

SAFE HAVEN

Sheltering Displaced Persons from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence



CASE STUDY: COLOMBIA

MAY 2013

HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER | SEXUAL VIOLENCE PROGRAM

University of California, Berkeley, School of Law



This four-country study was conducted as part of the Sexual Violence Program at the Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, School of Law. It was written by Sara Feldman.

The Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law conducts research on war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. Using evidence-based methods and innovative technologies, we support efforts to hold perpetrators accountable and to protect vulnerable populations. We also train students and advocates to document human rights violations and turn this information into effective action. More information about our projects can be found at <http://hrc.berkeley.edu>

The Sexual Violence Program seeks to improve protection of and support for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence by providing policymakers and practitioners with evidence-based recommendations about accountability and protection mechanisms. This study aims to initiate discussion about the kinds of temporary harbor available to individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence in forced displacement settings such as refugee camps and internally displaced communities. The four case-study locations are Kenya, Haiti, Colombia, and Thailand. All fieldwork occurred in 2012.

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Safe Haven: Sheltering Displaced Persons from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. Case Study: Thailand, Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley (2013).

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFRODES	<i>Asociación Nacional de Afrocolombianos Desplazados</i> (National Association for Displaced Afro-Colombians)
CINEP	<i>Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular</i> (Centre for Research and Popular Education)
CODHES	<i>La Consultoría Para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento Forzado</i> (Consultancy for Human Rights and Forced Displacement)
COHRE	The Center for Housing Rights and Evictions
DPS	<i>Departamento de Prosperidad Social</i> (Department of Social Prosperity)
DV	Domestic violence
ELN	<i>Ejército de Liberación Nacional</i> (National Liberation Army)
FARC–EP	<i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo</i> (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
GBV	Gender-based violence
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
ILSA	<i>Instituto Latinoamericano por una Sociedad Alternativa</i> (Latin American Institute for an Alternative Society)
INMLCF	<i>Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses</i> (The National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
RUPD	<i>Registro Único de la Población Desplazada</i> (Central Registry for the Displaced Population)
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SJR	<i>Servicios Jesuitas a Refugiados</i> (Jesuit Refugee Service)
SNAIPD	<i>Sistema Nacional de Atención Integral a la Población Desplazada</i> (National System for Integral Attention to the Displaced Population)
UAO	<i>Unidad de Atención y Orientación a la Población Desplazada, Departamento de Prosperidad Social</i> (Assistance and Orientation Unit for the Displaced Population, Department of Social Prosperity)

UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN HABITAT	United Nations World Settlements Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

A Note about Terminology in These Reports

The Human Rights Center has done its best to reconcile sensitivity, clarity, and efficiency in its word choice.

These reports are concerned with protection of various groups of forcibly displaced individuals in Colombia, Haiti, Kenya, and Thailand. In these countries, we find the following categories of displaced persons:

- **Refugees**, defined in the 1951 *Refugee Convention* as a person who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” In summary, a refugee is a person in a foreign land who cannot return to his/her home country for fear of persecution on account of certain characteristics of identity or belief.
- **Internally displaced persons**, defined in the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (2004) as “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.” The movement is (1) coercive or involuntary, and (2) within national borders. It is not a formal legal status, as refugee status is.
- **Other forced migrants**, defined according to local context in the relevant case study report.

We refer to “sexual and gender-based violence” (SGBV) instead of simply “gender-based violence” (GBV) to include those rare occasions when sexual harm is not necessarily gender-motivated.

We first draw from the World Health Organization’s gender-neutral definition of sexual violence a line: “Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic a person’s sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless of relationship to the survivor, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.”

The broader concept of “sexual and gender-based violence” also incorporates the definition of gender-based violence offered in Recommendation 19 by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that

affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.” However, we know from increased reporting and empirical data that men and boys all over the world also suffer harm on account of their gender.

In the Spanish version of this report, however, we use *violencia basada en género* (VBG), or gender-based violence, the term commonly used by practitioners and academics in Colombia to ensure the comprehensibility and utility of this report.

As often as the text will allow, we use full phrases rather than acronyms to bring attention and emphasis to violence that is, more often than not, hidden.

When referring to individuals who have sought shelter from such violence, we refer to “survivors” and “shelter-seekers” and “shelter residents” more often than to “victims” to mark more forward-focused aspects of their experiences.

In light of the fact that the majority of cases handled by the shelter programs we studied involved a female survivor or shelter-seeker, we have opted for feminine pronouns when generally or hypothetically referring to survivors or shelter residents.

With respect to members of sexual minorities, such as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender or intersex individuals, we have opted to the simpler, more familiar acronym of LGBT, instead of LGBTQI or LGBTI. This is not meant as any disrespect to individuals who identify as queer or intersex. Rather, the Human Rights Center has decided to use the term LGBT to ensure the comprehensibility of this report, and thus to increase its impact and utility among policymakers, shelter providers, and others on the ground. It is our hope that queer and intersex persons will benefit from any increased awareness of the shelter needs of sexual minorities in general.

Finally, by *shelter* or *safe shelter*, we are not necessarily referring to a single physical structure or traditional safe house model. We use the term conceptually; in the context of this study, it refers to any physical space or network of spaces that exclusively or incidentally offers temporary safety to individuals. Among these, we focus on those that are available to individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence, particularly people who are displaced within their country.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After nearly fifty years of strife, Colombia continues to be plagued by war and its devastating humanitarian consequences. With roots in governance issues, competition for land and resources, the drug trade, and historical political grievances, the Colombian armed conflict has shifted and evolved in recent years, but it has not abated. Between 3.8² and 5.4³ million Colombians have been displaced from their homes due to the ongoing violence, and another 500,000 have sought refuge in neighboring countries.⁴

With general violence and insecurity as a backdrop, it is not surprising that both domestic violence and sexual and gender-based violence in the context of the conflict are significant problems in Colombia. Both phenomena are largely hidden, and the survivor populations are underserved. Although limited options for safe shelter are available to some individuals who have experienced domestic violence or those who have been displaced by conflict, survivors of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence have nowhere to turn.

In an era of increased attention to conflict-related violence, we are now beginning to understand the continuum of sexual and gender-based harm men, women, and children can suffer during armed conflict, in flight, and while temporarily resettled in refugee or internal displacement camps. Violence such as rape, gang rape, and sexual torture or slavery can occur during periods of armed conflict, perpetrated by different actors for different reasons. Those fleeing a conflict may still be susceptible to rape, sexual exploitation, or trafficking while attempting to secure transport, cross borders, and find lodging. Finally, even after flight—whether to refugee or internal displacement camps or in urban centers—their vulnerability to harm persists, perhaps due to a lack of protective networks, immigration status, or basic resources. In fact, displacement is believed to increase vulnerability through new and exacerbating conditions such as the breakdown of family and community ties, collapsed gender roles, limited access to resources, insufficient security, and inadequate housing.

When refugees or internally displaced persons experience sexual and gender-based violence, their needs can be particularly urgent and complex. They may experience compounded levels of physical or psychological distress resulting from individual and collective harms suffered. Unfortunately, multi-sectoral service options are often scarce in forced displacement settings.

It is important to better understand the options for immediate physical shelter that exist in these contexts. In addition to providing immediate physical protection, programs that provide shelter to displaced persons fleeing sexual and gender-based violence may help facilitate access to other critical services in resource-constrained settings.

However, research-based information about shelter-providing programs in these contexts is extremely limited. Evidence-based information about shelter models, client and staff needs, service chal-

allenges, and strategies is urgently required to inform policy, programming, and implementation guidance for international, national, and local entities that design or oversee these protection programs.

Research Aim and Objectives

As part of its Sexual Violence Program, the Human Rights Center conducted a one-year study in 2012 to explore and improve understanding of the options for immediate, temporary shelter for refugees, internally displaced persons, and other migrants fleeing sexual and gender-based violence in countries affected by conflict or natural disaster. We define “shelter” flexibly. For example, it may come in the form of a traditional safe house, a network of community members’ homes, or another safe space coordinated by a base organization.

Our aim was to generate research-based evidence to inform donors, policymakers, and international and local actors about types of relevant models, priority challenges, and promising practices.⁵ The study focused on three key objectives:

1. Identify and describe shelter models available to refugees, the internally displaced, and migrants fleeing sexual and gender-based violence.
2. Identify unique challenges experienced by staff and residents in these settings and explore strategies to respond to these challenges.
3. Explore protection needs and options for particularly marginalized victim groups, such as male survivors, sexual minorities, sex workers, and people with disabilities.

The aim and objectives were the same across each of the studies carried out in Colombia, Haiti, Kenya, and Thailand. Our research focused primarily on programs that served communities of refugees, migrants, and internally displaced persons (IDPs), including those operating in a camp setting. We also studied mainstream shelters to identify protection options and innovations in urban settings.

Study outputs include four country-specific reports and one comparative assessment that contain guiding considerations for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other stakeholders involved in the provision of protection to these populations.

Project Methods

The Human Rights Center conducted a review of scholarly and non-governmental organization (NGO) literature on shelter services in Colombia and on the response to sexual and gender-based violence both generally and specific to internally displaced persons. This review provided information on the context of sexual and gender-based violence in Colombia, key actors, and available protection mechanisms.

Fieldwork was conducted over five weeks in April and May 2012. In-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with a total of ten shelter staff and seven shelter residents from a total of eight shelters located in the cities of Bogotá, Medellín, and Pasto. Interviews were audio-recorded, and files were translated, transcribed, and coded with qualitative data analysis software (Dedoose).

Human Rights Center researchers also carried out twenty-eight key informant interviews with representatives from the government, UN agencies, NGOs, and faith-based organizations involved in

the provision of protection and support services to internally displaced persons in Colombia. Key informant interviews aimed to provide supplemental, contextual information.

Key study limitations included a limited sample size, a recruitment method that relied on shelter directors to recruit staff and residents to participate, and limited familiarity and knowledge of the study context among some of the data analysts.

Ethical approval was provided by the University of California at Berkeley's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects and the Profamilia Research Ethics Committee in Bogotá, Colombia.

Findings

Shelter Types

Human Rights Center researchers examined eight shelter programs available to displaced individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence in three locations: Bogotá, Medellín, and Pasto. Shelters included in this study were designed to serve one of three different populations: survivors of domestic violence, the displaced population generally, and displaced persons at particularly high security risk. The domestic violence shelter programs visited were funded and managed by the mayor's offices of Bogotá and Medellín. Shelters serving internally displaced persons were funded by government entities, faith-based organizations, and international donors. Displacement shelters were managed by faith-based organizations and NGOs.

In Bogotá, shelter sites included four "traditional safe houses": one for survivors of domestic violence, two for the general IDP population, and one for the high-risk IDP population. Researchers also visited one "hybrid" income-generating program offering hotel or apartment-based housing to displaced indigenous women. In Medellín, shelter sites included a "community host system" in which women in the Medellín area shelter survivors of domestic violence in their homes and a traditional safe house program that houses IDPs at high risk. In Pasto, Human Rights Center researchers visited one traditional safe house serving the general IDP population.

The length of stay in these programs ranged from three days to four months. Shelter programs offered a variety of services both on-site and through referral, including psychosocial support, legal aid, medical care, vocational training, and employment assistance. The extent of services varied considerably from one site to another.

Challenges and Strategies

Across the shelter programs examined in this report, staff exhibited high levels of professionalism and commitment to supporting their residents. Staff members take the initiative to engage in policy advocacy, provide livelihood activities, and follow up with clients, even though these activities are often beyond the scope of program budgets and require extended work hours. In addition, residents of domestic violence shelters generally reported positive experiences, having obtained social support and a newfound sense of empowerment and self-worth.

Shelter staff and residents in Colombia identified the various challenges they faced as well as the strategies they used to address some of these difficulties.

1. *Resident Security*

Residents of both shelters designed for survivors of domestic violence and shelters intended for individuals displaced by the conflict expressed concerns about security. IDP shelters open to the general displaced population were perceived to be the least secure. Residents felt threatened knowing that their perpetrators might be among the shelter population and that their shelters could be easily located by armed actors. Residents of both high-risk and general IDP shelters identified the need for restrictive eligibility criteria to assure their safety.

Domestic violence shelters were viewed as more secure as they have well-developed security protocols in place and are in confidential locations. Residents of domestic violence shelters generally reported positive experiences. They reported feelings of safety resulting from the social support they obtained at their shelters.

Residents of high-risk displacement shelters reported that rigid security protocols made them feel like they were imprisoned. However, for high-risk victims of paramilitary or state actors, having access to nongovernmental-governmental housing options was essential.

Many residents said that they did not feel comfortable seeking assistance from the police due to a general mistrust of government institutions. Some IDP residents expressed concerns about the insecurity of the neighborhoods in which the shelter was located. A few others, mostly residents of general IDP shelters specifically, found the behaviors of fellow residents, such as drug use and child abuse, to be sources of stress, though conflicts were said to be few. IDP residents were very concerned about ways to maintain their personal safety after they left the shelter. Some reported that they did not feel safe anywhere in the country.

2. *Staff Security*

A major obstacle to providing safe shelter for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence is the difficulty of safely and confidentially housing victims in the midst of an ongoing conflict. Staff at domestic violence shelters deal with the risk of aggression from abusers and from the armed groups with which they may be affiliated. Staff also face risks when assisting women living in areas controlled by armed groups or when operating shelters in those areas. Staff of IDPs shelters, in particular, reported that they often did not feel safe since armed actors may come looking for residents or may be hidden among the general population.

Many shelter staff members stated that they had learned to live with imminent risks and to normalize stressful conditions. Some host families of the community host system expressed nervousness and concerns about their own safety since they house people in volatile situations with minimal security.

Key strategies contributing to a sense of security among both shelter staff and residents include twenty-four-hour security guards, restrictions on visits, rules for residents' movements, and restrictive admission criteria. In addition, some organizations serving the displaced use a portion of their program funding to provide shelter to internally displaced persons in hotels or apartments, which can offer a more secure alternative to general IDP shelters.

3. *Shelter Options*

Key informants and service providers reported that temporary emergency shelter options for both the displaced population and individuals fleeing from sexual and gender-based violence are extremely limited in Colombia. A paucity of formal shelter opportunities has led many of those in need of immediate physical protection to pursue other options. Most victims of displacement, including those fleeing sexual and gender-based violence, rely on family networks and often move to another part of the country to seek shelter and safety. Of the few shelters designed for displaced persons that exist, most are not safe and appropriate places for those fleeing sexual and gender-based violence. General IDP shelters do not have adequate security in place to protect individuals escaping sexual and gender-based violence. Further, individuals who are unable to register as IDPs, such as those fleeing actions of the Colombian armed forces or paramilitaries, are not eligible for government-funded shelter.

In addition, the Human Rights Center uncovered no shelters in rural areas for those fleeing domestic violence. Few displaced persons access the domestic violence shelters in urban areas, which are designed to serve only female survivors who have officially denounced their perpetrators.

4. *Emotional Impact of Shelter Work on Staff*

Nearly all shelter staff members reported that the emotional burden and vicarious trauma they experienced in their daily work sometimes made it difficult to maintain the positive outlook and strength needed to provide emotional support to residents. Providers identified psychosocial support for staff and additional staff members as pressing needs that would enable them to provide better services.

5. *Residents' Unmet Needs*

A number of unmet needs of residents were identified, including limited access to medical care, a lack of access to education for children in domestic violence and high-risk IDP shelters, limited employment and residential options upon exit, and a lack of personal belongings. Staff and residents also indicated that residents would benefit from having greater access to psychosocial support during and after their shelter stay as well as from having child care to enable them to work during their stay.

6. *Transition Planning*

Both staff and residents expressed a need for a longer period of service provision and follow-up. Staff noted that a significant challenge to follow-up is the frequent movement of these individuals from one home or town to another. Residents of both high-risk and general IDP shelters stated that they did not have any options upon leaving the shelter that would enable them to remain safe and support themselves. Staff and residents across shelter types said that the most pressing challenges were the residents' lack of protection and lack of livelihood options after leaving the shelters, which put them at risk of returning to dangerous situations. Domestic violence survivors often return to their abusers while most IDPs find precarious

housing arrangements on the outskirts of big cities in neighborhoods where they may again fall victim to armed actors.

Some residents, particularly those in high-risk IDP shelters, said that they did not like the feeling of dependency they had while residing in a shelter and that they would like more assistance in accessing vocational training and employment. Some staff felt that allowing residents to stay in a shelter for more than a few weeks or months would engender dependency and make it more difficult for residents to become self-sufficient. Both staff and residents identified the need for increased focus on livelihoods and income-generating activities to ease the transition process.

Most shelters provide some financial assistance to residents upon exit from the shelter, either to pay one month of rent or to travel to join family members. All but one of the programs visited offer follow-up services ranging from one home visit to years of intensive follow-up. Residents of domestic violence shelters reported satisfaction with the transition process, which included personal assistance with their move and an inspection of their residence for security purposes.

7. *Funding and Resource Constraints*

Limited funding is a significant obstacle to the adequate provision of safe shelter for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in Colombia. Despite new laws enshrining protections and the right to services for female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence who have denounced their perpetrators and for registered internally displaced persons more generally, real results have yet to be seen on the ground in most of the country. In addition, many international aid agencies and NGOs have reduced their assistance to IDPs as the Colombian government promotes the idea that the conflict is winding down. Further, as government administrations change, contracts with shelter programs are often temporarily suspended or terminated.

Providers interviewed saw inadequate funding as a universal challenge, resulting in staff burnout, frustration, and a persistent feeling that they were unable to address some urgent needs of residents. Staff recommended diversifying funding sources and investing more staff time in fundraising as key strategies.

8. *Community Engagement and Awareness*

A low level of awareness among the general public and government officials about shelter programs for IDPs and people fleeing from sexual and gender-based violence inhibits many survivors from accessing services. While all municipalities are required to have a “Service Pathway” (*Ruta de Atención*) for individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence, these resources are rarely operational, and survivors seldom know where to go to get help, especially in rural areas and smaller towns. Further, most IDPs and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence do not know that they are entitled to certain protections and services under the law. Their limited knowledge of both their legal rights and available shelters prevents programs from reaching capacity. This situation creates the perception among government officials that the demand for shelter is low.

In addition, the need to maintain confidentiality and security precludes many shelters from carrying out meaningful community engagement or consultation. Shelter providers spoke of an inherent tension between confidentiality and community support and of the struggle to find the right balance between the two.

9. *Coordination among Shelters and Government Entities*

Limited coordination between government entities and service providers creates additional challenges to shelter provision. Shelters are often not at or near capacity due to the slow and sometimes confusing workings of the government entities serving the displaced and survivors of domestic violence. Shelter staff of high-risk IDP shelters noted that it can take more than a year to find out whether a high-risk family will be accepted into a formal state protection program. A number of the shelters studied were not operational at the time of fieldwork either because local authorities had not yet renewed an expired contract or because a change in local government administration had left the continuation of certain programs in doubt. These types of gaps result in frequent suspensions of critical services.

There is little or no coordination between shelters that serve IDPs and those that serve survivors of domestic violence. These are viewed as separate protection needs, and displaced individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence survivors remain underserved.

The level of coordination among organizations providing shelter was found to be low; however, staff of shelters that engage in some coordination found that it helped them to provide a greater number of services to their residents through referrals and to more effectively advocate to ensure that the needs of survivors remained a priority.

10. *Community Host Systems and Their Replication*

Staff and host families from the community host shelter program reported a number of ways that the model promotes healing and increases security for survivors of domestic violence. This program model provides individual attention to survivors and the comfort of a home setting, and it cultivates a network of survivor advocates in the community. However, some host families expressed concerns that housing survivors put the host family's own security at risk and can have a negative impact on family dynamics.

