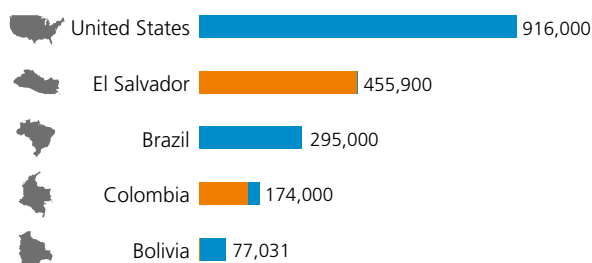


THE AMERICAS



Conflict 602,000
Disasters 1,545,000
6.4% of the global total

5 COUNTRIES WITH MOST NEW DISPLACEMENTS



Floods triggered the majority of the 1.5 million disaster displacements recorded in the Americas in 2019, as rivers burst their banks and forced whole communities to flee (see Figure 16). Wildfires also displaced significant numbers of people in the US and Mexico, and burned large tracts of Amazon rainforest in Brazil and Bolivia. Indigenous communities may well have been displaced by the Amazon fires, but information was hard to come by.

The Americas is a highly urbanised region that is home to millions of people who live in conditions of poverty and inequality. When disasters strike it is poor and marginalised communities that suffer the worst of their impacts, including displacement, as hurricane Dorian showed last year in the Bahamas (see The Bahamas spotlight, p.61).²⁷⁶

Conflict and violence triggered 602,000 new displacements across the region, an increase on the figure for 2018 driven largely by criminal and gang violence in Central and South America. Much of this violence takes place in urban areas, triggering displacement not only within towns and cities but also across borders.²⁷⁷ Rural areas are also affected. Around 6.5 million people were living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence at the end of the year.

Some countries have monitoring mechanisms to measure and understand the triggers, drivers and impacts of displacement, but in others painting a complete picture of the phenomenon is challenging.²⁷⁸ Most of the figures for conflict displacement should be considered

underestimates, particularly those for Central American countries, where in the absence of systematic government initiatives it tends to be civil society organisations that collect data. There has, however, been some progress recently in countries such as El Salvador, which passed a law on internal displacement in early 2020, and Mexico, which is developing one.

Filling the data gaps across the region will be vital not only in understanding internal displacement itself, but also its relationship with cross-border flight and other forms of migration, as in Venezuela (see Venezuela spotlight, p.59).

North America

The **United States** recorded more than 916,000 new disaster displacements in 2019, accounting for nearly 60 per cent of the regional total. The vast majority were triggered by storms and wildfires. Hurricane Dorian led to the evacuation of more than 450,000 people in the states of North and South Carolina, Florida, Georgia and Virginia between the end of August and early September, and wildfires triggered 423,000 displacements, 400,000 of them in California in October.



A fire in Sonoma county triggered the largest displacement event in the state, when more than 190,000 people were ordered to evacuate on 24 October. As the flames advanced, they destroyed around 176

homes.²⁷⁹ A fire in Los Angeles county triggered more than 100,000 displacements earlier in the month. The authorities had learned from the devastating wildfires of 2017 and 2018, and had put a number of measures in place that helped firefighters to contain the blazes.²⁸⁰ Knowing that electrical equipment had sparked fires in previous years, power supplies to 940,000 homes and businesses in northern California were cut to reduce risk.²⁸¹

Floods triggered around 20,000 displacements from Nebraska to Michigan and Illinois to Oklahoma in the first half of the year, when near record rainfall caused the Missouri, Mississippi and Arkansas rivers to burst their banks.²⁸² More than a month's rain fell in a day in some states, and millions of acres of farmland were inundated.²⁸³ At least 11 states sought federal disaster funds for more than 400 counties.²⁸⁴ Four tornadoes hit the state of Ohio in May, destroying more than 2,000 houses and triggering 5,800 displacements. Almost 2,000 people were still struggling to find a place to live three months later.²⁸⁵

Most disaster displacement in the US tends to take place in the form of pre-emptive evacuations organised by disaster risk management agencies at the federal and state level. There are also a variety of support programmes for people affected by disasters, including those displaced. The Federal Emergency Management Agency, for example, provides support in the form of temporary housing and financial assistance.²⁸⁶ People whose homes have been destroyed still face long-term impacts, however, and many struggle with the cost of

