

New drivers of displacement in Colombia

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Violence and displacement have not ended with the signing of the peace agreement in Colombia.

The recent signing of a peace agreement between the government of Colombia and the country's largest guerrilla group, FARC¹, fired hopes of finally achieving a stable and lasting peace. However, the actions of other armed groups pose a serious threat to achieving this objective. This is particularly evident in the southwestern region of Colombia, where there is a widespread presence of illicit crops and businesses, and armed actors such as the demobilised FARC, ELN² and large criminal gangs (referred to as BACRIM, from the Spanish *bandas criminales*, or more recently as Organised Armed Groups). The whole region constitutes a corridor for the transit of these groups and the products which they traffic, since it connects the mountain range and the production or extraction zones of southwestern Colombia with the Pacific ports and main routes of exit.

Since the signing of the peace agreement, other armed groups have moved in to occupy the ground abandoned by FARC. Armed clashes between government forces and ELN are accompanied by serious violations of human rights while also causing massive displacement of entire communities, such as that of the Wounaan ethnic group from

the Taparalito community. And the illegal activities of criminal gangs and other paramilitary gangs give rise to their own social and environmental problems.

The withdrawal of FARC and subsequent emergence of ELN in the department of Cauca has had some perhaps surprising negative repercussions for the local population. In the territories it formerly occupied, FARC at least had some authority and, for example, would warn the civilian population where mines had been laid. With FARC's withdrawal, this peculiar work of 'guardianship' towards the population has ceased.

For these reasons, many internally displaced people in southwestern Colombia are now being forced to leave the country, for Chile or Ecuador or even further, to North America or Europe.

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1. Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia)

2. National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional)