Forty-five displaced families live in a former school in the al-Waer neighbourhood of Homs, Syria. Photo: Emmanuel Bargues/OCHA, December 2015

PART 2

INSIDE THE GRID

Caveats for the estimates

Behind all of the figures in this report are people whose lives have been disrupted, in many cases severely, by traumatic events. Given the propensity of displacement to become protracted, the upheaval and its consequences can be long-lasting if not permanent. Becoming displaced not only means losing one's home and other material assets. Many IDPs also lose their jobs, livelihoods, social support networks and documentation that they are likely to need to start rebuilding their lives elsewhere. Their children's education is often interrupted, families are broken up, their health suffers, and the trauma and upheaval of flight leave many with psychological and physical scars.

With this human toll in mind, we take our responsibility to monitor internal displacement seriously and strive to report on it in a comprehensive and accurate way. That said, displacement is a complex, fluid and politically sensitive phenomenon and as such it is difficult to measure. Our estimates are our best attempt to do so – to count vulnerable people who are on the move and who have no official status, with the ultimate aim of their being provided with the protection and assistance they need.

Monitoring and reporting on IDPs is very different from doing so for refugees. IDPs are seldom registered and they are often difficult to identify. Some may not even want to put their head above the parapet by being counted. Some governments too resist efforts to monitor and report on displacement. A 2015 UN General Assembly resolution encourages states to "ensure the provision of reliable data on internal displacement", including by collaborating with IDMC, but most countries have yet to designate a specific government agency to systematically collect and share comprehensive data.[80]

As a result, we and our partners are left with an imperfect set of tools that are inconsistently used. We compile our figures based on the best, most credible data we are able to obtain, but they are ultimately only estimates. We round our figures to help emphasise that fact, and the numbers we publish are deliberately conservative.

Reporting accurately means treading a tightrope between under- and over-estimating the scale of displacement, with significant human implications for those affected. Under-estimates mean IDPs go unseen and unaccounted for when it comes to providing assistance. Over-estimates risk misdirecting scarce resources away from those most in need.

In this part we outline our efforts to improve the coverage and transparency of the global evidence base on internal displacement. By providing the breakdown of the age of our figures for the first time in this report, we are appealing to the governments concerned and to our partners in the field to contribute to this ongoing effort.

KEY FINDINGS AND MESSAGES

Our ability to obtain data on the number of IDPs and the processes responsible for increases or decreases in the size of the IDP population is limited.

The Guiding Principles and several UN General Assembly Resolutions have recognised that **sovereign states bear the primary responsibility for collecting and sharing data on internal displacement**. This should, of course, include regular updates on the number of people who have become newly displaced or achieved durable solutions, as well as data disaggregated by sex and age. At present, **displacement data in several countries is already outdated**, and it is at risk of becoming outdated in others, including countries with large IDP populations such as Afghanistan. In order to avoid this, more resources and capacities are needed at country level to collect displacement data and keep it up to date.

We have difficulty in obtaining data on the processes that lead to the end of displacement and the number of IDPs who have fled across international borders. There is also little information available about the number of children born to IDPs and the number of people who die in displacement.

Our estimates for the number of people internally displaced by conflict and violence are deliberately conservative. When we receive information that IDPs have returned, integrated locally or settled elsewhere, we subtract them from our totals regardless of whether they are known to have achieved a durable solution. We do this because reporting on the end of displacement and the processes that lead to it are open to different interpretations.

To generate global estimates, we have historically attempted to account for new displacements associated with disasters without indicating the length of people's displacement. This means **our figures are the sum of all displacements triggered by a particular disaster or event,** and do not account for any outflows such as returns or onward movements.

We were able to obtain updated information in 2015 for nearly 31.7 million of the 40.8 million people who we estimated were living in displacement as of the end of the year as a result of conflict and violence.

The age of the most recent data for the remaining 9.1 million IDPs varies widely and in some cases is significantly out of date. The data on nearly a million IDPs in Turkey dates back at least to 2006, and some for Guatemala goes back as far as 1997.

The issue of outdated or decaying data is of particular concern with Colombia, a country that has been among the five countries with highest number of people displaced by conflict every year since we began monitoring internal displacement in 1998.

Outdated or decaying data is a problem in 12 of the 53 conflict- or violence-affected countries in this report, accounting for approximately 20 per cent of IDPs worldwide. The countries concerned are Armenia, Bangladesh, Congo, Cyprus, Guatemala, Macedonia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Togo, Turkey and Uganda.

