Global Overview 2015: People internally displaced by conflict and violence

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Record breaking number of internally displaced

As of the end of 2014, 38 million people around the world had been forced to flee their homes by armed conflict and generalised violence, and were living in displacement within the borders of their own country.

Eleven million people were newly displaced during the year, the equivalent of 30,000 people fleeing a day.

Never in the last 10 years of IDMC's global reporting, have we reported such a high estimate for the number of people newly displaced in a year.

All data and analysis is based on IDMC monitoring between January and December 2014.

Major displacement events in 2014

- The majority of the increase in new displacement since last year is the result of the protracted crises in Iraq, South Sudan, Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Nigeria. These five countries accounted for 60% of new displacement worldwide.

- Iraq suffered most new displacement, with at least 2.2 million people fleeing from areas that fell under Islamic State (ISIL) control.

- In the Middle East and north Africa, 3.8 million people were newly displaced. There were 11.9 million IDPs overall, 90% of which were living in Iraq and Syria.

- With no end in sight, Syria's civil war forced at least 1.1 million people to flee their homes. At least 35% of Syria's population, or 7.6 million people, have been displaced. This makes it the country with the largest number of IDPs in the world.

- Heavy fighting in South Sudan displaced at least 1.3 million, particularly in the states of Unity, Jonglei, Lakes and Upper Nile. More than 11% of the country's population was newly displaced during the year.

- At least a million were newly displaced in DRC by low-intensity conflict and violence in the east of the country, and a series of brutal incidents such as the Beni massacres in North Kivu province.

- Boko Haram's ruthless campaign to establish an independent Islamic state in north-eastern Nigeria also drove significant new displacement. It was responsible for displacing more than three-quarters of at least 975,300 people. Issues of poverty, increasing inequality and social frustration form the backdrop to Boko Haram's emergence and expansion in Nigeria.

- Ukraine was the only country in which conflict caused new displacement in Europe, the Caucasus and central Asia. Displacement was driven by Russia's annexation of Crimea and fighting between the Ukrainian military and separatist forces in the east of the country that escalated during the year. At least 646,500 people fled their homes, contributing to a regional total of just under 2.9 million IDPs across 13 countries, compared with 2.2 the previous year.

The Americas
New displacement: at least 436'500
Cumulative displacement: at least 7 million

- The region experienced a 12 % increase on last year. Mexico and Perú had at least 281,400 and 150,000 IDPs respectively, and between them El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras had 566,700 IDPs, many of them displaced by organised crime and gang violence.
- The main cause of displacement in Mexico and the Northern Triangle was criminal violence mostly related to drug trafficking and gang activity.
- In El Salvador as many as 288,900 people were displaced by criminal violence and threats.
- Colombia accounted for 6,044,200 IDPs, 12% of its overall population. More than 63% of IDPs in Colombia live below the poverty line, and 33% live in extreme poverty.
- Forced dispossessions were most common in Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala. They were driven by both the legal and illegal extraction of resources, including logging, the cultivation of coca, opium poppy, marijuana and crops for biofuels and palm oil.

East Africa
New displacement: up to 446'250
Cumulative displacement: up to 1.9 million

- IDPs are spread across Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda and Zimbabwe.
- Somalia had the largest displaced population in the region with 1.1 million IDPs, followed by Ethiopia with 397,200 and Kenya with 309,200.
- More than 220,000 people fled their homes in Kenya in 2014, compared with 55,000 in 2013, mainly as a result of inter-communal violence.
- Inter-communal violence was the main driver of new displacement in Ethiopia, where 137,100 people fled their homes.
- Food insecurity is a serious concern across east Africa, particularly for IDPs. Somali IDPs are reported as having the highest rates of severe acute malnutrition in the country. The death rate among displaced children under five in Mogadishu is six times the average.

Central Africa
New displacement: at least 3 million
Cumulative displacement: at least 7.9 million

- The region is home to some of the continent's most complex and protracted displacement situations, and experienced a 15% increase on 2013 across Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, DRC, South Sudan, Sudan and the disputed region of Abyei. These countries and territories accounted for 70% of all displacement in sub-Saharan Africa.
- CAR, DRC, South Sudan and Sudan not only have the largest displaced populations in the region, but the Fund for Peace also ranks them among the world's top five fragile states.

- Much of the new displacement took place in South Sudan, where the security situation, heavy fighting and hunger displaced more than 1.3 million people across 10 states.
- In Sudan, as many as 457,500 people were forced to flee their homes in the Darfur region, with North and South Darfur accounting for two-thirds of the new displacement.
- In DRC, events such as the Beni massacres in North Kivu displaced more than a million people.
- Given the immense needs of both IDPs and their host communities, the international humanitarian and development responses have been chronically underfunded in all six countries.
- Other drivers of displacement in the region included: civilians fleeing to avoid being caught up in fighting between armed groups, targeted violence to force people off their land, internal armed conflict, inter-communal violence, exploited ethnic and religious tension, disputes over the control of land and natural resources, pursuit of political and economic power and overspill of conflicts from neighbouring countries.

