



KEYS TOWARDS  
PSYCHOSOCIAL  
ACCOMPANIMENT

3

 **Forced**  
Displacement





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**3. FORCED DISPLACEMENT.**

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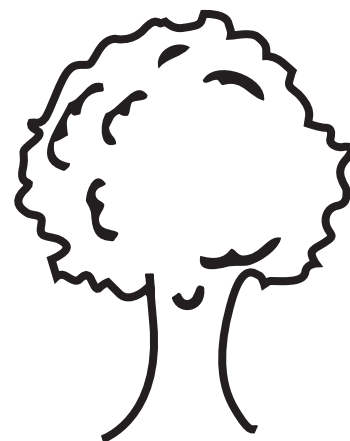
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# Forced Displacement<sup>1</sup>

## ① General objective

To understand from a psychosocial perspective what forced displacement is and acquire some accompaniment guidelines to support affected people and communities through their resistance processes.

## ② Specific objectives

- Reflect on the psychosocial impact and the coping mechanisms in situations of forced displacement at a personal, family, organizational, community and social level.
- Visualize some keys for psychosocial accompaniment that consider people's needs and resources in situations of forced displacement.

## ③ What is forced displacement?

**Forced displacement, unlike other serious human rights violations, is not covered by an international norm, Convention or Protocol<sup>2</sup>.** In 1992, the United Nations created the figure of the displaced persons Secretary-General Representative so that the International System could respond in these situations. The representative's mission was to visit countries and conduct research aimed at implementing public policies on the subject and defend the rights of internally displaced persons.

In 1998, Francis M. Deng, then the United Nations Secretary-General Representative on internally displaced persons,<sup>3</sup> together with the International Red Cross Committee (ICRC) and a group of experts, prepared the "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement", based on International Humanitarian Law (hereinafter IHL), Human Rights and regulations for refugees. In these "Principles" they outline that:

*[...] internally displaced persons are people or groups of people who have been forced to flee their home or place of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, human rights violations or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.<sup>4</sup>*

1 This booklet collects the contents discussed during the "Workshop on Psychosocial Accompaniment in situations of Forced Displacement" which was held on November, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014, facilitated by Clemencia Correa.

2 The Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions relative to the Protection of Victims of Armed Conflicts without International Character, in its article 17, speaks of the prohibition of forced displacements in situations of conflict, unless there are reasons of danger for the population for which they have to be carried out and this would have to be done in the best possible conditions for their safety, food, accommodation, etc.

3 Representative in the year of 1992.

4 Full text available on: <http://www.acnur.org/t3/fileadmin/scripts/doc.php?file=t3/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2001/0022>

Displacement is broached from an IHL perspective since it usually originates in circumstances of serious armed conflict, in cases of a population's genocide either by development projects, natural disasters or other circumstances. In this text we will only explore forced displacement in circumstances of sociopolitical violence.

Let's consider some definitions that are frequently linked to forced displacement and which are also contemplated in the Human Rights and IHL international framework:

### ■ **Forced displacement or Internal displacement**

"To displace" and "to evict" consists of making someone or something leave a place or physically remove them from the place they are.<sup>5</sup>

Forced displacement occurs when people are forced to leave their homes while remaining in their country due to a natural catastrophe, a warlike conflict or any other crisis situation. Internally displaced people remain in the same nation and in the same State. In most cases it is the State that causes or promotes the fleeing of people from their land.

What is at stake with displacement is the people's self-determination.

### ■ **Migration**

According to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights there are different types of migration: among them we find assisted, clandestine, spontaneous and forced migration. Here we will consider the broader definition:

A population movement within the same State or to the territory of another State, encompassing any kind of movement of people whatever their size, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people and economic migrants.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to highlight that in the case of Mexico the main causes of migration are the economic, migratory and "security" policies of the Mexican State.<sup>7</sup>

### ■ **Refuge**

According to the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person who 'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside their country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/ herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.'<sup>8</sup>

5 Full definition in the online version of the Dictionary of the Spanish Language: <http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=desplazar>

6 Full text available at: <http://www.corteidh.or.cr/sitios/Observaciones/11/Anexo4.pdf>

7 Full text available at: [www.tppmexico.org/audiencias-tematicas/migracion/](http://www.tppmexico.org/audiencias-tematicas/migracion/)

8 Full text available at: <http://www.acnur.org/t3/fileadmin/scripts/doc.php?file=t3/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2001/0005>

