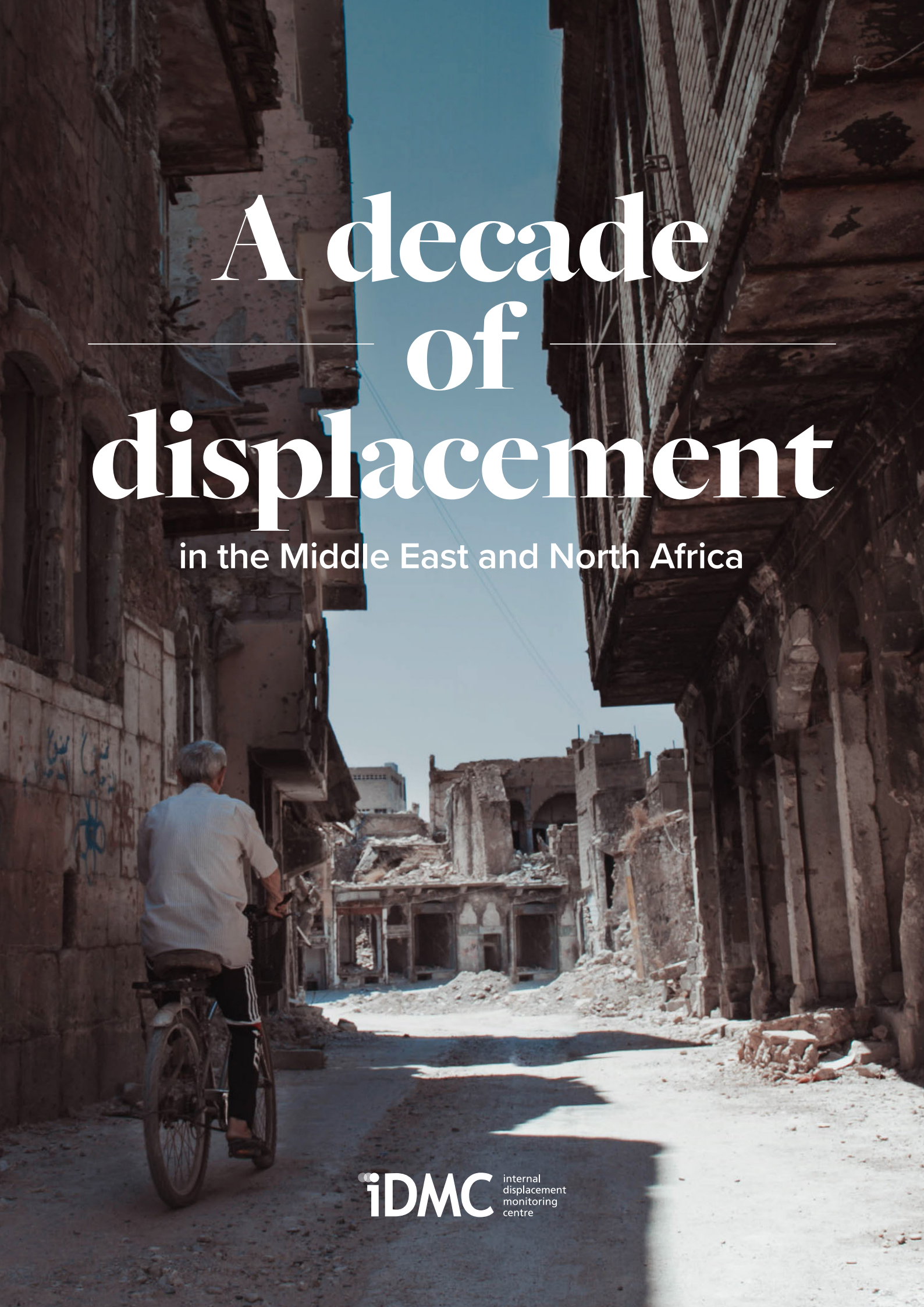
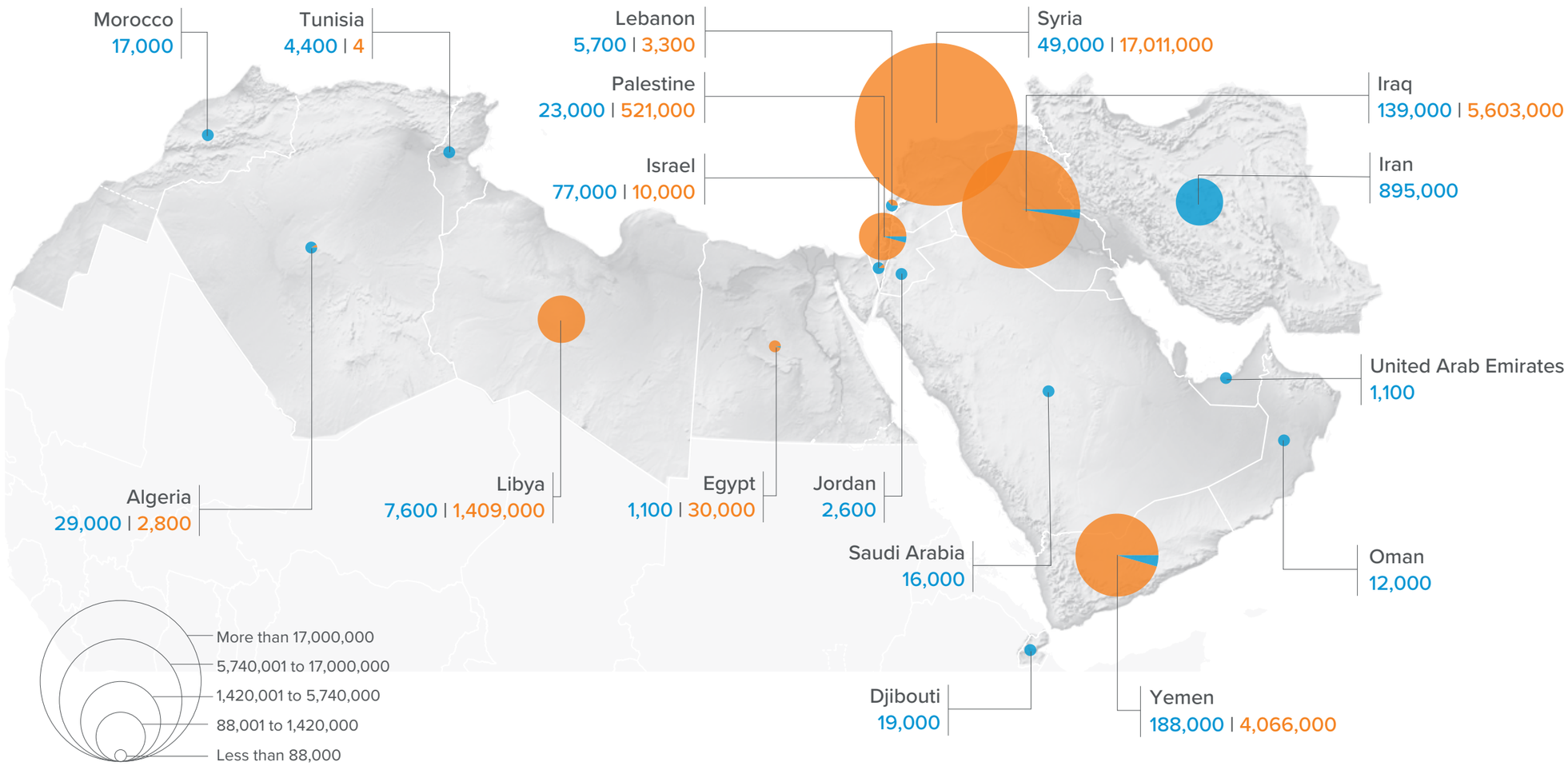
A decade of displacement

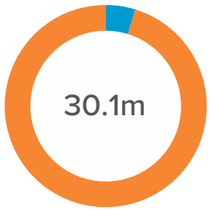
in the Middle East and North Africa



iDMC internal displacement monitoring centre

New displacements by conflict and disasters between 2010 and 2019

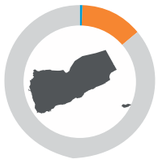




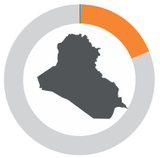
Total

1,487,000 New displacements - disasters | 28,656,000 New displacements - conflict

Syria
49,000 | 17,011,000
(56.6% of the total figure)



Yemen
188,000 | 4,066,000
(14.1% of the total figure)



Iraq
139,000 | 5,603,000
(19% of the total figure)

Libya
7,600 | 1,409,000
(4.7% of the total figure)

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

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Cover photo: A man riding his bicycle in Mosul Old City. Throughout Iraq, many internally displaced people (IDPs) are returning, and there has been an overall decrease in new displacements for the last two years. Despite the challenges, durable solutions are within reach, Alan Ayoubi/ NRC, 2019

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A girl is seen near a submerged field after flash floods hit the Sistan and Baluchestan Provinces in Iran in late January 2020. Photo by Reza Adeli/ Anadolu Agency via Getty Images, January 2020

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Idlib remains one of the governorates most affected by internal displacement in Syria. HFO project/OCHA, January 2020

Foreword

When the Arab Spring protests broke out across the Middle East and North Africa a decade ago, the region was home to more than 3.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs). The figure has more than tripled since as a result of civil wars, localised conflicts and disasters. We recorded as many as 12.4 million IDPs in MENA as of the end of 2019, making the region the second-most affected by internal displacement globally. If refugees and asylum seekers were to be added to the figure, the number of forcibly displaced people would come close to the populations of Bahrain, Jordan, Oman and Qatar combined.

Beyond the hard data, the increasingly chronic and protracted nature of displacement in MENA should be a serious cause for concern. Millions of IDPs a year have had to flee for a second and even a third time, creating a downward spiral of vulnerability that only serves to further prolong their displacement.

Few of the countries currently affected by displacement in MENA have policies that support IDPs' protection, assistance and durable solutions. In those that do, implementation has not been fast enough to cope with the growing challenges brought on by displacement. The spillover effects of these crises on IDPs, host communities and countries' broader social and economic wellbeing have not been comprehensively assessed, but it could easily be argued that an entire generation has been blighted and that the impacts of displacement on such a scale will stretch well into the future.

We are publishing a report dedicated to MENA for the first time, with the objective of taking stock of the scale of conflict displacement since the Arab Spring protests broke out. The report also examines disaster displacement in the region, something that has been overshadowed by the prevalence of conflict. It shows too how conflict and disasters are becoming increasingly intertwined, with significant implications for how peacebuilding, disaster risk reduction and durable solutions efforts need to be aligned to support IDPs in putting an end to their displacement.

If we want those most affected by displacement in MENA to break what has become a vicious circle of fragility and risk and to thrive, we need to act jointly and we need to act now. At IDMC, we believe that robust evidence on the scale, risk and impacts of displacement is the bedrock for discussions about solutions. When solid data is complemented with greater political commitment and more human and financial resources, positive change can occur.

Ten years after the Arab Spring, such discussions are much needed. We remain committed to supporting our national and international partners in strengthening the knowledge base, and providing them with reliable information and analysis to support policy development and interventions that help IDPs bring their displacement to a sustainable end and re-establish fulfilling and productive lives.

Alexandra Bilak
Director of IDMC

Photo credit: NRC/Jordan

Key messages

1

Ten years ago, the Arab Spring reshaped MENA's political, social and economic landscape. Political upheaval led to civil wars that together triggered an average of **2.9 million new internal displacements a year**, a third of the global figure, between 2010 and 2019.

2

Failed peace deals and broken ceasefires extended the violence, making the region's displacement among the most protracted in the world. **About 12.4 million people were still living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence at the end of 2019.** Figures have more than tripled in ten years, making MENA the second-most affected region after sub-Saharan Africa.

3

IDPs account for nearly 3% of MENA's total population. At least another 7.8 million people had fled abroad as refugees or asylum seekers by the end of 2019. The scale of both internal and cross-border displacement is unprecedented in some countries. Half of Syria's pre-war population has been displaced at least once.

4

Foreign interventions, the presence of numerous armed groups and the destruction of housing and basic services in urban areas have all contributed to prolonging displacement. **Greater political commitment from governments and the international community is needed to achieve peace and stability.** The bombing and shelling of cities must stop. It would considerably reduce internal displacement and allow people to return, which is essential to reactivating local economies, reconstruction and the achievement of durable solutions.

5

Disasters triggered at least 1.5 million new internal displacements in MENA over the past decade, more than half of them the result of floods. The region is mostly arid, and when it rains poor soil absorption capacity and the lack of adequate drainage systems often cause riverine, flash and urban floods. Our disaster displacement risk model suggests that nearly 400,000 people in MENA could be displaced by riverine floods in any given year in the future.

6

By investing in better data on displacement associated with disasters, including slow-onset events and the effects of climate change, countries can design more effective disaster risk reduction, preparedness and recovery plans.

7

The drivers and impacts of conflict and disaster displacement have become increasingly intertwined. Many IDPs taking refuge from conflict and violence have been pushed into secondary or tertiary displacement by floods and landslides.

Al Hol camp in Hasakeh governorate in Syria is home to more than 70,000 people of which more than 90% are women and children, Halldorsson/OCHA, 16 June 2019

8

The economic impacts of displacement in MENA are among the heaviest in the world. We estimate that the average cost per person for a year of displacement is $623, nearly double the global average of $390. That equates to an **overall economic cost of nearly $8 billion,** 40 per cent of our global estimate. This represents a huge additional burden for governments already struggling to provide basic services and maintain stability.

9

Around 6.3 million women and girls were living in internal displacement in MENA at the end of 2019. More than five million IDPs, and about 800,000 were over 60. Our initial disaggregated estimates provide a useful snapshot of how displacement affects different groups, but there are persistent data gaps. These must be addressed, and investing in the capacity to collect, store and analyse data beyond headcounts is imperative. Governments and the humanitarian community need data disaggregated by sex, age and other characteristics and that captures small-scale displacement events.

10

Governments also need information that allows them to assess the duration and chronic nature of displacement and how internal displacement relates to cross-border movements. Support for governments in developing and maintaining their monitoring systems would go a long way toward meeting this challenge.

11

Having reliable, timely and accurate data on the scale, duration, risk and impacts of internal displacement will be a key step in breaking the vicious cycle of instability and vulnerability in the region. More evidence and a solid baseline on displacement, as well as strengthened technical, human and financial capacity to monitor the phenomenon, will be vital for bolstering political commitment and driving action.

12

Identifying the practices, interventions and policy options that have been successful in reducing displacement and displacement risk will help collectively move from addressing problems to finding and advancing long-term solutions.

13

Peacebuilding and disaster risk reduction are prerequisites for the region's stability. Displaced people play a key role in this process, because only by supporting them in achieving durable solutions will governments and the international community be able to reignite economic activity in destroyed urban centres, rebuild the social fabric of communities that have been torn apart, and achieve prosperity and wellbeing. **In addressing the significant scale and severity of internal displacement head-on, MENA countries would be investing in no-regrets pathways toward sustainable peace and development.**

Introduction

On 17 December 2010, a young vendor of fruits and vegetables in Sidi Bouzid town, Tunisia set himself on fire after the police confiscated his merchandise. Several weeks of demonstrations followed, led mostly by young people, against corruption, unemployment, police repression and inequality. The wave of protests then spread across almost every country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and became known as the Arab Spring.

Ten years later, several countries in the region are in turmoil. Many, including Yemen, Libya and Syria, are devastated by nearly a decade of conflict that has driven a humanitarian crisis characterised by high levels of internal displacement and refugee flows. What seemed to be hope for a better future has quickly turned into a nightmare for people who have been forced into displacement and exile and who are still living in precarious conditions in displacement camps or in informal urban areas, knowing little but war. Ongoing instability, conflict and violence has characterized other countries like Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon for a long time as a result of foreign interventions, localized ethnic and religious tensions, and an overall situation of political volatility.

It is not only insecurity and conflict that have made displacement cyclical and protracted in recent years, however. Disasters, often overlooked, also trigger new and secondary displacement and contribute to making it protracted. In countries such as Syria and Yemen, floods, storms, and harsh winter conditions continually push people into secondary displacement, exacerbating their vulnerabilities and trapping them in poverty.

The reality of the MENA region is complex. Countries are highly prone to disasters, including slow-onset processes such as desertification and drought, as well as sudden-onset hazards such as floods and storms. Their capacity to cope with those events is severely diminished by years of violence, which have damaged or destroyed their infrastructure and eroded their ability to prepare and respond.

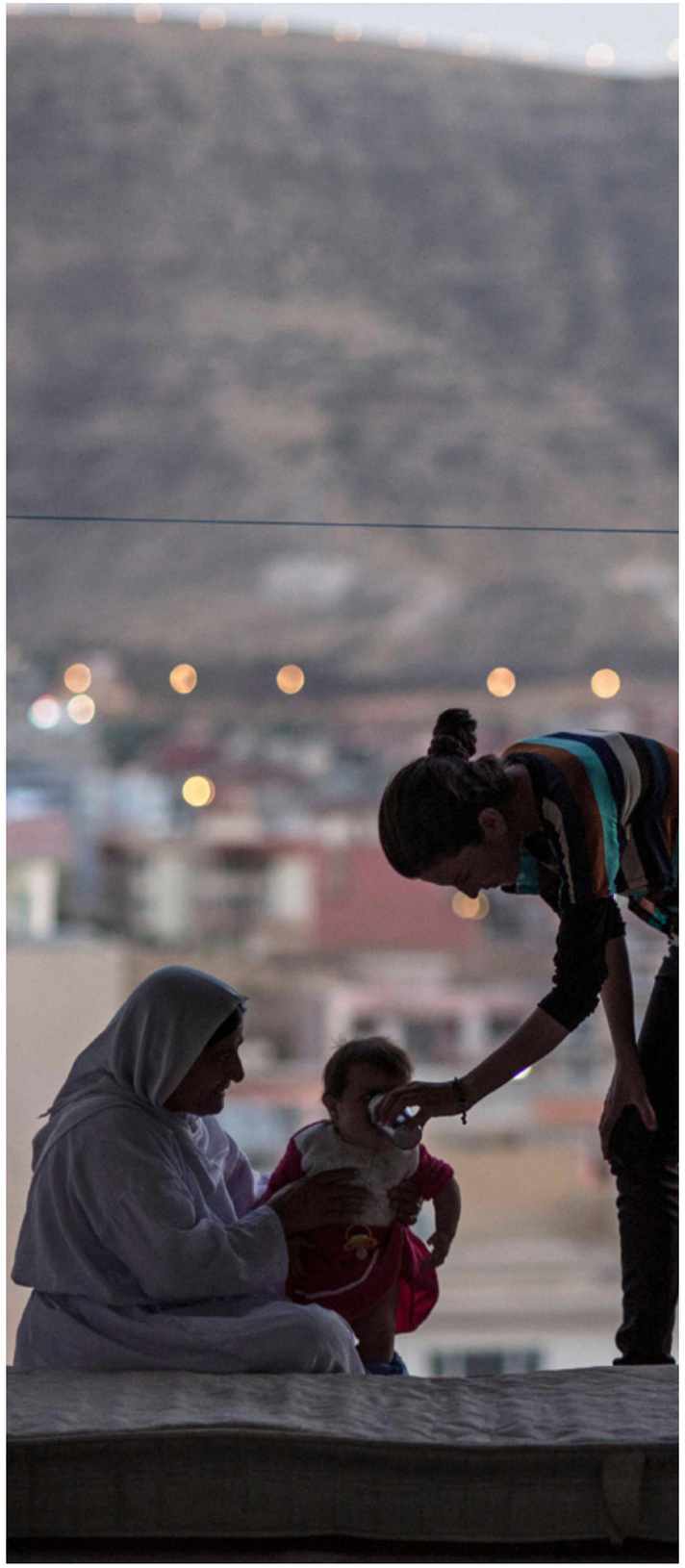
Forced displacement has been a common denominator and one of the most visible and negative impacts of the crises affecting the MENA region. In some countries, the scale of both internal and cross-border displacement has been unprecedented. About 12.4 million people were living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence across the MENA region at the end of 2019, making it the second most affected region globally after sub-Saharan Africa. More than 7.8 million people have sought refuge abroad, either as refugees or asylum seekers. Combined, the total population of displaced people currently make up more than four per cent of the region's population.[1]

Conflict and violence have reversed development gains achieved in many countries during the 1990s and 2000s.[2] Disaster risk reduction, sustainable development and peacebuilding initiatives are still being poorly implemented because of persistent insecurity. Entire families and communities have seen their lives disrupted by war and displacement, with women and children affected disproportionately.[3]

Safety and security issues and constraints on movement continue to keep internally displaced people (IDPs) from achieving durable solutions. Widespread destruction of urban infrastructure and unexploded ordnance impede returns. This has acted as a brake on the reactivation of local economies. It is also illustrative of how the negative impacts of displacement have become the drivers of further instability and displacement risk.

