

PART 1

# INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN 2019

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A Syrian family walks through the rubble of their neighbourhood in Homs.  
Photo © UNHCR/Vivian Tou'meh, March 2019

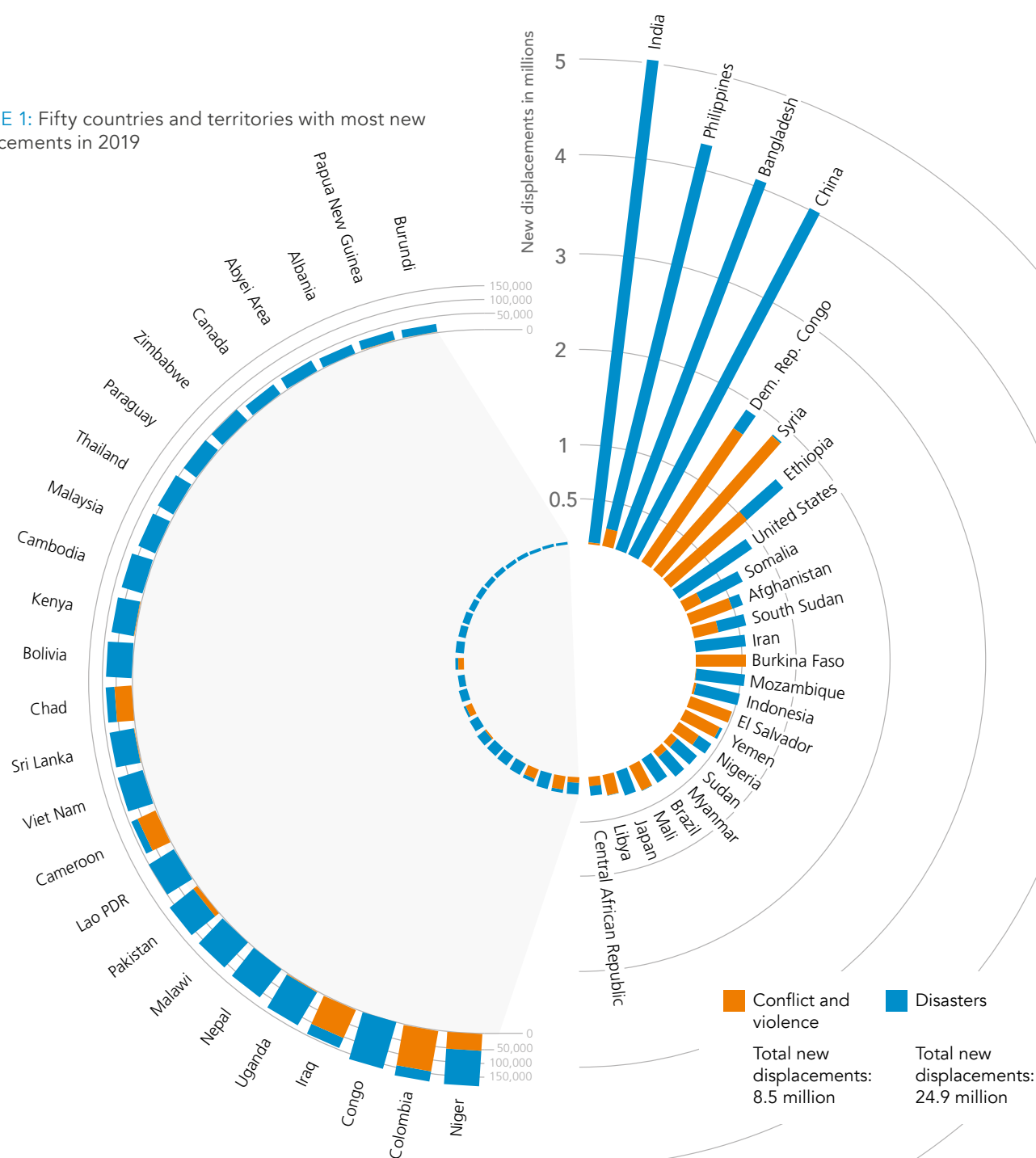


# NEW DISPLACEMENTS

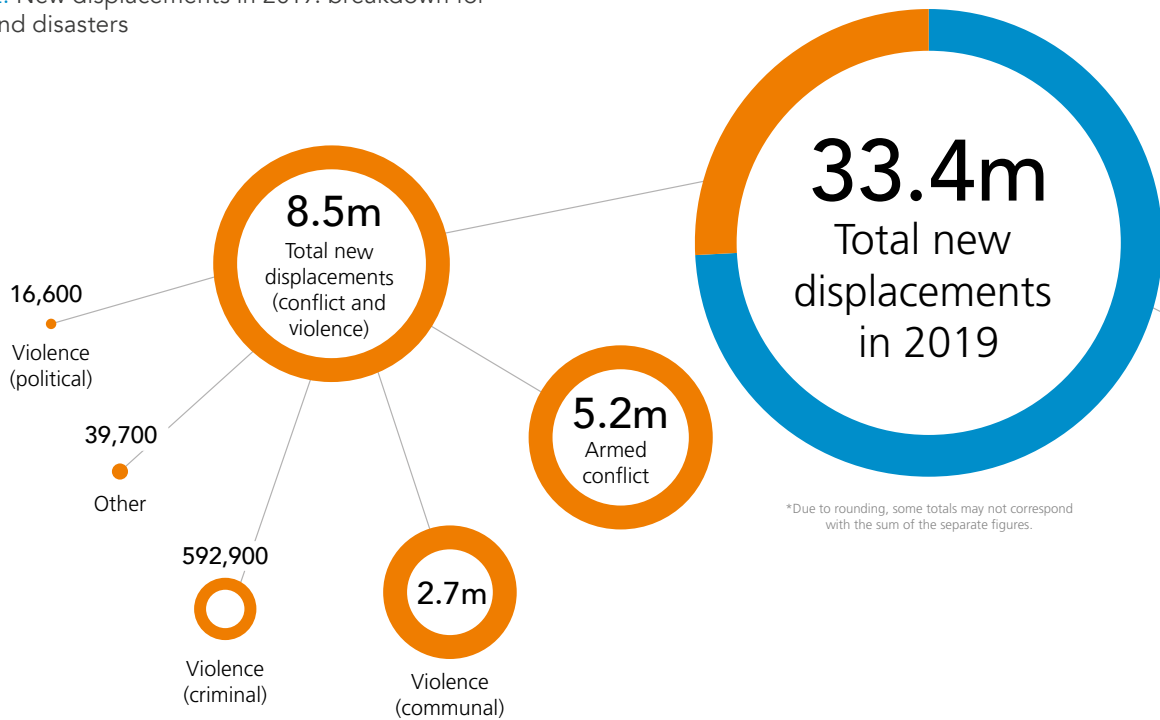
Conflict and disasters triggered 33.4 million new internal displacements across 145 countries and territories in 2019. Most of the disaster displacements were the result of tropical storms and monsoon rains in South Asia and East Asia and Pacific. Bangladesh, China, India and the Philippines each recorded more than four million, many of them pre-emptive evacuations led by governments. Many evacuees, however, had their displacement prolonged because their homes were damaged or destroyed.

Conflict continued unabated in countries such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Syria, which are also home to some of the largest numbers of people living in protracted displacement. Violence increased sharply in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, triggering significant new displacement. In countries including Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen, disasters forced many people already displaced by conflict to flee for a second time.

**FIGURE 1:** Fifty countries and territories with most new displacements in 2019



**FIGURE 2:** New displacements in 2019: breakdown for conflict and disasters

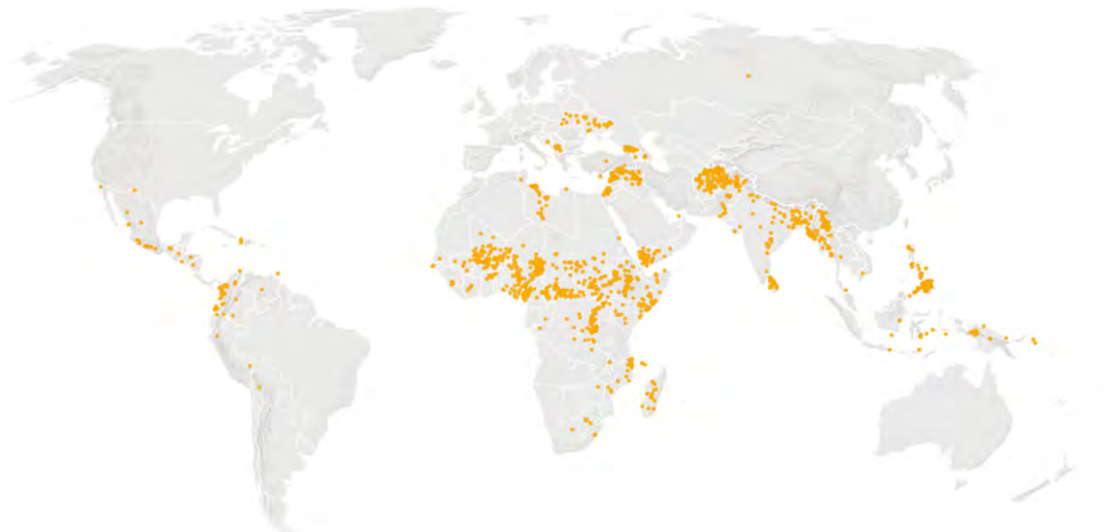


Disasters triggered nearly three-quarters of the new displacements recorded worldwide in 2019, accounting for 24.9 million. More than 95 per cent were the result of weather-related hazards such as storms and floods. The overwhelming majority of conflict displacements were triggered by armed conflict, but communal violence accounted for a significant proportion of the global total of 8.5 million (see Figure 2).

Geolocated data on internal displacement shows that although the phenomenon is a global challenge, even within countries and regions it tends to be concentrated in certain areas.

Conflict displacement occurs in pockets, including the eastern provinces of DRC, southern Somalia or departments on Colombia's Pacific coast (see Figure 3). Disaster displacement often takes place in highly urbanised areas such as the eastern seaboard of China and the US (see Figure 4). Many of these areas experienced various displacement events during the year. Beyond the global picture, it is important to shed light on these local specifics.

**FIGURE 3:** Conflict displacements in 2019 by location



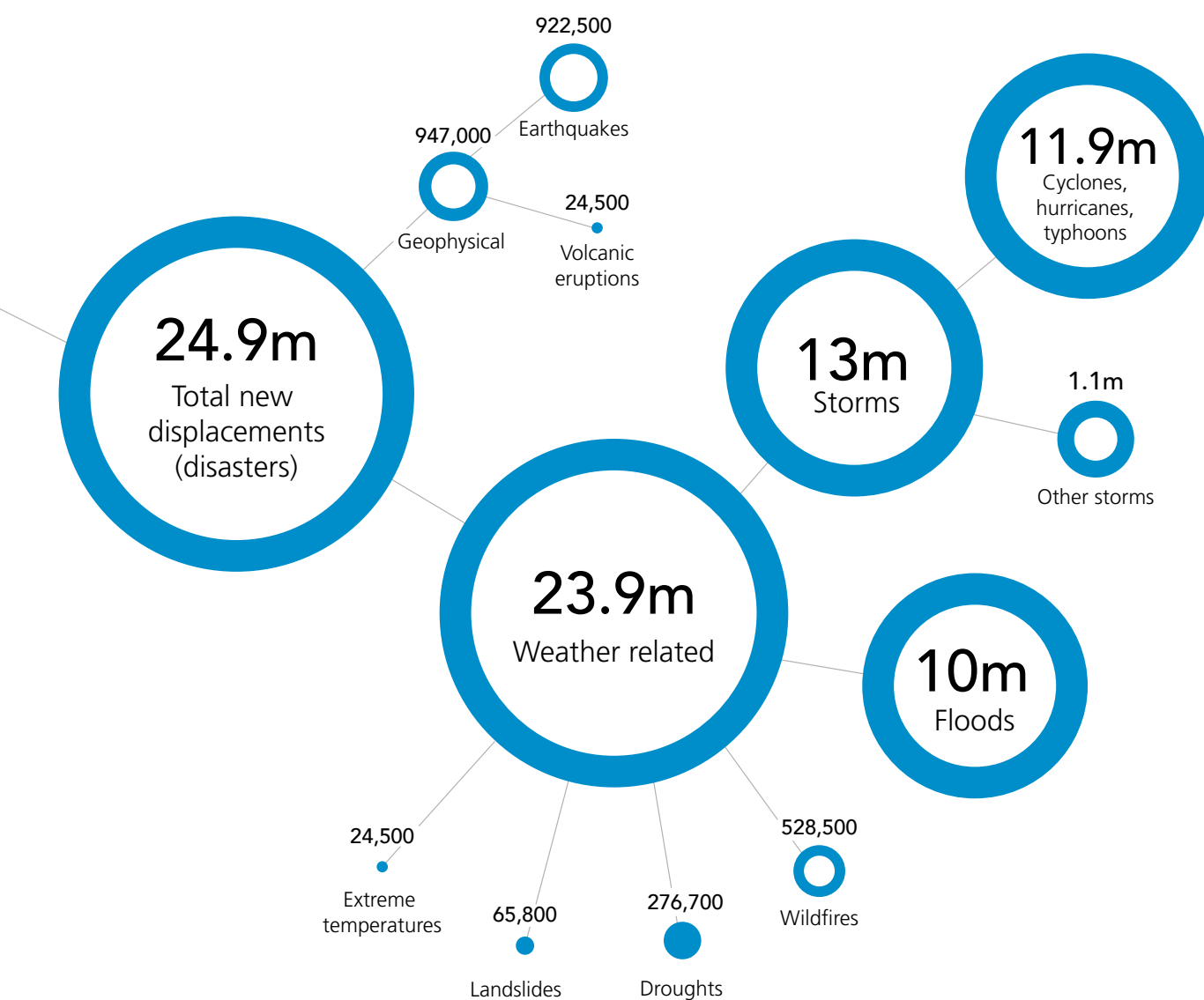
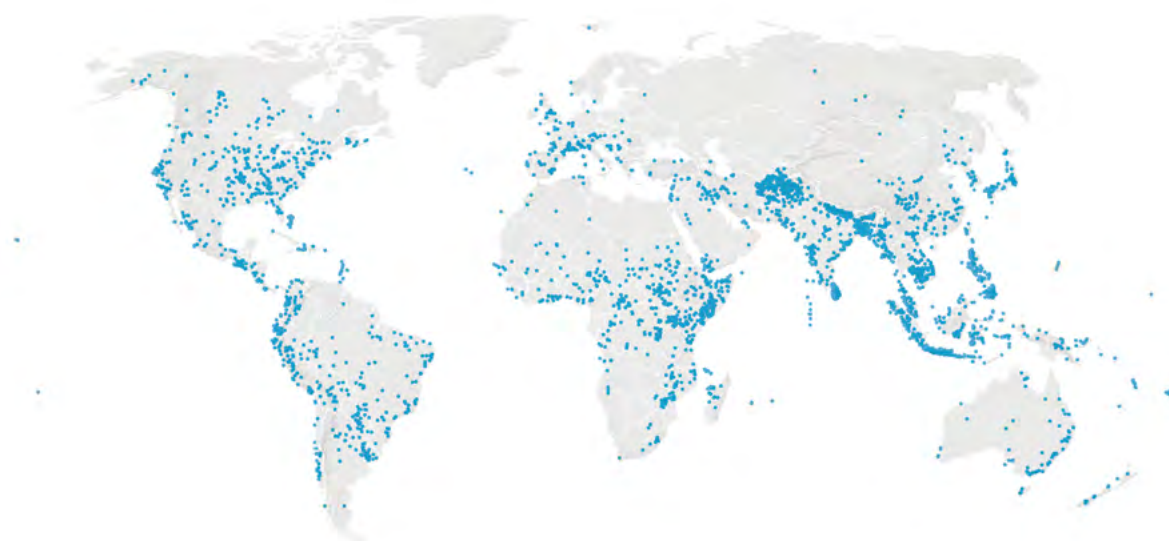


FIGURE 4: Disaster displacements in 2019 by location





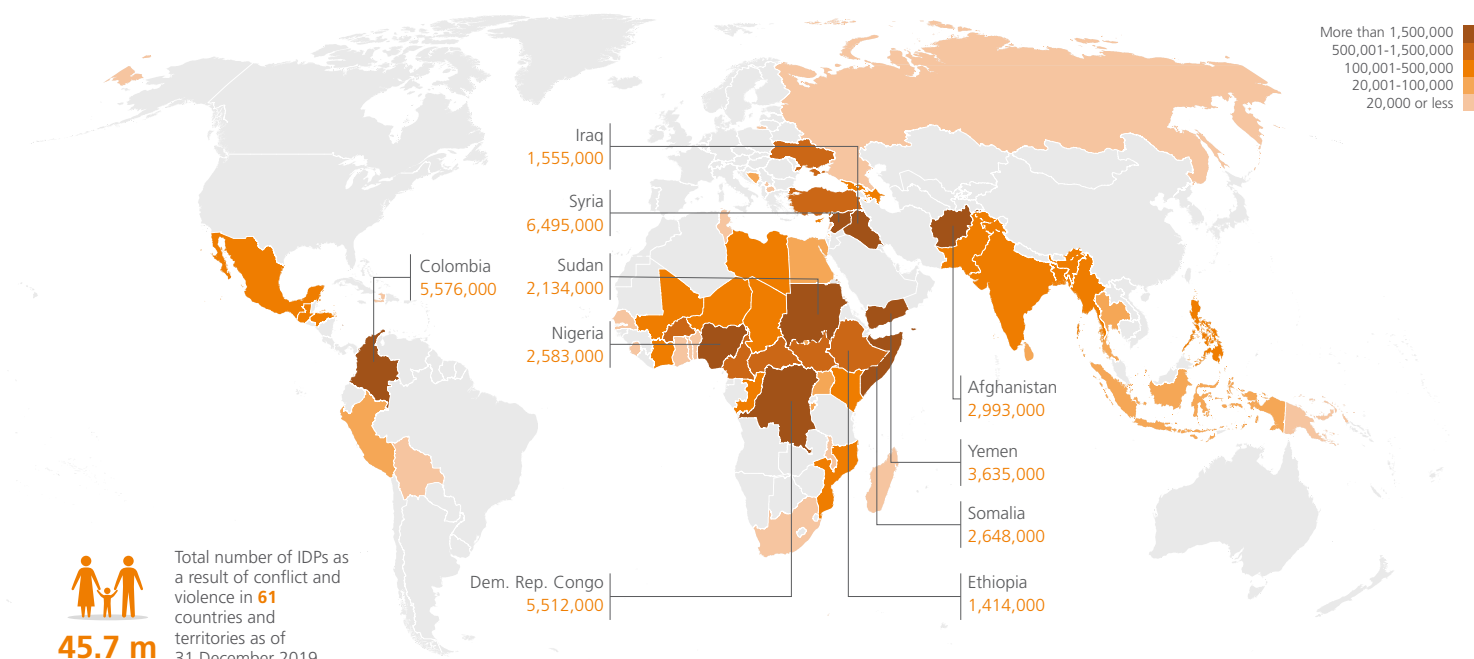
# PEOPLE LIVING IN DISPLACEMENT

## Conflict and violence

A record 45.7 million people were living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence in 61 countries and territories as of 31 December 2019 (see Figure 5). This figure is the highest ever recorded. It is also another reminder that internally displaced people (IDPs) make up an overwhelming majority of people to have fled conflict and violence worldwide. They outnumbered refugees by 19.8 million last year.<sup>1</sup>

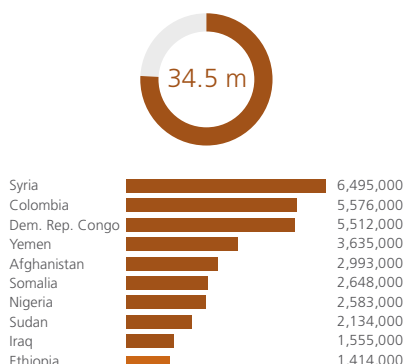
Five countries – Afghanistan, Colombia, DRC, Syria and Yemen – account for more than half of the global total. People may have been displaced by recent events, but the figures also include those who have been living in internal displacement for decades in countries such as Palestine, Peru, the Philippines and Sudan (see table 3 and the online methodological annex). Many millions of IDPs still face significant obstacles in their efforts to bring their displacement to a sustainable end. This highlights the urgent need to strengthen our collective effort to address an ever-growing challenge.