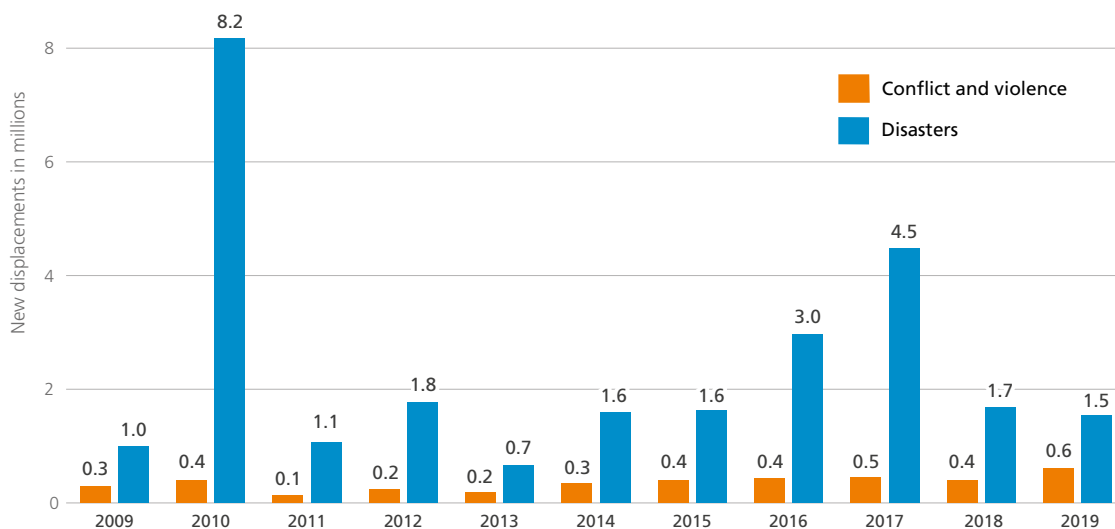
rebuilding to the extent that some are unable to do so before the next disaster strikes.²⁸⁷ By the end of 2019, 37,000 people were still displaced by disasters in the US.

Thirty-eight disasters, mainly storms, floods and wildfires, triggered more than 41,000 displacements in **Canada** in 2019. Spring snowmelt and heavy rain caused major rivers and lakes to overflow in Quebec province, inundating more than 9,000 homes and triggering more than 10,000 evacuations across 310 municipalities.²⁸⁸

High winds fanned intense wildfires in the central province of Alberta in May, triggering around 11,000 evacuations.²⁸⁹ The largest, the Chuckegg Creek fire, burned about 280,000 hectares of land. People began to return soon after the fires were put out, but schools in some areas were closed for the rest of the year.²⁹⁰ Hurricane Dorian hit the Nova Scotia peninsula on the Atlantic coast in September but with far less intensity than in other countries. Around 200 displacements were recorded.

Around a third of the disaster displacements recorded in Canada in 2019 took place in First Nations communities. The federal government has plans to work with First Nations communities and provincial and territorial governments to improve disaster risk reduction measures and the management of pre-emptive evacuations.²⁹¹ Its 2019 budget also included around C\$300 million (\$215 million) over five years to help First Nations communities to prepare for, mitigate and respond to emergencies.²⁹²

FIGURE 16: New displacements by conflict, violence and disasters in the Americas (2009-2019)



The Caribbean



Hurricane Dorian was the most powerful to strike the **Bahamas** since records began, and the most intense tropical cyclone worldwide in 2019.²⁹³ The category five storm caused unprecedented damage and triggered about 9,800 new displacements across the archipelago. Poor and marginalised communities of Haitian origin living in informal settlements were particularly hard hit (see The Bahamas spotlight, p.61).

The social, economic and political crisis in **Haiti** deteriorated further in 2019.²⁹⁴ Discontent with the government, price increases caused by the devaluation of the gourde and falling living standards combined to fuel nationwide protests and civil unrest that triggered 2,100 new displacements. This was the first time displacement associated with conflict and violence had been recorded in the country.²⁹⁵ Streets were barricaded, houses and shops attacked and police and protesters clashed in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and the departments of Artibonite, Nord, Ouest and Sud.²⁹⁶

Criminal gangs also took advantage of the insecurity and overstretched security forces to expand their activities and conduct a series of attacks that triggered displacement.²⁹⁷ The situation deteriorated further in the latter part of the year, and human rights organisations alleged government involvement in the violence and warned all parties against escalation.²⁹⁸

Disasters, mainly storms and floods, triggered 1,200 displacements in 2019, fewer than in previous years. Tens of thousands of people, however, were still living in displacement as of 31 December as a result of disasters in previous years. Nearly 33,000 people were still displaced across 22 sites after the devastating 2010 earthquake, many of them because of delays in reconstruction.²⁹⁹

The overall humanitarian situation in Haiti is cause for extreme concern. Hospitals, emergency services, civil protection units and orphanages are unable to function fully because of shortages of fuel, safe water and other basic services. The ongoing insecurity and protests have also impeded humanitarian agencies' access to those in need.³⁰⁰