The high levels of displacement put into question the success of crisis prevention and response measures. Lack of coherence and coordination across humanitarian, development, and disaster risk reduction initiatives, short-term and limited funding, and the lack of solid baseline data to assess the true scope and scale of internal displacement, are among the factors that, as a priority, need to be addressed.

Not everything is bleak, however. Good practices also exist across the region that can be extrapolated and adapted to different contexts. These include the development of more reliable data collection systems and platforms for collaboration and information exchange; the opening of political dialogue; and the development of policies on returns and other forms of durable solutions that have helped IDPs put an end to their displacement. Some of these initiatives have been led by governments in affected countries, opening a window of opportunity to re-think and improve current ways of working.



Winter compounded the already dire situation in an informal camp set up as a result of displacement in Dahuk, Iraq.
Iason Athanasiadis/OCHA, 15 September 2014

About this report

The Middle East and North Africa report on internal displacement, the first of its kind, delves into the scale, drivers, patterns and impacts of internal displacement in MENA. It offers a unique insight into historical and current displacement dynamics and provides a much-needed baseline for action on internal displacement in the region. By unpacking the current challenges and the potential solutions to internal displacement in the region, it serves as a basis for a renewed look into an old challenge with regional and global repercussions.

The report is divided in two main parts. Part 1 presents the trends and patterns of internal displacement associated with conflict, violence and disasters during the past decade. Part 2 discusses the current challenges in monitoring and reporting in the region, including the chronic nature of displacement, its economic and social impacts, and its relationship with cross-border and return movements. It also presents good practices and recommendations for the next decade, taking into account the nexus between conflict, disasters and displacement.

How to read the figures

New displacements correspond to the estimated number of internal displacement movements to have taken place during the year. Figures include individuals who have been displaced more than once. In this sense, the number of new displacements does not equal the number of people displaced during the year.

Total number of IDPs corresponds to the total number of people living in internal displacement as of 31 December 2019.

About the regional breakdown

This report defines the MENA region based on the World Bank's regional division.[4] It includes Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Palestine (West Bank and Gaza) and Yemen. The boundaries, names and designations used in this report do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IDMC and are presented solely for the purposes of illustration and analysis. The regional division is also selected in order to allow comparisons with other social and economic indicators available in the World Bank data portal.[5]

Eight years after the Libyan uprising and the downfall of the Gaddafi regime, the path towards peace and stability remains elusive and about 451,000 people remain internally displaced, Giles Clarke/OCHA, January 2019

Part

1

Monitoring displacement over the last decade

People returning to the Old City of Mosul, Tom Peyre-Costa/NRC, June 2018

Conflict and Violence

Conflict and violence triggered most of the internal displacement in MENA between 2010 and 2019, with an annual average of 2.9 million new displacements, compared with 149,000 for disasters. Around 12.4 million people were displaced by conflict and violence at the end of 2019. A broad range of factors, including armed conflict, the widespread destruction of housing and infrastructure, the presence of explosive remnants of war, overall insecurity and a lack of basic services continue to trigger new displacement and prevent IDPs from achieving durable solutions.

Chronic vulnerability and the risk of displacement in many countries are rooted in a complex set of social, economic and political factors that date back decades and even centuries. The Arab Spring, however, brought about a major shift in conflict and displacement dynamics in the region. Since it began in late 2010, there has been a significant increase in internal displacement. Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya are the most affected countries. MENA accounted for more than a third of the new conflict displacements recorded globally during the last decade (see Figure 1).

Several national crises have had a spill-over effect on neighbouring countries. Jordan and Lebanon have hosted Palestinian refugees for decades, but after the conflict in Syria broke out their combined refugee population increased by at least 1.3 million.[6] Both countries face difficult economic situations, and their capacity to respond has been undermined as a result. Many refugees still live in precarious shelters, making them vulnerable to secondary displacement when disasters strike.[7]

Each country has unique complexities that influence displacement trends, but there are cross-cutting factors that explain the changing dynamics of conflict, violence and displacement in the region as a whole. The following list is not exhaustive, but provides an overview of some of the key factors at play.

Foreign interventions

An increasing number of foreign actors have intervened directly or indirectly in a number of the region's conflicts. Be it through financial or military support, such interventions continue to play a role in making these conflicts more complex, triggering new displacement and making the phenomenon more protracted.

Russia intervened militarily in Syria in 2015 to fight the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other extremist groups. This represented a major shift in the distribution of forces. Bashar al-Assad's government had been losing large swathes of territory, and the Russian air force helped him to win most of it back, pushing non-state armed groups into increasingly smaller and crowded areas.[8] Assad's forces also captured places that had been under long-term siege, such as eastern Ghouta and eastern Aleppo.

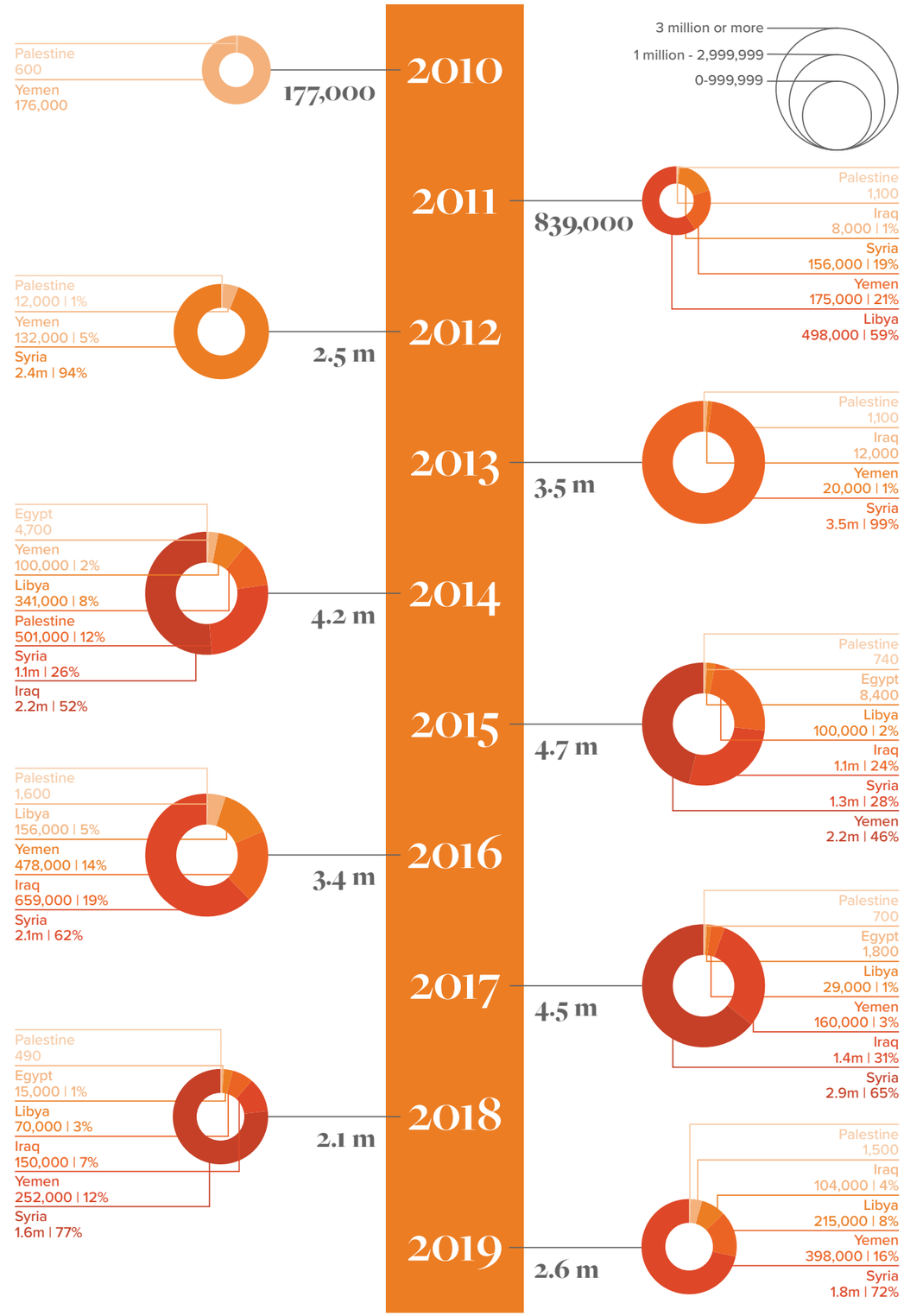
The offensives were accompanied by indiscriminate bombing and other violations of international humanitarian law. As places under siege fell between 2016 and 2018, hundreds of thousands of people fled, many of them to the shrinking areas held by non-state armed groups. There they faced dire humanitarian conditions.[9] Similar mass displacements were reported during offensives in the governorates of Dara'a, Quneitra, Hama and Idlib.[10]

When NATO forces intervened in Libya in 2011 in response to human rights violations by Muammar Gaddafi's forces, an estimated 500,000 people fled internally and tens of thousands abroad.[11] The country has experienced an increasing number of direct and indirect foreign interventions. The failed peace process of 2019 culminated in renewed fighting involving additional actors.

Despite an arms embargo in place since 2011, evidence shows that Russia, the UAE and Egypt have continued to provide military support to Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), which controls the eastern parts of the country.[12] Turkey provided military assistance to the forces of the UN-backed Government of the National Accord (GNA) in early 2020 to counter that support. The GNA was able to keep control of Tripoli and recapture Tarhuna as a result, pushing about 30,000 people into displacement.[13]

The intensified fighting that followed the Saudi-led coalition's entry into Yemen's conflict in 2015 gave the country the highest number of new displacements in the world that

Figure 1: New displacements by conflict in MENA (2010-2019)



Countries are shown only when the total new displacements value between 2010-2019 exceeds 20,000.

year.[14] The coalition's bombings and airstrikes have continued to trigger unprecedented displacement in subsequent years. They have caused the bulk of civilian casualties and the destruction of many homes and infrastructure.

The living conditions of those displaced have deteriorated as a result, and their prospects for durable solutions have become more elusive. The UAE has more recently provided military support to the Southern Transitional Council, the main separatist organisation in Yemen. This has caused further political fragmentation and triggered many of the new displacements in the south of the country in 2019.[15]

These examples are only a fraction of the complex set of national, regional and global geopolitical dynamics that continue to fuel conflict in MENA and overshadow efforts to advance political dialogue, peacebuilding and durable solutions for both IDPs and refugees.

Urban warfare

Pictures of entire cities destroyed by bombing and airstrikes, of people living in damaged and destroyed homes and of IDPs fleeing months of urban siege became common across the region during the last decade. The many clashes in major urban areas and the widespread damage and destruction of housing and basic services explain why new displacement figures have been, and remain, so high. They also explain why MENA has the second highest number of people living in internal displacement globally.

The death toll from urban conflict in Iraq and Syria is eight times higher than in non-urban areas.[16] In cities such as Hodeida in Yemen and Raqqa in Syria, airstrikes and mortar fire displaced hundreds of thousands of people. The cumulative effects of the disruption of basic services and the destruction of homes, schools, hospitals, electricity plants, water mains and other infrastructure create major barriers to people's return.[17]

These urban conflicts have specific displacement patterns. In some cases, such as the battle for Mosul in Iraq, people move to safer neighbourhoods within the same city. In other places, such as eastern Ghouta, people live in bunkers while they wait for the fighting to end.[18]

Warring parties have also sought to exert territorial control by expelling political, ethnic and religious groups, potentially engendering discrimination and human rights violations. Residents were segregated and their previously peaceful coexistence shattered in cities including Aleppo and Baghdad. This rupturing of social cohesion fuels inequality and makes the prospects for durable solutions more remote.[19]

Some urban conflicts are ongoing. Where they have concluded or stabilised, however, the difficulties of rebuilding and recovery impede IDPs' achievement of durable solutions. The reconstruction of cities will be extremely expensive and will take many years after the wars end, prolonging the displacement of former inhabitants.[20]

Urban conflict also creates challenges in terms of housing, land and property rights. As the Syrian government retakes control of towns and cities, reconstruction will begin. Evidence suggests, however, that segregation and displacement are being used to consolidate the state's authority and reward its supporters. New housing, land and property laws have also been passed that raise questions about how IDPs and other groups will be included in the reconstruction process.[21]

Disasters add another complication. When they hit urban areas, people can be forced to move again, further undermining their resilience. When flooding hit Sana'a in August 2020, many people already displaced by conflict sought shelter in substandard housing in other flood-prone areas. More recent floods have rendered most of these settlements uninhabitable, leaving the families homeless again.[22]

Ethnic, tribal and religious affiliations

Apart from Sunni Arabs, Sunni Kurds and Shia Arabs, the three main groups, MENA is home to a wide variety of ethnic and religious minorities. The affiliations of these minorities have influenced social, political and economic dynamics for centuries. They have played an important role in the way conflict and violence have unfolded and in the patterns of displacement and return movements in recent years.

Gaddafi used Libya's tribal structure to assert his control over the country. From a small tribe himself, he used the system to undermine groups he considered too powerful while building strategic alliances with others.[23] For example, he used the Tawergha tribe to mitigate the influence of the nearby town of Misrata.[24] Once he was ousted in 2011, the entire population of Tawergha, of around 40,000 people, was forcibly displaced as collective punishment for its support to Gaddafi.[25] Despite reconciliation agreements, the deliberate destruction of the town and its infrastructure and a pervasive feeling of insecurity have kept all but a few Tawerghans from returning.[26]

Syria's religious and ethnic composition has also influenced displacement patterns in the country's conflict. When the war broke out, Alawites and other minorities fled for protection and assistance to coastal areas where their communities were already established. Religious and ethnic affiliations also determined whether people fled internally or across borders. Unlike the Sunnis and Alawites, Christians did not have community or tribal ties that might provide refuge, making them more likely to flee abroad than move to displacement camps. Nearly half of Syria's Christians did so between 2011 and 2015.[27]

Discrimination has flared between tribal groups in Yemen as the conflict continues and resources are depleted. IDPs perceived as northerners have been denied entry to the southern region, and vice versa.[28] After Ansar Allah launched an attack on the internationally-recognised government in August 2019, southern militias began rounding up people of northern origin in Aden, Lahj and Abyan governorates and expelling them to Taiz. This increased protection concerns for northerners living in the south.[29] Fear of discrimination may also prevent people from moving from the frontlines to safer locations inhabited by a different tribal community.[30]

The tradition of tribes resolving tensions, however, has also prevented escalation in some places. In Mahrah governorate, local tribes have helped curtail political violence and established a peace committee to prevent further Saudi military interventions in the area.[31]

Ethnic and religious affiliations influence return patterns too. Turkey intervened militarily in northern Syria in October 2019 to create a "safe zone" where Syrian refugees could be returned. This triggered more than 220,000 internal displacements, mostly from Kurdish border towns. Others fled across borders.[32] Many refugees and IDPs from other ethnic backgrounds are now reluctant to be repatriated to an area which is home mostly to people of Kurdish origin.[33]

In neighbouring Iraq, rivalries among communities of different ethno-religious and tribal backgrounds are common, and conflict and displacement has weakened the country's fragile social cohesion.[34] Movement restrictions and other controls have been imposed according to IDPs' ethnic and religious identity. Sunni families, who are often perceived as affiliated with ISIL, face restrictions on their freedom of movement and access to services.[35] IDPs' ethnic and religious background also plays a role in how they integrate into host areas and whether they are able to achieve durable solutions.[36]

Extremism

Whether because of political and social divisions, religious affiliations or government and foreign interventions, many non-state groups have become increasingly radicalised in recent years, evolving into organised military structures. Al-Qaeda, ISIL and groups related to them have been widely condemned for carrying out attacks against civilians in violation of international law.[37] The extreme levels of brutality associated with such attacks have contributed to mass population movements both within and across borders.

ISIL has committed ethnic cleansing and genocide in Syria and Iraq, and its emergence in Syria has created a deep sectarian divide.[38] Non-Sunni Muslims and other political and religious minorities have been forced to flee ISIL-controlled territories and seek protection in other parts of the country. Kurds represented about 20 per cent of Raqqa's population before ISIL took over, but the latter's offensive forced nearly all of them to flee to Kurdish-held areas further north.[39]

When ISIL attacked the Sinjar area of Iraq inhabited by the Yazidi minority in 2014, all of the 400,000 people living there were either displaced, captured or killed.[40] More than 200,000 Yazidis were still displaced as of August 2020, most of them living in camps. Returns have increased since June 2020, but the situation in Sinjar remains difficult. ISIL has destroyed up to 80 per cent of the public infrastructure and 70 per cent of the homes in the area.[41]

In Yemen, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and other armed groups affiliated with ISIL have taken advantage of the security vacuum, growing sectarianism and a burgeoning war economy to extend and consolidate their positions in the southern governorates of Al-Bayda and Hadramaut.[42] Figures are hard to obtain, but armed attacks and repeated human rights violations have triggered displacement, as have foreign military interventions launched in response. As militias aggravate social divisions and impede the possibility of peace, IDPs' chances of achieving durable solutions become more remote.[43]

Injured man standing in his destroyed house in Jabalya refugee camp, Emad Badwan, 29 July 2014

Syria

The Arab Spring was the main trigger of Syria's conflict, but evidence shows that an extended period of drought and the steady decline of the country's economy were among the underlying factors that led to civil unrest in 2011 (see the Syria Spotlight, p. 60). The civil movement never achieved its goal of changing the government and President Assad is still in power, fighting against several non-state armed groups that have occupied large swathes of the country's territory.

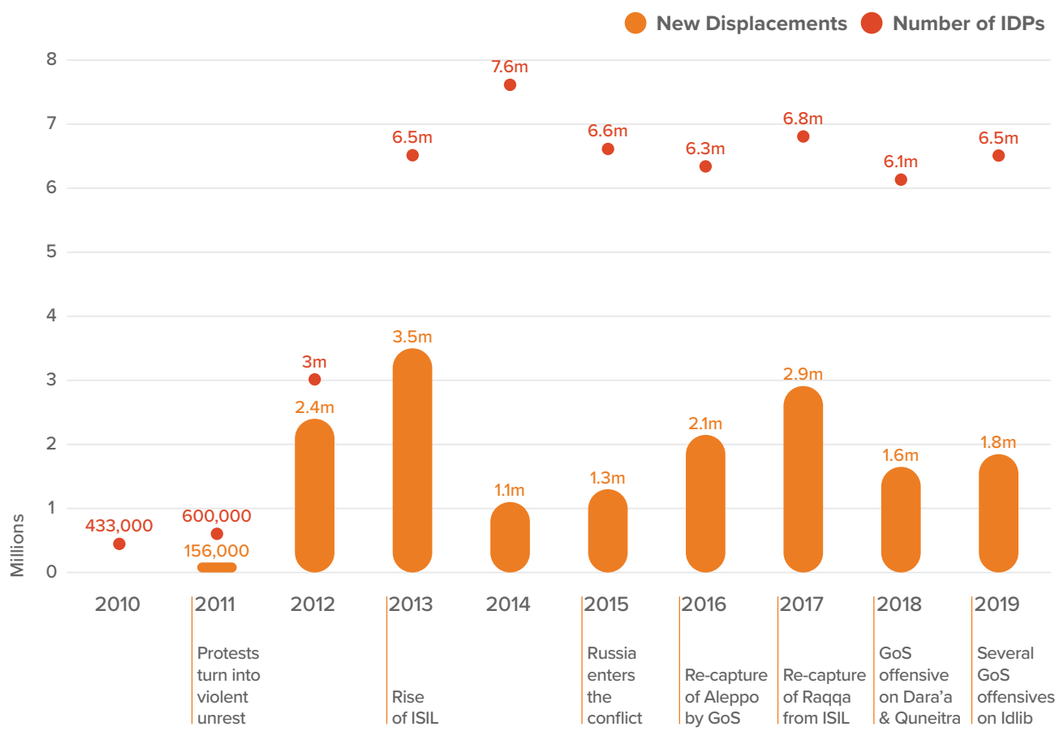
The conflict's toll on civilians has been unprecedented, and more than half of the country's pre-war population has been displaced internally or across borders. As the conflict entered its tenth year, around 6.5 million people were living in internal displacement, the highest figure in the world. Around 5.6 million Syrian refugees were living abroad.[44]

There are around 6.5 million IDPs in Syria, the highest number in the world

Internal and cross-border displacement has had a significant impact on the country's demography. Some governorates, such as Raqqa, Al Hasakeh and Deir-ez-Zor, have been depopulated, losing 53, 27 and 28 per cent of their populations respectively. Others have experienced a large inflow of people. The population of Idlib, for example, has increased by 39 per cent and about 70 per cent of its inhabitants are now IDPs.[45]

Around 2.5 million Syrians were trapped in besieged areas at some point between 2012 and 2018.[46] People living under siege for months or in some cases even years were subjected to dire conditions, including shortages of drinking water, food and medicines. Once the sieges were lifted, many people fled. In eastern Ghouta, where about 400,000 people were trapped, more than 158,000 fled the area in a matter of weeks.[47]

Figure 2: New displacements and total number of IDPs by conflict and violence in Syria (2010-2019)



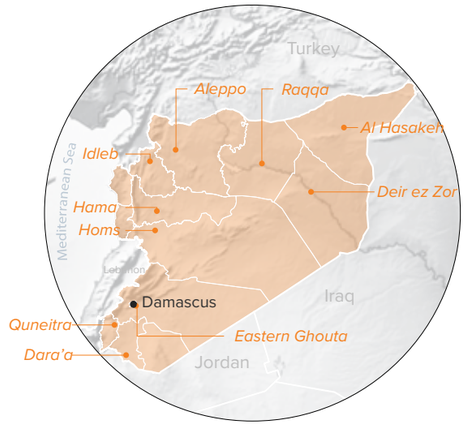
The first three years of the war brought an unprecedented increase in internal displacement. Bombardments and intense clashes between armed opposition groups and the government led to 156,000 new displacements, mostly inIdlib and Homs governorates in 2011.[48] As the Syrian opposition seized swathes of territory during 2012, Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps deployed to support the Assad government. More than 3.5 million displacements were recorded in 2013, the highest annual figure of the conflict.

