guerrillas. Many families had to flee. For them, we were guerrilla supporters,” he said.

Political affiliation has also resulted in persecution and displacement, the most notorious example being the case of the *Unión Patriótica* (UP), a political party formed by the FARC and the Colombian Communist party as part of an abortive peace process in the 1980s. Thousands of the party’s officials and supporters were assassinated, including two presidential candidates, leading some commentators to speak of “political genocide”.²² Lucas, who was a UP councillor, was displaced after an attempt on his life in 1995. Antonella decided to flee after a UP member in her town was assassinated.

Líderes sociales, a term which encompasses a variety of community activists and human rights defenders, have faced similar threats. Renata has been persecuted and threatened for years because of her involvement with a victims’ support group. She has been displaced three times, and has suffered various assassination attempts. In the last one, she was hit on the head, put in a bag and thrown down a mountainside. The government provided her with armed protection, which she renounced after her bodyguard was killed.

| Gender-based persecution

Some respondents were persecuted because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Emilia, who identifies as a transgender woman, has been displaced five times since the age of 16. She has also been forced to have sexual relations in exchange for “permission” to stay. She continues to feel threatened in her current community. Natalia, who aspires to become a transgender man, was forced to flee by the Clan del Golfo, a powerful drug cartel made up of former paramilitaries. Homophobic violence has been widespread throughout the armed conflict - 110 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people were murdered in Colombia in 2015.²³

ONWARD MOVEMENT: 'I DIDN'T FEEL SAFE'

REPEATED MOVEMENTS

More than a third of respondents said they had been displaced more than once. Some returned between displacements only to be forced to flee again. Before the FARC took Nicolás' parents, the guerrillas had displaced his family from their land countless times. On the day of his parents' abduction they had received flyers warning them to leave, but they were so tired of being displaced that they decided to stay.

Some respondents' repeated displacements had different triggers. Mía first fled when her daughter witnessed her father's assassination, before being displaced again when she was threatened for denouncing extortion demands on her business. Gabriela was first displaced by paramilitary groups seeking to control emerald production in her area of origin. Years later she was forced to flee again because of her business activities in a guerrilla-controlled area.

Other repeated displacements were driven by relentless persecution, leading in many cases to cross-border movement. Zoe and her husband moved various times in search of safety after he witnessed an assassination attempt. They eventually decided to leave the country after the perpetrators arrived in their latest neighbourhood. Tomás also decided to flee to Costa Rica after being internally displaced five times. "I didn't feel safe in any of those locations," he said.

The threats Daniela has received have been particularly tenacious. The ELN took her land in early 1990s, and the FARC subsequently seized it from the ELN. Two decades later, she decided to contact the government's property restitution agency. A month after initiating the process, she received a phone call inviting her to present herself in her municipality of origin to discuss the

restitution. When she contacted the agency to confirm the appointment, however, it had no record of the call. Further investigation revealed that her land was now in the hands of a powerful paramilitary group that was unwilling to facilitate restitution because the area was rich in gold. Daniela started receiving threats and had to enter a national protection programme.

She was relocated to another part of the country, where she suffered a first assassination attempt. She moved again. Then one of her relatives was murdered and a photo of the body was sent to her new address. She fled a third time. After receiving credible warnings that her bodyguard was conspiring with the paramilitaries to have her assassinated, she finally decided to flee the country. "I didn't want to leave Colombia. I love my country," she said. Her exile has not brought an end to persecution. She has continued to receive threats in Costa Rica, and must now contemplate moving again.

CROSS-BORDER FLOWS

Three-quarters of the refugees and returning refugees interviewed for this study had initially been internally displaced. The majority left the country because they had been unable to find safety and security despite their initial displacements. Gabriel fled first to a nearby village where he was threatened again, then to a larger urban centre where he was attacked. He eventually fled across the border into Ecuador. Martín fled to Bogotá after refusing to pay *vacuna*, but the FARC soon caught up with him: "They told me that no matter which part of the country I was in, if I refused to cooperate they would kill me," he said. "I wanted to try to live in my country, but when I saw this wouldn't be possible, I made the decision to leave."

FIGURE 2: Daniela's displacements



Some respondents, particularly those in border areas with easy access to neighbouring countries, moved abroad in response to the economic hardships of internal displacement. David was displaced from Catatumbo to Cúcuta in the early 2000s, and from there to nearby Venezuela where the economy was better at the time. Nicole fled from Tumaco to another city in Nariño department before moving on into Ecuador in search of better economic opportunities.

Not everyone, however, has either the means or motivation to leave the country. Despite having been repeatedly displaced as a result of her UP affiliation, Renata decided against moving to Canada because not all of her daughters would have been granted asylum. Paula had no other choice but to remain in Colombia. "To travel abroad you need savings, but I didn't have any," she said. The cost of travel can be a significant barrier to cross-border movement. Many refugees had to sell their property to finance their journey.

