

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

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16 February 2012

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Colombia: Whether women who head their own households, without male or family support, can obtain housing and employment in Santiago de Cali; violence against women in Santiago de Cali; government support services available to female-headed households in Santiago de Cali

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Background

The 2010 National Survey on Demography and Health (*Encuesta Nacional de Demografía y Salud del 2010, ENDS 2010*), carried out by Profamilia, a private, nonprofit organization specializing in sexual and reproductive health that provides health services and education to the Colombian people (Profamilia n.d.), indicates that 34 percent of Colombian homes are headed by women (ibid. Mar. 2011, 37). In an article posted on the website of the city council of Santiago de Cali, a representative of the Municipality of Santiago de Cali indicates that 28 percent of households in the city are headed by women (Santiago de Cali 9 Mar. 2011). However, 37 percent of children under the age of 15 in the city of Santiago de Cali live with only their mother, according to the ENDS 2010 survey (Profamilia Mar. 2011, 40). According to statistics provided by the Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation (Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional, Acción Social), the government agency responsible for [translation] "developing actions with victims of violence and displacement to guarantee their return [to their places of origin] and grant administrative reparations" (Colombia n.d.c), in 2011, 600 displaced households living in Santiago de Cali were headed by women, compared to 337 that were headed by men (ibid. n.d.a), down from 2010, for which Acción Social reported 1,030 households headed by women and 592 headed by men (ibid. n.d.b).

The city of Santiago de Cali is not listed as one of the ten municipalities with the highest rates of emigration; however, the Department of Valle del Cauca [of which Santiago de Cali is the capital] ranks ninth among departments with respect to persons who left for other parts of the country, with 4.16 percent of the total of displaced persons (Medellin 31 July 2011). However, Santiago de Cali receives 2.18 percent of the displaced population, or 81,284 people, placing it fifth among municipalities receiving displaced population (ibid.).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the General Coordinator of Taller Abierto, an NGO based in Santiago de Cali that works for social and gender equality, multiculturalism and peace (Taller Abierto n.d.), indicated that it is [translation] "very difficult" for displaced women to integrate in the city, especially if they are indigenous, Afro-Colombian, or from rural areas (ibid. 4 Oct. 2011). The General Coordinator also remarked that integration for women displaced due to armed conflict is [translation] "much more difficult" (ibid.).

2. Housing

According to the General Coordinator of Taller Abierto, women living in low income neighbourhoods face difficulties accessing housing because prices in the city are [translation] "too high" and social housing is "overcrowded" (ibid.). Additionally, they face barriers to accessing housing programs and education, particularly technical and higher education (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Employment

The ENDS 2010 survey indicates that 58.1 percent of women in Santiago de Cali were employed in 2010 (Profamilia Mar. 2011, 88). The majority of women were employed in sales and service (66.2 percent), with the next largest groups being 10.9 percent in administrative work and 10.5 percent in professional or technical jobs (ibid., 90). According to the survey, 41.2 percent of women who were seeking employment in Santiago de Cali reported having to undergo pregnancy

tests, compared to 30.5 percent nationwide (ibid, 105). Other tests required from women in Santiago de Cali when seeking employment were proof of sterilization (3 percent) and AIDS (16.2 percent) (ibid.). According to the survey, 4.1 percent of women in Santiago de Cali said they were fired because they got pregnant (ibid.).

According to the General Coordinator at Taller Abierto, the majority of displaced women in Santiago de Cali work as housemaids or as street vendors since they do not have the necessary training to access better jobs (Taller Abierto 4 Oct. 2011). She also indicated that the economic difficulties they face may expose them and their children to greater risks such as sexual violence, economic exploitation, and forced recruitment of their sons and daughters by local gangs (ibid.).

4. Violence Against Women

According to the General Coordinator of Taller Abierto, violence against women in Santiago de Cali is a [translation] "serious problem since [this violence] has to do with a context in which the patriarchal culture has been strengthened" (Taller Abierto 4 Oct. 2011). The Observatory of Family and Sexual Violence (Observatorio de Violencia Familiar y Sexual) of the Municipality of Santiago de Cali reported 9,138 cases of family and sexual violence in 2010 (Santiago de Cali 2010a). The Observatory indicated that victims suffered psychological mistreatment (34 percent), neglect (31 percent), physical abuse (24 percent), and sexual violence (6 percent) (ibid.). In the majority of cases, violence came from the mother or father (46.4 percent) or from a spouse or partner (21.4 percent) (ibid.). Profamilia's ENDS 2010 survey also indicates that 8.7 percent of women have suffered sexual abuse and 16.8 percent have experienced aggression from persons other than their spouses or partners (Profamilia March 2011, 384, 386). The majority of women, 78.2 percent, did not seek medical assistance after suffering physical abuse from their spouses or partners (ibid., 376).