Islamist movements became more prominent in 2013 and reached full strength in 2014 with the territorial expansion of ISIL across Iraq and Syria. The group's influence led to the establishment of a "caliphate" in Raqqa in mid-2014 and the occupation of about a third of Syrian territory. This prompted the US and five Arab countries to launch airstrikes against the group. The combination of ISIL attacks and the war against it drove hundreds of thousands of people from their homes, mostly in Raqqa, Deir ez Zor, Al Hasakeh and Homs governorates.[49]

The Syrian opposition began to be overtaken by radical Islamist groups, giving rise to a loose coalition known as Jaish al-Fatah, which took control of Idlib governorate in 2014. There were 7.6 million IDPs across the country as a whole by the end of 2014, the highest end-of-year figure on record worldwide.[50]

The government had lost most of the national territory to non-state armed groups by 2015. Russia entered the conflict that year, motivated by the fight against ISIL and regional economic and geopolitical interests. This not only changed the balance of power on the ground. It also triggered new waves of displacement. With military support of Russia, the Syrian army recaptured key urban centres in 2015 and 2016, including Syria's second city of Aleppo from Jaish al-Fatah. The eastern part of the city was almost completely depopulated during the offensive.[51]

Government forces continued to make territorial gains over the next two years, leading to another increase in new displacements. Around 1.3 million were recorded in 2015, 2.3 million in 2016 and 2.9 million in 2017. The government



• Capital city • Most affected areas

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and non-Islamist armed groups agreed a ceasefire in 2017, but it did not hold for long. As ISIL retreated from most of the Syrian territory it had occupied under intense bombing and shelling, hundreds of thousands of civilians fled. The battle to recapture Raqqa between November 2016 and September 2017 led to more than 300,000 new displacements, all but emptying the city.[52]

The last three years have been characterised by government offensives against non-state armed groups in the southern and north-eastern parts of the country. Displacement has been reduced to a few governorates. In areas that are still affected by conflict, however, there have been record flows. The June 2018 offensive on Dara'a and Quneitra governorates triggered more than 285,000 displacements, most of them over a period of two weeks.[53] This was the largest displacement event of the war up to early 2020, when the government offensive on Idlib governorate triggered nearly a million displacements over three months. Most of those displaced fled to overcrowded camps in shrinking areas controlled by non-state armed groups.[54]

The situation in Syria is critical, and IDPs face acute needs. More than 200,000 people displaced by the recent offensive in Idlib returned between March and July 2020, but many areas of the governorate are destroyed and uninhabitable. Returnees struggle to access humanitarian assistance while they endure economic hardship and a volatile security situation.[55]

This has led to overcrowding in shelters, and repair and reconstruction is complicated by the high price of materials and services as well as ongoing insecurity. Families in 75 per cent of the communities where IDPs have returned in Idlib are reportedly unable to afford essential food items. Damage to infrastructure and the high price of trucking means that half of the communities are short of water.[56] IDPs have also reported being afraid to return to towns and villages the government has retaken. There is a well-documented record of government forces arbitrarily arresting, torturing and forcibly disappearing civilians from territories held by non-state armed groups.[57]

The country also has to deal with a deepening economic crisis and tougher US sanctions put in place in June 2020.[58] This has had a severe impact on IDPs.[59] Markets in Syria are heavily reliant on imported goods and cross-border movement with Turkey, and the steep devaluation of the Syrian pound has eroded people's purchasing power. Prices of basic necessities such as food, water and hygiene products have reached new highs each month since November 2019.

The situation has been further aggravated by restrictions on cross-border activities imposed because of Covid-19.[60] The price of a typical food basket increased 200 per cent in the first six months of 2020.[61] The prevalent insecurity, shrinking economy, unavailability of basic services and interference of foreign actors mean that there is still far to go before the conflict is resolved and IDPs are able to achieve durable solutions.

Idlib hosts the largest number of IDPs in Syria as of 2020. HFO project/OCHA, January 2020

Iraq

Iraq has a long history of internal displacement, rooted in sectarian and ethnic tensions and fed by decades of dictatorship, conflict, a foreign invasion and more recently the war against ISIL.

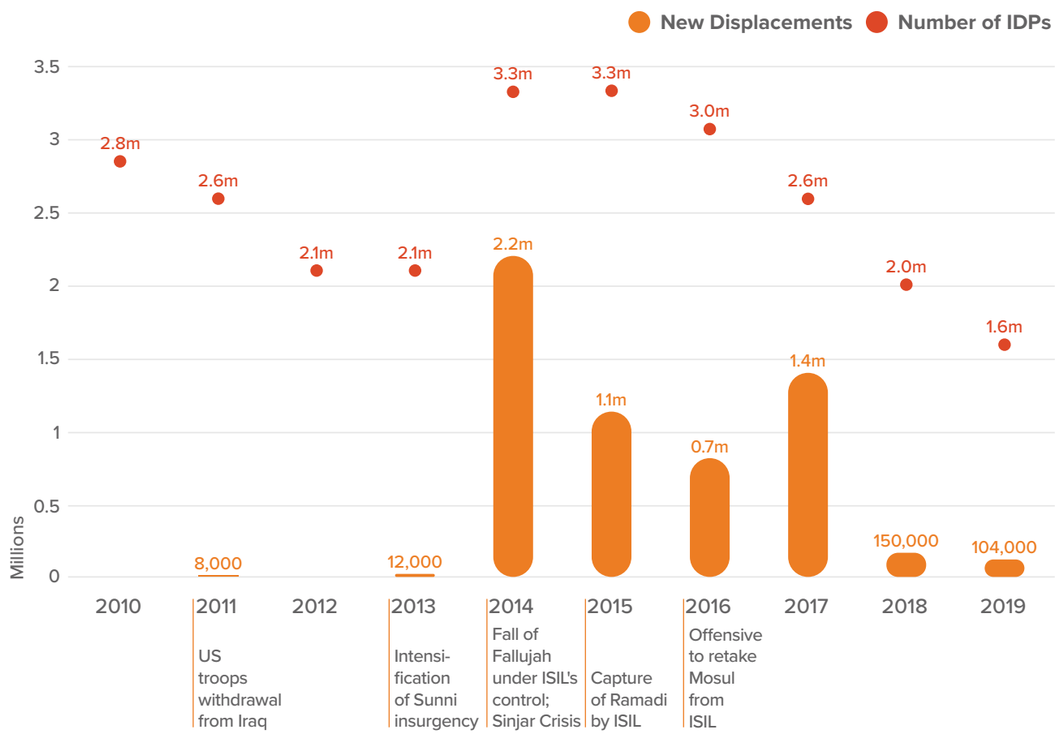
There were already 2.8 million IDPs across the country in 2010, most of them displaced during the US invasion. Sectarian violence and the persecution of minorities following the February 2006 bombing of the al-Askari mosque in Samarra, one of the country's holiest Shia shrines, also played a role.[62] The 2011 Arab Spring opened a new chapter, marked by unprecedented levels of displacement and one of the world's most acute humanitarian crises.[63]

As people took to the streets in February 2011 to demand more democracy and economic opportunity, government forces cracked down, sparking violence that spread quickly across the country. The initial protests were not necessarily linked to sectarian affiliation, but as instability increased during 2012 and 2013, sectarian divisions deepened and the Sunni insurgency intensified.[64] The number of new displacements increased from 8,000 in 2011 to 12,000 in 2013.

Islamic State in Iraq, which had evolved from al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2006, expanded during this period. The group changed its name to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in April 2013 and launched attacks that triggered mass displacement.[65] Having consolidated its territorial gains, ISIL claimed parts of Iraq and Syria as its "caliphate" in June 2014.[66]

ISIL's takeover of Falluja in January 2014, its offensive on Mosul in June, and the Sinjar crisis in August, led to Iraq recording more new displacements during the year than at any point in the last decade. As many as 2.2 million were recorded, mostly from areas that fell under ISIL control.[67]

Figure 3: New displacements and total number of IDPs by conflict and violence in Iraq (2010-2019)



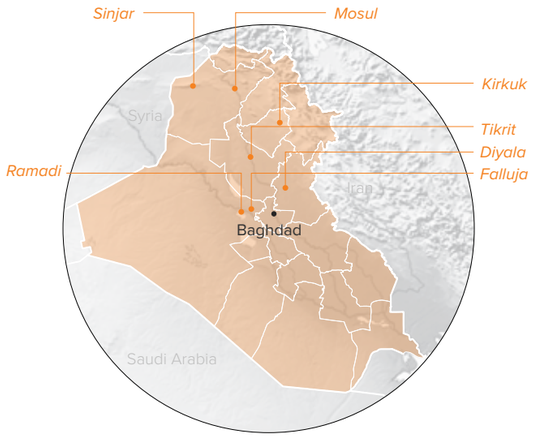
ISIL targeted certain religious and ethnic communities, including Christians, Shia Muslims, Yazidis, Kurds and Turkmen. These communities fled massacres, abductions, the destruction of property, forced marriages and the sexual enslavement of women.[68] They still suffer the impacts, especially the Yazidis, who have survived attacks perpetrated by ISIL that were recognised as genocide by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria.[69] By December 2014, the number of new conflict displacements in Iraq accounted for nearly 20 per cent of the world's total. With 3.3 million people living in displacement as of the end of the year, the country had the third highest figure globally after Syria and Colombia.[70]

Many militias grew in 2014 in the face of the immense threat ISIL posed. About 50 of them formed the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) after Iraq's most senior Shia clerk proclaimed a fatwa to take up arms against the group.[71] The prime minister officially recognised PMF as a way of defending the country, and the next two years were marked by continuous fighting between the Iraqi security forces and PMF against ISIL.

The Ramadi crisis, which erupted in April 2015 and ended with ISIL capturing the city in May, was among the most significant offensives in terms of displacement. More than 500,000 people fled their homes in Anbar governorate.[72] The largest offensive of the war, however, began in October 2016 and was launched to retake Mosul, which ISIL had seized two years earlier. By the end of 2016, 300,000 people were displaced along the so-called Mosul corridor, an area south of the city with several displacement camps in towns and cities in Ninewa governorate.[73]

Iraqi forces also made other significant gains during the year, retaking key areas including Diyala, Falluja, Ramadi and Tikrit. There were fewer displacements than in 2014, but the conflict still triggered 1.1 million new displacements in 2015 and 660,000 in 2016.[74]

Significant return movements began in 2015, the first since the birth of the ISIL insurgency. About 470,000 people had gone back to their home areas by the end of the year.[75] About a million returned the following year, including around 220,000 after the recapture of Falluja in June 2016.[76] There were, however, still more than three million IDPs in the country as of the end of the year, most of them in the Anbar, Baghdad, Kirkuk and Ninewa governorates.[77]



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The number of IDPs continued to decline in 2017, but there was an increase in new displacements to 1.4 million, the highest figure since the beginning of the ISIL insurgency. Most were triggered by offensives against the last ISIL strongholds, especially in Ninewa governorate. The retaking of Mosul in December 2017 led to the official declaration of ISIL's defeat.[78]

Clashes in October 2017 over the handover of Kirkuk and disputed areas of Diyala, Erbil, Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates from Kurdish to Iraqi forces triggered about 184,000 new displacements. Many only lasted a few days, but about 94,000 people were reported as still displaced ten months later.[79]

Tensions between Baghdad and the Kurdistan regional government over the status of these areas had been simmering for a long time, in part because of the importance of their oil fields. Kurdish forces had filled a security vacuum in Kirkuk since 2014, ultimately defeating ISIL in 2017 in collaboration with the Iraqi military. A Kurdish referendum in overwhelming favour of independence in September 2017, however, rekindled tensions and prompted Iraqi forces to move into the city. The federal government restored control of Kirkuk and most of the disputed areas by the end of October.[80] This came as a reminder of Iraq's complexity, in which longstanding disputes have repeatedly resurfaced once the struggle against a common enemy is over.[81]

As the conflict receded in late 2017, people continued to return home. Returns have outnumbered new displacements each year since, reflecting government encouragement and people's resilience in the face of one of the most intense conflicts this century.[82] The number of IDPs in Iraq fell from 2.6 million in 2017 to 2 million in 2018 and 1.6 million in 2019.

Humanitarian and development organisations operating in the country have increasingly focused on supporting returns that are voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable.[83] The government has also made considerable efforts to support IDPs and returnees in recent years. It has sought to achieve returns by focusing on material support, including transport to areas of origin, in-kind assistance in the initial phases of return, and return grants.[84]

It has also offered compensation for damaged property, injuries and deaths caused by ISIL.[85] Gaps remain in the initiative's implementation, however, because applying for and receiving compensation is lengthy and complicated. Only one per cent of applications had been accepted and none paid as of January 2020, though such compensation is essential in helping IDPs achieve durable solutions.[86]

There have also been difficulties in identifying and supporting alternative solutions to protracted displacement when returns are neither feasible nor preferable. Destruction, insecurity and instability in areas of origin often makes it difficult to make returns sustainable. Returns to some locations have been blocked, and there have been problems in community acceptance of some people, particularly those perceived to be affiliated with ISIL.[87]

All returnees are eligible for grants, but budget shortfalls means only a relatively small proportion have received them. Support for livelihoods, infrastructure repair, reconciliation and other initiatives necessary for sustainable returns is similarly limited. Many IDPs have no intention of returning, and they also require support, including greater efforts to identify their needs so they can integrate in their areas of displacement.[88]

The pace of returns has slowed in the past two years, but the government still began closing a number of camps in 2019 as part of its effort to return all IDPs to their places of origin. This complicated the situation for many IDPs, 70 per cent of whom had been displaced for more than three years.[89]

Persistent socioeconomic difficulties and political instability led to a new wave of large anti-government protests in October 2019. These echoed the demands of the Arab Spring and led to the resignation of the prime minister Adel Abdul Mehdi in November.[90] Insecurity persisted in 2020 and small-scale attacks against both government and civilian targets triggered new and secondary displacements. There have also been conflicts in neighbouring countries and tensions between the US and Iran, which have used Iraqi territory to conduct targeted attacks against each other.[91]

Measures to contain the Covid-19 pandemic have restricted the mobility of returnees and IDPs seeking to move between locations.[92] In some instances, the measures and the closure of camps have also triggered unanticipated secondary displacements. They have made it hard for IDPs to establish livelihoods and increased their vulnerabilities in urban and peri-urban areas where they face difficult conditions. There also have been important spill-over effects on host communities.[93] The Ministry of Planning, under the direction of the Prime Minister, is currently developing a national durable solutions plan.[94] The plan will be central for addressing the immediate and long-term challenges that IDPs may face. But more importantly, it will be critical to galvanize the progress made so far in addressing and reducing internal displacement in the country.

The closure of camps has triggered unanticipated secondary displacements and increased vulnerabilities

A displaced woman carrying a mattress in the muddy alleys of Hamam al Halil camp in Iraq. Without safe and sustainable returns, the 1.6 million displaced Iraqis are most likely to spend winter outside their homes. Tom Peyre-Costa/NRC, December 2018

Yemen

The crisis in Yemen is one of the world's most acute, with nearly 80 per cent of the population in need of humanitarian assistance.[95] Around 3.6 million people, or about 12 per cent of the population, were internally displaced as of the end of 2019. Unlike other major conflicts in the region, the situation in Yemen has not triggered large-scale cross-border movements. Fewer than 71,000 Yemenis were refugees and asylum seekers in 2019, most of them in the Horn of Africa.[96] Many more people may have wanted to flee, but physical, economic and social obstacles have prevented them from doing so.[97]

The conflict has its roots in long-standing political, economic and social tensions and divisions. Violence and displacement affected northern parts of the country in 2004, but the situation worsened considerably in 2011 during the Arab Spring when the president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, was ousted after 22 years of rule.[98] That year widespread political unrest, instability and violence triggered about 175,000 new displacements, mostly in Sana'a, Al-Bayda and Dhamar governorates.[99]

A transitional government led by the vice-president, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, took office in 2012 and enacted a national policy on IDPs. This was accompanied by a lull in the conflict and displacement, and some people returned home.[100] The overall political situation, however, was volatile. Hadi's rule disappointed parts of the population, and the stage was set for a second wave of conflict.[101]

Non-state armed groups exploited the situation. In the south, tribal militias and jihadist movements affiliated with AQAP took advantage of social divisions to morph into organised structures capable of controlling extensive territories.[102] In the north, Ansar Allah, a Zaidi Shia political and armed group also known as the Houthi movement, extended its influence across the country. Direct clashes between Ansar Allah and the government grew in intensity, and in late 2014 the group captured Yemen's capital, Sana'a, forcing Hadi to flee to Aden.[103]

These developments had a marked effect on displacement.[104] After a two-year decline in figures, the total number of IDPs returned roughly to where it had been in the pre-transition period, with about 334,000 people living in displacement at the end of the year. A third of them were displaced from Sa'ada governorate, Ansar Allah's stronghold. The neighbouring Hajjah and Amran governorates experienced significant displacement as well.[105]

The situation reached a peak in 2015 as Ansar Allah continued to move south, reaching the outskirts of Aden. In response, a coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia launched a military campaign in March to defend and reinstate the ousted government.

