

Displacement within the city: Colombia

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Since the late 1990s, Colombia's major cities have been places where people become displaced between communes and quarters of the cities. The city continues to receive people displaced from the countryside but cannot be considered a safe refuge for them. As illegal armed actors see that valuable resources – both human and other – are to be found in the city, so the war is brought into the city, causing further violence and displacement.

Some of those targeted have moved to neighbouring areas while others have returned to their original homes. It is more difficult for those who had to move from further afield or have been displaced again. With each displacement, “It's from one fire to another”, as one woman says. Those who have nowhere else to go occupy schools and other collective centres where, overcrowded and in poor living conditions, they are not even protected from the armed groups which caused the displacement.

While such people may not have had to move far, their losses and the breaches of their rights are no less. In one case, the people took refuge in a local school which was hardly suitable to live in. They asked the authorities for help but were refused, on the grounds that they did not meet the criterion of being displaced from the countryside to the city. In response, the

people achieved a legal victory by winning recognition of intra-urban displacement and the obligation of the state to provide assistance to those affected in this way. Despite this, there remain many cases where legal recognition is not accorded to such people and they do not receive assistance.

This failure on the part of the state to provide protection means that its citizens are more easily displaced. While some displaced have taken their case to court and obtained some assistance, others are too afraid to come out into the open. They prefer to remain invisible, with the result that the authorities and society at large underestimate the deleterious effects on their lives. Those who have won court cases did so by facing up to the fear and taking collective action.

Between 2000 and 2004, more than 4,000 people felt they had to flee from their homes in Medellín. Although intra-urban displacement has now reduced, there are still recurring peaks in displacement, there and in other big cities, and a feeling that the forces that displace people within the city could return at any time.

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