A number of stages are present during forced displacement, and differences may also arise in accordance with varying territorial interests. The perpetrator's exercise of power and resources will not be the same if they want to build a mine or if they want to invade some parcels of land to misappropriate the crops. It will also vary where there is a dispute over land and local caciques want to take it over. **Furthermore, the level of organization in the communities, their circumstances and capacity to defend the land will also have an impact.**



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**Before forced displacement.** It is common practice for communities to receive offers to purchase their land, attempts to illegally sell the lands, coercion to change the title of the land to the name of the perpetrators (for example, companies), or efforts are made to co-opt people to work for a boss in exchange for an allowance. In addition, companies formed or protected by paramilitary and drug trafficking structures are frequently established. Other strategies include threats or harassment pushing people to leave their land. And if these methods are not successful, assassinations, forced disappearances, torture, sexual torture and other forms of indiscriminate or selective violence begins. When powerful economic interests are at stake, military and paramilitary occupations are launched, generating multiple human rights violations, such as the burning of villages and massacres (scorched earth), or other acts of terror and cruelty against communities, until the population is forced to flee to save their lives.

**During forced displacement.** Depending on the type of pressure and human rights violations, families may venture from home in search of new life possibilities, thus generating belts of misery around other towns. Massive displacement can also occur, leading to the total dispersal of communities. However, in some cases peasants have the opportunity to organize themselves. In all these examples, people have been forced to leave their land, to move to an unknown place with unsuitable life conditions, to confront the deep uprooting of their history, their customs, their way of life and to face the loss of their possessions, their symbols (both historical and cultural), their ancestors and often, their loved ones. It is at this juncture that we find ourselves faced with a Humanitarian Emergency.

**After forced displacement.** There are a number of circumstances in which people and communities find themselves after being displaced. One of these is relocation, when they establish themselves somewhere else to rebuild their life. Relocation can either be collective or individual. The aim of returning to their place of origin is another aspect, and this entails thinking about procedures, ways and strategies to return to their territory. The return can also be individual or collective. Despite the emergency created by forced displacement, in both instances, relocation and return, social organization may occur. People begin to build protective life measures and demand their rights. These decisions will depend on their socioeconomic conditions, their family and community structure, their political options and the context of socio-political violence. Equally, individuals and groups can either receive the solidarity and support of the inhabitants of the settlement areas or be stigmatized and assaulted if for instance, they are considered criminals.

There are two elements inherent to forced displacement that we believe are important to highlight, and which will be further discussed when we review the impact and coping mechanisms in these events. Firstly, we can state that territory is a core issue, not only as a geographical space, but as a vital space of cultural reproduction and collective identity that comprises personal and community histories. In cases of forced displacement, a dispute emerges over the territory as a space for the production of capital and economic relations; also, as an important source of natural resources, often involving strategic transit and communication routes. Secondly, in terms of human rights, forced displacement violates in many ways the communities' right to self-determination, such as: systems of organization and decision-making governed by customs and practices; collective decision-making on economic development (concerning common goods and property); the right to forge one's collective history; the construction and exercise of one's power relations.

## **4. What is the purpose of forced displacement?**

In the first instance, forced displacement pursues the occupation of territory to impose the interests of capital through the exploitation and dispossession<sup>9</sup> of the land and the communities' history. In the background the goal is to make a profit with the territory, the natural assets and the people, in order to impose mega projects, via the exploitation of land and natural resources, or also to acquire the use of roads for the transfer of illegal goods or drugs.

Its objective is also to control communities and their way of life, to co-opt and adapt them to the needs of the market. Equally, it seeks to break the social fabric and generate material and symbolic uprooting to usufruct local labor. For example, the meaning peasants attribute to working the land is very different from the entrepreneurs' techniques and tractors.

9. Another concept which Forced Displacement could be confused with is Forced Eviction. The United Nations Information Sheet No. 25, gives the following definition: The practice of forced eviction involves the involuntary removal of persons from their homes or land, directly or indirectly attributable to the State. It entails the effective elimination of the possibility of an individual or group living in a particular house, residence or place, and the assisted (in the case of resettlement) or unassisted (without resettlement) movement of evicted persons or groups to other areas.

## 5 Forced displacement in Mexico

### a) Background

**The decade of the seventies in many ways marked the history of Mexico, and for many people, it laid the foundation of radical political positions in opposition to power.** At the time, the authoritarian regime coupled with the terrible massacres of students in 1968 and 1971 contributed to the gestation of several urban and rural guerrilla movements, as well as clandestine organizations, not necessarily armed. The strategy of the State at this stage was a military one: to “suffocate” these groups by spreading terror through massacres, disappearances, torture, arrests, persecutions, illegal raids, dispossession, destruction of small towns, and so on. This led to many families having to flee their territories and become invisible displaced persons.

