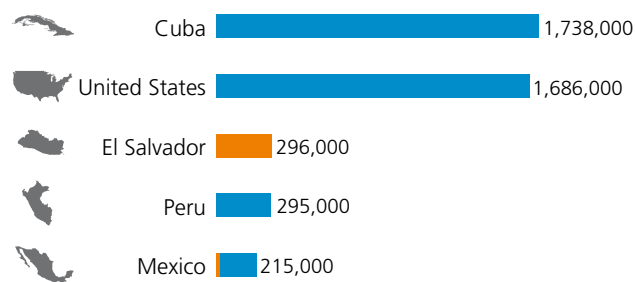


THE AMERICAS



DISASTERS 23.8%
CONFLICT 3.9%
OF THE GLOBAL TOTAL

5 COUNTRIES WITH MOST NEW DISPLACEMENT (conflict and disasters)



At 4.5 million, the number of people displaced by disasters in the Americas was about ten times higher than the 457,000 who fled conflict and violence in 2017, affecting high and low-income countries alike. People fled their homes from **Canada** to **Chile** to escape earthquakes and climate extremes in the form of cyclones, wildfires and floods. The region as a whole accounted for 24 per cent of displacement associated with disasters globally, second only to East Asia and Pacific.

Displacement associated with conflict and violence saw a steady increase, from 436,000 in 2016 to 457,000 in 2017. Mirroring previous years, countries like **El Salvador**, **Colombia** and **Mexico** were among the most affected. Criminal violence was also widespread in **Guatemala**, **Honduras** and **Venezuela**, but figures for internal displacement in those countries are difficult to come by.

The Atlantic hurricane season accounted for the vast majority of the region's displacement associated with disasters. Hurricane Irma was the largest disaster event of the year worldwide, displacing around 2 million people over two weeks in August and September. Hurricane Harvey displaced another 848,000 and Maria around 146,000. About twenty countries and territories, most of them small island developing states in **the Caribbean**, suffered the worst impacts of the season (see spotlight, p.42).

The US was also highly affected, particularly by Harvey, which caused unprecedented flooding in Houston, Texas. It is ironic that a subsidised flood insurance mechanism the federal government introduced in 1968 actually ended up promoting the construction of housing in flood-prone areas.¹⁸⁴ In this sense, Harvey's impacts were as much due to decades of unsustainable, badly conceived and poorly implemented urban planning as the intensity of the hazard itself. The storm displaced around 848,000 people in the US.

The west coast of **the US** and **Canada** suffered the impacts of major wildfires. In southern California the biggest wildfires affected an area the size of New York City and Boston combined, triggering the evacuation of more than 204,000 people.¹⁸⁵ Other wildfires in the US triggered more than 181,000 new displacements, and in Canada around 78,000. British Columbia experienced the worst wildfires in the province's history, displacing around 65,000 people.

Central **Mexico** was hit by a 7.1 magnitude earthquake that affected seven states and displaced 104,000 people. It struck on 19 September, the same day as in the 1985 Mexico City earthquake that killed thousands. Following the 1985 earthquake, Mexico established laws, policies, strategies and institutions to manage disaster risk, and now has one of the world's most sophisticated earthquake early warning systems.¹⁸⁶

Emergency drills have been conducted throughout the country every year since 1985 on 19 September as a reminder of the importance of disaster awareness.¹⁸⁷

The 2017 earthquake struck hours after the annual emergency drills, damaging and collapsing buildings and killing 230 people.¹⁸⁸ This showed that despite having strong governance and civil society engagement, Mexico still needs to do more to reduce disaster risk and avoid losses, damage and displacement.