The lack of updated data, particularly on displacement that has become protracted, is one of the main gaps we face in both conflict and disaster contexts. We have also found that **people displaced by intractable conflicts around the world tend to fall off the radar**. We have been unable to obtain return figures for a number of countries, including Bangladesh, Burundi, Guatemala and Turkey.

As a global monitor we want to call attention to such situations, and their inclusion also constitutes an **explicit plea for updated data and information**.

IDMC'S DATA MODEL

Capturing the human toll of displacement

To paint a comprehensive global picture of internal displacement associated with both conflict and disasters, we obtain data from our sources and relate it to the generic displacement model below (see figure 2.1). Obtaining data on each of the relevant processes or "flows", which determine displacement patterns, is a crucial part of accurate reporting. Not doing so would mean we lose sight of what is happening to tens of millions of people around the world every year.

Conservative estimates for displacement associated with conflict

For displacement caused by conflict and violence, we try to obtain data on the number of IDPs and the processes responsible for increases or decreases. Our ability to do this, however, is only partial (see Syria spotlight). For each of the situations we reported on last year, we were able to estimate the number of IDPs as of 31 December 2015 – this "stock" of people is represented by the orange box in figure 2.1 – and the incidents of new displacement, based on direct reporting from the field or by inference from increases in the size of displaced populations.

We have much more difficulty in obtaining data on the processes that lead to the end of displacement and the number of IDPs who have fled across international borders. These flows are represented by the dark blue arrows in figure 2.1. There is also little information available about the number of children born to IDPs and the number of people who die in displacement. Explicitly disaggregated information was only available for relatively few of the 52 countries and one region (Abyei) for which we provide estimates for 2015 (see table 2.1, p.36).

Figure 2.1: IDMC's displacement data model

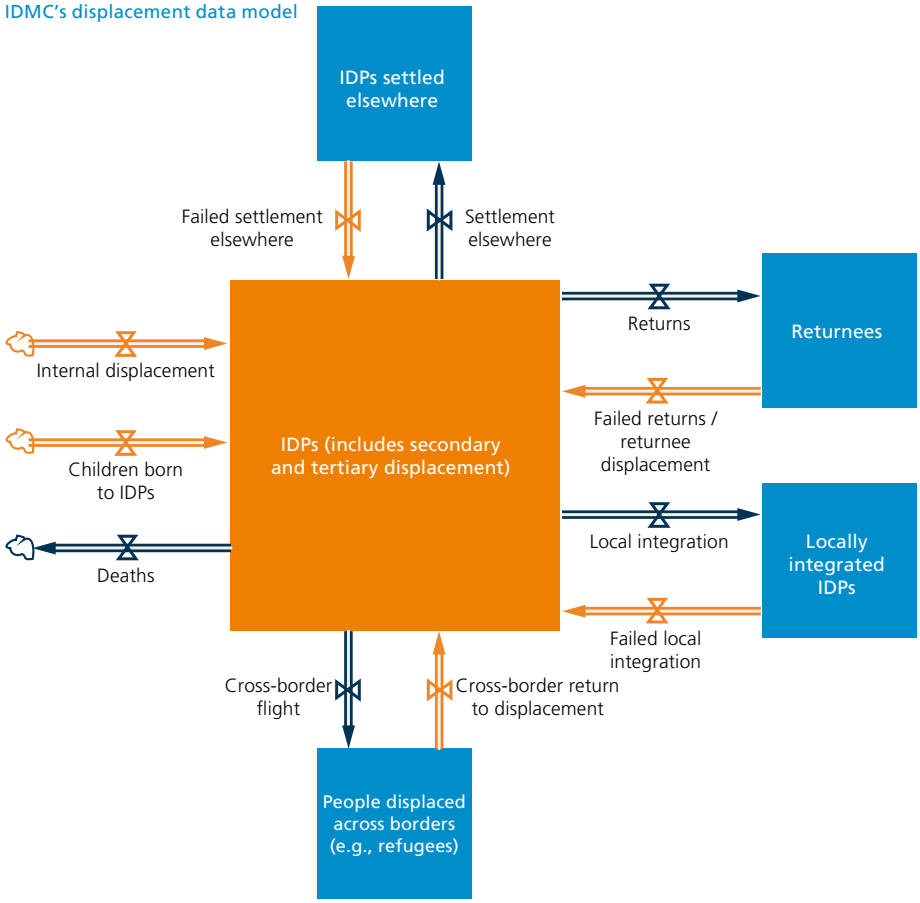


Table 2.1: Summary of data on 2015 flows that influence the total number of displacements associated with conflict or violence