West Africa
New displacement: at least 1 million
Cumulative displacement: at least 1.5 million

- Nigeria had the largest IDP figure with at least a million, followed by Côte d'Ivoire with just over 300,000 and Mali with at least 61,000 IDPs.
- Nigeria was worst affected by new displacement in 2014. Brutal attacks by Boko Haram intensified dramatically, accounting for the displacement of at least 975,300 people.
- We reported displacement in Cameroon for the first time, after cross-border attacks by the Islamist militant group Boko Haram forced at least 40,000 people to flee their homes.
- Continuing insecurity in northern Nigeria, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire prevent many IDPs from returning safely and sustainably. Those who did go back to their homes often found themselves at risk of being displaced again, or without the basic services needed to support their reintegration.
- Displacement across the region as a whole was caused by extremist violence, political power struggles, disputes over natural resources and inter-communal conflict often linked to land tenure.

Middle East and north Africa
New displacement: at least 3.8 million
Cumulative displacement: at least 11.9 million

- The number of IDPs in the region rose to a new record for the third consecutive year. Around 10,500 people a day were newly displaced.
- In the last four years, more than 7.8 million people have fled their homes, joining 4.1 million people already living in protracted displacement.
- From 2001 until 2011, displacement in the region accounted for a mere seven to 14 % of the global figure. In 2014 it accounted for 31 per cent of the global total.
- Iraq suffered most new displacement, with at least 2.2 million people fleeing from areas that fell under Islamic State (ISIL) control. The number of IDPs in Iraq was at least 3.3 million at the end of 2014.
- At least 7.6 million IDPs were in Syria by the end of 2014, the highest number in the region, and almost an 18-fold increase over the last four years.
- For hundreds of thousands of IDPs in Syria, return is not an option, given that 1.2 million homes, or 30% of the country's housing stock registered in the 2014 census are thought to have been damaged or destroyed.

- At least 400,000 people fled their homes in Libya, more than a 6-fold increase on 2013, and the number of IDPs in occupied Palestine reached at least 275,000.
- In Yemen, 100,000 people were displaced by renewed conflict, making a total number of IDPs in the country at the end of 2014 of 334,100.
- In occupied Palestine, discriminatory Israeli policies and practices have caused the displacement of thousands.
- Displacement in Yemen and Libya has been made worse by renewed insurgencies that have caused significant political instability.
- The sharp increase in the number of IDPs in Iraq and Syria not only reflects the failure of national authorities to prevent displacement and protect those fleeing, but also the role they have played in exploiting and instigating conflict for political or economic gain.

Europe, the Caucasus and central Asia

New displacement: at least 646'500

Cumulative displacement: at least 2.8 million

- The cumulative figure accounts for IDPs in the Balkans, Caucasus, central Asia, Cyprus, Turkey and Ukraine as of the end of 2014.
- Some IDPs in the region have been displaced more than once, interrupting their pursuit of durable solutions.
- Ukraine accounted for much of the new displacement, driven by Russia's annexation of Crimea in March and fighting between the Ukrainian military and separatist forces in the east of the country, accounting for at least 646,500 displaced people by the end of 2014.
- Displacement in the region has become increasingly protracted, primarily due to the absence of political solutions to each conflict.

South Asia

New displacement: at least 1.4 million

Cumulative displacement: at least 4.1 million

- There was an increase of 1.8 million IDPs on the previous year. Afghanistan, India and Pakistan accounted for all new displacement.
- IDPs in Pakistan increased from at least 746,700 to at least 1.9 million as insurgency and counterinsurgency operations intensified. This accounts for 46% of the region's displaced population.
- In Afghanistan the number of IDPs increased from at least 631,000 to at least 805,400.
- The figure for India increased from at least 526,000 to at least 853,900 as a result of inter-communal and NSAG violence.
- Displacement in the region is driven by armed conflict and generalised violence, such as inter-communal clashes and dispute over land. Members of minority groups are often discriminated against during their displacement.

South-east Asia

New displacement: at least 134'086

Cumulative displacement: at least 854'900

- The figure is down 4 % from 887,000 on the previous year. The decline reflects an overall trend in the region.
- There were 65% fewer IDPs than in 2013. This was mainly the result of a reduction in the number and intensity of violent incidents, particularly in Myanmar and the Philippines.

- Around 95% of the region's IDPs are concentrated in three countries. Myanmar has 645,300, Indonesia at least 84,000 and the Philippines 77,700.
- Around 35,000 people remain displaced in Thailand and 7,500 in Papua New Guinea.
- The majority of south-east Asia's IDPs live in protracted displacement. Some have been displaced for up to 15 years and few were able to return, integrate locally or settle elsewhere during 2014.

Internal displacement in a changing world

Inequality is on the rise, creating extreme disparities in wealth, education and other areas of human development. This has led to increased marginalisation of certain geographic areas, typically those far from political and economic capitals and the rising up of formerly repressed sectors of society seeking greater independence, power and control.