Central America



Violence perpetrated by drug trafficking cartels and paramilitary and vigilante groups triggered 7,100 new displacements in **Mexico** in 2019, but the figure should be considered an underestimate. Much of the displacement took place in the states of Chiapas, Chihuahua, Durango, Guerrero, Michoacán, Oaxaca and Sinaloa. One of the largest events occurred in Guerrero in January, when a criminal group known as *Los Cuernudos* began shooting and looting in the city of Coahuayutla, triggering more than 1,100 displacements.³⁰¹

There was also an increase in the number of people arriving at the US border having fled violence.³⁰² The situation in Ciudad Juárez was of particular concern, because many people hoping to seek asylum were living in tents on the street. The local authorities cleared those who had pitched their tents near the city's three international bridges and said they had been housed in a collective shelter run by a religious charity.³⁰³ Almost half of them were children and youth under the age of 18, and most had come from the state of Michoacán.³⁰⁴

Mexico does not have an official registry of IDPs, and the lack of comprehensive assessments and data make it difficult to fully understand displacement patterns, assess small-scale incidents and unpack the relationship between internal displacement, cross-border movements and returns. Civil society organisations monitor larger displacement events based on media reports.³⁰⁵

Efforts to establish a stronger evidence base were stepped up last year, however, when the government published a comprehensive report laying out the challenges inherent in assessing internal displacement associated with violence in the country. The analysis also shed light on opportunities to better measure its scale, patterns and impacts via existing registries.³⁰⁶

The report is a mark of greater commitment on behalf of the government to understand and address a phenomenon that represents a historical debt to the hundreds of thousands, if not millions of IDPs. It comes on top of parliamentary debates about a federal law on internal displacement, which has been ongoing since

Geremías was another victim of Colombia's longstanding conflict. After being displaced from his farm, he moved to the city of Cali, where he received government compensation and started a small business. Photo: UARIV, Colombia, 2019



April 2018.³⁰⁷ This momentum should be built upon, because it holds the promise of positive change after a decade in which the scale of the challenge has grown faster than policy initiatives to address it.³⁰⁸

There were relatively few disasters in Mexico in 2019 compared with previous years, and 16,000 new displacements were recorded. A quarter of them were pre-emptive evacuations in response to a false tsunami alarm in the southern state of Chiapas in November. Hurricane Lorena and tropical storm Narda triggered around 2,200 and 2,000 displacements respectively on the Pacific coast. Wildfires also led to the evacuation of about 2,100 people in the state of Veracruz in March, and 1,600 people in Baja California in October.

The displacement crisis in the **Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA)** attracted growing media attention and human rights concerns in 2019, particularly after El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras signed “safe third country” agreements with the US.³⁰⁹ These mean that people trying to reach the US will not be

able to apply for asylum there before doing so in any of these countries. This raises protection concerns because many people fleeing violence in their home countries may be sent back to unsafe areas where they may have no option other than a life of internal displacement.³¹⁰

There is little robust data with which to analyse the triggers, drivers and impacts of internal displacement, cross-border movements or returns in NTCA, and these gaps need urgent filling.³¹¹ Neither the government nor humanitarian agencies in **Guatemala** collect or publish information on internal displacement associated with conflict and violence systematically, but evidence shows that violence perpetrated by criminal gangs and unidentified armed groups against land rights and political activists has forced people to flee their homes.³¹²

El Salvador does not have a national registry, but civil society organisations collect data on internal displacement, mainly to inform their assistance and support programmes. Extrapolated results from one survey suggest there were 454,000 new displacements in

2019. Threats, extortion and assassinations perpetrated by criminal gangs are the main triggers.³¹³ This considerable increase compared with previous years is in part the result in a change of methodology.

The government adopted a law on internal displacement in early 2020, which raises hopes that some data gaps will be filled.³¹⁴ The move followed a constitutional court ruling in July 2018 that officially recognised the phenomenon in the country and instructed the government to develop appropriate legislation. The law provides for a registry of IDPs, which will improve the government's ability to measure, understand and act to address what is a growing challenge.

The government of **Honduras** has long recognised the existence of internal displacement, and established the Inter-Agency Commission for the Protection of People Displaced by Violence in 2013.³¹⁵ It has also been in the process of establishing a law on internal displacement since 2016, but the final draft is still to be approved.³¹⁶ The draft provides for a registry of IDPs and abandoned property, which is much needed given that it was impossible to obtain any data on new displacements last year despite evidence of violence. Nor was it possible to ascertain how many of the people who joined the so-called "caravans" of people making their way to the US border had previously been internally displaced.

A political and security crisis in **Nicaragua** that began in early 2018 has been escalating ever since. Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands injured, protesters have been arbitrarily arrested and many people have been reported as kidnapped.³¹⁷ There have also been frequent reports over the years of armed groups attacking indigenous communities to displace them and expropriate their land for illegal cultivations.³¹⁸ Violence, insecurity and human rights abuses have triggered waves of cross-border movements to other countries in the region, but it is impossible to assess how many people have been internally displaced.