Conflict- or violence- related flows	Number of countries or territories for which data was obtained out of 52 countries and one region
New incidents of displacement	28
Returns	20
Local integration	1
Settlement elsewhere	2
Cross-border flight	0
Children born to IDPs	2
Deaths in displacement	1

Not every flow is relevant to every situation we report on. The absence of data on new displacement may simply mean that no new displacement has taken place. Births and deaths may have been included in some of the data we obtained, but not in a way that allowed us to disaggregate it from other flows. That said, a cursory glance at table 2.1 reveals significant data gaps. This is particularly true for information on the processes that lead to the end of displacement, though their impact on the overall number of IDPs may be relatively small compared with the ever-increasing number of people newly displaced by conflict and violence.

Our estimates are deliberately conservative. When we receive information that IDPs have returned, integrated locally or settled elsewhere, we subtract them from our totals regardless of whether they are known to have achieved a durable solution. We do this because reporting on the end of displacement and the processes that lead to it are open to different interpretations.

This has sometimes led in the past to the application of different criteria for subtracting people from the displaced population. A profiling exercise might find that a percentage of those displaced have returned but still not achieved a durable solution. Continuing to count these people as IDPs creates a different – and higher – benchmark for assessing returns compared with another situation in which an authority simply reports that IDPs have "returned" or are "no longer displaced".

Data gaps for displacement associated with disasters

We use a different methodology to monitor displacement associated with disasters, one of the implications of which is that our coverage of the data model is more limited. Our figures are the sum of all of the people newly displaced by a particular disaster – all of the people in the orange box in figure 2.1, p.35 – without accounting for any of the outflows from that stock.

This means we are unable to report on the duration of displacement at the global level, or provide a cumulative figure for the number of people displaced as of 31 December 2015. We have, however, gathered evidence from dozens of case studies that shows there are hundreds of thousands of people still living in displacement following disasters in previous years and decades.

Our estimates do not reflect where people shelter or live while they are displaced, or where and when they eventually settle again. The figures may include people who fled disasters to other countries, but we found no such cases in the process of our 2015 data collection.

We are currently expanding our data collection in an effort to capture all of the outflows in our model for displacement associated with disasters. This includes IDPs who return to their home areas, integrate locally, settle elsewhere in the country or continue their flight across an international border. Doing so will enable us to paint a more comprehensive picture of situations as they evolve and enable comparisons between them.

SYRIA

Trapped in the country, and out of the picture

SPOT LIGHT

By any measure, the humanitarian situation in Syria worsened significantly in 2015. The country's civil war is now in its sixth year, with four of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council actively engaged in the hostilities, and it has caused one of worst displacement crises since World War Two.[81, 82] As of December, intense fighting and violence had forced more than 10.9 million people, or over half of the country's pre-war population, to flee their homes. Put another way, an average of 50 families have been displaced every hour of every day since 2011.[83] Of the total, at least 6.6 million people have been internally displaced.[84]

The bulk of international attention has focused on the millions of people who have risked their lives and those of their children to seek safety elsewhere in the region or in Europe, with diminishing hope of finding safety, acceptance and opportunity. Having initially admitted large numbers of refugees, however, neighbouring countries have increasingly restricted the flow of people out of Syria, or sealed their borders altogether.[85]

As a result, hundreds of thousands of people are trapped inside the country, abandoned in camps or staying with host communities near border points with no legal escape route and often living in subhuman conditions.[86]

The main causes of casualties and displacement in Syria are well known. They include indiscriminate attacks in populated areas, the deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure such as schools and healthcare facilities, and sieges during which people are deliberately deprived of aid and basic services such as food, water and medical care.[87] Such acts were relentless in 2015, and as of October, at least 1.3 million people had been newly displaced, many for the second or third time.[88]

Despite a broad awareness of these drivers, there is relatively little understanding of their specific consequences: who the IDPs are, where they flee to and in what number, and what their needs are. This incomplete picture and the failure to conduct an accurate assessment of the situation mean that the humanitarian response, which is already overwhelmed, is unlikely to be using the resources available efficiently.

