

Americas (/americas/) / Mexico (/americas/mexico/) / Mexico: Internal displacement in brief

Summary

31 December 2013 |

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Mexico: Internal displacement in brief

As of December 2013



Public census results correlated with data on homicides and criminality show a strong causal relationship between violence and internal displacement in Mexico. Over the last decade, hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes and communities. The states of Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Durango, Michoacán, Nuevo León, Sinaloa, Sonora and Guerrero have been worst-affected.

According to a 2010 government survey, more than one in every 100 families has at least one member who changed their residence in fear of their physical wellbeing, but no comprehensive study of displacement has been undertaken. It is hoped that the 2020 population count will gather definitive data.

Criminal organisations, fighting both each other and the security forces, have caught countless innocent civilians in the crossfire. The fear of forced recruitment, both of minors or people with technical skills, has also led many people to seek safety in other parts of the country. Local government officials and their families in particular are targeted if they refuse to cooperate with the crime syndicates. Human rights activists, who have denounced criminal groups and their infiltration of the state, have also become targets, along with many ordinary citizens who simply seek justice for the crimes they or their families have suffered.

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The most significant recent development to cause displacement has been the expansion of extortion rackets, including kidnappings, which have affected all levels of Mexican society. Criminal organisations no longer only fight over drug trafficking routes, but increasingly dispute territory more generally. The more territory they control, the more illegal protection payments they can demand from anyone from company owners to peasant farmers.

These acts of violence have forced people to flee individually and en masse in both rural and urban areas. In Guerrero and Michoacán states, the Knights Templar criminal group has tried to exercise complete control over both the public and private sectors. It has held many business interests, including illegal mining and logging, and its activities have led to the displacement of whole communities in remote areas.

The emergence of local self-defence groups to counter the Knights Templar and others is evidence of a desperate attempt to make up for the security forces' failure to rein in organised crime, and in some cases their collusion with it.

Religious and political violence, particularly among indigenous groups, has also forced people to flee their homes, and around 25,000 people are still living in protracted displacement in Chiapas state as a result of armed conflict that took place there in the early 1990s.

IDPs often have difficulty in finding adequate housing, work and schooling for their children. The loss of identity cards and mortgage documents also impedes their access to basic social services. Personal safety remains a concern after their flight, because some criminal groups have national reach and are able to trace their whereabouts.

Mexico's president, Enrique Peña Nieto, claims to have reduced violence levels in some areas of the country. Once epicentres of homicides, Ciudad Juárez and Acapulco started to become less violent towards the end of the previous president Felipe Calderon's tenure.

Efforts to assist IDPs have been piecemeal and fragmented. The National Programme for Social Prevention of Violence and Delinquency includes a focus on IDPs, but details of how it will be implemented are unclear. The Indigenous Development Commission provides housing and farming tools to some IDPs, but excludes victims of organised crime.

Support is also available from several social service agencies at various levels of government. States such as Guerrero, Sinaloa and Chiapas have adopted programmes for IDPs, but Chiapas has been slow in implementing the law it passed in 2012. Several senators have proposed national legislation for IDPs, including both a specific law on internal displacement and an amendment to the General Population Law, but they have yet to be debated.

The General Law for Victims, passed in December 2012, includes provisions for assistance and reparations for IDPs, including food, lodging, security and accompanied returns in safe conditions. The Executive Commission for Victims' Assistance, which was set up in late 2013 to oversee implementation has, however, yet to emphasise these components. In November, the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights called on the government to develop a clear policy on internal displacement.

ICRC and the Mexican Red Cross have provided support and assistance to IDPs at times of mass displacement, but the international response has generally been extremely limited.

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IDMC was established in 1998 at the request of the Interagency Standing Committee on humanitarian assistance. Since then, IDMC's unique global function has been recognised and reiterated in annual UN General Assembly resolutions.

IDMC is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), an independent, non-governmental humanitarian organisation.

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