In the same decade there was a significant conversion of indigenous faithful from the Catholic to the Protestant faith in communities originally from the state of Chiapas. Religious intolerance was expressed through violent confrontations between these groups and ended with the expulsion-forced displacement of several families from the communities, a situation that continues to this day.

In the same area, after the 1994 armed uprising of the Zapatista National Liberation Army-Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), a bloody persecution against the indigenous insurgents and against their support base communities began. Hundreds of indigenous peasants were displaced from their communities by military and paramilitary sieges. To illustrate this, a group of displaced families known as Las Abejas had to face a horrific situation: in December 22, 1997 a brutal massacre of children, women and the elderly took place in the town of Acteal. In addition to massacre and displacement, survivors found themselves having to face the cover-up and complicity of the Army and civil authorities and ultimately, impunity for the perpetrators.

Another state marked by displacements is Oaxaca, mainly the southern area known as the Loxicha region. In the mid-nineties, Zapotec indigenous communities faced cacique exploitation and subsequent repression at the hands of the police and the military, leading to the communities being occupied by the army. Besides the area being militarized, there was an increase in disputes over land, territorial control and natural resources. In other states of the center and south of the Republic, further instances of forced displacement took place due to agrarian conflicts, land invasions and electoral political conflicts. In this context, in 2006 the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous People - Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI) - launched the Attention to Displaced Indigenous People Project - Proyecto para la Atención a Indígenas Desplazados (PAID), calling on the three levels of government to coordinate tasks of relocation or return of displaced indigenous population.

Later in 2012, as a result of the armed conflict in Chiapas, the State Congress decreed a Law for the Prevention and Attention of Internal Displacement, which took up the United Nations Guiding Principles and ordered the creation of a State Council for Comprehensive Attention to Internal Displacement. However, the Council lacked the necessary regulation to define who, how and with what

resources the provisions of the Law would be put into effect.

In 2014, the state of Guerrero approved its own Law, which also had similar flaws.

## **b) Forced displacement at present**

**The current context of generalized violence in Mexico has become one of the main causes of forced displacement in the national territory.** The administration of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) began operations by the Federal Police in the state of Michoacán<sup>10</sup> as a way to cope with the growing number of murders caused by clashes between the Federal Police, the Army and the Navy.<sup>11</sup>

Criminal groups expanded their business from the trafficking and sale of drugs to the collection of fees, kidnapping, robbery, people trafficking, sale of real estate and fuel, among others. The increase in violence, disappearances and massacres in several states of the country resulted in the displacement of people, families and even entire communities in search of safer areas. The testimonies of victims themselves, as well as journalistic information, show that the violence was not only exercised by organized crime; they have exposed the relationship between criminal groups and the State. So, generalized violence is an expression of sociopolitical violence, with particular characteristics according to the region where it manifests and the power groups that operate there. In some instances, organized crime and the State participate in coordination with each other. Impunity and human rights violations have rendered entire communities defenseless. Communities that were once full of life, have now become ghost towns.<sup>12</sup>

The recent results from the National Survey on Demographic Dynamics - Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica (ENADID), conducted by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics - Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática (INEGI) and the National Population Council - Consejo Nacional de Población, show "[...] that in the period 2009-2014, of the 3.7 million internal migrants in the country, 236,800 had fled their homes because of insecurity.<sup>13</sup> These people come from the regions of Chihuahua, Federal District, Guerrero, Sinaloa and Tamaulipas. Furthermore, information provided by the Global Report on forced internal displacement<sup>14</sup> states that Mexico counted with 281,400 displaced persons between 2011 and 2015.

*The register includes 141 cases of mass displacement occurring in 14 federative entities, that is, the simultaneous movement of 10 or more families of the same community, victims of the same expulsion. The most affected sites are Guerrero, Sinaloa, Michoacán, Oaxaca and Chiapas. In states such as Tamaulipas, Coahuila and Veracruz, the same context of violence has prevented data from being obtained.<sup>15</sup>*

10 Operativo Conjunto Michoacán, which took place in December 2006. Later, it was reproduced in other states of the country such as Chihuahua, Guerrero, Veracruz, among others.