Floods caused displacement throughout the continent with **Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay** and **the US** as the most affected countries. The flooding in Peru was the worst in 20 years, and displaced around 295,000 people.¹⁸⁹

Displacement associated with conflict and violence in the Americas accounted for about four per cent of the global total. **El Salvador** appeared to be the worst affected country, with 296,000 new displacements, followed by **Colombia** with 139,000. This figure for Colombia was fewer than the 171,000 recorded in 2016, the result in part of the peace agreement signed between the government and the country's largest armed group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

The end of FARC's 50-year insurgency followed more than a decade of policy initiatives intended to address the plight of the country's IDPs, including the 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law, which laid the foundations for the negotiations that eventually led to the 2016 peace deal.¹⁹⁰ The process was backed by the international community and is widely considered a success to be emulated in other countries and regions affected by conflict.

Despite this important milestone in **Colombia's** recent history, violence continues to cause displacement. Criminal gangs, guerrilla groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), dissident FARC fighters and reconstituted paramilitary groups have occupied many of the territories FARC used to control. They have taken over illegal activities prevalent in these areas such as drug production, illegal mining and other extractive practices. The highest numbers of IDPs were recorded in the marginalised Pacific coast departments of Cauca, Chocó, Nariño and Valle del Cauca. Indigenous and African-Colombian communities have been disproportionately affected by the new wave of conflict.

The situation in Colombia has been defined as an ongoing humanitarian crisis characterised by urban displacement and dire conditions for IDPs, with two out of three living below the poverty line.¹⁹¹ Progress in implementing the land restitution and reform agreed by the government and FARC has been slow, raising fears that the peace process might be undermined and new waves of violence sparked.

The political and economic situation in neighbouring **Venezuela** deteriorated over the course of the year. The number of IDPs in the country is unknown, but as of the end of 2017 more than 500,000 Venezuelans were estimated to be living in exile across the border in Colombia, and about 110,000 people fled the country in October 2017 alone.¹⁹² It is also hard to establish how many of the people on the move have fled criminal violence, repression and intimidation, and how many the country's dire and deteriorating economic situation. Most, however, are in desperate need of food, medicines and healthcare.¹⁹³

The **Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA)** continues to be plagued by drug-related criminal and gang violence. An extrapolation of findings from a national survey in **El Salvador** suggests there were around 296,000 new displacements in the country as a result. An unknown number of people have been displaced in **Honduras**, while in **Guatemala** there are only reports about evictions, which represent a small part of all displacements. Internal displacement in the NTCA has tended to be invisible, but a number of policy developments in 2017 have the potential to begin filling an urgent knowledge and action gap (see spotlight, p.40).

The Americas as a whole also made important policy advances toward government transparency, responsibility and accountability for internal displacement. The 2017 San Pedro Sula Declaration, adopted by Central American countries, lays out the region's position on joint protection mechanisms for IDPs and migrants. This declaration also addressed forced displacement as a component of the 2030 Agenda, and referenced the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the SDGs.¹⁹⁴ This was a clear step in the right direction as countries continue to strengthen their regional, sub-regional and national efforts to address both violence and disaster-induced displacement in the region.

SPOTLIGHT

NORTHERN TRIANGLE OF CENTRAL AMERICA

A reluctant and fragmented response



There has been a marked upsurge in recent years in the number of people fleeing El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras – known collectively as the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) – to escape drug-related violence, the activities of organised crime gangs, conflicts over land and other generalised violence.¹⁹⁵ This rise in the number of asylum seekers, many of them unaccompanied minors or whole families, is undoubtedly symptomatic of a larger displacement crisis inside the three countries' borders.¹⁹⁶

Information about internal displacement is, however, largely anecdotal, making NTCA's IDPs all but invisible. Partly because of this knowledge gap, authorities have been reluctant to acknowledge and tackle the phenomenon. Given their reluctance and the lack of systematic data, responses to IDPs' needs have been fragmented. It is also difficult to judge their effectiveness.