11. *The Culture of Silence*

Dealing with a culture of silence around domestic violence and conflict-related sexual violence that is pervasive from the family to the municipal level is a primary challenge in the provision of shelter for survivors. This multifaceted problem inhibits survivors from reporting and seeking protection. While some progress has been made in recent years, cultural norms that blame the victim persist. Conflict-related sexual violence is a source of shame and considered taboo. Domestic violence is often viewed by both men and women as an acceptable part of a relationship, and the authorities responsible for receiving reports have been known to tell women to go home and work it out with their partners. For these reasons, and because of their limited awareness of shelter services, many women are afraid to formally denounce their perpetrators, a requirement for entry into domestic violence shelters.

Protection Options for Members of Marginalized Groups

Government-funded shelters do not have specialized services for indigenous persons, Afro-Colombians, the LGBT community, and people with disabilities or severe mental health needs. Although Human Rights Center researchers encountered some shelters created by the indigenous community to house displaced persons among their own group, the other aforementioned groups are usually without protection options if they cannot be served in mainstream shelters.

In Colombia, gender-based violence is almost always interpreted to mean domestic violence against women. In addition, most displacement shelters do not admit men without families due to concerns about their potential involvement with an armed group. As a result, single men who experience sexual and gender-based violence or who are simply displaced by the conflict have few options for shelter.

Conclusion: Observations and Recommendations

Based on study findings, the Human Rights Center offers the following recommendations to improve shelter services for internally displaced persons who are also survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in Colombia.

Recommendation to Colombian Government, Shelter Providers, and Donors

1. *Provide specialized protection for displaced persons fleeing sexual and gender-based violence by adapting existing shelter programs to meet the needs of this population.*

Domestic violence shelters and IDP shelters do not currently provide accessible, adequate protection for displaced survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Eligibility criteria of domestic violence shelters should be adjusted to increase access for IDPs who are not willing to denounce their perpetrators. The Assistance and Orientation Unit for the Displaced Population, Department of Social Prosperity (*Unidad de Atención y Orientación a la Población Desplazada, Departamento de Prosperidad Social*)(UAO) should collaborate with domestic violence shelter providers to ensure appropriate referrals of IDP fleeing sexual and gender-based violence. In addition, general IDP shelters should improve security for residents and enhance screening procedures both at the UAO and at individual shelters to prevent the entry of perpetrators. Services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence should be made available at IDP shelters either on-site or through referral.

2. *Increase shelter options for displaced persons fleeing sexual and gender-based violence by establishing additional shelters, especially outside of urban areas, and increasing awareness of available shelter services.*

For both the displaced and victims of domestic violence, shelter options are few and are mostly limited to major urban areas. Resources should be invested in expanding the network of shelters in Colombia, with particular focus placed on developing shelters that offer residents confidentiality and security. It is essential to invest time and resources in activities that will increase awareness of available shelters so as to increase shelter access.

3. *Increase shelter options for marginalized victim groups by conducting assessments of protection needs and developing appropriate services.*

Services that are tailored to the needs of specific vulnerable displaced populations are needed in Colombia. Indigenous populations, Afro-Colombians, the LGBT community, and people with disabilities or severe mental health needs are underserved. Assessment of the protection needs and service preferences of these groups should be conducted in order to develop appropriate services. Approaches might include developing specialized shelter services or adapting existing domestic violence shelters and IDP shelters to better meet the needs of these groups.

Recommendation to the Colombian Government and Shelter Providers

1. *Improve coordination between government entities and service providers.*

Limited coordination between government entities and service providers compromises provision of shelter services in Colombia. A number of the shelters studied were not operational at the time of fieldwork either because local authorities had not yet renewed an expired contract or because a change in local government administration had left the continuation of certain programs in doubt. Enhanced coordination between government entities and service providers would improve continuity and quality of services.

Recommendations to Shelter Providers (Government and Civil Society)

1. *Explore expanding the use of community host systems.*

The community host model that Human Rights Center researchers encountered in Medellín appears to be a promising way to house and support some women fleeing domestic violence. A traditional structure is more appropriate for others, and both models should be a part of a continuum of shelter options in a given community. The community host model should be further studied in Colombia with an eye to possible replication in other parts of the country, including rural areas.

2. *Provide a higher level of security in IDP shelters.*

Given the ongoing nature of Colombia's conflict, shelters for the displaced population must have a high level of security. Some residents at general IDP shelters report feeling unsafe due to the possible presence of armed actors in the shelters or in the surrounding areas. Therefore, a shelter model along the lines of those serving victims of domestic violence, with developed security protocol and confidential locations, appears to be more appropriate for displaced populations in Colombia as well.

3. *Provide psychosocial support to shelter staff.*

Shelter staff not only deal with the severe trauma suffered by their clients but also work under often unsafe conditions. This situation can result in burnout and re-traumatization of staff, some of whom are themselves survivors of violence or threats. Provision of psychosocial support would go a long way toward enabling these service providers to successfully and safely continue their important work.

4. *Increase focus on livelihood activities.*

Upon exit from shelter, many survivors do not have the ability to support themselves and their families. For this reason, many return to unsafe relationships, neighborhoods, or parts of the country. Shelter staff and residents recommend providing livelihood activities such as income-generation programs to shelter residents so that they are more easily able to enter the labor market successfully and become self-sufficient when they leave the shelter.

5. *Invest time and resources in appropriate follow-up services for residents.*

Most of the shelters studied by the Human Rights Center provide some level of follow-up services to residents after they leave the shelter. However, there are often not sufficient funding and staff time to provide as much attention as survivors need. Such support could both assist former shelter residents to access needed services and keep them safe from future threats.

6. *Evaluate the use of alternative purpose entities and independent living arrangements.*

Some organizations focused on providing other support services for displaced persons occasionally provide shelter for the displaced in apartments or hotels. Alternative purpose entities that offer shelter to their clients and programs offering independent living arrangements may be helpful options for displaced persons. However, serious consideration must be given to their security capacities and referral protocols.

Recommendations to Key Stakeholders Involved in Displacement and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Response (Including the Colombian Government, the UNHCR, and Civil Society)

1. *Sensitize and train first responders within government on sexual and gender-based violence issues and ensure they have updated information on available shelter options.*

Shelter referrals are limited due to a lack of knowledge among government personnel of shelter options and due to the sexist and discriminatory attitudes of some officials. We recommend greater emphasis on training and education of staff of the UAO, the Prosecutor's Office (*Fiscalía*), the Ombudsman's Office (*Defensoría del Pueblo*), the Family Commissions (*Comisariías de Familia*), the Municipal Attorney's Office (*Personería*), and other first points of contact directly involved in serving and protecting IDPs and survivors of domestic violence.

2. *Provide outreach and education to displaced individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence about their legal rights and shelter options.*

Lack of general knowledge about legal rights and shelter options for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and displacement inhibits service utilization. This situation leads to a perception by many government officials that demand for shelter is low. Shelter providers and other key actors in displacement and sexual and gender-based violence response should provide outreach and education to IDP communities regarding their legal rights and available shelters to increase access to and utilization of shelter services.

3. *Improve collaboration and coordination between shelter systems and key actors involved in sexual and gender-based violence and displacement response.*

There is extremely limited coordination among the shelters, government entities, and service providers involved in providing protection for internally displaced persons and individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence. Creating a bridge between these two systems and bringing key actors into dialogue is an important step toward ensuring adequate referrals and the development of appropriate services to support this population. The Department of Social Prosperity (*Departamento de Prosperidad Social*) or the UN Protection Cluster might be a potential coordinating body to facilitate this dialogue.

I. STUDY INTRODUCTION

Background

Individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence often have few options for protection. These options can be even more limited in humanitarian settings. At the same time, displacement is believed to increase vulnerability by exacerbating existing, and creating new, conditions that perpetuate sexual and gender-based violence.

Women's vulnerability increases dramatically in refugee camp settings where the breakdown of family and community ties, limited access to resources, insufficient security measures, and inadequate housing place them at heightened risk.⁶ Literature also suggests that domestic violence in particular increases in displacement contexts.⁷ It is theorized that psychological strains for men unable to assume normal social, economic, and cultural roles can result in their aggressive behavior toward women and children.⁸ Women and girls who are forced migrants are believed to experience a disproportionate amount of sexual and gender-based violence compared to men and boys.⁹

Where individuals are displaced by conflict or natural disaster, the needs of those who also experience sexual and gender-based violence are likely to be urgent and complex. Elevated rates of mental distress, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression have been recorded among diverse groups of refugees and IDPs.¹⁰ Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence are at risk for a range of physical, psychological, and social consequences, including STIs, HIV, unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion, trauma to the reproductive system, PTSD, depression, social stigma, and rejection by family or community; yet even a minimum level of services is rarely accessible.¹¹ Since displaced survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have often experienced multiple traumatic events, they may be at greater risk for adverse psychosocial outcomes.¹²

Programs that provide temporary emergency shelter to individuals with complex vulnerabilities, such as refugees, internally displaced persons, or forced migrants who have been subjected to sexual and gender-based violence, may also serve to increase their access to support services. As such, these programs may facilitate multisectoral approaches that address their special needs. Yet, despite this population's enormous vulnerability to harm and significant need for support, surprisingly little is known about emergency shelters available to survivors in refugee or other displacement settings globally or within Colombia specifically.

Literature Review

An examination of peer-reviewed and gray literature identified extremely limited research-generated data or guidance on the provision of temporary safe shelter from sexual and gender-based violence in Colombia. No peer-reviewed articles were identified. Two reports from international non-government-

tal organizations (NGOs) provided brief impressions of sexual and gender-based violence programs within the context of Colombia's armed conflict. Amnesty International detailed the state's physical protection programs available to some survivors of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, which do not include safe shelter.¹³ A report from the Reproductive Health Response in Crises (RHRC) Consortium underscored the paucity of government programs to address sexual and gender-based violence and the challenges non-governmental organizations face in attempting to meet some of these needs.¹⁴ A third study, conducted by the Center on Housing Rights and Evictions, examined mainstream shelter for survivors of domestic violence in Colombia (Bogotá), Argentina, and Brazil against a backdrop of women's housing rights in those nations.¹⁵ All of the reports highlighted the inadequacy of shelter and physical protection programs for survivors. However, a discussion of the provision of safe shelters to internally displaced persons and others—including program models, the challenges shelters face, and the strategies devised to meet the needs of survivors—is absent from the literature. This gap presents an area for further inquiry.

Study Objectives

This report on temporary shelter options for internally displaced persons fleeing sexual and gender-based violence in Colombia is part of a four-country study undertaken by the Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, School of Law. It is part of the Human Rights Center's Sexual Violence Program. The study aimed to improve understanding of the kinds of temporary shelter program models serving displaced individuals such as refugees, migrants, and internally displaced persons seeking protection from sexual and gender-based violence, and to identify challenges and promising practices. Specifically, it explored the following key questions:

1. What are some models of temporary physical protection serving individuals who are forcibly displaced (e.g., refugees or internally displaced persons) and are fleeing sexual or gender-based violence?
2. What are the particular challenges and strategies associated with providing temporary shelter in displacement contexts?
3. What are the protection options and challenges for particularly marginalized sexual and gender-based violence survivors in forced displacement settings?

Based on formative research on shelter models and fieldwork in two prior case studies—Kenya and Haiti—Human Rights Center researchers developed a loose categorization of *types* of shelter programs in order to provide a conceptual framework that can both serve as a theoretical list and enable comparison across case studies.

The six types of shelter programs the Human Rights Center conceptualized are:

1. *Traditional safe houses*: Survivors live together in a common structure, with staff overseeing operation of the accommodation.

2. *Independent living arrangements*: Staff arrange for survivors to be housed in separate accommodations (e.g., independent flats or hotel rooms) that were not built especially for safe shelter purposes. This is also known as “scattered site housing” in some contexts.
3. *Community host systems*: Survivors temporarily live in the homes of selected community members.
4. *Protected areas*: Survivors live in their own homes in a protected, enclosed subsection of a refugee or internally displaced persons camp.
5. *Alternative purpose entities*: Survivors stay in a setting designed to provide services unrelated to safe shelter (e.g., a police station, hospital clinic, or church).
6. *Hybrid models*: Programs that combine some elements of the above models.

This report presents the Human Rights Center’s findings about the forms of temporary shelter available to internally displaced persons fleeing sexual and gender-based violence in Colombia. It includes review of shelters designed to serve internally displaced persons as well as those designed to serve individuals fleeing domestic violence. Finally, this report offers recommendations based on preliminary observations of shelter-providing programs in Colombia.

The other case study locations where research was conducted as part of this study were Haiti, Kenya, and Thailand. Separate reports document findings for each country.

Methods

Design

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from both the University of California at Berkeley’s Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects and the Research Ethics Committee at Profamilia, a non-profit organization that specializes in sexual and reproductive health and provides medical services and education throughout Latin America.

In preparation for fieldwork, Human Rights Center researchers conducted a review of scholarly and NGO literature on safe shelters in Colombia and on sexual and gender-based violence response more broadly, which provided researchers with an understanding of the context of this violence in Colombia, key actors, and existing protection mechanisms available to IDPs and the general population. This review also informed shelter site selection.

Human Rights Center researchers visited shelters in Bogotá, Medellín, and Pasto (a city on the Colombian–Ecuadoran border) that serve victims of domestic violence and people who are displaced by the Colombian armed conflict. At these shelters, researchers conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with two subject groups: shelter staff and shelter residents. Semi-structured interviews were guided by standardized questionnaires and conducted directly in Spanish. Key topics explored included shelter services, security, transitions, shelter rules and procedures, services for marginalized populations, community perceptions, personal challenges experienced, and advice or lessons learned.

Site Selection and Sample

While both domestic violence and sexual and gender-based violence in the context of the armed conflict are prevalent throughout Colombia, Human Rights Center researchers purposively selected shelter programs in Bogotá, Medellín, and Pasto for inclusion in the study for a number of reasons. Bogotá and Medellín, being the largest cities in Colombia, have significant populations of internally displaced persons and greater infrastructure for serving that population than other cities. They also offer more services and protection assistance for victims of domestic violence than do other areas of Colombia. Pasto is located near the border and is the capital of a state with high levels of conflict-related violence. It was selected to provide information on the provision of services and protection in a more rural area with ongoing conflict.

To examine shelter options available to displaced survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, Human Rights Center researchers studied three general categories of shelters: domestic violence shelters, shelters serving individuals internally displaced by the conflict, and shelters with enhanced security measures serving those internally displaced persons at particularly high security risk. Only those shelters serving adult survivors of sexual and gender-based violence or displacement were included.

Over the course of five weeks during May and June of 2012, researchers conducted interviews at eight shelter sites. Ten shelter staff members were interviewed, including shelter administrators, shelter directors, and direct shelter service providers. All shelter staff interviewed were female. In addition, a total of seven shelter residents were interviewed. Residents were females between the ages of 28 and 50. Reasons for seeking shelter included domestic violence and conflict-related sexual violence.

Human Rights Center researchers made contact with shelter administrators or staff who then reached out to shelter residents and explained the nature of the study. At that point, certain shelter residents volunteered to participate, and they were interviewed. All participants were 18 years old or older. Researchers obtained verbal informed consent from all study participants. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and translated into English for analysis.

Human Rights Center researchers also conducted twenty-eight key informant interviews. Various local stakeholders were interviewed informally to gain a broader understanding of laws, referral mechanisms, and social and political contexts and to flag priority issues to include in interviews with staff and residents. Key informants included government officials from relevant offices, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and the staff of key think tanks in Bogotá, Medellín, and Pasto. Human Rights Center researchers also met with representatives from the UNHCR and the Colombian Catholic Church's social service office, *Pastoral Social*, in various field offices. For a complete list of organizations, see the Appendix.

Data Analysis

A team of six researchers based at UC Berkeley coded the transcripts using Dedoose, a qualitative coding software. Two of these researchers had also conducted the interviews. The team carried out thematic coding of the transcripts which included a series of deductive codes developed to reflect key

questions in the interview instruments. In addition, researchers employed an inductive approach to identify patterns in respondent experience. Select transcripts were double-coded to check for inter-coder reliability among the researchers.

Limitations

There are no shelters designed specifically to serve survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia, a situation that made it difficult to obtain information on challenges and strategies in addressing the needs of this specific population. For this reason, both domestic violence and displacement shelters were studied in order to obtain information about individuals displaced by the conflict and fleeing from sexual and gender-based violence. Many shelter providers and survivors were reluctant to discuss sexual and gender-based violence in the context of the conflict or saw the phenomenon as secondary to the issue of the survivors' displacement.

Additionally, due to time and resource constraints, Human Rights Center researchers were only able to visit eight shelters in the three locations noted above: Bogotá, Medellín, and Pasto. Shelters included in this study are not intended to constitute a complete list of available shelters in Colombia but were selected to reflect a range of shelter program models available to displaced survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

The recruitment of study participants by shelter directors may be an important limitation of this study as not all staff and residents at shelters had the opportunity to participate. However, since many shelter residents had experienced recent trauma, Human Rights Center researchers prioritized the well-being of participants and therefore relied on shelter staff to identify residents who were emotionally able to share their experiences. Nevertheless, the inherent bias of this sampling of study participants must be acknowledged.

We did not explicitly seek out *former* shelter residents who had transitioned back into the outside community, to avoid risk of exposing them. However, this restriction limited our ability to learn more about the experience of transition and longer-term reflections on the shelter stay. This is an area in need of more exploration, if possible.

Coding of qualitative data was conducted by six Human Rights Center researchers, four of whom were not involved in the interview process and therefore did not have intimate knowledge of the data and context prior to participating in the coding process. However, these researchers had been thoroughly trained and were familiar with the study objectives and interview guides. In addition, select transcripts were double-coded to ensure consistency of code application.

II. COUNTRY BACKGROUND

The war that has raged among Colombian security forces, guerilla groups, paramilitaries, and narcotics traffickers for more than forty-five years has cost the lives of an estimated 50,000 to 200,000 people and has displaced millions of others.