South America

Despite the signature of a peace agreement in **Colombia** in 2016 between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country's main guerrilla group, internal displacement continued



unabated in 2019. There were 139,000 new displacements recorded, compared with 145,000 in 2018 and 139,000 in 2017. The western departments of Chocó and Nariño were the most affected, followed by Cordoba, Norte de Santander and Valle del Cauca.

The ongoing conflict involves right-wing paramilitary and drug trafficking groups such as the Gaitanista Self-Defence Groups and the Gulf Clan, the leftwing National Liberation Army (ELN) and FARC dissidents, who are fighting for control of land, resources and drug trafficking corridors. Around 28,000 people were also forced into confinement during the year as whole communities were caught in the crossfire and unable to move.³¹⁹ The majority were in the heavily contested Pacific coast department of Chocó.

In some cases, displacement and confinement happened despite the Ombudsman's Office issuing alerts about imminent attacks, which reveals significant shortfalls in terms of pre-emptive action in response to such early warnings.³²⁰ It also illustrates the scale of the challenge Colombia continues to face in building stability and peace. The government is absent from many areas of the country, which armed groups have taken advantage of to expand their territorial control. The assassination of social leaders and human rights defenders also continues unabated. There were 253 such killings in 2019, bringing the total since the peace deal was signed to 817.³²¹

Floods, landslides, wildfires and storms triggered more than 35,000 displacements in Colombia in 2019. Flooding in Putumayo department led to the evacuation of more than 11,000 people in June, and Antioquia, Magdalena and Nariño departments were also affected between September and December. Heavy rain in Chocó in late February caused six rivers to burst their banks, affecting nearly 31,000 people. It was not possible to ascertain how many were displaced.³²²

The situation in **Venezuela** continued to be cause for concern in 2019, and 4.9 million people had fled the country as of March 2020.³²³ It is impossible, however, to know how many people were internally displaced before crossing the border or how many IDPs there are inside the country. These and other major data gaps impede a clear understanding of the triggers, drivers, patterns and impacts of the biggest migration crisis in Latin America's recent history (see Venezuela spotlight, p.59).

More than 500 disasters triggered 295,000 new displacements in **Brazil**, making it one of the most affected countries in the region. The overwhelming majority were triggered by floods and landslides. We also obtained figures for slow-onset phenomena such as drought and coastal erosion, which revealed 6,100 and 240 displacements respectively. As the dry season arrived, wildfires destroyed more than 50,000 hectares of Amazon rainforest. No displacement figures were available, but evidence suggests indigenous communities were hard hit by the fires.³²⁴

Disasters are a persistent challenge in Brazil, but the country's approach to managing them has shifted significantly since 2011, when Rio de Janeiro and its surrounding areas were flooded. New policies, mechanisms and norms were introduced to guide and coordinate disaster risk reduction, prevention and response. Parliament also enshrined a national protection and civil defence policy into law in 2012, which provided for the

establishment of the Integrated Disaster Information System (S2iD).³²⁵ This has improved the coordination, transparency and accessibility of national data collection considerably. The S2iD system provides data on housing destruction, homelessness, and internal displacement, but its full potential for measuring disaster displacement is yet to be exploited.³²⁶

Other types of displacement, however, are more difficult to assess. Criminal and gang violence are believed to displace people, but no figures are available.³²⁷ There is also evidence that development projects do so, but data is almost equally hard to come by.³²⁸

Small-scale disasters triggered 10,000 new displacements in **Peru** in 2019. An earthquake in the northern department of Loreto triggered around 4,300 in May, heavy rains in the central department of San Martín 2,600 in January and an eruption of the Ubinas volcano in the south of the country almost 1,200 in July.³²⁹



A view of the damage caused by category 5 Hurricane Dorian in Marsh Harbor, Great Abaco Island, Bahamas. Photo: UN Photo/OCHA/Mark Garten, September 2019

Presidential elections in **Bolivia** in October were to have given Evo Morales a fourth consecutive term in office, but the results were disputed and led to widespread protests. These quickly escalated into broader demonstrations, riots and strikes that forced Morales to resign the following month.³³⁰ Figures were hard to come by, but the violence triggered at least 30 displacements when homes were destroyed.

The country was also affected by severe weather, including torrential rains, hail storms and lightning strikes, between January and April. This led to widespread flooding that triggered 77,000 displacements in the departments of Chuquisaca, Cochabamba and La Paz. Thousands of dwellings were damaged or destroyed, along with crops, roads and water and sanitation infrastructure. Families who lost their homes received support to rebuild them and were able to return some months later.³³¹ There were also wildfires in the Amazon region, but no displacement figures were available.

