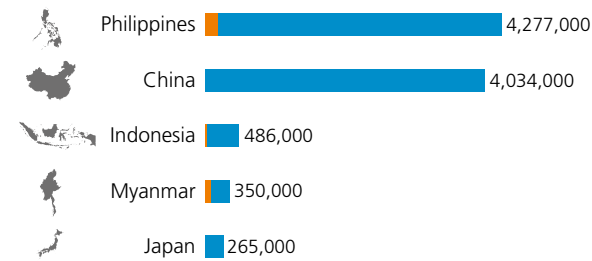


## EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC



### 5 COUNTRIES WITH MOST NEW DISPLACEMENTS



East Asia and Pacific accounted for most of the disaster displacement recorded worldwide in 2019, as it has done in previous years. This is unsurprising, given that the region is home to a large number of densely populated urban areas that are exposed to hazards including typhoons, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions.<sup>179</sup> Disasters triggered around 9.6 million new displacements across the region last year, below the average for the decade of 11 million (see Figure 13).

A number of major disasters have triggered mass displacement in the region since the turn of the century, including typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013, flooding in China in 2010 and the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, to name but a few. These events serve as a reminder that disasters on a similar scale are bound to happen again, and that reducing the risk of disaster displacement should continue to be a priority.

Some countries' capacity to reduce risk and manage the impacts of hazards has at times been overwhelmed by the sheer number of people exposed and vulnerable to them, but significant progress has been made across the region in setting up early warning systems and managing pre-emptive evacuations. The latter account for many of the disaster displacements recorded in East Asia and Pacific.

The early warning systems and evacuation protocols in China, Fiji, Japan and the Philippines are among those held up as examples of good practice. Island states including Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu are also working to improve their resilience to disasters

by strengthening their early warning capacities.<sup>180</sup> Such measures cannot, however, mitigate the destructive power of some hazards, and when homes are damaged or razed it prolongs the displacement of many evacuees.

The impacts of disasters and the displacement they trigger vary greatly across this vast region. Not all countries have the same financial and human capacity for disaster risk management, and when measured relative to population size impacts can be devastating. Absolute figures for displacement in Pacific small island states may appear tiny compared with those for other countries in the region, even if the vast majority of their populations have been affected by a disaster. For low-lying atolls, which are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts such as salinisation and sea level rise, displacement will have very different implications in the years and decades to come.<sup>181</sup>

Conflict and violence also triggered displacement in 2019 in Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Papua New Guinea. Around 288,000 new displacements were recorded across the region as a whole, and about 734,000 people were living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence as of the end of the year.



## East Asia



**China** records some of the highest figures for disaster displacement worldwide each year, the result of its vast population and high exposure to a range of natural hazards. As rapid urbanisation has taken hold over recent decades, cities have engulfed former satellite towns without planning that considers the implications for disaster risk of such expansion.<sup>182</sup> Many of China's disasters occur in urban areas, which are home to around 60 per cent of the country's population, as a result.<sup>183</sup>

Storms, floods, earthquakes and landslides triggered more than four million new displacements in 2019. At least 1.6 million were recorded during the rainy season in June and July. As typhoon Lekima approached in August, the national meteorological centre issued a red alert and more than two million people were evacuated.<sup>184</sup> The storm made landfall in Zhejiang province with winds gusting up to 185 Km/h, destroying more than 15,000 homes and triggering further displacement as it moved inland.<sup>185</sup> Lekima was among the disasters to trigger most displacement globally in 2019. It was the year's deadliest in East Asia and Pacific, and also the costliest. Economic losses were estimated at \$10 billion.<sup>186</sup>