According to the UNHCR, out of a population of 45 million, there are currently more than 3.8 million officially registered internally displaced persons (IDPs) inside Colombia¹⁶ while another 500,000 Colombians are seeking refuge in neighboring countries.¹⁷ However, officially registered IDPs encompass only a fraction of the total number of displaced persons in Colombia due to restrictions on eligibility, a lack of information, and several other barriers to registration. Some estimates of the number of internally displaced persons run considerably higher; for example, the Consultancy for Human Rights and Forced Displacement (*La Consultoría Para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento Forzado*) (CODHES) suggests the number could be as high as 5.4 million.¹⁸ By any measure, this is the largest displacement crisis in the Western Hemisphere; in fact, Colombians comprise the seventh largest refugee population in the world.¹⁹ Further, a 2010 study conducted across 407 Colombian municipalities where conflict actors were present found that between 2001 and 2009, 489,687 women stated they were victims of sexual violence; 74,698 of them held guerrillas and paramilitaries responsible for the violence, and 21,036 held members of the security forces responsible.²⁰ However, it is difficult to fully understand the magnitude of this problem, as official information is poor, the crime is highly invisible, and the level of impunity is high.²¹

The conflict in Colombia has its roots in the period of violent political conflict between the Liberal and Conservative parties in the 1940s and 1950s known as *La Violencia*. The violence spread quickly to rural areas of Colombia, where peasants on both the left and the right organized themselves into militia groups. The civil war eventually ended in a coalition government in 1958, but not before an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 people had lost their lives.²²

During the civil war, armed groups associated with the Liberal and Communist parties were driven into the countryside, forming the basis for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo*, also known as “FARC-EP” or “the FARC”), the leftist guerilla organization that continues to play a major role in Colombia’s conflict.²³ Established in 1966, the FARC remains Colombia’s largest guerilla insurgency to this day, with between 7,000 and 11,000 active members as of 2011.²⁴ In addition, the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*) (ELN), another leftist guerilla organization, was founded in 1963 with the goal of bringing about a communist revolution in Colombia.²⁵ Both the FARC and the ELN claim to represent the rural poor against Colombia’s wealthy classes and oppose the privatization of natural resources, US influence in Colombia, multinational corporations, and rightist violence. However, they are viewed as



This “memory room” at a shelter for IDPs serves to commemorate residents’ family members who have been killed or have disappeared as the result of conflict-related violence.



having evolved over time from ideological organizations to groups focused on self-perpetuation and control of territory and population.²⁶

In response to guerilla violence, landowners and businessmen organized “self-defense groups” in order to defend themselves and their property. Over time, these groups joined forces with the death squads created by drug cartels in the 1970s and 1980s to form right-wing paramilitary groups. It is believed that the Colombian security forces not only have tolerated the violence perpetrated by these paramilitary groups but also have often openly collaborated with them to combat guerilla groups like the FARC and ELN.²⁷ Paramilitary groups, believed to be responsible for a greater share of human rights abuses than any other party to the conflict, have perpetuated numerous abuses against the Colombian people, including massacres, assassinations, torture, forced displacement, and kidnappings.²⁸ Although self-defense groups were outlawed in 1989, they were not disbanded and instead continued

to grow through the 1990s and 2000s. Today there are approximately between 10,000 and 20,000 active paramilitaries.²⁹

At the heart of Colombia's ongoing conflict is the central government's inability to fully govern the entire country. Political corruption, the precarious state of Colombia's democracy, and social and economic inequality also contribute to instability and insecurity. Contests over possession and use of Colombia's most productive land fuel the ongoing conflict, with about eight million hectares of land having been illegally confiscated by various parties of the conflict during the course of the war, primarily from indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples.³⁰ Leftist militia groups and right-wing paramilitaries continue to terrorize the country, forcibly displacing civilians and perpetrating human rights abuses such as mass killings, torture, abduction, hostage taking, use of child soldiers, extrajudicial killings, and mistreatment of captured combatants.³¹

There are two general categories of displacement in Colombia: individual and mass displacement. Individual displacement (also known as *gota-a-gota*, or drop-by-drop, displacement) occurs when one family or individual flees because of a threat made by an armed group or because of a fear that violence is imminent. Many families may leave an area within the same general time frame because they have experienced similar threats, but they leave individually due to an individual threat, fear, or incident. This is most common form of displacement in Colombia today. Mass displacement, on the other hand, occurs in the wake of a massacre or bombing or in advance of such an impending event. In those instances, the entire population of a given village or rural community may flee together. This situation occurs mainly among indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, which are typically so tight-knit that they will see the threats as collective and flee violence together.³²

When President Juan Manuel Santos came to power in 2010, his government pledged to address the human rights abuses that are a hallmark of this conflict. However, armed groups continue to terrorize civilian populations. The internally displaced population in Colombia remains impoverished, disenfranchised, and fearful of violence, both in cities and in areas of ongoing displacement. It remains to be seen whether the government's reforms will translate into concrete improvements in the lives of the displaced of Colombia who desperately need protection, access to basic services, and justice.

Patterns of Displacement

The main pattern of displacement in Colombia is rural to urban since rural areas continue to be the most affected by conflict-related violence. Data from the National Department of Planning indicate that during the period 1998–2008, 92 percent of the displaced population migrated from rural areas, predominantly from the north and west of the country.³³ The Pacific coast departments of Antioquia, Nariño, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, and Córdoba produced the highest numbers of IDPs in 2011.³⁴ Most flee to urban centers, where they reside in informal slums. Others remain in rural areas within their municipality or a neighboring municipality. The top ten Colombian municipalities to which IDPs (both registered and unregistered) had migrated as of 2009 were Bogotá (244,184), Santa Marta (141,520), Medellín (135,391), Sincelejo (83,098), Buenaventura (65,270), Cali (61,784), Villavicencio (61,416), Valledupar (60,975), Cartagena (58,601), and Florencia (57,168).³⁵

According to a UNCHR report, in 2010, Bogotá, then a city of seven million people, hosted the largest displaced population in the country with approximately 270,000 IDPs. Its suburb of Soacha (population 450,000) is among the largest receiving communities for IDPs in the country, hosting 65 percent of the IDPs who come to the Bogotá area.³⁶

IDPs in Colombia typically face grinding poverty, whether in the cities or the countryside. They have few prospects for work, education, or decent housing as displaced persons often face discrimination. Nationwide, 98.6 percent of the displaced live below the poverty line, and 82.6 percent are officially classified as living in extreme poverty. These rates contrast sharply with the rates for the non-IDP population, of whom 29.1 percent live in poverty, and 8.7 percent live in extreme poverty.³⁷

IDPs also experience difficulty accessing health care, especially in rural areas. National legislation entitles registered IDPs to unlimited access to free health care and medicines.³⁸ In practice, however, hospitals commonly refuse to treat IDPs, many IDPs lack the necessary identification papers to receive medical aid,³⁹ and reimbursements are so unpredictable that, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), about half of the internally displaced do not seek medical assistance because they lack the funds to do so.⁴⁰

Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations have been disproportionately affected by forced displacement. While Afro-Colombians represent only 7 percent of the total population, they comprise 23 percent of the displaced population; similarly, only 3 percent of Colombians are said to be indigenous, yet they make up 6 percent of the total number of displaced. Both the Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations typically live in the rural areas. Their territories are often the source of conflict since various armed groups vie to use their land for mining, control of drug-trade routes, or other purposes.⁴¹ Displacement is particularly devastating for these communities: the land is integral to their cultural heritage, and they depend upon it for their survival.⁴² In a 2009 ruling, the Colombian Constitutional Court warned that at least thirty-four indigenous groups “are in danger of cultural or physical extermination due to the internal armed conflict.”⁴³ Subsequent court decrees declared that the lack of governmental protection for indigenous and Afro-Colombian displaced persons was unconstitutional and ordered the government to implement programs to guarantee the rights of these two groups. However, such programs have had limited success.

Key Actors in Displacement Response

The main actors providing aid to displaced persons in Colombia fall into three categories: the Colombian government, various UN agencies, and civil society organizations. Although these agencies and organizations do not provide services specifically designed for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, they offer food, education, health care, protection, and other basic services to IDPs, a number of whom are fleeing sexual and gender-based violence.

Colombian Government

The Colombian Department of Social Prosperity (*Departamento de Prosperidad Social*, or DPS, previously known as *Acción Social*) coordinates IDP assistance through the National System for Integral

Attention to the Displaced Population (*Sistema Nacional de Atención Integral a la Población Desplazada*, or SNAIPD), which is responsible for implementing the country's National Plan for Attention to the Displaced Population.⁴⁴ While DPS oversees overall coordination, the municipalities, departmental governments, and districts are responsible for implementing the National Plan.⁴⁵ These entities often lack the funding and political will necessary to provide this assistance, however, and coordination between national and local bodies is lacking.⁴⁶ Another key government entity is the Central Registry for the Displaced Population, or *Registro Único de la Población Desplazada* (RUPD), the agency responsible for registering and qualifying IDPs for assistance.

Qualified displaced persons who register as IDPs through RUPD⁴⁷ are entitled to receive aid (including food, psychosocial care, rent, and basic household necessities) during a three-month emergency phase, after which they are entitled to assistance in the form of education, health care, and livelihood training.⁴⁸ However, according to a key informant at the Assistance and Orientation Unit for the Displaced Population, or *Unidad de Atención y Orientación a la Población Desplazada* (UAO), it can take up to a year for displaced persons to receive confirmation of their status as displaced, during which time they are without the services and benefits to which they are entitled.

Although registered IDPs are legally entitled to housing in the form of the three-month rent subsidy noted above, there are very few shelters available to IDPs in Colombia who find themselves in need of further accommodation. In addition, IDPs who are not registered through the UAO are not eligible to access this rent subsidy.

The officially registered population represents only a fraction of the total of displaced persons in Colombia. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), for example, estimates that 60 percent of internally displaced persons in Colombia are not registered—and thus do not receive government assistance—due to lack of information about available services or the registration process, fear of coming forward, or failure at the time of registration to provide government-issued identification, which many rural residents do not have.⁴⁹ A study ordered by the Constitutional Court also found that more than half of the displaced population is not registered due to high rates of rejection, in part because those who report that they were displaced by state actors are not counted in the registry.⁵⁰ Fur-



In a general shelter for internally displaced persons, a sign hangs in the atrium: “For the migrant, his country is the land that gives him bread.”

thermore, persons who were displaced for reasons not directly related to the conflict, such as natural disasters or drug-related aerial fumigation, are not eligible. This undercounting results in a lack of overall resources available to IDPs, and a huge population remains underserved.⁵¹

UN Agencies

The primary role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Colombia is to advise and support the government in its efforts to improve protection and services for the displaced population.⁵² The main UNHCR representation in Colombia is in Bogotá; however, there are suboffices in Pasto, Medellín, and Bucaramanga and field offices in Barranquilla, Apartadó, Arauca, Cúcuta, Quibdó, Altas de Cazuca, Villavicencio, and Mocoa. A UN thematic group, or cluster, on protection has also been established.⁵³

Civil Society

A number of international and national NGOs serve internally displaced persons, regardless of registration status, with emergency food, medical care, and psychosocial services. Additionally, several national organizations carry out research, investigations, reporting, and advocacy activities on human rights issues and the conditions of the displaced. Religious organizations, especially the Catholic Church, also play an active and influential role in protecting and serving the displaced in Colombia.

Civil society organizations have long been active in Colombia on behalf of the rights of IDPs, and their presence is growing, especially in rural areas. However, there is some tension between these organizations and both the Colombian government and armed groups. Human rights defenders, for example, are often accused by the government and by paramilitaries of being guerilla sympathizers and are routinely attacked by right-wing armed actors.

While none of the IDP organizations we encountered focused specifically on protection from sexual or gender-based violence in the context of the armed conflict, many staff members understood the importance of these overlapping issues and stated their desire to do more for this population.

III. SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA

Sexual violence is widespread in Colombia, and it occurs against a cultural backdrop of gender discrimination, stereotypes, and social norms that often condone violence against women.

According to the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences in Colombia, 125 women were killed by their husbands or partners and nearly 51,200 cases of domestic violence were reported in 2010 alone.⁵⁴ Other sources report an even higher incidence of domestic violence. For example, the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science (*Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses* [INMLCF], or “*Medicina Legal*”) encountered 77,545 cases of domestic violence in Colombia in 2010, though it believes actual numbers are much higher still.⁵⁵ Domestic violence occurs throughout the society, but displaced women and those living in conflict zones are at particularly great risk.

Certain groups are also particularly at risk for sexual and gender-based violence. Among them, indigenous women are often singled out for sexual violence by armed groups, an outcome related to the multiple forms of discrimination they face based on gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.⁵⁶ Those who decide to report such crimes of sexual and gender-based violence may face several challenges, including language barriers, lack of culturally appropriate services, the need to travel long distances through unsafe areas to report the crime, and medico-legal procedures that are alien to their culture, such as gynecological exams.⁵⁷ Afro-Colombian women are also subject to multiple discriminations and frequently experience traumatic acts of physical and sexual violence in the course of displacement, though few of them report the incidents because of their fear of retribution and lack of knowledge about the reporting procedure.⁵⁸

In Colombian society lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals may be viewed as inviting aggression. LGBT Colombians have, for example, been subject to targeted killings during “social cleansing” efforts by paramilitary and guerilla groups because of their sexual and gender identities.⁵⁹

In Colombia a number of internally displaced women, and occasionally men, turn to survival sex—the exchange of sex in circumstances where those exchanging sex for survival lack other options⁶⁰—or transactional sex—the exchange of sex or sexual favors for gifts, services, humanitarian goods, etc.⁶¹—in order to support themselves and their families. According to a 1999 study, 72 percent of those engaged in sex work in Colombia were internally displaced.⁶² Participation in these activities is often the result of coercion and may itself have been initiated by an act of sexual violence or other exploitation. The authorities often dismiss allegations of sexual violence in these circumstances on grounds that the alleged victim was a sex worker.⁶³

Furthermore, as the issue of sexual and gender-based violence is typically defined in Colombia as affecting only women and girls, men and boys can be a marginalized victim group. Virtually all research on and services for those suffering sexual and gender-based violence in Colombia are female focused, and there is limited recognition that men and boys can suffer such violence as well.

Due to a long-standing culture of impunity in Colombia and lack of faith in the justice system, crimes of sexual violence are rarely reported, particularly when armed groups are the perpetrators. A United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report from 2000 found that although between 60 and 70 percent of Colombian women were reportedly victims of some form of violence, conflict-related or not, only 9 percent reported it.⁶⁴ Survivors of sexual violence fear reporting due to a lack of confidentiality since some institutions that handle their claims have ties to armed groups, especially in conflict zones. Furthermore, rape and other forms of sexual violence are seen to violate the honor of and bring shame to the victim, her family, and her community, so a victim's reporting of such a crime can itself be seen as a transgression.⁶⁵

Accessing health care is a challenge for victims of sexual violence. In addition to stigma, which prevents many women from seeking care, many rural residents do not have hospitals or clinics nearby.⁶⁶ Although survivors of sexual violence have a right to health care by Colombian law, their lack of knowledge of protocols and procedures adds to their difficulty in obtaining appropriate care even where it is available.⁶⁷ When survivors are able to access care, they are often faced with medical professionals who are not educated about issues surrounding sexual and gender-based violence and who may blame survivors for their predicament. To compound the problem, according to CODHES, long delays are common when necessary medical tests are conducted after an occurrence of sexual violence has been reported.⁶⁸

Conflict, Displacement, and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

In conflict zones, rape and other forms of sexual violence are regularly used as tactics of war by all of Colombia's armed actors, most of whom act with impunity. State military forces, paramilitaries, and guerilla forces employ this strategy as a form of intimidation, as a means of revenge or punishment, and as a means of exerting control over territory. Women assumed to ally with one of the warring parties are often targeted by the other party as a way to send a message to the armed group and civilians alike. Paramilitary and guerilla forces perpetrate sexual violence on female members of their own units as well, and women combatants are typically forced to undergo an abortion when a pregnancy is discovered.

In addition, it is believed that levels of family violence may be considerably higher among displaced communities than in the broader Colombian society due to the social and economic stresses of displacement and poverty.⁶⁹ For example, it is often harder for a displaced man to find employment than it is for his spouse to find work in the informal sector, causing a shift in gender roles that sometimes leads to violence.⁷⁰

According to the US Office on Colombia, a nonprofit advocacy organization, 20 percent of all women in Colombia in 2005 had experienced domestic violence while a disproportionate 52 percent of internally displaced women had suffered the same.⁷¹ Those differences tied to displacement notwith-

standing, the increasing urbanization of the conflict in recent years has made it more difficult to draw the distinction between conflict-related and non-conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. As urban wings of armed groups proliferate in cities like Bogotá and Medellín, armed actors target displaced and resident women alike for initiation rapes and for a means to displace their families from their homes or neighborhoods in order to gain control of territory.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Laws and Policies

Myriad laws and systems exist in Colombia to protect and serve survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, especially those displaced by conflict. (See the box on page 30 for a brief overview of the relevant laws and policies.) However, a lack of coordination and political will and a confusing network of responsible entities make it difficult for a survivor to report a crime of sexual violence and receive protection and assistance. And, as previously mentioned, many Colombian women are loath to report incidents of sexual and gender-based violence due to shame, stigma, lack of confidentiality in the reporting process, and concern that the perpetrators have a formal or informal relationship with the authorities in charge of receiving the reports.

Key Actors in Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Response

While efforts to increase coordination between entities serving the internally displaced and victims of sexual and gender-based violence are on the rise, there remains a marked disconnect between the two systems.

Government

Official complaints against perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence initiate the formal protection and prosecution process and are filed with the Prosecutor's Office (*Fiscalía*), the Ombudsman's Office (*Defensoría del Pueblo*), or the Family Commissions (*Comisarías de Familia*). Some survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are eligible for Colombia's physical protection programs that serve victims of the conflict, witnesses, and others with communications systems, bodyguards, armored vehicles, and police patrols. Specifically, the programs are as follows:

1. The Office of the Attorney General coordinates a protection program for victims and witnesses.
2. The Protection Program of Law 975 is designed for victims and witnesses participating in the Justice and Peace Process, part of a demobilization effort that aimed to provide justice and reparations for victims of the armed conflict.
3. The Ministry of the Interior heads a protection program for human rights defenders, community leaders, trade unionists, and journalists. This program is available to victims of sexual and gender-based violence if they fall into one of these categories.

To date, these programs have had limited success protecting victims and potential victims of sexual and gender-based violence. A number of challenges, including strict eligibility criteria, limit the number of beneficiaries and significantly undercut potential benefits to survivors. To qualify for protection,

COLOMBIAN LAWS AND POLICIES RELATED TO SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND DISPLACEMENT

International Law

Colombia has ratified the following:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its two Optional Protocols
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Sanction, and Eradication of Violence Against Women (the “Belem do Para Convention”)

Domestic Law

- Article 93 of the 1991 Constitution—International human rights treaties have the status of constitutional law and thus take precedence over national law.
- Article 43 of the Constitution—Women and men have equal rights and opportunities before the law, and women shall not be subjected to discrimination.
- *Peace and Justice Law (975) of 2005*—Aims to provide justice and reparations for victims of the armed conflict, including victims of sex crimes.
- *Law against Violence against Women (1257) of 2008*—Established norms for the prevention and prosecution of violence and discrimination against women. This law led to the creation of safe shelters.
- *Victims and Land Restitution Law (1448) of 2011*—Designed to return lost and stolen land to those displaced by the conflict and to provide restitution to victims of human rights violations in the context of the conflict. The law has been criticized for shifting focus to land restitution over the immediate protection needs of victims of the ongoing conflict.⁷² According to key informants, many women’s names do not appear on the titles to their land, so they have no hope for restitution if their husbands are killed or disappear in the conflict.

Constitutional Court Rulings

- Decision T-025 (2004)—Declared the gap between the rights guaranteed to IDPs and the government’s capacity to uphold these rights an “unconstitutional state of affairs.” The ruling set forth a basic bill of IDP rights and issued court orders that spelled out programs and policies to address these gaps.⁷³
- Follow-up decrees:
 - Auto 092 (2008)—Acknowledged sexual violence as a habitual and systematic practice in the armed conflict. Reminded the Colombian authorities of their constitutional obligation to try to prevent the disproportionate displacement of women and to work to ensure that displaced women are guaranteed all of their rights.⁷⁴ Ordered the government to implement specific programs designed to protect women displaced by the conflict and called on the Office of the Attorney General to make progress on investigating cases of sexual violence.⁷⁵
 - Auto 237 (2008)—Declared that the government of Colombia had not fulfilled the orders handed down in Auto 092.
- Sentence T-045 (2010)—Directed the Ministry of Social Protection to ensure that health policies and services meet the needs of conflict victims and provide specific programs for women victims.⁷⁶

a victim must have already formally reported the crime and demonstrated that she or he is cooperating with the investigation by providing information to help identify and locate the perpetrator.⁷⁷ While the government attempted to introduce a gender focus to these programs in 2010,⁷⁸ their emphasis continues to be on protecting union and other organizers, and they are mostly not designed to meet the protection needs of women. Female activists and witnesses are also less likely to be recognized as at-risk, underscoring a lack of government understanding and sensitivity to the rights and protection needs of sexual and gender-based violence survivors.⁷⁹ The usefulness of the programs is further limited by significant time delays, a lack of gender training for officials, and the temporary (three-month) duration of protection measures.⁸⁰

After the passage of the Law against Violence against Women (1257) of 2008, government municipalities began to establish *Rutas de Atención Integral a Mujeres Víctimas de Violencia de Género* (Roadmaps for Comprehensive Attention to Women Victims of Gender-Based Violence), known as the *Rutas de Atención*. Notable elements of the *Rutas de Atención* include an emergency hotline and a description of the steps that organizations such as NGOs, police, and hospitals can take to secure care and protection for victims.⁸¹ Unfortunately, the *Rutas* are only functioning in a few locations, and general awareness of the procedures is limited even in areas where they are operational.⁸² Per the regulations accompanying the Law against Violence against Women (1257) of 2008, a female victim of domestic violence has a right to shelter, food, and transportation if remaining in her home would put her at risk. The Colombian government is trying to fulfill this obligation by opening shelters for survivors. However, the number of shelters remains low, and women face several barriers to entering these shelters.