Countries further south in the Rio de La Plata basin were also hard hit by unusually heavy rains and floods in 2019.³³² Water levels in the **Paraguay** river reached their highest in almost 50 years.³³³ The ensuing floods in several neighbourhoods of the capital Asunción triggered the majority the 54,000 disaster displacements recorded nationwide.

Rains and floods also cut off thousands of families in the department of Alto Paraguay between March and July.³³⁴ Crops and infrastructure were damaged and livelihoods disrupted.³³⁵ In parts of the Chaco region that were unreachable overland, the initial response had to be provided by helicopter. The emergency shelters provided to those displaced had few sanitation facilities, and some families who had lost all their belongings were living in makeshift shelters in public spaces.³³⁶

Decades of deforestation, the alteration of river courses and other human processes combine to increase the severity of floods in Paraguay.³³⁷ The government has begun to build dikes to protect some riverine areas, and is investing in flood monitoring mechanisms and early warning systems.³³⁸

Floods also triggered around 23,000 displacements in **Argentina**. The northern provinces of Chaco, Corrientes, Entre Ríos, Santa Fe, Santiago del Estero and Tucumán were worst affected. The provincial government in Santa Fe declared an agricultural emergency.³³⁹

Uruguay recorded around 22,000 new disaster displacements in 2019, mainly the result of floods and wildfires. Flooding in January was described as the worst in 30 years. The floodwaters took more than ten days to recede in seven departments and more than 20 days in four.³⁴⁰ A series of lesser disasters across 19 of the country's 20 departments also triggered displacement.³⁴¹

Thanks to the government's Comprehensive Monitor of Risks and Impacts (MIRA), figures for displacement in Uruguay are robust. The system keeps track of disaster damages and losses, including the number of people displaced during voluntary and government-assisted evacuations.³⁴²

SPOTLIGHT

VENEZUELA

First steps toward filling data gaps

Venezuela has been in the throes of a social, economic and political crisis since 2014, prompting almost 15 per cent of the population to leave the country in the largest exodus in Latin America's recent history.³⁴³ The crisis continues to deepen, and people continue to flee to neighbouring countries in search of better living conditions. More than 4.9 million had done so as of March 2020.³⁴⁴

How many of those crossing the border were internally displaced beforehand is not known, nor how many may have been forcibly displaced and remain in Venezuela. More is known about what happens outside the country, but it is still difficult to clearly understand what is driving people to flee within and beyond its borders or the extent to which such movements are voluntary or forced. In essence, lack of data makes it impossible to estimate the scale or severity of internal displacement in Venezuela. The only evidence available is anecdotal, but the gravity of the situation merits much more attention.

Venezuela's crisis began around 2010 during the last years of Hugo Chávez's rule, and deepened in 2014, a year after Nicolás Maduro became president. In a country heavily reliant on oil, falling crude prices put a significant dent in the economy and production became increasingly crippled by lack of maintenance and invest-

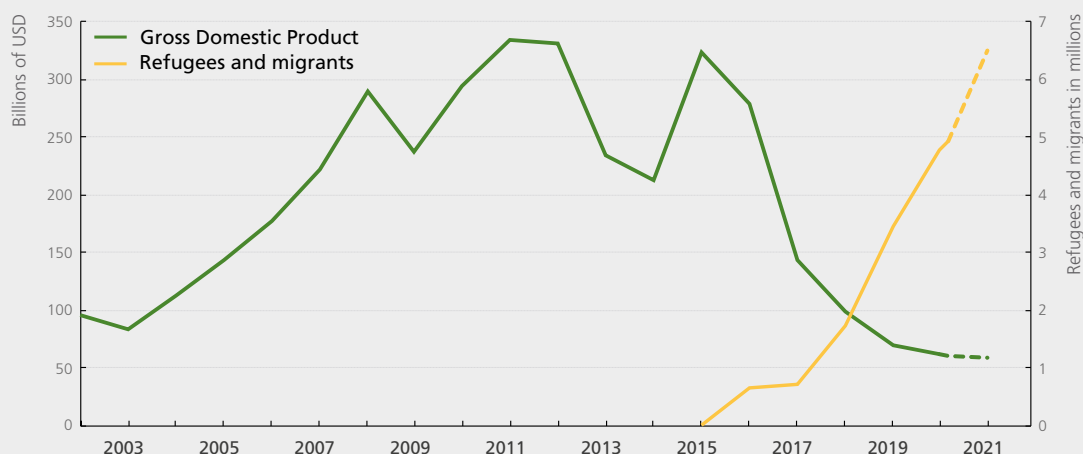
ment.³⁴⁵ International sanctions aggravated the situation further and the country went into economic freefall, marked by hyperinflation and a collapse in oil and other major exports. GDP shrank from \$323.6 billion in 2015 to \$70.1 billion at the end of 2019 and inflation has risen at the fastest rate in recent world history.³⁴⁶ This has been accompanied by a political, social and humanitarian crisis that continues to deepen and drive mass population movements (see Figure 17).³⁴⁷