The causes of flight within and from the region are much less ambiguous than its scale. Homicide rates in NTCA were nearly seven times the global average in 2017, despite reductions in recent years.¹⁹⁷ Aside from assassinations, extrajudicial killings and femicide, the region is also haunted by disappearances, rape, kidnappings, threats, the forced recruitment of children, intimidation and extortion. There tend to be few official investigations into crimes and even fewer convictions, even for homicides, creating an environment of flagrant impunity.¹⁹⁸ Some communities also face the impact of structural violence rooted in the reallocation of resources in ways that limit their ability to secure their basic needs.

Faced with such endemic violence, many people feel they have no choice but to uproot their families and livelihoods in search of safety elsewhere in their countries. Given the criminal organisations' wide reach and states' lack of protection capacity, and in some cases political will, they often find that internal displacement does not provide the sanctuary they seek. Studies have found that people who had fled NTCA countries to Mexico crossed the border after those perpetrating violence or threats against them had caught up with them.¹⁹⁹ Many people are also reluctant to file reports for fear of reprisals, deep distrust of some authorities and the lack of a guarantee of state assistance if a report is made.

Amid mounting evidence of a displacement and protection crisis in NTCA, stakeholders worked at the local, national and regional level in 2017 to strengthen responses for those affected.²⁰⁰ Such efforts are cause for cautious optimism, but it remains to be seen whether they will translate into real change for people at risk of, or affected by displacement.

The Honduran government has taken the regional lead in officially recognising displacement, and it took several promising policy steps during the year. The Inter-institutional Commission for the Protection of People Displaced by Violence, created in 2013, was endowed with a human rights secretary and a directorate for IDPs' protection. Draft legislation on preventing and responding to internal displacement is due for presentation to congress in 2018, which would make gang-related displacement a criminal offence. Several municipalities also began designing displacement response

plans, a first step toward creating local public policies to address the phenomenon.

In El Salvador, the constitutional chamber of the Supreme Court accepted petitions filed in November referring to internal displacement associated with criminal violence. The move came after the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights granted precautionary measures in favour of one of the cases and following an amendment to the Criminal Code in 2016 that included the crime of restricting freedom of movement by threats, intimidation or violence.²⁰¹ The country's justice and security minister also officially recognised displacement associated with gang violence, a significant development for a government that had previously been reluctant to do so.²⁰²

This progress was undermined, however, by the US government's announcement in January 2018 that it was to revoke temporary protective status for nearly 200,000 Salvadorans who had been living legally in the country since two earthquakes struck in 2001.²⁰³ In the absence of clear and effective protocols for reintegrating returnees, it is feared that deportations on such a scale could overwhelm El Salvador's political and economic capacity to receive them and add to the country's displacement crisis.

A national government's acknowledgement of internal displacement on its territory and its responsibility for addressing the phenomenon is an essential first step toward an effective and integrated response.²⁰⁴ It is, however, only a first step. A broad range of measures are needed to mitigate the humanitarian consequences of a displacement crisis. Long-term solutions lie in socio-economic development and regional cooperation based on a full understanding of the breadth and depth of the crisis.

With this in mind, countries of origin, transit and asylum met in October 2017 for a conference on the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework in the Americas.²⁰⁵ With the adoption of the global refugee compact due in 2018, national and regional stakeholders discussed ways of putting commitments made in their 2016 San José action statement into practice to better protect people who flee violence in NTCA.

The US government had been one of nine - along with those of the three NTCA countries, Belize, Canada, Mexico and Panama - that welcomed the 2016 San

José action statement. Together with representatives from international organisations, academia and civil society, they pledged to prevent and address the causes of violence, improve asylum and protection responses and promote regional cooperation.²⁰⁶

Policymakers and responders in NTCA need to harness this momentum and implement the political commitments already made. Legislative, administrative and budgetary measures should be based on reliable and timely data on the numbers and needs of IDPs that sheds light on risk across the displacement continuum, from internal flight to cross-border movement and back again. In parallel, countries outside the region should recognise the need to share responsibility for addressing the situation and achieving durable solutions. Otherwise the impact on individuals, communities and countries as a whole of a growing displacement crisis will continue unchecked.

