

City planning for sexual diversity: new policies in Bogotá

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Bogotá is the primary destination of those internally displaced by violence in Colombia. The places of origin of the population displaced by violence are also the areas with the highest levels of violations of the rights of LGBT people, mainly transgender women¹. Guerrillas and paramilitary groups direct violence against sectors considered to be opposed to the social order they wish to maintain since they see them as symptoms of 'social decay'. The sectors they victimise include drug users, homeless people, individuals linked to prostitution, those living with HIV/AIDS, members and leaders of unions and community organisations – and homosexuals and transgender individuals.

30% of displaced LGBT people now living in Bogotá cite the reasons for their flight as associated with their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In the areas of Bogotá where displaced trans women tend to settle, there is widespread violence, sale and use of drugs, and trafficking of people for sexual exploitation – networks which are frequently linked with trans women and to which boys, girls and adolescents are most exposed.² However, social mobilisation in these areas has been strengthening progressively for more than a decade, culminating in 2009 in the signature of Agreement 371 of the Council of Bogotá on LGBT public policy. This policy fully guarantees the equal rights of LGBT people and has two key aims: firstly, to guarantee services and assistance regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity and, secondly, to promote a culture free of violence on the basis of sexual orientation and gender

identity. Relating to the first, for example, the district housing subsidy for the low-income population now recognises same-sex couples as a family unit with the right to benefit from this assistance.

Implementation of this policy requires strengthening those organisations and leaders who have a role to play in supporting LGBTI rights. The authorities need improved information systems to monitor displacement due to sexual orientation and gender identity. The majority of trans individuals who arrive in Bogotá have low educational levels and tend to enter society in informal and transsexualised activities (hair and beauty, prostitution, tailoring, etc) with precarious working conditions; the network of institutions – such as community centres – which are responsible for catering to the specific needs of vulnerable groups and displaced people needs to be extended, and the social inclusion of these groups should be promoted through strategies for cultural change.

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1. transgender person with a female gender identity
2. 42% of transgender women find it difficult to rent a home and 27% are victims of violence at the hands of their partners. 100% of the transgender women surveyed had suffered some form of aggression or had been harmed by abusive or offensive sexual approaches. (Taken from Bogotá's Baseline Public Policy for the Full Guarantee of Rights of LGBT, 2010.)