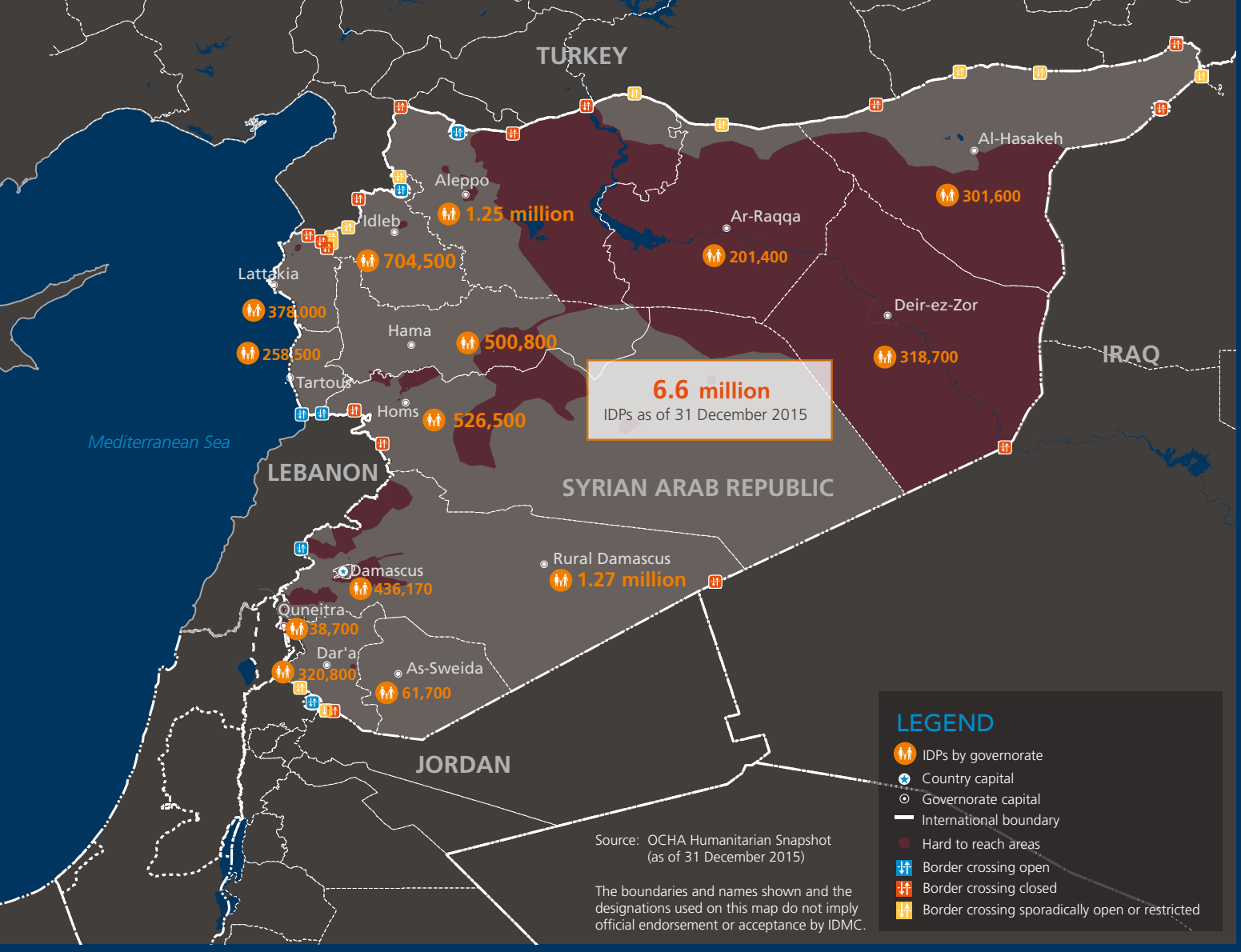
The limitations of current data collection efforts worldwide, as outlined in our confidence assessment tool (see methodological annex), can be broadly grouped into three categories in Syria – security and access restrictions, the political environment and methodological challenges.