SPOTLIGHT

THE ATLANTIC HURRICANE SEASON

and the importance of resilience

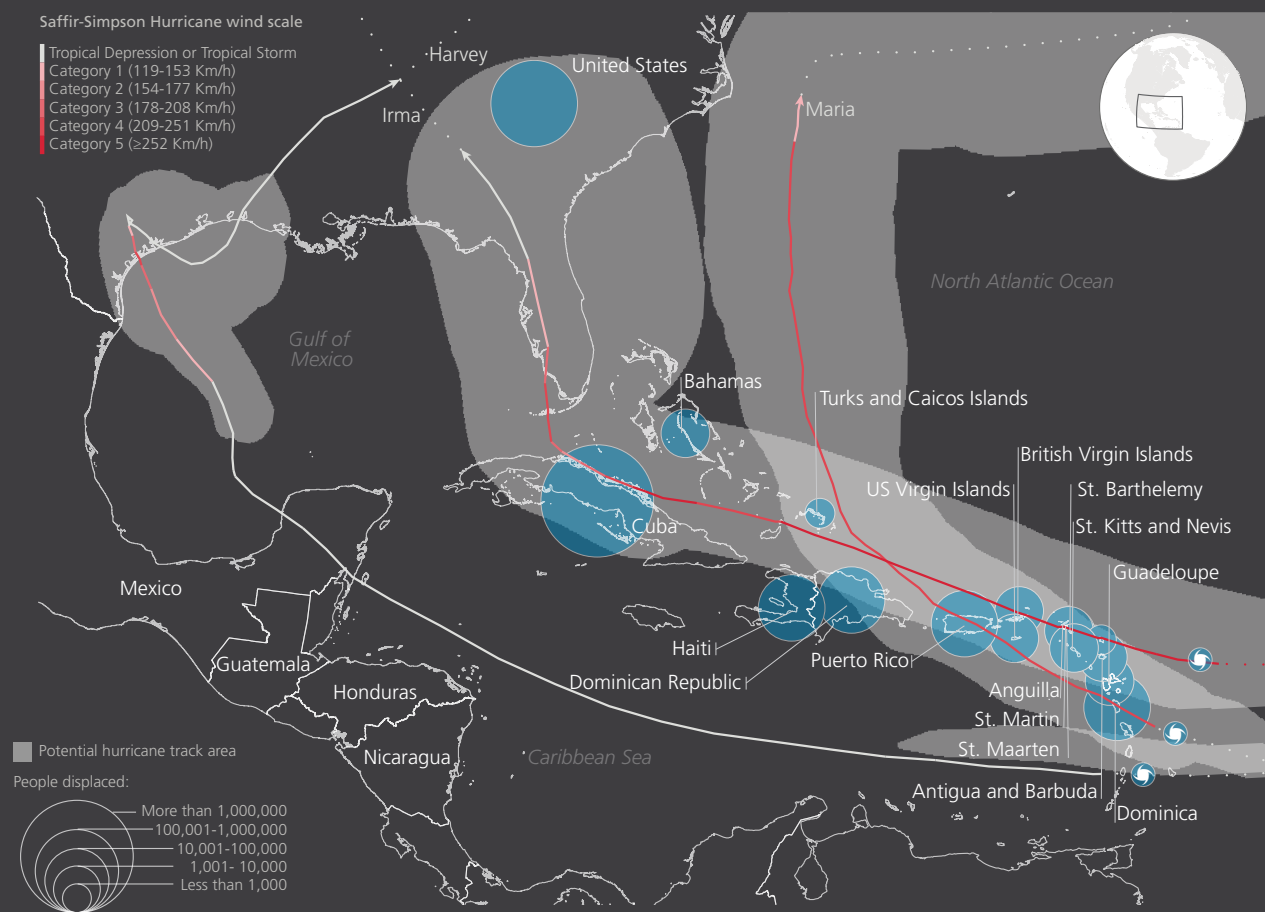
The 2017 Atlantic hurricane season was the seventh most active since records began in 1851 and the most active since 2005. Ten hurricanes affected around 20 countries and territories, of which six developed into category 3 storms or above.²⁰⁷ The three major hurricanes, Harvey, Irma and Maria, displaced over 3 million people in the space of a month. They hit as the region was still

recovering from the devastation wrought by hurricane Matthew, which displaced 2.2 million people in 2016.

