



Millions of people have been forced to flee their homes in Colombia as a result of conflict and violence, one of the largest populations of Internally Displaced Persons in the world. Many struggle for years to recover from the loss of homes, lands and loved ones. With 14 offices in Colombia, UNHCR works hand in hand with displaced people to help them rebuild their lives in the full enjoyment of their rights. It supports the State's efforts by contributing to the prevention of forced displacement - protecting communities at risk- promoting assistance and protection, and advising on durable solutions, with an emphasis on local integration given the current context.

More than 3 million people are on the State's National Registry for internally displaced people. Over 741,000 were registered just between 2007 and 2009 –with provisional figures for 2009 in 117,000 at this point. Armed conflict and related violence like murders, threats, persecution, sexual violence, landmines and forced recruitment of children are the leading causes of displacement.

The State's annual budget for the displaced is above USD 700 million in 2010. Important resources are devoted to emergency assistance, income and housing subsidies, health and education for displaced persons. Significant problems of integration remain, however, and official estimates are that more than 90 percent of the displaced live in poverty. Displaced people have lost up to 6 million hectares of land during their flight, according to different sources. A number of them continue to be persecuted, either by the same or by different groups, even after displacement. Although there is no comprehensive monitoring mechanism, joint studies between UNHCR and the Government have found difficulties for those who returned in several areas of the country. Because of their strong economic and cultural ties to the

land, indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups suffer even more acutely from forced displacement. 34 indigenous groups are at risk of "cultural and physical extermination" as a result, according to Colombia's Constitutional Court.

### **Who is affected by forced displacement?**

Forced displacement in Colombia is due to multiple factors. Fighting between Government troops and irregular armed groups in several zones of the country, fighting between some of those groups in other areas, pressure and threats to communities by groups involved in the production of illegal crops, fear of child recruitment by the irregular groups and the presence of land mines are among the most common reasons.

Forced displacement occurs all over Colombia, but it tends to be concentrated in the more remote rural and border areas, where there is little civil state presence or services and irregular armed groups have influence -75 out of 100 displaced in the country escape from just 17% of the municipalities. .

The indigenous and Afro Colombians are disproportionately affected by forced displacement. First, because of geography: many of them live in rather isolated areas where violence has intensified, like the Pacific –for both groups- and the Orinoquia –for the indigenous. Second, because of the smaller presence of the State precisely in those remote areas –making access to Government protection and assistance much more difficult.

**"I still have bad dreams at night sometimes. Dreams of them coming to the town and shooting at us. My wife wakes me up and reminds me that we're here, that we escaped".  
A displaced man in Cartagena, September 2009.**

Third, because of their special links to the land on which there are strategic and/or economic interests and their more collective forms of social organization.

In recent years, the Pacific Coast –mainly the provinces of Choco and Nariño- the Orinoquia –including provinces of Meta and Guaviare-, the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in the North, the departments of Tolima and Huila in the Center-South of the country, Caqueta, Putumayo (South), Arauca (border with Venezuela) and Antioquia have been among the areas most severely hit by forced displacement. There are also reports of intra-urban displacement, even in big cities like Medellin and Bogota. Displacement has decreased in other zones like Montes de Maria and Perija (North), and in the East of the province of Antioquia.

### What does UNHCR do?

Preventing forced displacement is at the heart of UNHCR's intervention in Colombia, and "protection by presence" is one of the main tools. (There were close to 2,500 missions in 2009). The UN refugee agency operates in some of the most difficult conflict zones as well as in cities with large displaced populations. UNHCR encourages the direct participation of displaced persons in its projects, with a focus on effective local implementation to bring positive and concrete changes in people's lives.

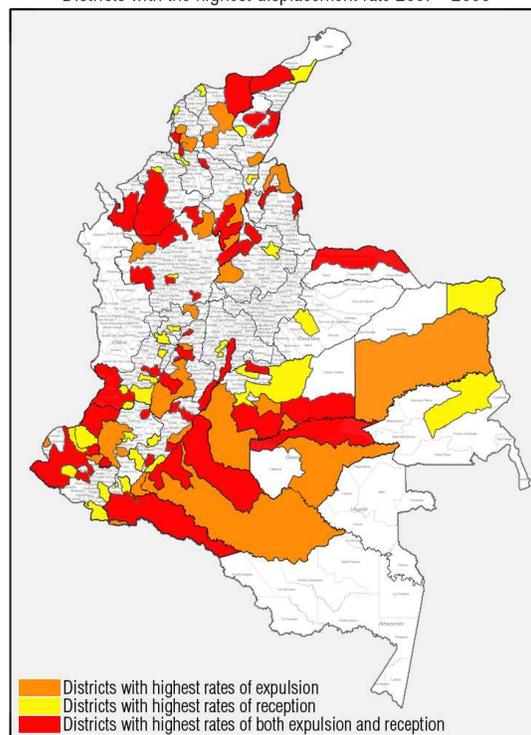
UNHCR works in reception zones to help national and local authorities deliver programs so that the displaced can receive assistance and enjoy their rights –with tools varying from UNHCR-sponsored legal clinics to special education schemes facilitating displaced children's return to school, support for planning and participation in committees with the authorities. Follow-up on threats against displaced leaders and coordination with Government, State bodies and UN organizations for their protection are other key tasks.

In expulsion zones, a constant presence in the communities, practical protection projects, prevention efforts, community strengthening and support for contingency planning are among the tools to improve protection, as well as land protection –more than 3,5 million hectares protected by a Government project co-sponsored by UNHCR- documentation for those displaced and at risk of displacement – over 800,000 beneficiaries- and workshops on displacement and human rights for the Armed Forces.

In all cases, identifying the different impacts of displacement in different populations and developing ways to address those different impacts is part of UNHCR's intervention. The UN refugee agency has helped the Government develop guidelines for the response to differential needs of the displaced.

UNHCR has 14 offices in Colombia, with a Branch Office in Bogotá and Field Offices in Neiva, Medellin, Apartado, Quibdo, Barrancabermeja, Arauca, Cucuta, Barranquilla, Buenaventura, Pasto, Mocoa, San Jose del Guaviare and Villavicencio.

Colombia Displacement Map  
Districts with the highest displacement rate 2007 - 2009



### A few key targets for 2010

UNHCR has 15 key targets for 2010. Some of them are:

**- Priority: Land and property**

300,000 hectares of land belonging to persons that are displaced or at -risk of displacement are protected (Government-led effort).

**- Priority: Prevention**

20 Practical Protection Projects (PPPs) are implemented with at least 10,000 beneficiaries in regions of high risk of displacement with the objective of opening up humanitarian space.

**- Priority: Collective rights of indigenous and Afro-Colombians**

10 prevention and protection plans for indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities at-risk of displacement prepared in a participatory manner, with resources assigned and in implementation.

UNHCR's work in Colombia is possible thanks to: Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, US department of State (BPRM-USA) - Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) - European Commission and European Commission Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) - France - Germany - Italy - Luxembourg - Norway - The Netherlands - Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) - Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) - Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) - Spanish Autonomous Communities and Local Authorities: Generalitat Valenciana, Junta de Comunidades de Castilla y la Mancha.



UNHCR is the United Nations Refugee Agency, with the international mandate to protect more than 34 million refugees and displaced people around the world. It is in Colombia at the invitation of the government to support the State's efforts to assist and protect displaced people. UNHCR has 14 offices in Colombia, including a Branch Office in Bogotá and 13 Field Offices in conflict zones and reception areas. For more information: [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org) or call UNHCR Bogotá on + 57 1 658 0600.