FIGURE 5: Total number of IDPs by conflict and violence as of 31 December 2019



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

10 countries and territories with the highest number of IDPs as of 31 December 2019



Other countries and territories

South Sudan	1,352,000	Mali	208,000
Turkey	1,099,000	Niger	195,000
Cameroon	969,000	Philippines	182,000
Ukraine	730,000	Chad	176,000
Central African Republic	592,000	Kenya	162,000
Burkina Faso	560,000	Congo	134,000
India	470,000	Mozambique	110,000
Myanmar	457,000	Pakistan	106,000
Libya	451,000	Bosnia and Herzegovina	99,000
Bangladesh	427,000	Egypt	65,000
Azerbaijan	351,000	Peru	60,000
Mexico	345,000	Thailand	41,000
Côte d'Ivoire	303,000	Indonesia	40,000
Georgia	301,000	Uganda	32,000
Honduras	247,000	Abyei Area	31,000
Palestine	243,000	Sri Lanka	27,000
Guatemala	242,000	Burundi	23,000
Cyprus	228,000		

Countries and territories reporting less than 20,000 people displaced by order of magnitude:

Kosovo, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, Lebanon, Sierra Leone, Benin, Madagascar, Haiti, Togo, Russia, South Africa, Ghana, Malawi, Macedonia, Bolivia and Tunisia

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

## Disasters

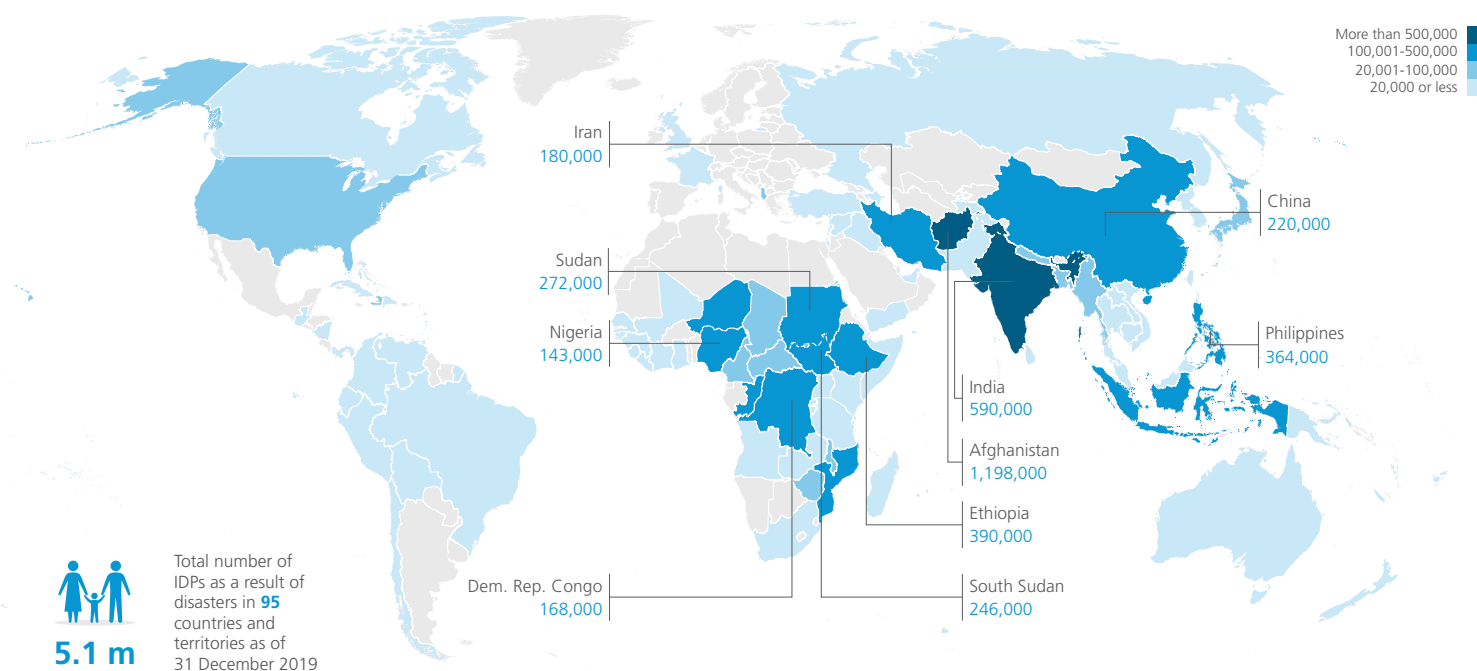
At least 5.1 million people were internally displaced by disasters across 95 countries and territories as of 31 December 2019 (see Figure 6). This is the first time such a global figure has been compiled. About 90 per cent of the total is made up of people displaced during the year. The remainder were displaced in previous years, and were included in the estimate when evidence of their continued displacement was available. The overall figure is an underestimate, because little data is collected on how long people are displaced for following disasters (see online methodological annex).

Afghanistan had the highest number of people still displaced as a result of disasters at the end of 2019,

with 1.2 million IDPs who fled drought and floods in recent years (see Figure 6). Hundreds of thousands more were still displaced after disasters that struck during the year in countries such as India, Ethiopia and South Sudan. Around 33,000 people were still living in displacement in Haiti a decade after the devastating 2010 earthquake.<sup>2</sup>

The scarcity of time-series data makes it difficult to fully understand the scale and nature of protracted displacement triggered by disasters and climate change impacts. Assuming that IDPs return to their homes soon after disasters may lead to the incorrect assumption that they no longer have vulnerabilities associated with their displacement. The reality is often more complex and these initial estimates, however conservative, constitute a first step toward filling this major knowledge gap.

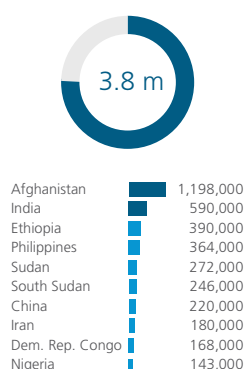
FIGURE 6: Total number of IDPs by disasters as of 31 December 2019



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

10 countries and territories with the highest number of IDPs as of 31 December 2019

Other countries and territories



Mozambique	132,000
Niger	121,000
Congo	107,000
Indonesia	104,000
Central African Republic	95,000
Bangladesh	88,000
Japan	88,000
Malawi	54,000
Zimbabwe	52,000
Haiti	51,000
Myanmar	41,000
United States	37,000
Albania	32,000
Nepal	29,000
Cameroon	28,000
Chad	27,000
Abeyi Area	26,000

Countries and territories with less than 20,000 people displaced by order of magnitude:

Comoros, Pakistan, Malaysia, Australia, Ghana, Burundi, Papua New Guinea, Viet Nam, Canada, Mali, Peru, Rwanda, Lao PDR, Sri Lanka, Gambia, Russia, Syria, Sierra Leone, Cuba, Tajikistan, France, Bolivia, Korea, Chile, Colombia, United Kingdom, Brazil, Kenya, Madagascar, Guatemala, Cambodia, Tanzania, Angola, Uganda, Dem. People's Rep. Korea, Bahamas, Fiji, Liberia, Somalia, Taiwan, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Thailand, Yemen, Iraq, Venezuela, Ecuador, Israel, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, Barbados, Mauritius, Senegal, Turkey, Vanuatu, South Africa, Zambia, Panama, United Arab Emirates, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Guinea, Northern Mariana Islands, New Zealand, St. Lucia, Puerto Rico, French Polynesia and Trinidad and Tobago

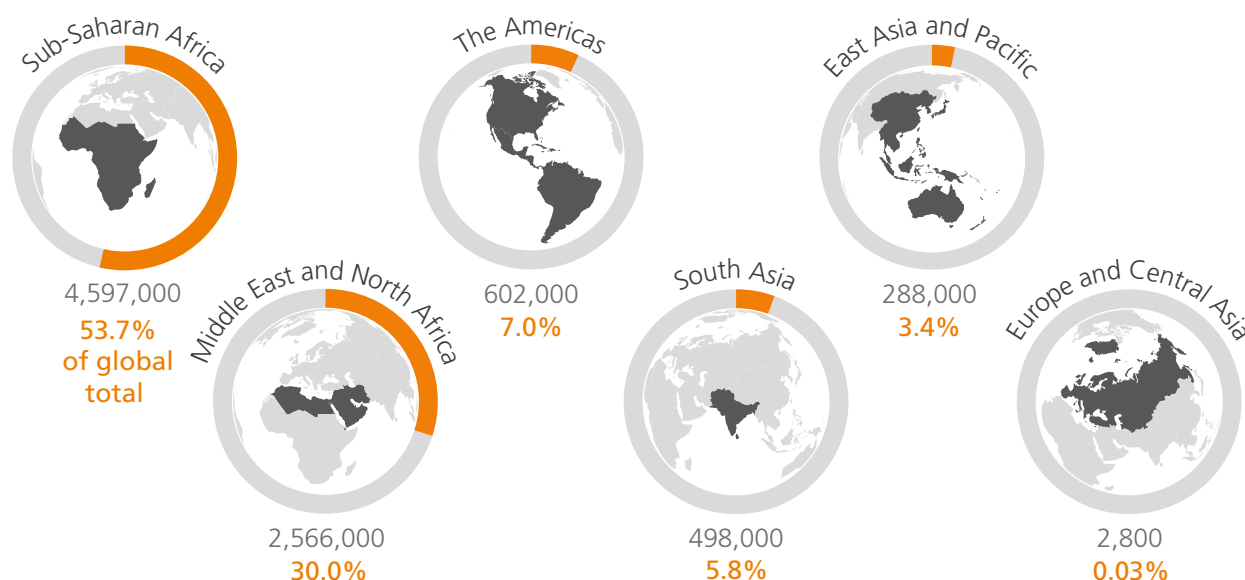
Due to rounding, some totals may not correspond with the sum of the separate figures.



# REGIONAL OVERVIEWS

## Conflict and violence

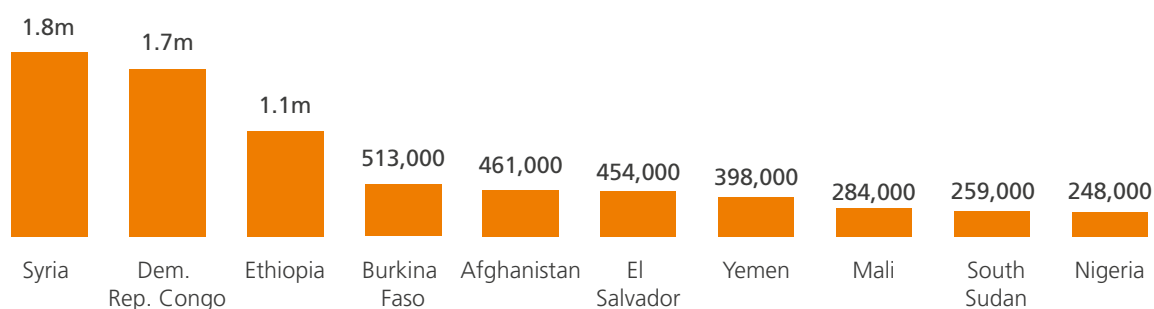
FIGURE 7: Conflict and violence: new displacements by region in 2019



Most of the new displacements triggered by conflict and violence in 2019 were recorded in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. The majority took place in Syria, DRC and Ethiopia, as in previous years. An unprecedented number was recorded in Burkina Faso, and significant increases in Mali and Libya. A combination of improved data collection and persistent conflict and violence also led to a rise in figures for countries such as El Salvador and Yemen.

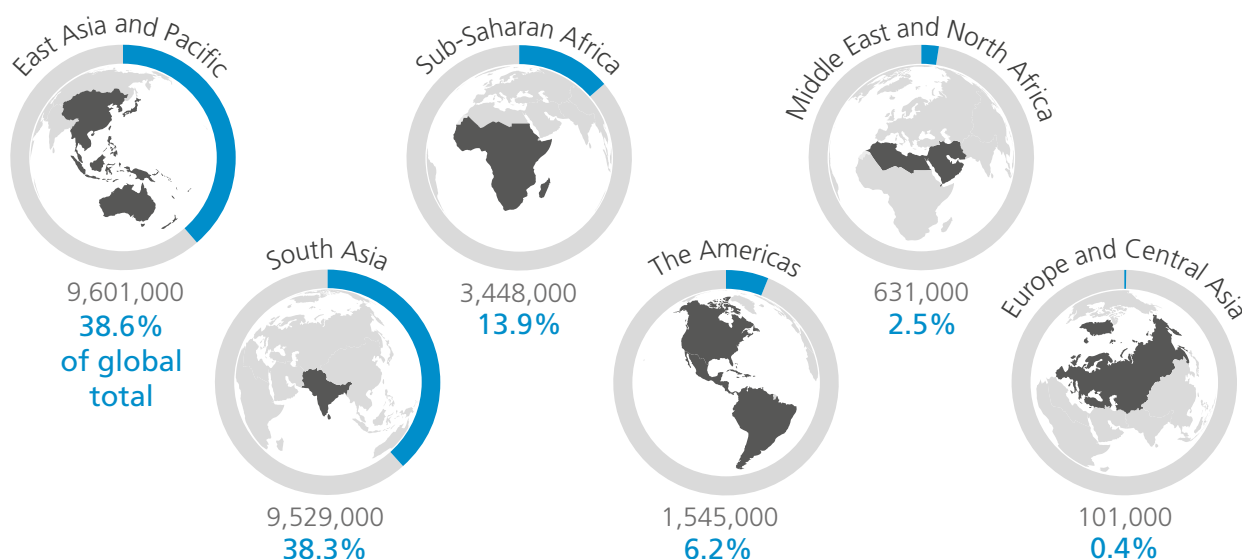
The number of new displacements fell in some countries thanks to successful ceasefire agreements and peace-building initiatives, as in the Central African Republic (CAR), Iraq and South Sudan. Many such situations are still fragile, however, and more efforts are needed to reduce the risk of conflict and displacement reoccurring. Humanitarian aid remains essential for IDPs, but it will take longer-term development interventions to resolve the underlying challenges that prolong the displacement of millions of people.

FIGURE 8: Ten countries with the most new displacements by conflict and violence in 2019



## Disasters

FIGURE 9: Disasters: new displacements by region in 2019

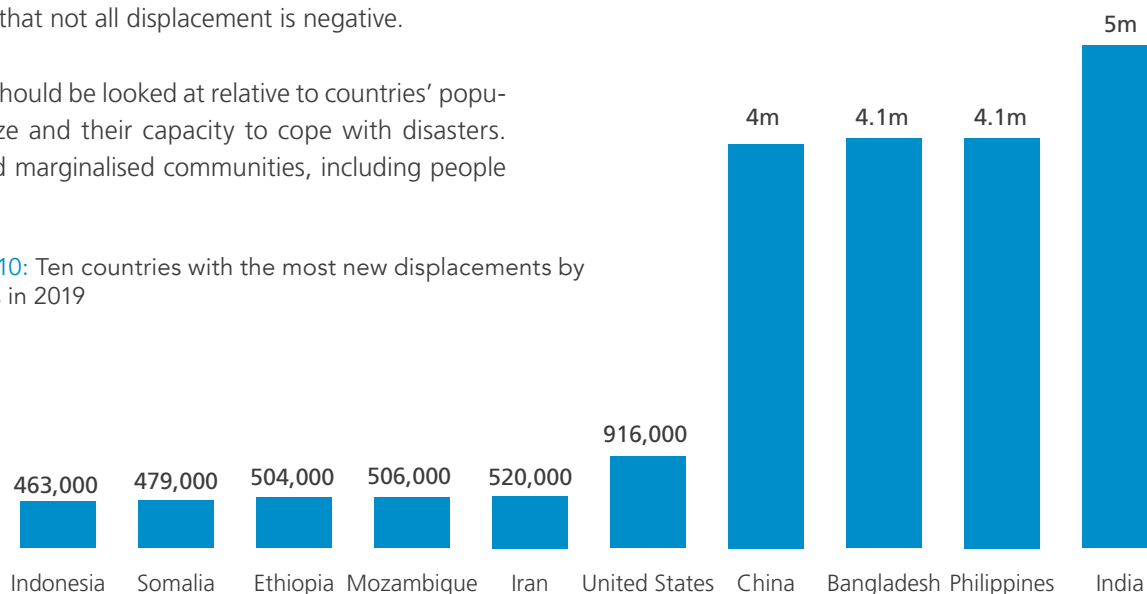


Most of the new displacements triggered by disasters in 2019 were recorded in East Asia and Pacific and South Asia, as in previous years. Monsoon rains, floods and tropical storms hit highly exposed areas that are home to millions of people. The majority of the new displacements were in the form of government-led pre-emptive evacuations. These successfully reduced the number of people killed in a number of large disasters and highlight the fact that not all displacement is negative.

already displaced by conflict who are then forced to flee disasters, are of particular concern. As countries move forward in implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, they should consider displacement as part of their risk reduction, response and recovery frameworks.

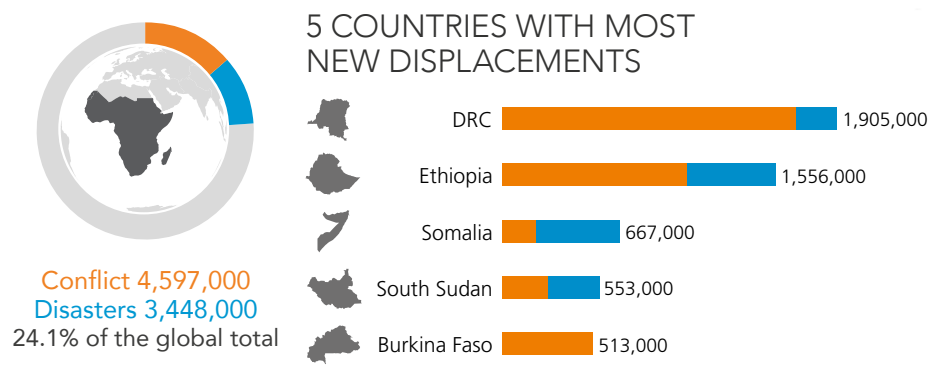
Figures should be looked at relative to countries' population size and their capacity to cope with disasters. Poor and marginalised communities, including people

FIGURE 10: Ten countries with the most new displacements by disasters in 2019





## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



Sub-Saharan Africa was once again the region most affected by conflict displacement in 2019. Armed conflict, communal violence and jihadist attacks continued in several countries, some of which are struggling to deal with protracted crises. Widespread poverty, longstanding economic stagnation, lack of development, competition over diminishing resources and the effects of climate change are among the factors that increase the risk of displacement.

The same factors also aggravate its impacts, heightening and prolonging IDPs' vulnerability. Around 19.2 million people were living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence as of the end of 2019, the highest figure in the world and the highest ever recorded for the region.

Historical data shows that internal displacement associated with conflict and violence has increased in sub-Saharan Africa over the past decade (see Figure 11). There were 4.6 million new displacements recorded in 2019, accounting for nearly 54 per cent of the global total. Jihadist groups operating in the Sahel region escalated their attacks and triggered mass displacement in countries including Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (see The Sahel spotlight, p.23).

Boko Haram's insurgency, now in its tenth year, and operations against the group continued to trigger significant new displacement and prolong its duration across the Lake Chad basin, a region that also has to contend with environmental degradation and desertification.

