

At a glance

Global Estimates 2014: people displaced by disasters

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Rising global trends: 22 million people displaced by disasters in 2013

Millions of people are forced to flee their homes every year as a result of disasters triggered by natural hazards. In 2013, 22 million people were displaced by disasters brought on by natural hazard events. This is triple the amount than by conflict in the same year.

Mass displacements are frequent in countries most exposed and vulnerable to natural hazards. More than 600 events were recorded during the year, of which 37 involved mass movements of 100,000 to four million plus people.

Displacement per region

Most of the largest displacements took place in populous Asian countries. Typhoons, floods and earthquakes in China and the Philippines accounted for 12 of the 20 largest displacements.

Rainy season floods in sub-Saharan Africa triggered five of the 10 largest displacements relative to population size which included: Niger, Chad, Sudan and South Sudan, and Mozambique.

Exposure of populations to hazards in the most developed countries also led to some of the world's largest displacements: for instance, Typhoon Man-yi in the Chubu region of Japan displaced 260,000 people, tornadoes in the US state of Oklahoma 218,500, and floods in Alberta, Canada, displaced 120,000.

Severe floods hit Europe, particularly in Germany, the Czech Republic, Russia and the UK, displacing a total of 149,000 people.

The Americas had an unusually quiet hurricane season and the region did not experience any major geophysical disasters.

Asia

- Typhoon Haiyan accounted for the largest displacement of the year, forcing in the Philippines, a million more than in Africa, the Americas, Europe and Oceania combined
- Most displacement since 1970 has taken place in Asia, where more people are exposed to natural hazards than in any other region
- 19 million people were displaced in 2013, or 87.1 per cent of the global total

Africa

- 1.8 people were displaced, accounting for 8.1 per cent of the global total
- The region also accounted for 8.6 per cent of global total between 2008 and 2013
- Exposure to hazards that trigger displacement is expected to increase faster in Africa than in other regions
- Given that Africa's population is predicted to double by 2050, displacement risk is expected to increase faster than in any other region in the coming decades.

Key Concerns

Six year overview: 2008 to 2013

Disasters displaced an average of 27 million people each year between 2008 and 2013.

Major disasters are irregular and relatively infrequent, but they cause displacement on a vast scale when they do occur. Thirty-five disasters that each forced more than a million people to leave their homes accounted for 70 per cent of all displacement over the six-year period.

Increased investment in disaster risk reduction measures, such as better urban planning, the maintenance of flood defences and the introduction of building standards for housing and other infrastructure that can withstand smaller-scale hazards, could prevent or mitigate much of their impact.

Countries with displacement caused by both conflict and disasters

In 33 out of 36 countries affected by armed conflict between 2008 and 2012, there were also reports of natural hazards forcing people to flee their homes.

The combination of conflict and natural hazards creates military and environmental obstacles to population movements, isolating communities and limiting people's options in terms of flight and destinations.

Disaster risk reduction measures and community-based livelihood strategies are needed to enable people to adapt to new shocks, prepare for future ones and prevent repeated cycles of displacement.

Prevention and preparedness

Unless action is taken to reduce disaster risk and to help communities adapt to changing weather patterns, we are likely to see much more displacement in the coming years and decades.

For increasing numbers of people living in areas prone to natural hazards, early warning systems and well-planned evacuations will become ever more important.

Policymakers should take care to ensure that national disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation plans and measures incorporate the risk and impact of displacement.

Looking ahead

Higher average levels of displacement are to be expected in the coming decades.

Demographic trends and vulnerability will continue to be the primary drivers of displacement risk, and changes in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are expected to add to this risk.

To offset population growth, governments and their partners will need to step up efforts to reduce people's exposure and vulnerability by adopting and enforcing better land-use plans and building regulations, addressing income inequality and improving conditions for large populations living in informal settlements.