

Doubly forgotten

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The plight of over four million people displaced by the conflict in Colombia fits into the definition of a protracted situation regarding numbers, duration, chronic character and lack of adequate response by local governments and the international community. However, the Colombian situation has not been included in official documents, papers, meetings, presentations or publications about protracted refugee situations either by international organisations or by scholars.

Colombia is portrayed as a stable middle-income country rather than a failed state, which is the focus of present work developed on protracted displacement. Misrepresenting the causes of displacement in and from Colombia – as that of a democratic state threatened by terrorist groups and drug traffickers – hampers the recognition of forced migrants' rights. Responses to displacement caused

by the Colombian conflict are also affected by regional political and security considerations which are often at odds with humanitarian interests.

The consequence of playing down the conflict and humanitarian crisis is that Colombian displaced people receive little attention from the international community in terms of diplomatic efforts, financial resources and specific policies. As this situation continues over time and no specific initiative on protracted situations is implemented in the region, IDPs and refugees live in an ever-deteriorating situation of limbo, with decreasing possibilities of finding protection, assistance and durable solutions to their plight.

The study of neglected protracted situations such as in Colombia draws attention to the complex political processes at different levels that are behind the

perception of a protracted situation and its inclusion – or not – in studies and policy-making efforts. Most scholarly work and international organisations' initiatives on protracted displacement have been geographically limited, focusing on Africa and Asia and, very recently, on the Balkans. The study of neglected protracted situations such as Colombia can shed new light on the problem, especially regarding internal displacement, urban displacement and regional/local responses. The Colombian case can help to broaden concepts and efforts not only regarding protracted displacement but also forced migration in general.

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