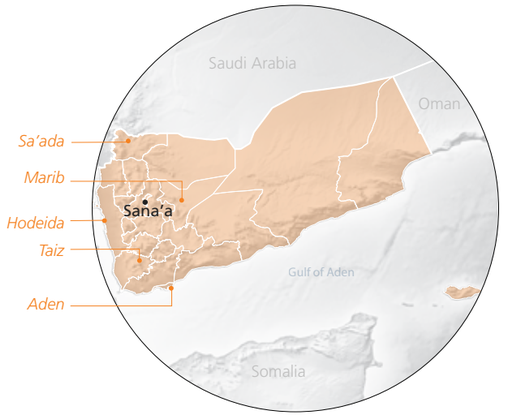
This opened a new chapter in Yemen's war. The Saudi-led coalition used heavy weapons and airstrikes that destroyed housing and infrastructure on a broad scale, severely affecting cities such as Hodeida, Taiz and Aden.[106] The bombings disrupted markets, education and health services and crippled infrastructure vital for the provision of goods.[107] If poverty and malnutrition were already high before 2014, the rapid escalation of violence only served to make the situation worse. More than 35 per cent of the population reported losing their main source of income in 2015 and 2016.[108]

About 2.2 million new displacements were reported in 2015, the highest figure in the world that year and almost as many as in Syria and Iraq combined. Displacement was reported in every governorate, with the highest figures in Taiz. More than 2.5 million people were living in displacement across the country by the end of the year.[109] The overwhelming majority of those displaced during this period were still living in displacement at the end of 2019.[110]

A relative stabilisation of the conflict, especially in the south, led to a considerable reduction in the number of IDPs in 2016. More than a million people were believed to have returned home. This decrease, however, was concentrated in a few areas of the south. It remains to be seen how sustainable the returns are given repeated military offensives. About 478,000 new internal displacements were reported in 2016, with the highest numbers in the north and west.[111]

The number of new displacements continued to fall in 2017, but the humanitarian crisis deepened. In response to Ansar Allah firing missiles over Riyadh, the Saudi capital, the coalition imposed a blockade on the country to prevent arms from entering.[112] The port city of Hodeida, the country's gateway for goods and aid, was blocked, and the city was transformed into the conflict's hotspot, impeding the delivery of humanitarian aid. Tensions escalated further in June 2018 when the coalition launched a major offensive on Hodeida, triggering at least 64,000 new displacements between June and November.[113]

Forces loyal to the internationally recognised government secured their positions in the south. Supported by the UAE, the Southern Transitional Council (STC) emerged in 2017 as the first armed opposition group on Hadi's side, and a power-sharing deal between both political forces was signed in November 2019.[114] Renewed tensions surfaced in April 2020, however, when the STC declared self-rule in southern governorates. This aggravated social divisions and led to new attacks that displaced many people in what had been relatively safe areas, such as Abyan governorate.[115]



• Capital city • Most affected governorates

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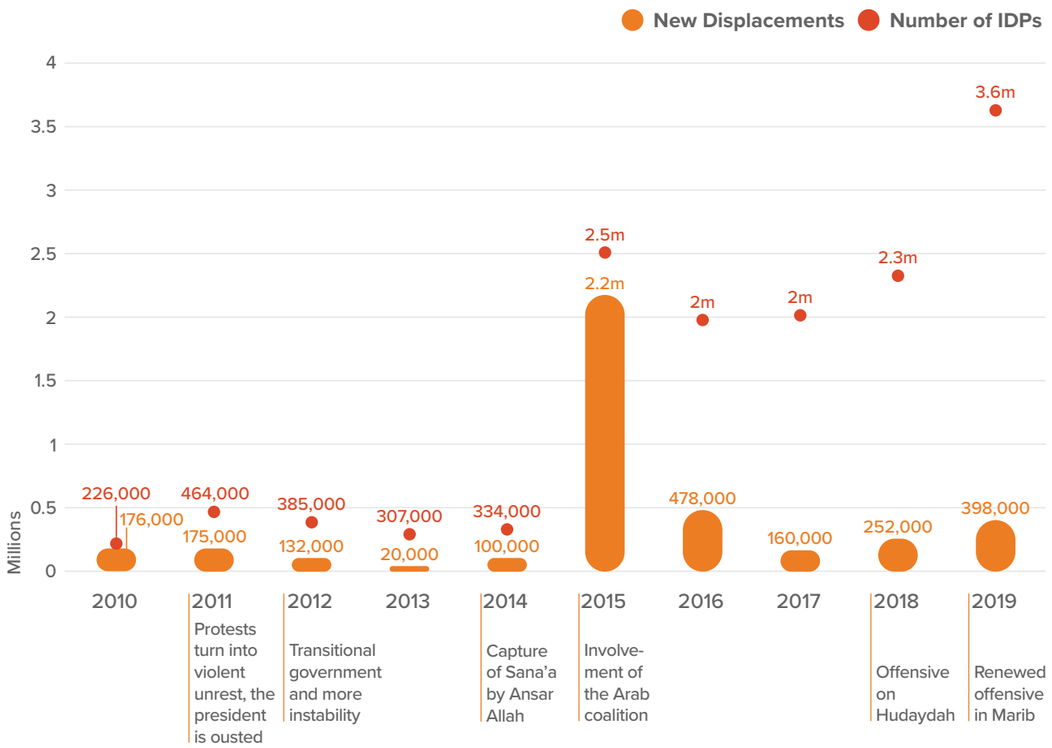
Figure 4: New displacements and total number of IDPs by conflict and violence in Yemen (2010-2019)



Displacement patterns in Yemen have fluctuated according to shifts in the frontlines of the conflict. Most displacement before 2014 was concentrated in Sa'ada in the north, but the largest movements in 2015 took place in areas around Sana'a, the south and Aden governorate. The highest numbers of displacements took place in the west in 2017 and 2018, especially from areas around Hodeida.

Marib and Al Jawf governorates, which have largely been spared from the conflict, became important destinations for IDPs. Between them they were hosting 919,000 at the end of 2019.[116] In January 2020, however, Ansar Allah launched an offensive against the coalition's positions in Marib. This triggered more than 60,000 new and secondary displacements in the two governorates in the six first months of the year.[117]

Entire families flee and return with the ebb and flow of violence. Returning may mean going back to a damaged or destroyed house. Some people have even returned to home areas near the frontlines because of the high costs associated with their displacement. IDPs meanwhile face high levels of food insecurity and few services and livelihood opportunities.[118] More than a third live in vulnerable shelters, and many are displaced again by flash floods, evictions or violence as a result.[119] The Covid-19 pandemic has heightened these vulnerabilities, added to movement restrictions and further decreased employment opportunities.[120]

IDPs have limited livelihood opportunities and face high levels of food insecurity. With few alternatives, some people have even returned to damaged homes near the frontlines

Establishing peace will be the first step in easing Yemen's humanitarian crisis. Although challenging to implement, ceasefires such as the Stockholm agreement of 2018 have significantly reduced displacement.[121] A lasting peace might enable people to return to normal life and allow IDPs, who in some cases have been displaced for years, to achieve sustainable solutions.

Ali, aged 70, and IDP from Al Hudaydah now lives in a shack in the desert outside Aden, Yemen. He earns roughly a one dollar a day (3,000 Yemeni Rials) selling plastic to a recycling business in town, Giles Clarke/OCHA, March 2019

Libya

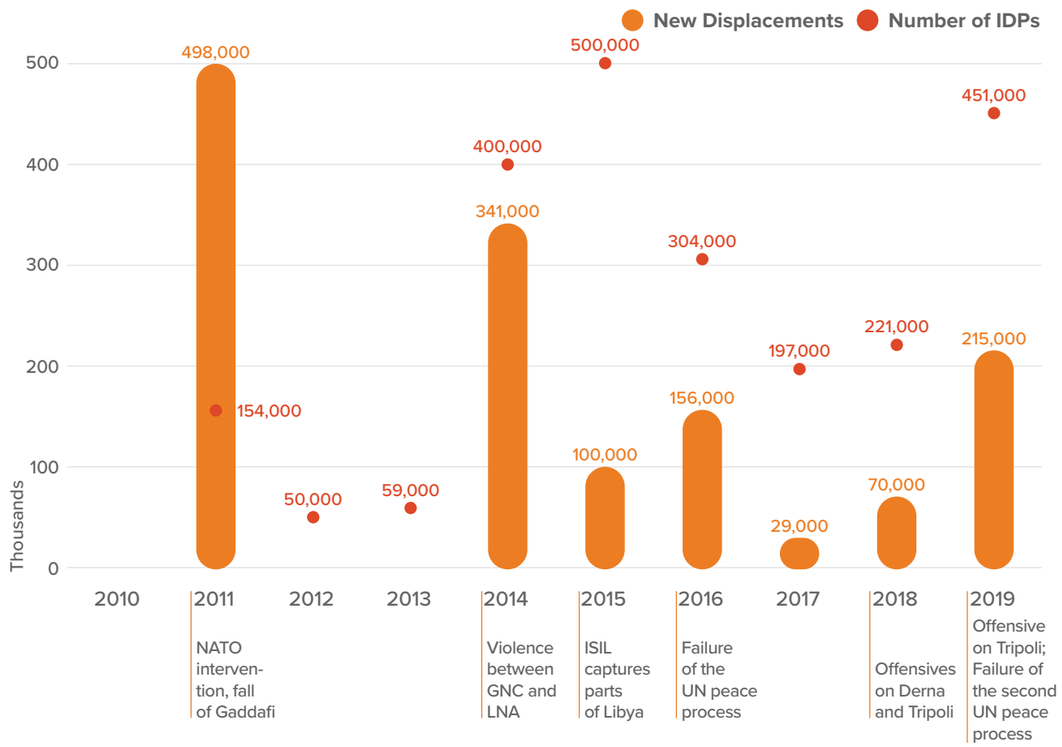
Since the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has been embroiled in social division, political instability and economic decline that have triggered two civil wars and high levels of internal displacement. Despite some years of partial stability and reductions in displacement, the overall trends have been upward. There were 215,000 new displacements in 2019, three times more than the previous year and the highest since 2014.

The Arab Spring came to Libya in February 2011 when protests in Benghazi led to clashes with the security forces. Armed opposition militias seized several major cities, including Benghazi, Tobruk and Misrata, and by the end of the month had organised themselves into a National Transitional Council aimed at changing the government. Gaddafi's response was increasingly violent, and in mid-March the UN Security Council declared a no-fly zone over the country and authorised a NATO military intervention.[122]

IDMC recorded 215,000 new displacements in 2019, the highest number since 2014

The conflict between NATO and Gaddafi's forces triggered nearly 500,000 displacements in 2011. Most people returned to their areas of origin shortly after Gaddafi was deposed and NATO declared an end to the hostilities. About 154,000 people were still living in displacement at the end of the year, prevented from returning by widespread destruction and prevailing insecurity.[123]

Figure 5: New displacements and total number of IDPs by conflict and violence in Libya (2010-2019)



No new displacements were recorded in 2012 and 2013, but the political and security situation remained volatile. The country's newly elected government struggled to assert itself.[124] Many combatants refused to lay down their arms, and there were violent clashes between militias, Islamists, and tribes.

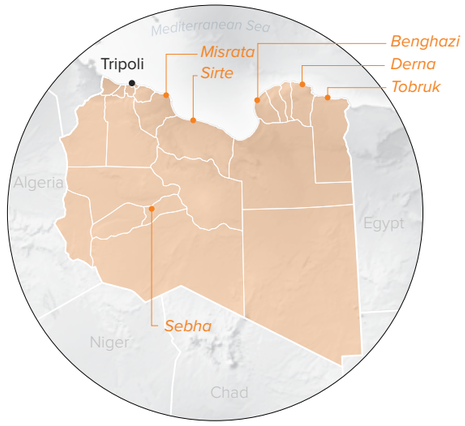
The violence affected urban centres such as Benghazi, Derna and Sebha, as well as desert areas in Cyrenaica. Several embassies, including those of the US and France, were attacked. IDPs continued to return home amid the instability, and by the end of 2013 the number of people still displaced as a result of the 2011 war has fallen to around 59,000.[125]

A contested election in May 2014 resulted in two separate governments and warring factions. The General National Congress (GNC), with its seat in Tripoli, took control of western Libya. The Libya National Army (LNA), led by Haftar and with its seat in Tobruk, took control of the east. Violence between the two parties led to more than 341,000 displacements in 2014, the highest figure since the 2011 war, as some of the country's most populated urban areas become epicentres of conflict. Many people who had been displaced in 2011 were forced to flee again.[126]

ISIL seized parts of Libya at the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015. Many other militias joined the conflict, either to support one of the governments or to pursue other objectives. Fighting triggered about 100,000 displacements in 2015. At the end of the year, the two rival governments agreed in principle to unite to form the Government of National Accord (GNA) during UN-backed peace talks.[127]

The agreement did not hold for long. The two governments continued to disagree within GNA during 2016, and violence flared again. ISIL lost most of its control over Libyan territory, most notably the cities of Sirte and Derna, after several offensives led by both governments and supported by US airstrikes. The violence in 2016 triggered about 156,000 displacements, but the frontlines stabilised during 2017 and displacement decreased. It was the first year since 2014 when there were more returns than displacements, and the total number of IDPs fell to 197,000 by the end of the year.[128]

The following two years were characterised by renewed offensives, a surge in fighting and the entry of new actors into the conflict. Offensives on Tripoli and Derna in 2018



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caused 33,000 and 24,000 displacements respectively, a significant share of the total for the year. Then in April 2019, when it seemed as if a UN-backed peace conference might bring stability, the country slipped into a serious episode of violence just two days before the conference was to begin.[129]

About 215,000 new displacements were recorded in 2019 as a result, the highest figure since 2014. Most of the fighting took place in and around the capital, after Haftar launched an offensive on the city in April that triggered as many as 170,000 displacements. 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.[130]

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 Gaddafi in 2011 and the flight of almost all of the city's 33,000 inhabitants. There was also heavy fighting around Tripoli toward the end of the year.[131]

The large numbers of migrants and asylum seekers in Libya have been particularly at risk during the conflict, especially those in detention centres near the frontlines. During the 2019 offensive on Tripoli, for example, an airstrike hit the Tadjourah detention centre, killing 53 people and injuring 130.[132] Other centres have been cut off

from essential services for days, and evacuations to safer locations were delayed.[133] Refugees and asylum seekers in detention centres have also reportedly been forced to support armed militias.[134]

Direct and indirect foreign interventions intensified in 2020. Turkey entered the conflict early in the year, providing support to GNA to counter that supplied by the UAE and Egypt to Haftar. The Turkish support helped GNA capture cities, including Tripoli and Tarhuna, but led to the displacement of more than 27,000 people.[135] Despite an arms embargo imposed on Libya in 2011, Russia also sent military aid.[136]

The UN announced the resumption of inclusive peace talks in October 2020 and the GNA leader has announced that power will be transferred to a new administration once a government is formed.[137] Given the increasing role of foreign actors, however, it remains to be seen whether peace can be achieved and displacement reduced.[138]

Vegetable Market in the Old Town of Benghazi, Libya. Benghazi was heavily affected by violence and many people fled in the past decade, Giles Clarke/OCHA, February 2019

Palestine

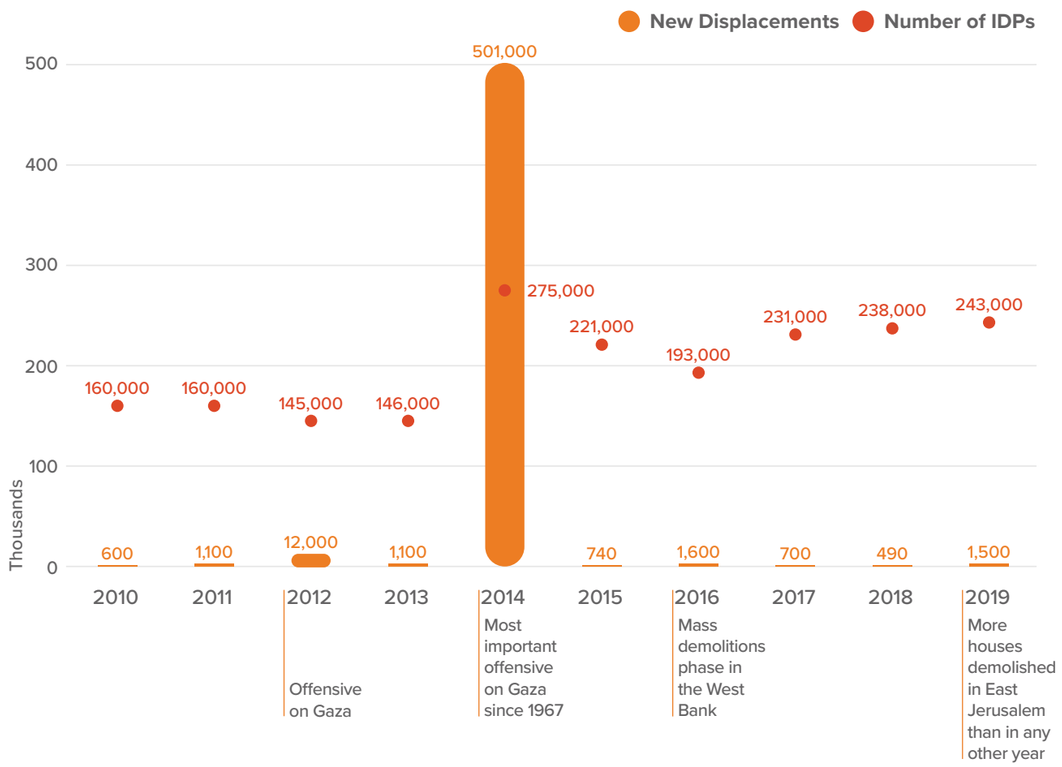
Internal displacement in Palestine is among the most protracted in the world. Most IDPs have been displaced since the 1967 war, but renewed hostilities and housing demolitions also forced people from their homes during the last decade. There were 1,500 new displacements recorded in Palestine in 2019, and 243,000 people were still displaced at the end of the year. A further 2.3 million Palestinians were also registered as refugees in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in 2019, the result of their displacement in around 1948 from what is now Israel.[139]

The displacement situations in the three areas that make up Palestine vary significantly. Most of the new displacements in the Gaza Strip are the result of the destruction of homes by airstrikes and pre-emptive evacuations triggered by escalations in hostilities between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups.

In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, displacement serves as a means for Israel to gain territorial control by allocating land for illegal settlement construction and other purposes. Demolitions, settler and military violence and harassment, and restrictions on movement and access to services and humanitarian assistance have all been reported in the West Bank. These acts constitute a breach of Article 2 of the UN Charter and successive Security Council resolutions.[140]

Episodes of violence in the Gaza Strip in 2012, 2014, 2018 and 2019 triggered large numbers of displacements and aggravated the already dire humanitarian situation caused by Israel's blockade of basic goods and services.[141]

Figure 6: New displacements and total number of IDPs by conflict and violence in Palestine (2010-2019)



An Israeli military operation, codenamed Protective Edge, caused escalating violence between its forces and the Hamas movement in July and August 2014, triggering around 500,000 new displacements, the equivalent of more than a quarter of Gaza's population.[142] Around 18,000 homes were destroyed or severely damaged, and figures for civilian casualties and displacements were the highest since 1967.[143]

The majority of IDPs returned after a ceasefire agreement, but the Gazan economy was already in near collapse because of the blockade. With 45 per cent of people unemployed and more than half living in poverty, their ability to reconstruct damaged infrastructure was limited.[144] The humanitarian community has since repaired and rebuilt most of the homes.[145]

Further escalations of violence, while lower in intensity, have taken place since. The most recent in May and November 2019 triggered over 460 new displacements. Around 7,400 people were living in displacement in the Gaza Strip at the end of 2019 as a result of the different waves of violence observed since 2014.[146]

Most of the 9,400 new displacements recorded in the West Bank and East Jerusalem between 2010 and 2019 were triggered by demolitions, forced evictions and confiscations of Palestinian property by Israeli forces, especially in area C but also to a lesser extent in areas A and B.[147] Under the Oslo Agreements between 1993 and 1995, the West Bank was divided into three areas. The Palestinian Authority administers area A, and it shares the administration of area B with Israel. In area C, Israel retains near exclusive control, including over law enforcement, planning and construction.[148]

Most of area C, which makes up more than 60 per cent of the West Bank, has been allocated for the benefit of Israeli settlements or the Israeli military.[149] The status of Jerusalem is disputed. Following the occupation of the West Bank in 1967, Israel annexed the whole city as its capital, but Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of their state. Israel has instituted policies since the annexation intended to shift the demographic and geographic composition of East Jerusalem to increase its sovereignty over the city.[150]

An average of 940 Palestinians a year were evicted between 2010 and 2019, reaching a peak of 1,600 in 2016. The trend has continued in 2020 with demolitions at their highest level since that year.[151] More families may have been displaced as a result of harassment, increased movement restrictions, loss of livelihoods and other causes, but figures are hard to come by.[152]

Administrative divisions - Oslo Agreement in the West Bank
Source: Palestinian Authority, Ministry of Planning (PA MOP), 2004

- Area A and B
- Area C
- No Man's Land
- Israeli Declared East Jerusalem Municipality
- Nature Reserve
- Most affected areas

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

On average, more than 900 Palestinians have been evicted from their homes every year since 2010

The number of reported demolitions has increased under Covid-19 restrictions, as have attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians. These attacks have involved physical violence and damage to property, including crops and vehicles.[153] The UN has described a "coercive environment", in which Israeli policies and practices create a reality that is difficult for Palestinians to endure.[154]

Israeli authorities have also demolished the family homes of Palestinians accused of acts of terrorism or rendered them uninhabitable. This constitutes a form of collective punishment which has left 460 people, including 200 children, homeless since 2010.[155] Housing demolitions have triggered more than 8,700 displacements, almost all of them involving Palestinians who lack Israeli building

permits. It is difficult for Palestinians to get building permits in the West Bank, particularly in East Jerusalem and area C.[156] The average rate of approval for permits in area C during the 2010s was three to four per cent.[157]

Two thousand of the new displacements recorded in the West Bank over the last 10 years have taken place in East Jerusalem, with the neighbourhoods of Beit Hanina in the north and Jabal al Mukabir and Silwan in the south most affected.[158] Most were triggered by the demolition of housing. More Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem were demolished in 2019 than in any of the previous 15 years, triggering around 360 new displacements. At least a third of all Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem lack building permits. Some of them have already been issued with demolition orders, and the rising trend is expected to continue.[159]

New displacements in Palestine over the past decade and the total number of IDPs remain high relative to population size.[160] The number of people living in long-term displacement is also cause for concern, as is the phenomenon of repeated displacement. More than 50 per cent of people displaced as a result of home demolitions in the West Bank have never returned, and many of those who did were displaced again.[161]

The announcement of an annexation plan in April 2020 increased the number of home demolitions in the second half of the year. The repeated violation of UN resolutions not only triggers new displacement. It also undermines any prospects of durable solutions for IDPs.[162]

Children from Al Muntar Bedouin community are playing. Their school, like many others across in the West Bank risk to be demolished and the children to drop out, Lys Arango/NRC, Nov 2017.