CONDITIONS IN DISPLACEMENT: 'WE HAD TO START AGAIN FROM SCRATCH'

Once displaced, whether internally or across borders, those affected face the daunting task of rebuilding their lives. Conditions in displacement, however, are often challenging. Alongside continued security threats, IDPs and refugees interviewed struggle to access adequate housing, basic services and employment.

IDPs IN COLOMBIA

| Housing

Thanks to the Colombian government's progressive policy to combat extreme poverty, vulnerable households may be entitled to free social housing. 100,000 homes have been made available, of which 70 per cent have been allocated to IDPs.²⁴ It is up to the beneficiaries, however, to furnish and equip the homes they receive. Emiliano's only source of income is informal recycling, which means his family's home has a bare cement floor, broken windows and little furniture, but he is still grateful to have a roof over his head. "I thank god every day that the government was able to give us this home", he said. His neighbour Agustín, in contrast, has set up a successful business selling *avena*, a popular oat-based drink, and is proud of how well he has furnished his home.

Some of the social housing projects are in areas affected by violence and insecurity. One respondent was stabbed eight times after reporting a crime to the police. Amanda, who lives in the same apartment complex, also worries about the widespread use of drugs in the neighbourhood. Daniel lives in a different neighbourhood, but has similar concerns. "You see people having sex, smoking



Social housing in Soacha

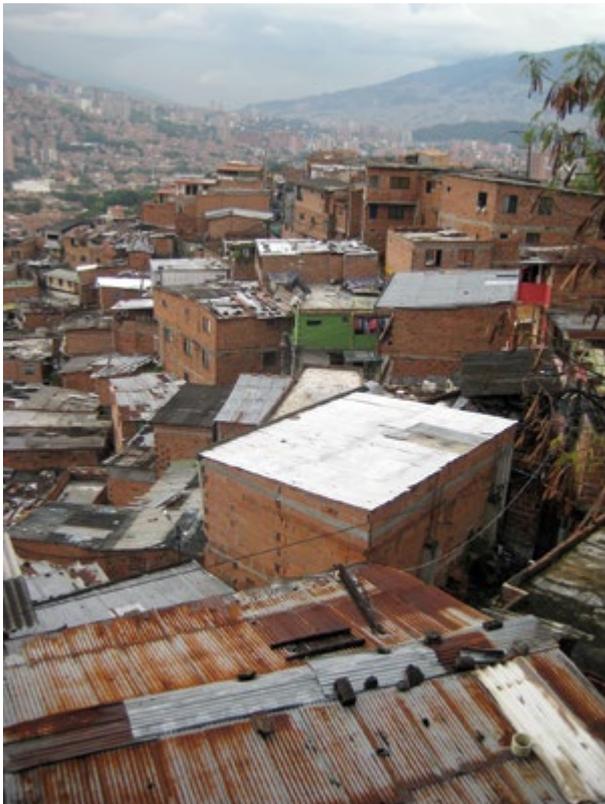
marijuana, stealing things," he said. "The police have no power here, on Sunday they were expelled with machetes ... Some demobilised fighters have started taking control of some of the buildings. Young people are involved in gangs."

Despite the difficulties experienced by some beneficiaries, their situation is generally an improvement on their previous living conditions. Before being provided with housing, Daniel and Agustín were living in Altos de la Florida, an overcrowded slum in the hills of Soacha, with poor access to basic services, including sanitation, and widespread criminality.²⁵ The lack of proper roads

is also an issue, and Daniel remembers once having to go to the doctor on a donkey. "It wasn't as fast as an ambulance," he said.

Many of those who have not received social housing continue to live in such informal settlements. According to the housing ministry, nearly 30 per cent of all Colombian families did not have adequate homes as of 2013.²⁶ María Fernanda's home is made out of mud, Juan Pablo's out of plastic and wood. Juana lives in a similar shelter with her seven children and three grandchildren, and has no access to safe drinking water. She shares a latrine with several other households and has hooked up an illegal connection to the electricity supply.

Manuela lives in the street with her husband and son. They have attempted to seek refuge in homeless shelters, but there are none for families. Valentina is also homeless and feels constantly unsafe. "I don't like talking to people, you can't trust anybody," she said. Her bag and mobile phone were stolen recently, leaving her with nothing but the clothes she was wearing.



Peripheral neighbourhood of Medellín

| Employment and food security

Overall unemployment in Colombia is estimated at nine per cent.²⁷ People who have fled from rural areas, who are often less educated and do not have transferable skills, have particular difficulty finding work in urban centres.