The 2017 season set several new records. Harvey was the wettest recorded tropical cyclone in US history, dumping around 137 centimetres of rainfall on the continent.²⁰⁸ More than 19 trillion gallons of rainwater fell in parts of Texas, causing widespread floods and prompting the largest disaster response in the state's history.²⁰⁹ It was also the first major hurricane to make landfall in the US since Wilma in 2005, the 12-year gap being the longest on record.

Hurricane Irma was the most powerful hurricane ever recorded in the Atlantic, with maximum sustained winds of 296 km/h, accompanied by torrential rain and storm surges.²¹⁰ It also triggered the highest number of new displacements associated with a disaster in 2017 at more than 2 million, accounting for 11 per cent of the global total of 18.8 million. Irma affected 15 countries and territories, more than any other storm of the season.

FIGURE 6: People displaced by the three main storms of the Atlantic Hurricane Season 2017



Sources: IDMC analysis from several sources (e.g. FEMA, COE, Copernicus EMS, IOM, CDEMA, local governments, IFRC DMIS), Hurricane paths and track area NOAA (2017), population data from the Demographic and Social Statistics of the United Nations (UNSD, 2015).

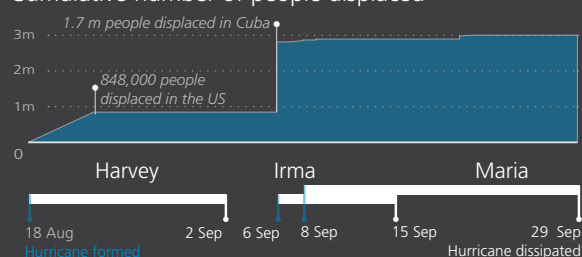
The US endured significant impacts and received most of the media coverage, but a number of Caribbean islands, including **Cuba**, **Dominica** and **Puerto Rico** also suffered substantial losses and displacement both as a result of pre-emptive evacuations and the damage and destruction of homes.

Dominica bore the brunt of hurricane Maria, which tore across the island as a category 5 storm on 18 September. Every household was affected. Dominica was unprepared for such an intensive event, making recovery and reconstruction challenging and slow. Three months after the disaster, only eight per cent of the island's inhabitants, mainly those living in the cities of Roseau and Portsmouth, had had their electricity supply restored.

🌀 Around **3 million** people in 16 countries and territories were displaced during the 2017 Atlantic Hurricane Season. Most of the displacements were triggered by three major hurricanes: Harvey, Irma and Maria.

Event name	Country	Displaced People	Percentage of the displaced population in the territory
Harvey	United States	848,000	0.3
	Cuba	1,738,000	15.3
	United States	202,000	0.1
	Dominican Republic	24,000	0.2
	St. Maarten (Dutch part)	13,000	31.7
	Haiti	13,000	0.1
	St. Martin (French part)	11,000	2.7
Irma	British Virgin Islands	6,000	19.2
	Bahamas	1,600	0.4
	Guadeloupe	1,500	0.3
	St. Barthelemy	1,500	16.2
	Antigua and Barbuda	1,400	1.5
	Anguilla	500	3.4
	US Virgin Islands	390	0.4
	Puerto Rico	190	0.01
	Turks and Caicos Islands	60	0.2
	St. Kitts and Nevis	33	0.1
Maria	Puerto Rico	86,000	2.3
	Dominica	35,000	47.4
	Dominican Republic	23,000	0.2
	US Virgin Islands	1,900	1.8

