

COLORS 57: SLUMS

One in six people alive today lives in a slum or informal settlement in one of the world's cities. That's 1 billion people, the majority of whom have little access to services like electricity, water and sewers, few links to the formal economy and insecure rights to the land they live on. But overriding poverty and unhealthy living environments are just one aspect of life in urban slums. For COLORS 57 we sent teams of photographers and journalists to 12 slums on five continents. From Spain to Bolivia, Tokyo and Nairobi, we found communities actively improving their lives. As Cjiljana Jovanovic, 47, a Kosovanian refugee now living next to a bridge in Belgrade along with 270 other Roma families explains, *When you know how to organize yourself, anywhere can be nice*. These are communities that have their own stylists, interior decorators, architects, electricians, bankers, plumbers, doctors and businesspeople. Objects are put to maximum use: A pool table doubles up as a bed at night; Tetrapak cartons become waterproof wallpaper; pigs become informal garbage disposal units, Coca-Cola crates are used instead of bricks. People brew their own alcohol and cook specialties for small restaurants or food stalls; one person started a bar with just one case of beer for sale. And what one person can't do alone, groups manage with ease. Only one toilet seat for 750 people? Save up a few cents a month per family and build a clean, communal toilet block connected straight to the nearest sewer. No fresh water? Run a pipe into the nearest mountain stream. No electricity? Tap into the municipality's supply—when they offer you the service, you'll be happy to pay. Organized communities from Mumbai to Rio de Janeiro are fighting for their neighborhoods to be recognized as official districts in the city; they are building sewers and organizing for trash to be collected or recycled. And, although time and money may be scarce, individual ingenuity is everywhere: From advertising billboards used as makeshift walls, to glass doors used as windows or a cat-flap built into the door of a shack. COLORS 57: Do-it-yourself culture for cash-strapped urban dwellers.

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