

# HONDURAS

## Unearthing a hidden displacement crisis

SPOT  
LIGHT

Long notorious for some of the highest homicide rates in the world,<sup>119</sup> Honduras has recently experienced enough of an increase in displacement caused by criminal violence to bring the issue into the political limelight. To begin tackling its impacts, the government created the Inter-Agency Commission for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence (CIPPDV) in late 2013, and tasked it with driving “the creation of policies and the adoption of measures to prevent forced displacement caused by violence, as well as to care for, protect and find solutions for displaced people and their families”.<sup>120</sup>

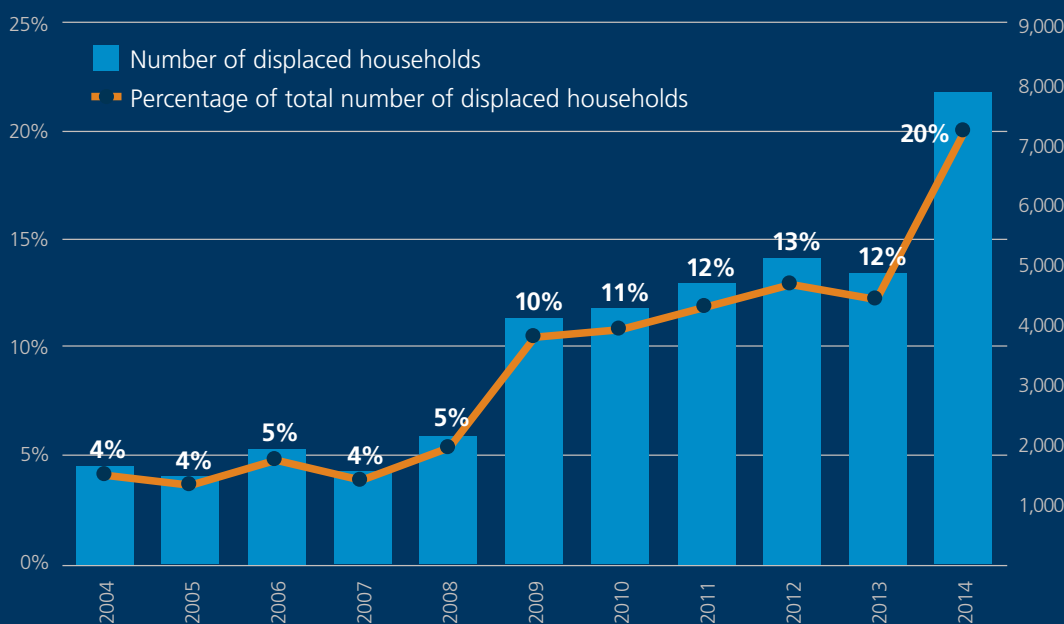
As a first step, the commission launched a research project in 2014 to reveal the country’s invisible displacement crisis and determine its scope and scale. An inter-agency team was created to carry out a study, led by CIPPDV and supported by the National Statistics Institute, the Jesuit Reflection, Investigation and Communication Team, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS).<sup>121</sup>

The aim was to collect information on people who had changed their place of residence within

Honduras between 2004 and 2014 for “specific reasons relating to violence and general crime”. For the purposes of the survey, the specific reasons were “forced recruitment, extortion, murder, threats, injury, sexual violence, insecurity in the community [conflict, shootings], kidnapping, forced disappearance, torture, discrimination, arbitrary detention and dispossession of land and dwellings”. People who reported having changed their place of residence because of robbery or assault were not classified as displaced.<sup>122</sup>

A total of 2,138 households were surveyed across 20 municipalities identified as having the highest concentrations of displaced people.<sup>123</sup> Based on an extrapolation of the findings it is estimated that they are home to around 174,000 IDPs, including children born in displacement.<sup>124</sup> Of those surveyed, 67.9 per cent said their decision to move was influenced only by violence and insecurity, and without consideration of other factors that usually determine migration, such as employment or living conditions.<sup>125</sup>

A deeper examination confirms a correlation



Source: Survey and Enumeration of Households Affected by Internal Displacement in 20 Municipalities in Honduras (Nov-Dec 2014)



Two girls play in the neighbourhood of Comunidad Bordos Llanos de Sula, San Pedro Sula, just a few blocks away from a murder scene where police found buried bodies. Photo: Oscar Leiva Marinero/ Catholic Relief Services, July 2014

between the intensity of criminal violence and population movement. As depicted in the graph, displacement levels remained relatively stable between 2004 and 2008, but rose noticeably between 2009 and 2013.<sup>126</sup> This trend coincides to some extent with the rise in homicide rates, an indication of the degree of violence to which people were exposed.<sup>127</sup>

The dynamic is contradicted somewhat by a spike in displacement in 2014, when homicide rates fell.<sup>128</sup> This anomaly may in part be explained by respondents' tendency to report more recent events to a greater extent than those that happened long ago.<sup>129</sup> Alternatively, the surge in the number of IDPs may reflect a broader reality of people fleeing a general deterioration of their security and daily lives.

Be that as it may, the progressive increase in the number of people displaced accentuates the Honduran authorities' need to create a clear and shared conceptual framework within which to understand why and at what point people flee areas plagued by criminal violence. The need is reiterated in one of the study's main recommendations, "to establish a definition of who may be considered a victim of forced displacement, in accordance with the Guiding Principles

on Internal Displacement, with the aim of identifying the range of people who may receive the State's attention".<sup>130</sup>

The UN special rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs stressed the point further during his official visit to Honduras in November 2015.<sup>131</sup> He welcomed the government's recognition of internal displacement, and highlighted the need for concerted action to tackle its causes and protect IDPs' rights. He urged the government "to strengthen its efforts to stop an internal displacement epidemic" caused by organised and gang-related crime and violence.