Food prices have skyrocketed, leading to high levels of malnutrition. Undernourishment has increased almost fourfold, from 6.4 per cent between 2012 and 2014 to 21.2 per cent between 2016 and 2018.³⁴⁸ Water shortages are also widespread. Many communities receive water less than once a week, which has a disproportionate effect on vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant and lactating women and elderly people.³⁴⁹ The lack of medicines and health services has increased mortality rates, and there has been a resurgence of diseases such as diphtheria, measles, malaria, tuberculosis and HIV.³⁵⁰

Constant power cuts have also affected healthcare and other services, and at times have left millions of people without electricity, running water or telecommunications, causing chaos in cities.³⁵¹ Around seven million people, or 21.7 per cent of the country's population, were in need of humanitarian assistance as of August 2019.³⁵²

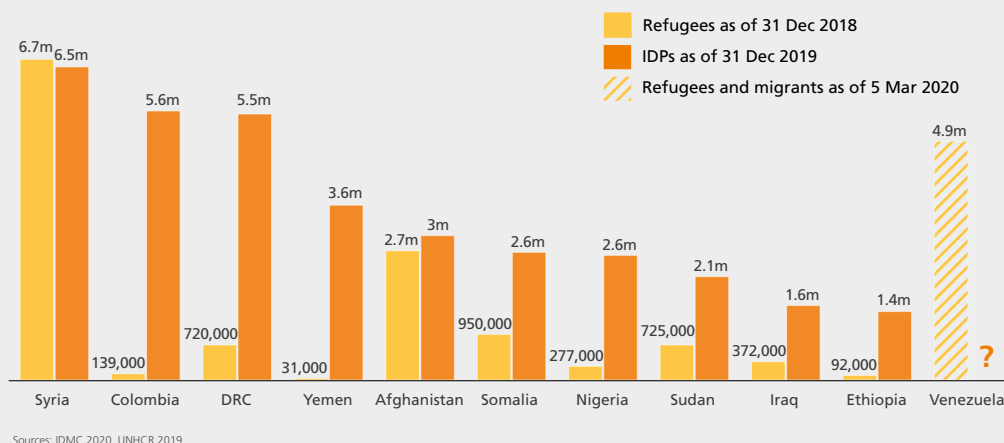
Statistics on violence in Venezuela also make for grim reading. The country has been the most violent in Latin America and the Caribbean since 2017, and has the highest homicide rate in the region.³⁵³ In some areas, particularly those bordering Colombia, non-state armed groups including paramilitaries, criminal gangs and

FIGURE 17: Venezuela's GDP vs. Refugees and Migrants



Sources: R4V, <https://r4v.info/es/situations/platform>, IMF 2020

FIGURE 18: Major displacement crises globally and Venezuelan refugees and migrants for comparison



Colombian guerrillas use violence and intimidation to exercise tight control over the population.

All of the above constitute the backdrop for mass displacement within and beyond Venezuela's borders, but the lack of information on population movements within the country limits understanding of the role each factor plays. It is entirely possible, and indeed likely that significant internal displacement is taking place unreported.

The scale of cross-border movements is well documented, however, and it is unprecedented. It is worth remembering that the figure of more than 4.9 million as of March 2020 does not include many who have not registered with authorities and who cross Venezuela's porous borders unnoticed on a daily basis.³⁵⁴ If the current trend continues, 6.5 million people could have left the country by the end of 2020.³⁵⁵

Only Syria, which is mired in a nine-year civil war, has recorded more people fleeing the country, and this reflects Venezuela's unique situation among the world's largest forced displacement crises. In other countries such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, Nigeria and South Sudan, most internal and cross-border displacements are triggered by active conflict in specific areas, rather than broader economic collapse and insecurity (see Figure 18).

For countries where data is available on both IDPs and refugees, the chart compares the scale of internal displacement and cross-border movements. Venezuela is included for comparison purposes, but it is not possible to make the same distinction because no internal displacement data is available. It is also difficult to distinguish between refugees and migrants among those who have fled the country. Many Venezuelans

who might meet the criteria for refugee status choose not to register and opt instead for alternative legal routes that speed up their access to work, healthcare and education. The majority of those crossing the border need international protection regardless of their status.³⁵⁶

What little information is available on the situation inside the country, scattered in reports from international, non-governmental and civil society organisations, shows that people are uprooted by a range of factors, including the lack of services and livelihood opportunities, severe shortages of food and medicines, generalised violence and hyperinflation.³⁵⁷

Efforts to gather more information are under way. International organisations have begun to collect data on protection and mobility. National universities and other institutions have also incorporated relevant questions into the National Living Conditions Survey.³⁵⁸ The survey, which was rolled out in 2019, could shed light on the number of people who have fled their homes since September 2018 and their reasons for doing so. As such it should help to begin to paint a better picture of internal displacement in the country.