Many countries in Central Africa continued to suffer the effects of communal conflicts, while the interlinked triggers of conflict and climate change in East Africa forced people to flee their homes in Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan.

Figures for displacement associated with disasters in sub-Saharan Africa are lower than for conflict and violence, but they are still cause for concern. The 3.4 million new displacements recorded in 2019 represent one of the highest figures ever for the region (see Figure 11). Unusually heavy rains caused widespread flooding in several countries, where a chronic accumulation of vulnerabilities and risks aggravated its impacts and fuelled displacement.

Countries in the East and Horn of Africa experienced one of the wettest rainy seasons in 40 years.<sup>3</sup> Flooding along the White Nile basin forced many people already displaced by conflict to flee again (see White Nile basin spotlight, p.27). Mozambique bore the brunt of cyclones Idai and Kenneth, which triggered hundreds of thousands of displacements and destroyed homes, infrastructure and crops. Comoros, Madagascar, Malawi and Zimbabwe were also hard hit (see Mozambique spotlight, p.25).

Nearly two million people were thought to be living in internal displacement as a result of disasters in sub-Saharan Africa as of the end of the year.

## Central Africa



The region's most affected country in 2019 was the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, where ethnic tensions, local grievances and chronic poverty are the major drivers of internal displacement. Nearly 1.7 million new conflict displacements were reported during the year, compared with more than 1.8 million in 2018 and 2.2 million in 2017.

Clashes between the military and armed groups in the eastern province of North Kivu triggered 520,000 new displacements, primarily in Lubero and Rutshuru territories, and an upsurge in intercommunal violence between the Hema and Lendu communities triggered 453,000 in the north-eastern province of Ituri. There was also an escalation of conflict between armed groups and intercommunal violence in South Kivu, where 401,000 displacements were recorded, mainly in Mwenga and Fizi territories. Most of the people displaced were women and children.

The political situation in DRC remains tense, despite the fact that 2019 marked the first peaceful transition of power in the country's history.<sup>4</sup> The new government inherited a series of challenges, not least the activities of more than 100 armed groups in the east and ongoing conflict in other areas.<sup>5</sup> Around 5.5 million people were living in internal displacement as a result of conflict

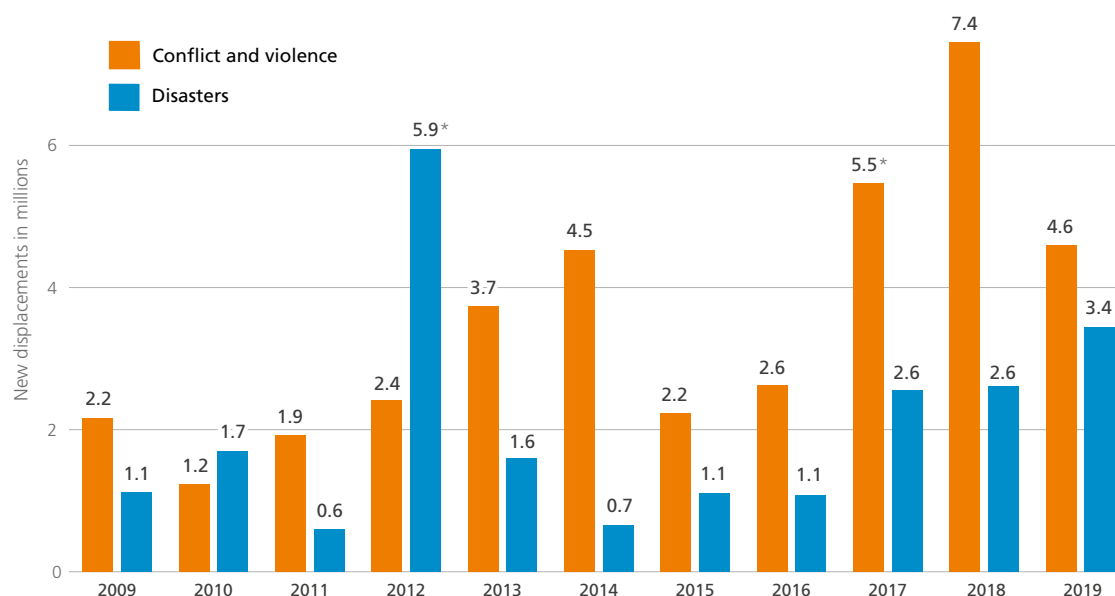
and violence as of the end of the year, and around 15.9 million were expected to need humanitarian assistance in 2020.<sup>6</sup> The country also had to deal with its second largest Ebola outbreak, a measles outbreak and a cholera outbreak, which between them killed thousands of people.

Heavy rains and flooding affected 12 of DRC's 26 provinces between October and December.<sup>7</sup> The country as a whole recorded 233,000 new disaster displacements, the highest ever figure. Floods triggered 137,000 in Nord-Ubangui and Sud-Ubangui provinces, which border the Central African Republic (CAR), and Tshopo province was also badly affected. Around 168,000 people in DRC were thought to be living in displacement as a result of disasters as of the end of the year.

The government of **CAR** signed a peace deal with 14 armed groups in early February after more than two years of negotiations facilitated by the African Union.<sup>8</sup> Implementation is progressing despite several setbacks and disagreements that were resolved with help from the international community, and the number of new conflict displacements fell from 510,000 in 2018 to 96,000 in 2019. The security situation remains fragile, however, and IDPs' needs largely unmet.

The most serious violence of the year occurred in Birao in Vakaga prefecture, where 24,000 new displacements were recorded in September as a result of clashes between the Popular Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic and the Movement of Central

**FIGURE 11:** New displacements by conflict, violence and disasters in Sub-Saharan Africa (2009-2019)



\* Updated figures. For further details see methodological annex, available online.



African Freedom Fighters for Justice, both signatories to the peace deal.<sup>9</sup>

CAR also suffered its worst flooding in 20 years in 2019, and the capital Bangui was among the places hardest hit. About 102,000 new displacements were recorded across the country, and the floods caused extensive damage to infrastructure and livelihoods. More than 10,000 homes were destroyed, and wells and latrines overflowed.<sup>10</sup> About 6,700 hectares of farmland in Ouham prefecture were inundated, aggravating food insecurity. More than a third of CAR's population of 4.7 million were facing acute food insecurity and in need of emergency assistance as of the end of the year.<sup>11</sup>

The **Republic of Congo** was also hit by its worst floods in decades, which damaged or destroyed infrastructure, crops and livelihoods. The Ubangi and Congo rivers burst their banks between October and December, inundating hundreds of villages and triggering as many as 163,000 new displacements in the departments of Cuvette, Likouala, Plateaux and Sangha.<sup>12</sup>

Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration activities continued in the east of the country following the signing of a peace deal between the Ninja militia and the government in December 2017.<sup>13</sup> The region has regained stability since, but there were still around 134,000 people living in displacement as a result of the conflict at the end of the year, around 79,000 of them in Pool department.

The security situation in anglophone areas of **Cameroon** has been deteriorating for the last two years. Clashes between anglophone separatists and the security forces have increased in Northwest and Southwest regions, and they spilled over into West and Littoral regions in 2019.<sup>14</sup> Lack of access has impeded an accurate assessment of the number of new displacements, leading to a conservative estimate of 26,000. Boko Haram also continued its activities in Far North region, triggering around 40,000 new displacements during the year.

Despite the scale of displacement and the extent of people's needs, Cameroon's crisis is among the world's

*A displaced family stand by their tents in the Gossi region of Timbuktu, Mali.  
Photo: NRC/Togo Moise, February 2018*



most neglected. Nearly a million people were living in internal displacement as of the end of the year, including in the relatively peaceful regions of Adamaoua and Centre region, which have increasingly become destinations for IDPs fleeing conflict in other areas of the country.

Lack of access also impeded an accurate assessment of disaster displacement in Cameroon, but in common with other countries in the region it experienced widespread flooding and landslides in 2019. Around 24,000 new displacements were recorded, but the figure should be considered an underestimate. The floods affected displacement camps in the Far North region, forcing some IDPs into secondary displacement.

No figures on internal displacement associated with Boko Haram's insurgency were available in neighbouring **Chad** until 2019, when improved monitoring mechanisms were put in place in Lac province. These revealed around 52,000 new displacements during the year.<sup>15</sup> Clashes between pastoralists and farmers in other provinces including Moyen-Chari, Ouaddai and Sila also forced people to flee their homes, bringing the number of new conflict displacements across the country as a whole to 58,000.

Around 30,000 new disaster displacements were also recorded. The most significant event was flooding in Salamat province in August. The Logone river and Lake Maga burst their banks, which affected not only areas of south-western Chad but also north-eastern Cameroon.

## West Africa

Long-running conflict and violence persisted across **Nigeria** in 2019. Around 248,000 new conflict and violence displacements were recorded during the year, and nearly 2.6 million people were thought to be living in internal displacement as of 31 December. The government established the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development in August, an important step intended to improve the coordination and mobilisation of resources to prevent and respond to humanitarian and displacement crises.<sup>16</sup>



Boko Haram carried out a series of attacks in the north-eastern states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe during the year, triggering more than 105,000 new displacements.<sup>17</sup> More than 473,000 IDPs were living in camps without adequate shelter across the three states as of October, and another 34,000 were living out in the open.<sup>18</sup> Torrential rains also flooded several displacement camps, forcing many IDPs into secondary displacement. Insecurity has impeded humanitarian access and the response has been further stretched by the mass arrival of new IDPs, leaving many camps overwhelmed.<sup>19</sup>

Long-standing ethnic conflict between Fulani pastoralists and Hausa farmers in north-western Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara states triggered new displacements in 2019 as it took on new dynamics in the form of rural banditry and criminal violence. Around 178,000 people were living in internal displacement across the three states as of the end of the year.<sup>20</sup> Clashes between farmers and herders in the central states have also escalated in recent years, triggering 53,000 new displacements in 2019. The figure, however, should be considered an underestimate. The growing and shifting patterns of violence in both areas require better monitoring to ascertain the true scale of displacement.<sup>21</sup>

As Africa's most populous country, Nigeria is highly exposed to disasters, particularly floods. It is traversed by several major rivers that often burst their banks during the rainy season. Adamawa and Borno states, which were already affected by conflict, bore the brunt of flooding in 2019 during an exceptionally long rainy season. Flooding in the Niger river basin also destroyed almost 2,700 homes in Niger state in August and September. Disasters triggered around 157,000 new displacements across the country as whole, and were thought to have left about 143,000 people living in internal displacement as of the end of the year.

The security situation in **Burkina Faso**, a relatively peaceful country in recent years, deteriorated sharply in 2019, triggering an unprecedented 513,000 new displacements (see The Sahel spotlight, p.23). Jihadist militants, including al-Qaeda affiliates from neighbouring Mali, were quick to exploit the security vacuum left by the fall of the former president Blaise Compaoré in 2014, and a homegrown group known as Ansaroul Islam emerged in late 2016. Initially active in northern Soum region, the militants have spread by



tapping into local grievances in the east and south-west.<sup>22</sup> They launched near-daily attacks on the security forces in 2019, and as the state struggles to protect civilians, a growing number of self-defence militias have emerged, aggravating the situation still further.<sup>23</sup>

Violence in central **Mali** has been escalating since early 2018 and continued to do so last year. It has its roots in a long-standing crisis in the north, where Tuareg separatists and jihadist militants seized swathes of territory in 2012 following an attempted coup in Bamako.<sup>24</sup> A French-led military intervention pushed the militants back the following year, but they have since regrouped and expanded from the desert north into the country's fertile central regions (see The Sahel spotlight, p.23).

The government signed a peace agreement with a number of militias in 2015, but despite some progress in terms of social and economic development, political instability has impeded its implementation. The country has since had four prime ministers, and a series of cabinet reshuffles have undermined continuity.<sup>25</sup>

Mali is also vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Increasing variation in rainfall patterns, land degradation and erosion have disrupted many people's livelihoods. About 60 per cent of the population live in rural areas and rely on rain-fed agriculture. Around 400,000 people are thought to be affected by drought each year, and 500,000 by flooding.<sup>26</sup> There were 6,600 new disaster displacements in 2019, but limited data means the figure is conservative.

In neighbouring **Niger**, the eastern region of Diffa remains highly unstable. Boko Haram and other non-state armed groups carried out a series of attacks during the year, including one that triggered more than 18,000 new displacements in late March and early April.<sup>27</sup> The situation in the western states of Tahoua and Tillabéri is also cause for serious concern (see The Sahel spotlight, p.23).<sup>28</sup>

The government declared a state of emergency in all three states in mid-March, and the UN and a number of NGOs suspended their humanitarian operations in some areas for several weeks in early May.<sup>29</sup> Some have been able to resume their work since, but in a climate of violence and insecurity.

Extensive flooding triggered 121,000 new displacements in 2019, mainly in the capital Niamey and Diffa

state. Drought is also a major trigger of displacement, but robust data is hard to come by. It is also difficult to distinguish drought and conflict as triggers, and in many areas they are interlinked. What is known is that ever more frequent and intense episodes of drought disrupt pastoralists' livelihoods to the extent that they become unsustainable, forcing many into displacement. Some farmers have no choice but to move seasonally to urban areas in search of alternative income.<sup>30</sup>

## East and the Horn of Africa



There was a significant fall in the number of new displacements in **Ethiopia**, from 2.9 million in 2018 to over a million last year. Many IDPs, however, live in insecure areas with little or no access to basic services or humanitarian assistance, and a significant number have been displaced more than once. There were around 1.4 million people living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence as of the end of the year, also considerably fewer than in 2018.

The decreases are the result of a national steering committee led by the Ministry of Peace approving a three-phase plan in March to return all IDPs to their places of origin in the following months.<sup>31</sup> Implementation began almost immediately, and 1.2 million IDPs were thought to have returned by the end of the year. Most displacement sites in Gedeo, West Guji and East and West Wollega were dismantled.

Not everyone returned voluntarily, however, and many returnees encountered significant obstacles in re-establishing their lives. Many found their homes damaged or destroyed or were confronted by other issues in trying to reclaim their property and land. Few have access to assistance or basic services, and farmers and small business owners whose livelihoods have been disrupted have received little support. Insecurity in some return areas has led to a significant number of secondary displacements.<sup>32</sup> Some IDPs went into hiding and sought to relocate themselves to avoid having to return to their areas of origin.<sup>33</sup>

Disasters triggered 504,000 new displacements in 2019. Around 190,000 were recorded during the first rainy season between April and June, and 177,000 during the second in October and November, when the rains were



*The Horn of Africa experienced above-average rainfall that triggered widespread flooding. This man and his wife lost their home and shop in Lodwar, Turkana county, Kenya. © UNICEF/UNI250645/Chinyenze, December 2019*

unusually heavy. Eastern and south-eastern parts of the country were affected by drought, particularly lowland pastoralist and agro-pastoralist areas of Somali region, Oromia region, the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' region (SNNP) and parts of Afar region.<sup>34</sup> The situation is of particular concern in Somali, where most of the 131,000 drought displacements recorded in Ethiopia last year took place. More frequent and intense episodes of drought had previously affected nearly 56,000 households in the region between 2015 and 2017.<sup>35</sup>

Internal displacement clearly represents a major challenge for the country, but there were important policy developments intended to address the phenomenon during the year. With support from the UN and the international community, the government launched a durable solutions initiative in December.<sup>36</sup> It provides a framework for the achievement of sustainable solutions to displacement, from the policy and legislative to the operational level.

The initiative acknowledges that internal displacement is a development priority that needs to be addressed through coordinated planning and action across sectors.<sup>37</sup> Given its recent launch, 2020 will begin to reveal the extent to which putting it into practice enables safe, voluntary and dignified returns. The government also organised a series of national consultations that

culminated in Ethiopia ratifying the Kampala Convention in February 2020.<sup>38</sup>

Conflict and violence in **Somalia** triggered 188,000 new displacements in 2019, mainly in the south-east where the al-Shabaab militia, which is affiliated to al-Qaeda, has its stronghold. More than half were recorded in Lower Shabelle region as a result of clashes between the group and the Somali army supported by African Union forces. Persistent insecurity in rural areas impeded the provision of humanitarian aid, leading many people to flee to overcrowded camps in urban areas, mainly in Mogadishu, in search of refuge and assistance.<sup>39</sup> Tens of thousands of IDPs returned home during the year, but many only temporarily to work their land during the sowing and harvest seasons.<sup>40</sup>

Disasters triggered 479,000 new displacements. In common with other countries in East Africa, Somalia was affected by widespread flooding in the second half of 2019 during an unusually wet rainy season influenced by El Niño. About a quarter of the displacements took place in Belet Weyn city in Hiraaan state.<sup>41</sup> Other regions were affected by drought, which triggered around 60,000 new displacements.

Internal displacement is fuelling Somalia's rapid urbanisation, as people who struggle to survive and make a living in rural areas seek opportunities in urban areas.<sup>42</sup>





Communities affected by Cyclone Idai test out the first drops of water from a new water point installed by the Spanish Red Cross. The cyclone has left many people in Mozambique at risk of disease.  
Photo : IFRC/Corrie Butler, May 2019

Many, however, establish themselves in informal settlements where they are at high risk of eviction. More than 264,000 people, most of them IDPs, were evicted during the year, making forced evictions one of the main triggers of secondary displacement in the country.

In response to the new and protracted displacement across the country, the government launched a durable solutions initiative (DSI) with UN support in 2016.<sup>43</sup> In 2019 it established an inter-ministerial durable solutions secretariat, ratified the Kampala Convention and approved a national policy on IDPs and returning refugees.<sup>44</sup> Somalia's DSI has been a significant catalyst for these and other developments, leading the government to fully own the country's response to internal displacement, and providing an example for others to follow.

Unprecedented flooding in the East Africa, particularly **Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia**, not only triggered widespread displacement but also established conditions for a locust infestation that caused damage across the region. This further eroded people's livelihoods and negatively affected food security.<sup>45</sup> Away from the headlines, the floods also displaced hundreds

of thousands of vulnerable people along the White Nile basin, in many cases forcing IDPs who had already fled conflict into secondary displacement (see White Nile basin spotlight, p.27).

The most affected country along the basin was **South Sudan**, where the floods were described as the worst in the country's history.<sup>46</sup> They triggered 98 per cent of the 294,000 new disaster displacements recorded in 2019, and left around 246,000 people still living in displacement as of the end of the year.

The signing of a revitalised peace agreement between the government and a number of armed groups in September 2018 has led to a reduction in conflict and violence.<sup>47</sup> The number of associated new displacements also fell from 321,000 in 2018 to 259,000 in 2019, but there were still 1.4 million people living in internal displacement as of the end of the year. Implementation of the agreement has been slow and there was an increase in violence and displacement in the second half of 2019, but the formation of a unity government in February 2020 has rekindled hopes of lasting peace.<sup>48</sup>

The tense political situation in **Sudan** aggravated ethnic and intercommunal disputes over scarce resources during the year. Clashes in East and Central Darfur and White Nile state triggered nearly 10,000 new displacements in May and June. Violence between Massalit and Arab communities in West Darfur in the last two weeks of December also triggered more than 46,000. There were 84,000 new conflict displacements recorded across the country as a whole, and more than 2.1 million people living in internal displacement as of the end of the year.

The number of disaster displacements in 2019 was among the highest recorded for Sudan, and the vast majority were triggered by flooding in White Nile state.<sup>49</sup> The floods also led to a cholera outbreak in Blue Nile, Gezira, Khartoum and Sennar states (see White Nile basin spotlight, p.27).<sup>50</sup>

Disasters triggered 130,000 new displacements in **Uganda** in 2019, mainly in Bukedi, Sironko and Teso regions, and 74,000 in **Kenya**. The latter figure includes 10,000 recorded in West Pokot county, which was hit by landslides in November. The two countries also recorded 2,300 and 1,800 displacements respectively triggered by localised intercommunal violence.