They also have to endure the higher cost of living in urban areas and reduced access to natural resources, which in turn affects their food security. People who were previously able to grow their own food and keep their own livestock, or to buy food relatively cheaply, find themselves having to rely on family and friends or humanitarian assistance.²⁸ As Paula said: "Hunger is more common in cities than in the countryside."

Formal employment has increased in Colombia, but more than half of the country's non-agricultural workers were still employed informally as of 2013.²⁹ Few alternatives to this type of work exist for displaced people. "There are no opportunities for decent work," Ana Sofia said. This, in turn, contributes to inequality and social exclusion.³⁰

Many of those able to secure employment still struggle to make ends meet. Elena works 12-hour shifts in a restaurant for less than \$10 a day and has difficulty covering her basic living costs. Andrés works in construction, but is sometimes unable to afford to buy enough food.

Many respondents also noted that economic opportunities had become fewer still with the arrival of Venezuelans fleeing the deteriorating situation in their country. As competition for scarce jobs increases, some displaced Colombians report finding it harder to get work. The integration of Venezuelans into the labour force is recognised as a significant challenge for Colombia, alongside the risk of rising xenophobia.³¹



A street vendor in Bogotá

| Access to services

With a literacy rate exceeding 94 per cent and close to 100 per cent reported primary school enrolment, education may not be as much of a challenge in Colombia as it is in other countries affected by displacement.³² Most of the IDPs interviewed said their children were able to attend school, and the majority were satisfied with the quality of education provided. Research participants suggested that education challenges were in fact more acute in their areas of origin, reflecting the country's urban-rural divide.

Similarly, the IDPs interviewed generally reported higher quality healthcare in their host communities than in their areas of origin. More than 90 per cent of Colombians in both rural and urban areas are nonetheless affiliated to healthcare programmes.³³ Most are expected to pay social security contributions, but some vulnerable households are able to access free basic healthcare via the Identification System for Potential Beneficiaries of Social Programmes (*Sistema de Identificación de Potenciales Beneficiarios de Programas Sociales, SISBEN*).³⁴

That is not to say that all displaced people have unrestricted access to healthcare. Valentina suffers from a painful hernia, but she has been unable to register for free healthcare. Nor is she able to afford social security payments, let alone the cost of the operation she needs. "When I find a little money, I go to the pharmacy and buy painkillers," she said.

REFUGEES IN COSTA RICA

| Legal status

Costa Rica is widely recognised as having one of the world's most comprehensive legal frameworks for the protection of refugees.³⁵ Given its comparative stability, it receives more than any other country in Central America. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), there were more than 2,300 Colombian refugees in Costa Rica in 2017. Because many former refugees have been granted residency or citizenship, the overall number of Colombians hosted is much higher.³⁶

Refugees in Costa Rica can apply for a residence permit three years after being granted refugee status. They can either preserve their refugee status, which means they are not allowed to travel back to their country of origin, or renounce their protection in order to be able to do so. They can also apply for citizenship after five years in the country.

Some respondents felt that the 2016 peace agreement may be responsible for the perceived decline in the number of successful asylum claims. Bianca required an armed escort to accompany her to the airport when she fled Colombia, but her asylum application has been rejected. The recent large-scale arrival of Nicaraguans may also be leading to delays.³⁷ Mía has been waiting to be granted refugee status for nearly three years. Ariana, who arrived in Costa Rica recently, said she had been given an appointment in June 2020. Rodrigo is in a similar situation. "I'm still in limbo," he said.



Poster on applying for asylum in Costa Rica

| Employment

Refugees in Costa Rica have full employment rights, and asylum seekers can apply for a work permit after three months. Thanks to this legislation, many Colombians have been successful in rebuilding their lives in the country. Gabriela has owned her own hairdressing salon for nearly 20 years, and Florencia a clothes shop for more than ten. A 2018 survey of Colombians living in Costa Rica found that 63 per cent felt their economic situation had improved since leaving Colombia.³⁸

That said, many of the refugees and asylum seekers who took part in this research said they had experienced hunger during their first year in Costa Rica. “The beginning was very difficult ... We used to live comfortably, but we had to start again from scratch,” Samantha said. Rodrigo is still waiting for his work permit, and has few options. “The only opportunities I have found are working as a street vendor,” he said.

Nor does the legal right to work guarantee employment. “I have been here for three years, but I haven’t been able to position myself in the labour market,” said Carolina. “I’m desperate, because I need to work.” Camila has

been in Costa Rica since 2001, but she still works as a street vendor to make ends meet. “I feel things are getting worse rather than better,” she said.