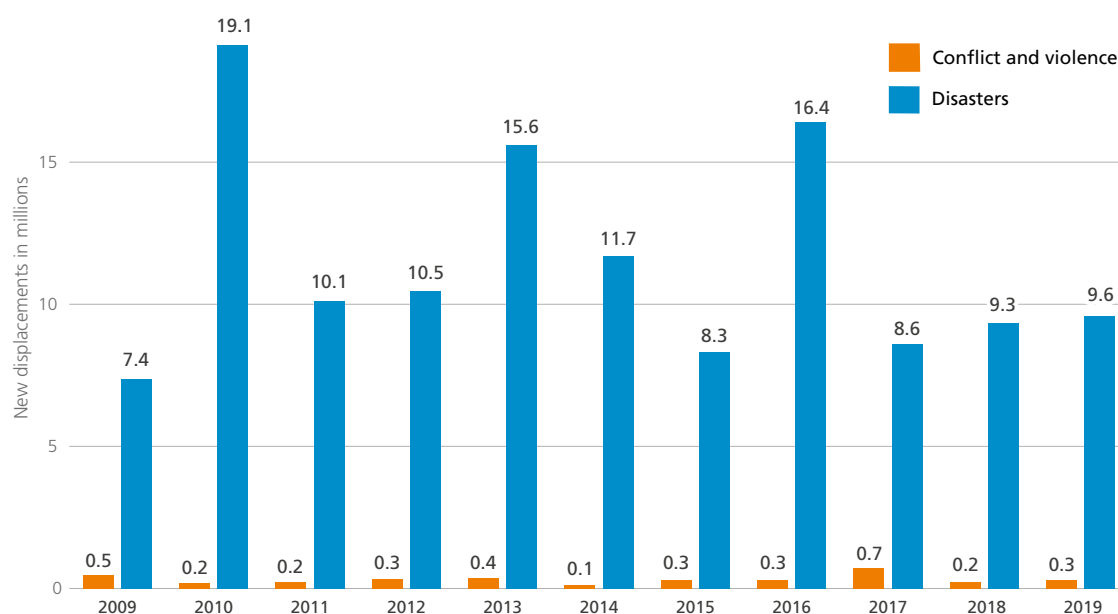
A 6.0 magnitude earthquake also struck Sichuan province in June, destroying 3,500 homes and triggering around 95,000 displacements.

Many data gaps remain in terms of the broader phenomenon of displacement in China. No information is available on the number of people who flee political violence, and little on those displaced by development projects. The latter are likely to trigger significant displacement, however, given the country's rapid modernisation and urbanisation.

Storms and earthquakes triggered more than 265,000 displacements in **Japan** in 2019. Typhoon Hagibis was the largest disaster of the year, forcing people to take refuge in temporary shelters in 30 out of the country's 47 prefectures. Around 237,000 people evacuated, but this represented only three per cent of the almost eight million who were ordered or advised to do so.<sup>187</sup> The challenge of getting people to evacuate continues to be a significant concern for authorities.<sup>188</sup> Earthquakes struck Fukuoka, Hokkaido, Kumamoto and Yamagata prefectures during the year, but triggered few displacements.

Little data is available on internal displacement in countries such as **Mongolia**, but the country has been increasingly affected by the impacts of the *dzud*, severe weather conditions that lead to mass livestock loss and disrupt the livelihoods of thousands of nomadic communities.<sup>189</sup>

FIGURE 13: New displacements by conflict, violence and disasters in East Asia and Pacific (2009-2019)



A displaced man stands by the ruins of his home in Balaroa, Palu, Indonesia, one year after the Central Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami. More than 104,000 people were still displaced as a result of disasters in Indonesia as of the end of 2019. Photo: OCHA/ Pierre Peron, September 2019



## South-east Asia

Together with China and India, the **Philippines** is among the countries to record most disaster displacement worldwide each year.

Between six and nine major typhoons make landfall annually, and the country also sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire, making it prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.<sup>190</sup> Storms and earthquakes triggered 4.1 million new displacements in 2019.

Tropical depression Usman triggered more than 550,000 across nine provinces in early January, and typhoon Lekima, known locally as Hanna, 38,000 in August before moving on to wreak havoc in China. Typhoon Kammuri, known locally as Tisoy, triggered more than 1.4 million new displacements across central regions of the Philippines in December. It was the 20th



typhoon to strike the country in 2019, making it an unusually stormy year. It was also among the disasters to trigger most displacement globally.<sup>191</sup> Many of the displacements triggered by these storms were in the form of pre-emptive evacuations.