The government of President Santos has gone farther than its predecessors to address sexual and gender-based violence and other human rights abuses related to the armed conflict. Still, the overall government response leaves room for improvement, and its recent policy changes have yet to yield measurable improvements on the ground. In 2011, for example, Amnesty International criticized Colombia's state institutions for failing survivors of conflict-related sexual violence "every step of the way," especially "women and girls from indigenous, Afro-descendent and peasant farmer (*campesino*) communities; forcibly displaced women; and women living in poverty."⁸³

UN Agencies

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) play a central role in addressing sexual and gender-based violence in Colombia. The UNHCR's stated function is to support the government to protect and serve IDPs (as previously noted) and to ensure that responding to sexual and gender-based violence is a priority. It assists with the implementation of the Service Pathways (*Rutas de Atención*), improves statistical data collection on cases of sexual violence, facilitates victims' access to the judicial system, and increases awareness of sexual and gender-based violence. The UNFPA cooperated with the government statistics office to establish a standardized national system to collect information on gender-based violence.⁸⁴ It has conducted public education campaigns and training of government officials on sexual and gender-based violence issues.⁸⁵

Civil Society

Colombian women's organizations concerned with sexual and gender-based violence are well organized and have had recent success in advocating for the passage of the Auto 092, the Constitutional Court decree on gender-based violence, and subsequent follow-up actions to that groundbreaking decision. However, women's groups are often stigmatized as radical and anti-male and face significant barriers to effecting change. As women's rights activists directly challenge the culture of silence around gender-based violence, they are increasingly themselves targets of violence and intimidation by armed actors, especially paramilitary groups, who see their activism as a threat and have responded by using sexual violence.

The Catholic Church, as already mentioned, plays an important role in the protection and service of the displaced population of Colombia, which includes victims of sexual violence. The Catholic Church's social service arm, Pastoral Social, assists IDPs in a number of ways, including providing shelter, help with registration, and emergency assistance in its reception centers and accompanying communities at risk of displacement and in the process of return. Because the Church promotes "traditional" gender roles and is opposed to women's access to contraception and abortion, however, some survivors of sexual and gender-based violence are reluctant to turn to it when they are in need of assistance.

FINDINGS

The following research findings regarding the provision of safe shelter for displaced survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in Colombia are derived from interviews with shelter staff, shelter residents, and key informants.

Shelter Context and Types in Colombia

Human Rights Center researchers aimed to identify any forms of immediate temporary shelter available to internally displaced persons in Bogotá, Medellín, and Pasto.

Human Rights Center researchers visited six traditional safe houses, one community host system, and one hybrid program (alternative purpose entity and independent living arrangements) that houses some indigenous women participating in income-generating activities who are at high security risk in apartments or hotels.

Key stakeholders described these and other shelters options for displaced survivors of sexual and gender-based violence as generally falling within two groups: shelters serving women fleeing from domestic violence and shelters serving IDPs. They noted a general separation between shelter systems serving these two populations and very little coordination between key actors. Among the group of IDP shelters, Human Rights Center researchers noted a subset of shelters with enhanced security measures that served members of the IDP population who are at high risk of experiencing violence. Throughout this report, the Human Rights Center uses the following three categories to reflect these differences and to facilitate discussion of safe shelters in the Colombian context: domestic violence shelters, general IDP shelters, and high-risk IDP shelters.

Shelter sites included in this study were assigned identifiers based on the above-mentioned categories, which include DV (domestic violence shelter), IDP (general shelters for internally displaced persons), and HR IDP (high-risk IDP shelters) and are referred to as such throughout this report to protect the confidentiality of both the shelter programs and the study participants.

During fieldwork in Colombia in May and June 2012, Human Rights Center researchers visited the following shelters:

<i>Site Identifier</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Type</i>
DV-1	Bogotá	Traditional safe house
HR IDP-1	Bogotá	Traditional safe house
IDP-1	Bogotá	Traditional safe house
IDP-2	Bogotá	Traditional safe house
IDP-3	Bogotá	Hybrid: alternative purpose entity + independent living arrangements (income-generating program that shelters some high-risk participants in hotel rooms)
DV-2	Medellín	Community host system
HR IDP-2	Medellín	Traditional safe house
IDP-4	Pasto	Traditional safe house

*DV—domestic violence; IDP—internally displaced persons (general); HR IDP—high-risk internally displaced persons.

Context of the Colombia Shelter Sites

In order to best understand the shelters and the challenges that shelter staff and residents face, it is useful to take a closer look at the contexts—Bogotá, Pasto, and Medellín—in which they are set. These cities, and the shelters visited in each, are described below.

1. Bogotá

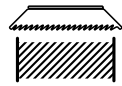
Bogotá, Colombia’s capital and largest city (with a population of 8.626 million people in 2012),⁸⁶ is ethnically diverse, with significant populations of indigenous persons and Afro-Colombians along with the majority *mestizo* population. The Bogotá area hosts the largest total population of displaced persons in the country—approximately 270,000 reside there. In 2011, 11,000 IDPs arrived in Bogotá, second to Medellín, which received 15,000 displaced persons that year.⁸⁷ The highest concentration of displaced persons in Bogotá is in the municipality of Soacha on the outskirts of the city. Conflict-related violence is prevalent in Soacha, and police presence there is minimal.

According to a 2008 report by Colombia’s National Forensic Institute (*Medicina Legal*), Bogotá residents reported 16,759 cases of domestic violence, or one case every half hour.⁸⁸ However, since the conflict is mostly not active in the capital, it is difficult to ascertain the prevalence of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence there, though it is likely to be low. Sexual violence having to do with the conflict is not generally disclosed or discussed, so it is hard to determine how many people in Bogotá have suffered it.

As is true throughout the country, the systems that serve survivors of domestic violence and survivors of displacement are completely separate in Bogotá. In order to provide psychosocial assistance and

SHELTERS STUDIED IN COLOMBIA

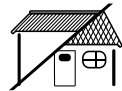
SHELTER TYPES



• TRADITIONAL SAFE HOUSES



• COMMUNITY HOST SYSTEMS



• HYBRID MODELS

PACIFIC OCEAN



POPULATION SERVED

 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

 INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

housing to victims of domestic violence, the Bogotá mayor's office hosts two traditional shelters (such as DV-1) and plans to open one more. The mayor's office operates no shelters for the displaced directly, but it does contract with a few private shelters to house registered IDPs. There is some coordination between the various displacement shelters: those with shorter service periods will sometimes refer their residents to another shelter in which a longer-term stay is possible.

In order to be admitted by government-run domestic violence shelters, survivors must first present their claim of abuse (or *denuncia*) in the Prosecutor's Office (*Fiscalía*), the Family Commission (*Comisaría de Familias*), or the Ombudsman's Office (*Defensoría del Pueblo*). Once that process has been initiated, and if the victim continues to cooperate in the prosecution of her abuser, she may be referred to a domestic violence shelter if she meets the entry requirements and is in need. If she drops the abuse claim, she must leave the shelter.



Waiting room of a shelter designed to serve internally displaced persons with high security risks.

For survivors of displacement, including survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, the government makes referrals and provides funding to private shelters operated by religious organizations and private nonprofit organizations. The *Unidad de Atención y Orientación a la Población Desplazada* (Assistance and Orientation Unit for the Displaced Population) (UAO) is the first stop for displaced persons in Colombia, and it makes referrals to a number of services, including shelters. According to UNHCR staff, there are five UAOs in Bogotá, and there is not much coordination among them. UAO staff report that they see, on average, two hundred displaced people a day and are not able to attend to all of them.

Other NGOs serving the displaced also provide housing stipends or physical space to victims of the conflict in need of shelter. For example, the Latin American Institute for an Alternative Society (*Instituto Latinoamericano por una Sociedad Alternativa*) (ILSA) has an emergency fund to house women leaders and activists who are threatened by armed actors for up to three months along with their children in Bogotá.

2. Medellín

With a population of three million people, of whom approximately 250,000 are displaced,⁸⁹ Medellín is Colombia's second largest city. In the past few years, the city has received greater numbers of displaced persons than Bogotá. The reasons, according to UNHCR staff in Medellín, are that Medellín has better services, more space, and a more welcoming attitude toward IDPs. Most IDPs reside on the edges of the city, some in areas where the rule of law is virtually nonexistent. Criminal gangs, which are often affiliated with paramilitary groups, hold sway over large swaths of territory. In recent years, Medellín has seen a significant rise in intraurban displacement, with people being displaced from one area of the city to another.

As armed groups have gained power and territory inside cities in recent years, the conflict has become increasingly urbanized. Although the majority of displacement still occurs in rural areas, this more recent pattern has contributed to intraurban displacement. This phenomenon is especially pronounced in Medellín, where intraurban displacement apparently rose by more than 80 percent in the first half of 2011 when compared to displacement during the same period in 2010.⁹⁰ In addition, domestic violence is a significant problem in Medellín, one which the mayor's office there has been working to address for over ten years.

There is only one shelter in Medellín dedicated to women fleeing sexual and gender-based violence, a community host model (DV-2) coordinated by an NGO that places survivors of domestic violence with host families. No shelters exist in Medellín, nor in the department of Antioquia outside of Medellín, specifically for those who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence in the context of the armed conflict, though the mayor's office staff say that the need is great. The Secretariat of Women of the Medellín Mayor's Office is currently working to develop a shelter specifically for women victims of the conflict.

Medellín does host three displacement shelters and is served by three UAOs. One of those three shelter programs (HR IDP-2), administered by the Program of Attention to Victims of Armed Conflict (*El Programa de Atención a Víctimas del Conflict Armado*) of the Mayor's Office, provides highly secure shelter to victims of the conflict who are at extreme risk. This shelter program houses residents in hotels, former convents, and a variety of other buildings that have been fully converted to function as traditional safe houses. In order to be eligible for shelter, these individuals must have an active protection route in process, which means that the Prosecutor's Office or the National Protection Unit is evaluating their claim for protection.

3. Pasto

Pasto is the capital of the predominantly rural southwestern-most department of Nariño, which borders Ecuador and the Pacific Ocean. Pasto is a growing small town with a population of approximately 400,000, of whom 30,000 are displaced.⁹¹ While the state of Nariño is a transit zone for displaced persons, local UNHCR and NGO staff report that Pasto sees more Colombians returning from Ecuador than headed there since people tend to cross from Colombia to Ecuador along the Pacific coast or



Front courtyard and entrance to a general shelter for internally displaced persons.

further inland via the department of Putumayo. While there is some intraurban displacement in Pasto, the conflict in Nariño still largely follows the traditional lines of the Colombian conflict, in which most displacement is rural to urban.

According to data collected by the Ombudsman's Office, in 2008, Pasto reported the highest percentage of female victims of domestic violence in Colombia, with 43.3 percent of women there having experienced some form of domestic violence in their lifetime.⁹² However, few people report crimes of domestic or sexual violence in Nariño as a whole. In Nariño, especially outside of Pasto, the phenomena of domestic violence and displacement overlap more often than they do in large cities such as Medellín and Bogotá since abusive partners may also be armed actors, making it even less likely that a

victim will report the crime. Types of sexual and gender-based violence observed by staff of organizations that work with survivors include sexual slavery, psychosocial control, and forced labor. According to Pastoral Social staff, men in the region are also sexually victimized in the course of the conflict and are even less likely to disclose the crime than women.

There is no shelter in Pasto specifically for victims of sexual and gender-based violence, though an NGO that continues to provide comprehensive care to women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in Pasto operated a community host shelter for survivors until 2011. The shelter project, funded by the mayor's office, was discontinued when a new, unsympathetic administration came to power.

IDP-4, operated by a faith-based organization, is the only formal shelter for the displaced in Pasto. The organization also manages a temporary shelter in the Nariño border town of Ipiales that is open to anyone in need of shelter, although the majority there are displaced persons. A typical stay is short, just one or two nights, as many are on their way to or from Ecuador.

In Pasto, the protection route for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence flows from the UAO to the Prosecutor's Office (*Defensoría*) to the Department of Health, which is supposed to provide services and support to survivors. However, according to key informants, Department of Health staff lack education on this issue and do not provide much in the way of assistance.

For victims of the conflict in Pasto, the UAO is the first point of contact, and it refers IDPs directly to IDP-4. This option is only available to registered IDPs. Those in need of humanitarian assistance who are not referred to IDP-4 are instead referred to the Colombian Red Cross, the local implementing partner of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). This assistance comes in the form of up to three months of food and household-supply vouchers. Because those who reside in the shelter are not eligible for Red Cross assistance, some residents choose to leave the shelter early so that they can receive it.

According to staff at IDP-4, civil society in Pasto is shrinking due to reductions in funding and a mistaken belief among international actors that the conflict is winding down. Staff of IDP-4 and the Colombian Red Cross maintain relationships that help them provide housing options to displaced persons after the end of their respective service periods. Sometimes religious communities also house people in Pasto. There is also a shelter that houses only indigenous people, who are often uncomfortable in the general shelter. However, the majority of the displaced population cannot take advantage of these opportunities, often because they are not registered or because shelters are at capacity, so they attempt to rent apartments or find family and friends to stay with. If they are not able to afford the apartments they rent, IDPs may be evicted and then move to another apartment, where they are again not able to pay rent. They do not end up sleeping on the street, however, according to Red Cross staff. Instead, people take them in, especially if they are from the same region or town. Said a staff member from one NGO in Pasto, "I really don't understand how they make it work, but it seems that they do."

Shelter Program Profiles

1. DV-1—Traditional Domestic Violence Shelter

Type	Traditional safe house for women survivors of domestic violence.
Location / Context	Industrial/working-class neighborhood in Bogotá with some IDP residents (not a predominantly IDP neighborhood).
Managing organization	Mayor’s Office of Bogotá
History	Founded in 2011 in response to the passage of Law 1257 of 2008, which established norms for raising awareness about, preventing, and punishing violence and discrimination against women. It is one of two such houses operated by the mayor’s office; two more are planned.
Mandate	To provide a safe living space and comprehensive care to women victims of domestic violence to help them break the cycle of violence and begin to reconstruct their lives.
Funding	Mayor’s Office of Bogotá
Housing description	15 private rooms (4 beds each) where women can stay with their children. The shelter has a kitchen, dining room, TV room, children’s playroom, meeting room, storage area, 12 bathrooms, laundry room, infirmary, and staff offices.
Capacity	Maximum capacity is 50. At the time of the visit, the shelter was at capacity.
Eligibility criteria	A woman must be referred by the relevant government entities (the Fiscalía or the Comisaría de Familia) and must have filed a restraining order, indicating that she has formally denounced her perpetrator.
Harms fled	Domestic violence, and the perpetrator is almost always the male significant other.
IDPs housed?	Yes—IDPs are eligible, but the shelter is not specifically geared toward that population.
Children housed?	Yes

Staff	17 staff, including director, 2 social workers, psychologist, occupational therapist, educator, lawyer, nurse's aide, 2 facilitators, administrative assistant, driver, 2 security guards, cook, nutritionist, and a general services staff person.
Length of stay	Up to 4 months, though extensions are occasionally granted. The average stay is slightly less than 4 months.
Services—in-house	Accommodation, food, psychosocial assistance, legal assistance, infirmary, professional development courses
Services—by referral	Medical care, child care, education, vocational training
Code of Conduct, Rules	Residents must report where they are going and for how long in order to leave the shelter. Staff occasionally first verify that the destination is safe. Cell phones are allowed, but the shelter location is not disclosed to anyone.
Security	24-hour guard and in a confidential . Located across the street from a police station.
Transition planning	A transition plan is initiated at entry and is actively followed during the last month of a resident's stay. The shelter helps with relocation costs in some cases and checks the safety of independent housing. If a survivor chooses to return to a perpetrator, mediation is not included. The shelter will notify the <i>Comisaría de Familias</i> that a survivor has returned to her perpetrator.
Tracking / Monitoring	Regular tracking visits and phone calls are made with former residents for up to a year after they have left DV-I. Residents who return to their perpetrators do not receive any follow-up.
Notes	While the formal eligibility criteria state that a woman must be a victim of domestic violence to stay at DV-I, exceptions are sometimes made for short periods in emergency cases for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in the context of the armed conflict.

2. HR IDP-1—Traditional High-Risk Displacement Shelter

Type	Traditional shelter
Location / Context	A relatively insecure neighborhood in Bogotá with considerable crime and drug dealing
Managing organization	A nonprofit organization with a governing board
History	Founded by the Claretian religious community in 1997 as a human rights committee and established as an NGO in 2003.
Mandate	To provide legal assistance, psychosocial support, and shelter to social leaders and human rights defenders who are at high risk of political persecution or are victims of a crime of the state.
Funding	The Claretian religious community primarily, including in-kind donation of the shelter space and utilities. Other organizations, such as Amnesty International and the Swiss Embassy, fund specific projects.
Housing description	2 rooms on a cold and dark floor with beds for 5 and 7 to 8 people, respectively (mattresses can be brought in to accommodate additional family members). There are a kitchen and a common sitting area. Included on a separate floor are a child-care room, staff offices, and a memory room (to commemorate lost loved ones).
Capacity	Space for 25 individuals between two locations, including another shelter space the same organization maintains in a different part of town. At the site visited, approximately 13 people can be housed.
Eligibility criteria	Human rights defenders, community leaders, and victims of state crimes or paramilitary violence. Must be referred by a human rights organization, community leader, the Claretian community, or a former resident.
Harms fled	Conflict-related violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, commonly perpetrated by the paramilitaries or the Colombian armed forces.
IDPs housed?	Yes
Children housed?	Yes
Staff	4 full-time staff (program manager, social worker, administrative coordinator, and a legal representative), 2 part-time volunteers

Length of stay	Officially 2 weeks, but the average resident stays for a month or longer.
Services—in-house	Accommodation; initial ration of food; psychosocial support, legal aid, and employment assistance; vocational training
Services—by referral	Medical care, psychosocial counseling
Code of Conduct, Rules	Residents are not to disclose the location of the shelter to anyone. Most come and go as they please, but they are advised to return early and be careful about where they go. Extremely high-risk cases must tell staff where they are going and cannot go out alone.
Security	24-hour guard, confidential location. Staff live in the building, a factor that provides additional security and a feeling of safety. The shelter has never had a security breach, but it has no relationship with the police.
Transition planning	A transition plan is initiated prior to departure from shelter, in which staff help residents figure out where to go or what to do next, such as renting an apartment in Bogotá or relocating to another part of the country to live with family or friends. Staff assist with relocation expenses and, when possible, with the first month's rent.
Tracking / Monitoring	Staff maintain close ties with many former residents who have remained in Bogotá. Former residents also come by the office to obtain monthly food assistance and to participate in vocational training workshops.
Notes	Residents are at extreme risk but tend to prefer a short stay at the shelter. Renting an apartment in Bogotá may be a less secure alternative, but the shelter's location and closed-in nature are seen as drawbacks.