11 To know more about the Mexican context, refer to the Main Booklet.

12 Recurrent situations in the states of Chihuahua, Guerrero, Sonora where there is a presence of security personnel of the three levels of government. See Municipality Plutarco Elías Calles, Sonoyta in Sonora; full text available at: <http://contralinea.info/archivo-revista/index.php/2015/05/17/la-guerra-por-la-plaza-de-sonora/>

13 Montalvo, Tania L. "El 6.4% de los mexicanos que abandonaron su hogar lo hicieron para huir de la violencia" in Animal Político Magazine, 18 de agosto 2015. Full text available at: <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2015/08/el-6-4-de-los-mexicanos-que-abandonaron-su-hogar-lo-hicieron-para-huir-de-la-violencia/>

14 Conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council. Full text available at: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/library/Media/201505-Global-Overview-2015/20150506-global-overview-2015-en.pdf>

15 Montalvo, op.cit.

Desplazamiento Forzado.		
¿Qué significa?	¿De qué manera se presenta en Méx y cómo se vive?	Principales Interrogantes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- VERNOS obligados a dejar nuestro lugar</li> <li>- Puede ser 1 persona, Familia, Comunidad.</li> <li>- Criterios, se expresa de alguna manera.</li> <li>- No está clara la categoría</li> <li>- No es un delito</li> <li>- No se reconoce a las víctimas.</li> <li>→ ya se reconoce, aunque no está claro.</li> <li>- Pérdida de espacio q' te da identidad y la pérdida de las redes de apoyo.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No es una decisión, es un hecho violento que genera más violaciones.</li> <li>- Pérdida de referentes. (creencias, ideales).</li> <li>- Lxs principales afectadosxs niños y mujeres.</li> <li>- Estigma.</li> <li>- Movimiento en el territorio.</li> <li>- Ruptura tejido social, cultura, reconfiguración.</li> <li>- Empezar a construir en otro lugar y de otra manera.</li> <li>- Se da de manera repentina, no se puede planear.</li> <li>- Pérdida de doc.</li> <li>- Siempre hay consecuencias.</li> <li>- Violencia política, conflictos agrarios.</li> <li>- Ahora hay una heterogeneidad en las personas desp.</li> <li>→ ya no necesariamente es de medio rural y medio urbano.</li> <li>- Territorio. Paramilitarización - Megaprojects</li> <li>- Estigma. miedo y dolor.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>El desp. forzado es en sí mismo una violación DH.</li> <li>¿Qué pasa cuando el estado interviene?</li> <li>→ Dama más → Divide.</li> <li>→ pero es su responsabilidad.</li> <li>¿Cómo se diferencia Desp. Forzado de migración?</li> <li>→ exilio.</li> <li>¿La Reglamentación del Desp. Forzado. Requiere ser a nivel federal o sólo estatal?</li> <li>¿Son suficientes las normativas? ¿funcionan?</li> <li>¿Cuál es nuestra tarea cómo org?</li> <li>¿Cuáles son los objetivos del Desp. Forz?</li> <li>¿Cómo lo utiliza el Edo a su favor?</li> <li>¿En qué medida se considera una estrategia de Edo?</li> <li>→ Herramientas legales para la defensa.</li> <li>¿Por qué se expropiaban los territorios?</li> <li>→ Legalización del despojo.</li> <li>Valores de los gob a nivel económico ¿cómo queda el D.F.</li> </ul>

While sociopolitical violence is an important cause of internal displacement, in several regions this is aggravated by the imposition of economic megaprojects with their resultant political and agrarian conflicts.

Usually the information about these projects is partially or totally hidden from the population. People often ignore who wants to expel them from the area, or why, or which companies are involved, or whether the pressure to sell, rent or accept money for the expropriation of lands will be supported by a popular consultation (as generally, these are communal lands), or even if pertinent environmental impact studies have been carried out.

Those conditions are generally not met, and people must face the imminent threat of having to leave their land by force. **When the population is informed or consulted, it is easier for them to defend their rights, resist dispossession and avoid forced displacement.**

Within the Mexican context one of the main characteristics of forced displacement is the fact that it is silent and non-reportable. **In situations of sociopolitical violence, the vulnerability of remaining on the land is greater than in cases of megaprojects. In these instances, alternatives can be sought, and other resources, in addition to legal ones, can be put in place.**

## c) Victims and perpetrators

Victims forced to leave their place of origin can vary from one individual, one or several families or an entire community. The contexts are complex: men and young people executed or disappeared; women who remain to head the family; girls, boys and older adults or those with some disability without the possibility to attend school or access the necessary care. Added to this is the high level of poverty, along with differences in ways of life, cosmo-vision and customs. Displaced people are a heterogeneous group and their transit is not necessarily from a rural to an urban environment.