Earthquakes struck the southern provinces of Cota-bato and Davao del Sur in October and December. These and other smaller earthquakes triggered a total of 413,000 displacements. Many of those who evacuated to government shelters remained displaced for some time because their homes had been damaged or destroyed or for fear of aftershocks. The government's commendable data collection, combined with the use of anonymised Facebook user data made it possible to understand where people moved from and to, and for how long they were displaced (see Philippines spotlight, p.83, Part 2). Robust data of this kind is vital to guide responses in the Philippines, which has to deal with the impacts of disasters, including mass displacement, across an archipelago of more than 7,500 islands.

Mindanao, the southernmost island of the Philippines, has been the scene of conflict between the government and separatist groups for four decades. More than 120,000 people have been killed over the years in fighting between the army and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the New People's Army, smaller jihadist groups such as Abu Sayyaf, which is linked to ISIS, and others.<sup>192</sup> Tens of thousands of people are displaced each year, and around 182,000 people were still living in displacement as of the end of 2019.

Last year also marked an important milestone in efforts to bring peace to the region with the government's ratification of a law to establish the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Doing so should help to resolve one of the issues at the heart of the conflict by giving more independence and autonomy to more than 3.5 million Muslim Mindanaoans.<sup>193</sup> The law also provides for a transitional administration for the region which will transfer power to former Moro Islamic Liberation Front militants who will govern until elections in 2022.

The new BARMM administration is developing strategies and entities to address the humanitarian and development needs of its population, including those of displaced families, but many challenges still lie ahead.<sup>194</sup> Armed groups that were not part of the negotiations are still active, and 95 per cent of the new conflict displacements recorded in the Philippines in 2019 were in Mindanao.

**Myanmar** recorded 270,000 disaster displacements during the year, triggered by flooding and landslides brought on by monsoon rains. Mon state was worst hit, with 77,000 evacuations.<sup>195</sup> People in many areas remained in shelters for several days and in some cases weeks while they waited for the floodwaters to recede. Farmers were particularly hard hit because crop damage was extensive. The country also recorded 80,000 new conflict displacements, the highest figure since 2012 (see Myanmar spotlight, p.45).

More than 400 disasters of varying scale and intensity struck **Indonesia** in 2019, triggering 463,000 displacements. Because of its location at the junction of three tectonic plates and in the intertropical convergence zone, the country is highly prone to seismic and weather-related hazards that displace hundreds of thousand of people a year.<sup>196</sup>

A 6.8 magnitude earthquake that hit Maluku province in September destroyed 6,108 homes and triggered 231,000 displacements, making it the largest displacement event of the year. False rumours of a tsunami and people's fear of aftershocks meant that many stayed in shelters beyond the immediate aftermath of the quake.<sup>197</sup> A number of localised floods triggered another 140,000 displacements during the year.

Hazard intensity plays a major role in driving disasters in Indonesia, but rapid and unregulated urbanisation and other human practices also increase disaster risk. Jakarta, home to around 10.5 million people, is a case in point. The capital is sinking faster than any other city in the world, mainly the result of sea level rise, construction on land prone to subsidence, and illegal pumping. Around 40 per cent of the city lies below the sea level, and when it rains whole neighbourhoods are often flooded and some rivers reportedly even begin to flow upstream.<sup>198</sup>

Local authorities have devised a climate action plan and put flood protection measures in place, and there are longer-term plans to move the city to a new location.<sup>199</sup> Meanwhile, however, disaster risk is increasing. If no action is taken, around 80 per cent of northern Jakarta could be underwater in ten years.<sup>200</sup>

Indonesia also recorded displacement associated with conflict and violence in 2019. Most took place in Papua province in late September, when violent protests between Indonesian and Papuan students triggered more than 17,000 displacements. Localised riots and social tensions also forced people to flee their homes in East Java, East Kalimantan, Papua and Sulawesi.

Tropical storm Podul and tropical depression Kajiki struck **Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thailand** and **Viet Nam** during the year. Laos was worst affected, with flooding across six provinces in the Mekong river valley.<sup>201</sup> Savannakhet and Champasak were particularly hard hit, and the two storms between them triggered almost all of the 103,000 new displacements recorded in 2019. Podul and Kajiki also triggered 13,000 of the 89,000 displacements recorded in Viet Nam and 29,000 of the 61,000 recorded in Thailand.