More than 4.5 million people were living in areas of the country that the UN considered to be either difficult or near impossible to reach in 2015, including besieged cities, and humanitarians had less access than in 2014.[89, 90] The number of people living in areas OCHA classified as besieged more than doubled from 2014 to almost 500,000 people in early 2016, of whom less than one per cent received food aid.[91]

Monitoring internal displacement was further hampered by the intensity of the conflict and the volatility of its frontlines. The presence of the Islamic State (also known as ISIL and ISIS) made the north-eastern governorates of Ar-Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor particularly difficult to access, and the lack of data collection in such areas is likely to have led to significant under-reporting.

The unpredictable complexity of Syria's political environment also impedes the collection of reliable data. OCHA's displacement estimates, for example, which are only aggregated at the country level once a year, are based on information gathered from various government entities, UN agencies and the Syrian Red Crescent Society. In areas under opposition control, it has also had to rely on NGOs active there and local authorities. As such, data collection and reporting are subject to the influence of parties to the conflict, including some that have played a central role in causing displacement in the first place.[92]

Methodological challenges meantime may result in under-reporting or double counting, and a distorted understanding of the needs of people fleeing within and beyond Syria. The estimated 6.6 million IDPs in the country as of the end of 2015 is fewer than the 7.6 million at the end



of 2014,[93] but the figure relative to the population as a whole has most likely increased, given the number of people who have fled abroad. The current reporting systems for refugees and asylum seekers also make it very difficult to know how many were formerly IDPs. As such, when figures for IDPs and refugees are combined, many people are counted twice.

The fact that many, if not most IDPs have been forced to flee more than once presents another methodological challenge. Multiple displacements are difficult to track in any context, and particularly so in Syria. One the one hand, such people may not be counted at all because they live in host communities where they are largely invisible, but on the other multiple displacement may mean that people are counted more than once – each time they are displaced.

Agencies that estimate the number of IDPs in different parts of the country use different methodologies, and those trapped in besieged cities will have been displaced relatively short distances given their inability to leave the area. Efforts to count these IDPs effectively are hampered both by the methodological challenge of identifying them among the besieged population as a whole, and by the lack of access to areas under siege.

Compared with the attention given to Syrian refugees, the country's IDPs have been neglected, with significant implications for humanitarian funding and assistance, not to mention the lives of those affected.[94] The pace of displacement remains relentless, and people are likely to continue to uproot their families at a similar rate unless the fighting is brought to an end.[95] Despite needs increasing throughout 2015, it was harder than ever to get aid to the most desperate.[96]

Data gathering is a vital part of saving lives. Timely and reliable information on the trajectories of families fleeing violence within Syria and the tipping point to cross the country's border contribute to a better understanding of their situation. This in turn improves the quality of advocacy and programming on their behalf, and ultimately the likelihood that efforts to protect and assist them will be better resourced and targeted.

Working with DECAYING DATA

The lack of updated data, particularly on displacement that has become protracted, is one of the main gaps we face. We have tried to address it as consistently and transparently as possible by presenting stratified bar graphs of the number of IDPs based on the age of the data for each situation. We have chosen to continue reporting on situations for which we have not received any new information, but we call attention to the fact that the data may be out of date.

We were able to obtain updated information in 2015 for nearly 31.7 million of the 40.8 million people who were living in displacement as of the end of the year as a result of conflict and violence (see figure 2.2). For an annual report targeting global policy processes, this information can be considered up to date. The age of the most recent data for the remaining 9.1 million IDPs varies widely and in some cases is significantly out of date. The data on nearly a million IDPs in Turkey dates back at least to 2006, and some for Guatemala goes back as far as 1996.

Despite these and other sources being out of date, we continued accounting for the IDPs concerned for two reasons. As a global monitor we want to call attention to such situations, and their inclusion also constitutes an explicit plea for updated data and information. We hope that by presenting our data in this way, our readers will be able to draw their own conclusions about the displacement situations covered, and decide how much emphasis to put on evidence that may be years out of date.