Whatever the population and its demographic or economic situation, what is real is that the decision to move is an enforced one taken in order to protect their life. Apart from the displacement being a violent and traumatizing event in itself, a long chain of violations to their human rights is further added. In most cases the escape is abrupt, and people can barely carry what is at hand.

These people are rarely legally and socially recognized as victims or internally displaced persons.

Displacement is not considered a victimization, and consequently, it isn't classified as a crime. Furthermore, there is a lack of adequate documentation of the facts, little or no record of the number and characteristics of the victims and thus no way to make a meaningful analysis of the magnitude and complexity of the problem.

Regarding the perpetrators, although there may be disputes between power groups and characteristics specific to different territories, we can affirm that forced displacement—which exposes the horror of war and the interests of the capital and the State—is the product of actions carried out by State security bodies, paramilitary

groups, business corporations and criminal economic groups (often in complicity) to dispossess the lands of peasants, indigenous people, and to gain control of the population. In countries where a declared internal armed conflict exists, for example Colombia, displacement is also generated by armed confrontation between insurgent groups and the State and other structures. In any case, it is the State that has the responsibility to protect the population both in situations of generalized violence and in those created due to economic causes and which involve business players. And therefore, the State, through its actions (such as military incursions, assassinations and enforced disappearances), omissions or acquiescence (with the paramilitary and / or multinational groups) is the main entity responsible for forced displacement.

**In Mexico, as in Colombia, the State has been the main body responsible for forced displacement under the guise of a fight against drug trafficking and organized crime.** Some examples of this include the passing of laws that permit the expropriation of territories, thus "legalizing" the dispossession and forced displacement of people and criminalizing peoples' resistance and the defense of their rights.



## ⑥ Testimony

We will now provide a brief description of an experience of forced displacement in order to introduce the theme of psychosocial impact and coping mechanisms in these events.

The department of Chocó, located in the Colombian Pacific Region on the border with Panama, is a region where great economic interests are at stake, such as the Interoceanic Canal. It is an area of global biodiversity that has been largely ignored by government agencies. African palm plantation projects are being established there. The area has traditionally been inhabited by an Afro-descendant population, some mestizos and indigenous people who lived in 23 districts known as veredas. In February 1997, 5,000 people – around 23 communities – were displaced and 300 people executed or disappeared. Eighty-six of these crimes were perpetrated during the “Genesis” operation commanded by General Rito Alejo del Río and jointly executed by the 17th Army Brigade and paramilitary groups.

***“The fear was such that for almost two months we did not even dare go to school... They kept circling the territory, we lost part of the rice harvest, what they didn’t burn was lost because we weren’t able to pick it up” (Child’s testimony from the Cacarica region).***

A group of 1500 displaced people organized themselves over a period of three years, starting a legal suit against the Colombian State to be allowed to return, under a plan of civil protection and economic guarantees. They returned in three phases in the middle of the war and after a process of organization and resistance from January to October 2000 and March 2001. These people restructured their way of life, their methods of education and harvest in order to live collectively. Today they remain in settlements called “humanitarian zones”.

***“Yesterday they displaced us, they murdered us, they disappeared us. Yesterday and today we are together at the hands of the world, resisting death and impunity.” (Memory Wall, Cacarica in Chocó, Colombia).***<sup>16</sup>

## ⑦ Psychosocial impacts of forced displacement<sup>17</sup>

After displacement, human rights violations continue, the social fabric is ruptured and there is no assurance of security. And displaced persons face a number of losses, such as their territory of origin, identity, reputation, connections and social status, to name a few. Displaced people walk roads and squares anonymously without finding a sense of belonging.<sup>18</sup>

Let us now review some psychosocial impacts of forced displacement at a personal, family, organizational, community and social level.

<sup>16</sup> Full text available at: [http://escolapau.uab.cat/img/programas/musica/construccion\\_paz\\_jeferson%20orejuel\\_.pdf](http://escolapau.uab.cat/img/programas/musica/construccion_paz_jeferson%20orejuel_.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> The separation between psychosocial impacts and coping mechanisms has an explanatory and didactic function, but both are simultaneously and singularly manifested from the initial moment of the violent experience. (See the Main Booklet, section “Working with victims”).