The small landlocked countries of **Burundi** and **Rwanda** experienced significant disaster displacement. Storms, heavy rains and landslides triggered 25,000 new displacements in Burundi, which peaked in November and December. About 6,000 people were evacuated pre-emptively from high-risk areas of Rwanda in December to escape the onset of heavy rains.<sup>51</sup>

## Southern Africa

**Mozambique** bore the brunt of two unusually powerful storms in 2019 that triggered hundreds of thousands of new displacements, and left around 132,000 people still displaced as of the end of the year. The impacts of cyclones Idai and Kenneth were also felt in Comoros, Malawi and Zimbabwe (see Mozambique spotlight, p.25).<sup>52</sup>



Kenneth triggered around 24,000 new displacements in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province, where its impacts were aggravated by an escalating conflict between government forces and jihadist militias. There were more than 160 attacks in 2019, compared with 60

in 2018 and six in 2017.<sup>53</sup> Around 5,300 new displacements were recorded, but the figure should be considered an underestimate given the difficulties in gathering data on highly localised incidents of violence. Many people fled to neighbouring provinces or across the border into Tanzania. Others sought shelter on islands off the coast of Cabo Delgado.<sup>54</sup> Violence and displacement increased around the time of elections in October, and some IDPs were unable to vote in their registered polling stations.<sup>55</sup>

Kenneth also hit **Comoros** hard, destroying about 4,600 homes and affecting people who were already poor and vulnerable, mostly on the island of Grand Comore. Around 19,000 disaster displacements were recorded during the year. The situation on Comoros received little media attention, but damages and losses were put at \$185 million, and recovery and reconstruction costs could be as high as \$277 million.<sup>56</sup>

Idai struck **Malawi** before it strengthened into a tropical cyclone, but it still triggered around 110,000 new displacements in Southern region. After later wreaking chaos in Mozambique it also triggered 51,000 in **Zimbabwe**, mainly in the rural districts of Chimanimani and Chipinge in Manicaland province. Extensive crop losses aggravated an already fragile food security situation in the area after an extended period of drought.<sup>57</sup> It was not possible to obtain drought displacement figures either for Zimbabwe or the wider region, which has been suffering episodes of severe drought for the last five years. However, evidence shows that its impacts have been widespread, and that they are playing a role in heightening people's vulnerabilities.<sup>58</sup>



## SPOTLIGHT

# THE SAHEL

## A deepening crisis of regional dimensions

The Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa suffered a sharp increase in violence and mass displacement in 2019. A number of jihadist groups have become increasingly active in border areas between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, commonly known as the Liptako Gourma region, carrying out attacks, stoking communal and ethnic violence, and raising concerns about a major and escalating security challenge with regional implications. Boko Haram's insurgency and military offensives against the group have also continued to force people to flee their homes in the Lake Chad basin.<sup>59</sup> Around 854,000 new internal displacements were recorded across the three countries in 2019.

The jihadist groups, which are local but globally oriented, have spent years exploiting local grievances, laying the ground for armed insurgencies to emerge and expand. Some of the disputes involve access to land and water, but many attacks are part of efforts to root out individuals linked to one extremist group or another, or to take revenge for previous violence. The militants have also taken advantage of porous borders and the absence of government forces. They have forcibly recruited people, laid siege to villages, burned homes, destroyed the livelihoods of whole communities and perpetrated severe human rights violations.<sup>60</sup>

The security situation in Mali has been deteriorating since 2013.<sup>61</sup> Islamist militants have regrouped in the desert north and expanded into the fertile centre of the country. They have gained ground by recruiting from the Fulani community, nomadic herders left behind by government and development programmes that favour agriculture. Long-standing grievances between Dogon farmers and Fulani herders over land and resources have also increased considerably.<sup>62</sup> More than 290,000 new internal displacements were recorded in 2019, most of them triggered by escalating communal violence in Mopti and Gao. The two regions currently host the largest numbers of IDPs, of whom there were 208,000 across the country as a whole as of the end of the year.

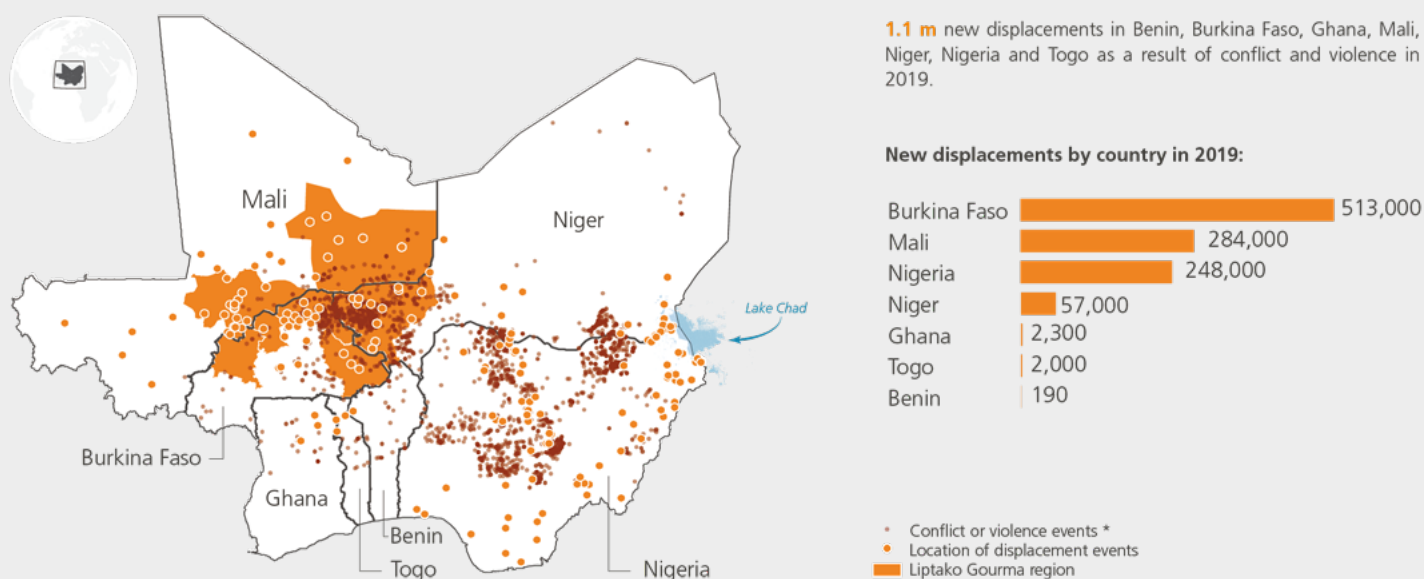
Insecurity has also spread to eastern and southern regions of neighbouring Niger and Burkina Faso, where different armed groups are using similar methods to recruit and expand. The situation in Niger is of particular concern because the country sits at a dangerous crossroad of violence, surrounded on all sides by countries facing security crises. The eastern region of Diffa has suffered the effects of Boko Haram's insurgency for a decade, and the government has also been forced to step up military activity and protection efforts in the western regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua in response to escalating violence and displacement, particularly over the last two years.<sup>63</sup>

There are worrying signs that the dynamics of these two separate conflict hotspots are becoming more intertwined, and that Niger may form a potential bridge between them.<sup>64</sup> There were 57,000 new internal displacements, due to conflict and violence, recorded in the country last year, of which 26,000 were in Tillabéri and Tahoua.

It is Burkina Faso, however, which faces the most alarming security situation.<sup>65</sup> Violence spread from northern to eastern regions of the country in 2019, triggering 513,000 new displacements, a ten-fold increase on the figure from 2018. Around 560,000 people were living in internal displacement as of the end of the year. Communities have been generous in hosting displaced people, but the country's infrastructure is poor, the government has struggled to respond to IDPs' largely unmet needs and the international community has paid little attention to the crisis.<sup>66</sup>

Access to health services and education has deteriorated, and IDPs are in urgent need of protection. There are more than twice as many displaced women as men, and many have been subjected to abuse and sexual violence. There are particular concerns about the protection of women in hard-to-reach areas where violence goes unchecked.<sup>67</sup>

The presence and influence of armed groups is growing in all three countries, and their shifting activities and the complex dynamics of the situation make it difficult for individual governments to rein in the insurgents. Military efforts to do so have also triggered significant displacement. New initiatives intended to respond more effectively to the crisis have emerged, including the creation in 2017 of the Joint Force of the Group of Five of the



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

\*Source: ACLED events associated with air/drone strikes, armed clashes, attacks, looting/property destruction, non-state actor overtakes territory and shelling/artillery/missile attacks in 2019

Displacement data: ACLED, CMP, CONASUR, DRC, ECHO, IOM DTM, IRC, local authorities, local media, MSF, NADMO, OCHA, Protection Cluster, SEMA, REACH, RRM, UNHCR, 2019

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

Sahel (G5 Sahel) to fight jihadist violence and insecurity in the region with UN and African Union support.<sup>68</sup> Many challenges remain, however, and meanwhile there is a growing sense of fear among local communities, including those who have been displaced, prompted by the realisation that living in a conflict zone is becoming the new normal.<sup>69</sup>

There is also increasing concern that the violence and insecurity will spread further south to countries such as Benin, Ghana and Togo. Attacks by Fulani militias triggered new displacements in Benin's northern Atacora region in 2019. Further west, a land dispute between Gangan and Tchokossi communities in northern Togo triggered as many as 2,000 new displacements in late June, and intercommunal violence and clashes forced people to flee their homes in northern Ghana between January and May.

If violence continues to spread into previously calm countries, much more displacement is only to be expected. More efforts to address the main triggers and drivers of conflict across the Sahel are required if the current situation is to be prevented from spiralling into a new regional crisis.

# MOZAMBIQUE

## The long-term impacts of cyclones Idai and Kenneth

After an extended drought that halved agricultural production and caused widespread food insecurity, two powerful tropical storms wreaked havoc across southern Africa in 2019. Cyclones Idai and Kenneth were unprecedented in the region, and triggered 640,000 and 45,000 displacements respectively. Countries including Comoros, Madagascar, Malawi and Zimbabwe were hard hit, but it was Mozambique that suffered the worst of the damage and where most of the displacement was recorded.<sup>70</sup>

First to strike was Idai, which as a tropical depression caused severe flooding and forced tens of thousands of people to flee in northern Mozambique and Malawi in early March. It then moved out to sea, where it developed into an intense tropical cyclone equivalent to a category two hurricane.<sup>71</sup> Idai then skirted the west coast of Madagascar before moving back toward Mozambique, where it made landfall on 15 March near the coastal city of Beira, home to 500,000 people. About 90 per cent of the city was damaged, and much of it destroyed. Most of the people displaced were from poor and vulnerable communities living in informal settlements ill-equipped to withstand the ravages of the storm.<sup>72</sup>

As it moved inland, Idai cut across the central provinces of Manica, Sofala, Tete and Zambezia and then neighbouring Zimbabwe, damaging crops and displacing whole rural communities.<sup>73</sup> The storm triggered around 478,000 displacements in Mozambique and left millions in need of humanitarian assistance. More than 93,500 people were still displaced in 71 resettlement sites in the four central provinces as of the end of the year.<sup>74</sup>

Cyclone Kenneth, the equivalent of a category four hurricane, struck just over a month after Idai, between 23 and 29 April. It developed in the Indian Ocean and hit Comoros and Mayotte before making landfall in the province of Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique. Kenneth triggered significantly fewer displacements than Idai, but it was the most powerful cyclone

to hit Africa since records began with gusts of up to 220 km/h.<sup>75</sup> An ongoing conflict in Cabo Delgado, where several Islamic militias have been attacking and displacing people since 2017, added to the challenges brought on by the disaster. The conflict slowed down the delivery of aid to those affected and is a significant barrier to recovery and reconstruction efforts.<sup>76</sup>

A number of factors combined to make Idai and Kenneth among the most devastating disasters the region has experienced. International meteorological services projected the intensity and path of both storms and national authorities declared them emergencies, but local early warning systems proved ineffective. Few people evacuated from high-risk areas before either made landfall.<sup>77</sup> Even after the wrath of Idai, there was little evidence of displacement being pre-emptive as Kenneth approached. Most people moved during or after the storm, once their homes had been damaged or destroyed.<sup>78</sup>

Both storms also struck places where people were already living in vulnerable conditions. Poor communities in urban areas such as Beira were disproportionately affected and had little capacity to recover and rebuild.<sup>79</sup> Millions of people in rural areas were already facing food insecurity as a result of drought, and the storms only served to aggravate the situation. Harvests and seed stocks were decimated, leaving many farmers unable to sustain their livelihoods. Across the regions affected most people rely on agriculture for a living.<sup>80</sup> Around 67,500 children were facing malnutrition in the country as of the end of the year, and 2.5 million people - or 10 per cent of the country's population - were in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>81</sup>

As the emergency phase of the response to Idai and Kenneth receded, new challenges emerged, including the resettlement of IDPs in areas at less risk from future disasters. With support from international organisations, the government designated areas it deemed suitable for habitation. About 89,000 people in Manica, Tete and Zambezia provinces were resettled in new sites and allocated plots of land on which to build new homes and farms.<sup>82</sup>

Many of the plots, however, have proved unsuitable for agriculture, leaving many still dependent on food aid.<sup>83</sup> Many of the resettlement sites were also affected when the rainy season arrived toward the end of the year. Downpours destroyed hundreds of tents and emergency

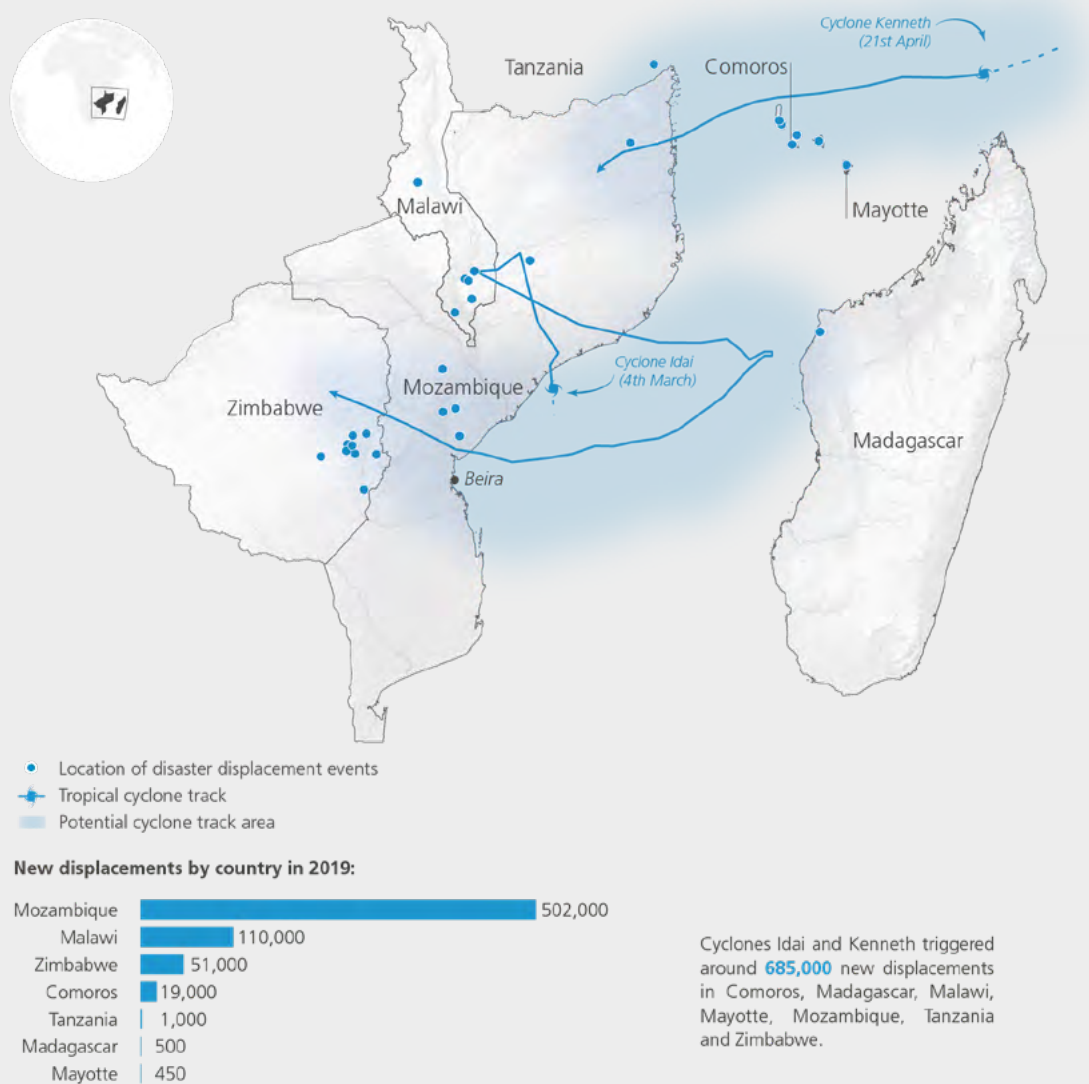
shelters, triggering more than 2,800 secondary displacements between December 2019 and January 2020.<sup>84</sup> This trend continued during the first months of 2020.

Basic humanitarian needs such as food, water and shelter were still unmet across Mozambique several months after the disasters. Only 11 per cent of people surveyed in resettlement sites said they planned to live there permanently, and most cited precarious living conditions, a lack of livelihood opportunities and poor access to basic services as the main reasons. Displaced children and young people, who make up the majority of those in resettlement sites, also struggled to restart their education.<sup>85</sup>

Cyclones Idai and Kenneth show that the impacts of climate change and variability are most acutely felt by

people who are already vulnerable, highly exposed and unprepared to respond. Disaster risk reduction measures, including better early warning systems and contingency plans, and the building of climate-resilient infrastructure, are vital if the risk of future displacement is to be reduced.

Significant numbers of people are also still living in displacement as a result of the two storms, and it is clear that humanitarian assistance alone will not address the challenges they face. Mozambique's government and international organisations are planning for the kind of long-term investment needed for reconstruction and the pursuit of durable solutions.<sup>86</sup> Whether these efforts bear fruit remains to be seen and will depend on sustained commitment at all levels.



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

Sources: Local authorities, relief workers, local media, OCHA, Red Cross, INGC, IOM, ECHO and DODMA, 2019. Cyclone data from GDACS, 2019

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## SPOTLIGHT

# WHITE NILE BASIN

## Chronic impacts, cyclical displacement

Floods triggered 73 per cent of the 3.4 million new displacements associated with disasters across sub-Saharan Africa in 2019. Ethiopia, Somalia and Mozambique recorded some of the highest figures. Relative to population size, however, the situation in several areas of the White Nile river basin was cause for particular concern. This includes parts of Uganda, South Sudan, the contested Abyei Area and Sudan, where the people affected were already highly vulnerable in social and economic terms.

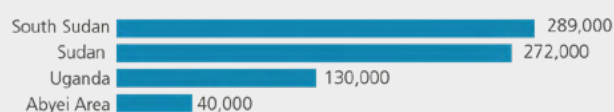
Heavy rains caused the White Nile and its tributaries to burst their banks several times during the year, triggering a combined total of more than 700,000 new displacements. Some people already displaced by conflict and violence were forced to flee again by the floods, which made few media headlines and attracted little international attention despite their widespread impacts.

The White Nile basin is 3,700 kilometres long and covers about 1.8 million square kilometres. Different rainy seasons take place along the territories it cuts through, and floods are not uncommon. The river flows from the Ugandan highlands to the vast floodplains of South Sudan, which are home to one of Africa's largest wetlands, known as the Sudd. Its ecosystem supports farming and pastoral cultures and major wild-life migrations.<sup>87</sup>

A complex combination of social, economic and political pressures are at play in this vulnerable sub-region. The river basin has been subject to decades of significant transformation, including for the irrigation of ever greater expanses of cultivated land, the construction of hydropower dams and urban expansion, all of which have increased the risk of disasters.<sup>88</sup> Ongoing conflict, weak governance and political instability in different



**New displacements by country or territory in 2019:**



Due to rounding, some totals may not correspond with the sum of the separate figures. Sources: Local authorities, IFRC, OCHA, Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, Save the Children and UN, 2019

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areas also contribute to making the White Nile basin a displacement risk hotspot.<sup>89</sup> Last year's floods were not a single disaster, but rather several events of varying intensity that had different impacts on communities along the basin.