Egypt

The bulk of the internal displacement in Egypt during the last decade was triggered in the Sinai region after long-term ruler Hosni Mubarak was ousted in February 2011 during the Arab Spring. In 2013, when the democratically elected president Mohamed Morsi was removed following renewed protests, there was an increase in terrorists' attacks against security forces and state infrastructure in North Sinai, including gas pipelines.[163] These attacks continued throughout 2014.

In response to a series of terrorist attacks, the Egyptian government launched a counteroffensive that same year, which was accompanied by a curfew and a state of emergency in North Sinai. It also announced a plan involving housing demolitions to create a buffer zone 14 kilometres long and half a kilometre wide along the border with Gaza to destroy jihadist hideouts and smuggling tunnels.[164] The Egyptian army had begun demolishing buildings along the border in July 2013, but the rate of demolitions increased sharply after October 2014, when terrorist groups carried out an attack against the army.[165]

The demolition of housing triggered more than 4,700 new displacements in 2014, based on Egyptian government data. As many as 2,900 people were financially compensated for the loss of their homes and land. They also received an additional three months of financial assistance for alternative accommodation, and schools for their children.[166]

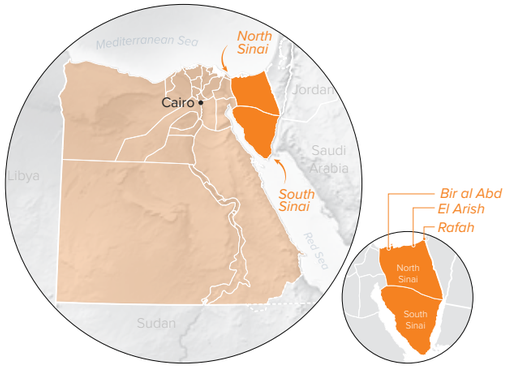
The demolitions continued until 2015, triggering another 8,400 displacements. More than 3,400 people were compensated through the same mechanisms. Some people were excluded for reasons that included the discovery of a smuggling tunnel in their house.[167] Several committees were established to support those displaced, monitor their needs and develop programmes to assist them.

They continue to inform the government periodically about the evictees' situation.[168]

Terrorist groups' persecution of Coptic Christians in the city of el-Arish triggered nearly 1,300 new displacements in February and March 2017. The government intensified its counteroffensive in late 2017 and 2018, after another attack by the group reportedly killed more than 300 civilians in the same city. The Egyptian military put the whole of North Sinai under lockdown, closed main roads and restricted movement in and out of the governorate. Only those holding special security permits were allowed passage.[169]

Housing demolitions also resumed, triggering 600 new displacements in the latter part of 2017. Most of those affected received government compensation.[170] The demolitions continued in 2018 and only about 39 per cent of Rafah's original inhabitants remained in the city in 2020.[171]

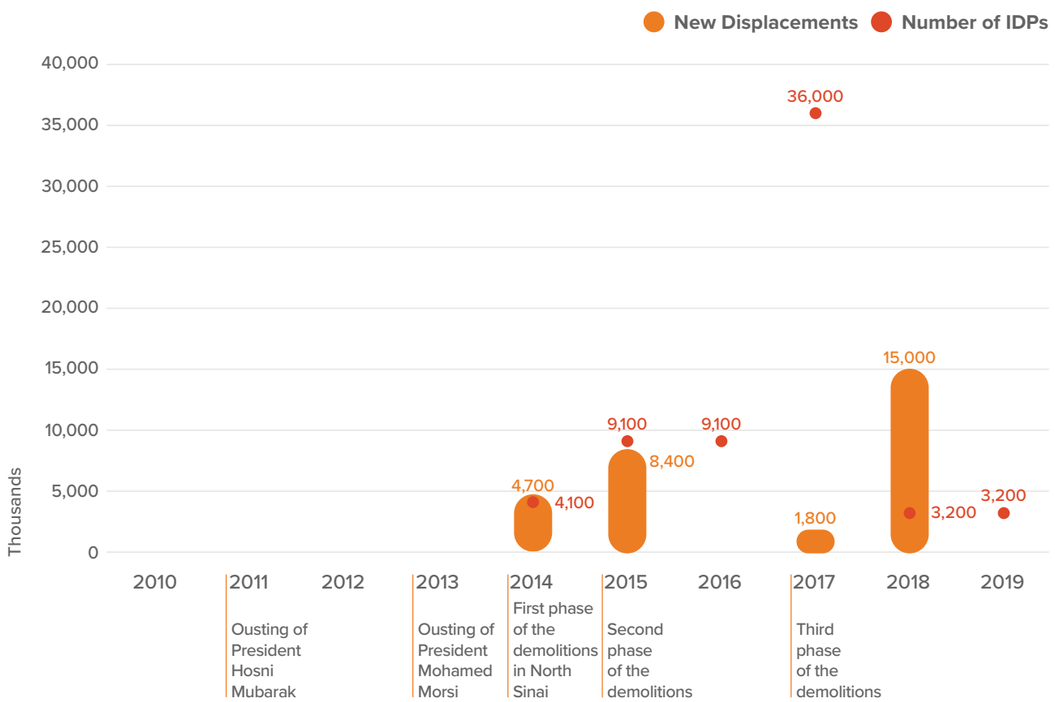
The government drew up plans in 2015 to build a city called New Rafah to resettle those displaced, and as of June 2020 it had public infrastructure, services and more than 10,000 housing units.[172] While the overall security situation has improved, there were 3,200 IDPs in Egypt as of the end of 2019, all of them displaced by violence in Sinai.[173]



• Capital city • Most affected areas

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

Figure 7: New displacements and total number of IDPs by conflict and violence in Egypt (2010-2019)



Demonstration near Cairo University in Egypt, Mohamed Abdel Samad, 2013

Disasters

Because of the prevalence of conflict and violence in many countries of the MENA region, local and national authorities, as well as humanitarian aid providers, struggle to collect data on disaster displacement. This creates important gaps in knowledge of its scale, patterns, impacts and duration. For this reason, the overall estimates of both new displacements and the total number of IDPs associated with disasters are highly conservative.

Despite these limitations, the data reveals that there have been nearly 1.5 million new disaster displacements during the last decade. As Figure 9 shows, the overall numbers are on the rise, a phenomenon that can be explained both by an increasing number of floods and an overall improvement in data collection and the monitoring of disaster displacement.

Most disaster displacement during the last decade has been triggered by weather-related events, with floods causing more than half, and storms, including cyclones, more than 175,000 displacements. While less frequent, earthquakes have also affected some countries in the region, triggering nearly 343,000 displacements (see Figure 8). There are important data and knowledge gaps related to displacement in the context of slow-onset hazards. The following sections will analyse in more detail the different impacts of disaster displacement in the countries affected.

Floods

The MENA region is highly vulnerable to weather-related disasters and the effects of climate change.[174] The region is mostly arid and subject to seasonal rainfall. When it rains, poor soil absorption capacity and lack of adequate drainage systems often cause riverine, flash and urban floods, some of which have been devastating.[175] Floods are the natural hazard triggering most displacement at the regional level, with nearly 58 per cent of the total for 2010 to 2019. The floods that affected Iran in 2019 triggered more internal displacement than any other event at the regional level during that period and have been described as the worst to hit the country in more than 15 years (see Iran Spotlight, p.54).[176]

IDPs and refugees driven from their homes by conflict have been unevenly affected by floods and flash floods, and many have been forced to flee for a second and even a third time. More than any other hazard, floods contribute to making displacement chronic, cyclical and protracted. From Syria and Iraq to Jordan and Lebanon, disasters have worsened the conditions of IDPs and refugees living in camps and informal urban areas.

Figure 8: New disaster displacements in MENA, by hazard type (2010-2019)

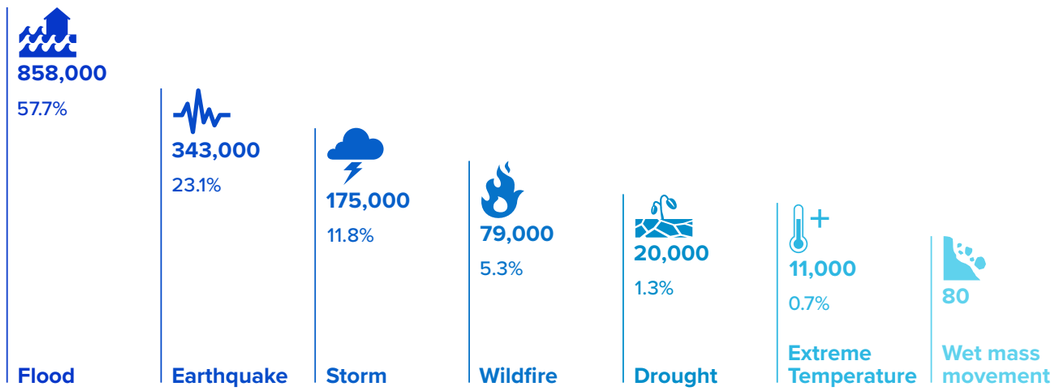
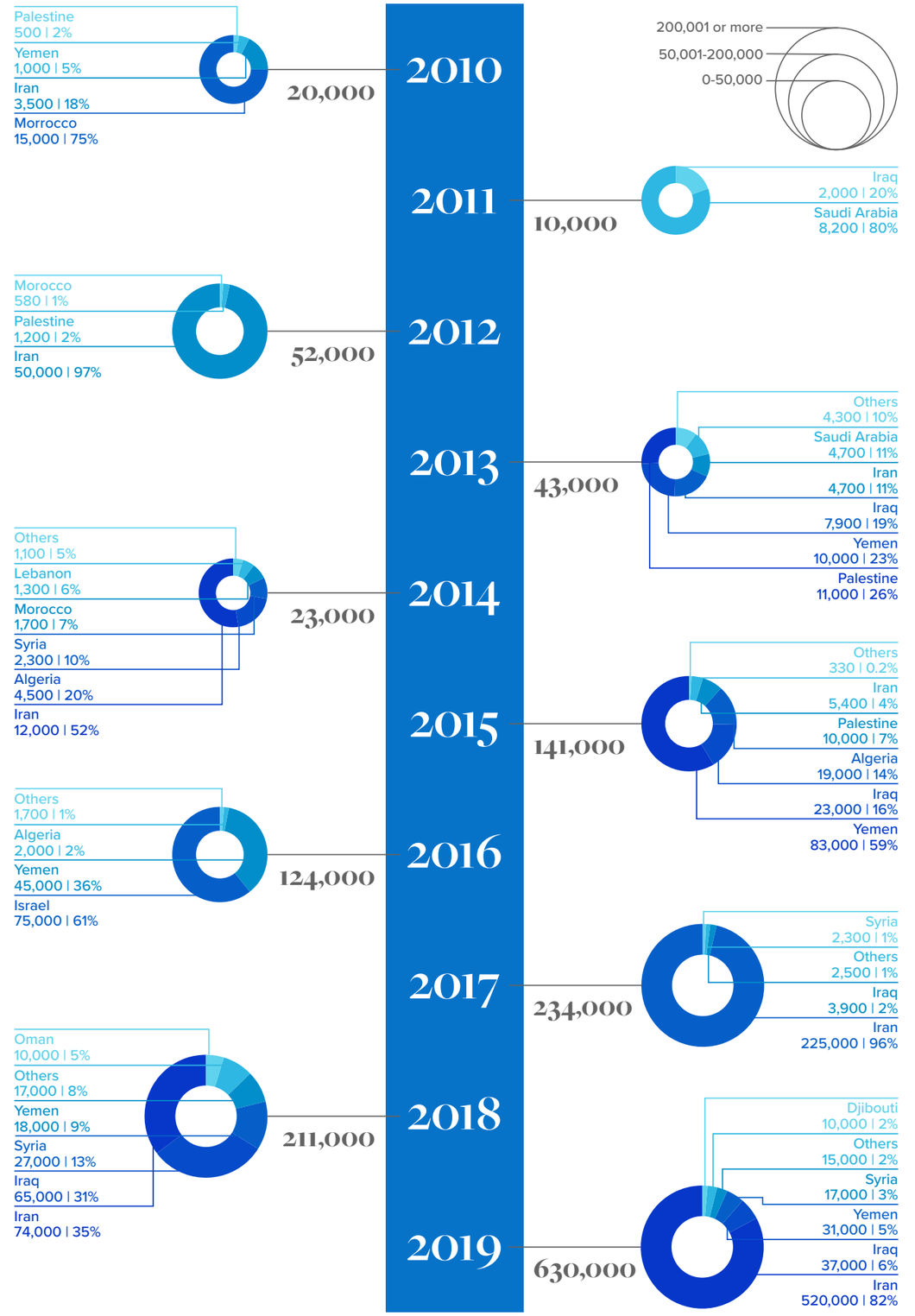


Figure 9: New displacements by disaster in MENA (2010-2019)



Others refer to countries whose value of disaster displacement for a given year was too small to be visible in the figure.

Floods struck IDP camps severely across the north of Syria in 2019, for example. At the end of March, more than 14,000 people were displaced in Al Hassakeh governorate, and more than 40,000 IDPs were affected in 14 camps in Idlib.[177] Another flood created severe impacts at IDP camps in December of that year in northern areas of Idlib. These areas host the highest number of IDPs in the country. With their tents inundated and uninhabitable, about 2,850 IDPs were forced to move again in the midst of a fierce offensive.[178]

Floods cause the most disaster displacement in MENA. They contribute to making displacement chronic, cyclical, and protracted in the region

Iraq has experienced similar phenomena. IDP camps were lashed by floods, and as many as 2,100 displaced families had to be evacuated from six camps in Baghdad and Anbar to alternative shelters in November 2015.[179] More recently, in November 2018, widespread flooding hit Ninewa and Salah al Din governorates. More than 35,000 people were displaced. Thousands of them were pushed into secondary displacement, making their ability to achieve durable solutions even more remote.[180]

Recent events in the Marib governorate of Yemen are a clear illustration of this overlap between conflict displacement and flood risk. Largely spared from conflict, the governorate was home to 770,000 IDPs at the end of 2019.[181] Renewed hostilities from late January 2020 then led to a sharp deterioration in IDPs' conditions. When flooding occurred in March, April and late July, IDPs bore the brunt of it. Flooding from the Marib Dam on 31 July destroyed 735 shelters and damaged 1,790 in Sirwah District alone, displacing thousands for a second or even third time. Flooding has also pushed landmines and other explosive devices into areas not previously affected by them.[182]

Floods have impeded the flight of people from insecure areas. Flooding hit Mosul in May 2017 during the conflict between Iraqi forces and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The city was under heavy fire and residents fled in search of safety. Heavy rains, meanwhile, triggered flooding in the Tigris river. All crossing points between East and West Mosul were cut off. The military had to dismantle the makeshift bridges linking the two sides of the city, and residents took to risking their lives by crossing in small fishing boats able to hold only about five people each. This slowed down their flight from the city and left many waiting in peril on the banks of the river.[183]

Rapid urbanization has increased floods' impacts. Insufficient drainage and water management systems, among other factors, have increased people's exposure to them. So has poor groundwater absorption capacity caused by the development of urban infrastructure and inadequate planning of human settlements.[184] The Saudi city of Jeddah, home to 3.5 million people, is a case in point. Studies have shown how urban expansion and insufficient drainage systems have heightened flood risk.[185] The city is located in an area characterised by low levels of rainfall, but when rains hit, damages can be devastating. Entire parts of the city may be inundated. This was the case in 2009 and 2011, when the city was confronted by severe flash floods. The 2011 floods were among the most intense on record, and rendered 1,500 families homeless.[186] Their scale and intensity, however, led to the development of new flood protection measures and flood risk assessments aimed at reducing future impacts.[187]

Several urban areas in the region are facing similar challenges, underscoring the need to develop risk-sensitive urban planning to reduce the likelihood of damage, loss and population displacement. IDMC's flood displacement risk model shows that on average 392,000 people could be displaced by riverine floods in any given year in the MENA region. The risk of flood displacement, the model's results show, is highly concentrated in urban and peri-urban areas (see Flood risk Spotlight, p.52).

The displacement journey has many difficulties, but shelter is one of the first essential steps for protection of Syrian displaced population against secondary disaster displacement, Diab/UNHCR, 2016

Spotlight - Reducing risk: flood displacement

Historical data shows that floods are the hazard triggering most displacement in the MENA region. Looking backwards, however, is not enough to assess and reduce the risk of future displacement. Risk models are a useful tool for estimating the level of damage from future disasters. They provide valuable information to decision-makers and planners that can support risk reduction efforts. While disaster risk modelling has been well developed and applied, however, few models have looked at the likelihood of displacement in the context of disasters.

IDMC developed a unique riverine flood displacement risk model that estimates how many people could be displaced in the future by riverine floods. The data produced by the model is disaggregated by urban and rural areas, allowing for a better understanding of the implications for towns and cities.[188]

This Average Annual Displacement risk (AAD) should be considered conservative, as it is based on population exposure data as of 2018. The way displacement risk changes, however, depends on how cities will expand and grow.[189] The model also looks at riverine floods, not urban floods. The likelihood of flood displacement can increase because of inadequate drainage and water management systems, informal urban expansion, and lack of absorption capacity in cities, among other factors not included in the model.

Despite being conservative, the results show a considerable challenge ahead. On average, 392,000 people could be displaced by riverine floods in any given year across the MENA region.[190] More than three-quarters of the people at risk of flood displacement will be in urban and peri-urban areas (see Figures 10 and 11).

The data produced by the model can be used to inform urban and national sustainable development planning. It can also be employed to put in place disaster risk reduction measures, including crisis prevention and management tools, contingency plans, and early warning systems. Making internal displacement risk part of the equation would mean that such interventions could support durable solutions and displacement risk reduction in the years to come.