An article in *El País*, a Santiago de Cali-based newspaper, indicates that the Observatory of Family Violence reported 2,282 cases of violence against women from January to June 2011 (24 Nov. 2011). However, other sources cite statistics from the Ombudsperson of Santiago de Cali that indicate that the Centre for Assistance to Victims of Intrafamily Violence (Centro de Atención a Víctimas de Violencia Intrafamiliar, CAVIF) reported 6,300 cases of domestic violence, 90 percent of these against women, from January to October 2011 (*El Tiempo* 25 Nov. 2011; see also *El País* 25 Nov. 2011). The Ombudsperson also indicated that, of 1,200 cases of rape, 90 percent were against women younger than 14 years of age (*El Tiempo* 25 Nov. 2011; *El País* 25 Nov. 2011). According to the representative of the Municipality of Santiago de Cali, 73.8 percent of women in that city have been affected by domestic violence (Santiago de Cali 9 Mar. 2011).

El Tiempo, a Bogota-based newspaper, also cites the Ombudsperson as saying that, according to a report from the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses, INMLCF), 80 women were murdered in the city from January to October 2011 (25 Nov. 2011).

5. Government Programs

In his 2010 Management Report (*Informe de Gestión 2010*), the Ombudsperson of Santiago de Cali indicates that the municipality has distinct shelters for victims of family and sexual violence, displaced persons, the homeless, and children and adolescents, with nine in total (Santiago de Cali 2010b). The Positive Human Resource Foundation (Fundación Recurso Humano Positivo, Fundación Rh Positivo), an organization that develops educational, health and cultural projects (Fundación Rh Positivo n.d.), indicates that it has a shelter for women victims of family or sexual violence and offers them food, health, psychological and legal assistance (ibid. 9 Mar. 2011). Further, the Municipality of Santiago de Cali indicates on its website that, from October 2009 to November 2011, 800 people benefited from the shelter (Santiago de Cali 9 Nov. 2011).

According to the website of the Ombudsperson, medical personnel attending cases of violence against underage women must report the cases to the Office of the Attorney General, the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, ICBF) or family commissioners (ibid. Jan. 2011b).

With regard to displaced persons, the Municipality of Santiago de Cali has the Unit for Assistance and Orientation of Displaced Persons (Unidad de Atención y Orientación al Desplazado, UAO), which provides [translation] "access to local state services for displaced populations" (Santiago de Cali 14 July 2010). According to the website of the Ombudsperson, displaced persons must report to the UAO, where their application will be assessed within 15 business days (ibid. Jan. 2011a). If the application is approved, the displaced person can access, free of charge, primary and secondary schooling for children, health services, and orientation on housing (ibid.). However, the website of the Ombudsperson also indicates that the municipality does not have [translation] "adequate infrastructure to handle events of massive displacement and also lacks an appropriate contingency plan for this purpose" (ibid. 2010b). The General Coordinator of Taller Abierto further indicated that displaced women encounter [translation] "many limitations" on access to specific programs for them, and despite the existing legislation to guarantee their rights, these laws [translation] "have advanced very little" in solidifying their rights (Taller Abierto 4 Oct. 2011).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful: Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional, Alcaldía de Santiago de Cali, Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular, Defensoría del Pueblo, Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, Instituto Popular de Capacitación, Sisma Mujer, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, and Universidad del Valle.

Internet sites, including: Alta Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, *Caracol*, Colombia – Ministerio de la Protección Social, Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, Comisión de la Unión Europea en Colombia, Cruz Roja de Colombia, *El Espectador*, Factiva, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, *El Mundo*, Noticias RCN, Organización Internacional para las Migraciones, Opción Legal, Pastoral Social, Profamilia, *Semana*, UNIFEM.

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