## The Pacific

More than 25,000 new disaster displacements were recorded in **Australia** in 2019, the majority triggered during an unusually long and intense bushfire season. At least 15,000 people were living in displacement at the end of the year as a result, and fires continued to burn in some parts of the country into January and February 2020.



New South Wales was the worst affected state. It recorded more than 9,000 new displacements between August and December, followed by South Australia, which recorded 4,200 in November and December. The fires also spread to Victoria in December, triggering 2,000 new displacements on top of 1,500 recorded during an earlier spate of fires in March. Bushfires occur every year in Australia, but the season at the end of 2019 was declared the worst on record and recognised as a consequence of climate change.<sup>202</sup> Most of the displacement took place in the form of evacuations.

Fires also triggered 1,400 displacements in Tasmania in January, and a powerful storm left 1,300 people homeless in Queensland at the end of the month. Cyclone Trevor triggered around 1,800 evacuations in East Arnhem Land and Northern Territory in March. The storm made landfall as the equivalent of category four hurricane and officials declared a state of emergency. Flooding brought on by cyclone Veronica also triggered 1,100 evacuations near Port Hedland in Western Australia in March.<sup>203</sup>

Twelve disasters, most of them volcanic eruptions, triggered more than 31,000 new displacements in **Papua New Guinea**. The Mount Ulawun and Manam volcanoes in West New Britain and Madang provinces erupted in June, triggering 16,000 and 4,000 evacuations respectively. The eruptions also destroyed homes, crops and wells, leaving villagers without food and water, and the ash columns disrupted domestic flights.<sup>204</sup> A second eruption of Mount Ulawun in August triggered another 3,000 displacements. People sought refuge in centres that were still hosting families displaced by the first eruption.<sup>205</sup>

Coastal and island communities are also exposed to storms during the rainy season from November to April, and those inland often experience flooding and landslides. Continuous heavy rain in April led to landslides that triggered around 5,000 new displacements in Western Highlands province.<sup>206</sup> Cyclone Trevor, which formed on the east coast in March, triggered more than 400 displacements and caused crop damage that left more 15,000 people facing food shortages.<sup>207</sup>

Papua New Guinea also recorded 1,300 new conflict displacements in 2019. The revenge killing of women and children in a longstanding tribal conflict in Hela province triggered as many as 800 in July, and more than 14,000 people were living in internal displacement as of the end of the year. Most had fled ethnic clashes, tribal conflict and violent land disputes.

**Fiji** also recorded disaster displacement in 2019. A tropical depression caused floods and landslides in January, leading about 2,300 people to seek shelter in 43 evacuation centres. The storm did little damage, however, and most were able to return quickly to their homes.<sup>208</sup> Cyclone Sarai, the equivalent of a category two hurricane, triggered another 2,500 evacuations in December. Many people were able to return shortly after the storm passed, but large parts of Fiji, including the main island of Viti Levu, continued to experience power cuts for several days. As the country recovered from Sarai, another tropical depression struck, which also affected Tuvalu and parts of Samoa and Tonga.<sup>209</sup>

Tropical storms are not uncommon in Fiji, and their impacts are often devastating. This led the government to launch a cyclone early warning system in November. The first of its kind in the Pacific region, the system is intended to save lives and protect property in low-lying coastal areas. It may also trigger more displacement in the form of evacuations, but will reduce disaster mortality risk. Other countries in the region are also regularly affected by disasters and are in the process of reinforcing their early warning capacities.<sup>210</sup>

Obtaining data on disaster displacement in the Pacific is challenging, particularly for slow-onset and small sudden-onset events. Integrating data on pre-emptive evacuations and displacement into national accounting systems for disaster damage and loss would help to

improve understanding of the phenomenon. It would also enable the monitoring of disaster risk reduction measures.