Increasing inequality and social frustration form the backdrop to the emergence and expansion of a growing array of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and people throughout the world are fleeing the activities of such groups, from ISIL in the Middle East, Boko Haram in west Africa and al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa.

Today's armed conflicts put civilians in harm's way as never before, the result of an abundant flow of weapons, warring parties' failure to respect the rules of international humanitarian law and the increasingly asymmetrical nature of conflict.

On top of this, the world's population is set to reach 9.6 billion by 2050. This growth combined with rising inequality, lack of democratic representation and competition for territory and resources has particularly marginalised religious, ethnic and tribal minorities, who make up a significant proportion of the displaced populations in numerous countries monitored by IDMC.

Countries where new displacement took place in 2014 were among the most economically vulnerable and least able to cope with crisis. When displacement takes place in less economically developed states, they are unlikely to have the resources and capacity to respond to IDPs' short-term needs, let alone invest in longer-term solutions.

Conflict in one country can have regional implications, creating a "domino effect" on its neighbours. The phenomenon has been visible in the Middle East since 2011, and more recently in Nigeria where its internal conflict spilled over and caused internal displacement in Cameroon and Niger in 2014.

As displaced populations become ever more dispersed in areas where it is harder for humanitarians to reach them, the task of assisting them increasingly falls to their host communities. Such an arrangement may be manageable in the short term, but over time IDPs may "outstay their welcome", putting additional pressure on already scarce resources.

Protracted displacement

In 2014, there were people living in displacement for ten years or more in nearly 90 per cent of the 60 countries and territories we monitored. More than 80% of IDPs forced to flee again in 2014 did so to escape further conflict or generalised violence in their places of refuge, as in CAR, DRC, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.

The majority of protracted displacement is the result of a failure to anchor IDPs' return, local integration or settlement elsewhere. In one in five cases, governance failures by absent states were also a major factor, as seen in CAR, South Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan.

There is a need to consider the links between protracted displacement and political crises, and to distinguish between governments' inability and governments' unwillingness to resolve it.

Displacement can also be prolonged by a strong government's deliberate politicisation of the issue or its refusal to enter into the formal resolution of a crisis. Governments' unwillingness to provide solutions often stems from the same logic that triggered displacement in the first place.

Repeated cycles of displacement make IDPs' circumstances, needs and vulnerabilities more complex and acute. Many IDPs living in protracted displacement find that international attention declines over time, leaving them neglected by donors, the media and regional and international responders.

Crises often reveal underlying structural challenges within a country, particularly when the displacement they cause becomes protracted, and potentially creates a feedback loop that traps states and their citizens in a spiral of increasing vulnerability.

The very existence of protracted displacement is evidence that approaches to durable solutions have largely failed.

Methodological challenges in data collection

This year we monitored 60 countries and territories. Changes in the way our sources collect and analyse their data led to dramatic adjustments in our estimates in 2014. In Côte d'Ivoire where a profiling exercise was conducted, we reported a four-fold increase in our estimate. In Nigeria, international support improved the national capacity to collect information, leading us to reduce our cumulative estimate by 70%.

Discrepancies in the way IDPs are counted from country to country affect tallies. For example in Colombia, the country with the second-largest displaced population in the world, IDPs are recorded in an official registry. Those who have achieved durable solutions or died in displacement are never deregistered, leading to an ever-growing number.

Data on IDPs tends to focus on those living in camps, camp-like settings and collective centres, who make up only a small fraction of the displaced population. Increasing numbers of IDPs also flee to urban areas where they are largely invisible among the urban poor, and these two factors mean that overall this report is likely to understate the true scale of displacement.

Quotes from IDPs

"The message was very clear; leave now or be killed." Abo Hassan , A Shiite farmer from the Sunni village of Al-Zaidan, Iraq

"The first time we were displaced was in 1993, following fighting between the armed groups...It was a hard time for us because we were hiding in the bush." Itunda, Kitshanga, North Kivu, DRC

"The war came to our towns and turned everything upside down." Luda Zdorovetz, 26 Dzerzhisk, Donetsk oblast Anton Leonenko, 27 Makeevka, Donetsk oblast, Ukraine

"We don't know what's going to happen next and not knowing makes it more difficult." Luda Zdorovetz, 26 Dzerzhisk, Donetsk oblast Anton Leonenko, 27 Makeevka, Donetsk oblast, Ukraine

"We have been in this care centre for almost four years, living in broken tents and with no one helping us." Pikas Kapi, Bulolo care centre, Bulolo town, Morobe province Papua New Guinea

"The government doesn't care about us and would prefer us all to leave this place, but it's our home." Pikas Kapi Bulolo care centre, Bulolo town, Morobe province Papua New Guinea

"We bury so many babies who die from the cold, I've lost count. Maybe around 20 every winter. " Wali Khan Kabul informal settlements: Kart-e-Naw NRC Afghanistan