As the situation continues to deteriorate and ever more people flee across its borders, it is important to have robust data on the scale, triggers and drivers of internal displacement in Venezuela, and the conditions those forced to flee face. It is vital to allow humanitarian aid providers to collect data on the ground, in order to understand and differentiate between the drivers of migration and displacement, and the respective needs associated. Without such information, this major gap will continue to hamper an objective assessment of one of the world's largest population movements of the 21st century.

SPOTLIGHT

THE BAHAMAS

Dorian and the political dimensions of disaster risk

Hurricane Dorian was among the disasters to trigger most internal displacement in 2019. A category five storm with wind speeds of up to 295 km/h, it hit several countries in the Lesser Antilles as well as the US and Canada between 26 August and 7 September. More than 464,000 new displacements were recorded. The Bahamas bore the brunt of the storm, the most powerful to hit the country since records began.³⁵⁹ Over the course of three days, it caused widespread devastation and triggered 9,800 displacements.

Dorian made landfall in Elbow Cay on 1 September. It moved across the island of Abaco and hit Grand Bahama the following day, inundating the international airport and destroying almost everything in its path. The damage was so extensive because Dorian's storm surge coincided with an exceptionally high tide, known as a "king tide", which occurs when the gravitational forces of the moon and the sun are aligned and at their height. The result was a wall of water several metres high that flooded entire coastal areas.³⁶⁰

The country was unprepared for such a disaster, and the consequences were severe. Economic losses were put at \$3.4 billion, and 73,000 people, or a fifth of the population, were affected.³⁶¹ Abaco and Grand Bahama were worst-hit. Around 9,000 homes were damaged and 2,900 destroyed.³⁶² Most of the people displaced fled to the main island of New Providence, others to Elbow Cay and Eleuthera. Some rented temporary accommodation, but many stayed with relatives or in collective shelters. Unusually for a disaster, Dorian also triggered cross-border displacements, mainly to Florida in the US and Nova Scotia in Canada.³⁶³

Dorian's impacts on the Bahamas were unprecedented, but not everyone the storm displaced faced the same conditions.³⁶⁴ Haitians and Bahamas-born nationals of Haitian origin were particularly affected, a reflection of their historical marginalisation. It is often implied by the authorities and the population that Haitian communi-

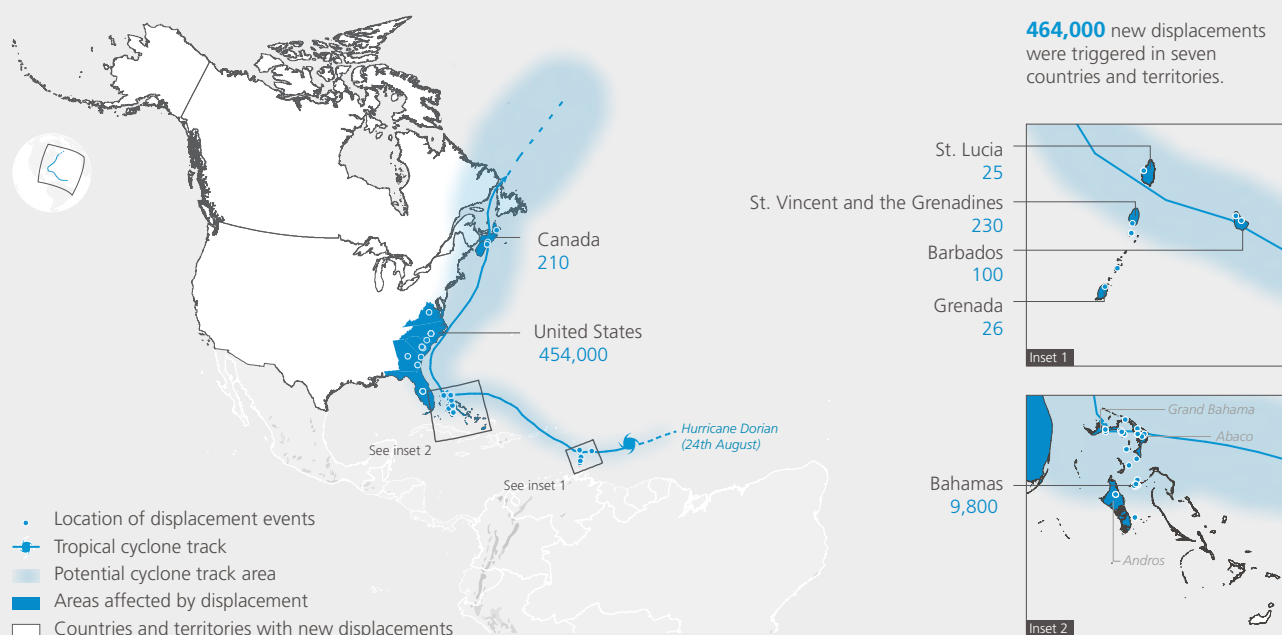
ties are not citizens and so should not technically be considered internally displaced or entitled to support and compensation, but for the majority the Bahamas had been their habitual place of residence for years and in many cases generations.³⁶⁵

