

COLOMBIA

Tackling protracted displacement post-conflict

SPOT
LIGHT

After six years of negotiations between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country finally reached a peace deal in late 2016 to end more than 50 years of armed conflict that cost more than 260,000 lives and displaced more than seven million people.⁶⁴ Violence has continued, however, with the assassination of 17 community leaders since the agreement was signed in November and thousands of people newly displaced.⁶⁵

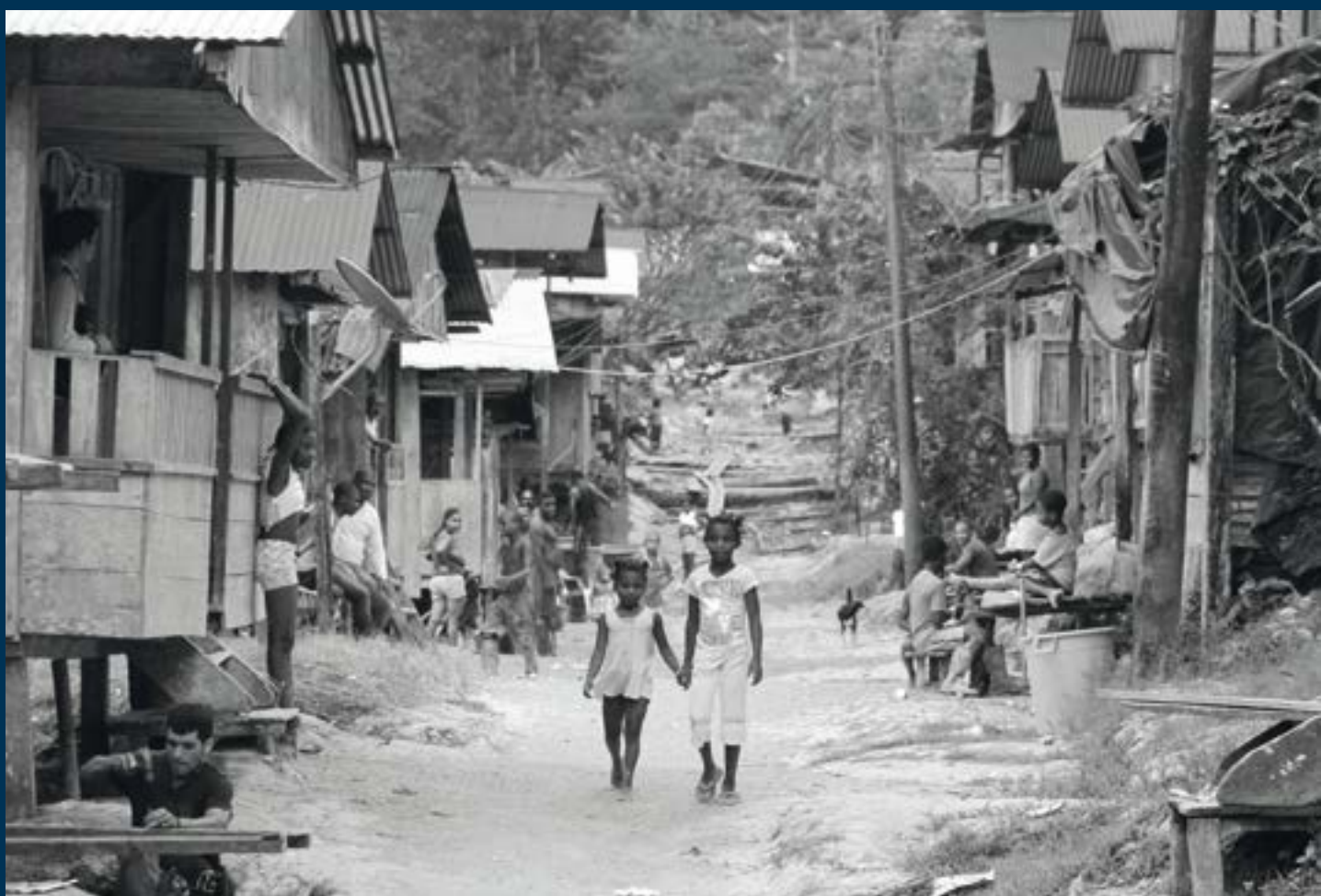
With a cumulative figure of 7.2 million IDPs, Colombia has the largest displaced population in the world, but this is likely to be an overestimate. Another 340,000 Colombians are living as refugees or in a refugee-like situation abroad.⁶⁶