Upstream in Uganda, rainy season downpours led to localised floods and landslides, triggering 130,000 displacements. Government regulations seek to avert the construction of housing in high-risk areas and there are plans to relocate populations, but people have continued to establish themselves in informal settlements on steep slopes where the risk of landslides is high. When the rains came, thousands were forced to flee as a result.<sup>90</sup>

Floods triggered 289,000 displacements in South Sudan, many involving people already internally displaced by

conflict and Sudanese refugees who were sheltering in at-risk areas and who became displaced for a second time.<sup>91</sup> Local communities were also forced to flee, crops were damaged and livestock lost. This aggravated food insecurity in areas where malnutrition levels were already high.<sup>92</sup> The floods contaminated the majority of water sources, increasing the risk of water-borne diseases such as cholera.<sup>93</sup> Submerged roads also delayed the provision of humanitarian aid significantly.<sup>94</sup>

South Sudan's Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management put a two-year strategic plan in place in 2018 that acknowledged the need to address the challenges brought on by the combination of disasters and conflict.<sup>95</sup> The events of 2019, however, revealed the continuing limitations in efforts to prevent and respond to disasters in areas affected by conflict. They also raised concerns about the extent to which humanitarian crises put the brakes on recent peacebuilding and recovery gains.<sup>96</sup>

Further north in the contested Abyei Area, unprecedented rains and floods destroyed at least 5,000 homes and triggered more than 40,000 new displacements, accounting for about a third of the population.<sup>97</sup> Abyei is also home to 31,000 people living in protracted displacement as result of conflict. Many have been doing so for years, and some for decades. The majority were staying in temporary shelters unable to withstand months of heavy downpours and strong winds, and many IDPs were forced into secondary displacement as a result. People who had previously fled conflict in South Sudan were also displaced for a second, and in some cases a third time.<sup>98</sup>

The floods destroyed roads, bridges and other public infrastructure. They also severely damaged farmland, reducing agricultural production. With access routes cut, many communities were isolated for extended periods and local markets were also affected. Fewer than ten per cent of displaced households had livestock or food stocks, meaning the majority had to restrict themselves to one meal a day.<sup>99</sup> The lack of adequate shelter and access to livelihoods and the ongoing risk of further displacement only served to aggravate people's already precarious living conditions.<sup>100</sup>

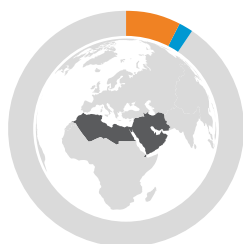
Flooding in Sudan triggered 272,000 new displacements, most of which were recorded in White Nile state over the period of a few weeks. More than 16,500 homes were destroyed across the state.<sup>101</sup> Some people

without social or family networks struggled to find shelter, and some families were reported as having to sleep in the open air. Both IDPs and refugees from South Sudan were among those displaced. Food insecurity also increased.<sup>102</sup>

The disaster took place on top of a major political transition. The country's president of three decades, Omar al-Bashir, was deposed in April following months of protests over an economic crisis. A transitional government was finally put in place in August, at the height of the flooding, which slowed down the coordination of response efforts.<sup>103</sup> Sudan's Humanitarian Aid Commission activated the country's flood steering committee and task force, but they were unable to cope with the situation and UN and civil society organisations had to provide support for those affected.<sup>104</sup>

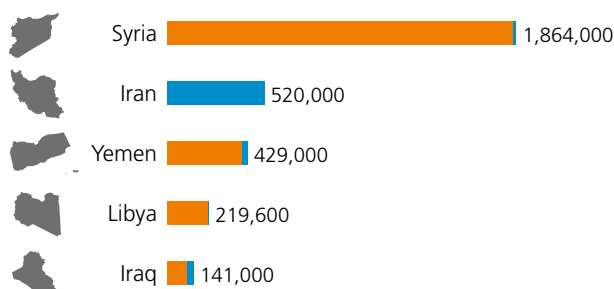
The displacement triggered along the White Nile basin in 2019 shows that disasters can have devastating outcomes when they hit vulnerable communities in politically fragile countries where unsustainable development practices, environmental change and weak governance heighten disaster displacement risk. When conflict and insecurity are also factors, impacts can become chronic and cyclical, as seen with IDPs and refugees forced to flee for a second or third time. Ongoing peacebuilding efforts will have to be reinforced and sustainable development planning and disaster risk reduction supported across the basin to avert what for many has become a downward spiral of vulnerability and displacement risk.

## MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



Conflict 2,566,000  
Disasters 631,000  
9.6% of the global total

### 5 COUNTRIES WITH MOST NEW DISPLACEMENTS



The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) accounts for more than a quarter of people internally displaced by conflict and violence globally. The vast majority are in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, three countries embroiled in protracted conflicts that have triggered mass population movements

Other countries in the region unaffected by conflict displacement are hosting large numbers of refugees. Whether displaced in their home countries or abroad, most people live in protracted conditions, and ongoing violence and disasters put many at risk of secondary displacement. The situation represents a major barrier to development in MENA and a driver of further instability and risk.<sup>105</sup> Around 12.5 million people were living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence across the region as of the end of the year.

There has been an overall increase in the number of new displacements associated with conflict and violence in the region over the last decade, and particularly since the 2011 Arab spring (see Figure 12). There were 2.6 million recorded in 2019. Figures for Iraq were slightly lower than the decade average as the country's conflict wanes, but the fighting in Syria is far from over and more new displacements were recorded in 2019 than in 2018 (see Syria spotlight, p.35).

MENA is also prone to natural hazards, and Iran was particularly hard hit in 2019. Flooding triggered more than 600,000 new displacements in the region. Severe winter weather including cold snaps, snowstorms

and floods also forced people to flee their homes in Algeria, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, but data on disaster displacement in the region is sparse and estimates of its scale are conservative. These hazards often strike vulnerable communities, including people already displaced by conflict. Humanitarian agencies have worked to make displacement sites more resilient, but secondary displacements triggered by floods and storms still took place in Iraq, Syria and Yemen.<sup>106</sup>

### Syria

The Syrian conflict, now in its tenth year, triggered 1.8 million new displacements in 2019, mostly the result of military offensives in the north-east and north-west of the country. Around 6.5 million people were living in internal displacement as of the end of the year. Another 5.6 million people have fled the country, meaning that more than half of its pre-war population has been displaced.<sup>107</sup>

Clashes between the Syrian Democratic Forces and ISIS in Hajjin and Baghouz in the eastern governorate of Deir ez Zor triggered around 125,000 new displacements in the first quarter of the year. More than half of those who fled made for Al Hol camp in Al Hasakeh, stretching its capacity to its limits.

The now failed de-escalation zone established in the border areas between Idlib and Hama in 2018 also became a conflict and displacement hotspot in 2019.<sup>108</sup> Shelling triggered about 100,000 new displacements

between January and April, followed by an escalation in fighting that continued for the rest of the year.

Idlib governorate became the main theatre of conflict and the scene of a major humanitarian crisis, the result of extremely limited access and the fact the Turkish border was and still is closed, leaving people with few if any options to escape the fighting.<sup>109</sup> Turkey's widely condemned incursion into north-eastern Syria also triggered more than 220,000 new displacements in just over two weeks, mainly from Kurdish border towns (see Syria spotlight, p.35).

Flooding in several areas of the country triggered 17,000 new displacements in March and December, mainly in Al Hasakeh and Idlib governorates.<sup>110</sup> Most of the people affected were IDPs living in camps who were forced into secondary displacement when their tents and personal belongings were swept away.

## Yemen

Conflict and violence triggered 398,000 new displacements in Yemen in 2019, almost double the figure for the previous year, which was partly influenced by improved data collection and access. Most displacement took place in Al Dhale, Hajjah and Hodeidah governorates. For many of the people affected it was not the first time they had fled, each displacement heightening their vulnerabilities.

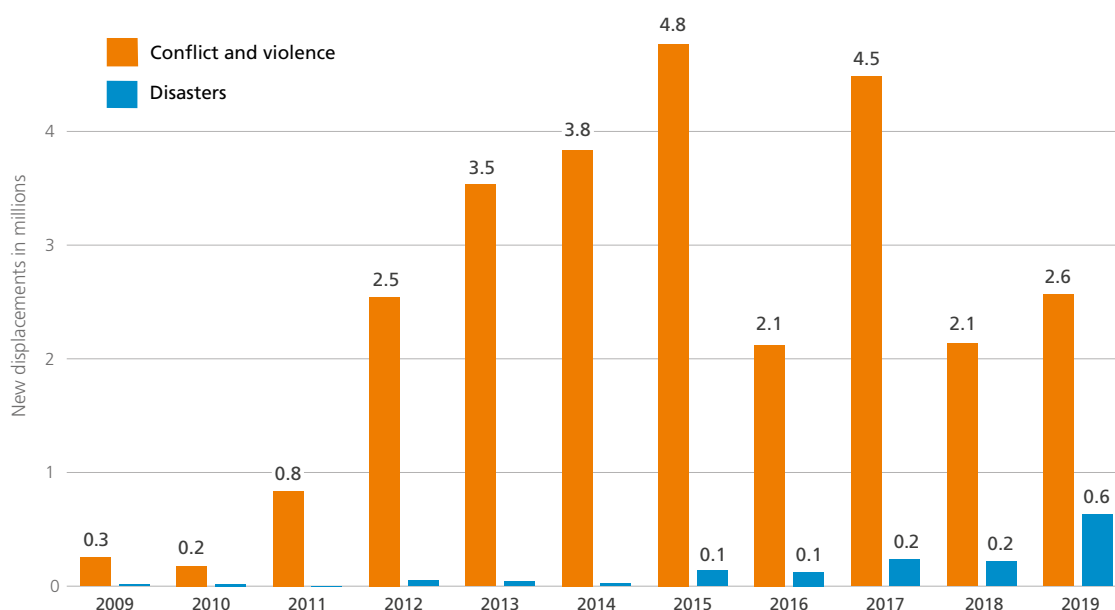
Efforts to reach political solutions helped to relieve the situation in some areas of the country. The internationally-recognised government and Ansar Allah, also known as the Houthi movement, signed the Stockholm Agreement in December 2018 to establish a demilitarised zone around Yemen's main port of Hodeidah.<sup>111</sup> It was not until May that fighters began to withdraw, but when they did the number of new displacements in the area dropped from 31,000 in the first five months of 2019 to 8,000 during the rest of the year.<sup>112</sup>

The end of the year also brought new hope as the wider conflict also showed signs of de-escalating. The Southern Transitional Council (STC), a political group that emerged in 2017 demanding the establishment of an independent federal state in southern Yemen, signed a power-sharing deal with the government in November. Saudi Arabia separately agreed a truce with Ansar Allah the same month.<sup>113</sup>

Riyadh for its part eased restrictions on Yemeni airspace to allow people to be flown out of the rebel-held capital Sana'a for medical treatment abroad. Ansar Allah announced that attacks on Saudi Arabia would be halted in return, and a broader initiative between the two sides to further pacify the situation was under discussion in December.<sup>114</sup>

Despite these promising developments, Yemen's crisis is still the world's most acute. Nearly 80 per cent of the

FIGURE 12: New displacements by conflict, violence and disasters in Middle East and North Africa (2009-2019)





population were in need of humanitarian assistance at the end of the year, and 3.6 million people were living in internal displacement, an increase of more than a third on the figure since 2018.<sup>115</sup>

Part of the increase in the number of IDPs is the result of better geographical coverage in terms of data collection, but it also reflects the continuing scale of displacement as local response capacity is overwhelmed and humanitarian access deteriorates.<sup>116</sup> More than half of the country's displaced households live in rented accommodation, but 35 per cent live in vulnerable conditions in informal settlements, collective centres, public buildings, tents and even out in the open.<sup>117</sup> The de-escalation of fighting in some parts of the country has also increased the risk of IDPs being evicted, as happened in the city of Marib.<sup>118</sup>

Disasters triggered 31,000 new displacements in 2019. Twelve of the country's 22 governorates experienced heavy rainfall that led to flash flooding in mid-May.<sup>119</sup> The floods destroyed tents in displacement settlements, triggering around 3,000 secondary displacements. The rains intensified at the end of July, and further flooding triggered 13,000 new displacements in the weeks that followed. Most western governorates were affected, but Hodeidah and Al Mahwit were the hardest hit. IDPs and host communities lost their homes, shelters, livestock and livelihoods.<sup>120</sup>

Flooding also damaged displacement sites in Aden city, Tuban in Lahj governorate and Khanfir in Abyan in September, triggering 15,000 secondary displacements.<sup>121</sup> Storms struck the country in the latter part of the year, but displacement figures were hard to come by. Cyclone Kyarr hit in October and was the most powerful on the Arabian-peninsula in 12 years. Cyclone Maha in November and Pawan in December also hit the country.<sup>122</sup>

## Libya

The conflict between the Libyan National Army (LNA) and the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli intensified in 2019. Around 215,000 new displacements were recorded as a result, three times the figure for the previous year and the highest since 2014. Most of the fighting took place in and around the capital after 4 April, when the LNA's commander, Khalifa Haftar, launched an offensive on

the city.<sup>123</sup> The conflict triggered as many as 170,000 new displacements as people fled to safer neighbourhoods, the Nafusa mountains and various locations along the north-west coast. Almost a half of those displaced were under 18, and most sought shelter with host families.<sup>124</sup>

Fierce fighting between the two parties spread to the southern city of Murzuq in August. It included heavy aerial bombardments and numerous attacks on residential neighbourhoods, leading to one of the largest losses of civilian life since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.<sup>125</sup> Almost all of the city's 33,000 inhabitants fled the area. There was also heavy fighting around Tripoli toward the end of the year, and around 451,000 people were living in internal displacement as of 31 December.

The events of 2019 suggest that the war in Libya has entered a new phase. What used to be a low intensity conflict now involves the use of sophisticated weaponry including guided missiles and drones, despite a UN arms embargo on the country. The increasing number of foreign mercenaries fighting on both sides has also enhanced their military capabilities. As the conflict escalates, several countries have called for a ceasefire and raised concerns about growing foreign interference.<sup>126</sup> The German government hosted a summit in Berlin in January 2020 in an effort to limit such interference and shore up the UN arms embargo. An agreement was reached among foreign powers, but the situation in Libya remains extremely fragile.<sup>127</sup>

Severe flooding in the municipality of Ghat and surrounding areas of south-western Fezzan region triggered more than 4,600 new displacements in early June. The floodwaters were up to two metres deep in some areas, and caused severe damage to infrastructure and farmland vital to local livelihoods.<sup>128</sup> A third of the people displaced sought refuge in collective shelters, and the remainder in schools or with friends and relatives.<sup>129</sup> There was no further information available about their conditions.

## Iran

Disasters triggered more than 520,000 new displacements in Iran in 2019, by far the highest figure in the region. Torrential rains and floods between mid-March and mid-April caught local people and the water management authorities by surprise, particularly as they

A girl stands at a displacement site where her family is constructing a hut in Abs, Hajjah governorate, Yemen.  
Photo © UNHCR/Ibrahim Al-Ja'adi, May 2019



came after a long period of drought.<sup>130</sup> The rains began in the northern province of Golestan before moving to south and west, bringing floods to 28 of the country's 31 provinces.

The disaster was described as the worst to hit the country in more than 15 years. More than 2,000 towns and villages, home to more than 10 million people, were affected.<sup>131</sup> Golestan received about 70 per cent of its annual rainfall in 24 hours, and the provinces of Lorestan and oil-rich Khuzestan were also hard hit. The government struggled to react quickly enough to the threat the rains posed, and had to release water from dam reservoirs that flooded farmland and in some cases densely populated areas.<sup>132</sup> Around 180,000 people were still living in displacement at the end of the year as a result of the disaster.

Iran is also prone to frequent and powerful earthquakes because of its location at the junction of the Eurasian and Arabian tectonic plates.<sup>133</sup> Three major earthquakes struck the country in 2019, triggering 14,000 new displacements. The most powerful was a 5.9 magnitude quake on 8 November which triggered 13,000 new displacements in East Azerbaijan province.

## Palestine

The West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza recorded 1,500 new displacements in 2019, bringing the number of IDPs in Palestine as of the end of the year to 243,000. Housing demolitions, forced evictions, the confiscation of property and acts of violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers and the military all forced people to flee their homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Violence also flared up in Gaza in early May and mid-November, leading to the destruction of many homes and the displacement of hundreds of people.<sup>134</sup>

More Palestinian houses were demolished in East Jerusalem in 2019 than in any of the past 15 years, and people living in Area C, East Jerusalem and Hebron are at high risk of eviction.<sup>135</sup> Reports of settlement expansion, settler violence and access restrictions also increased during the year.<sup>136</sup> The establishment of Israeli settlements in Palestine, including East Jerusalem, constitutes a violation of international law, but the number of such projects is expected to rise.<sup>137</sup> The political landscape in Israel and the content of a US plan for the Middle East announced in early 2020 raise concern about an increase in expulsions and displacement in the West Bank.<sup>138</sup>

## Iraq

Conflict in Iraq waned in 2019 and the number of new displacements fell to 104,000 as a result. The number of people living in displacement as of the end of the year also declined to 1.6 million from two million in 2018 and 2.6 million in 2017.<sup>139</sup> This illustrates the commendable efforts the government has made to reduce the phenomenon.

That said, 78 per cent of the country's remaining IDPs have been displaced for more than three years, and the pace of returns slowed in 2019 as a result of insecurity, social unrest and a lack of livelihood opportunities and basic services in some areas (see Iraq spotlight, p.37).<sup>140</sup>

Storms and flooding triggered more than 37,000 new displacements along the course of the Tigris river during the year. The Tigris, the Euphrates and their tributaries burst their banks and flood the surrounding plains and urban areas every year. The country has an extensive network of dams and canals that are key to energy generation and irrigation in otherwise arid and semi-desert areas, which may have contributed at increasing flood risk.<sup>141</sup> Storms also affected several governorates bordering Iran.<sup>142</sup>

Water scarcity is also a problem in southern Iraq, where shortages increase pollution and undermine people's livelihoods. Around 34,000 people were estimated to be displaced in January 2019 from the four governorates of Basra, Missan, Muthanna and, Thi-Qar because of water shortages. Many of those affected moved to urban areas, and the scale of displacement has shaped the landscape of some mid-sized towns and cities. For example, new arrivals from rural areas have fuelled rapid population growth and urbanisation in Basra city over the last decade as agricultural livelihoods have dwindled. Its water and sanitation infrastructure, however, has struggled to cope.<sup>143</sup>







*A displaced man from Hawja town, at the Laylan camp in Kirkuk, Iraq.  
Photo: NRC/Alan Ayoubi, February 2019*



## SPOTLIGHT

## SYRIA

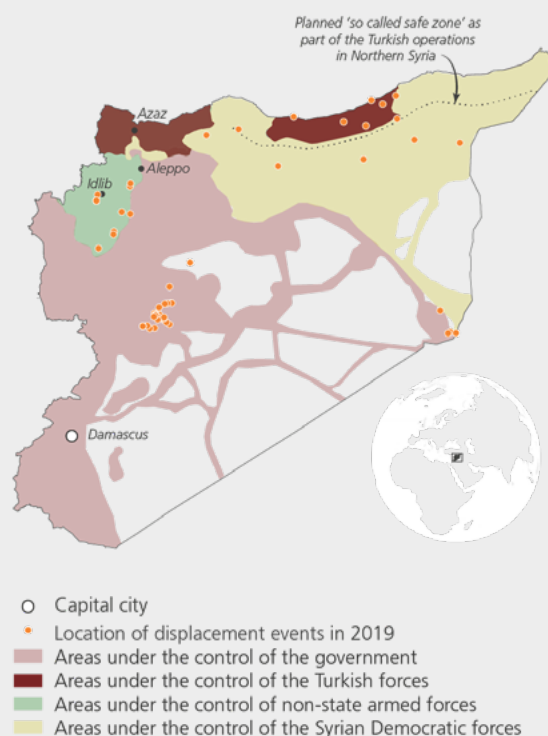
## No safe place to return to

The Syrian government continued to make territorial gains in the country's nine-year civil war in 2019.<sup>144</sup> A series of military offensives against non-state armed groups pushed the number of new displacements recorded during the year to 1.8 million, compared with 1.6 million in 2018 and 2.9 million in 2017. The figure is one of the highest annual totals since the conflict began. About 6.5 million people were living in internal displacement as the year drew to a close, many of them in dire conditions.