According to agencies operating in Costa Rica: “Despite having the desire, the capacity and the right to work, refugees and asylum seekers still face serious barriers to employment. The main barriers are lack of knowledge on behalf of employers regarding their documentation and their right to work; myths and misunderstandings regarding refugees; limited education opportunities and challenges validating academic credentials; and lack of information undermining access to banking services and social security.”³⁹

| Housing

Housing is perhaps one of the greatest challenges for the Colombians interviewed in Costa Rica, who find the cost of rent disproportionately high given the employment challenges they face. “We have to pay our rent in five days, and we are still missing half the money,” said Carolina, who is currently unemployed. Benjamin, an elderly man unable to work since suffering a stroke, receives rental support from UNHCR. “Without it, I would have to live under a bridge,” he said.

Others struggle to find accommodation because of landlords’ discrimination.⁴⁰ Tomás remembers one who refused to rent him a room because he thought all Colombians were drug traffickers, a widespread perception. “Being Colombian means being stigmatised, even if you’re a good person,” said Maite. “People say ‘oh, you’re Colombian, you must know Pablo Escobar.’ It’s like a tattoo. It’s tiring. It’s disheartening.”

| Access to services

Respondents generally felt that Costa Rica offered good opportunities for their children. “You’ve barely crossed the border and they’re already starting school,” said Florencia. Primary and secondary education is free and perceived to be of good quality, and school meals are provided. Parents also felt there were more opportunities for further education than in Colombia. Samantha’s daughter was the first person in her family to go to university. Further education is not free, however, and two respondents said they had to ask their children to withdraw from university temporarily while they saved up to pay for another semester.



Colombian refugees Miriam and Ricardo prepare bread at the family's bakery in San José, Costa Rica. Photo © UNHCR/Santiago Escobar-Jaramillo, August 2017

Costa Rica's child-friendly policies mean that children have preferential access to free healthcare, but the situation for adults may be more complicated. Just over 60 per cent of Colombians living in Costa Rica surveyed in 2018 said they had access to healthcare.⁴¹ Most businesses are required to provide medical insurance for their employees, but refugees and asylum seekers who depend on informal work or day labour are rarely covered, and few are able to afford the monthly premium themselves.⁴² Without insurance the cost of healthcare is high. Maite, who is unemployed, went to hospital with severe pain in her neck and was charged 130,000 colones (\$216) for her consultation.

Those whose asylum applications have been rejected said they only had access to healthcare for life-threatening emergencies. "Unless your guts are hanging out, they won't attend you if your paperwork isn't in order," Maite said. "I have something wrong with my stomach, but I have to put up with the pain," said Bianca.

Discrimination by public health officials also appears to be an issue in some cases. When Sebastián tried to take out an insurance policy, he was refused on the basis of

his nationality. Mía also felt that the rights of refugees and asylum seekers were not always understood or respected. "Some officials do not recognise our documents as valid and don't recognise our rights," she said.

| Security

Costa Rica is traditionally perceived as a safe haven in a region otherwise beset by instability, but Colombians who have been living in the country for a long time said there had been a gradual increase in crime. "When I arrived here I felt very safe. I walked around feeling completely relaxed, but now you have to be more careful," said Antonella.

Despite the rise in criminality, including thefts and assaults, respondents overwhelmingly felt safer in Costa Rica than in Colombia. "There may be crime, but not as much as back home," said Ariana. Regina expressed similar sentiments. "We live more peacefully here. Nobody persecutes us, nobody extorts us," she said. Ninety-seven per cent of Colombians living in Costa Rica surveyed in 2018 said they felt safer in their host country than they did in Colombia.⁴³

THE CHALLENGE OF RETURN

MOTIVATIONS FOR RETURN

Some refugees have chosen to return to Colombia, often encouraged by perceptions of increasing peace and stability that do not necessarily reflect the reality on the ground. “After so much time away, we wanted to come back,” said Isabella, who returned from Argentina in July 2018.

The returns seem set to continue. Of the 22 Colombians interviewed in Costa Rica, three said they intended to return and four were thinking about the possibility of doing so in the future. Unfortunately, some returns seem to be driven by false expectations or difficult conditions in host countries.

| Narratives of peace

The peace agreement has helped to shift perceptions of Colombia abroad, as evidenced by the increasing number of foreign visitors. Some Colombian refugees, however, believe such optimism to be misplaced and accuse the international media of failing to report the reality on the ground. According to Sofia: “There are many things that never come to light precisely to continue deceiving foreigners.” Sebastián agreed. “What they say on international news channels is a lie ... They are hiding the truth,” he said.

Based on the information she had received, Isabella was surprised at conditions in Colombia when she returned from Argentina. “I thought things were a little better,” she said. “When you’re abroad you hear about the peace agreement, but actually a lot is still happening.”