<sup>18</sup> We suggest reading the text “Efectos psicosociales y culturales del desplazamiento”, of Universidad Nacional de Colombia, where this subject is studied in depth. <http://www.bdigital.unal.edu.co/1461/>

## a) Personal and family levels

Displaced people express feelings of worry, anguish, fear, anger, suffering, hopelessness, guilt, frustration and helplessness. The ties built with family and loved ones or with the whole community are disrupted. Life projects are destroyed, spaces and ties with the land are lost, causing a de-structuring of personal, collective and social referents, including culture, spirituality, and also their concept of the State and its laws.

When referring to the personal impact we can think of three dimensions: emotionally we primarily find deep sadness, anger, despair and constant longing. In relation to behavioral issues, usually there is isolation, frequent crying, avoidance, distrust and hyper-vigilance. Finally, thought processes involve recurrent recollections of their

previous way of life, of the events that caused or followed the displacement, such as despair, doubts, confusion, disorientation and hopelessness about the future.

**Significant changes take place within the family, not only regarding roles and family dynamics, but as a family group and as people in terms of the symbolic representation prior to the displacement:**

- The family home is no longer a place of reference and on many occasions, the family is forced to live in camps in the open under precarious conditions, without basic services, water or sanitation.
- Countless men are executed or disappeared. Those who manage to flee can't see themselves working in a different context. For example, a peasant who used to work his land now finds himself unable to sell his labor in the city.
- Women, who are generally responsible for feeding the family, find themselves in difficulties to do so due to scarce or nonexistent economic resources, and no proper cooking conditions. Furthermore, they are especially affected when they become widows, as they are burdened with both the economic responsibility and the care of their children. In addition, they are blamed or stigmatized, and become more vulnerable to possible aggressions, sexual harassment or abuse.
- Precarious circumstances mean that children are left without sufficient care and without the possibility to attend school. Frequently, they have to precipitate the beginning of their working lives to support the family economy. This exposes them to child exploitation, increased vulnerability, drug use or sexual abuse.
- For the elderly and other sick or disabled relatives, displacement is particularly painful due to the enormous sense of uprooting and their limited possibilities to contribute with the rest of the family. Often adequate space for their needs cannot be provided, and they are left without health services.

Their projects, as well as their sense of life and personal identity are damaged; their self-image and that of their loved ones is affected. What needs to be considered is that their own resources, coupled with the circumstances of displacement and resettlement, may either reduce or, on the contrary, deepen the impact at an individual and family level.

## b) Organizational, community and social levels

People who have been displaced have to face an unpredictable scenario whilst burdened by the terror of the atrocities they've witnessed, and the threats and messages of violence they have experienced before or during the event. **The experience of fear may differ according to the personality and age of each person and the level of social support encountered.**

When several families have been displaced, a climate of generalized fear is perceived. Silence, distrust, fear of reporting, fear of meeting or expressing feelings, thoughts and needs are all present. Their self-determination as a people is disrupted: previous community leadership (spiritual, community, political) is undermined or destroyed; community practices relating to the handover of power, cultural knowledge and conflict resolution are broken. The community feels abandoned, their collective identity, their culture, their spirituality and their sense of belonging is challenged. Often, they experience the imposition of authorities and a replacement of their norms, customs and laws.



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New settlements in urban areas are often improvised and increase poverty and insecurity. Fear and alienation can rupture social ties, and in turn this can make everyone just look after themselves. **The State, through its institutions or social welfare agencies, can also worsen this rupture.**

When marked cultural differences exist, adjusting to a new space can be difficult. Often in the new place of settlement, the displaced persons don't know anybody and are unaware of any dangers particular to the area. Besides, they are frequently stigmatized, rejected and even blamed by the inhabitants of the area for the violence experienced. This is a clear example of how responsibility is shifted from the State and the perpetrators on to the victims.

The state of emergency, precariousness and limited resources makes it difficult for displaced people to establish support networks and have access to the justice system, thus increasing their lack of legal protection. They are then further confronted by the absence of basic guarantees, impunity [for lawbreakers], and frequently of defamation and stigmatization at the hands of both institutions and the media. Consequently, they are further victim-

ized by what can be termed the institutionalized lie. Some political groups also seek to take economic or political advantage of displacement situations and make promises of support.

Finally, remember that the process of forced displacement has no clear length of time. It may take days, months or years before return or relocation. This will have an effect on the psychosocial impact and the coping mechanisms, especially in relation to mourning losses and the possibility of overcoming the "before and after" displacement. Additionally, it can have an impact in their capacity to restore their sense of life, and envisage their future life project.