Figure 2.2: People internally displaced as a result of conflict and violence as of 31 December 2015, by year of latest data update

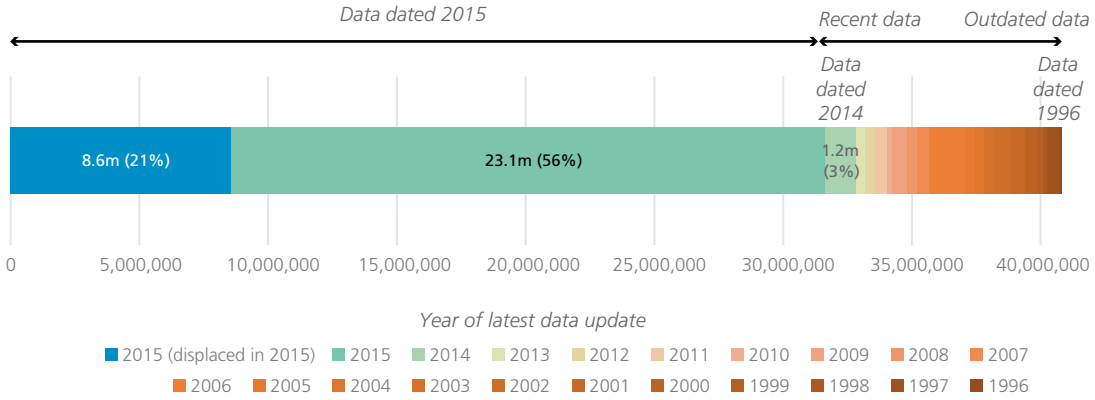
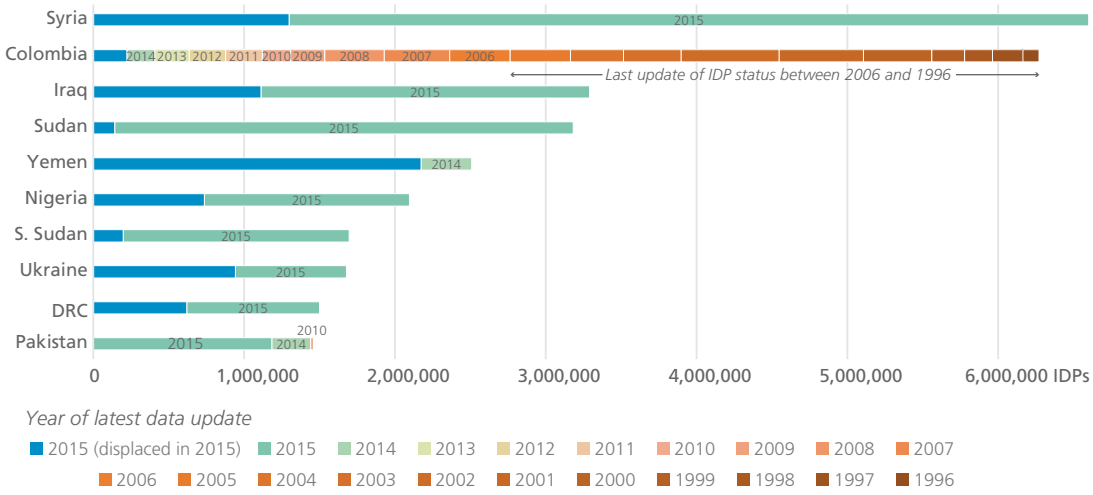


Figure 2.3: Countries with the highest number of people internally displaced by conflict, stratified



A more nuanced illustration of the ten countries with most people internally displaced by conflict (see figure 2.3) points to the fact that some of the stock data is relatively old and possibly decaying. This was the case for 12 of the 52 countries and one region (Abyei) in this report, accounting for less than 20 per cent of IDPs worldwide. The countries concerned were Armenia, Bangladesh, Congo, Cyprus, Guatemala, Macedonia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Togo, Turkey and Uganda.

Eighty-one per cent of the data used to compile our country estimates has been updated within the past two years, but in some cases part or all of the latest available information is more than two years old. This is the case for Colombia (see box) and the 15 other countries shown in figure 2.4. The upshot is that the estimates we generated for some countries are more reliable than for others.

We have also found that people displaced by protracted conflicts around the world tend to fall off the radar. Colombia is clearly not the only country to have outdated or decaying data for its stock of IDPs. We have been unable to obtain return figures for a number of countries, including Bangladesh, Burundi, Guatemala, Thailand and Turkey.

