

19.3 million displaced by disasters but “mother nature not to blame” says new report

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GENEVA 20 JULY 2015: In the last seven years, an estimated one person every second has been displaced by a disaster, with 19.3 million people forced to flee their homes in 2014 alone. Disaster displacement is on the rise, and as policy leaders worldwide advance towards the adoption of a post-2015 global agenda, the time has never been better to address it.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) released today its global report, *The Global Estimates: People displaced by disasters*. The report reveals how, in 2014, 17.5 million people were forced to flee their homes by disasters brought on by weather-related hazards such as floods and storms, and 1.7 million by geophysical hazards such as earthquakes.

“The millions of lives devastated by disasters is more often a consequence of bad man-made structures and policies, than the forces of mother nature,” said Jan Egeland, Secretary General of NRC. “A flood is not in itself a disaster, the catastrophic consequences happen when people are neither prepared nor protected when it hits”.

The report points to the man-made factors that drive an overall increasing trend in disaster displacement, like rapid economic development, urbanisation and population growth in hazard prone areas. “These factors are a toxic mix, because when such hazards strike there are more homes and people in their path, and therefore flight becomes necessary for survival” said director of IDMC, Alfredo Zamudio. Climate change is also expected to exacerbate the situation in the future, as severe weather hazards become more frequent and intense.

The report argues that these drivers are increasing the number of people becoming displaced, and the risk that their displacement becomes a long-term problem. Today, the likelihood of being displaced by a disaster is 60% higher than it was four decades ago, and an analysis of 34 cases reveals that disaster displacement can last for up to 26 years.

People in both rich and poor countries can be caught in protracted, or long-term, displacement. In the US, over 39,000 people are still in need of housing assistance following Hurricane Sandy in 2012, and 230,000 people have been unable to establish new homes in Japan following the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident.

“Governments should prioritise measures to strengthen the resilience of people whose displacement risks becoming protracted, or has already become so,” said William Lacy Swing, director general of International Organization for Migration, which assisted in the data collection for the report. “If communities are strengthened and ready beforehand, with solid infrastructure, early warning systems, and other such measures, displacement can be used as a short term coping strategy, or at best be avoided altogether”.

The report comes at a crucial time this year as various past and future policy processes come together. These include the Sustainable Development Goals which are to be adopted in September, as well as ongoing preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. What this report shows is how disaster displacement bridges all these policy processes.

“We can talk about sustainability, climate change and a reformed humanitarian architecture” said Zamudio, “but to ensure that all these policy processes turn into concrete action, we need to pay closer attention to those living on the front lines; in this case the millions of men, women and children currently on the run from disasters worldwide”.

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Notes to editors:

- In 2014, more than 19.3 million people became displaced by disasters in 100 countries worldwide.
- Since 2008, an average of 26.4 million people have been displaced by disasters each year - equivalent to one person displaced every second.
- 17.5 million people were displaced by disasters brought on by weather-related hazards in 2014. 1.7 million were displaced by geophysical hazards.
- Since 2008, an average of 22.5 million people have been displaced by climate- or weather-related disasters each year - equivalent to 62,000 people every day.
- Asia, home to 60% of the world’s population, and with 16.7 million people displaced, accounted for 87 per cent of the global total in 2014.
- China, India and the Philippines experienced the highest levels of displacement in absolute terms, both in 2014 and for the 2008 to 2014 period.
- In 2014, Europe experienced double its average level of displacement for the past seven years. 190,000 people were displaced in 2014, mostly by flood disasters in the Balkans.
- Displacement in Africa was three times lower in 2014 than the average over the last seven years. Relative to their population size, however, many African countries such as Sudan, experienced high levels of disaster displacement.
- Contrary to common assumptions, displacement following disasters can become protracted and returning home is not always an option. A sample of 34 cases accounts for over 715,000 people in such situations. Monitoring of protracted displacement situations is scarce, resulting in an important blind spot in our current understanding of disaster displacement.

To download the full report: [click here](#)

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