Figure 10: Riverine flood displacement risk in selected MENA countries (urban and rural areas)

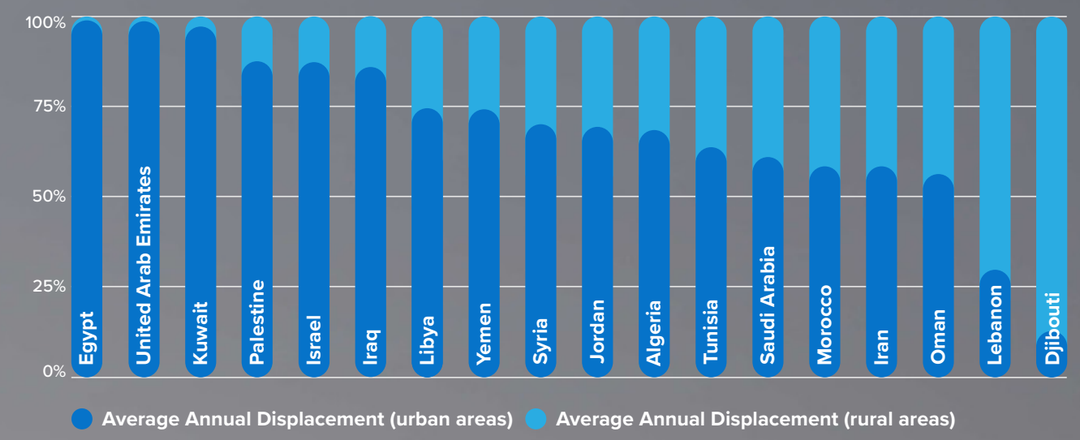
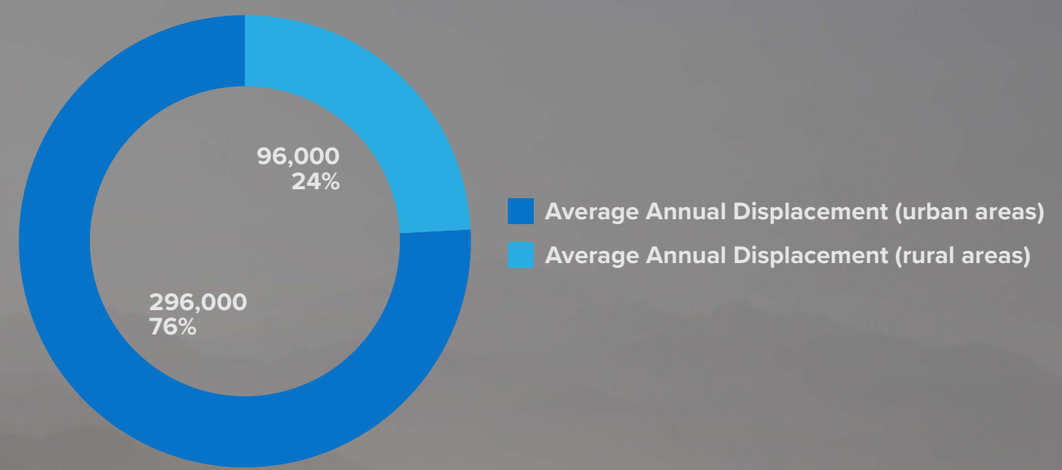


Figure 11: Riverine flood displacement risk in MENA (urban and rural areas)



Lake Assal, Charlotte Cans/OCHA, June 2015

Spotlight - Iran: half a million people displaced by floods

Iran has had the highest number of new disaster displacements in the MENA region during the last decade. Because of its location between two tectonic plates, the country is prone to earthquakes. It is also vulnerable to climate extremes including drought and floods.[191] Following an extended period of low precipitation, increasing temperatures and desertification, the country was confronted by extreme floods between March and April 2019, the worst disaster of the last 15 years.[192] Twenty-five out of 31 provinces were affected, with Golestan, Fars, Khuzestan, and Lorestan suffering some of the worst impacts. At the peak of the disaster, an estimated half a million of people were displaced.[193]

The floods struck about 2,000 towns and villages, home to more than ten million people. Seventy-eight people were killed and 65,000 houses were destroyed. Damages and losses amounted to $4.7 billion.[194] Farmland was harmed or destroyed in rural areas, making the impacts on agriculture particularly severe.[195] Many Afghan refugees living in Golestan are undocumented and also lost their livelihoods and shelters.[196]

A combination of natural and human factors explains why the floods were so devastating. The rainfall recorded from 20 March to 21 April was the highest ever recorded, based on 35 years of satellite imagery.[197] It came after a long period of drought, which contributed to decreasing soil absorption capacity and resulted in flash flooding that took communities and authorities by surprise. The floods also occurred during the Iranian New Year holiday. Many public offices were closed, and this delayed the response.[198]

As rains continued unabated, authorities decided to redirect floodwaters towards farms and crops to avoid overflows at dams and protect oil infrastructure.[199] Roads and productive land were badly damaged, and the agricultural sector was particularly hard hit.[200] Farmers who saw their crops and dwellings inundated sought refuge elsewhere. The Iranian Red Crescent Society responded by putting in place 120 camps in public buildings and ultimately providing emergency shelter to 347,000 people. Five months after the disaster, all camps were reported closed, and people had returned to their governorate of origin.[201] The government also moved to drain flooded areas and provide safety nets to those affected.[202]

Many internally displaced people returned to houses declared uninhabitable by authorities. Others were still staying in tents near their home. Large numbers of people were still suffering from vulnerabilities linked to flood displacement several months after the disaster.[203] Based on an IDMC estimate using housing destruction as a proxy, 180,000 people were still living in displacement as a result of the disaster at the end of 2019.[204]

Iran has a well-developed disaster risk management system. The 2019 floods, however, revealed shortfalls in terms of coordination and response in the face of such severe weather extremes. More floods struck the country during 2020, and studies show the pattern will continue, with longer periods of drought and intermittent heavy rains increasing the risk. Investing in weather forecasting and early warning systems, strengthening preparedness and recovery, and learning the lessons from this widespread disaster could help prevent displacement in the future.[205]

Palm trees stand in flood water after heavy rainfall in Khuzestan province, Susangerd, Iran. The floods in 2019 triggered more internal displacement than any other event at the regional level during the last decade. Ali Mohammadi/Bloomberg, April 2019

Storms

The combined effects of storms and floods are often difficult to entangle. Storms, IDMC's evidence shows, have also affected the region and triggered displacement. Even though most of the MENA region is not prone to cyclones, countries including Yemen, Oman, Djibouti, and the UAE have been hit by tropical cyclones in recent years. Other storms, including snowstorms, have triggered displacement in countries like Iran, Lebanon and Palestine. Data collection is inconsistent and insufficient, and the overall figures at the regional level are conservative.

During the last decade, there have been some outlier years in terms of displacement, with 2015 being particularly devastating. Two cyclones, Chapala and Megh, made landfall in Yemen in the span of a few days in November, triggering 43,000 and 40,000 displacements, respectively. These storms were among the most severe to hit the country in the last decade and came on top of an intense confrontation between the internationally-recognised government and Ansar Allah (also known as the Houthi movement).[206] Their successive impacts aggravated the overall humanitarian situation and pushed many conflict IDPs into secondary displacement.[207] That same year, winter storm Huda displaced 10,000 in Palestine, a high number considering its population.

Another intense cyclone season occurred in 2018, with cyclones Mekunu, Luban and Sagar causing extensive damage and displacement across Oman, Yemen and Djibouti. In the three countries combined, about 38,000 displacements were reported, with the bulk of them in Yemen. Relative to Djibouti's population, cyclone Sagar triggered a high number of displacements. Over nine thousand people were displaced from 19 to 20 May, 2018, the equivalent of one per cent of the country's population. The majority of this displacement was triggered in Djibouti city, where one year of rain fell within a single day, unleashing flash floods that put about half of the city under water. This was particularly worrisome, given that nearly a fifth of Djibouti's population were estimated to live in conditions of extreme poverty.[208]

More recently, winter storms hit Iran, pushing tens of thousands into displacement across many provinces. About 23,000 people were provided with emergency shelter in January 2018 following days of heavy snowfall.[209] Two winter storms, though less intense, hit the country in 2019. One took authorities by surprise, as it took place during the second half of November, rather than in January and February, as normally occurs. More than 300 people took shelter in emergency camps.[210]

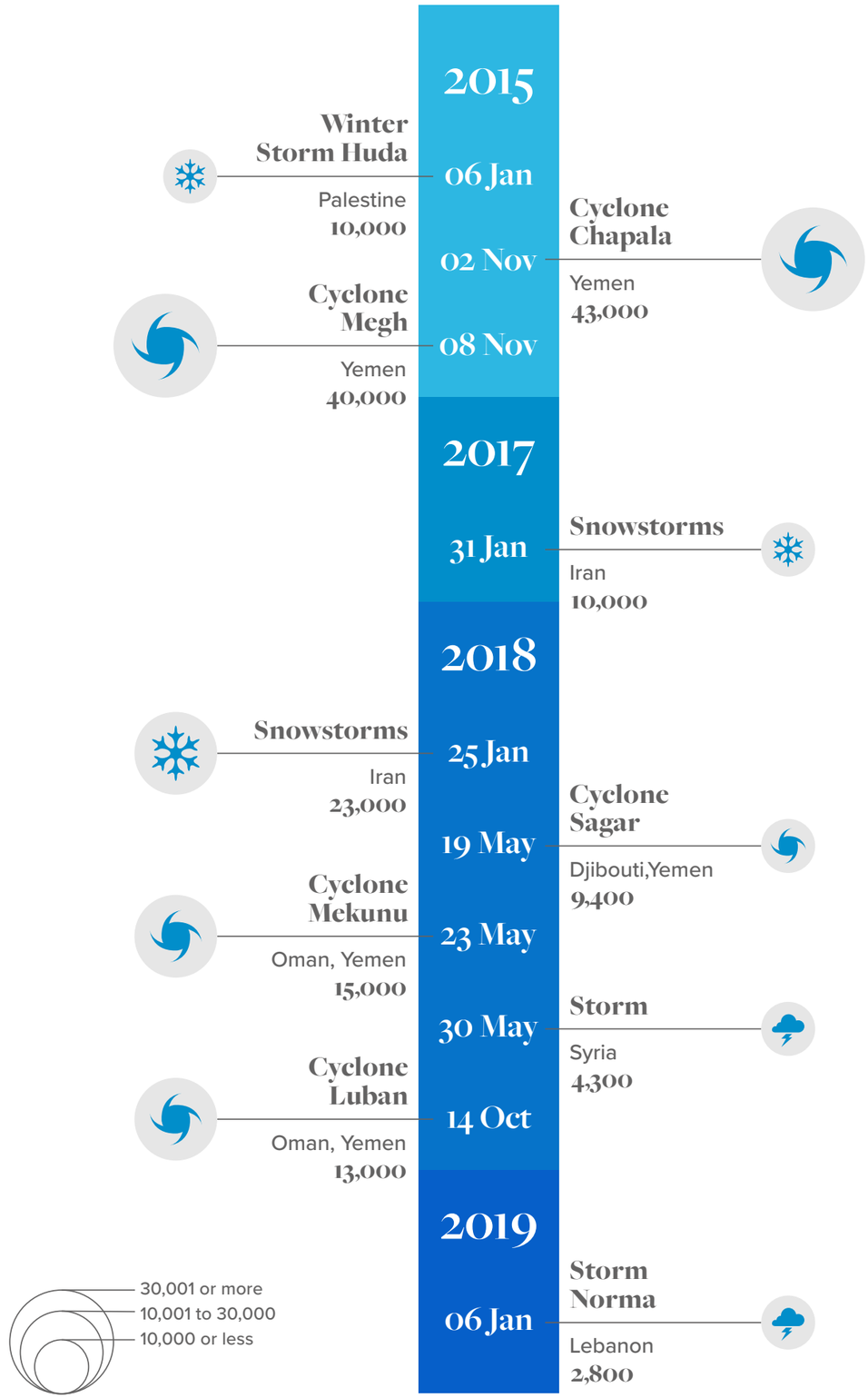
Syrian refugees in Lebanon are particularly vulnerable to disasters. Around 17 per cent of Syrian refugees there live in informal settlements, and about 40 per cent of these settlements have been built with inadequate materials in areas at risk.[211] Storm Norma, which struck in early January 2019, brought cold weather, snow and flooding to Lebanon, forcing about 2,800 Syrian refugees to seek alternative shelters. Because of the high percentage of the Syrian population living in informal settlements and the difficulty that humanitarian agencies and relief organisations have in accessing them, these figures are conservative. The difficulty in access also delayed the disaster response.[212]

Several countries in the MENA region including Jordan, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, have developed disaster damage and loss databases. Some of these databases, however, have not been updated for several years or are not publicly available.[213] As a result, numbers on internal displacement triggered by storms are hard to come by. Figure 12 shows the ten major storms that triggered displacement in the region from 2010 to 2019, based on data obtained by IDMC from partners. As can be seen, Yemen was the most affected country. The figures, combined with data on displacement triggered by floods, show how vulnerable the region is to hydro-meteorological hazards.

Slow-onset hazards

The MENA region is the most water scarce region globally and faces associated slow-onset hazards, including drought, desertification and land degradation.[214] Our understanding of how these processes exacerbate the social and economic vulnerability that drives displacement is still limited, however.[215] While it is problematic to directly link drought and conflict displacement, studies have provided evidence on how drought can increase conflict risk.[216] Research suggests that the civil unrest and subsequent war in Syria in 2011 was partly driven by several years of drought that undermined livelihoods in rural areas. Economic decline led to a rural-urban migration that increased social, political and ethnic tensions in cities. This fuelled discontent and ultimately led to civil unrest and war (see Syria spotlight, p.60).

Figure 12: Ten major storms triggering displacement in MENA (2010-2019)



The limited data available on internal displacement associated with drought and other slow-onset hazards makes a compelling argument for better monitoring and analysing the phenomenon in the MENA region. Of all new displacements recorded in the region between 2010 and 2019, only 1.3 per cent have been triggered by drought. When this figure is broken down, however, it becomes evident that it comes from Iraq alone, and only for 2019. This reveals a troublesome lack of data and monitoring at the regional level. It also suggests that the figure may be but the tip of the iceberg. Iran provides another example. Based on data collected over the past decade, about 97 per cent of the country has been affected by long-term drought.[217] No data on related displacement, however, exists. Strengthening the monitoring of drought displacement should be a regional priority.[218]

While Iraq is the only country where data on drought displacement is available, the evidence is illustrative of the challenges many countries could face. Iraq has been affected by water scarcity since at least 2007, with extremes observed in 2015 and 2016. Traditional rural livelihoods have become less sustainable as a result of asset depletion and erosion. Irrigation canals have begun to run dry and water quality has plummeted. The response, however, has been piecemeal at best. As a result, increasing numbers of farmers have stopped working their land, livestock owners have sold their animals, and significant numbers of people have moved away in search of alternative sources of income. While these population movements should be considered forced displacement, data is hard to come by. More than 20,000 displacements related to the crisis were recorded in 2018 and 2019, with the governorates of Basra, Missan and Thi-Qar being the most affected.[219]

Desertification, salinization and sea level rise are other slow-onset hazards that will continue to affect the region, and climate change could aggravate their impacts. No displacement figures, however, have been reported as a result of these hazards. There are important differences between countries when it comes to desertification and water scarcity. Some, like oil-rich Saudi Arabia or the UAE, have sufficient funds to access water sources or create new ones through desalinization. Others, like Yemen or Jordan, rely on groundwater but struggle to mobilize the necessary investments to secure new water resources.[220]

Yemen, despite being frequently hit by floods, has the lowest water availability per capita in the world. This extreme water scarcity is in part a result of overexploitation of groundwater which leads to saltwater intrusion in coastal areas. At the same time Sana'a, which is located in the highlands, is the world's most water stressed city and is the only capital in the world that may run out of fresh water within the next decade.[221] There is no data available to quantify the displacement risk related to this phenomenon.

Though many coastal areas are at risk, figures on displacement caused by sea level rise, coastal erosion and salinization are all but missing in the region. Alexandria, in Egypt, is a case in point. The city's coastal areas are becoming increasingly more vulnerable to land subsidence, flooding and salinization.[222] This is affecting the broader Nile Delta region, but no figures on displacement have been obtained so far. Other coastal areas on Saudi Arabia's west coast and in Kuwait, just to mention a few, are also at risk of being affected by salinization and sea level rise.[223] With climate change posing specific challenges to the region, more baseline data is needed to assess the risk of displacement resulting from slow-onset phenomena.

Desertification, salinization and sea level rise will continue to affect the region, and climate change could aggravate their impacts

A flooded road in Gilan Province, Iran where around 200 people were affected by heavy rains. Several bridges collapsed and some roads were blocked, Ashkan Shabani /SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images, October 2019

Spotlight - Syria: drought as a driver of conflict

Syria's civil war is the product of a complex set of factors that range from religious, social and political tensions to deteriorating economic conditions and resulting grievances, especially among youth. While drawing causality between drought and conflict is problematic, evidence suggests that the impoverishment among rural households caused by extended drought prior to the Arab Spring catalysed the uprising in 2011 and played a role in how Syria's civil war unfolded.[224]

Prior to 2011, more than 75 per cent of Syria's land was used for agriculture. The bulk of agricultural production was concentrated in the country's north-east, home to about 58 per cent of Syria's poor. Most of the rural communities consisted of families of farmers and pastoralists who were highly vulnerable to climate shocks.[225] Between 2006 and 2009, the country faced consecutive and severe droughts whose effects were exacerbated by water scarcity and increasing insecurity in land tenure. Extreme drought conditions in the fertile lands around the Euphrates and Tigris rivers caused the worst crop failures in living memory. In the years prior to the Arab Spring, around 75 per cent of farmers lost their crops and 80 per cent of herders lost their livestock.[226]

The drought, which returned in 2011, was made worse by water management decisions, poor planning and policy errors. The Syrian government provided subsidies for water-intensive crops such as wheat and cotton, further draining water sources.[227] By the end of the year, the UN estimated that between two and three million people were affected, with one million pushed into food insecurity. Hundreds of thousands of people struggled to cope with the crisis, and between 40,000 and 60,000 families were forced to move.[228]

These people mostly headed to suburbs in Aleppo, Damascus, Dara'a, Deir ez-Zor, Hama, and Homs, which were already affected by poverty, inequality and a lack of job opportunity. The suburbs were the centre of the first protests against the President al-Assad, as the regime's failure to alleviate the effects of drought and massive internal migration sunk in.[229] Rural communities also played a prominent role in the Syrian protests. The rural farming town of Dara'a, for example, was a hotbed of early protest after being hard hit by drought and water scarcity, with little assistance from the government.[230]

These conditions played a key role in the conflict's power struggles, with hydroelectric dams and other reservoirs gaining significant strategic value. Non-governmental armed groups captured the Tishrin hydroelectric dam on the Euphrates River after heavy clashes in November 2012. The dam is considered of major strategic importance to the Syrian regime. In February 2013, the same forces captured the country's largest hydroelectric facility, the Tabqa dam.[231] Both offensives involved heavy fighting and led to the displacement of thousands of people. As the country enters its tenth year of conflict, the effects of climate change will continue to play a major role in how it unfolds. More analysis will be needed on how conflict and drought are connected and how the challenge can be addressed.

In 2019, fires have caused damage to agricultural fields and crops across Syria, further threatening food security and livelihoods, Halldorsson/OCHA, June 2019

Earthquakes and tsunamis

Geophysical hazards like earthquakes and tsunamis are less frequent, and few such events have triggered displacement since 2010 across MENA. The risk of earthquakes and tsunamis is relatively high, however, given the location of several countries on the intersection of the Eurasian, Arabian and African tectonic plates. At any moment, internal displacement could be triggered by geophysical events, and more attention should be put on the likelihood of subsequent displacement. IDMC's Global Disaster Displacement Risk Model shows, that on average, 288,000 people could be displaced by earthquakes and tsunamis in any given year in the region. Iran, Iraq and Egypt are the countries most at risk of displacement from such occurrences.[232]

288,000 people could be displaced by earthquakes and tsunamis in any given year in the region

Apart from seismic activity that triggered 4,500 displacements in Algeria in 2014, the major geophysical event triggering displacement in recent years was the 7.3 magnitude earthquake that hit border areas between Iran and Iraq on 12 November 2017.[233] The Iranian north-western region of Kermashah, abutting Iraq, was the epicentre of the tremor, which displaced about 170,000 people on the Iranian side of the border and 3,900 on the Iraqi side. It was the deadliest earthquake in the world that year, and its intensity was such that it was felt as far away as Turkey, Kuwait and Israel.[234]

Hundreds of aftershocks were felt for several days, and as a precautionary measure, people residing in the area were told to sleep outside their house.[235] Many buildings and houses were destroyed or damaged.[236] In Iran, the displaced were sheltered in emergency tents either because their homes were destroyed or because it was unsafe to return given the high risk of structural collapse.[237] In Iraq, the impacts where mostly felt in Sulaymaniyah governorate, but were less devastating than in Iran. A number of houses were damaged, collapsed, or were on the verge of collapse, forcing an estimated 3,900 people to leave their homes and seek refuge with relatives or in tents provided by the Iraqi Red Crescent.[238] The same year, 33,000 people were displaced by seven other earthquakes in Iran.