The most intense offensives of 2019 were those in the north-western governorate of Idlib and north-eastern areas of the country bordering Turkey. Each triggered the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom had already been displaced a number of times. The situation in Idlib was of most concern. The government had planned to retake parts of the governorate by force in 2018, but fears of the humanitarian crisis it might trigger led Iran, Russia and Turkey to mediate a ceasefire.<sup>145</sup> Idlib remained one of the last areas controlled by non-government forces, including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a listed terrorist organisation.<sup>146</sup>

The agreement did not hold, however, and the governorate - home to three million people, half of whom are IDPs - became the scene of unrelenting attacks that triggered mass displacement. Women and children, who make up more than three-quarters of Idlib's population, were particularly affected.<sup>147</sup> The Syrian army, backed by its allies, intensified its airstrikes and ground attacks toward the end of the year, and many people had to move a number of times in search of safety.

Several hospitals were bombed in clear violation of international law, and one airstrike hit a displacement camp in Qah, near the Turkish border, which was hosting about 4,000 IDPs.<sup>148</sup> Around 284,000 new displacements were recorded across the governorate in December alone. The figure of 1.2 million for the year as a whole accounted for 67 per cent of the total nationwide, and the situation continued to deteriorate in early 2020.<sup>149</sup>



\*Sources: Institute for the Study of War (ISW) as of situation report 17-28 December and Reuters, 2019. Displacement data: Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme, IDP task force.

Another major development took place in the north-east of the country, home to 710,000 IDPs.<sup>150</sup> After the US announced the withdrawal of its troops in October, Syrian Democratic Forces fighters in the area found themselves with little military or diplomatic backup. Turkey launched a military operation known as Peace Spring soon after. Ankara said the main objective of the operation was to establish a "safe zone" inside Syria of about 3,600 square kilometres where refugees living in Turkey would potentially be returned and resettled.<sup>151</sup>

The Turkish army crossed into Syria in a widely condemned offensive that triggered more than 220,000 internal displacements, mostly of people living in Kurdish border towns, and 17,900 cross-border displacements into northern Iraq.<sup>152</sup> Around 75,000 people were still displaced in Syria as a result of the offensive as of 26 November. The majority were living with host communities, others in informal settlements and collective shelters.<sup>153</sup>

Operation Peace Spring was also intended to protect Turkey's southern border from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), labelled by Ankara and other countries as a terrorist group.<sup>154</sup> Many people died during the offensive, and serious human rights abuses committed by the Turkish forces against the local population were reported.<sup>155</sup>

The ensuing challenges are far from over. Refugees forcibly returned to Syria from Turkey will struggle to achieve durable solutions in a region that most are not originally from, and where conditions are already extremely precarious for the large number of IDPs who have been living there for years.<sup>156</sup> The Turkish government claims there is no refoulement, but others argue that refugees are being sent back to a war zone.<sup>157</sup>

Forcible returns from other countries have also been reported, but are very difficult to monitor. IDPs trying to return to their homes in north-eastern and north-western Syria face many challenges as a result of the Turkish incursion and subsequent changes in local community dynamics and demographic makeup. Some have been prevented from returning as a result.

Overshadowed by these events, the implementation of Law 10, which is officially intended to expedite the expropriation of land for reconstruction and “redesign of unauthorised illegal housing areas”, began to take effect in 2019.<sup>158</sup> People’s knowledge of the administrative procedures required to claim their property rights tends to be limited.<sup>159</sup> Many IDPs who lost deeds and other documents during their displacement have

found it is too late to do so as a result.<sup>160</sup> Their inability to exercise their property rights effectively means they are unable to return, or at least not sustainably, even if reconstruction is under way in their home areas.

Civilians, including IDPs and returning refugees, continue to bear the brunt of Syria’s civil war. As the fighting enters its tenth year, mass displacement continues to take place, and millions of people already displaced lack livelihood opportunities and access to basic services. The voluntary return of refugees may be delayed until the situation improves, but hundreds of thousands of IDPs are going back home or trying to do so, which highlights the need to establish conditions conducive to safe and dignified returns.

The current focus on lifesaving humanitarian assistance is still vital given the depth of Syria’s ongoing crisis, but it should not overshadow the need for peacebuilding initiatives and longer-term support for those trying to achieve durable solutions. Without a resolution to the conflict and a reconciliation process that includes all of the country’s ethnic groups and religions, displacement will not be brought to a sustainable end.



*Iman fled with her family to seek safety eight years ago. “If only we can go back to what we used to”, she said, gazing at the cracks in her damaged house and hoping that one day she could go back home. Photo © UNHCR/Antwan Chnkddji, June 2019*

## SPOTLIGHT

## IRAQ

## Solutions to displacement within reach

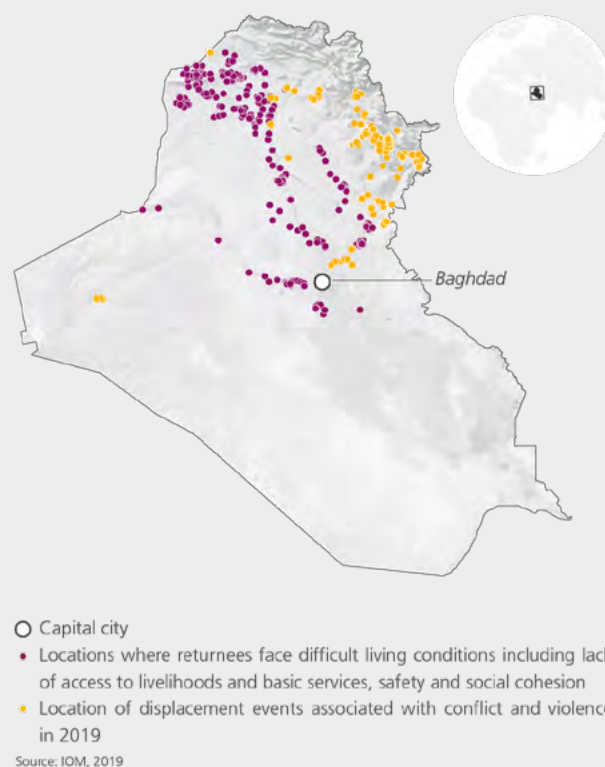
Decades of dictatorship, a foreign invasion, years of internal conflict and more recently the war against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) made Iraq one of the countries most affected by internal displacement in the world. Since the battle against ISIL officially concluded in December 2017, however, there have been signs that the situation is improving and that many IDPs are going back to their homes.

Displacement figures dropped over the last two years to reach an all-time low in 2019, when 104,000 new displacements and more than 1.6 million people still living in internal displacement were recorded. This illustrates the significant progress the government has made in addressing the phenomenon, and sets an example for other countries.

That said, insecurity and social unrest persist, and the pace of returns slowed in 2019 as a result. More than three-quarters of the country's IDPs have been displaced for more than three years.<sup>161</sup> Many obstacles remain to their achieving durable solutions and new challenges are emerging, which reinforces the need to step up peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts.

Military operations against remaining ISIS pockets continued across north-central and western governorates in 2019, in response to attacks against both government and civilian targets.<sup>162</sup> Large tracts of agricultural land across 11 governorates were destroyed by fires, which ISIL is thought to have lit to deter IDPs from returning home.<sup>163</sup> Low-intensity sectarian violence between Shia and Sunni militias continues across the country, as do tensions between the Kurdish regional government and the authorities in Baghdad.<sup>164</sup> The national government still struggles to exert control over some areas of the country, where insecurity prevails.

There is also a general sense of frustration and mistrust among the population, which led to civil unrest in Octo-



ber.<sup>165</sup> Protesters massed in the streets of Baghdad and other cities to demand the government's dismissal. The then prime minister, Adel Abdul Mahdi, agreed to resign in early November, but the demonstrations continued. Protesters demanded the fall of the whole government, the speeding up of economic reforms and an end to Iran's influence in Iraqi politics. At least 467 protesters had been killed and more than 9,000 injured as of 30 January 2020.<sup>166</sup>

This insecurity and volatility is not conducive to sustainable returns, and the closure of a number of camps has further complicated the situation for many IDPs. While the government has set a goal of returning all IDPs to their places of origin by the end of 2020, many home areas are still insecure and lack basic services.<sup>167</sup>

In such circumstances, the closure of more than ten camps in 2019 led to the secondary displacement of many IDPs, whether to other camps or urban and peri-urban areas where they live in even more precarious conditions.<sup>168</sup> The loss of civil documentation is also a considerable obstacle to IDPs' efforts to overcome their vulnerabilities, including their access to legal protection and basic services.<sup>169</sup> Of the 462,000 people reported to have returned in 2019, we estimate that 456,000 achieved partial solutions to their displacement, but

6,000 ended up in displacement again despite their efforts to re-establish their lives in their home areas.<sup>170</sup>

The restoration of social cohesion, often overlooked in post-conflict situations, will also be vital in creating an environment in which communities from different ethnic groups and religious affiliations can coexist. ISIL previously exploited the erosion of Iraq's social cohesion to gain influence and expand, and addressing it will help to prevent the re-emergence of violence, shore up reconstruction efforts and ensure that IDPs and returnees are able to achieve genuinely durable solutions.<sup>171</sup>

The government has made commendable efforts to measure, understand and act to address what was one of the world's major internal displacement crises.<sup>172</sup> With support from the international community, it conducted damage and needs assessments to estimate the impact of the conflict and identify recovery and reconstruction needs across seven governorates.<sup>173</sup> The exercise concluded that the damage incurred ran to \$45.7 billion. The housing, health and education sectors were identified as the worst affected, which explains why many IDPs are still living in protracted displacement. Efforts are also under way to invest in community recovery and stabilisation.<sup>174</sup>

Recently, IOM and its partners developed a return index for Iraq, which helps to understand displaced people's main priorities when contemplating return and the obstacles they face, and to identify geographical areas where more investment is needed.<sup>175</sup>

Its findings confirm that the destruction of housing stock is by far the main obstacle to return. Areas where at least half of the homes have been destroyed are 15 times less likely to have returns than locations where housing remains relatively intact. Unemployment is another major factor. Families are 10 times less likely to return to areas where residents are unable find jobs, compared with locations where there is enough work. The presence of armed groups was also identified as a significant obstacle to return and other forms of durable solution.

The government launched a recovery and resilience programme in February 2018. Supported by the UN, it has helped to speed up efforts to address the social dimensions of reconstruction and create conditions that

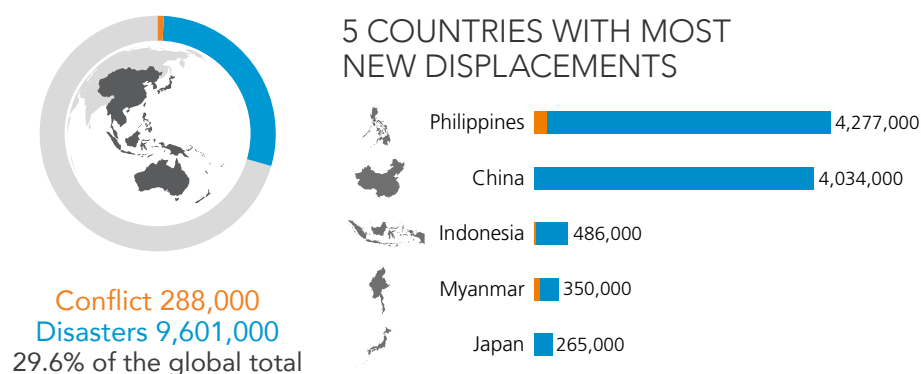
would promote safe, dignified and voluntary returns. This has included clearing unexploded ordnance, providing IDPs with legal support and strengthening the capacity of institutions responsible for documentation, compensation, property restitution and family reunification.<sup>176</sup>

The Iraq Durable Solutions Network and the Governorate Returns Committee Secretariat were also established at the end of 2019. From its offices in Baghdad, Erbil and Mosul, the latter has the overarching objective of coordinating sustainable returns and supporting the Governorate Returns Committees, which focus on camp consolidation and closures. These institutions have a potentially vital role to play in ensuring that returns and other forms of solution are genuinely sustainable.<sup>177</sup>

The steady decline in internal displacement figures over the last two years suggests these initiatives are working, and that solutions are within reach. If the momentum is to be maintained, ongoing initiatives designed to establish lasting stability and peace will have to be sustained. As people continue to return to their home areas across the country and others try to integrate locally, it is also vital that their living conditions be monitored and improved. Investing in social cohesion and community-based responses will be key. Only by doing so will return, resettlement and local integration come to equate with bringing displacement to a sustainable end.<sup>178</sup>



## EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC



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>



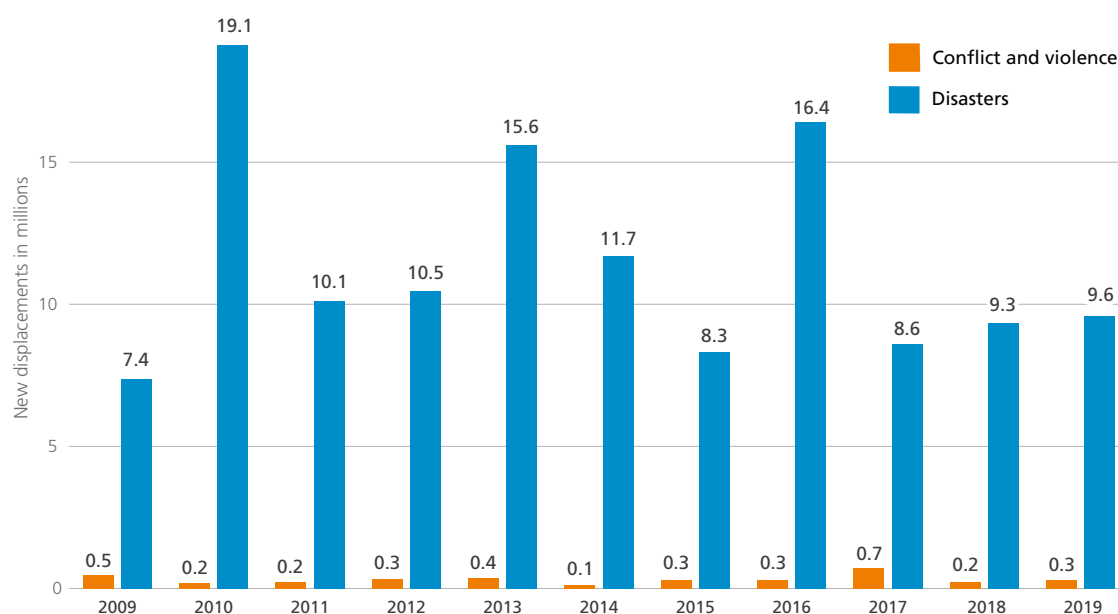
A 6.0 magnitude earthquake also struck Sichuan province in June, destroying 3,500 homes and triggering around 95,000 displacements.

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 Balara, 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 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

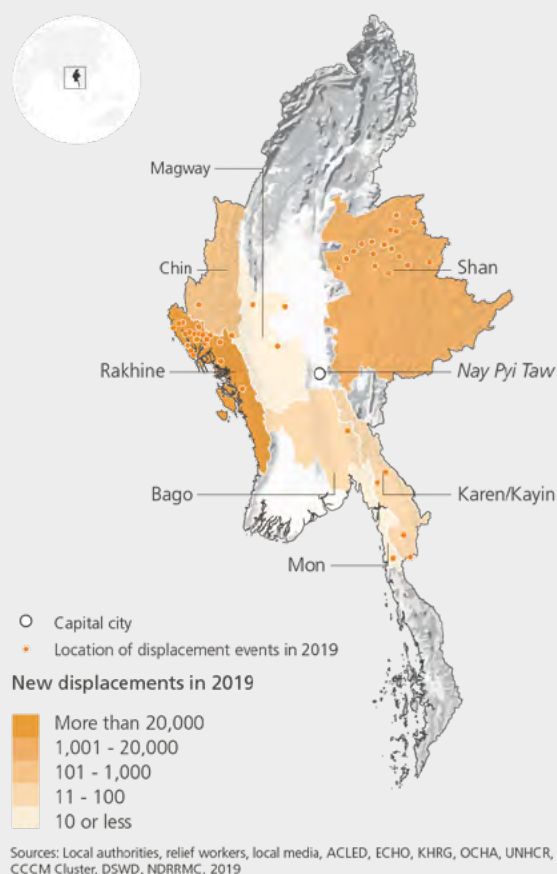
## Highest displacement in years

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

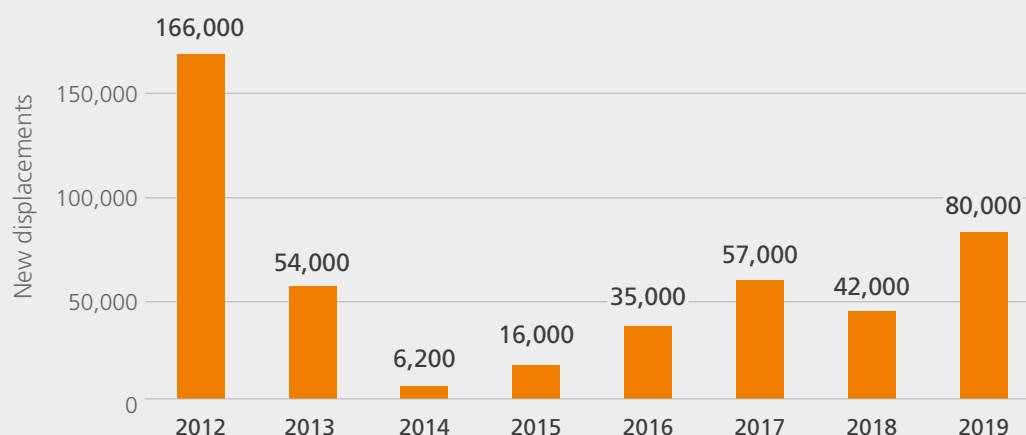


10,000 displacements the following month. The alliance declared a unilateral ceasefire in September, but skirmishes continued to trigger displacement through to the end of the year.<sup>220</sup>

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>

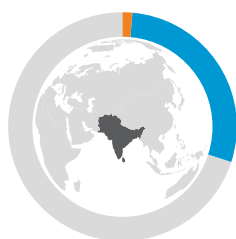
The issue of insecure tenure over land also needs to be resolved.<sup>227</sup> There are concerns too that development projects in mining, agriculture and logging are impeding IDPs' return to their areas of origin.<sup>228</sup>

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.