3. IDP-1—Traditional Displacement Shelter

Type	A traditional shelter that serves displaced persons who are referred by the Colombian government’s Unit of Assistance and Orientation (UAO).
Location / Context	Soacha, a district just outside Bogotá that is heavily populated by displaced people.
Managing organization	Faith-based organization
History	Shelter opened in 2008 in response to growing numbers of the displaced in Soacha.
Mandate	To provide housing and dignity to the displaced population in Soacha.
Funding	Primarily mayor’s office. Additional sources include the Church (start-up funding), other religious communities, and UNHCR.
Housing description	Offices and meeting rooms on the ground floor, 4 gender-segregated dorm rooms on the second floor. Gender-segregated bathrooms, storage area for valuables, common TV area, outdoor patio, kitchen, and laundry area.
Capacity	28; at the time of visit, there were no residents: the shelter’s contract with the mayor’s office was under review for renewal.
Eligibility criteria	An individual must be in the process of obtaining status as an IDP, must not have other options for housing (i.e., a social safety net), and must not have sought shelter at IDP-1 previously. Single men (without families) are not officially permitted to stay, though exceptions have been made in the past.
Harms fled	Residents are displaced and thus have been threatened, directly or indirectly, by armed actors.
IDPs housed?	Yes
Children housed?	Yes
Staff	10 total: 3 reception assistants, 2 staff in charge of general and domestic services, an administrative assistant, a psychologist, a social worker, a program coordinator, and a director.

Length of stay	Per the Victims Law, the displaced are entitled to 90 days of shelter. However, to discourage dependency, shelter staff aim to have residents stay for only 15 days, which is the average length of stay.
Services—in-house	Accommodation, daily meals, psychosocial assistance, vocational training
Services—by referral	Medical care, vocational training
Code of Conduct	Residents may not use drugs or alcohol, must be present at all meal-times, and cannot spend a night outside the shelter. A nightly curfew of 6 p.m. is imposed due to the insecure nature of the area. Visits are highly restricted.
Security	No security guard; reception assistants play a gatekeeper role. The shelter is located within blocks of two police installations. Staff are in close contact with the police and educate residents about staying safe. There was one security breach involving a demobilized paramilitary, but no one was hurt.
Transition planning	No formal exit planning, but staff assist residents with securing leases and cover some relocation costs if necessary. The focus is on the autonomy of the individual to create his or her own plans.
Tracking / Monitoring	Regular follow-up visits with families that stay in Soacha, periodic check-ins with those who have moved farther away.
Notes	Terms proposed by the mayor’s office in current contract negotiations would make the shelter financially unsustainable. It is thus not clear if the shelter will be able to continue serving IDPs.

4. IDP-2—Traditional Displacement Shelter

Type	Short-term traditional shelter serving IDPs in Bogotá, economic migrants, and refugees.
Location / Context	Industrial neighborhood in Bogotá
Managing organization	Faith-based organization
History	Began as a shelter for those coming temporarily to Bogotá for health treatment who had nowhere to stay. As greater numbers of displaced persons arrived in the city, the shelter evolved into primarily a displacement shelter starting in 1997 or 1998. In 2002, the program expanded to include vocational training and capacity-building workshops.
Mandate	To provide temporary shelter for those who cannot find shelter elsewhere and to help them to orient themselves upon arrival in the city.
Funding	Primary funding from the Catholic Archdiocese of Bogotá, with additional support from Caritas Internationalis of Switzerland, the Episcopalian Conference, Caritas Internationalis of Sweden, and the Pan-American Development Fund.
Housing description	First floor has a kitchen, dining room, TV room, staff offices, and meeting rooms. Second floor has shared, gender-segregated bedrooms, bathrooms, showers, a playroom for children, and a laundry room.
Capacity	Room for 60 people, but it was only housing 11 individuals at the time of visit, none of whom were displaced. Shelter tries to take fewer than 60 people in order to ensure that scarce resources last the entire year.
Eligibility criteria	The individual must be referred by the Municipal Attorney’s Office (<i>Personería</i>), the UAO, or Catholic parishes. The shelter does not admit men who come alone. It used to do so but ran into security problems, including men who attempted to harm others or to commit suicide.
Harms fled	Most residents are displaced and have been threatened, directly or indirectly, by armed actors. Some residents have experienced sexual violence by armed actors and/or domestic violence.

IDPs housed?	Yes
Children housed?	Yes
Staff	9 staff: general services, accounting, administrative support, psychosocial assistance, and management.
Length of stay	Official length of stay is 3 days as the service is really intended as a mechanism for migrants to orient themselves upon arrival to Bogotá. There are unofficial and quiet exceptions to this rule.
Services— <i>in-house</i>	Accommodation, daily meals, psychosocial assistance, vocational training
Services— <i>by referral</i>	Medical care
Code of Conduct, Rules	Minimal rules. New intakes must arrive before 5pm. Visits are allowed outside of the bedrooms.
Security system	24-hour security guard; nuns live on site. The lack of restrictive rules makes it possible for armed actors to enter and request services, something that has happened on occasion. The shelter has a good relationship with the police and can call for assistance.
Transition planning	No formal exit planning, but staff assist with housing and employment searches, time permitting. The shelter occasionally helps residents with the first month's rent and sometimes refers people to other shelters permitting longer stays.
Tracking / Monitoring	No formal follow-up due to the large numbers served (approximately 10,000 people per year). However, shelter staff do conduct home visits with particularly vulnerable former residents.
Notes	Lack of funding a primary concern, preventing the shelter from meeting community needs.

5. IDP-3 — *Independent Living Arrangement*

Type	Independent living arrangement. High-risk participants of an income-generating program for indigenous women who are housed in apartments or hotel rooms.
Location / Context	Upper-middle-class neighborhood in Bogotá
Managing organization	An independent organization managed by two directors
History	Founded in early 2011 and became operational in November 2011. The Ministry of Social Protection and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) helped found the organization to provide income-generation activities for indigenous women displaced or vulnerable in Bogotá, an attempt to comply with Auto 092.
Mandate	To provide income-generation and culture-preservation activities and psychosocial support for displaced or vulnerable indigenous women in Bogotá.
Funding	Initial funding from the Ministry of Social Protection and IOM, but the shelter is now largely self-sufficient. The directors use some of their own resources, and small profits from income-generating activities contribute additional funds.
Housing description	Not currently equipped to house women at the property, but women are sometimes housed in separate apartments or hotel rooms. Directors planned to start housing up to 20 women on-site by the end of 2012, and if funds could be raised, they hoped to purchase a house for women to live in medium to long term.
Capacity	Highest number served at one time was 25, but staff will never turn anyone away. At time of visit, 7 women housed.
Eligibility criteria	Must be an indigenous woman in a situation of displacement or vulnerability.
Harms fled	Persecution by armed actors, including sexual and gender-based violence in the context of the conflict and/or within their own families.
IDPs housed?	Yes

Children housed?	Yes
Staff	The two co-directors are the only full-time staff; occasional assistance from volunteers.
Length of stay	No official length of stay; average stay is a few days to one week.
Services—in-house	Accommodation, vocational training, income-generating activities
Services—by referral	Medical care, psychosocial assistance
Code of Conduct, Rules	There are no specific rules.
Security system	No guard. Greater security is needed. One attempted security breach when an armed actor tried to locate a participant.
Transition planning	No formal transition planning. Shelter tries to assist participants to find secure housing in Bogotá or other cities.
Tracking / Monitoring	Since the shelter is relatively new with few served, staff maintain contact with many former participants.
Notes	An interesting model that may be more prevalent in Colombia than is commonly believed, in which organizations providing other services to high-risk populations are also providing shelter informally.

6. DV-2—Community Host Domestic Violence Shelter

Type	Community host shelter in which members of the community take in women victims of domestic violence.
Location / Context	Medellín, with 15 host families both in town and in a rural area outside of it.
Managing organization	Operated by an NGO and managed by the Medellín Mayor’s Office, Secretariat of Women.
History	Established 2006 by the Medellín Mayor’s Office, Secretariat of Civil Culture’s Subsecretary of Women, in response to a lack of shelter options. Originally operated as a traditional protection shelter but closed due to difficulties and replaced with a community host model after the Subsecretary of Women encountered a similar model abroad and began a pilot project.
Mandate	To provide protection, shelter, and empowerment to women victims of gender-based violence.
Funding	Secretariat of Women of the Medellín Mayor’s Office
Housing description	Private family homes within the community. Women generally sleep in the same room with their children and share common spaces (e.g., kitchen, living room, bathroom) with the host family. Meals mostly prepared by the host family; residents able to cook on occasion.
Capacity	15 women and their children. Maximum capacity is rarely reached. At the time of visit, DV-2 did not have any residents because the managing NGO was negotiating a contract renewal with the mayor’s office.
Eligibility criteria	Women must be residents of Medellín, must be 18 years or older, and must have filed a complaint with the relevant authorities against their perpetrators. Occasional exceptions are made for girls aged 16 or 17 who are suffering from domestic violence.
Harms fled	Approximately 90 percent of residents are fleeing from intimate partner violence. Others have experienced family violence, sexual violence, violence due to sexual orientation, and/or conflict-related violence.
IDPs housed?	Yes
Children housed?	Yes

Staff	6 to 7 full-time staff, including psychologists, social workers, a program coordinator, and a logistics assistant. University social work interns also provide support. The shelter organization relies on a network of between 17 and 20 host families who are ready to accept survivors at any time. Host families are compensated monetarily and are provided with training and support.
Length of stay	The maximum length of stay is 6 weeks. The majority of residents stay for this time. Exceptions are sometimes made, for example, if a resident would be at extreme risk of violence if she left.
Services—in-house	Accommodation, meals, psychosocial assistance, legal aid, child care, handicrafts and empowerment workshops
Services—by referral	Medical care, education, rent and food assistance at program’s end, vocational training, psychosocial assistance, legal aid
Code of Conduct, Rules	Visits must be authorized and supervised and must only take place at the NGO office. Women cannot communicate with their perpetrators or disclose the location of the residence to anyone. However, the program also works with perpetrators to educate them about healthy relationship behavior in cases in which survivors indicate that they would like to reconcile.
Security system	Good relationship with the police, who are present during all visits with perpetrators. Enhanced security measures in order to better protect staff and survivors are needed since security breaches have occurred.
Transition planning, effect	A transition plan is initiated as soon as a woman arrives. Most go to live with relatives or move into apartments. Others return to their perpetrators. A program designed for men educates them about appropriate relationship behavior/ anger management.
Tracking / Monitoring	DV-2 has a 4-month follow-up period, though in many cases the shelter loses track of women who move or change phone numbers. Women can continue to receive psychosocial and legal assistance after they exit the shelter program.
Notes	This model gives women personalized attention in the healing environment of a family home. It can be challenging for hosts to receive strangers into their homes, especially those who have suffered severe trauma. Some hosts do not feel safe sheltering women.

7. HR IDP-2—Hybrid High-Risk Displacement Shelter

Type	Hybrid model houses residents in a combination of independent living arrangements and alternative purpose entities.
Location / Context	Medellín
Managing organization	Program of Attention to Victims of the Armed Conflict (<i>El Programa de Atención a Víctimas del Conflicto Armado</i>) (PAVCA) contracts with private operators to provide shelter services.
History	The mayor’s office in 2006 founded a program providing legal and psychosocial assistance to victims and founded the shelter program in 2011 to address victims’ needs for shelter while protection claims are being evaluated.
Mandate	To provide protection, shelter, legal assistance, and psychosocial support to high-risk victims of the conflict, including men, women, and children.
Funding	Medellín Mayor’s Office
Housing description	Two locations in hotels, one for victims who have fled their homes due to threats to their lives, the other for witnesses and informants. Each family has a private room and bath, shared kitchen/dining room, a play area for children, a living room, and a laundry room.
Capacity	No official maximum capacity; additional hotels and apartments are found for victims referred by the Prosecutor’s Office or Public Ministry. 60 residents at the time of this study. The Medellín Mayor’s Office, Unit of Displacement, has a separate shelter for the general displaced population with capacity for up to 250 people.
Eligibility criteria	High-risk victims—witnesses, the displaced, community leaders, and informants—with an active protection route in process, under evaluation by the Prosecutor or National Protection Unit (NPU).
Harms fled	Violence, often sexual in nature, related to the armed conflict perpetrated by various armed groups.
IDPs housed?	Yes
Children housed?	Yes

Staff	A lawyer, social worker, and psychologist. They work with hotels to provide everyday shelter services and employ a coordinator, hotel manager, cook, and another psychologist.
Length of stay	Official maximum is 15 days, renewable. The purpose of the time limit is to pressure the Prosecutor’s Office to process claims quickly since they can take 15 days to 6 months to resolve. Average stay is 6 months, but stays range from 3 months to 1 year.
Services—in-house	Accommodation, meals, psychosocial assistance, legal assistance
Services—by referral	Medical care
Code of Conduct, Rules	Only staff and residents can enter the shelter. Residents can only leave with an escort for essential appointments (e.g., medical, legal), may not receive calls on the shelter phone, but may use their own cell phones. Children cannot attend school.
Security	A high-security facility, with a 24-hour guard, bodyguard, and escort services provided by the metropolitan police, who also make regular patrols. Shelter location is confidential; the community does not know this population is being housed.
Transition planning	For those whose claims are accepted, the Prosecutor or NPU arranges a protection route out of the shelter. For those whose claims are rejected, the shelter helps to find housing, may assist with rent, and facilitates access to other public benefits and services.
Tracking / Monitoring	Limited contact with former residents who enter witness protection. 1 to 2 follow-up visits with former residents who remain in Medellín and are not in witness protection. Phone check-ins conducted with those who move farther away.
Notes	Lengthy duration of shelter stay and state protection process take a toll on residents’ mental health. One resident expressed concern that private contractors may not be the most appropriate entities to work with this vulnerable population. She suggested that the government or social workers experienced in working with this population should provide the services directly.

8. IDP-4—Traditional Displacement Shelter

Type	Traditional shelter for the general displaced population
Location / Context	Pasto, the capital of the conflict-ridden southwestern department of Nariño; many IDPs pass through Nariño on their way to Ecuador. The shelter is located in a neighborhood with many displaced persons outside of the city center.
Managing organization	A faith-based organization provides services through a contract with the mayor’s office.
History	Founded in 1999 by the Dioceses of Pasto and formally began operating as a shelter in 2002.
Mandate	To provide temporary shelter and support to the general displaced population in Pasto.
Funding	The Dioceses of Pasto, the Pasto Mayor’s Office, church donations, and voluntary personal and professional donations.
Housing description	Gender-segregated large dorm bedrooms; shared kitchen, dining, and living rooms and outside green space.
Capacity	Official maximum capacity of 50 but will take in as many displaced people as need shelter. Usually houses between 15 and 45, but number once was as high as 480 people. At the time of the Human Rights Center’s visit, 24 were present.
Eligibility criteria	Displaced persons except single adult men. Most referred by UAO (<i>Unidad de Atención y Orientación</i>). Eligibility criteria are established by a committee of organizations.
Harms fled	Sexual and gender-based violence, threats and violence related to the armed conflict perpetrated by armed groups. For those IDPs at high risk of repeated violence, the Red Cross finds secure housing.
IDPs housed?	Yes
Children housed?	Yes, children can stay with their mothers.

Staff	A full-time administrator and a coordinator who lives on site in addition to a social worker, an occupational therapist, a psychologist, and 2 health care workers. Social work interns and volunteer attorneys also assist shelter staff at times.
Length of stay	Maximum is 30 days; average is 10 to 15 days. Per the Victims Law, the maximum will be extended to 60 days.
Services—in-house	Accommodation, meals, psychosocial assistance, religious services
Services—by referral	Medical care. Some emergency cases are tended by the San Vincent health center.
Code of Conduct, Rules	Residents must arrive each night by 7 p.m., and they are responsible for the care of their own children.
Security	A live-in staff person is on site 24/7, but the shelter does not have a high level of security. Many residents feel unsafe because they believe armed actors may be among the residents. There have been incidents of armed actors looking for residents. The shelter sometimes collaborates with the police for security, but residents often feel less safe if the police are present or involved.
Transition planning	The shelter helps residents find rooms or small apartments in Pasto or figure out where they can stay after they leave the shelter. For the transition of residents into the community, the shelter collaborates with the Red Cross, which provides food, household supplies, and humanitarian assistance for IDPs who are no longer housed in the shelter.
Tracking / Monitoring	Staff initially conduct regular home visits with families who have exited the shelter. Former residents are able to continue accessing services such as psychosocial assistance and youth programs through the program office.
Notes	Residents often feel insecure because of the open nature of the shelter. The shelter is not able to provide differentiated services for vulnerable populations due to a lack of resources, though staff have identified this need.

Challenges and Strategies

Across the many types of shelters surveyed in this report, Human Rights Center researchers observed an extremely high level of professionalism and commitment of staff to the populations they serve. Staff members work long hours, with minimal staffing and resources, to provide shelter and care to survivors of displacement and sexual and gender-based violence. Many staff of shelter programs visited were taking the initiative to engage in policy advocacy, provide livelihood activities, and follow up with former residents even though those activities were often outside their official scope of work and program budgets.

Human Rights Center researchers also found among the various shelter staff members interviewed tremendous empathy for and a sense of solidarity with the people they served. Many shelter staff emphasized the importance of treating survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and displacement with kindness, humility, and respect. One staff member at a high-risk IDP shelter, for example, spoke movingly of the need for professionals to overcome feelings that they are somehow different and better than those they serve:

“You have to leave behind a lot of things they teach you. When one is a professional, they put you in another place. The victims are there, and you are the professional, an object of intervention. We’ve always wanted to leave behind those paradigms. We feel the same as the people. And we feel that we are victims [of the conflict] as well.”

Staff reported a deep satisfaction with their work since they enjoyed the personal relationships they formed with residents and the personal growth they experienced. Residents of domestic violence shelters generally reported positive experiences with the programs visited, having obtained social support and a newfound sense of empowerment and self-worth.

Staff and residents of the different shelters studied in Colombia identified several key challenges in their situations that seemed to cut across shelter types as well as some that were more specific to particular models, contexts, or populations. The variety of challenges include those related to security, service provision, emotional stress, transition planning, and funding constraints, among others. Shelter staff and residents also highlighted strategies they are using to address some of these difficulties that may have wider applicability.

CHALLENGES

1. Resident Security
2. Staff Security
3. Shelter Options
4. Emotional Impact of Shelter Work on Staff
5. Residents’ Unmet Needs
6. Transition Planning
7. Funding and Resource Constraints
8. Community Engagement and Awareness
9. Coordination among Shelters and State Entities
10. Community Host Systems and Their Replication
11. The Culture of Silence

1. Resident Security

While security is a concern in all shelters, many domestic violence shelters have well-developed security protocols and are set up in confidential locations, as are shelters designed for the high-risk IDP population. By contrast, both residents and staff believe shelters open to the general displaced population to be the least secure. The problem is in part structural: it is fairly straightforward to keep perpetrators of domestic violence out of shelters because typically their victims have identified them. Recognizing armed actors who are party to the conflict and bent on further attacks, however, may not be so easy. Furthermore, because IDP shelters typically operate in areas with high numbers of the displaced, those attackers can blend in with the general population and more easily gain access to shelters and target victims inside. One resident expressed the resulting anxiety this way:

“I am scared because I realize that this place is a shelter, and any displaced person can enter, so it would be easy for the people that are looking for my family to arrive. They can also go to the UAO, ask where the displaced stay, and come here. This is why I do not feel safe here and why I am scared.”

Residents who said they did feel safe in their general IDP shelter were nonetheless concerned for their safety after they left. A number of residents of IDP shelters said they were afraid for their lives and concerned that they would not be able to support themselves in the absence of secure living options for them. As one resident of a high-risk displacement shelter remarked:

“Yes, I feel safe, but we will have to leave. Once I leave, it is my responsibility. Even through the years, I venture outside with escorts and everything, but I go out in fear.”