Haitians and Bahamas-born nationals of Haitian origin make up between 10 and 25 per cent of the population.³⁶⁶ It is not possible to give a more accurate figure because many migrants are undocumented and unaccounted for. The two countries have strong ties that date back to the 18th century, when many Haitian slaves and slave owners established themselves in the Bahamas. Significant numbers of Haitians also migrated to the archipelago in the second half of the 20th century as living conditions at home gradually deteriorated. Such movements reached a peak in the 1980s and 90s as the Bahamian economy flourished, mostly thanks to tourism.³⁶⁷

Haitians living in the Bahamas have faced years of stigmatisation, discrimination and marginalisation, and they are widely seen as a burden on the economy. Many live in poverty and their children have little or no access to quality education. Haitian households also have significantly less access to basic services such as water and electricity than other families.³⁶⁸ Nor does the government recognise citizenship as a birth right.³⁶⁹ Applying for citizenship often takes several years, and in some cases delays have led to deportations.

Before Dorian struck, 41 per cent of documented Haitians and 20 per cent of undocumented migrants were living in two informal settlements known as The Mudd and Pigeon Peas, low-lying areas of Abaco that the storm all but razed.³⁷⁰ None remained as of 19 September, and more than 300 Haitians and Bahamas-born nationals of Haitian origin were reported missing.³⁷¹

The storm also left many others at greater risk of further stigmatisation, poverty and deportation. Haitians were among 5,500 people from Abaco and Grand Bahama who sought refuge in government-run shelters across the capital, Nassau, which survived Dorian relatively intact.³⁷² By the end of November, however, thousands had returned to Abaco and there were only 585 people left in the shelters.³⁷³ Many left as soon as those unable to legitimise their presence in the Bahamas began to be deported. IOM figures for 4 October, for example, show a significant fall in the number of people in shelters the day after 100 Haitians were deported.³⁷⁴



Due to rounding, some totals may not correspond with the sum of the separate figures.

Sources: Local authorities, IOM, CCCM Cluster, OCHA, FEMA, CDEMA, USAID, PDC, WHO, Red Cross, local media, NEMA, WHO, PAHO, IFRC. Tropical storm data from GDACS, 2019

The boundaries and the names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IDMC.

The government has also told those who lost their jobs as a result of the hurricane that they will have to leave the country, even if they still have a valid work permit. Authorities have taken advantage of the disaster to enforce the country's 2014 immigration policy. The immigration minister said: "Dorian did not give persons amnesty. If you were without status before the storm, you remain without proper status after the storm".³⁷⁵ Thirty-one per cent of people living in affected settlements on Abaco said the immigration services had approached them, and arrests have taken place.³⁷⁶ Hundreds of Haitians have sought shelter in churches and other unofficial collective sites as a result, fearing deportation to a country that many may not even know.³⁷⁷

Prospects for durable solutions for the Haitian diaspora are unclear. The government intends to offer Bahamians the possibility of re-establishing their lives in safe areas, and to reduce disaster risk by building hurricane-resistant infrastructure. Building regulations will also have to be strictly enforced as reconstruction takes place.³⁷⁸ The government has also undertaken a \$6.4 million project called the Family Relief Centre on Abaco to provide temporary housing for those affected by Dorian, and many Bahamians have received low-cost

homes and in some cases plots of land.³⁷⁹ It has said, however, that undocumented migrants are not eligible, potentially heightening their vulnerabilities and exposing them to the risk of protracted displacement.³⁸⁰

A former Haitian finance minister has said the government's policy of deporting Haitians could undermine the reconstruction effort on Abaco.³⁸¹ Many have much-needed construction and agricultural skills.³⁸² Instead even those who stay may continue to suffer marginalisation and chronic poverty. Entire informal settlements in Marsh Harbour where many Haitians used to live will be cleared because of their low-lying location, but it is unclear where their former inhabitants will be relocated to, or even if they will be relocated at all.

Dorian's impacts on Haitian communities in the Bahamas illustrate the social and political dimensions of disaster risk, and the disproportionate effects that disasters can have on marginalised communities. As the reconstruction phase continues, it is vital that Haitians and Bahamas-born nationals of Haitian origin are not left further behind, otherwise Dorian's impacts may be reabsorbed and trigger a new cycle of risk and displacement.