



Internal Displacement of Colombian Ex-Combatants World Bank Presentation

Introduction

After five decades of armed violence and numerous attempts at peace processes and disarming illegal armed groups, Colombia has reached a decisive point. Since 2003, the current disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process has demobilized close to 55,000 people, both from the right-wing paramilitary and left-wing guerrilla forces. Colombia is looking for a way out of the armed conflict through an inter-institutional process that is solid and sustainable, and that will contribute towards the construction and consolidation of peace across the national territory in a sustainable manner.

Colombia¹ is located at the northwestern part tip of South America, it has coasts in two oceans: the Atlantic in the North, and the Pacific in the west. Colombia shares boundaries with Brasil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela. Colombia's geographical area is 2.070.408 Km², and is administrative and politically divided into 32 regions. Colombia has a population of 46.294.841 and it has a democratic model, decentralized, ruled by the President of the Republic of Colombia, Mr. Juan Manuel Santos Calderón.

There are currently 32,000 ex-combatants who are part of the Colombian reintegration program and are committed to the national reconciliation process by reconstructing the country's historic memory, victims' reparation, and contributing with social service works in their receiving communities. In Colombia, amnesty processes have evolved from the reinsertion of former guerrillas in the 1980s and 1990s to a consolidated reintegration policy. Public policy, such as CONPES 3554 of 2008, has elevated the government's commitment towards those who abandoned the armed struggle and expressed their desire to return to civilian life.

Today, the Colombian reintegration policy aims for ex-combatants' sustainable return to legality. The three strategic pillars that buttress this goal are 1) the need to strengthen individual competencies and skills in his/her reintegration process, as well as those of his/her immediate nucleus; 2) the importance of reintegrating the demobilized person into his/her receiving community, and raising that community's awareness on individual reintegration processes; and 3) the need to secure co-responsibility from the private, non-governmental sectors and the entire civil society in a peace-building process that will benefit the entire Colombian population.

DDR and internal migrations

To date, the Colombian reintegration program's range and national coverage includes 29 regional Service Centers and one Mobile support center. Through these thirty centers it is possible to provide continued service and benefits² to an ex-combatant regardless of his/her residence. It is

¹ View map at the end of the document.

² Socioeconomic benefits include: Psychosocial support, health and education support, job training, employability and economic insertion. In order to incentivize assistance and commitment to psychosocial, education, and



also possible to constantly monitor an ex-combatant's process without limiting his/her mobility within the country.

The Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR) is currently working to strengthen the reintegration route that develops the competencies and skills of former combatants and promotes reconciliation and cohabitation actions with receiving communities. This holistic reintegration route also aims towards strengthening the shared responsibility of external actors in the reintegration process. The route will be composed of three stages (basic, intermediate, and advanced) and it aims to achieve a responsible culmination of the reintegration process and ultimately, sustainability in legality.

To provide its services despite internal migrations has been one of the greatest challenges of the current reintegration processes. In large part, the demobilized population settles in the main cities of Colombia. Out of the 6,094 persons that demobilized between 2008 and 2011, 49.2% relocated to large cities. A large percentage has moved to Bogotá (17.3%), Villavicencio, Meta (11%), Cali, Valle del Cauca (10.9%) and Medellín, Antioquia (9.9%). The remaining 3,096 persons (50.8%) moved to 28 departments, confirming high levels of dispersion across the national territory.

Perhaps more relevant than location, is the reason behind people's migration. Persons enrolled in the reintegration process often request relocations to the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR). In 2011, out of 29,571 persons active in the reintegration process, 2,249 (7.68%) moved between cities, stating reasons mainly related to job changes (35%) and family motives, which in turn are closely related to security issues (35%). Change in residency (17%) and lack of economic opportunities (13%) are also reasons for migration. Job changes and lack of opportunities are associated with a need for economic sustainability and are a determining factor for migration. As a result, the tendency is to relocate in the large urban centers.