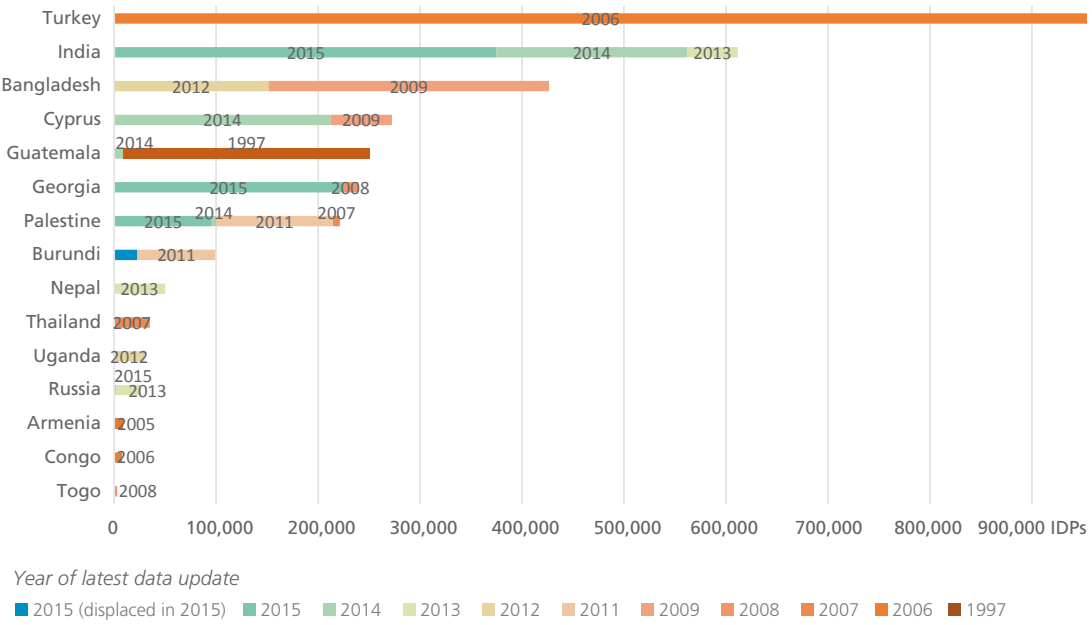
The figures for these countries highlight the need for improved and updated data on displacement. As clearly stated in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and reaffirmed in successive United Nations General Assembly Resolutions, sovereign states are primarily responsible for maintaining up-to-date statistical information on their displaced populations.

Each year, IDMC reaches out to UN Member States inviting them to share their displacement data, and each year only a handful reply. This year, only five governments responded with their data – Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Ireland and Mexico. Governments in several other countries – Afghanistan, CAR, Colombia, Cyprus, the DRC, Honduras, Macedonia, Mali, Nigeria, Peru, the Philippines, Russia Sri Lanka, Togo and Ukraine – designated national authorities to collect and publish this data or to collaborate with others to do so.

Particularly in protracted crises, displacement data often becomes outdated when government authorities and international actors lose the capacity needed to collect it. This can be due to attention and resources being allocated to more visible or pressing crises. When UNHCR shared its 2015 IDP data for Afghanistan, it notified us that IDP profiling and data collection had ceased, partly due to lack of funding.

The solution to this is more frequent collection of displacement data that accounts for the number of IDPs as well as the flows leading into and out displacement. By providing the breakdown of the age of our figures for the first time in this report, we are appealing to the governments concerned and to our partners in the field to contribute to this ongoing effort. Donor governments should ensure that designated authorities have the resources and capacity to collect displacement data and keep it up to date. Data-gathering agencies should, in turn, give warning several months prior to halting their data collection to give time to address this impending gap.

Figure 2.4: Countries with fewer than a million IDPs displaced by conflict, for which some data or all is older than 2014



Decaying displacement data in **COLOMBIA**

The issue of decaying data is of particular concern with Colombia (see figure 2.3), a country that has been among the five countries with the highest number of people internally displaced by conflict every year since we began monitoring internal displacement in 1998.

To its credit, the government has maintained a sophisticated and detailed account of the country's displaced population. The data in the latest iteration of its registry for IDPs, part of the national victims' registry administered by the country's victims unit, is disaggregated by age, gender, provenance and resettlement location, and paints a highly detailed picture.

The registry, however, is primarily intended as a tool to facilitate the government's provision of victims' reparations, in accordance with law 1448 of 2011. As such, it does not take into account people who are no longer displaced, whether because they have achieved a durable solution, or because they have died. This means that the number of IDPs in the country never decreases.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many people displaced by Colombia's conflict, now in its sixth decade, have resettled in the country's cities, but it is impossible to gauge with any certainty how many of the 6.3 million or so people who fled their homes between 1996 and 2015 still live in displacement. The estimate for 2015 is likely to be significantly inflated and should be interpreted with caution.