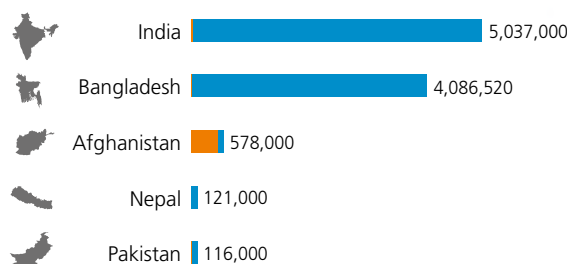


## SOUTH ASIA



Conflict 498,000  
Disasters 9,529,000  
30% of the global total

### 5 COUNTRIES WITH MOST NEW DISPLACEMENTS



South Asia recorded 9.5 million new displacements associated with disasters in 2019, the highest figure since 2012. Floods triggered by the monsoon in India and Bangladesh and cyclones Fani and Bulbul were among the events to force most people to flee their homes both in the region and globally.

An average of 6.5 million disaster displacements have been recorded in the region over the last decade, making it one of the most affected by the phenomenon worldwide (see Figure 15). From Afghanistan to Bangladesh and from India to Sri Lanka, not only disasters but also conflict and violence trigger mass displacement every year. Many of the triggers, drivers and impacts vary from one country to another, but poverty and inequality are common factors that drive new displacement and prolong and aggravate IDPs' vulnerabilities.

South Asia is home to almost a quarter of the world's population and is experiencing rapid urbanisation.<sup>232</sup> Significant progress has been made in reducing poverty in recent decades, but about 16 per cent of the people still live on less than \$1.90 a day.<sup>233</sup> A growing number live in cities exposed to hazards such as monsoon rains, floods, tropical storms, earthquakes and landslides. Slow-onset events such as drought and riverbank and coastal erosion also trigger displacement, but data is hard to come by.

Faced with frequently devastating and deadly disasters, many countries have strengthened their disaster risk management and early warning capacities in recent years. It is not yet possible to disaggregate figures to distinguish clearly between pre-emptive evacuations and displacements after the onset of a disaster, but

evidence suggests that the former account for the majority of population movements triggered by some larger events. Nor is there data with which to fully understand for how long people remain displaced, but our conservative estimate is that around 1.9 million people were still living in displacement as a result of disasters at the end of the year.

Conflict and violence also triggered displacement in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, and to a lesser extent Sri Lanka, in 2019. Around 498,000 new displacements were recorded across the region as a whole. The annual total has fallen over the past decade, mainly because of the de-escalation of violence in Pakistan. Afghanistan's conflict, however, shows little sign of abating. In addition, the situation on both sides of the line of control in disputed Kashmir remains highly volatile. Around four million people were living in displacement as a result of conflict and violence as of the end of the year, with Afghanistan accounting for 75 per cent of the regional total.

### India

There were five million new disaster displacements in India in 2019, the highest figure in the world and the result of a combination of increasing hazard intensity, high population exposure and high levels of social and economic vulnerability. Nearly 22 per cent of the country's population live below the national poverty line.<sup>234</sup> The year was also the seventh warmest since records began in 1901, and the monsoon was the wettest in 25 years.<sup>235</sup> These conditions helped to fuel the destructive power of the eight tropical storms to hit the country during the year.

The most severe was cyclone Fani, which tracked across the states of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal in early May, before moving north to Bangladesh. Equivalent to a category four hurricane, Fani was the most powerful storm to strike the country in the last five years, and the most intense to form in the Bay of Bengal since 1999.<sup>236</sup> As it approached the coast of Odisha with maximum sustained windspeeds up to 240 km/h, the government organised the evacuation of more than 1.8 million people. The states disaster management authorities were lauded for their life-saving operations.<sup>237</sup> Another 289,000 people were evacuated in Gujarat in June ahead of cyclone Vayu, which changed track and reduced in intensity before making landfall later than expected.<sup>238</sup>

The south-west monsoon triggered more than 2.6 million displacements in the months that followed. In a rare meteorological event, it then came to an end on the same day as the north-west monsoon began.<sup>239</sup> The north-west monsoon continued to trigger displacement in October and November, along with cyclone Maha, which hit Kerala and the Lakshwadeep islands on 31 October. Cyclone Bulbul struck Odisha and West Bengal ten days later, triggering 186,000 displacements.

Drought displacement was also recorded in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. There is little robust data available to estimate its scale, but water shortages in Maharashtra between March and June forced about 50,000 farmers and their families to take refuge in “cattle camps”, displacement sites run by NGOs where livestock is also fed and watered.<sup>240</sup> There were thought

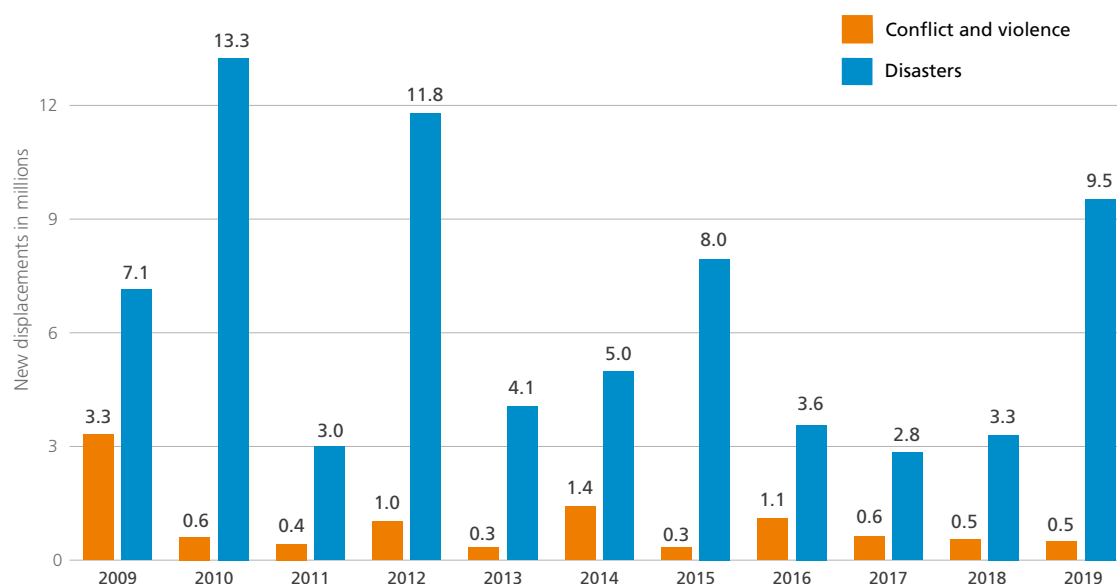
to be around 590,000 people living in internal displacement as a result of disasters across the country as of 31 December, but the figure is highly conservative given the high number of new displacements and the damages and losses recorded during the year.

Conflict and violence triggered about 19,000 new displacements in India in 2019. Political and electoral violence, primarily in Tripura and West Bengal in the first half of the year, accounted for more than 7,600. Lesser unrest and inter-communal violence continued to trigger displacement in the second half of the year.

A suicide attack that killed 40 soldiers in Indian-administered Kashmir in February led to retaliatory airstrikes and sporadic shelling near the line of control between Indian and Pakistani-controlled territory that continued into March.<sup>241</sup> At least 2,600 displacements were recorded, but comprehensive figures were hard to obtain. Further shelling across the line of control during autumn triggered more displacement, bringing the total to 5,300.<sup>242</sup>

The government in Delhi revoked the special status accorded to Indian-administered Kashmir in August and imposed a curfew, which led to protests that were met with force.<sup>243</sup> Telecommunications and internet access were shut down, making it difficult to obtain information, including on displacement.

FIGURE 15: New displacements by conflict, violence and disasters in South Asia (2009-2019)



## Bangladesh

Together with China, India and the Philippines, Bangladesh was among the countries to record the largest number of new disaster displacements in 2019 with more than four million. It was also the highest figure for the country since data became available in 2008. Most were in the form of pre-emptive evacuations, which is testament to the government's efforts in preparedness. It has put effective early warnings systems in place under which local people receive alerts quickly after the country's meteorological department issues them, allowing them to evacuate and saving many lives.<sup>244</sup>

Cyclone Fani triggered the evacuation of 1.7 million people across several coastal districts in May.<sup>245</sup> Combined with those that took place in India, Fani triggered almost 3.5 million displacements, the highest figure for a single event in 2019. Cyclone Bulbul then triggered more than 2.1 million evacuations in November. Most people returned to their homes after the storm had subsided.<sup>246</sup> The number of pre-emptive evacuations organised in India and Bangladesh before the landfalls of Fani and Bulbul was the highest recorded in a single year. Monsoon floods also triggered more than 307,000 displacements in less than three weeks in July.<sup>247</sup>

Few conflict displacements were recorded in 2019. Inter-communal violence against Ahmadi Muslims took place sporadically during the year in Rangpur division, and violence also broke out between political opponents following elections. Clashes between host communities and Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar led to the destruction of shelters in August.<sup>248</sup> Around 427,000 people were living in displacement as result of conflict and violence as of the end of the year.

## Afghanistan

Fighting between the army and the Taliban escalated in 2019 and ISIS attacks continued, triggering a rise in the number of new conflict displacements in Afghanistan to around 461,000. Most took place in the east, north and north-east of the country. Around three million people were living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence at the end of the year, the highest figure on record for the country.

The Taliban controlled more territory in 2019 than at any time since the US launched its military intervention in 2001. Attacks by ISIS-Khorasan Province on Taliban positions in Chapadara district triggered around 25,000 new displacements in March. Despite government calls for a ceasefire and peace talks between the Taliban and US representatives, the group launched a new offensive in April.<sup>249</sup> Fighting between the security forces and the Taliban triggered 36,000 displacements in Takhar province in June. By July the civilian death toll had risen to its highest level since records began in 2009. Women and children accounted for 41 per cent of the casualties.<sup>250</sup>

Heavy fighting spread to Kunduz city in August, triggering around 22,000 displacements and aggravating the humanitarian crisis in the area by restricting the movement of aid providers and disrupting communications.<sup>251</sup> Insecurity in the country more broadly also contributed to a low turnout in presidential elections at the end of September. The rival candidates disputed the results and as of the end of the year no results had been published.<sup>252</sup> This uncertainty and the collapse of a further round of US-Taliban talks in September helped to make Afghanistan's conflict the deadliest in the world last year.<sup>253</sup> More than half of people displaced as a result were children.<sup>254</sup>

Adding to the insecurity and political challenges, more than 3.3 million Afghans returned from abroad between 2012 and 2019, primarily from Pakistan and Iran.<sup>255</sup> Not all returns have been voluntary, however, and many refugees have found themselves living in internal displacement once back in the country. Tenure insecurity and other land issues are a major challenge for returning refugees and IDPs alike. They also trigger cyclical displacement and heighten people's already chronic vulnerability.<sup>256</sup>

Afghanistan experienced its worst drought in decades in 2018, which triggered more than 371,000 displacements.<sup>257</sup> Its impacts continued in 2019 as poor harvests increased food insecurity across the country, leaving many IDPs in dire conditions of poverty and malnutrition.<sup>258</sup> A further 4,200 new drought displacements were also recorded. A lack of services, markets and social protection has also forced people to move from rural to urban areas, fuelling the rapid expansion of informal settlements in the country's main cities.<sup>259</sup>



Refugees make their way across a flooded Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Later on, clashes between host communities and Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar led to the destruction of shelters in August. Photo © UNICEF/UN0325318/Brown, July 2019

Flooding, including flash floods, triggered 111,000 displacements during the year, the bulk of them in March. Badghis, Farah, Helmand, Herat and Kandahar provinces were worst affected.<sup>260</sup> The floodwaters also hampered relief operations. Around 1.2 million people were thought to be living in displacement at the end of the year as a result of disasters.

## Pakistan

More than 16,000 displacements associated with conflict and violence were recorded in Pakistan in 2019, of which 15,000 were triggered by an increase in shelling across the line of control that separates Indian and Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Those who fled stayed with host families or in camps, and most returned to their homes within a week.

Intercommunal violence against Hindu communities in Ghotki city and Christian communities in Karachi displaced hundreds of families in Sindh province.<sup>261</sup> Cross-border clashes flared between Afghan and Pakistani forces in October, but displacement figures were difficult to obtain.<sup>262</sup> Conflict between different armed groups in the border areas between Afghanistan and

north-west Pakistan concluded in 2017, but more than 101,000 people were still living in displacement in the northern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at the end of 2019 as a result of law enforcement operations.

A number of natural hazards struck Pakistan during the year, but disaster displacement figures for the country are hard to come by, leading to a conservative estimate of 100,000. An earthquake in the north-east triggered 55,000 in September, and the monsoon 23,000 in July and August. Flooding and riverbank erosion triggered 10,000 pre-emptive evacuations in Balochistan province in June. Cyclone Kyarr affected coastal areas of the country causing more than 1,100 displacements in October. Flooding, including flash floods, affected several displacement sites in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in February.<sup>263</sup> More than 15,000 people were living in displacement across Pakistan as a result of disasters at the end of the year.



## Nepal

Nepal recorded 121,000 new disaster displacements in 2019, more than 98,000 of them triggered by monsoon rains, floods and landslides.

The south-west monsoon, which originates in the Bay of Bengal and moves along the southern flanks of the Himalayas, tends to bring Nepal around 80 percent of its annual rainfall over a period of three months.<sup>264</sup> The 2019 monsoon arrived later than usual, but from end of June it brought the most rain recorded in a decade. Heavy rains and floods blocked major roads and disrupted communication networks, hampering access to affected communities for the emergency services on Nepal's southern plains.<sup>265</sup>

A powerful windstorm affected the southern districts of Bara, Parsa and Ilam in March, destroying homes and triggering 6,200 displacements. Another affected the western district of Kailali in June, triggering 9,500 and disrupting relief efforts.<sup>266</sup>

Among the 2,8 million people displaced by the 2015 Gorkha earthquake, many are still living in displacement at the end of 2019, waiting for their homes to be rebuilt.<sup>267</sup> Nepal's location at the junction of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates makes it highly prone to earthquakes. The Gorkha quake and its long-term impacts are a reminder that significantly more investment in risk reduction, in particular the enforcement of building and zoning regulations, is needed to cope with such intensive events.

## Sri Lanka

Monsoon rainfall in Sri Lanka was lower than usual in 2019, and fewer people were displaced than in previous years as a result.<sup>268</sup> A series of small storms did develop from September, however, triggering floods, landslides and around 45,000 evacuations. Heavy rains affected more than 136,000 people across six districts and many homes were damaged.<sup>269</sup> The north-east monsoon triggered floods, landslides and 34,000 displacements in North, East, North Central, Sabaragamuwa and Uva provinces in November and December.<sup>270</sup> Some areas received more than two metres of rainfall in a day.<sup>271</sup>

Sri Lanka also recorded a relatively small number of displacements associated with conflict and violence in

2019. A series of simultaneous suicide attacks by radical Islamist militants on churches and hotels killed more than 250 people during Easter celebrations in April.<sup>272</sup> The army conducted counterterrorism operations in response, which caused more than 1,400 evacuations in Ampara district the same month.<sup>273</sup> The violence also inflamed tensions between the country's ethnic and religious groups.<sup>274</sup> Anti-Muslim riots triggered around 300 displacements in the cities of Minuwagoda, Negombo and Kurunegala in May, and many mosques, shops and homes were destroyed.

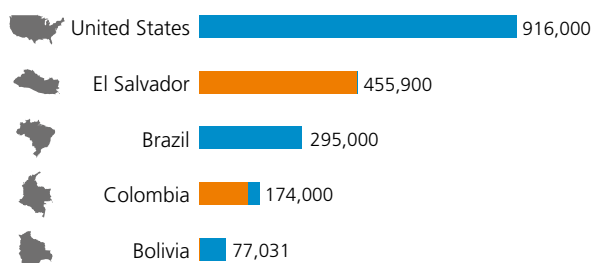
The UN called on all groups involved to work together to stop hate attacks and prevent further violence in Sri Lanka, which continues to grapple with reconciliation after the end of the country's civil war in 2009.<sup>275</sup> Around 27,000 people were living in displacement as a result of conflict and violence at the end of the year, the majority of them since the war.

## 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).<sup>276</sup>

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.<sup>277</sup> 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.<sup>278</sup> 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.<sup>279</sup> 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.<sup>280</sup> 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.<sup>281</sup>

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.<sup>282</sup> More than a month's rain fell in a day in some states, and millions of acres of farmland were inundated.<sup>283</sup> At least 11 states sought federal disaster funds for more than 400 counties.<sup>284</sup> 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.<sup>285</sup>

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.<sup>286</sup> People whose homes have been destroyed still face long-term impacts, however, and many struggle with the cost of

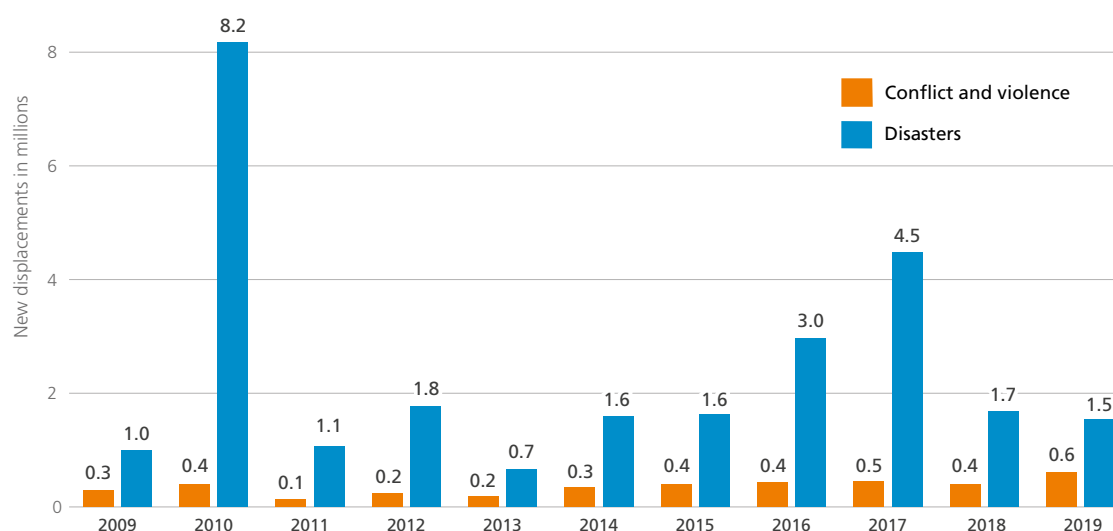
rebuilding to the extent that some are unable to do so before the next disaster strikes.<sup>287</sup> By the end of 2019, 37,000 people were still displaced by disasters in the US.