“To deny the continued existence of the guerrilla movement is like hiding the sun with one finger,” said Valeria. Many foreign governments, however, appear to be doing just that. Respondents in Costa Rica noted that an increasing number of asylum applications seem to have been rejected since the peace agreement.⁴⁴ As



Graffiti in Bogotá: “Peace is now”

such, narratives of peace that do not reflect the reality on the ground may be contributing to both premature and uninformed returns and a decline in opportunities for asylum.

| Expectations of support

According to law 1448 of 2011, known widely as the Victims’ Law, Colombians forced to flee the country as a result of the armed conflict are entitled to return and reintegration support, including measures to help them access healthcare, housing, vocational training and psychosocial and legal services.⁴⁵ In the spirit of the law, UARIV set up a registry of victims abroad in 2013 and collaborated with host countries to facilitate registration. Colombians living in 45 countries have registered so far.⁴⁶ The 2016 peace agreement similarly includes measures to accompany and assist the return of victims abroad.⁴⁷ Those living overseas who are not victims of the conflict are also entitled to return assistance under law 1565 of 2012.⁴⁸

Many Colombian refugees are aware of these mechanisms, and for some the promise of support has been



Selling bolivars and handicrafts on the streets of Cúcuta

instrumental in their decision to return. In practice, however, only a quarter of the returning refugees interviewed said that assistance had been forthcoming.

UNHCR told Michelle about the legislation and outlined the benefits of return while she was living in Ecuador. She said she was promised a cash payment of 1.5 million pesos (\$477) and other forms of support. When she returned to Colombia, however, she received less than half of the sum and no other type of assistance. “Nobody knows about this law and they’re not interested in implementing it”, she said. Vicente was even less fortunate. UARIV contacted him while he was in Ecuador to offer return support, but he has received nothing since arriving back in Colombia. He would not have returned if he had known, he said.

Alma had a similar experience. After her asylum application in Ecuador was rejected, UARIV outlined the benefits of return, including transport back to her area of origin, a month and a half’s salary, housing support, employment opportunities and compensation. UNHCR also offered to facilitate resettlement in a third country, but the delays were such that she decided to return. Her children were out of school and she was eager for them

to resume their education. They went back to Colombia in March 2016 and she received the promised salary payment, but nothing else. “They promised me many things, but they haven’t kept their promise,” she said. She wishes now that she had waited for resettlement.

Others returned to Colombia in the hope of receiving compensation that in reality they were entitled to while abroad. Fernando went back because he and his family were contacted and told they could receive their compensation if they returned, but as yet they have received nothing. Javier and his wife also received a call from UARIV while they were in Brazil and were promised compensation if they returned. Javier has indeed been compensated, but his wife has received nothing. They had planned to use the funds to build a house in Brazil, but his compensation alone is not sufficient.

BOX 2: FORCED RETURNS

Following a security incident on the border between Colombia and Venezuela in 2015, Caracas ordered the deportation of thousands of Colombians under the pretext of reducing insecurity caused by Colombian paramilitary groups. More than 1,700 Colombians were deported, and a further 22,000 Colombians are reported to have returned ‘voluntarily’ due to fears of deportation and abuse.⁴⁹ David was forcibly returned by Venezuelan security forces due to alleged affiliation to paramilitary groups, despite having fled Colombia more than a decade earlier in order to escape threats from paramilitary groups in their country of origin. He left Venezuela empty-handed, unable to bring even a suitcase. Originally from Catatumbo, he has been unable to return to his community of origin because of continued insecurity.

| Difficult conditions

Poor conditions in host countries were another important motivation to return. Isabel has been working as an ice cream vendor in Venezuela for the past decade, but she is now contemplating going back to Colombia because of the rising cost of materials and decreasing demand. She would by no means be the first to do so. Between 300,000 and 500,000 Colombians have

returned from Venezuela since the start of the crisis in 2010, including half a dozen interviewed for this study.⁵⁰ Among them was Manuel, who has no doubt that he would have stayed in Venezuela if it had not been for the crisis.

Venezuela is not the only country from which refugees are returning. One respondent returned from Spain when he lost his job during the economic crisis there, and two returned from Ecuador because of the lack of economic opportunities. Olivia was living in such extreme poverty in Chile that her children were malnourished and they had to sleep in a homeless shelter. When one of her sons fell ill as a result of bed bugs, they decided to return to Colombia.

Relatively few Colombians have returned from Costa Rica, but of those who have the majority did so because they were unable to find a decent job.⁵¹ Catalina is one such example. Some of the refugees interviewed in San José were also contemplating return. “It’s so difficult,” said Antonella. “I’ve always said I would never return, but now I’m living such a critical situation here.” Sofia has also been reluctantly thinking of going back to Colombia. “If I had economic opportunities here, I would never return,” she said.

IDPs often return for similar reasons, motivated by poor conditions in their host communities and despite continued insecurity in their areas of origin. “I would rather die with dignity from a bullet here than die of hunger on the city streets”, one participant in a previous study said.⁵² Such testimonies reinforce the importance of meeting displaced people’s basic needs to avoid premature, unsafe and unsustainable returns.