Cumulative number of people displaced



The economy, which depends on tourism and agriculture, was also hard hit. Post-disaster needs assessments suggest the tourism sector is likely to take at least a year to recover given the extent of infrastructure damage. This leaves people who depend on tourism for their living to face the dual challenge of losing their income while trying to rebuild their homes.²¹¹

Crops, boats and other farming and fishing equipment were also lost or destroyed, which will have a knock-on effect on neighbouring countries because Dominica is an important exporter of food to the region.²¹² The extent of the damage to the economy was such that people may be forced to leave the island in search of decent job opportunities and living conditions.²¹³

The total number of people Maria displaced on Dominica is hard to quantify. IOM identified around 3,000 people still living in collective centres across the island two weeks after the storm struck, but numerous unofficial displacement sites and host families were not assessed. Initial assessments of destroyed and damaged buildings put their number at between 17,000 and 20,000. These would have been home to 54,000 people, or about 80 per cent of the island's population.²¹⁴ Based on building assessments conducted by the government in mid-December 2017, we estimate that more than 35,000 people were displaced, and they are likely to remain so, until they fully recover from Hurricane Maria.

Like Dominica, **Puerto Rico** was also unprepared for Maria's impacts, making recovery and reconstruction slow. The island's economy was already in crisis, the result of years of mismanagement, and around 40 per cent of its inhabitants were living in poverty. This in turn meant that spending on social programmes was high, but Puerto Rico – which is an unincorporated US territory – receives little federal funding relative to its population size.²¹⁵ Nor had it received any federal disaster aid a month after Maria struck, unlike other affected areas of the US such as Florida, Georgia, Texas and the US Virgin Islands.²¹⁶

This despite the fact that Puerto Rico was left without mains drinking water, 80 per cent of its power grid was destroyed and mobile and other communications infrastructure badly damaged. Around 60,000 homes were still roofless three months after the disaster.²¹⁷ The island's economic losses were estimated to amount to around 73 per cent of its GDP, and the poverty rate to have increased by 10 per cent.²¹⁸

On the island of St. Maarten, the hurricane damaged or destroyed 70 per cent of homes and buildings. Photo: The Netherlands Red Cross/Arie Kievit, September 2017



The situation in Puerto Rico shows how economic drivers combine with a storm's short and longer-term impacts to reduce a population's resilience and heighten its vulnerability, which in turn increases the risk of displacement. Maria displaced at least 86,000 people on the island, of whom 70,000 were evacuated from flood-prone areas after the failure of the Guajataca Dam.²¹⁹ Many people who fled their homes, however, took shelter with friends and family and were not counted, making the estimate conservative. There was also significant migration to the continental US, and this is likely to continue. Some estimates suggest the island could lose around 14 per cent of its population by 2019 as a result of Maria's impacts.²²⁰

The 2017 hurricane season also hit **Cuba** hard. The island was in the throes of a severe drought and was still recovering from the aftermath of hurricane Matthew in 2016 when Irma made landfall on 9 September. The storm raged for more than 71 hours and affected 12 of Cuba's 15 provinces. More than 158,000 houses were reported damaged, of which more than 16,600 were partially collapsed and around 14,600 completely destroyed.²²¹

Cuba, however, offers a lesson in resilience. All Cubans are taught what to do when hurricanes approach from an early age. Disaster preparedness, prevention and response are part of the national curriculum, and people of all ages take part in drills, simulation exercises and other training. The island's civil defence system and meteorological institute are pillars of its disaster risk management system, and every individual has a role to play at the community level as a storm bears down. Schools and hospitals are converted into shelters and transport is quickly organised.²²²

Around 1.7 million people were evacuated before and during Irma, keeping them safe from its destructive power and demonstrating that, when managed as a resilience measure, displacement need not always be a negative outcome.