

FOREWORD

In April 2017, diplomats and donors met in Brussels to support the future of the Syrian people and their neighbours. The conference was overshadowed by a horrific chemical attack on civilians in Idlib, Syria. As people were dying in harrowing circumstances, the leaders in Brussels had scheduled discussing the return of refugees to the country. The contrast between those plans and the reality on the ground could not have been starker.

By the end of 2016, more than half of Syria's 22 million people had fled the violence of the past six years. People continue to flee daily, and many remain displaced within the country.

These days Syrians can only move so far. The country's international borders were effectively closed in 2015-2016, leaving hundreds of thousands internally displaced near crossing points into neighbouring countries. As the conflict evolves some are returning to their homes. But we do not know if this is because the situation in their area of origin has improved, or because it was unsustainable in their place of refuge.

The plight of refugees returning elsewhere, as in Afghanistan and Somalia, is also a cause for concern as the number of refugees worldwide continues to rise and global interest in returns increases. The risk that unprepared, involuntary or premature returns will cause more internal displacement in the future cannot be underestimated.

This year, IDMC's Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) examines the connections between internal and cross-border displacement. It shows that people unable to find safety by fleeing within their own country eventually embark on dangerous journeys across borders in search of refuge and a better life.

It also indicates that refugees and migrants who return or are deported back to conditions similar to those that led to their flight risk becoming displaced again. This will only add to the country's existing number of internally displaced people (IDPs). Given the current attention to


these issues, and that patterns and trajectories vary significantly from one country to another, a much stronger evidence base is needed.

This year's GRID continues to publish estimates and analysis of people internally displaced by conflict, violence and disasters in a single report. Many more people were displaced once again by disasters than conflict, showing that disaster risk reduction remains a core priority of our times. In addition to large scale and sudden-onset events, slowly developing food security crises triggered by drought and exacerbated by existing vulnerabilities and protracted conflict also continue to affect millions of people. A significant number of new internal displacements in 2016 had multiple causes.

People also continue to be displaced by development projects and investments, and while the GRID does not yet provide global figures for this, it is important to remember that development can benefit some while severely affecting others.

IDMC continues to be the reference point for statistics on internal displacement. But the picture we paint is still incomplete. More accurate and rigorous data is vital to a number of current global policy processes, so we appeal to governments and partners to increase their efforts to provide comprehensive and timely information.

We must remember that behind the figures presented here lie many millions of people whose lives have been torn apart. Our hope is that through better information and evidence, decisions that affect their fragile futures can be improved.


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Norwegian Refugee Council