Iraq and Iran are situated at the junction of the Eurasian and Arabian tectonic plates, where the Zagros mountains take shape.[239] Seismic activity is common. Two consecutive earthquakes of 6.4 and 6.2 magnitude hit Iran's Eastern Azerbaijan Province in August 2012, mostly affecting rural settlements, including about 400 villages. Severe damage and destruction was reported in at least 46 of them.[240] More than 100,000 people were displaced.

More recently, on 23 February 2020, another 5.7 magnitude earthquake shattered the region of Urmia in Iran, at the border with Turkey, affecting both sides of the border and displacing more than 14,000 people in Iran.[241] Shortly after, Iran became one of the first countries to be severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, interrupting assistance to the displaced population. As of October 2020, Iran was still the country in the region most stricken by the disease, impeding the ability of displaced people to quickly return home and illustrating how difficult it is for a country to respond to overlapping crises.[242]

No displacement has been reported in the region from tsunamis, but countries along the Mediterranean coast are at risk. IDMC's risk model suggests there is a five per cent probability that in the next 50 years an estimated 650,000 people may become displaced from the north-west coast of Egypt by such an event.[243] Historical events prove that this can happen. In the year 365, a powerful earthquake off the coast of Greece triggered a tsunami that devastated the city of Alexandria.[244]

A little girl plays in the water as waves hit the shore at Serra, near Aden, Giles Clarke/OCHA, March 2019

Part

2

Advancing solutions in the next decade

Ali Mohammed, 49 years old, and his family arrives at Abs Camp from Kushar, Hajjah northern Yemen after the conflict escalated in the area. Like Ali, the conflict also forced thousands of families to flee but many others are trapped, living off food stocked in their homes to survive, Mohammed Awadh/NRC, March 2019

As of the end of 2010, when the Arab Spring protests had just begun in Tunisia, there were nearly 3.7 million people living in internal displacement in MENA, most of them in Iraq. The figure has more than tripled over the last ten years to reach 12.4 million at the end of 2019 (see Figure 13). The region's IDPs now make up nearly 30 per cent of the world's total. Most live in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya. The impacts of displacement have also become the drivers of further instability and risk. They have created a vicious cycle in which displacement becomes more chronic and protracted.

Even in countries where conflict has receded, reconstruction is difficult because of high costs and the lack of the social cohesion needed to reactivate local economies. When disasters strike on top of this and trigger more displacement, progress toward the achievement of durable solutions can be brought to a halt or even reversed. In such volatile environments, the design and implementation of policies for sustainable development and durable solutions can be extremely demanding.

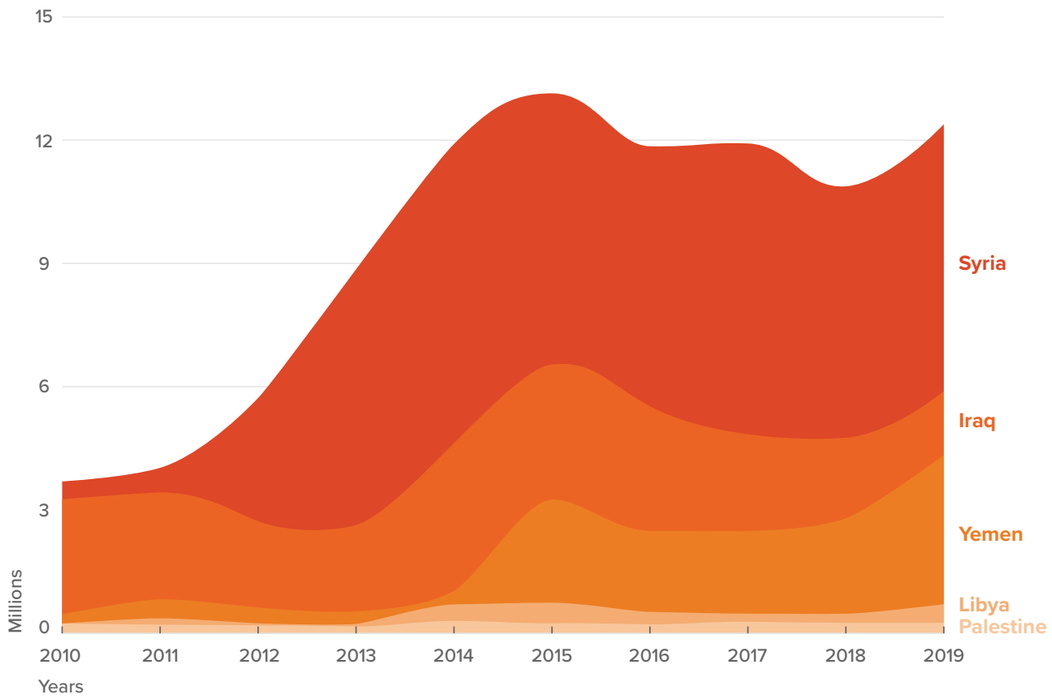
Many IDPs have been unable to put an end to their displacement as a result, and governments and humanitarian aid providers face challenges in supporting them.

Our internal displacement index (IDI), which provides an indication of the overall situation in different countries and regions, shows that many MENA countries have some of the lowest average IDI values worldwide. This is explained by low levels of security and stability, modest policy development and implementation, and the severity of displacement (see Figures 14).

Strengthening peacebuilding efforts and increasing security are essential for improving the overall situation, and a key step is to improve the availability and quality of data on internal displacement. A solid baseline is needed to guide efforts in risk reduction and prevention, response, recovery and durable solutions.[245]

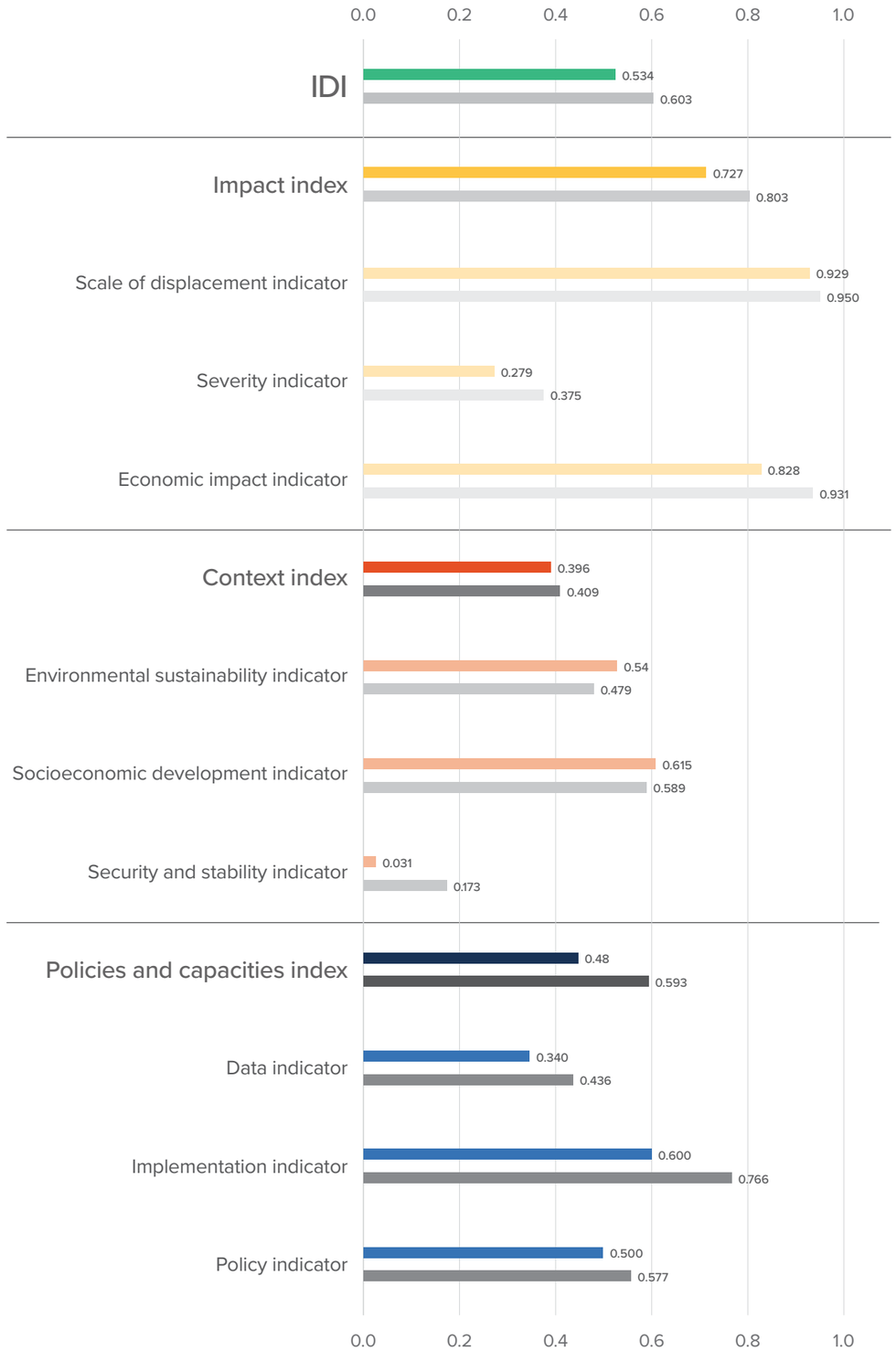
Putting an end to displacement requires greater understanding of how it comes about and how it can be prevented. Better assessing its economic and social impacts, capturing its chronic and protracted nature and unpacking its relationship with cross-border and return movements would help to establish the knowledge to inform policy and drive positive change for IDPs. This section looks at these issues in detail and identifies gaps and good practices that are relevant to all stakeholders working on humanitarian response and development planning.

Figure 13: Total number of IDPs by conflict and violence in the MENA region (2010-2019)



The country names and values are shown only when the total number of IDPs per year value exceeds 100,000.

Figure 14: Internal Displacement Index in MENA (coloured) and globally (grey)



Measuring social and economic impacts

Whether it is triggered by conflict, violence or disasters, internal displacement has important economic and social consequences for IDPs, their host communities and countries as a whole.

It has a destabilising effect on the housing conditions, livelihoods, health, education and security of those forced to flee their homes, often with significant financial repercussions that limit their ability to contribute to the economy. It also generates specific needs, including shelter, food and healthcare that must be paid for by IDPs themselves, host communities, government agencies and the humanitarian sector.

We estimate the total cost of meeting the needs of all of MENA's IDPs as of the end of 2019 at more than $8 billion. This includes providing every IDP with support for housing, healthcare, education and security, and compensating them for their loss of income.[246] It equates to an average cost per IDP of $623, far higher than the global average of $390[247] (see Figure 15).

The high cost is partly a result of the severity of the region's displacement crises, but also the high average income levels in some of the countries assessed compared with other regions and countries affected by the phenomenon. Data on the economic impact of internal displacement is available for only five MENA countries: Iraq, Libya, Palestine, Syria and Yemen.[248]

Our understanding of the social and economic impacts of displacement in MENA is still limited. These estimates only consider the costs of covering IDPs' immediate needs and losses. They do not account for the longer-term economic consequences of displacement. The disruption of children's education, for example, may limit their future employment prospects and reduce their potential income. Nor do they include the economic impacts on host communities or communities of origin. If these were included, the overall figures might be much higher.

Despite these limitations, the figures highlight the substantial economic burden internal displacement places on IDPs, governments and aid providers responding to crises in MENA, and the challenges it poses for socioeconomic development. The total cost of meeting the needs of Syria's 6.5 million IDPs and their estimated loss of income for one year is more than $5.6 billion, which represents about 14 per cent of the country's GDP (see Figure 16).[249]

Figure 15: Economic impact per IDP for one year of displacement for selected MENA countries

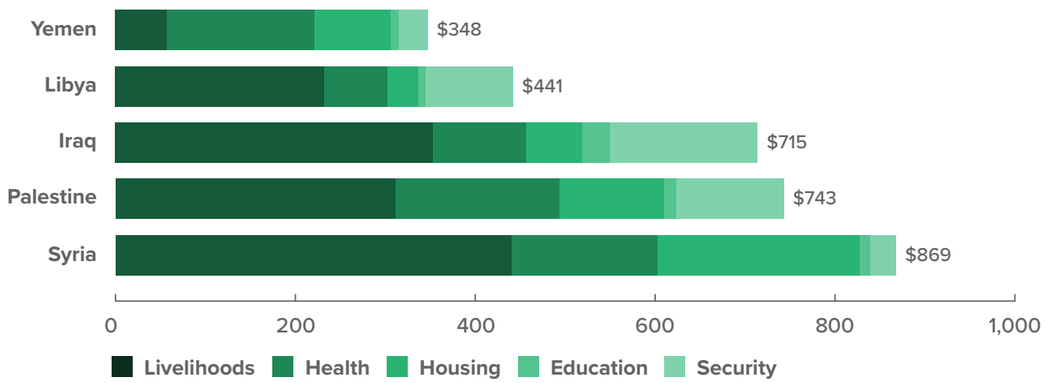
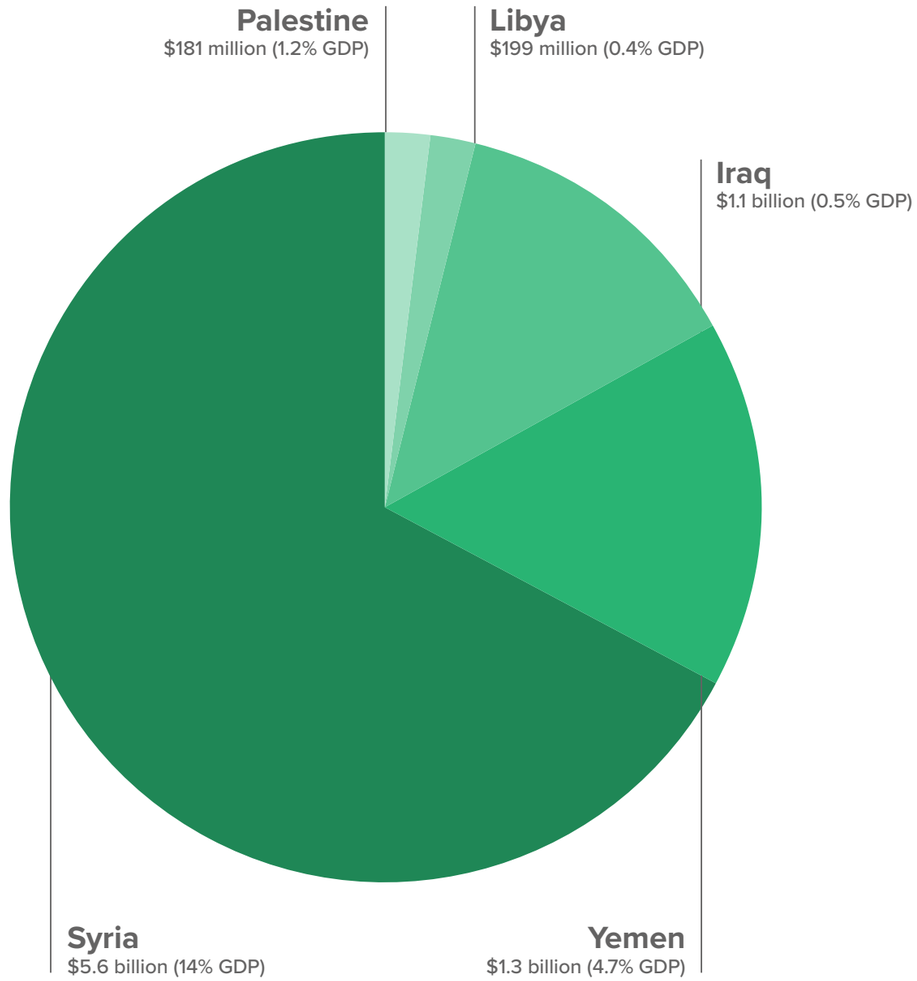


Figure 16: Total economic impact of internal displacement in 2019 for selected MENA countries (in USD, % of countries' GPD)[250]



Economic impacts increase with both the scale and severity of displacement. Our estimate for Yemen in 2019 was nearly $1.3 billion, more than twice the annual figure we calculated for the country between 2015 and 2017.[251] The increase is linked to a rise in the number of IDPs from two million in 2017 to more than 3.6 million at the end of 2019, and changes in IDPs' needs as a result of the deepening crisis.[252] Many now face prolonged displacement and extreme hunger amid severe economic decline.[253] The number of IDPs thought to be in need of food assistance has risen significantly. Identifying areas in which displacement has the highest economic impact can help governments and aid providers to tailor more effective interventions. To do that, however, requires better data on the number of people displaced, the duration of their displacement and the associated costs and losses in different areas.

Disaggregating the data

Understanding how many children, women and older people are displaced is essential for planning adequate assistance. It is also key to raising enough funds to support durable solutions. We started publishing estimates of the number of IDPs by age and sex in 2019. These estimates are based on the number of people living in internal displacement in each country at the end of the year and the UN Population Division's demographic data. They assume that the demographic distribution of IDPs is similar to that of the overall population.

When applied to MENA, this method reveals that about 6.3 million women and girls were living in internal displacement at the end of 2019 as a result of conflicts, violence and disasters. Nearly five million IDPs were under 18, and about 800,000 were over 60 (see Figure 17).

These estimates are calculated at the global and regional level, but more detailed information is required at the national level. Data disaggregation is often lacking, but there are good examples of it in countries such as Iraq and Libya, where the International Organization for Migration's displacement tracking matrix (IOM DTM) provides data disaggregated by displacement site with unique identification numbers and geolocated information using GPS coordinates.

This gives governments and humanitarian and development agencies a better understanding of the types of shelter IDPs live in, whether they are in an urban or rural location and their access to livelihoods and basic services. Datasets are also interoperable, allowing easy comparisons to be made between sites. In Palestine, OCHA has a displacement database which contains data disaggregated by sex and age and information on IDPs' most reported needs. OCHA conducts its assessments at the event level, which makes them particularly accurate.[254]

We started to disaggregate our internal displacement figures by subnational location in 2017, and by sex and age in 2019. Despite some progress, not all of our data collection partners disaggregate their figures. Less than 14 per cent of the countries and territories for which we are able to access data on conflict IDPs present this information by age and sex.[255] When data is aggregated for reporting purposes, we also lose the granularity that would help us understand how displacement affects different populations, their movements and their social and economic characteristics. Filling these gaps should be a collective priority in the years to come.

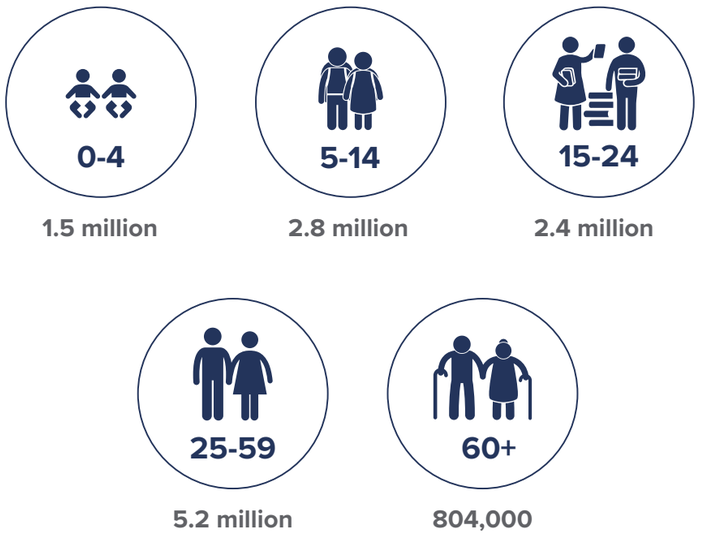


Figure 17: Total number of IDPs in MENA as of the end of 2019, by age group

Capturing small-scale displacement events

Identifying small-scale displacement events is still a major challenge. As in other regions, small-scale disasters in MENA tend to go unreported because of the absence of humanitarian agencies and data collectors on the ground. Event-based monitoring of local media articles is the only way to identify them and fill in the gaps. Most of the evidence we gathered on displacement associated with disasters in countries such as Bahrain, Oman and Tunisia came from local media reports and other news platforms.