BOX 3: BARRIERS TO RETURN

Not all refugees who want to return to Colombia are able to do so. Fear of persecution and insecurity in areas of origin are barriers for some, and the cost of the journey is prohibitive for the economically vulnerable. Benjamin would like to go back home to his wife and daughter despite continued threats from the ELN, but he is unable to afford to and worries about becoming a burden on his family without adequate support from the state. “I would be taking food away from my wife and daughter,” he said. Elderly, unable to work and far from his family, Benjamin suffers severe depression. “I’ve even tried to kill myself,” he said.



Crossing the border from Venezuela into Colombia

SUSTAINABILITY OF RETURN

Less than a quarter of the returning refugees interviewed currently live in their areas of origin, predominantly for fear of continued insecurity. “They are killing people every day there. The situation in Colombia hasn’t improved at all,” said Sergio, who has returned from Ecuador but dares not go back to his area of origin.

In general, there has been improvement. The country’s recorded homicide rate has decreased from 65 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2000 to just over 25 in 2016.⁵³ Despite this progress, more than 200 *líderes sociales* have been murdered since the peace agreement.⁵⁴ Eduardo, who has resumed his social activities since returning to Colombia, has received numerous threats and regularly changes neighbourhoods.

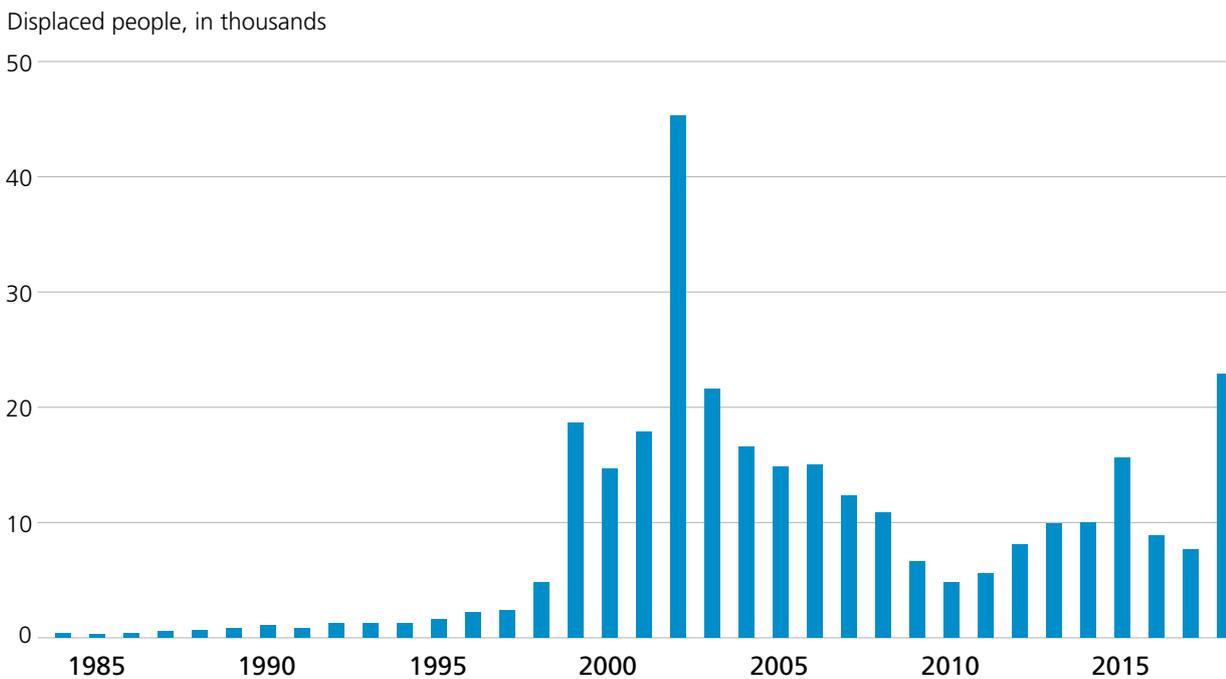
Other returnees have also been displaced again once back in Colombia. Miguel returned from Venezuela because of the crisis and settled in a new city because of continued threats in his village of origin. Despite his attempts to maintain a low profile he received new threats from the ELN and was forced to move again.

The scale of new displacement associated with conflict in 2018 makes it clear that, despite the promises of the peace agreement, the number of victims continues to grow. Preliminary figures, which are almost certainly an underestimate, indicate that there were around 87,000 new displacements during the year.⁵⁵ Thirteen survey respondents were among those newly displaced. Mariana fled her home in Catatumbo in Norte de Santander department to escape fighting between EPL and ELN. Displacement in the department as whole reached its highest level since 2002.

