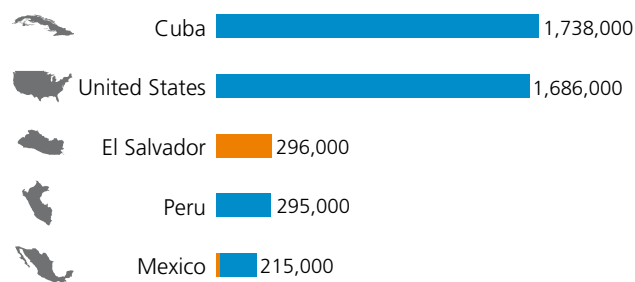


THE AMERICAS



DISASTERS 23.8%
CONFLICT 3.9%
OF THE GLOBAL
TOTAL

5 COUNTRIES WITH MOST NEW DISPLACEMENT (conflict and disasters)



At 4.5 million, the number of people displaced by disasters in the Americas was about ten times higher than the 457,000 who fled conflict and violence in 2017, affecting high and low-income countries alike. People fled their homes from **Canada** to **Chile** to escape earthquakes and climate extremes in the form of cyclones, wildfires and floods. The region as a whole accounted for 24 per cent of displacement associated with disasters globally, second only to East Asia and Pacific.

Displacement associated with conflict and violence saw a steady increase, from 436,000 in 2016 to 457,000 in 2017. Mirroring previous years, countries like **El Salvador**, **Colombia** and **Mexico** were among the most affected. Criminal violence was also widespread in **Guatemala**, **Honduras** and **Venezuela**, but figures for internal displacement in those countries are difficult to come by.

The Atlantic hurricane season accounted for the vast majority of the region's displacement associated with disasters. Hurricane Irma was the largest disaster event of the year worldwide, displacing around 2 million people over two weeks in August and September. Hurricane Harvey displaced another 848,000 and Maria around 146,000. About twenty countries and territories, most of them small island developing states in **the Caribbean**, suffered the worst impacts of the season (see spotlight, p.42).

The US was also highly affected, particularly by Harvey, which caused unprecedented flooding in Houston, Texas. It is ironic that a subsidised flood insurance mechanism the federal government introduced in 1968 actually ended up promoting the construction of housing in flood-prone areas.¹⁸⁴ In this sense, Harvey's impacts were as much due to decades of unsustainable, badly conceived and poorly implemented urban planning as the intensity of the hazard itself. The storm displaced around 848,000 people in the US.

The west coast of **the US** and **Canada** suffered the impacts of major wildfires. In southern California the biggest wildfires affected an area the size of New York City and Boston combined, triggering the evacuation of more than 204,000 people.¹⁸⁵ Other wildfires in the US triggered more than 181,000 new displacements, and in Canada around 78,000. British Columbia experienced the worst wildfires in the province's history, displacing around 65,000 people.

Central **Mexico** was hit by a 7.1 magnitude earthquake that affected seven states and displaced 104,000 people. It struck on 19 September, the same day as in the 1985 Mexico City earthquake that killed thousands. Following the 1985 earthquake, Mexico established laws, policies, strategies and institutions to manage disaster risk, and now has one of the world's most sophisticated earthquake early warning systems.¹⁸⁶

Emergency drills have been conducted throughout the country every year since 1985 on 19 September as a reminder of the importance of disaster awareness.¹⁸⁷

The 2017 earthquake struck hours after the annual emergency drills, damaging and collapsing buildings and killing 230 people.¹⁸⁸ This showed that despite having strong governance and civil society engagement, Mexico still needs to do more to reduce disaster risk and avoid losses, damage and displacement.

Floods caused displacement throughout the continent with **Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay** and **the US** as the most affected countries. The flooding in Peru was the worst in 20 years, and displaced around 295,000 people.¹⁸⁹

Displacement associated with conflict and violence in the Americas accounted for about four per cent of the global total. **El Salvador** appeared to be the worst affected country, with 296,000 new displacements, followed by **Colombia** with 139,000. This figure for Colombia was fewer than the 171,000 recorded in 2016, the result in part of the peace agreement signed between the government and the country's largest armed group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

The end of FARC's 50-year insurgency followed more than a decade of policy initiatives intended to address the plight of the country's IDPs, including the 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law, which laid the foundations for the negotiations that eventually led to the 2016 peace deal.¹⁹⁰ The process was backed by the international community and is widely considered a success to be emulated in other countries and regions affected by conflict.

Despite this important milestone in **Colombia's** recent history, violence continues to cause displacement. Criminal gangs, guerrilla groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), dissident FARC fighters and reconstituted paramilitary groups have occupied many of the territories FARC used to control. They have taken over illegal activities prevalent in these areas such as drug production, illegal mining and other extractive practices. The highest numbers of IDPs were recorded in the marginalised Pacific coast departments of Cauca, Chocó, Nariño and Valle del Cauca. Indigenous and African-Colombian communities have been disproportionately affected by the new wave of conflict.

The situation in Colombia has been defined as an ongoing humanitarian crisis characterised by urban displacement and dire conditions for IDPs, with two out of three living below the poverty line.¹⁹¹ Progress in implementing the land restitution and reform agreed by the government and FARC has been slow, raising fears that the peace process might be undermined and new waves of violence sparked.

The political and economic situation in neighbouring **Venezuela** deteriorated over the course of the year. The number of IDPs in the country is unknown, but as of the end of 2017 more than 500,000 Venezuelans were estimated to be living in exile across the border in Colombia, and about 110,000 people fled the country in October 2017 alone.¹⁹² It is also hard to establish how many of the people on the move have fled criminal violence, repression and intimidation, and how many the country's dire and deteriorating economic situation. Most, however, are in desperate need of food, medicines and healthcare.¹⁹³

The **Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA)** continues to be plagued by drug-related criminal and gang violence. An extrapolation of findings from a national survey in **El Salvador** suggests there were around 296,000 new displacements in the country as a result. An unknown number of people have been displaced in **Honduras**, while in **Guatemala** there are only reports about evictions, which represent a small part of all displacements. Internal displacement in the NTCA has tended to be invisible, but a number of policy developments in 2017 have the potential to begin filling an urgent knowledge and action gap (see spotlight, p.40).

The Americas as a whole also made important policy advances toward government transparency, responsibility and accountability for internal displacement. The 2017 San Pedro Sula Declaration, adopted by Central American countries, lays out the region's position on joint protection mechanisms for IDPs and migrants. This declaration also addressed forced displacement as a component of the 2030 Agenda, and referenced the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the SDGs.¹⁹⁴ This was a clear step in the right direction as countries continue to strengthen their regional, sub-regional and national efforts to address both violence and disaster-induced displacement in the region.