This approach has its problems, however. News media do not produce figures for data collection purposes. The information may not be validated and is unlikely to be disaggregated. It is also rare for media outlets to follow up on a displacement situation, particularly if it is small-scale, making it all but impossible to assess its duration and evolution. The disparities in the way media outlets collect and report their information also makes it difficult to compare different situations and countries, and political bias may compromise nuanced and objective reporting.

To overcome this challenge, governments could support local authorities and communities in strengthening their capacity to collect data. This would improve the accuracy of local-level data and reduce the over-reliance on media monitoring to track small-scale displacement events.

Monitoring repeated displacement

Capturing individual movements is still extremely difficult. There is enough evidence, however, to show that a significant proportion of the new displacements referred to in part one of this report involved people fleeing for a second or third time as a result of new conflict events, disasters or a combination of the two. Data on repeated displacements is still limited, but the phenomenon has been a constant in MENA over the last decade.

Secondary displacement has become commonplace across the region, affecting not only IDPs but also refugees, many of whom live in camps or camp-like settings near river basins and on steep slopes where they often settle despite the risk of flooding and landslides.[256] Some camps are in remote areas, making it difficult for aid providers to access them and provide a timely response when a disaster strikes.

Many other IDPs move to urban and peri-urban areas often exposed to natural hazards, where they live in precarious conditions. Here they face the risk of secondary displacement as result of forced eviction as well as conflict and disasters.[257]

The international community has developed coordination and management guidelines intended to reduce the risk of disasters in camps. Good examples include UNHCR's Global Strategy for Settlement and Shelter published in 2014 and the camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) cluster standards, which are currently being tested.[258] Their implementation, however, has proved highly challenging in complex and volatile situations such as Syria and Yemen.

IOM DTM in Iraq and the Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (HNAP) in Syria have started to differentiate between primary and repeated displacements. IOM DTM now includes questions about whether people were displaced for the first or second time in their surveys, which gives us a better understanding of displacement and conflict dynamics. It also provides more information about the sustainability of returns and the likelihood of returnees becoming displaced again.

HNAP's data also tells us how many times displaced people have been forced to flee. It shows, for example, that more than half of the displacements recorded during the last major offensive on Idlib between December 2019 and early March 2020 involved people fleeing for at least the second time.[259] This evidence helps us to better understand IDPs' vulnerabilities and coping capacities.

Measuring the duration of displacement

Available data rarely provides a full understanding of the duration of displacement. This is particularly true of disaster displacement, because most data is collected at the time that people are displaced. Follow-ups during displacement are unusual, which feeds the misconception that it is overwhelmingly a short-term phenomenon. Some people are able to return quickly after a disaster strikes, but many remain displaced for months or even years and struggle to restore or rebuild their homes, land and property.

Many IDPs also lose part or all of their income as a result of their displacement, which weakens their resilience

to future shocks. Tracking the duration of displacement would help to quantify these issues and fill the gaps. Governments could also use such data to seek long-term investments from donors and financial institutions.

The regular updates IOM DTM publishes in a number of countries are a good example of tracking displacement over time. Its assessments contain detailed information on IDPs' location and their perspectives on durable solutions. They also shed light on their needs and expectations and help to identify the difficulties they face in returning home. Such information informs long-term recovery efforts. It can also be used to produce return indexes and severity assessments that help to reveal how people are able to bring their displacement to a sustainable end.

Post-disaster needs assessments (PDNAs) are another valuable way to assess the number of people who remain displaced in the aftermath of large disasters. They provide an understanding of the overall situation in which displacement takes place and how recovery and reconstruction efforts have supported those affected, including IDPs. The Iranian government conducted a comprehensive PDNA after the country's 2019 floods. It showed that around half of those displaced were children, revealed how the response was structured and shed light on IDPs' conditions several months after the disaster.[260]

Such detailed assessments, however, are only carried out once and only for major disasters. Local authorities should emulate these efforts by keeping track of where IDPs are for several months after a disaster and monitoring when they achieve solutions. National authorities and NGOs could compile and aggregate such information, which would be helpful in assessing the issue at the national level and designing or adjusting recovery plans.

Understanding displacement by slow-onset hazards and climate change

Capturing displacement associated with drought, desertification and other slow-onset phenomena is a challenge not unique to MENA. Slow-onset disasters evolve over long periods of time, as does any associated displacement. People tend not to flee en masse, and it is often difficult to distinguish between displacement and other types of migration driven by a lack of socioeconomic opportunities. Settings where conflict and drought occur together pose additional problems in this sense, and it is hard to analyse the interplay between them.

Drought displacement figures in the region are only available for Iraq, and even there it was difficult to determine when people were displaced or for how long. The data did, however, provide us with useful insights about displacement patterns. It showed, for example, that most families displaced by water scarcity moved to urban areas, and that many stayed within their governorates of origin.[261] Such information is vital when it comes to planning responses and preventing future displacement.

Several countries in MENA have adopted policies on desertification, including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, but none include the prevention or monitoring of any associated displacement.[262] They could take their efforts to the next level by including such provisions.

Improving coordination and ownership

Most of the displacement data collected over the last decade has been the result of the work of UN agencies and NGOs. Few governments in MENA have centralised datasets on disaster and conflict displacement. Those that do exist are rarely updated and the metrics are often unavailable in a format suitable for sector planning or policy development. Collaboration between government bodies should also be encouraged, because it helps to create bridges between evidence and policy making.

The case of Iraq shows this is possible and demonstrates how collaboration and data sharing can support the tailoring of effective policies. With support from the international community, Iraq's Ministry of Planning collaborated with all line ministries to conduct damage and needs assessments to estimate the impact of the country's conflict, and identify recovery and reconstruction needs across seven governorates.

The housing, health and education sectors were identified as the worst affected, shedding light on why many IDPs still live in protracted displacement. The results have fed into the government's reconstruction and development framework, and efforts are also under way to invest in community recovery and stabilisation.

IOM and its partners recently developed a return index for the country. This helps to understand IDPs' main priorities and obstacles when it comes to going back to their homes or home areas. It also helps to identify geographical areas where more investment is needed.[263]

Supported by the UN, the government launched a recovery and resilience programme in February 2018 that has helped to address the social dimensions of reconstruction and create conditions suitable for 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.

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 secretariat 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 solutions are genuinely sustainable.[264]

Addressing the displacement continuum

Internal and cross-border movements are reported on separately, but in reality they are often intertwined. Many refugees and asylum seekers were once IDPs who crossed borders for lack of the protection and assistance they needed in their country of origin. Many returning refugees also go back to a life of internal displacement.[265]

Measuring and understanding the push and pull factors that play a role in the dynamics of this displacement continuum is challenging. The data is not comprehensive enough to fully understand the scale of the phenomena involved, leaving important knowledge gaps that impede responses and longer-term policies on durable solutions for both IDPs and returning refugees.

There have been some positive steps toward filling these gaps in MENA. Interviews we conducted in 2018 reveal that around 58 per cent of Iraqi refugees and returning refugees had been internally displaced before they fled abroad.[266] Most had been displaced during the conflict with ISIL, and many had been forced to move various times within their own city or further afield. When they finally left the country, it was often because they saw no opportunities for durable solutions. Some were unable to find safety, while others struggled to access employment and services in their places of displacement.

Many IDPs faced with such obstacles are unable to afford to leave their country, even if they want to. Half of the Iraqi IDPs we surveyed said cost had prevented them from seeking refuge abroad. In Yemen, where we conducted research in 2019, three-quarters of IDPs said the same. Restrictive migration policies that force many IDPs to resort to irregular modes of migration are also a factor. The clandestine nature of travel means journeys from Yemen to Europe can cost as much as $26,000.[267] These limited paths to international protection expose IDPs throughout MENA to repeated and prolonged internal displacement.

Many of those who do cross borders face such harsh conditions that they eventually have little choice but to return to their home country regardless of the security situation there. This was the case for many returning refugees in Iraq.[268] They chose to go back after enduring conditions that included restricted movement and limited access to services in Syrian refugee camps or lack of employment in Jordan. Many people who have returned to Syria have also done so after experiencing economic difficulties and discrimination in their host countries.[269]

Many refugees who return prematurely end up in a life of internal displacement. Fewer than half of the returning refugees we surveyed in Iraq were living in their areas of origin, mostly because of the lack of security there.[270] Others had returned to find their homes destroyed, forcing them to live in rented housing or displacement camps. Others still found their homes intact but faced a lack of basic services and few livelihood opportunities. Returnees in Syria face similar challenges. Even in provinces where the conflict has abated, they struggle to get jobs and access services.[271] Faced with the impossibility of achieving a durable solution at home, some returning refugees cross borders again.

These dynamics tell us that preventing future cross-border movements means addressing the causes and impacts of internal displacement, and that preventing premature returns means meeting refugees' basic needs and encouraging host countries not to press for them to go home.

A holistic approach is needed to address the vulnerabilities of displaced communities along the entire displacement continuum, both in countries of origin and abroad.

Working on the conflict-disasters nexus

The figures in this report differentiate conflict and disasters as distinct triggers of displacement. There is enough evidence, however, to argue that they are intertwined. The disasters-conflict nexus has gained increasing attention in both research and policymaking in recent years, reflecting a paradigm shift in the way we define and understand the drivers of crisis risk.[272]

Such a shift has begun to take root in MENA, but progress in terms of policy development on disaster risk reduction (DRR), peacebuilding and durable solutions has been slow, and not all policies that touch on these issues consider displacement as a factor of crisis risk. The Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, however, shows signs of changing the narrative. Its first version, adopted in late December 2010, recognises displacement as an important risk factor in the region.[273]

A decade later, the updated version reinforces the argument and highlights the need to consider the links between DRR and conflict when developing local and national DRR strategies.[274] It also asserts that states have the prime responsibility for implementing the strategy at the national level, but progress in doing so has been modest. Of the 22 Arab League members, only seven have developed national DRR strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.[275] About half have established national disaster loss databases, but not all are up to date or publicly available.[276]

Egypt and Jordan have developed DRR strategies that consider the nexus between disasters, conflict and displacement. Egypt's 2011 strategy refers extensively to displacement, including the risk of displacement associated with slow-onset processes such as sea level rise in the Nile Delta.[277] Jordan's strategy for 2019 to 2022 mentions the need to consider conflict risk in disaster risk management.[278]

Few countries in MENA have dedicated legislation on internal displacement compared with other regions, in part because ongoing conflict, recurrent disasters and resulting displacement have hampered the development of policies that address crisis risk more comprehensively. Syria, the country most affected by internal displacement in the world, does not have institutional arrangements to deal with the challenge. This should be a cause for concern, because the country's reliance on international humanitarian aid has important shortfalls in terms of durable solutions and risk reduction.[279]

Only Iraq and Yemen have specific instruments. Yemen adopted a national policy on internal displacement in 2013 that underscores the need to protect and assist IDPs.[280] It covers conflict and disasters, and is intended to prevent displacement and create mechanisms to cope with it in the future. It contains specific support for IDPs and other affected communities by making provisions in the areas of housing, employment, training and recovery. It also sets out clear responsibilities and focal point institutions.

The policy, however, remains largely unimplemented, the result of significant shortfalls in terms of resources and capacities, and the escalation of conflict since 2014, which had led to a deepening divide between the country's different administrations.[281]

Iraq developed a comprehensive national policy on displacement in 2008, but its implementation has been slow.[282] IDPs have reported difficulties in registering with local authorities, making it difficult for them to access support mechanisms.[283] Any assistance for durable solutions also tends to favour returns over local integration and resettlement, despite the fact that ethnic and religious differences in areas of origin continue to prolong many people's displacement.[284]

Libya created a commission on IDPs in 2013 under the prime minister's office and established a committee in Tripoli. Both agencies collaborate and coordinate with international organisations on aid provision.[285]

These examples show that some countries have demonstrated political commitment to addressing displacement and reducing conflict and disaster risk, but the progress made so far pales in comparison with the scale and severity of the phenomenon. This tells us that policy frameworks and initiatives on durable solutions, conflict resolution and DRR should be better aligned toward the goal of preventing displacement and reducing the risk of it occurring. Only in this way will they address a key factor in overall crisis risk.

Hamzeh is a 20-year-old university student, joinded a livelihood programme for refugees and host communities in Jordan to pay his tuition fees, NRC, December 2018

Conclusion

The Arab Spring opened a new chapter in MENA's history. It prompted a wave of social unrest across the region, and in some countries long-running armed conflict and unprecedented internal displacement. Most of that recorded over the past decade was triggered by conflict and violence, but disasters also forced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes each year. The drivers and impacts of conflict and disasters have become increasingly intertwined and contribute to making displacement chronic and protracted.

In order to break this vicious cycle of instability and vulnerability, a renewed focus is needed on how crisis risk is generated and how peacebuilding, DRR and sustainable development efforts can be adjusted to changing and complex realities. Having reliable, timely and accurate data on the scale, duration, risk and impacts of internal displacement will be a key step.

More evidence and a solid baseline on displacement will be vital in bolstering political commitment and driving action. Strengthened technical, human and financial capacity to monitor the phenomenon will be essential to reducing the trends presented in this report. For this to happen, significant investment needs to be made in the following areas: Measuring the social and economic impacts of displacement, disaggregating the data, capturing small-scale displacement events, measuring the duration of displacement, addressing the displacement continuum, working on the disasters-conflict nexus (see the Table).

All of the above issues touch on the challenges of addressing displacement, but they could also be looked at from the perspective of solutions. There is not, however, a solid repository of good practices and solutions currently available. All stakeholders working on DRR, peacebuilding and durable solutions need to identify the practices, interventions and policy options that have been successful in reducing displacement and displacement risk. By doing this, we will collectively move from addressing problems to strengthening long-term solutions.

Current challenges		Ways forward and policy opportunities
Measuring the social and economic impacts of displacement	There are no accurate estimates on how displacement affects the social and economic well-being of IDPs, host communities and local and national governments in MENA.	Better understanding of the financial costs and social repercussions of displacement will enable more efficient planning and more effective humanitarian responses, sustainable development interventions and support for durable solutions.
Disaggregating the data	Women, children, elderly and disabled people face different impacts and challenges in coping with displacement, but few national-level datasets are disaggregated, which limits our understanding of these differences.	Assessing the demographic composition of IDPs means policies and operations can be tailored to the differentiated impacts of displacement on specific populations and age groups. Such data will also allow countries to report on the Sustainable Development Goals and other national and international frameworks for monitoring progress.
Capturing small-scale displacement events	Few datasets capture small-scale displacement events, particularly those triggered by disasters and localised conflict and violence. The reliance on media monitoring to capture these events make estimates less reliable.	Strengthening local-level capacities to monitor displacement will help to reveal how the phenomenon manifests at a more granular level. More reliable data on small-scale events will also inform local action on solutions and risk reduction.
Measuring the duration of displacement	Many IDPs are forced to flee for a second or third time, contributing to protracted displacement across MENA. Measuring this is still a challenge, and the data gaps mean we do not fully understand the causes.	Monitoring IDPs' conditions after they are displaced, and assessing when they have been able to put an end to their displacement is essential. This will allow countries to identify successful practices that can be replicated to reduce vulnerability and risk.
Addressing the displacement continuum	The relationship between these phenomena in the region is not adequately measured or understood. When and why IDPs cross borders and how refugees return to a life of internal displacement are among the main questions that need to be answered.	Returning refugees and IDPs face similar obstacles to durable solutions. A holistic response is needed to address the vulnerabilities of communities affected by displacement irrespective of their displacement status. Planning and policy for IDPs should be integrated with that for returning refugees.
Working on the disasters-conflict nexus	Data on conflict and disaster displacement is collected separately, and interventions are addressed in silos. There is enough evidence, however, to show that they form part of the same equation.	Considering the nexus between the different triggers and drivers of displacement will allow policymakers and responders to design interventions that address those common to conflict and disasters. This will contribute to reducing overall crisis risk.

Glossary

Armed Conflict: An armed confrontation between the armed forces of states (international armed conflict) or between governmental authorities and organised armed groups or between such groups within a state (non-international armed conflict).[286]

Communal Violence: Violence perpetrated across ethnic, religious or communal lines that has not met the threshold of a non-international armed conflict. Communal, in particular inter-communal violence can overlap to a significant extent with political violence with one type of violence triggering the other.[287]

Cross-border displacement: Forced movement of persons across borders, whether as a result of conflict, disasters, or other drivers of movement including development projects, irrespective of legal status in receiving countries.[288]

Disaster: A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts.[289]

Driver of displacement: Underlying structural factors that combine, overlap and accumulate to enable a crisis to erupt. Synonyms include root cause, push factor, or stressor. Examples of displacement drivers include environmental (e.g. desertification), social (e.g. ethnic tensions), political (e.g. corruption), and economic (e.g. poverty or inequality).[290]

Durable Solutions: In the context of internal displacement, a situation where internally displaced person no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement.[291]

Flows: The number of individuals or instances of displacement that cause the total number of IDPs (stock) to increase or decrease. Flows include new displacements, returns, cross-border displacement, settlement elsewhere, and local integration.

Forced evictions: The permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection.[292]

Informal settlements: The term is used in this report to denote the wide spectrum of inadequate housing. While context specific, the mostly widely applicable is probably that used by UN-Habitat which includes: i) residential areas where inhabitants have no security of tenure and may squat or rent informally; ii) neighbourhoods that lack basic services and infrastructure, and iii) housing that may not comply with planning and building regulations and may be built in environmentally sensitive areas.[293]

Locally integrated: A situation where former IDPs who, based on a voluntary and informed decision, have achieved safe, dignified and sustainable integration in the location they were displaced to. Those who do not meet the criteria set out in this definition should still be considered to be IDPs.

Protracted displacement: A situation in which the process for securing a durable solution to displacement is stalled, and/or IDPs are marginalised as a consequence of a lack of protection of their human rights.[294]

Relocation: The act of moving evacuated people to a place where they stay until return or settlement elsewhere in the country becomes possible (temporary), or the act of moving people to another location in the country and settling them there when they no longer can return to their homes or place of habitual residence (permanent).[295]

Resettlement: A situation where former IDPs who, based on a voluntary and informed decision, have settled in a location other than their place of former habitual residence or place of displacement, and have achieved safe, dignified and sustainable integration in this location.

Return: For internal displacement, return implies movement from the place of displacement back to the place of former habitual residence, ideally the former home. In the case of cross-border displacement, return signifies movement from the host country back to the country of origin.

Returnees: A distinction should be made between 'returning refugees' and 'returning IDPs'. In the case of internal displacement, a returnee is a former IDP who, based on a voluntary and informed decision, has returned in safety and dignity to their place of former habitual residence. Former refugees or migrants who cannot go back to their former habitual residence for one of the reasons set out in the Guiding Principles and are unable to sustainably integrate elsewhere are IDPs. Similarly, former refugees or migrants who, after their return, are forced to flee or leave their home or place of habitual residence for one of the reasons set out in the Guiding Principles, are also IDPs.

Risk: The potential loss of life, injury, or destroyed or damaged assets which could occur to a system, society or a community in a specific period of time, determined probabilistically as a function of hazard, exposure, vulnerability and capacity.[296]

Stock: Number of individuals living in situations of internal displacement as a result of conflict, disasters, or other drivers of displacement at any given point in time. In the absence of durable solutions, the stock figure may include IDPs who have attempted to return to their areas of origin, resettle elsewhere, or integrate locally in their place of displacement.

Trigger: Event in the wider environment that threaten people's security. Triggers may or may not lead to displacement as people evaluate the level of threat posed by an event to their immediate physical and economic security and their capacity to flee their homes. While these events directly trigger displacement, they come about as a result of the complex interaction of multiple underlying drivers.[297]

Urban area: Given the lack of an agreed definition on what an urban area is, for the purposes of this report, an urban area is defined as "a spatial concentration of people and wealth that is usually reliant on a cash-based economy, with relationships between the two shaped and regulated by a set of political, social, legal and economic institutions". In this sense, both towns and cities are considered here as urban areas.[298]

Urban displacement: encompasses forced movements of people from rural to urban areas (rural-urban), from urban to rural areas (urban-rural), between (inter-urban) and within urban areas (intra-urban).

Vulnerability: The characteristics determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts of hazards.[299]

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Join us as we work to make real and lasting change for internally displaced people in the decade ahead.

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