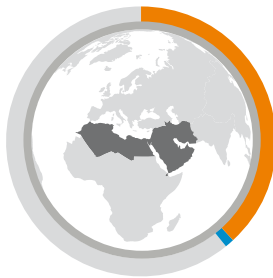


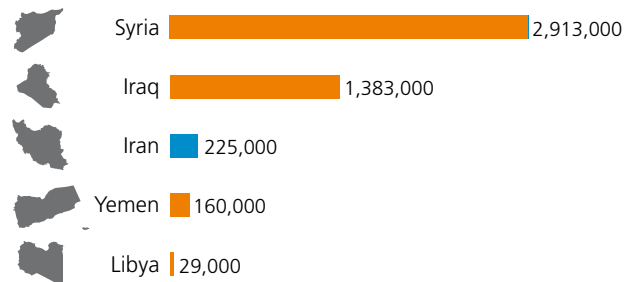
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



CONFLICT 38.1%
DISASTERS 1.3%
OF THE GLOBAL
TOTAL



5 COUNTRIES WITH MOST NEW DISPLACEMENT (conflict and disasters)



The Middle East and North Africa accounted for 38 per cent of new displacements associated with conflict and violence worldwide in 2017, with almost 4.5 million recorded. New displacement in the region was concentrated in **Iraq**, **Syria** and **Yemen**, all of which the UN classified as L3 emergencies.⁸⁷ The three countries also figure among the ten with the largest stock figures globally, accounting between them for 11.4 million people living in displacement as of the end of 2017. Syria and Iraq had the first and fourth-highest figures at almost 6.8 million and 2.7 million respectively, and Yemen the sixth-highest at 2 million.

The fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) caused much of the new displacement in **Iraq** and **Syria** during the year. The battle to retake the Iraqi city of Mosul led to more than 800,000 displacements in 2017, while in Syria, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) drove ISIL out of its self-proclaimed capital of Raqqa, causing the displacement of the city's entire population of about 230,000 people.⁸⁸ Syrian government forces also retook Deir Ezzor from ISIL, causing more than 800,000 new displacements in the process.

We also estimate that there were over 1.8 million returns in Iraq in 2017, most of which to areas previously held by ISIL. People trying to return have experienced a number of significant obstacles, including unexploded ordnances, mines and booby traps, as well as complex administrative processes and new local dynamics. This

has left them unable to achieve durable solutions, meaning we still consider them internally displaced and count them as such.

Returns are also being discussed in **Syria**, both to areas previously controlled by ISIL and opposition enclaves where de-escalation zones were set up in 2017, particularly in Idlib and Daraa governorates. Unsafe conditions in the former and ongoing conflict in the latter, however, continue to displace people and prevent those returning from achieving durable solutions. Return conditions and obstacles in both countries will be important to monitor in 2018 (see spotlight, p.24).

Conflict continued to be the main trigger of displacement in **Yemen** in 2017. The launch of Operation Golden Spear by pro-government forces backed by the Saudi-led coalition and airpower led to new displacement early in the year, with at least 41,000 people fleeing the most affected coastal areas in the immediate aftermath of the operation, followed by many more. Blockades throughout the year caused severe shortages of food and basic medicines, forcing people to move in search of basic services and humanitarian assistance. They have even forced homeless, destitute and hungry IDPs to return to what may have been left of their homes in frontline areas. 160,000 new displacements were recorded in Yemen over the year, a number that should be considered an underestimate (see spotlight, p.26)⁸⁹.

More people returned in **Libya** than were displaced in 2017, but conflict between local militias in several areas of the country still led to about 29,000 new displacements. In **Palestine**, about 700 new displacements were recorded. Demolitions, forced evictions, settler violence and the illegal expansion of settlements continued to force Palestinian families from their homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Discriminatory laws that systematically deny Palestinians building permits and access to basic services are also an underlying driver of displacement.

The Middle East and North Africa region faces significant challenges in protecting and assisting people displaced by conflict. **Yemen** adopted a national policy on internal displacement in 2013, but the lack of government capacity and legal framework for its implementation along with the state of paralysis the government has found itself in since 2014, places responsibility for responding to the country's IDPs primarily in the hands of the international community.⁹⁰ Other countries also have policies, but they are reactive in that they are mainly a framework for land and property restitution for a specific past event, such as the pre-March 2003 Baathist era in **Iraq** and the 1975 to 1990 civil war in **Lebanon**.⁹¹ They were not designed as a foundation for the management of future displacement crises.

Despite the relatively low disaster displacement figure, the region is not spared from disaster risk. Drought, desertification, sand storms, flooding and earthquakes are the most common hazards affecting the region, some of which have put a considerable number of people to move. Rapidly growing and increasingly dense urban populations, poor urban planning and low construction standards heighten people's exposure and vulnerability to hazards.

Disasters displaced about 234,000 people across the region, 225,000 of them in **Iran**. The country is prone to seismic activity, and a series of earthquakes caused displacement throughout the year. The largest, of magnitude 7.3, struck western areas in November, reducing whole neighbourhoods to rubble and destroying almost 80 per cent of the infrastructure in the cities of Sar Pol Yahab and Ghasr Shirin.⁹² Storms and flooding also displaced as many as 21,000 people in Iran throughout the year.

The Arab League adopted an eight-year DRR strategy in 2012, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) committed to developing a risk reduction roadmap.⁹³ The Arab League's DRR strategy is one of only a few that explicitly mention the need to prioritise vulnerable groups, including IDPs. Such initiatives demonstrate political will, but many challenges remain, chief among them increasing the capacity of national bodies, clearly delineating their roles and developing standardised data collection methods to inform decision-makers.

Displacement has reached unprecedented levels in the Middle East and North Africa, and the dearth of national or regional policies or legal mechanisms tackling the phenomenon reflects a lack of political will to protect IDPs and address root causes of displacement, in particular the conflicts that plague the region. These conflicts are characterised by blatant disrespect for human rights and international humanitarian law. The international community has sometimes been complicit in, and has otherwise largely failed to address such violations. Without renewed efforts by states in the region, and the wider international community to resolve these political crises, engage in reconstruction and build stability, internal displacement will continue to grow.