One survivor further emphasized the importance of long-term solutions in addition to meeting immediate security needs:

“I know that they can’t touch me because I am in the hands of the state . . . and this [knowledge] gives me a certain measure of security. I’ve never felt unprotected in any moment. But security is not enough. We need solutions.”

Some survivors, especially those who have experienced multiple displacements, said that they did not feel safe anywhere in the country and that they believe the only option available to them is to leave the country. However, many displaced Colombians who did migrate to neighboring countries continue to experience insecurity, and resettlement to a third country is an extremely limited option.

Most residents commented that they did not feel comfortable seeking assistance from the police and expressed a mistrust of government institutions in general, though a few survivors identified a shelter’s affiliation with the state and coordination with the police as a reason that they felt safe where they were. For those who had been high-risk victims of persecution by the state itself, however, having access to nongovernmental housing options was essential.

In addition to concerns about being housed with armed actors, some IDP residents expressed a feeling of insecurity in the neighborhoods in which their shelter was located. Other survivors were con-

Dorm room at a general shelter serving internally displaced persons.



cerned about coexistence with a diverse group of residents. Many survivors spoke of the challenges of getting along with people from other backgrounds and with different habits. In shelters for the general IDP population, some instances of drug use and child abuse were mentioned, which were sources of stress and concern for survivors. However, serious or disruptive conflicts between residents were rare at shelters.

When it came to security strategies, many shelter residents identified a high level of confidentiality about the shelter’s location as a major contributor to their feelings of safety and security. Well-developed security protocols, including twenty-four-hour guards and restricted outings and visits, were also mentioned as being important. IDPs in traditional low-security facilities understandably said they felt threatened knowing that their persecutors might be among the shelter residents and that their shelter could easily be located by armed actors. One shelter staff member also echoed this problem:

“They can be a victim of someone who we are providing services to here because we don’t know who is the victim and who is the perpetrator.”

Residents of general and high-security facilities alike identified the need for restrictive admission criteria to assure safety. In response to this need, all but one of the general displacement shelters visited by Human Rights Center staff did not allow the entry of single men. However, IDP shelters surveyed did not conduct any additional screening, a practice that left them vulnerable to armed actors who might be among the sheltered women or be men traveling with other family members.

Many residents or staff at shelters housing either high-risk or general displaced victims described experiences in which armed actors came looking for residents or drove by in dark cars with escorts. When asked, staff members who reported such an incident stated they believed these actors to be paramilitaries, although the Colombian government claims that paramilitary groups no longer exist. According to shelter staff, residents, and key informants, armed groups look for specific displaced persons because of the possibility that they could testify against them.

Residents recommended more stringent eligibility requirements for stays in IDP shelters as an important strategy to prevent the entry of armed actors and others with negative behaviors such as drug use. Tighter entry requirements, some residents pointed out, might also prevent those who were not displaced from using a facility whose housing and services were intended for victims of the conflict.

While the mobility of and visits to residents are typically tightly controlled in domestic violence and high-risk IDP shelters, communication about and disclosure of a shelter location is, of course, harder to control. Most shelters focus on educating residents about self-protection and allow residents to keep their personal cell phones. Residents are expected to keep their whereabouts completely confidential, though doing this is more of a challenge in the case of domestic violence shelters, and there have been security breaches. In shelters for the displaced, some staff members and survivors reported having their phone calls intercepted by armed actors, a situation that presents another risk for residents with cell phones. At shelters that had not experienced security breaches, staff, like residents themselves, typically identified the confidentiality of the shelter location as the primary reason for success in that area. One notable exception is the community host domestic violence shelter in Medellín, whose staff said that community knowledge about the nature of the host homes had prevented perpetrators from reaching their intended victims. Community members who knew a victim's whereabouts, for example, were able to warn the host family in time to prevent a security breach.

A special exception to this pattern of security breaches and concern about the safety of shelter residents is the government shelters for high-risk victims of the conflict: they rarely experience security breaches since the level of security is very high, including police patrols and armed escorts for visits and appointments off-site. However, these shelters are only available to individuals who have an active protection route in process, a situation that means that the Prosecutor, or *Fiscalía*, or the National Protection Unit is evaluating their claims for protection. If their claims are rejected, they must leave the shelter. Additionally, the particularly high level of security in these shelters often engenders residents' feelings of being locked in or imprisoned as their movements and participation in life outside the shelter are severely restricted. Aversion to this lack of freedom, including their limited ability to participate in education and livelihood opportunities, deters many IDPs who are under imminent threat from seeking shelter, and they remain within the wider community. Some residents interviewed, though, spoke of friends or colleagues who had been murdered after they had decided not to move to a shelter for high-risk victims.

2. Staff Security

Some staff in both domestic violence and IDP shelters reported feeling safe in their work, but others expressed concern. Many acknowledged the risks but described how they had learned to live with those risks and operate under stressful conditions. As one staff person put it:

“One learns how to live in a situation of crisis and emergency and risk. One normalizes it, but the risk remains.”

While the community host system is regarded by the staff at the program visited by the Human Rights Center as a successful and replicable model, some host families expressed concerns about their own safety since they were opening up their homes to a person in a volatile situation and were often

not equipped to provide a high level of security. One host woman spoke of getting butterflies in her stomach each time a resident arrived; another host reported once having been attacked by a resident who was using drugs.

Staff at domestic violence shelters, like the survivors themselves, have to contend with the risk of aggression both from abusers and from armed groups or criminal gangs with which some abusers may be affiliated. Staff of these shelters also face risks when assisting women who live in areas controlled by armed groups or when operating in those areas themselves. Staff at IDP shelters, like residents themselves, have to contend with situations in which armed actors come looking for residents or in which armed actors themselves are hidden among the residents being housed.

Staff at the few shelters for community leaders, witnesses, and informants who are considered to be in danger of imminent physical harm because of their high-profile roles similarly face some danger should they be confronted by perpetrators. These shelters, though, as mentioned, are designed to provide a higher level of security than other shelter types. At the opposite extreme, because shelters for the “general” displaced population in Colombia are not designed to provide true protection, just accommodation and food, their staff are more vulnerable and often do not feel safe. This is the challenge of providing shelter in the midst of an ongoing conflict.

One emerging protection strategy that may help to address this concern is to use some of the shelter organization’s funds to provide shelter to IDPs in hotels or apartments—a more secure alternative to readily discovered IDP shelters. An additional benefit of this strategy is that those members of vulnerable groups not comfortable in shelters open to the general displaced population may be housed with others in a similar situation or from a similar background. In the case of IDP-3, an income-generating program serving indigenous women who have fled to Bogotá, for example, program staff often temporarily house program participants together in apartments or hotels in the city. However, one drawback to independent living arrangements is a lack of clear regulations and security protocols. In one instance at IDP-3, for example, an armed actor came to the office looking for someone being sheltered. In that case, the only mechanism residents had to protect themselves was a locked gate. Fortunately, staff were able to turn the armed actor away without any trouble.

3. Shelter Options

Based on interviews with residents, staff, and key informants, Human Rights Center researchers identified the need to increase shelter options for IDPs fleeing from sexual and gender-based violence. Available shelters are not effective in meeting the specific needs of this population due to their limited accessibility or security, and in some areas there are no shelter options at all.

Staff and residents, for example, pointed out a major gap in protection in Colombia: there are no domestic violence shelters located in rural areas. They recommended locating shelters in more remote areas so that survivors do not have to flee to cities in order to receive protection. Staff at the community host shelter, which houses women in a rural community just outside of Medellín, explained that it is easier to keep victims safe in rural areas since they are less likely to encounter their perpetrators far from their homes. A peaceful rural environment was also found to be helpful to a survivor’s psychological well-being and healing process.

The importance of differential assistance to specific populations was also pointed out by residents, especially in the case of IDP women, many of whom may have suffered sexual violence at the hands of armed actors. There are at present no programs specifically designed to meet the needs of displaced survivors fleeing from sexual and gender-based violence, and few IDP shelters are particularly attuned to their needs.

Another gap in protection is that of providing shelter for displaced people fleeing actions of the Colombian armed forces or paramilitaries. These individuals are not able to officially register as IDPs and are thus ineligible for government-funded shelter or other IDP benefits. Nongovernmental shelters are able to fill a bit of this void, but a major need for shelter and protection for this population remains. An NGO staff member remarked:

“Fundamentally we responded to the urgent need of those being horribly victimized, above all a victimization by the state. The state sponsored and participated in the violations and acts of the paramilitaries. And in many acts of disappearance, the state with their armed forces were protagonists. They were responsible.”

Many IDPs are at risk even if they do meet the requirements for participation in government protection programs. As previously mentioned, general IDP shelters are easy to access, and residents there often do not feel safe. There is considerable need for secure, confidential shelter options for a larger segment of the IDP population.

Key informants also emphasized the lack of formal shelter mechanisms for sexual and gender-based violence survivors, a situation that drives most of those in need to rely on their family networks and often to move to another city or department to seek shelter and safety. In some cities and department capitals, displaced people from the same rural communities will take each other in even if they had not previously been part of each other’s immediate social networks.

4. Emotional Impact of Shelter Work on Staff

Many shelter staff reported getting a great deal of satisfaction from the knowledge that they were providing needed emergency shelter and services. That sense of accomplishment was well captured by one staff member in this way:

“There are cases that make you say: ‘This really works, this makes things possible, this really helps to ensure rights, really helps women.’ Seeing cases like this is what compels you to continue. It’s gratifying to see that this type of service, the model we follow, really works.”

Many also remarked on the positive relationships they had formed with residents and mentioned feeling that their work was a constant process of learning and growing, making them better people and strengthening their outside relationships. One person explained:

“We’ve created this space as a life project. We are more than staff, those of us who work here. So we have a kind of fraternity, and we transmit that to those we serve.”

Carrying the emotional burden both of not being able to do more to help the people they care for and of the difficult personal stories of the residents, though, presents a challenge for shelter staff. While vicariously experiencing such trauma, it can be difficult for staff to maintain the positive outlook and strength needed to provide support to residents. One shelter coordinator, herself displaced by conflict-related violence, was retraumatized after hearing so many stories similar to her own while working at a displacement shelter:

“After all that I had lived through, I hadn’t spoken to anyone about it. And then I was taking in all these horrible stories from the families that came here. And I remembered all that I had experienced. And at night I would see the movie of exactly what I had lived over and over.”

Because of this trauma, she developed significant medical problems and had to take a leave of absence, during which she worked on learning self-care strategies that have enabled her to continue her work without doing damage to herself.

Many shelter service providers felt simultaneously inspired and exhausted by their work. Nearly every shelter worker interviewed identified psychosocial support for shelter staff as a pressing need, something that most shelter programs do not provide, and related stories of feeling overwhelmed and emotionally taxed. Limited resources made their work more difficult, they said, and the addition of staff members not only would lighten their load but also would help their organization provide better services.

5. Residents’ Unmet Needs

Shelter residents identified a number of unmet needs, but they acknowledged that this deficiency was due to a lack of resources, not to a lack of the staff’s will or understanding. Access to health care and education for their children were central concerns, along with the limited materials they would have with which to start a new life and their restricted viable options for housing and livelihood after leaving the shelter.

In all shelter categories, medical care is difficult for residents to access, and many said their medical needs, especially for emergency treatment and medications, often went unmet. Most of the shelters studied have a first-aid kit on-site but do not provide any other medical services in-house. Both



Mural brightening the wall of a shelter for individuals displaced by the conflict.



Children's play area at a general shelter for internally displaced persons.

officially registered IDPs and survivors of domestic violence are eligible for publicly subsidized health care. However, the process of actually obtaining this care, especially urgently needed medications or consultation with a specialist, can be lengthy.

Another difficulty residents of all types of shelters described was a lack of educational options for their children. "I feel very safe," one shelter resident said. "The only thing that worries me is the education of my children. Because of that, I don't know whether to stay here or not." In some domestic violence and high-risk IDP shelters, children are not allowed to go to school for fear of their abduction or other harm that could be inflicted on them by persecutors. In shelters where children's attendance at school is feasible, some parents said they did not have the necessary resources for school supplies, books, and uniforms.

Limited access to education for their children was consistently mentioned as a source of frustration to survivor parents, some of whom had seen their children remain out of school for over a year. At some IDP shelters, the stay is often so short that it does not make sense to enroll children in school until the residents have settled in a more permanent location.

The concern residents expressed over inadequate materials with which to start a new life took several different forms. One resident of a general IDP shelter, for example, remarked how incredibly difficult it had been to arrive at the shelter with nothing and to leave just as empty handed. While some of the shelters surveyed provide residents with in-kind donations or vouchers to purchase household supplies, not all do. Having some belongings to take with her and help her start a new life would have made a big difference in her case, she said:

"I have nothing. Everything is loaned to me. Everything. You enter that room and everything there, everything is theirs. I have nothing, no blanket, nothing."

Some residents suggested that assistance with payment of the first month's rent would also give them a big boost in beginning their lives anew. Psychosocial support was also identified as being of fundamental importance, and survivors recommended that shelters continue such support after the service period ended. Residents expressed concern about work possibilities as well. Not all of the shelters studied permit survivors to work, out of concern for their security. And some that do permit

residents to work do not provide child care, making it particularly difficult for a working resident to become financially self-sufficient.

6. Transition Planning

The nature of planning for a resident's transition from shelter to the community varies widely from one type of shelter to the next in Colombia. For those displacement shelters that have a short average length of stay, transition planning often amounts simply to educating residents about their immediate options and any services and benefits to which they may be entitled. At other shelters considerably more help is available to residents.

Central to transition planning at all shelters are housing and employment, both of which pose significant challenges for survivors of conflict-related and intrafamily violence. In addition to limited resources with which to pay rent, discrimination against IDPs contributes to their difficulty. Most shelters provide some financial assistance to those who exit, typically enough money either to pay one month of rent or to travel to join family members.

Staff are usually reluctant to send exiting residents to other shelters. Reasons include a lack of such options, the dubious quality of some shelters, and a desire to help residents become independent. It is rare for survivors to stay at a shelter more than once, but occasionally survivors of domestic violence who are threatened or attacked by their abusers again after leaving the shelter will seek that haven again.

For residents of high-security IDP shelters, exit planning is not always in the hands of shelter staff since those survivors may be entitled to participate in a state protection program or to be taken to a confidential location by another nonprofit agency. For those exiting these high-security shelters on their own, staff typically assist with the first month's rent and help residents to find jobs and apartments. If it is unclear whether a victim of the conflict will enter a state protection program, an uncertainty that can last for months, staff work on a contingency plan. For the most part, high-risk survivors do not have faith that the government protection programs are easily accessible and functioning. In other cases, the programs may not exist even though they are mandated by law. Many high-risk victims of the conflict felt that relocation or resettlement to another country was their only hope for safety. However, this action rarely happens.⁹³ In the absence of a long-term solution by the government, high-risk victims are often shuttled from one shelter to another.

Most residents of both domestic violence and IDP shelters end up relocating with family, whether nearby or in another part of the country. Indeed, the first step in most shelters' transition plans is to identify a survivor's family and social networks. One exception to this is IDP-4 in Pasto, where staff report that residents typically stay in Pasto since the cost of living is low, and the city is fairly welcoming to IDPs. Although it is less common than relocation with family, some residents of domestic violence shelters return to their abusers once they leave. Shelter staff attribute this outcome primarily to economic dependency and a lack of employment options for women with little education and work experience. Those with employment sometimes find their own apartments.

Displaced persons who do not move in with relatives typically find housing on the margins of large cities where rent is inexpensive, but security there is precarious. Ideally, many displaced residents would like to return to their home villages, but no one interviewed believed doing that was a safe option. Displaced persons interviewed spoke of the difficulty of leaving their rural land for the city, which made it hard for them to thrive in shelters and to contemplate exit scenarios that typically involve living in marginalized areas of large cities. One person expressed her dissatisfaction this way:

“My daughters, a year ago, had such a different concept of life than they do now. And here we are vegetating. And when we leave here, if we stay in a city, we’ll still be vegetating. Killing ourselves! Killing ourselves to survive.”

All but one of the shelters studied offer follow-up services to residents after they leave. The exception is IDP-2, where the volume of residents served is too large for follow-up to be feasible and where stays are so short that lasting relationships are seldom formed between staff and residents. At other shelters, though, ongoing assistance ranged in duration from one or two home visits to years of intensive follow-up. One staff member described their process for follow-up:

“We become very close to the families, to their problems, to their needs. There is a lot of trust and friendship. They call us and let us know that they’re well and they’re in such and such place, [and] they’re doing better. Or we call them to see if they need support.”

Of course, follow-up with shelter populations can be a challenge since survivors frequently move from one home, and one town, to another. Even the programs that had short follow-up periods, though, made an effort to encourage residents to visit and to take advantage of the continuing services offered. While host families are not supposed to remain in contact with former resident survivors, in some cases such a strong friendship is formed that the parties maintain a relationship—another source of support for a woman after she leaves the program.

Nearly all residents said they could benefit from a longer service and follow-up period. Shelter staff also recommended placing an emphasis on follow-up services, especially long-term services to those most in need among survivors of domestic violence and conflict-related violence.

Residents of the different types of shelters typically expressed satisfaction with staff attempts to help with transition, but they said that those efforts did not change the reality of the employment and security concerns they knew they faced. Residents of the domestic violence shelters surveyed reported being satisfied with the very thorough exit process and follow-up service they received, including personal assistance with their moves and inspection of their new residences for their security. Although many residents of high-risk IDP shelters, like residents at domestic violence shelters, found the level of service at the shelters to be quite high, they too remained concerned about long-term protection and livelihoods options. Aside from the serious protection problems the displaced have to contend with, discrimination against displaced persons and, often, their lack of skills appropriate to the urban labor

market make it particularly difficult for the displaced to find employment. As a result, some become dependent on state assistance should they qualify for it.

Some residents mentioned that they do not like the feeling of dependency they have while residing in a shelter and stated that they would like more help with vocational training and securing employment. This situation was particularly true in shelters for high-risk victims of the conflict, in which the feeling of being locked in was pervasive among residents.

Among shelter staff, opinions differed on the appropriate length of service and resident dependency on shelter programs. While frustration with the difficulty of helping residents find permanent housing and employment was universal, some shelter staff felt that keeping residents, whether displaced persons or victims of domestic violence, at the shelter for longer than a few weeks or months would engender dependency and ultimately make it more difficult for residents to become self-sufficient. Correspondingly, many staff members identified the need for an increased focus on income-generating activities and their psychosocial as well as economic benefits. As one staff member expressed it:

“If someone doesn’t have enough to eat, if someone doesn’t have a place to sleep, . . . you can’t speak to them about human rights. Guaranteeing human rights is ensuring that they have food, a good house, and that they can care for their children. Satisfying basic needs is realizing fundamental rights.”

7. Funding and Resource Constraints

Inadequate funding for shelter programs, not surprisingly, was found to be a universal challenge. Lack of adequate resources not only affects the provision of needed services (such as long-term follow-up and enhanced security) to residents but also can cause staff burnout and frustration, especially in the rare cases in which they have to turn a survivor away from the shelter.

As the Colombian government promotes the idea that the conflict is winding down, the international community is beginning to shift its priorities elsewhere. Key informants and shelter staff reported to Human Rights Center researchers that many international organizations are shutting down offices in Colombia in response to a perception that the need for assistance to IDPs is lessening. These same interviewees stated plainly that the need is not decreasing and that, unfortunately, the conflict is still going strong. Safe shelter for IDPs in Colombia is already such a scarce resource that a decreasing commitment by the international community to the displaced in Colombia could be devastating.

Reliance on government funding presents a challenge to many shelters for domestic violence victims and IDPs in Colombia. As government administrations change, contracts with shelter service providers are often temporarily suspended or delayed, as was the case at IDP-1, DV-1, and DV-2. Such delays result in a halt in critical services that may last months. Often commitment to protecting these vulnerable populations rests with a particular individual in a government body, and changes in leadership can cause programs to disappear altogether. Institutionalization of these programs and diversification of funding sources on the part of shelter providers could prevent this.