Around 78 per cent of all IDPs in Colombia live in 282 of the country's 1,122 municipalities, with

large numbers in major cities such as Bogotá and Cali and their surroundings.⁶⁷ As many as 80 per cent live below the poverty line, including between 33 and 35 per cent who live in extreme poverty.⁶⁸ Indigenous and African-Colombian communities have long been disproportionately affected. The two groups together made up 74 per cent of IDPs involved in mass displacement events – events in which at least 10 families or 50 people are displaced – between January 2014 and August 2016.⁶⁹ They also accounted for 6.7 per cent and 14.5 per cent of all registered displacements in 2016, but represent only 3.4 per cent and 10.6 per cent of the total population.⁷⁰

Colombia's IDPs continue to face substantial obstacles in their pursuit of durable solutions. A recent report notes the following reasons for the protracted nature of their displacement:

Internally displaced sisters walk hand-in-hand in the small village of Caimito, Cauca. Photo: NRC/Ingrid Prestetun, 2016



| Prolonged conflict and insecurity in areas of origin are made worse by a lack of state presence, and levels of crime and violence are also high in areas of refuge. The latter not only triggers secondary displacement, but also adds to IDPs' unaddressed trauma and other mental health issues.

| Many IDPs, particularly those from rural backgrounds or indigenous and African-Colombian communities, do not have the skills to compete in urban labour markets. Nor do young IDPs have enough access to higher education, which is essential for moving out of poverty in Colombia.

| Land restitution in areas of origin is difficult, tenure is insecure, and the illegal status of the settlements where many IDPs live prevents municipal authorities from providing services and infrastructure.

| Local authorities' capacity is weak and the central government does not allocate them enough funds, in part because its calculations are based on outdated census data.

| IDPs are not integrated into regular state action, and coordination between line ministries is weak.

| Donors have allocated only limited resources for durable solutions, because funding prioritises other aspects of the peace agreement, such as disaster risk reduction and transitional justice.⁷¹

Colombia has an advanced legal framework for IDPs, and since 2004 the Constitutional Court has been demanding that the government guarantee victims' rights. This led to the introduction of the 2011 victims' law, a pioneering piece of legislation that entitles IDPs and other victims of the conflict to reparations.⁷² It also led to the creation of a dedicated government victim's unit and a national plan for assistance and reparation.⁷³

The 2011 law envisages addressing IDPs' needs on three levels. First, they receive immediate humanitarian assistance, vital given that 4.9 million people in Colombia are considered to be in need of it. This falls under the responsibility of the victim's unit, with support from international organisations. The second level aims to overcome socioeconomic vulnerability, and focuses on seven components: food; education; identification documents; family reunion; health, including

psychosocial attention; housing; and livelihoods, including vocational training and occupational orientation. The third level is reparation, involving compensation, rehabilitation, restitution and guarantees of non-repetition.

In less than four years, the programme has compensated more than 500,000 victims, but this represents less than 10 per cent of the total number who are supposed to receive compensation by 2021.⁷⁴ According to an evaluation by Harvard University's Carr Center, to do so would require a sevenfold increase in the victims' unit capacity.⁷⁵

In support of the government, UNHCR and UNDP have also been running a "transitional solutions initiative" in 17 communities to help IDPs become less dependent on the authorities and more self-reliant.⁷⁶ The programme aims to improve quality of life, strengthen organisations and institutions, and protect victims and their rights.

Most of the victims of Colombia's conflict are IDPs. The fact that the government has included them among those entitled to compensation is a commendable and significant first step. The commitment, however, creates unprecedented challenges given that more than 12 per cent of the country's population is eligible for reparation.

Given that implementing the many requirements of the peace agreement with FARC will require significant attention and resources, it will be vital to keep the country's seven million IDPs at the top of the government's agenda and to help them overcome the obstacles they still face in achieving durable solutions. This also means ensuring that the humanitarian and development sectors, local authorities and private enterprises work collectively to end aid dependency and promote IDPs' self-reliance.⁷⁷