

Internal displacement at all-time high after unprecedented year of crises

20 May 2021, Geneva - The total number of people living in internal displacement reached a record 55 million by the end of 2020. During a year marked by intense storms and persistent conflict, 40.5 million new displacements were triggered across the world by disasters and violence, the highest annual figure recorded in a decade.

“It is particularly concerning that these high figures were recorded against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, when movement restrictions obstructed data collection and fewer people sought out emergency shelters for fear of infection,” said the director of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Alexandra Bilak.

Escalating violence and the expansion of extremist groups in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Burkina Faso fuelled some of the world’s fastest growing displacement crises, according to IDMC’s annual global report. Long-running conflicts, such as those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria and Afghanistan, also continued to force large numbers of people to flee.

“It’s shocking that someone was forced to flee their home inside their own country every single second last year. We are failing to protect the world’s most vulnerable people from conflict and disasters,” said the secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Jan Egeland.

Weather-related events, primarily storms and floods, were responsible for 98% of all disaster displacement. Intense cyclone seasons in the Americas, South Asia and East Asia and the Pacific, and extended rainy seasons across the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, uprooted millions of people. Cyclone Amphan alone triggered around five million displacements across Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Myanmar. The Atlantic hurricane season was the most active on record with 30 named storms, including hurricanes Iota and Eta which affected 12 Central American and Caribbean countries.

A convergence of conflict and disasters led many people to be displaced for a second or even third time, increasing and prolonging their vulnerability. Many of those who fled flooding in Yemen had already been uprooted at least once by the country’s civil war.

The number of people living in internal displacement worldwide has been rising steadily for more than a decade. It reached a record high as of 31 December 2020, when there were more than twice as many internally displaced people (IDPs) than refugees. Forty-eight million people have fled conflict and violence, and seven million disasters, but given the incomplete data the latter is likely to be a significant underestimate.

This year’s Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID 2021) focuses on our changing climate. Rising temperatures are increasing the intensity and frequency of weather-related hazards, but climate change is not the only factor that drives displacement risk. Many more years of data are needed to draw a direct link.

There have been significant advances in the development of national and regional policies, and global attention on the issue is growing. Countries are beginning to invest in proactive measures, such as planned relocation and community-led initiatives to reduce displacement risk. Filling the data gaps will be critical to support these efforts and to make the case for more flexible and predictable funding.

“Today’s displacement crises arise from many interconnected factors, including climate and environmental change, protracted conflicts and political instability. In a world made more fragile by

the Covid-19 pandemic, sustained political will and investment in locally-owned solutions will be more important than ever,” said Bilak.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Visit our dedicated [GRID landing page](#) to download the report, explore interactive infographics, country-specific information and videos.

A selection of [images](#) and [b-roll footage](#) are available to download here. Raw data is available upon request.

About IDMC:

Every day, people flee conflict and disasters and become displaced inside their own countries. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre provides data and analysis and supports partners in identifying and implementing solutions to internal displacement.

How to understand our figures: We report two different metrics on internal displacement: 1) The number of new displacements that take place during the year. This refers to the number of movements rather than the number of people displaced. If a family of four is caught up in fighting and flees to safety, then the settlement they are sheltering in is flooded and they have to move again, we count that as eight new displacements. 2) The number of people living in internal displacement is a snapshot of the global situation at the end of the year. It includes people newly displaced during the year, and in previous years when data is available, who have not yet returned home, integrated locally or resettled elsewhere.

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