The low-lying atolls and small island developing states in the Pacific are particularly vulnerable to sea level rise and salinisation, and people displaced in such situations may find it increasingly difficult to return. Planned relocations have been taking place in Fiji and the Solomon Islands since 2014, and policies and guidelines are in place in both Fiji and Vanuatu.<sup>211</sup>



People stranded in Mallacoota, Victoria, are evacuated by the Australian army after bushfires ravaged the town on 30 December 2019. Photo: Justin McManus/The Age/Fairfax Media via Getty Images, January 2020

## SPOTLIGHT

# MYANMAR

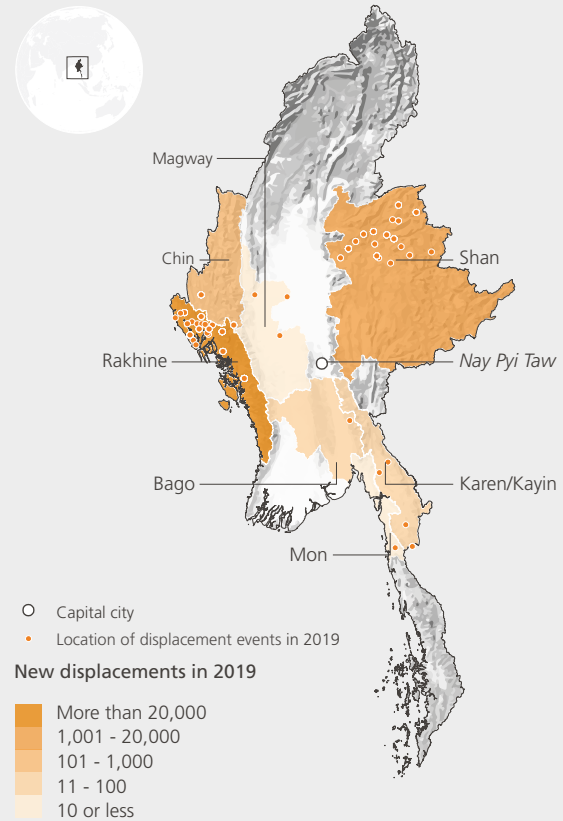
## Highest displacement in years

Armed conflict and direct attacks on civilians forced people to flee their homes in Myanmar for decades, and displacement has been a vital coping mechanism for civilians confronted with fighting between the government and separatist groups. In 2019, unilateral cease-fires and an ongoing peace process failed to prevent an escalation in conflict that triggered 80,000 new internal displacements, the highest number since 2012 (see Figure 14).<sup>212</sup> There are signs the situation is improving in some states, but many IDPs still face significant challenges in their pursuit of durable solutions.

Rakhine state has been the scene of mass displacement in the past, most notably in 2012 and more recently in 2016 and 2017 when 800,000 displaced members of the Rohingya ethnic group sought refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh. Last year, however, it was an escalation of conflict between the military and the Arakan Army, an ethnic nationalist armed group, that triggered significant new displacement.<sup>213</sup> The group has existed since 2009, but its operations had previously been limited mostly to small-scale operations in Chin state and supporting other ethnic armed groups in the north-east of the country.<sup>214</sup>

Only four days of 2019 had passed, however, when coordinated attacks against the military triggered internal displacement that continued throughout the year.<sup>215</sup> As many as 48,000 IDPs were living in 136 sites across Rakhine and Chin as of 16 December.<sup>216</sup> As in previous years, humanitarian organisations were prevented from accessing many IDPs in areas affected by the conflict where needs were high.<sup>217</sup> This contributed to food shortages in the displacement sites.<sup>218</sup>

In Shan state, which borders China, Laos and Thailand, the Brotherhood Alliance - made up of the Arakan Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army - launched a major offensive against the security forces in August in reaction to having been excluded from national peace talks for the previous five years.<sup>219</sup> Clashes led to about