Lessons learned have shown that it is not viable to reintegrate a demobilized person in an environment of poverty. For these reasons, the ACR's strategy for job training provides a person and his family the skills to become economically productive and sustainable. In order to ensure this, work with other government entities has been key. Inter-institutional work merges training and job offers, allows for an analysis of the job market, and supports the demobilized individual and his/her family, thus increasing the breadth of the strategy and the coverage of the national Reintegration policy.

The ACR has developed what is called the "Information System for Reintegration," (SIR) which continuously collects personal information and progress reports of each and every individual enrolled in the reintegration process. Upon updates of new developments or changes, the system allows the ACR to manage person's contact info at any moment. It is also a useful tool for monitoring of the person's situation as long as the ex-combatant is active, at least once a trimester, facilitating the analysis of aspects related to national migration and progress in his/her reintegration process.

job training benefits, an ex-combatant is granted 480,000 COP (160,000 COP per benefit). Legal benefits include preclusion of political crimes, compulsory military service, and legal record.



It is important to highlight that the updates for participants' contact and location information can be managed by all of the ACR's Service Centers. Additionally, it is a requirement to update the person's files in the system whenever any assistance is provided to a former combatant, be it physically or via telephone. Whenever service is provided over the telephone through any of the available assistance mechanisms, the ACR makes sure to gather the person's most updated contact information, thus counting with a permanent resource for locating the demobilized population.

The system's flexibility allows for a person's relocation to occur smoothly and effectively. Because of this, whenever a participant in the reintegration process voluntarily voices an interest to relocate, his/her request is inserted into the system. The request closes upon the person's arrival to their new location. Likewise, if relocations are irregular (or are not previously consulted with Service Center staff at the person's original location), the system allows for an update upon arrival to the new place so the person can resume and complete their reintegration process.

What happens after reintegration?

Understanding that individual reintegration requires positive environments, the Government of Colombia has aimed to strengthen receiving communities in order to generate civic, economic, and social capacities that facilitate sustainable reintegration of former combatants. However, it is still necessary to go further in depth on issues related to internal migrations, given that while economic reasons might be the primary drivers for moving, Colombia is still a country in conflict. This aspect plays a role in people's permanence in a determined place, be it because of risk of being victimized or pressure towards recidivism.

The ACR actively participates as a complement to the National Territory Consolidation Plan. Through this plan, consolidated State presence, basic infrastructure, guarantees for investment, and joint government efforts are sought across the country.

Likewise, one of the key pieces has been a shift in perceptions and the construction of a sense of co-responsibility in peace-building matters. The work with civil society has been and will continue to be key for the opening of spaces of interaction and integration, as are places of convergence for the formulation of initiatives that lead to local sustainable development.

The success of future demobilization depends on the success of this phase. In order to accomplish that, communities must be strengthened and protective environments must be consolidated in the face of problem such as children and youth recruitment and organized crime within political, social and economic structures.

Conclusions

It is well known that in Colombia there is a large number of demobilized persons that migrate on a regular basis within the country. This phenomenon happens for different reasons mostly associated to satisfy their proper and family economic needs.



Such high mobility represents a major challenge for the Colombian Government in two main aspects: the first one is the importance of get deeper understanding into the internal displacement and migration phenomenon of this particular population which will identify the variables that explain such reasons in order to make assertive decisions to adjust the public policy. The second challenge is to be able to guarantee the direct attention to the demobilized persons and to prevent the interruption of the reintegration process for the participants that are migrating within the country.

It is essential to highlight the importance of having an information system and platform in place, which can be feed from any service center all over the country and that, at the same time, allows having real time information. Such platform, also enables to follow up the reintegration route of the demobilized population and identifies significant variables that give support to the decision making process in the public policy.

Finally, migration related issues represent a major challenge for the reintegration process in terms of the flexibility that the program needs to have, in order to effectively service the demobilized population. However, there are mechanisms and protocols already in place that allows the reintegration program to cope with such reality.