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.<sup>288</sup>

High winds fanned intense wildfires in the central province of Alberta in May, triggering around 11,000 evacuations.<sup>289</sup> 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.<sup>290</sup> 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.<sup>291</sup> 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.<sup>292</sup>

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.<sup>293</sup> 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.<sup>294</sup> 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.<sup>295</sup> 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.<sup>296</sup>

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.<sup>297</sup> 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.<sup>298</sup>

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.<sup>299</sup>

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.<sup>300</sup>

## 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.<sup>301</sup>



There was also an increase in the number of people arriving at the US border having fled violence.<sup>302</sup> 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.<sup>303</sup> Almost half of them were children and youth under the age of 18, and most had come from the state of Michoacán.<sup>304</sup>

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.<sup>305</sup>

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.<sup>306</sup>

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.<sup>307</sup> 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.<sup>308</sup>

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.<sup>309</sup> 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.<sup>310</sup>

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.<sup>311</sup> 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.<sup>312</sup>

**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.<sup>313</sup> 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.<sup>314</sup> 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.<sup>315</sup> 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.<sup>316</sup> 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.<sup>317</sup> 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.<sup>318</sup> 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 Córdoba, 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.<sup>319</sup> 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.<sup>320</sup> 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.<sup>321</sup>

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.<sup>322</sup>

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.<sup>323</sup> 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.<sup>324</sup>

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).<sup>325</sup> 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.<sup>326</sup>

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

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.<sup>329</sup>



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.<sup>330</sup> 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.<sup>331</sup> 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.<sup>332</sup> Water levels in the **Paraguay** river reached their highest in almost 50 years.<sup>333</sup> 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.<sup>334</sup> Crops and infrastructure were damaged and livelihoods disrupted.<sup>335</sup> 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.<sup>336</sup>

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

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.<sup>339</sup>

**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.<sup>340</sup> A series of lesser disasters across 19 of the country's 20 departments also triggered displacement.<sup>341</sup>

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.<sup>342</sup>



## 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.<sup>343</sup> 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.<sup>344</sup>

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-

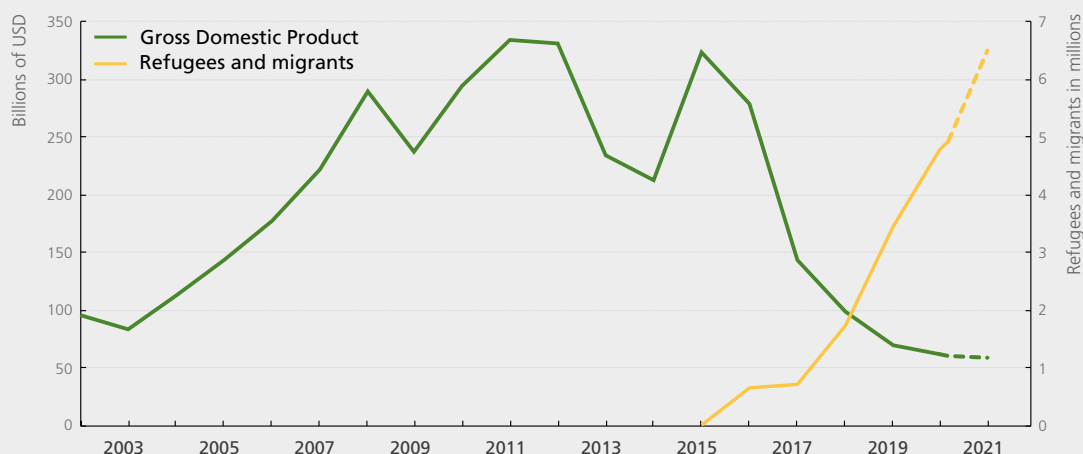
ment.<sup>345</sup> International sanctions aggravated the situation further and the country went into economic freefall, marked by hyperinflation and a collapse in oil and other major exports. GDP shrank from \$323.6 billion in 2015 to \$70.1 billion at the end of 2019 and inflation has risen at the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

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.<sup>348</sup> 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.<sup>349</sup> 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.<sup>350</sup>

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.<sup>351</sup> Around seven million people, or 21.7 per cent of the country's population, were in need of humanitarian assistance as of August 2019.<sup>352</sup>

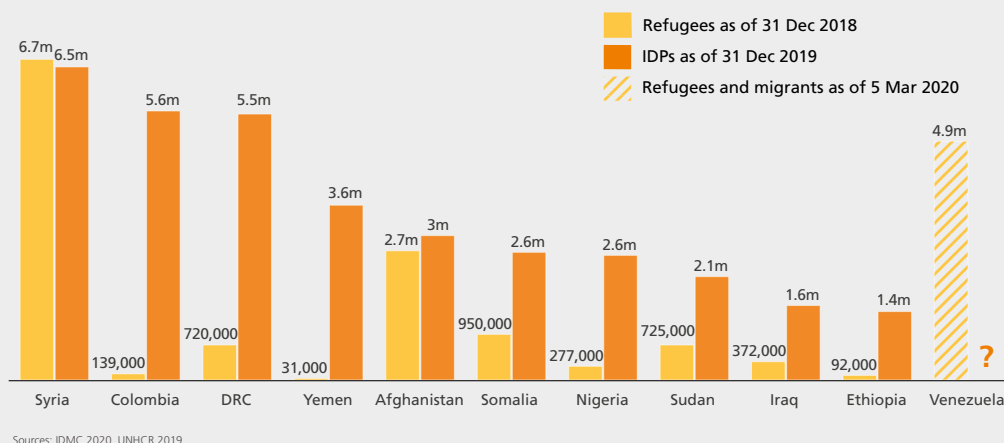
Statistics on violence in Venezuela also make for grim reading. The country has been the most violent in Latin America and the Caribbean since 2017, and has the highest homicide rate in the region.<sup>353</sup> In some areas, particularly those bordering Colombia, non-state armed groups including paramilitaries, 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.<sup>354</sup> If the current trend continues, 6.5 million people could have left the country by the end of 2020.<sup>355</sup>

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.<sup>356</sup>

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.<sup>357</sup>

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.<sup>358</sup> 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.<sup>359</sup> 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.<sup>360</sup>

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.<sup>361</sup> Abaco and Grand Bahama were worst-hit. Around 9,000 homes were damaged and 2,900 destroyed.<sup>362</sup> 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.<sup>363</sup>

Dorian's impacts on the Bahamas were unprecedented, but not everyone the storm displaced faced the same conditions.<sup>364</sup> 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-

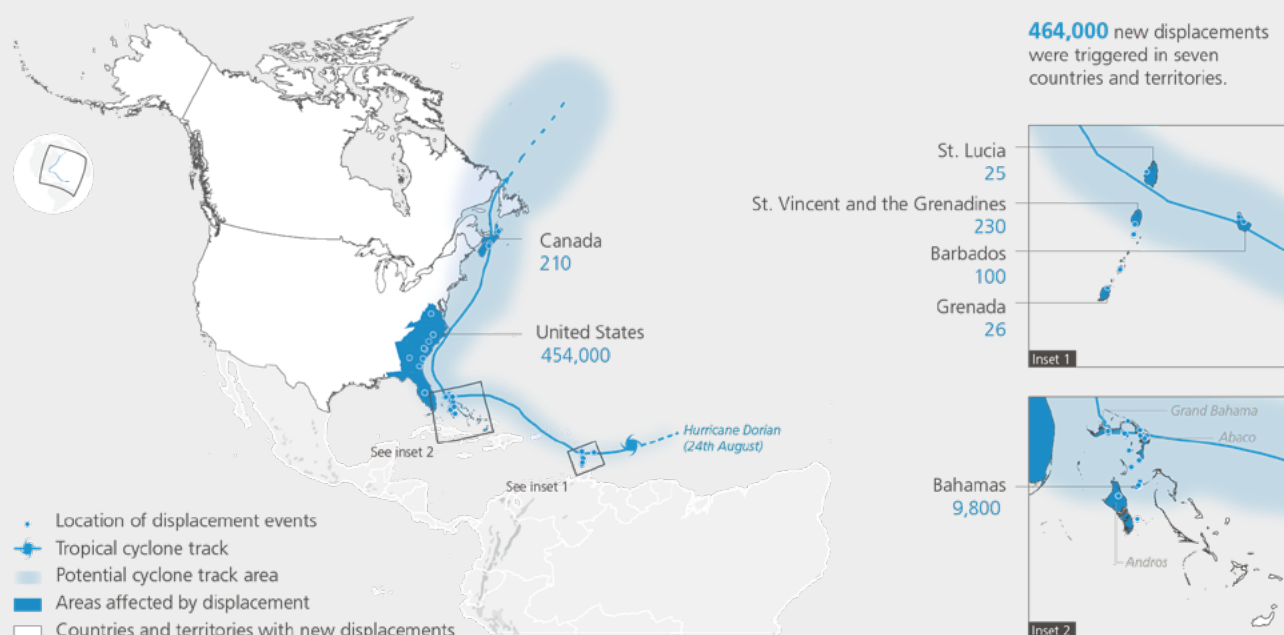
ties are not citizens and so should not technically be considered internally displaced or entitled to support and compensation, but for the majority the Bahamas had been their habitual place of residence for years and in many cases generations.<sup>365</sup>

Haitians and Bahamas-born nationals of Haitian origin make up between 10 and 25 per cent of the population.<sup>366</sup> 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.<sup>367</sup>

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.<sup>368</sup> Nor does the government recognise citizenship as a birth right.<sup>369</sup> 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.<sup>370</sup> None remained as of 19 September, and more than 300 Haitians and Bahamas-born nationals of Haitian origin were reported missing.<sup>371</sup>

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.<sup>372</sup> By the end of November, however, thousands had returned to Abaco and there were only 585 people left in the shelters.<sup>373</sup> 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.<sup>374</sup>



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".<sup>375</sup> Thirty-one per cent of people living in affected settlements on Abaco said the immigration services had approached them, and arrests have taken place.<sup>376</sup> 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.<sup>377</sup>

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.<sup>378</sup> 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.<sup>379</sup> It has said, however, that undocumented migrants are not eligible, potentially heightening their vulnerabilities and exposing them to the risk of protracted displacement.<sup>380</sup>

A former Haitian finance minister has said the government's policy of deporting Haitians could undermine the reconstruction effort on Abaco.<sup>381</sup> Many have much-needed construction and agricultural skills.<sup>382</sup> 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.

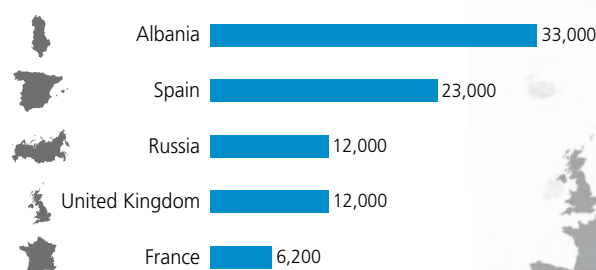


## EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



Conflict 2,800  
Disasters 101,000  
0.3% of the global total

### 5 COUNTRIES WITH MOST NEW DISPLACEMENTS



Relatively little displacement was recorded in Europe and Central Asia compared with other regions in 2019, preserving a trend set in previous years. The number of new conflict displacements was the lowest since 2014, largely the result of a de-escalation in fighting in eastern Ukraine. The figure for the country itself was the lowest since the conflict broke out that same year (see Figure 19).

The region is, however, home to more than 2.8 million people still living in internal displacement as a result of the war in Ukraine and previous conflicts in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Kosovo, Russia and Turkey. The length of people's displacement and the severity of their conditions vary from one situation to another, but some IDPs have been displaced for as long as twenty years. In many cases it is difficult to ascertain whether or not they have achieved durable solutions.

Disasters triggered 101,000 new displacements across the region in 2019, more than double the figure for the previous year. The majority were the result of floods and summer wildfires, but three earthquakes in Albania displaced the largest numbers of people at once. The availability and quality of data on disaster displacement varies from country to country, making estimates for many conservative. There is very little evidence, for example, about the scale and impacts of disasters in Central Asia.

### Eastern Europe

**Albania** recorded 33,000 new disaster displacements in 2019, the highest figure in the region. A 5.2 magnitude earthquake destroyed more than 50 homes and triggered around 250 displacements near the south-eastern city of Korçë in June, and 5.8 magnitude event and after-shocks around 500 in September.<sup>383</sup>



The most powerful quake, however, and the strongest in decades in Albania, was a 6.4 magnitude event that struck coastal areas near the city of Durrës in November.<sup>384</sup> It damaged more than 95,000 homes and triggered around 32,000 displacements. Ninety schools were also closed as result of damage they sustained. Most of those forced to flee their homes were still displaced as of the end of the year.<sup>385</sup>

**Russia** recorded 12,000 disaster displacements in 2019, most of them triggered by floods. The most significant event took place in Irkutsk, where heavy rain caused the Angara river to burst its banks in June.<sup>386</sup> The subsequent flooding destroyed 1,200 homes in 50 villages and triggered more than 10,000 displacements. The same area was flooded again the following month, triggering more than 1,100 evacuations.<sup>387</sup> The two episodes of flooding together left around 5,000 homes unfit for occupation.<sup>388</sup>

Record high temperatures, electrical storms and strong winds led to unusually fierce wildfires in the south-east of the country. Fires in Trans-Baikal territory burned more than 100 homes and triggered 340 displacements in April.<sup>389</sup> More intense fires in July and August destroyed around 4.5 million hectares of Siberian forest, but no information was available about possible displacements.<sup>390</sup>

No new conflict displacements were recorded during the year, but around 1,800 people were still living in displacement as of 31 December from conflicts in the 1990s.

The number of new conflict displacements recorded in **Ukraine** fell considerably in 2019 as fighting in the east of the country waned. Just 60 were recorded along the contact line that divides government and separatist-held areas, the result of violence, damage to homes, lack of services and forced evictions.<sup>391</sup> There were, however, still around 730,000 people living in displacement at the end the year as a result of the five-year conflict.

The government has taken measures to assist and protect the country's IDPs, including the adoption of a law on internal displacement in 2014.<sup>392</sup> It also adopted a three-year strategy in 2017 to reintegrate displaced people and facilitate their pursuit of long-term solutions, and has run programmes in partnership with international organisations to support, resettle and protect them.<sup>393</sup> Many IDPs have benefited from these measures, but many others still live in precarious conditions.

Representatives from Ukraine, Russia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) met in October 2019 to discuss the next steps in the imple-

mentation of the Minsk Agreement and agreed to a multi-step process known as the Steinmeier Formula.<sup>394</sup> This Formula provides for the holding of elections and a potential special status for the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk. The modalities of these elections, however, which would be held under OSCE standards and Ukrainian legislation, have not yet been decided.

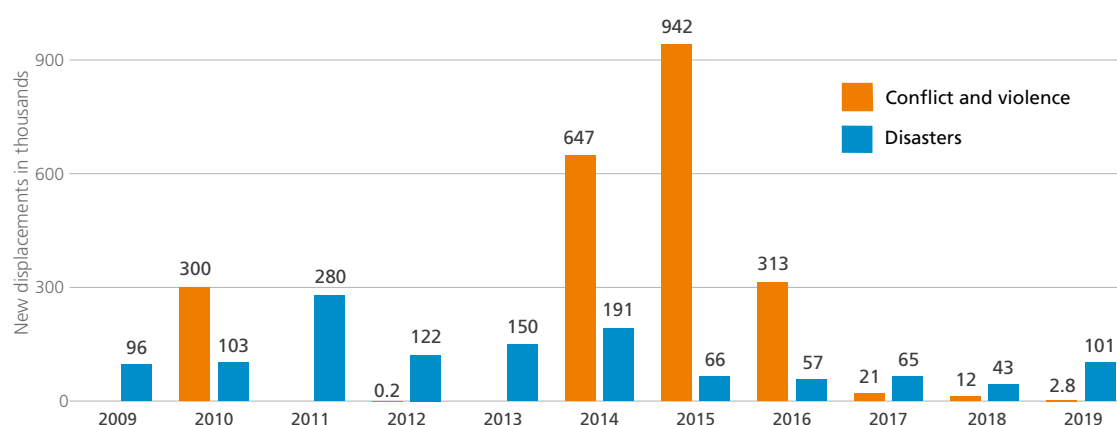
## Western Europe

**Spain** recorded more than 23,000 new disaster displacements in 2019, the highest figure in western Europe. Around 18,000 were triggered by summer wildfires that burned nearly 90,000 hectares of land. The fires in the Canary Islands, the most affected region, were the worst in a decade.<sup>395</sup> Around 10,000 people were evacuated in August, many of them from the municipalities of Artenara and Vallesco on Gran Canaria.<sup>396</sup> Most people were able to return to their homes in the days after the fires were put out.<sup>397</sup> Unusually hot and dry conditions helped to fuel the fires, but their impacts were also aggravated by increased development and tourism that mean firefighters have to tackle blazes over wider areas.<sup>398</sup>



Electrical storms and torrential downpours hit the east and south-east of mainland Spain in September.<sup>399</sup> The ensuing floods triggered about 5,000 displacements across the autonomous communities of Valencia and Murcia. They included the evacuation of 2,200 residents from the town of Santomera in Murcia for fear a local dam would overflow.

**FIGURE 19:** New displacements by conflict, violence and disasters in Europe and Central Asia (2009-2019)



Thirty-two disasters triggered more than 6,200 new displacements in **France**. Around 3,400 were the result of a series of floods, half of them evacuations in southern parts of the country in November. Heavy rains and high winds in the south and west also triggered 635 displacements in December.

The largest single displacement event, however, was an earthquake in Ardèche department in November that destroyed more than 800 homes and triggered 2,000 displacements. The people affected were still living in displacement as of the end of year. Ardèche is in a low-risk area for seismic activity, but the quake was the strongest in France for at least 15 years.<sup>400</sup> Wildfires and landslides also forced people to flee their homes during the year.

Localised disasters triggered around 12,000 displacements in the **United Kingdom** in 2019. Torrential rain caused so much runoff from the Toddbrook reservoir in Derbyshire that the volume of water caused structural damage to its dam.<sup>401</sup> More than 6,500 people were evacuated for fear it would burst as the rains continued. Local authorities, firefighters and the Environmental Agency worked together to reduce the risk of a collapse, including by pumping water out of the reservoir to reduce pressure on the dam.<sup>402</sup> The incident was a reminder of the need to maintain and reinforce aging concrete infrastructure.

Some parts of the county of South Yorkshire received the equivalent of a month's rain in a day in November. This led to severe flooding in and around the cities of Sheffield and Doncaster. More than 100 schools were closed, and around 1,800 homes and businesses badly affected.<sup>403</sup> Around one in six homes in the UK are at risk of flooding, and insured losses amount to around £1 billion (\$1.2 billion) a year. The combination of climate change and variability and poor compliance with building standards only serve to heighten the risk.<sup>404</sup>

Floods triggered around 2,400 of the 3,400 disaster displacements recorded in **Italy** in 2019. The most significant event took place in June in towns near Lake Como in the north of the country.<sup>405</sup> Heavy rains caused flash floods that prompted the pre-emptive evacuation of 1,000 people across several municipalities.

A 4.8 magnitude earthquake triggered around 600 displacements near Florence in the province of Tuscany in December. Most of the people displaced were shel-

tered in civil protection facilities.<sup>406</sup> A volcanic eruption on the island of Stromboli triggered about 70 displacements in August. The Stromboli volcano is one of the world's most active and has been erupting regularly since 1932. The island is sparsely populated but is frequented by tourists on day trips.<sup>407</sup>

## Central and western Asia

Attacks against Turkish soldiers launched from inside neighbouring Syria triggered more 2,000 new displacements in **Turkey** in October 2019.<sup>408</sup> The figure should be considered an underestimate because other attacks also took place in border areas but there was little access to information on the ground with which to estimate the scale of any possible displacement.

Around 1.1 million people were still living in displacement as of the end of the year as a result of conflict between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in the 1990s and security operations in the south-eastern Anatolia region in 2015 and 2016.

Around 550 disaster displacements were also recorded in 2019, figures that should be considered underestimates.

Obtaining displacement figures in countries across Central Asia is challenging. We were only able to compile an estimate for disaster displacement in **Tajikistan**, where 4,800 people were evacuated in the south-western districts of Vose' and Farkhor in June as a result of heavy rains, mudflows and widespread flooding.<sup>409</sup> More than 1,000 homes were damaged, 354 of them seriously.<sup>410</sup> The people affected incurred significant financial losses and lacked food, safe water and sanitation. About 2,100 people were estimated to still be displaced by the end of the year.

People in several countries in the region continue to suffer the legacies of previous conflicts and violence. Intercommunal violence in southern **Kyrgyzstan**, for example, triggered more than 300,000 displacements in 2010.<sup>411</sup> Around 170,000 people were still living in displacement the following year, but little information is available about their conditions since.<sup>412</sup>

Around 770 new displacements were recorded in the country in 2019. People were evacuated from a village





near the border with Tajikistan after clashes in March and July.<sup>413</sup> The human rights situation in Kyrgyzstan has improved in recent years, but minorities continue to suffer discrimination and have few education and job opportunities.<sup>414</sup>

*Since the conflict started in 2014, this man and his family have been living in an abandoned house on a farm near the village of Novyi Donbas in Eastern Ukraine. Photo: IOM/Muse Mohammed, August 2018*

