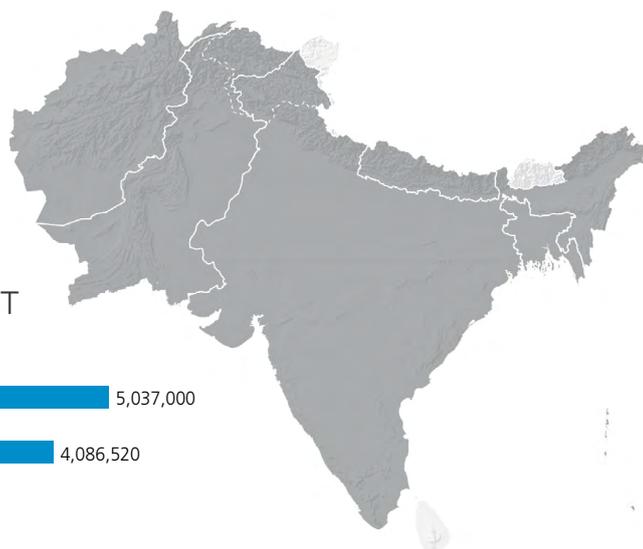
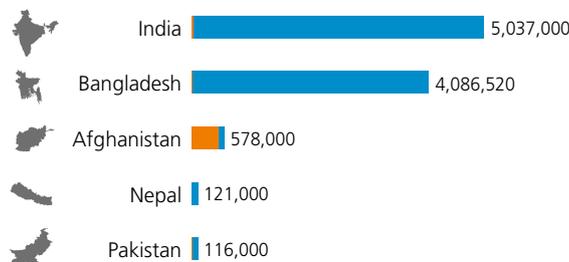


## SOUTH ASIA



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

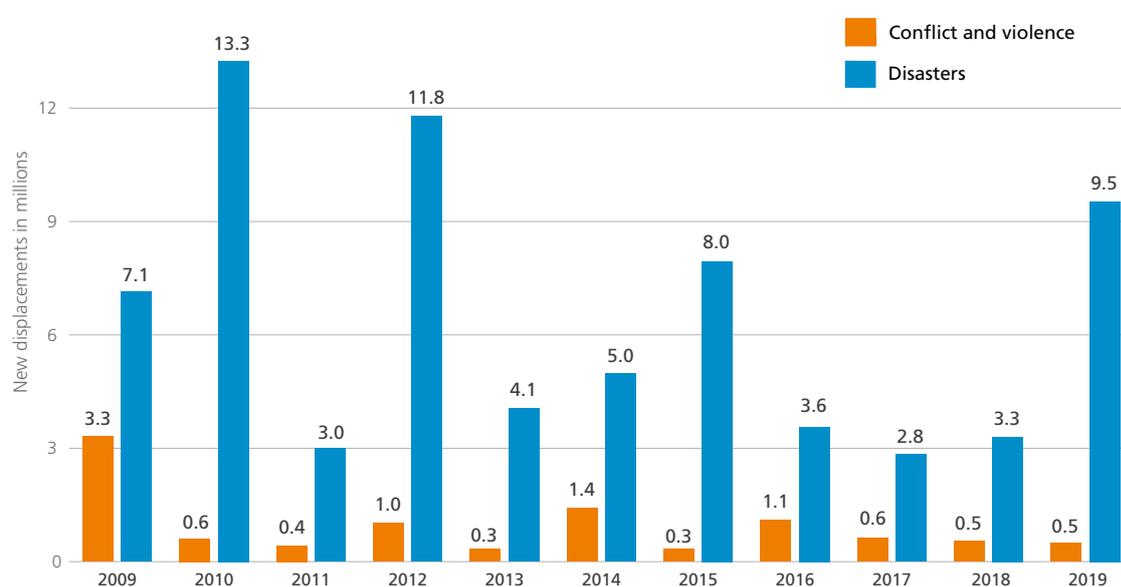
to be around 590,000 people living in internal displacement as a result of disasters across the country as of 31 December, but the figure is highly conservative given the high number of new displacements and the damages and losses recorded during the year.

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.