Alongside insecurity, returning refugees face numerous other challenges. Carla had her own business in Venezuela, but is now barely able to make ends meet. Her meagre income is spent almost entirely on rent and utilities. Her son, who studied civil engineering in Venezuela, works as a handyman because his diploma is not recognised in Colombia.

As a result of these barriers to durable solutions, almost a third of the returning refugees surveyed aspire to leave the country again. When Jorge finally receives his compensation, he plans to buy a plane ticket abroad.

FIGURE 3: New Displacement in Norte de Santander department.



Source: Victims’ registry

DURABLE SOLUTIONS IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Colombia has perhaps the world's most comprehensive legal framework on internal displacement, and the concept of IDPs' protection predates the adoption of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Law 387 of 1997 recognises the state's responsibility "to formulate policies and adopt measures for the prevention of forced displacement, and for assistance, protection, socioeconomic consolidation and stabilization of persons internally displaced by violence".⁵⁶

The legal framework has since been complemented by additional laws, decrees and regulations.⁵⁷ The most significant addition is law 1448 of 2011, the Victims' Law, which among other things emphasises victims' right to assistance and reparation, including compensation and property restitution.⁵⁸ Because it applies to victims within and beyond the country's borders, it is a rare example of a durable solutions framework that covers the entire displacement continuum.

BOX 4: UARIV

The Victims' Unit (*Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas*, UARIV) was created under law 1448 to oversee registration, assistance and reparations for victims of the armed conflict. When a person is displaced, they must first make a declaration at the Ombudsman's Office (*Defensoría del Pueblo*), the Inspector General's Office (*Procuraduría*) or a local municipal watchdog (*personería*). They then proceed to a local UARIV attention point, where they are attended by a municipal team. Requests for inclusion in the victims' registry are assessed at the national level, but the municipal team is able to provide immediate assistance while registration is pending. Once a victim is included in the registry, they become eligible to receive support through national mechanisms.

Reparation is also at the core of the 2016 peace agreement. Among other measures it outlines victims' right to restitution, compensation and rehabilitation.⁵⁹

Despite the sophisticated mechanisms available to promote durable solutions, the reality is somewhat more complex. "I don't know my rights," said Lucía. "I come to queue up here at the Victims' Unit, waiting for them to give me some assistance, but really I know nothing about the rights I have or the legal mechanisms available for people like me who were forced to leave our land because of the conflict."

Even for those who are aware of their entitlements, accessing them is often a challenge. With more than eight million victims in the registry, Colombia's institutions are struggling to keep up. The following section examines provisions for assistance, compensation and property restitution in theory and in practice.

ASSISTANCE

Victims are entitled to receive humanitarian assistance to address vulnerabilities related to their displacement. This includes medical and psychological assistance, temporary accommodation, food assistance and non-food items. There are three levels of assistance:

- | Immediate: for recently displaced people in situations of acute vulnerability who require temporary accommodation and food assistance. This is provided by the receiving municipal authorities until the victim is included in the registry.
- | Emergency: once included in the registry, displaced people are entitled to assistance determined by an assessment of the urgency and severity of their situation.



A view of the community of Nueva Esperanza, where families displaced because of ongoing armed conflict have lived for many years. Photo © UNHCR/Ruben Salgado Escudero, December 2017

| Transitional: registered households whose needs are not deemed to meet the emergency criteria may be eligible for transitional assistance, including livelihood programmes.⁶⁰

Many of the IDPs surveyed have benefited from humanitarian assistance. Fabiana received two million pesos (\$635) and furniture for her home. Maria José initially received food assistance and then 1.7 million pesos (\$540). Alexa has received both financial assistance and psychosocial support.

Despite the comprehensive provisions, others have been less well supported. Irene received one payment in 2017, but is still waiting for two further disbursements. Clara's family is in a similar situation. They were supposed to receive financial support three times a year, but only one payment has been forthcoming.

Some have received nothing at all. Valentina is homeless and included in the victims' registry, but she has been told she needs to update her paperwork before she can receive any support. On the day of the interview, she had spent her last 4,000 pesos (\$1.30) on transport to the attention point and faced the return journey on foot.

Ana Paula has been left feeling disheartened: "It's not worth trying to get involved in these claim processes. You lose too much time and dignity for such a low handout," she said.

