IDPs, without discrimination, at least up to the level enjoyed by similarly situated non-displaced members of the population.¹

Internal displacement is understood by most city authorities in Colombia as a national-level phenomenon with local implications that must be taken care of by the national government.² As a result, municipalities do not systematically incorporate displacement into their local or municipal development plans (with some exceptions) and do not see it as their responsibility to appropriate resources to respond to the phenomenon, particularly when it comes to long-term development.

Recent legislative changes aimed at solving this problem have determined that responsibilities should be shared between national and local government. Nevertheless, the degree of shared responsibility is not clear and the proportion of costs that should be covered by the central government, particularly for long-term socio-economic support, is not set.

Bogotá has taken some steps to incorporate special programmes for IDP families leaving the three-month emergency support network. One such project includes a dedicated social protection programme for IDP families (called ‘Bogotá, a positive city for a better life’) within Bogotá’s development plan. Nevertheless, such projects remain mostly ad hoc and their impact has not been evaluated. In any case, much more needs to be done to ensure that city planning and development policies encompass social protection for IDPs settling in the city, and to evaluate the impact of existing programmes.

². See also Ferris article p39.
³. ‘Bogotá positiva para vivir mejor’

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**Invisibility of urban IDPs in Europe**

Marzia Montemurro and Nadine Walicki

Some IDPs in the Balkans, Caucasus and Turkey seek ‘invisibility’ for security reasons. Others become invisible when they are forced to move again within the city by the actions of city authorities or property owners.

Where displacement to towns and cities is itself a coping strategy, IDPs may prefer not to display any features that may differentiate them from other urban inhabitants in an effort to avoid becoming targets. Choosing private accommodation over government-sponsored housing can also contribute to their ‘invisibility’, as can barriers to registration.

Displaced for an average of 15 years, IDPs in Europe, for example, have gradually moved from government accommodation to private accommodation – that they rent, own or share – in towns and cities, or continue to reside in informal settlements at the periphery of urban centres. The fact that they have adopted behaviour similar to that of other urban residents, including economic migrants, are interspersed with them and are searching to integrate has discouraged any effective profiling and monitoring of their needs.

IDPs’ accommodation, in particular when informal or collective, is often precarious; IDPs are more prone to forced evictions on the basis of discrimination or because owners decide to reclaim the space to sell it or use it for other purposes. This accrued risk of intra-urban mobility increases pressure on IDPs to keep a low profile, while evicted IDPs usually disappear even further into the urban landscape.

In some cases, government policies have exacerbated their invisibility by creating legal barriers. In an effort to manage increasing urbanisation, governments in Russia and Azerbaijan, for example, have limited people’s choice of residence, rendering IDPs in many cases ‘ghost residents’. Similarly, Roma IDPs in Serbia must, like other citizens, produce a contract for their accommodation to apply for personal documentation, social assistance and free health care, which they are often unable to provide.

Internally displaced woman preparing a meal in a collective centre that was formerly a tuberculosis treatment centre, Tbilisi, Georgia.
Among other considerations drawn from carrying out such a study, three become apparent.

Firstly, the question of who is or is not an IDP needs to be carefully considered – not only in light of the definition provided by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement but also so as to have a common approach among all actors involved for who will and who will not be included in the final count.

Secondly, in order to provide an appropriate response in urban contexts, it is essential to collect information on all the different segments of the urban population affected by displacement – urban poor, migrants, forcibly displaced, returnees, etc – as this will provide a comparative snapshot of each group’s vulnerabilities and highlight how conflicting interests may come into play.

Thirdly, in situations of protracted displacement, such a comparative analysis can provide much needed information on whether IDPs have attained durable solutions and, if not, what the outstanding obstacles are, including the unaddressed needs of the host urban population.

On this last point, the example of protracted displacement situations in Europe is particularly relevant. As donors and the media show decreasing interest in internal displacement in Europe and as most governments still prioritise return of IDPs to their homes, there is a widespread lack of basic information about IDPs seeking durable solutions through settlement options other than return, especially in urban settings. This lack of interest and information on IDPs settling in urban areas is just another form of invisibility. Though in principle an easy group to collect data on because concentrated in the same location, displaced populations who had found refuge either in collective centres or other forms of gathered settlements in urban areas were not profiled in at least 24 out of 56 situations of internal displacement monitored by IDMC in 2008.

Because of the protracted nature of their displacement, IDPs in Europe are facing increasing challenges as the transition to a market economy continues to change urban landscapes. For example, much social housing has been privatised while the continued occupation of collective centres often conflicts with governments’ privatisation policies and owners’ interests, leading to the eviction and further displacement of residents. Governments have made few housing alternatives available to evicted IDPs and very few former communist countries have developed or implemented social housing legislation since their transition to the market economy. While IDPs’ needs may not differ, in some cases, from those of other urban residents, their claims for property restitution and/or compensation remain largely unanswered, which still sets them apart from their neighbours.

The influx of IDPs into urban areas has put pressure on services and infrastructure which have not always been able to meet the increase in demand. Experience has shown that these IDPs are unlikely to return to predominantly agricultural areas when they have a chance to do so – but it is certain that they will be more able to make a truly voluntary choice about whether to return if they are able to live a normal life now.

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1. See article pp13-15 and http://www.internal-displacement.org/urban
2. http://www.internal-displacement.org/europe