The programs that had best weathered such storms were those that received funding from a diverse array of sources, such as the Catholic Church, international human rights organizations, and

foreign governments. Staff from those organizations shared the corresponding recommendation that shelters invest staff time and resources into raising funds from outside sources to give themselves greater resiliency in hard times.

8. Community Engagement and Awareness

Few of the shelters studied reported engaging in meaningful consultation with their surrounding communities in the creation of the programs, in some cases due to the confidential nature of the shelters. It seems there is an inherent tension between confidentiality and community support, and some shelters mentioned struggling to find the right balance between the two. The Medellín and Bogotá mayor's offices both have branches that focus on gender issues, and these entities participate in roundtables with NGOs and other government branches, a practice that may have influenced the creation of some city-sponsored shelters.

In the case of IDP-4 in Pasto, the larger displaced community that lives in the vicinity of the shelter looks to the IDP shelter as a kind of community center for the displaced. However, the shelter is not able to fulfill this role since shelter residents do not feel safe having the wider community being able to access the shelter space. Since it is hard to know who is who, shelter residents would prefer to have the space restricted to residents only. Shelter staff said they aim to open a community center for this population in the neighborhood, but a lack of resources has prevented them from doing so thus far.

In the nation as a whole, the efforts of the government to educate its own personnel and the public at large about displacement and domestic and sexual violence have had limited success. A low level of knowledge among the general public and government officials about shelter programs for domestic violence victims and IDPs prevents programs from reaching capacity and bars many victims from receiving needed services. In addition, since there is so little shelter space currently available, it is not widely known that this resource exists, both for victims of domestic violence and for the displaced, a situation that further exacerbates the problem. A general culture of silence around domestic violence and conflict-related violence also contributes to low referral levels. Many shelter staff members and key informants mentioned the need for widespread educational programs about shelters and the issue of sexual and gender-based violence in general, especially those that would target government personnel.

9. Coordination among Shelters and State Entities

Staff also expressed frustration with the slow, often incoherent workings of the public entities that serve the displaced and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, making it a challenge to provide quality services. Working with state institutions to find a secure long-term solution for high-risk victims is a specific challenge that staff identified, noting that it can take over a year to find out whether a family will be accepted into a formal state protection program. A number of shelters (from all three categories) visited by Human Rights Center researchers were experiencing a disruption in service at the time of the visits due to a delay in the renewal of their government contracts. The lack of education of government personnel about sexual and gender-based violence is a major obstacle to serving this population, and as a result, shelters are often not at or near capacity although staff contend that the need is there.

There is also little or no coordination between shelters that serve IDPs and those that serve survivors of domestic violence in Colombia. They are seen as two completely different protection needs and are governed by different sets of laws. In Colombia, gender-based violence is understood to be domestic violence against women. Sexual violence in the context of the conflict is largely a hidden phenomenon, and domestic violence among IDPs is also understudied, and survivors are underserved.

Although the level of coordination with other organizations was found to be fairly low among the shelters studied, those shelters that actively coordinate and consult with other organizations urge others to do the same. Staff at those shelters found that relying on other organizations had helped them provide a greater number of services to their residents through referrals, and they also found that in times of trouble it helped to have a larger network of organizations advocating with them to ensure that the needs of survivors remained a priority.

10. Community Host Systems and Their Replication

Community host families at DV-2 deal with the difficulty of adapting to new residents in their homes every six weeks, some of whom come from very different backgrounds and have different habits, customs, and behaviors. One host woman spoke of her struggles with the difficult behaviors of children who come from difficult and unstable situations and told how those behaviors can have a negative effect on the dynamics within her own family.

However, staff and host families with the community host shelter, along with the government personnel funding the program, suggest replicating that model in other places. Some of those individuals have previously worked at or managed traditional shelters, and they identified a number of ways in which this model better serves women victims of domestic violence. The community host model allows for individual attention and a home setting, which, according to staff and host families, promote healing and increase security. That model also provides needed income for the local families that host survivors, cultivates a network of survivor advocates among host families, and may bring some survivors their first exposure to intrafamily relationships that do not involve violence or aggression. As one staff member explained:

“I don’t want to criticize institutions because they provide many things, like the protection of life and professional assistance, but what they offer is not as affectionate, friendly, and familiar as a shelter home. What our residents generally say is that they’ve found a family, a family different from the one they have.”

That view was echoed by someone who had fled domestic violence and was sheltered in the community host program:

“It was like finding myself again and knowing that I am capable of many things. I can go out and lift my face up and not have it be noticed . . . that I am an abused woman . . . because I always felt like less than the rest.”

Reports by residents, staff, and host families indicate that the community host model operated in Medellín has been highly successful. Medellín, however, the only city in Colombia that currently boasts such a program, is a city with a strong commitment to women’s issues and is comparatively wealthy



Children's bedroom in a community host family home in Medellín.

by Colombian standards. According to staff in the Secretariat of Women in the Medellín mayor's office, the office had been working on this issue for ten years. Effective organization among women's groups in the city pushed the government to place more importance on the issue, and that, together with visionary leadership from the then-head of the Secretariat of Women, eventually made the shelter program possible.

Government officials from other parts of Colombia, including Cartagena, Bogotá, and Pasto, have visited Medellín to study and potentially replicate the community host model. Human Rights Center researchers did not uncover any information about the existence of such a model, or plans to create one, in Cartagena or Bogotá. In Pasto, a network of community host shelter homes did exist for a time, but it was suspended in 2011 because of lack of commitment from the mayor's office. The managing NGO reported that a significant challenge was a stipulation from the mayor's office that the program could only house women from Pasto, a requirement that made it difficult to serve many IDPs from other areas. However, where there is both political will and adequate funding, the community host model appears to be a promising option for providing both protection and rehabilitation to survivors.

11. *The Culture of Silence*

A culture of silence around conflict-related and domestic violence in Colombia particularly affects the provision of shelter to those survivors. Many women feel that the violence perpetrated against them is their fault and are not aware that there are services and protections available to them. For those reasons, they are afraid to formally denounce their perpetrators. This situation sometimes creates an additional barrier to receiving shelter since women are required to denounce their perpetrators in order to enter government-run domestic violence shelters. These shelters are generally underutilized because women victims either do not know they exist or are not willing or able to follow the process necessary for entry.

Key informants confirmed that the culture of silence around sexual and gender-based violence is a primary challenge in the provision of safe shelter for survivors. While some progress has been made in recent years, cultural norms that blame the victims persist. The advocacy of Colombian women's groups has helped change the perception of a woman's role in society in recent years, but Colombia remains a very *machista*, or male chauvinist, country. Because of this situation, reports of domestic violence or rape used as a weapon in the conflict are very low. Not only do women themselves often see domestic violence as an acceptable part of a relationship, but also the authorities responsible for receiving reports and treating victims have been known to tell women to go home and work it out with their partners. In the case of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, rape and sexual violence are so shameful and are such taboo subjects that they are rarely mentioned.

Protection for Marginalized Victim Groups

Another key challenge lies in providing adequate shelter options for certain traditionally neglected groups of sexual and gender-based violence survivors. As previously discussed, restrictive admission criteria were identified by residents of high and low-security facilities as necessary in order to ensure security. Accordingly, only one of the general displacement shelters where Human Rights Center staff conducted interviews admitted single men. However, this policy does not always prevent armed actors from entering IDP shelters and also creates a protection gap for men.

In addition, when people in Colombia speak of gender-based violence, they are talking about violence against women, and the two terms are used interchangeably. *Violencia de género* or *violencia basada en género* is almost always interpreted to mean *violencia intrafamiliar*—intrafamily, or domestic, violence. As a result, men have few options for shelter, whether they are victims of sexual and gender-based violence or victims of the conflict, as most displacement shelters do not admit men without families due to concerns about their potential involvement with an armed group.

Shelter provision to sexual and gender-based violence survivors from indigenous communities also presents unique challenges. In the case of IDP-3, an organization that provides income-generation activities for displaced indigenous women and that sometimes houses these women off-site, staff reported that the neighbors protested the location of the organization in their neighborhood and raised concerns that program participants would steal from them and disrupt the peace. Neighborhood residents apparently even protested the establishment of the program in the mayor's office, another move program staff attribute to discrimination against both indigenous and displaced persons in Colombia. One staff member explained the situation in the following way:

"An indigenous woman is discriminated against in four ways: for being a woman, for being indigenous, for being ugly—because they say we're ugly, the indigenous women—and for being displaced. Four times discriminated."

One strategy that addresses the lack of differential attention for vulnerable populations is that of nonprofit organizations serving the displaced using some of their funding to provide shelter to IDPs in hotels or apartments as an alternative to IDP shelters. Groups that would not feel comfortable in

shelters that are available to the general displaced population are open to being housed with others in a similar situation or from a similar background. In the case of IDP-3, indigenous women who have arrived in Bogotá fleeing the conflict in their territories find a community of women in similar circumstances and live together temporarily in apartments or hotels in the city as they work together on income-generating projects and cultural preservation activities. These are women who would not feel comfortable being housed in a traditional shelter setting or with the general IDP population. Realizing the magnitude of this need among indigenous women, staff at IDP-3 are working to create sleeping space in their main office and hope to purchase a house where these women can live long-term. This model has the advantage of addressing two problems of traditional IDP shelters at once: the lack of specialized attention given to vulnerable populations as well as the relative lack of security in shelters open to the general IDP population.

Other vulnerable populations, such as LGBT survivors and those with medical and mental health needs, also lack shelter options in both domestic violence shelters and IDP shelters. The lack of funding and lack of political will contribute to the dearth of options for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence who have special needs. One homosexual male who had been displaced by the conflict described the victimization he had experienced in mainstream IDP shelters and felt that he did not have any options for safe shelter.

V. CONCLUSION: OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Operating in the midst of ongoing conflict and in a culture of silence about sexual and gender-based violence, shelters serving the displaced and survivors of domestic violence in Colombia confront considerable challenges. Nonetheless, Human Rights Center researchers found shelter staff to possess remarkable dedication and tenacity, even in the face of scarce resources and tenuous security. Shelter residents, even when critical of certain aspects of their shelter experiences, expressed appreciation of staff efforts and showed an understanding of the systemic issues that make the provision of safe shelter such a challenge in Colombia.

It is inherently difficult to protect people while armed conflict is active. After nearly fifty years of battle between armed groups within Colombia's borders, the Colombian government yearns to lead the country into a post-conflict phase while still struggling to resolve a war that has not yet ended. This tension is reflected in efforts such as the Victims and Land Restitution Law of 2011 that have emphasized restitution and reconciliation. According to key informants interviewed by Human Rights Center researchers, this post-conflict focus can come at the expense of individual security since IDPs are often targeted by armed groups when they attempt to reclaim their land. It also shifts the discussion away from the immediate physical protection of those who have been victimized or who are at risk of violence and gives the impression that the conflict is over.

Whether due to a lack of focus on the physical security of the displaced population or simply to scarce resources, general IDP shelters in Colombia are relatively few and mostly serve as temporary refuges for the recently displaced or those moving from one part of the country to another. This situation is due in part to the fact that IDPs feel safer in communities where it is easier to blend in and not be marked as displaced. However, crime in these marginalized urban areas is high, and armed groups continue to be active within them. Security is precarious for most displaced persons, but very few have access to a formal state protection mechanism.

The few shelters that exist in Colombia for survivors of domestic violence are quite successful in protecting and serving those in their care. However, the culture of silence that surrounds sexual and gender-based violence in Colombia makes it a challenge to connect survivors with resources, even where they exist. Restrictive entrance requirements and survivors' general lack of knowledge about shelters create even more of a divide between those fleeing intrafamily violence and the programs and services that can help them.

The systemic challenges that underlie both of these phenomena—displacement and sexual and gender-based violence—collide when it comes to providing shelter for individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence in the context of the Colombian armed conflict. The insecurity that plagues many shelters for the displaced prevents those IDPs who have fled sexual and gender-based violence or experienced it during displacement from turning to those shelters for help. Meanwhile, cultural

norms that compel a displaced survivor of sexual and gender-based violence to stay silent or face consequences may keep her from reporting the crime and receiving protection in a domestic violence shelter. Those survivors of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence who do find themselves in either domestic violence or displacement shelters will typically find that their particular needs are not being addressed despite the best intentions of staff. The recommendations that follow seek to address this gap.

Recommendations to the Colombian Government, Shelter Providers, and Donors

1. *Provide specialized protection for displaced persons fleeing from sexual and gender-based violence by adapting existing shelter programs to ensure that they are accessible to and meet the needs of this population.*
2. *Increase shelter options for displaced persons fleeing from sexual and gender-based violence by establishing additional shelters, especially outside of urban areas, and by increasing awareness of available shelter services.*
3. *Increase shelter options for marginalized victim groups by conducting assessments of their protection needs and by developing appropriate services.*

Recommendations to the Colombian Government and Shelter Providers

1. *Improve coordination between government entities and service providers.*

Recommendations to Shelter Providers (Government and Civil Society)

1. *Explore expanding the use of community host systems.*
2. *Provide a higher level of security in IDP shelters.*
3. *Provide psychosocial support to shelter staff.*
4. *Increase focus on livelihood activities.*
5. *Invest time and resources into appropriate follow-up services for residents.*
6. *Evaluate the potential of alternative purpose entities and independent living arrangements.*

Recommendations to Key Stakeholders Involved in Displacement and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Response (including the Colombian Government, the UNHCR, and Civil Society)

1. *Sensitize and train first points of contact within government on sexual and gender-based violence issues, and ensure they have updated information on available shelter options.*
2. *Provide outreach and education to displaced individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence about their legal rights and shelter options.*
3. *Improve collaboration and coordination between shelter systems and key actors involved in sexual and gender-based violence and displacement response.*

Recommendations to the Colombian Government, Shelter Providers, and Donors

1. *Provide specialized protection for displaced individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence by adapting existing shelter programs to ensure that they are accessible to and meet the needs of this population.*

Domestic violence shelters and IDP shelters are not accessible to or effective in meeting the needs of displaced individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence. Domestic violence shelters, which currently provide the most effective support and protection from sexual and

gender-based violence, rarely serve displaced persons. Internally displaced persons are often ineligible for services at domestic violence shelters because the eligibility criteria requires that residents officially denounce their perpetrators and because these shelters typically serve only residents of the cities or departments in which they operate. Further, the UAO, which is often the first point of contact for IDP survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, does not make referrals to domestic violence shelters since they are not viewed as part of the IDP referral network. General IDP shelters do not have adequate security measures in place to protect those fleeing sexual and gender-based violence as perpetrators can easily enter the shelters to seek assistance there. IDP shelters also do not offer specialized support services for those who have suffered from sexual and gender-based violence that occurred in the context of the conflict or once they had been displaced. Specialized services are needed within shelters for those who find themselves at the crossroads of sexual and gender-based violence and displacement.

Government and civil society should adjust the eligibility criteria of domestic violence shelters to increase access for IDPs. In addition, domestic violence shelter providers should collaborate with the UAO to establish a viable referral pathway to these shelters for IDPs fleeing sexual and gender-based violence. The UAO should consider integrating sexual and gender-based violence screening into interview protocols for IDPs seeking assistance to identify survivors and ensure that those fleeing sexual and gender-based violence are referred to domestic violence shelters.

In addition, providers of general IDP shelter should improve security by considering additional measures such as having a twenty-four-hour security guard on-site and keeping the location of the shelter confidential. The UAO should also consider enhancing screening procedures for IDPs seeking assistance to ensure that perpetrators of violence are not referred to IDP shelters for assistance. Shelter providers serving the IDP population should make sexual and gender-based violence support services such as psychosocial support and medical care available to survivors either on-site or through referral.

2. *Increase shelter options for displaced persons fleeing sexual and gender-based violence by establishing additional shelters, especially outside of urban areas, and by increasing awareness of available shelter services.*

Many among the displaced have suffered sexual or gender-based violence, and domestic violence is believed to increase in the context of displacement. Many key informants, shelter staff, and shelter residents reported that for both the displaced and those fleeing from domestic violence, shelter options are few and are mostly limited to major urban areas. Donors should be invested in expanding the network of shelters available in Colombia, with particular focus placed on developing shelters that offer residents confidentiality and security from intrusion.

Further, although not all existing shelters currently operate at capacity, that situation is due not to insufficient need but instead to a lack of knowledge among the survivor populations about shelter that is available. Government and civil society shelter providers should invest time

and resources in activities to educate the community and to increase awareness of available shelter services.

3. *Increase shelter options for marginalized victim groups by conducting assessments of their protection needs and by developing appropriate services.*

Services that are tailored to the needs of specific vulnerable displaced populations are needed in Colombia. Organizations that serve indigenous populations are filling a bit of this gap for that group, but other vulnerable populations, including Afro-Colombians, the elderly, the disabled, the LGBT community, and those with severe mental health needs, remain largely underserved. Assessment of the protection needs and service preferences of these groups should be conducted in order to develop appropriate services. Approaches might include developing specialized shelter services or adapting existing domestic violence shelters and IDP shelters to better meet the needs of these groups.

Recommendations to the Colombian Government and Shelter Providers

- I. *Improve coordination between government entities and service providers.*

The lack of effective coordination between government entities and service providers compromises the provision of shelter services in Colombia. A number of the shelters studied were not operational at the time of fieldwork either because local authorities had not yet renewed an expired contract or because a change in the local government administration had left the continuation of certain programs in doubt. These types of gaps result in frequent suspensions of critical services. Often a program started by one administration is abandoned by the next, and new government staff may not understand the importance of providing shelter or addressing sexual and gender-based violence. Along with making shelter a higher priority, improved coordination between government entities and service providers would ensure more continuous and better shelter services.

Recommendations to Shelter Providers (Government and Civil Society)

- I. *Explore expanding the use of community host systems.*

The community host model that Human Rights Center researchers encountered in Medellín appears to be a promising way to house and support women fleeing domestic violence in some circumstances. Study participants noted that this program model can provide individual attention to survivors, comfort and healing in a home setting, and an environment in which survivors can learn from familial relationships that do not involve violence. A formal shelter structure is appropriate for some domestic violence survivors, such as those at higher risk of harm or those with special needs, and should be a part of a continuum of shelter options. However, the community host model may be a viable alternative for some individuals and should be further studied in Colombia with an eye to possible replication in other parts of the country, including rural areas.

2. *Provide a higher level of security in IDP shelters.*

Given the ongoing nature of Colombia's conflict, shelters for the displaced population must have a high level of security, which is currently lacking in the general IDP shelters. Residents at general (not high-risk) IDP shelters report feeling unsafe due to the possible presence of armed actors in the shelters or in the surrounding areas. Those armed actors may be actively threatening shelter residents. In some cases, displaced persons fleeing opposing groups may be housed in the same shelter as members of the groups they are fleeing, a situation that further exacerbates tensions and fears. Therefore, a shelter model more along the lines of those currently serving victims of domestic violence, with security measures such as on-site security guards and confidential locations, would also be appropriate for displaced populations in Colombia. In addition, appropriate screening protocols, both at the UAO before a person's referral to IDP shelters as well as upon her or his entering the shelter, could be used to improve security and ensure that perpetrators are not admitted into shelters.

3. *Provide psychosocial support to shelter staff.*

Many shelter staff members reported a need for psychosocial support in the workplace. Staff that serve these vulnerable populations not only deal with the severe trauma suffered by their clients but also often work under unsafe conditions. This situation can result in burnout and retraumatization of staff, some of whom are themselves survivors of violence or threats. Provision of psychosocial support would go a long way toward enabling these service providers to successfully and safely continue in their important work.

