

Worldwide displaced population reaches record 59.5 million in 2014

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Worldwide forcible displacement due to armed conflict or persecution is at its highest level in recorded history, according to a report released Thursday by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The annual Global Trends Report: World at War estimates that a record 59.5 million people were forcibly displaced by the end of 2014, with the largest recorded annual increase of 8.3 million and a staggering increase of 22 million from merely a decade ago.

Despite their failure to apportion any blame whatsoever to those responsible for this crisis, the report succeeds in presenting a broad overview of the suffering and displacement that has been wrought by imperialism in the recent period. Those uprooted by “Persecution, conflict, generalized violence, and human rights violations have formed a ‘nation of the displaced’ that, if they were a country, would make up the 24th largest in the world,” roughly equal to the population of Italy or the United Kingdom.

Of the 59.5 million forcibly displaced people, 19.5 million are refugees living outside their country or territory of origin, 1.8 million are asylum-seekers whose refugee status has not yet been determined, and 38.2 million are internally displaced persons, those forced to flee violence or persecution but who have not crossed an international border.

Roughly 51 percent of the world’s refugees are children below 18 years of age, up from 41 percent in 2009 and the highest figure in over a decade.

Worldwide, one in every 122 people is now either a refugee, internally displaced or seeking asylum.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres declared in a press release, “We are witnessing a paradigm change, an unchecked slide into

an era in which the scale of global forced displacement as well as the response required is now clearly dwarfing anything seen before.”

The detailed report quantifies the broad range of conflicts that have created this humanitarian catastrophe. The most devastated region is the Middle East, and in particular Syria, where the US-stoked civil war that began in 2011 with the financing of Islamic fundamentalist organizations laid the groundwork for the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The subsequent US-led bombing campaign and proxy war against ISIS, combined with the unrelenting brutality of ISIS itself has, over the past year, brought the cumulative displacement of Syrians to 11.6 million, so that globally “almost one out of every four refugees is Syrian, with 95 percent located in surrounding countries.”

Syria became the world’s largest source country of refugees during 2014, outnumbering Afghanistan, which had held this position for more than 30 years. Concurrently, an influx of roughly 1 million Syrian refugees caused Turkey to become the world’s largest refugee-hosting country, exceeding Pakistan, which for over a decade has given asylum to the majority of Afghans fleeing war and sectarian violence wrought by the ongoing US-led war in Afghanistan.

In 2014, 403,600 Syrian refugees were newly registered in Lebanon, which remained the third largest refugee hosting country with a total of 1.15 million refugees. Lebanon has by far the largest number of refugees in relation to its national population, with 232 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants, or nearly a quarter of the total population. Prior to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Lebanon was home to just 8,000 refugees.

The cumulative impact of imperialist intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria has created a situation where “Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon and the Islamic Republic of Iran hosted more than 5.2 million or 36 percent of all refugees worldwide,” according to the report.

Across Africa, violent conflict has erupted or reignited in numerous countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (over 4 million displaced), South Sudan (over 2.4 million displaced), Somalia (2.3 million), the Central African Republic (1.49 million), Nigeria (1.38 million), Côte d’Ivoire (121,000), Libya (371,000), Mali (427,000) and Burundi (335,000).

The findings of the report stand as a damning indictment of the US-led imperialist order, which is ultimately responsible, either overtly through direct military intervention or covertly through the machinations of the CIA and weapons sales, for every war that has unleashed the cumulative chaos documented by the report.

With the full-scale eruption of American imperialism in recent years, there has been an unrelenting increase in the number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide, particularly in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. In the past four years alone, there has been a fourfold increase in the number of individuals forced to flee their homes each day, from a daily average of 10,900 in 2010 to 42,500 in 2014.

“It is not just the scale of global forced displacement that is disconcerting,” the report notes, “but also its rapid acceleration in recent years. For most of the past decade, displacement figures ranged between 38 million and 43 million persons annually. Since 2011, however, when levels stood at 42.5 million, these numbers have grown to the current 59.5 million—a 40 percent increase within a span of just three years.”

Following the February 2014 fascist-led putsch that toppled Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, the ensuing civil war in eastern Ukraine has forcibly displaced over 1 million people. An estimated 237,000 are now refugees, mostly residing in Russia, while 823,000 are internally displaced. Over the course of the year, the total number of refugees in Russia swelled from 3,400 to 231,800, with Ukrainians now constituting 98 percent of all refugees in Russia.

Significantly, 6.4 million refugees, or 45 percent of

the total, are enduring protracted refugee situations, defined by UNHCR as a situation “in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five years or more in a given asylum country.”

For the vast majorities of refugees, the horrific conditions from which they flee are often found to be only marginally better in the country where they ultimately find asylum.

In 2014, developing regions hosted 86 percent of the world’s refugees, the highest value in over two decades, while those in the subcategory of Least Developed Countries hosted 25 percent of the global total. Over 5.9 million refugees, or 42 percent of the total, reside in countries where per capita GDP is below US\$5,000.

The report offers no recommendations for ending the refugee crisis, but in media interviews Guterres has decried the lack of funding for aid organizations such as the UNHCR, which provides a range of services to a majority of refugees worldwide.

The only way to resolve this international crisis, whose origins lie in the private ownership of the means of production and the division of the world into rival nation states, is through the international mobilization of the working class in the fight for socialism, laying the foundations for the building of a new society based on social need, not private profit.



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