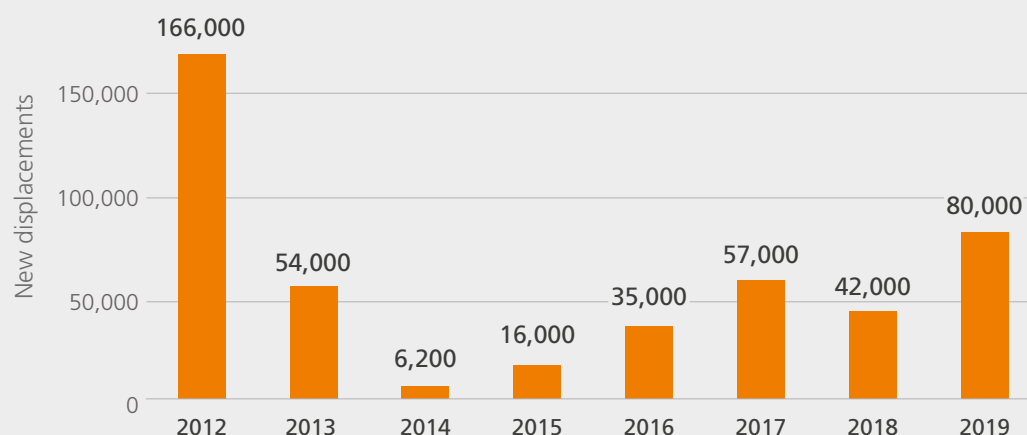
Sources: Local authorities, relief workers, local media, ACLED, ECHO, KHRG, OCHA, UNHCR, CCCM Cluster, DSWD, NDRRMC, 2019

10,000 displacements the following month. The alliance declared a unilateral ceasefire in September, but skirmishes continued to trigger displacement through to the end of the year.<sup>220</sup>

The escalation of the conflict in Shan led to the highest number of new displacements recorded in the state for many years. Displacement tends to be temporary, but it also tends to be cyclical with people displaced time and again from the same places. There were also frequent reports from both Rakhine and Shan in 2019 of people fleeing their homes pre-emptively because of the arrival of soldiers in their villages, which was sometimes accompanied by looting. In other cases, the military told people who had fled violence to return to their homes once they had arrived in new locations in search of safety.<sup>221</sup>

Other protracted displacement situations were still unresolved as of the end of the year. More than 107,000 IDPs were living in displacement in Shan and Kachin states as a result of conflict that escalated in 2011. As many as 131,000 Rohingya and Kaman IDPs were also living in camps in central Rakhine having fled inter-communal violence in 2012 and 2013. Some may have been able

FIGURE 14: New displacements by conflict and violence in Myanmar (2012-2019)



to relocate since 2015 but, like other Rohingya, their freedom of movement and access to basic services continues to be restricted.<sup>222</sup>

Another 163,000 IDPs in southern Shan, Karen, Karenni and Mon states and Bago and Tanintharyi regions have received little attention from the international community. These areas are relatively peaceful compared with other parts of the country, but disputes about border demarcations and territorial control also triggered new displacement during the year.<sup>223</sup>

Despite some promising developments, fighting broke out in November in areas of Kachin that IDPs had previously abandoned but close to where returnees are living. No new displacements were recorded in Kachin state in 2019 for the first time in years, but the clashes highlight the fragile security situation, which is a barrier to durable solutions.<sup>224</sup>

The government, ethnic armed groups and civil society organisations have also expressed their willingness to facilitate the return of 97,300 people still displaced across the state.<sup>225</sup> UN agencies and local organisations are working to ensure that returns take place in a safe and dignified way, but people still have significant assistance and protection needs. Greater emphasis is also required on mine clearance and mine risk education efforts.<sup>226</sup>

The issue of insecure tenure over land also needs to be resolved.<sup>227</sup> There are concerns too that development projects in mining, agriculture and logging are impeding IDPs' return to their areas of origin.<sup>228</sup>

The government has made the closure of displacement camps in areas affected by conflict a priority, and it adopted a national strategy to this end in 2019.<sup>229</sup> The UN welcomed the move, but cautioned that IDPs' freedom of movement and access to basic services continued to be restricted.<sup>230</sup> Unresolved conflicts and continued segregation, particularly of Rohingya and Rakhine communities, also warrants concern.<sup>231</sup>

As long as armed conflict continues in Myanmar, displacement will continue to be a coping mechanism for the civilian population. Returns and relocation do not in themselves constitute durable solutions, and future camp closures will have to be accompanied by systematic monitoring to ensure they result in a sustainable end to displacement.