## ⑧ Coping mechanisms in cases of forced displacement

Following the same format of looking at coping mechanisms at the individual, family, organizational and community levels, and before we can consider these, let us highlight that an essential first step is the need to socially recognize the existence of internal forced displacement. That is, to have information and be aware of the situation that is being experienced. **One way to arrive at this is by sharing the different experiences and learning the ways of facing this issues that have been developed in other countries** (for example, in Colombia).

Both individually and collectively each experience is lived differently, and it is with this understanding that each person can reintegrate it into their own process, and each community into their own history.

## a) Personal and family levels

Several factors need to be considered: the individual way in which adversity is faced, the strength of relationships within the family, age, character and personal history, as well as the place of each member within the family and additionally, if either a family member or close friend was lost prior to displacement. After displacement, efforts -not always successful- are focused on emotionally sustaining themselves and at salvaging personal and collective dignity. They learn to survive with the basics and find means to make their way in the new situation, and this involves personal changes and new group configurations.

**A key to identify the personal and family coping mechanisms is to consider not only the losses, but also what has remained. Yes, material things are left behind, but there is often the possibility of preserving internal and collective strengths, learning experiences, symbolisms and ties that provide support.** This helps re-signify the individual and collective identity. Perhaps they don't live in the same place, but they are together with their family or with others who have suffered the same fate. Even though everyone experiences it in their own particular way, the family group can provide mutual understanding and support.

## b) Organizational, community and social levels

**Equally, in cases of collective forced displacement, as in cases of individual or family displacement, coping mechanisms will differ according to how the group identifies itself as a collective.** Some reflections to consider can be: who they are as a group, and what was their previous social status; whether they are organized, and if not, if they foresee the possibility of organizing themselves; do they have social cohesion and how do they usually solve problems and make decisions; previous experiences when they faced adverse situations and what was the outcome.

**What also contributes to collective coping and resistance is the possibility of recognizing the structure and role of the State and whether the group has any capacity to set boundaries. Factors that will help them recover their life project and achieve social transformation include clearly realizing what the State has done to them, finding which other players are involved and then regaining their strengths, community resources, and identifying collective principles.** All of these will enable the community to continue in an articulated fashion and sustain their process of resistance. The opening of spaces for dialogue and the agreement on basic rules of coexistence in the settlement, strengthens internal cohesion and

provides collective security.

**Cultural expressions, such as spiritual rituals, artistic activities or collective activities, like tequio (voluntary work for the community), allow the development of territorial roots and for traditions and customs to be maintained, as well as strengthening the peoples' history and collective identity.**

It takes time to organize after forced displacement, but attempts to rearticulate, rebuild bonds of trust and avoid isolation are important. It also helps to search for information about what is happening in the territory and become aware of the risks, whether a new settlement is planned or if the return is desired. The knowledge about what their rights are and who should respond to their demands helps visualize, in a self-managed way, routes, procedures and measures to decide what to do and how to do it.

## 9 Pre-conceptions held by companions

When accompanying victims in cases of forced displacement, as well as in other forms of socio-political violence, it is important to reflect on what pre-conceived ideas might exist and which do not necessarily correspond to the concrete reality of the people. Here are some that can help us think about improving our accompaniment.



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**To think that the priority is the political demand of human rights.** Although this is very important, for displaced persons it is usually a priority to immediately seek dignified living conditions and satisfy their basic needs such as housing, food and health. Organizing for the demand of rights, and visualizing future possible life projects, tend to occur later.

**To think that once they are out of the territory the risk is over.** This may or may not happen, it depends on each specific situation, and profound and constant analyses of the context and effective security in the area have to be made. Sometimes, the perpetrators continue to harass people to avoid their articulation, organization and possible return.

**To think that it is the first time that they face situations of fear.** On the contrary, in most cases, peasants, indigenous people and other groups have had to defend their land in the past. The current displacement can mean a new traumatization, but it also allows them to revisit past experiences, visualize strengths, resources and learning, as well as contribute to the re-signification of resistance in the socio-political violence experience.

**To think that we work for the return to their community of origin.** While many of the displaced people hope to return, it is important to recognize, when talking about the future, that return is one possible future. In order to survive and resist, the community has to engage in the here and now, and from there determine what conditions are required for the desired future. Working together will help the group recognize the actual losses and the real possibilities ahead.