COMPENSATION

In addition to assistance, the government offers economic compensation for victimising events suffered during the conflict in an attempt to support "the strengthening or reconstruction of affected people's life projects".⁶¹ Households who have been forcibly displaced are entitled to receive between 17 and 27 times the monthly minimum wage, which roughly equates to between \$4,000 and \$6,500. A person who has suffered a number of victimising events is entitled to up to 40 times the monthly minimum wage, or around \$9,600.⁶²

Given the large numbers of victims, the government has to find ways of paying compensation while maintaining fiscal sustainability. Its annual budget is not sufficient to compensate all victims at once, so it has established criteria for prioritising beneficiaries.⁶³

For victims of displacement, the government assumes that compensation will have greater impact once their

vulnerabilities related to food security, housing and health have been addressed. In order to determine which victims should be prioritised, the government assesses their vulnerability through a comprehensive questionnaire. Those unable to meet their basic needs are not prioritised for compensation, but are instead provided with continued assistance. Those whose basic needs are met are no longer eligible for assistance and are prioritised instead for compensation. Victims outside the country are automatically prioritised for compensation given their limited access to other forms of redress.⁶⁴

A total of 962,815 people have received compensation as of January 2019.⁶⁵ This already represents a significant achievement, but represents only around 10 per cent of victims nationwide. Huge numbers continue to wait for compensation, and delays in payment undermine the effectiveness of this generous provision. Only one participant in this study, who returned from Brazil, has received compensation for his displacement.

Belén has been displaced for 16 years, but has yet to receive either assistance or compensation. Martín has been told he will receive his compensation soon, but he is sceptical. “I don’t know how or when I will receive it,” he said. “It’s like an illusion. I don’t count on it. It’s a fairy tale.”

Among research participants in UARIV attention points, frustration with the system is high. Many of the IDPs interviewed had been queuing since dawn. “I’m not a beggar. Why do I have to have to lose my dignity this way? I’m entitled to this money,” said Esteban. The process is also costly, not only in terms of transport but also lost days of work. Julieta has had to sell her family’s fridge to help finance her regular trips to the attention point.

PROPERTY RESTITUTION

In addition to assistance and compensation, those who lost their property as a result of the conflict are entitled to restitution, even if they were forced to sell the property in question. Return is not a condition for eligibility. IDPs can request property restitution without returning to their region of origin, and victims outside Colombia can lodge their claim with the support of the embassy in their country of refuge.⁶⁶

To initiate the process, a claimant must first record their lost property in the Register of Dispossessed and Forcibly Abandoned Land (*Registro de Tierras Despojadas y Abandonadas Forzosamente*). A judge then examines any competing claims on the property, and makes a decision accordingly. Secondary occupants and people of “good faith devoid of guilt” are eligible for compensation for the loss of the property being restored to its original owner.⁶⁷

Camilo returned from Venezuela in 2015. With support from the Land Restitution Unit (*Unidad de Restitución de Tierras, URT*), he was able to recover his land. “The support was very good,” he said. “They even helped me set up a cocoa production business.”

Others, however, are afraid to apply for restitution. Sara still has the title deed to her house, but does not feel safe requesting support. “Whoever requests property restitution becomes a target,” she said. Mariángel, who does not want to return anyway, feels that attempting restitution would be futile: “I don’t want to be killed for no reason,” she said. Some attempts to recover property have indeed led to persecution and displacement, as discussed previously in this report.

Nor are all efforts to reclaim property successful. Pedro was forced to sell his farm at a very low price and he has been fighting for restitution for decades. Ignacio used to own four farms with cassava, sugar cane, beans, potatoes and onions, but he too has struggled to recover his land. URT has so far only offered to recover one of his farms. Restitution also depends on security conditions in the area where the land or property in question is located. If investigators are unable to gain access, restitution cannot take place.

Those unable to reclaim their former homes sometimes have the opportunity to receive land elsewhere. The peace agreement provides for three million hectares of land to be distributed to landless agricultural workers, with particular emphasis on victimised rural communities including IDPs.⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

Drivers of displacement in Colombia have ranged for decades from active conflict to persecution and extortion. Cross-border movements are often the result of repeated displacements or persistent persecution, which prevent those affected from finding safety within the country. Insecurity is still widespread despite the 2016 peace agreement, as evidenced by continued displacement.

Colombia has sophisticated mechanisms to promote durable solutions, including measures for humanitarian assistance, compensation and property restitution. These mechanisms, however, are overburdened by the scale of displacement.

Neither Colombia's longstanding legislation on IDPs nor the 2016 peace agreement have yet fostered conditions conducive to durable solutions for the displaced people

who took part in this study. The IDPs, refugees and returning refugees interviewed experience significant challenges in accessing adequate housing, livelihoods and basic services. Security also remains a concern, leading in some cases to further displacement.

The participants in this research had only limited understanding of the mechanisms available for durable solutions, suggesting a gap in the dissemination of information on Colombian legislation. Delays in receiving compensation were an overwhelming source of concern, overshadowing alternative opportunities for support.

The findings of this report also suggest a need for more nuanced reporting on Colombia that reflects the reality of continued conflict and displacement. Flawed narratives of peace run the risk of undermining access to asylum and encouraging premature returns.



Women and children from the Mocoa community light candles forming the word "paz", or peace. Photo © UNHCR/Ruben Salgado Escudero, December 2017

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