4. *Increase focus on livelihood activities.*

Many survivors do not have the ability to support themselves and their families once they leave shelter. For this reason, many return to unsafe relationships, neighborhoods, or parts of the country. Displaced persons from rural areas may not have the skills necessary to participate in the urban economy. Many domestic violence survivors do not have the level of education necessary to find a job that will enable them to support their entire family without the financial support of their abusers. Shelter staff and residents recommend providing livelihood activities such as income-generation programs to shelter residents so that they will be more easily able to enter the labor market successfully and become self-sufficient when they leave the shelter. Shelter programs should provide access to livelihood activities either on-site or through referral, depending on program capacity and general length of stay.

5. *Invest time and resources into appropriate follow-up services for residents.*

For those shelters serving residents who remain in the same community, follow-up services should be a priority. Most of the shelters studied by the Human Rights Center provide some level of follow-up services to residents after they leave the shelter. However, in both domestic violence and IDP shelters, staff reported that there are often not sufficient funding and staff time to provide as much attention as survivors need. Such support could both assist former shelter residents in accessing needed services and keep them safe from future threats.

6. *Evaluate the potential of alternative purpose entities and independent living arrangements.*

Some organizations focused on providing other support services to displaced persons, such as income-generating projects and counseling services, occasionally provide shelter to the displaced in apartments or hotels. Many of the people they serve fear for their lives. These organizations fill an important gap since there is a major lack of secure, confidential options for the displaced in Colombia outside of the government protection programs. Some alternative purpose entities that house clients on-site or in independent living arrangements such as IDP-3 are able to provide greater confidentiality than general displacement shelters, but most need to put in place adequate security and referral protocols. Providing support to these organizations so that they can expand and improve their shelter services may be a positive step toward protecting this population.

Recommendations to Key Stakeholders Involved in Displacement and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Response (including the Colombian Government, the UNHCR, and Civil Society)

1. *Sensitize and train first points of contact within government on sexual and gender-based violence issues, and ensure they have updated information on available shelter options.*

The ability of staff at the UAO, the Prosecutor's Office (*Fiscalía*), the Ombudsman's Office (*Defensoría del Pueblo*), the Family Commissions (*Comisarías de Familia*), the Municipal Attorney's Office (*Personería*), and other first points of contact within government to provide shelter referrals is limited by a lack of knowledge of shelter options and resources available. In addition, the sexist and discriminatory attitudes of some officials result in survivors receiving misinformation or being recommended to return to dangerous situations. Greater emphasis on the training and education of the government staff directly involved in serving and protecting IDPs and survivors of domestic violence is needed in order to remedy this problem.

2. *Provide outreach and education to displaced individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence about their legal rights and shelter options.*

Due to their limited knowledge and awareness of the shelter services available to them, individuals who have experienced displacement and sexual and gender-based violence do not fully utilize services, so shelters are rarely at capacity. Although government agencies at the national and municipal level have recently increased education and outreach efforts, the number of individuals seeking shelter services still does not represent the actual need. While all municipalities are required to have a "Service Pathway" (*Ruta de Atención*) for individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence, survivors seldom know where to go obtain support, especially in rural areas and smaller towns. Further, most survivors do not know that they have rights and that they are entitled to certain protections and services under the law, even though DV survivors and registered IDPs are both entitled to housing in some form. Shelter providers and other stakeholders involved in sexual and gender-based violence and displacement response

should provide outreach and education to IDP communities regarding their legal rights and shelter options in order to increase both access to and utilization of shelter services.

3. *Improve collaboration and coordination between shelter systems and key actors involved in sexual and gender-based violence and displacement response.*

There are a general separation and limited coordination between the shelter programs, government entities, and service providers involved in providing protection to individuals fleeing sexual and gender-based violence and those serving internally displaced persons. However, there are many people who find themselves at the crossroads of these two phenomena since conflict and displacement can often increase a person's vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence. Creating a bridge between these two systems and bringing key actors into dialogue are important steps in ensuring that the needs of displaced survivors are effectively addressed through adequate referral and the development of appropriate services to support this population. The Department of Social Prosperity (*Departamento de Prosperidad Social*) (DPS) or the UN Protection Cluster might be a potential coordinating body to facilitate this dialogue.

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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

1. AFRODES: *Asociación Nacional de Afrocolombianos Desplazados* (National Association for Displaced Afro-Colombians)
2. *Casa de la Mujer*
3. *Casa de la Mujer Indígena*
4. CODHES: *La Consultoría Para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento Forzado* (Consultancy for Human Rights and Forced Displacement)
5. *Colombia Diversa*
6. *Defensoría del Pueblo* (Human Rights Ombudsman)
7. *Dejusticia*
8. *Departamento de Prosperidad Social—Unidad de Atención a Víctimas* (Department of Social Prosperity—Victims’ Attention Unit)
9. *Fundeas* (Pasto)
10. GENFAMI: *Fundación para el Desarrollo Integral en Género y Familia* (Foundation for the Development of Gender and the Family)
11. Humanas Colombia: *Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos y Justicia de Género* (Regional Center for Human Rights and Gender Justice)
12. ILSA: *Instituto Latinoamericano por una Sociedad Alternativa* (Latin American Institute for an Alternative Society)
13. Program of Protection of Indigenous Displaced Women’s Rights, Section of Indigenous and Minority Affairs, Colombian Ministry of the Interior
14. Pastoral Social, Conferencia Episcopal Colombiana (Pasto, Ipiales, Bogotá)
15. Profamilia
16. Colombian Red Cross (Pasto)
17. Secretariat of Gender Equality, Government of the Department of Antioquia (Medellín)
18. Secretariat of Women, Medellín Mayor’s Office (Medellín)
19. Secretariat of Health, Government of the Department of Antioquia (Medellín)
20. UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Bogotá, Medellín, and Pasto
21. USAID: The United States Agency for International Development
22. *Vamos Mujer* (Medellín)

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTS

Safe Shelter Interview Questions

Group 1: Safe Shelter Providers (Administrators, Staff, Volunteers)

Prior to or after interview, the following should be noted on interview form:

- Interview date, start / end times, location
- Interviewer name and contact information
- Interviewee assigned identifier (i.e. KE / Main St. / Group 1 / Respondent 1)
- Position (administrator, direct service staff, volunteer, etc.)
- Name of shelter / organization / group providing assistance (for use by HRC staff in data analysis stage only; not to be included in reports unless otherwise requested by the organization)
- Notation as to whether refugee camp, IDP camp, or urban/rural non-camp setting
- Informant gender
- Interpreter name, if applicable
- Others present
- Note any documents / records provided

Pre-Interview Checklist:

- Informed Consent
 - Emphasize that any / all participation is voluntary
 - Explain that the respondent should feel free to choose to skip any question for any reason, or to pause or leave the interview at any time
- Informal introduction
 - Ask for the informant's name, shelter name, and location
 - Do not record the informant's name, but assign identifier (ex. respondent 3)
- Confidentiality:
 - Explain how confidentiality will be maintained, specifically: the respondent's name will not be documented anywhere, the name of the shelter will be recorded for the purposes of data analysis by HRC staff only, and specific shelters will not be referred to by name in the report unless otherwise requested by the organization.
- Check interpretation and comfort with interpreter
- Check comfort with location
- Turn on digital recorder, if interviewee consents

Interview Questions

A. Informant Profile

1. What is your position?
2. What are your primary responsibilities?
3. How long have you worked / volunteered in this position?

B. General Program Information (for shelter administrators / managers only¹)

4. What is the mandate of this program?
5. Who established it? When? Why?
6. Did the local community have any role or input in its design / establishment? Please explain.
7. Who is the managing organization? Is there a separate parent organization?
8. Who funds the shelter program?
9. Do any rules or guidelines govern the operation of this shelter program? If so, please explain.
 - a. Do you have any Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)? (Ask for a copy later.)
 - b. Is there a Code of Conduct for individuals who stay here? (Ask for a copy later.)
10. How many staff work here? What are their positions?
11. What is the maximum capacity of the shelter / shelter space at any one time?
12. How many people are housed here right now (accounting separately for resident staff)?
13. What do you do when someone comes for shelter but you cannot provide it?
14. What coordination, if any, exists between this shelter and other shelters in the community?

C. Population Served

15. How do shelter-seekers learn about this program?
16. Are there formal eligibility criteria for who can stay here? If so, please explain.
(Probe for whether principle resident's children can also stay; gender / age criteria.)
17. Are there any types of people you do *not* house here? (Probe men, boys, LGBTIs, HIV+, elderly, disabled, etc.).
 - a. Is that exclusion an explicit rule, or just a matter of practice?
 - b. For members of groups you do not serve, are you able to refer them anywhere else? If so, where?
18. Of the people staying here right now, how many are fleeing SGBV and how many are fleeing some other kind of harm?
19. Of the people staying here right now, what is the breakdown according to:
 - a. Gender?
 - b. Age? (Under 18, 18–50, over 50)
 - c. Marital status?
 - d. Refugee / IDP status?

¹ These questions are only for shelter managers or administrators only. However, depending on the level of knowledge and experience of direct service/line staff, they may also be able to provide some of the general shelter data. Therefore, questions from Section B can be administered to direct service providers at the discretion of the interviewer.

20. For those fleeing or fearing SGBV, what were the most common forms of SGBV fled / feared?
21. Who are the most common perpetrators in these SGBV cases? Any trends?
 - a. Probe male / female, known / unknown to survivor, members of same community, persons of authority, camp workers, etc.
22. What, if any, alternate protective measures have people tried before coming here?

D. Operation of Shelters / Alternative Mechanisms of Protection

23. Once someone comes here for help, what happens? Can you please briefly explain the process from A to Z? (Probe intake procedure, emergency needs-assessment, admission & transition decisions, medical / police visits, etc.)
24. What is the average length of time a person stays here? Is there a limit?
25. About the shelter space itself: Please describe where your residents stay.

E. Services Provided

26. Please tell me about the services the program provides:
 - a. Housing (Probe shared rooms / beds, assignment to adults v. children, etc.)
 - b. Food
 - c. Medical Care
 - i. How would you describe the physical condition of those seeking shelter when they first arrive here?
 - ii. What, if any, medical care is provided in-house? (Probe pregnancy test, HIV, etc.)
 - iii. What medical care needs are referred out? To where?
 - iv. Do you think it's possible that some medical needs are not being addressed either in-house or through referral? If so, please explain.
 - d. Counseling
 - i. How would you describe the mental health condition of those seeking shelter upon arrival here? How is this assessed?
 - ii. What, if any, psychosocial support and counseling is available to people staying here? Please describe it.
 - iii. How long can an individual receive counseling?
 - iv. Are there options for people to continue to access counseling after they leave here? (i.e. access to program counselors here after they leave, referrals to community-based counselors, etc.)
 - e. Education for Children
 - i. What percentage of the housed children were attending school before coming to stay here?
 - ii. Are children able to access educational services while staying here? If so, please describe.
 - f. Education / Vocational Training / Income Generating Activities for Adults

- g. Movement / mobility
 - i. Please describe any restrictions on residents' movement outside the shelter space.
 - h. Communication
 - i. Are there any specific rules regarding residents' communication with people outside the shelter? If so, what are they?
 - ii. Probe use of cell phones, what information is confidential, etc.
27. Is the shelter/organization connected to other supportive services or resources? If so, how?
28. What are the most common challenges that for people staying in this shelter? How do you help them deal with these challenges?
29. What do those who stay here need most that you cannot currently provide?

F. Security

30. Do you feel residents are safe here? Please explain safety measures and remaining risks.
31. Does the general community know that this building / space is being used to provide safe shelter to survivors of SGBV (and possibly others?)
- a. Is there any attempt to hide its existence or location? Please describe.
32. How do you manage visitors? Are there rules specific to visitors? What steps are taken to make sure only safe visits take place?
33. Have you had any security breaches? Please explain what happened and how you dealt with them.
34. Please describe the shelter's relationship / experiences with the police.

G. Refugee / IDP camp specific

35. How do the services or provisions your residents receive here compare to what other camp residents receive?
36. What is the relationship between someone's admission here and their chances of resettlement? What do camp residents believe about this relationship? (Probe for concerns about fraudulent claims.)
37. Are there any aspects of this shelter program that feel unique to the refugee / IDP camp context?

H. Transition, Solutions

38. Let's talk about helping someone transition out. How does this work? Please describe the process.
39. What kind of transition plans are generally attempted?
- a. Probe: Mediation, integration into family / community, referrals to police & legal aid efforts.
 - b. Probe: transfer to other shelters / refugee resettlement

40. What generally happens to someone when they leave this shelter program? How do you know?
 - a. Is anything done to track an individual's safety once he / she has left here? If so, what?
 - b. How are you able to evaluate the program's success?
41. Do you ever have "repeat" residents who return here again after leaving the shelter? Please describe typical scenarios and how you handle those cases.

H. Experience as a Shelter Provider

42. What are the primary challenges *you* face as a provider?
43. How have you (and your colleagues) attempted to overcome these challenges?
44. Do you and your colleagues feel safe doing this work? Why or why not?
45. Does your job impact you psychologically / emotionally? How do you deal with this?
46. Is there any kind of support that would help you do your job better?
 - a. Probe: psychosocial support
 - b. Probe: hiring staff with any specific expertise
47. What is the hardest thing about your job?
48. What is the best thing about your job?

I. Other

49. Is there anything else about your experience as a provider that you would like us to know?
50. Is there anyone else you would recommend we interview to learn more about providing safe shelter to people fearing SGBV?
51. Are there any lessons you've learned that you would like to share with other groups / organizations involved in providing protection and support to survivors of SGBV?

Post-Interview Checklist

- Thank interviewee; Check how he / she is feeling (if upset or unwell, follow protocol)
- If appropriate to do so, review any questions that remain / need clarification
- Turn off recorder, if applicable (let interviewee know you are doing so)
- Explain next steps
- Remind of confidentiality, no names used, etc.
- Thank you, goodbye

Safe Shelter Interview Questions

Group 2: Shelter Residents / Program Participants / Beneficiaries

Prior to or after interview, the following should be marked in notes:

- Interview date, start /end times, location
- Interviewer name and contact information
- Interviewee assigned identifier (i.e. Group B, Respondent 4)
- Name of shelter / organization / group providing assistance (for use by HRC staff in data analysis stage only; not to be included in reports unless otherwise requested by the organization)
- Notation as to whether refugee camp, IDP camp, or urban/rural non-camp setting
- Informant gender
- Language of interview
- Interpreter name and contact information, if applicable
- Others present
- Other impressions: demeanor, unsolicited information, etc.
- Diagrams, maps

Pre-Interview Checklist:

- Informed Consent
 - Emphasize that any / all participation is voluntary
 - Explain that the respondent should feel free to choose to skip any question for any reason, or to pause or leave the interview at any time
- Informal introduction
 - Ask for the informant's name, shelter name, and location
 - Do not record the informant's name, but assign identifier (ex. respondent 3)
- Confidentiality:
 - Explain how confidentiality will be maintained, specifically: the respondent's name will not be documented anywhere, the name of the shelter will be recorded for the purposes of data analysis by HRC staff only, and specific shelters will not be discussed by name in the report unless otherwise requested by the organization.
- Check interpretation and comfort with interpreter
- Check comfort with location
- Turn on digital recorder, if interviewee consents

Interview Questions

A. Informant Profile

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you from?
3. Are you part of a particular ethnic group? Which one?
4. Do you practice a religion? If so, which one?
5. Aside from the one we are using now, what languages can you speak?

B. Family Background

6. Are you married?
 - a. *If in camp:* Is your spouse living here in the camp, too?
7. Do you have children? (*If yes, establish number, ages, gender, and whether any are physically in his / her care at present.*)
 - a. Are you responsible for taking care of anyone else, as well? If so, who / where are they?
8. *If in camp:*
 - a. When did you come to the camp?
 - b. Where were you living before you came to this camp?
 - c. Which of your family members live in this camp now?

C. Reason for seeking shelter / protection:

(Preface gently, follow-up as necessary. Keep in mind that subject may have left home / sought shelter on multiple occasions—so note this if it becomes apparent, but focus first on this last resort to shelter.)

9. Seeking shelter / protection this time:
 - a. When did you leave home? Why? (*Probe form of harm; known or unknown abuser, how long suffered harm*)
 - b. When did you come here? (*Probe steps if gap between home and shelter; modify below as appropriate.*)
 - c. What did you fear would happen to you if you stayed [at your home]?
10. Is this the first time you have left [home] because of [xxxx]? If not:
 - a. How many times before have you left before this time?
 - b. Where did you go those times?
 - c. Did you try those options again this time? If so, what happened? If not, why not?
11. Have you ever gone to the police for help? If yes, what happened? If no, why not?
12. How did you hear about *this* place?
13. What did you know about it before you came here? How did you know these things?
14. How far from your home is this place?
15. Why did you finally decide to come here? (*Probe especially in cases of ongoing SGBV—what was the final straw?*)
16. How long will you be able to stay here?

D. The Shelter Experience—Basic Services

17. Let's talk about what it's like to be here. How do you feel about the support services you are receiving? (For each, probe for *unmet needs / suggestions / comparison to what resident was receiving before coming to shelter*)
 - a. Housing / Accommodation
 - b. Food
 - c. Medical care
 - d. Counseling
 - e. Education for children
 - f. Adult education / Vocational training
 - g. Religious Practice
 - h. Are you receiving any other kind of service or support while staying here? Please explain.
18. What are the rules about staying here?
19. How do you feel about the rules here? (*Refer to specific rules, if known.*)
 - a. Probe: Visitors
 - b. Probe: Movement
 - c. Probe: Communication
20. Is there anything you need that you cannot have or do here? If so, what?

E. Security, Transitions, Solutions

21. Does anyone in your family or community know where you are? Please explain. (*Note that this may include abuser, especially in domestic violence situations.*)
22. Does the person who (might) hurt you know where you are? (*Pluralize and use conditional tense as appropriate.*)
 - a. If yes, how does he / she know?
 - b. Has he / she attempted to contact or find you? If so, how? What happened?
23. Do you feel safe here from the person who (might) hurt you?
 - a. If yes, what things here make you feel safe?
 - b. If no, why not?
 - a. Have you told staff / volunteers here that you feel afraid?
 1. If yes, what was their response?
 2. If no, why not?
24. Aside from that person who (might) hurt you before you came here, do you feel safe here?
 - a. If yes, what things here make you feel safe?
 - b. If no, why not? What do you fear? (*Probe: Has anything bad happened to you here?*)
 - a. Have you mentioned your fear to staff / volunteers here?
 1. If yes, what was their response?
 2. If no, why not?

25. Ideally, where would you want to go when you leave here?
 - a. Is that possible? Why / Why not?
26. In reality, what do you think you will do when you have to leave this shelter?
27. What can staff / program volunteers do to help you be safe when you leave?
28. If you ended up in danger again after leaving here, what would you do?
29. What do you want to happen to the person who wants to hurt you?
30. Please explain how the members of your community feel.
 - a. How do they feel about people coming to shelters like this?
 - b. What would they expect someone in your situation to do?
 - c. How do you feel about their expectations?

F. Other

31. What is the best thing about being here?
32. What is the hardest thing about being here?
33. Do you think coming here was a good idea? If no, what would you do differently if you are ever in danger again?
34. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience staying here?
35. Do you have any suggestions or advice for organizations providing shelter or support to survivors of SGBV? (*Probe: What aspects / services are most important to you? What improvements can be made?*)

Post-Interview Checklist

- Thank interviewee; Check how he / she is feeling (if upset or unwell, follow protocol)
- If appropriate to do so, review any questions that remain / need clarification
- Turn off recorder, if applicable (let interviewee know you are doing so)
- Provide information re: supportive services, shelters, etc., if appropriate
- Explain next steps
- Remind of confidentiality, no names used, etc.
- Thank you, goodbye



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