**To think that fear never ends and is always harmful.** Fear will appear according to the moment, conditions, connections and protection systems that are created for the well-being of the displaced population. The key is to prevent this fear from paralyzing or unconsciously mobilizing, but rather to work so that fear can regain its function as a protective mechanism and help plan and carry out actions within reach to achieve safety and care. Fear is a constant reminder of the wound, it is its mark, but it is possible to transform it. That is the purpose of psychosocial accompaniment.

## DON'TS

Standardize the stages of forced displacement.

Perform assistentialist interventions.

Limit our work only to analysis and crisis intervention.

Silence facts, emotions or feelings associated with the damage and trauma.

Promote individualist approaches.

Orient the task towards forgetting.

## DOS

**Consider which stage of the displacement our accompaniment is engaged in.** This will help us identify the people's needs and priorities, as well as take into account the psychosocial impacts and coping mechanisms that usually take place at that time and foresee what may follow.

**Reflect upon and evaluate the concrete situation, as well as the process followed by individuals and families with a view to strengthening autonomy and self-management.** It is important to keep in mind that people are actors of their own life and political project; assistentialism infringes as it generates dependency and passivity.

**Guide the psychosocial accompaniment of people and families towards the future,** in order to strengthen their life plan and resistance. It is important not to limit our vision only to the current scenario, but to analyze the personal, family and community evolution in the different stages of displacement. Furthermore, be able to envisage possibilities and strategies for the future, going from the micro structural to the macro and vice versa.

**Promote the verbal expression of the lived experience and the emotions generated.** The accompaniment seeks to contribute to the understanding of what happened: how and why the displacement was carried out, who directly or indirectly benefited, what was the importance of the territory for the interests of the perpetrators. Articulation helps victims understand the facts, while allowing them to name the harm, the losses and the meaning of all of these.

**Practice a dialectical stance during the accompaniment,** aiming to link the personal identity and life plan with the collective identity and its historical and cultural development. Although the displacement is individual, the collective and cultural is consolidated within people in order to provide them with symbolic meaning. It isn't our task to make individuals adapt, but rather to support them in the rebuilding of their relationships and the incorporation of their history and life project, from their past and towards their future.

**Make psychosocial accompaniment a path to re-signify the past (historical), affirm the present and build towards the future.** This entails visualizing and assuming a historical and symbolic continuity in the course of life.

## DON'TS

Make the many losses invisible.

Standardize the needs, impacts and coping mechanisms.

Limit the impact of fear only to the negative.

Encourage individual or collective decision making.

Privilege only one aspect of the displacement process.

**Facing the causes of displacement allows for an improvement in the human rights crisis, exposes the State violence strategy, cuts across the mechanisms of war, enables the reconstruction of the social fabric and contributes towards eradicating impunity.**

## DOS

**Provide a space for the recognition of all losses**, tangible and intangible, so as to contribute towards the elaboration of multiple grieving processes: for loved ones, for geographic benchmarks, for material and symbolic references, for their world view, for their own transformations and the changes in others.

**Build differential accompaniment strategies** that contemplate the needs, psychosocial impacts and coping mechanisms of different groups: women, men, children, young people, the elderly, the disabled.

**Contribute towards the confrontation of fear by recognizing it as a protective mechanism.** The purpose is to build security strategies, even from the first days of displacement.

**Make accompaniment a space of respect and encouragement of autonomy and self-management.** The people are the ones who will decide their forms of organization, participation and decision-making. These can be oriented towards the individual or towards the collective, towards relocation or return, towards the daily and immediate or the strategic and political. Our function is to accompany, not to intervene.

**Promote integral accompaniments with an interdisciplinary focus.**

## 10 “El Morralito” (Tool bag)

Finally, we share and add to the “morrallito” (tool bag) some of the questions that have arisen in our experiences as companions in cases of forced displacement:

To what extent is this considered a State strategy; for what purpose and why? How is forced displacement different from migration, refuge and forced eviction and what are the similarities or common features? How does learning about other experiences of displacement in other countries help us? In Mexico, why haven't there been advances in the regulation of forced displacement? Would regulations be helpful and important in this regard and would they work?



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(Colombia)



How, from the accompaniment perspective, can we contribute so that people who have been displaced can incorporate their former experiences without getting stuck in the past? How can we contribute to a recognition of the present and the possibilities and strengths that exist in the new circumstances? How to work towards visualizing and building the future? How to deal with the dilemma of relocation or return? What would be the indispensable conditions for these alternatives? Regarding impunity and the legal powerlessness of victims of forced displacement, what are our main challenges as psychosocial companions?

## This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



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