

A record 86 million people forcibly displaced worldwide

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The number of people living in internal displacement around the world reached 59.1 million at the end of 2021, up from 55 million and 50 million in 2020 and 2019, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)'s annual global report. There are an additional 26.6 million registered refugees living outside their country of origin, taking the total number of forcibly displaced people to 86 million.

To put this figure in context: the equivalent of the population of Germany, or more than one percent of the world's 7.9 billion population, have been driven from their homes. And this is only the recorded number. The real figure is higher. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), whose annual Global Trends Report on forced displacement is due to be published on June 16, puts the total number including asylum seekers at more than 100 million.

The record number of internally displaced people (IDPs) is the result of wars, conflicts and violence provoked or directly waged by the imperialist powers, as well as natural disasters, often created or exacerbated by the activities of the world's giant corporations and their governments.

Last year saw 38 million new IDPs created, with sub-Saharan Africa the most affected area. More than five million people were displaced in Ethiopia alone, the highest figure ever for a single country in one year, due to the civil war against Tigrayan rebels that has spread to neighbouring provinces. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Afghanistan and Myanmar also registered unprecedented numbers of IDPs in 2021.

The DRC has for decades been the arena of largely unreported and forgotten wars, fought by shifting alliances aided and abetted by neighbouring countries and the local kleptocrats they serve, for control of the country's vast mineral resources. These are of critical importance for the global manufacturing of the lithium-

ion batteries used for electric vehicles (containing cobalt), electronic devices (containing tantalum, tin and gold) and infrastructure (copper for transmission lines). Over 4.5 million Congolese are displaced within the DRC due to violence in the Kasai, Tanganyika, Ituri, and Kivu regions, while more than 864,000 Congolese refugees were recorded in 2021. The DRC also hosts large numbers of refugees from neighbouring countries.

The Middle East and North Africa has recorded the smallest number of new IDPs in 10 years, as US-orchestrated conflicts in Syria, Libya and Iraq have to some degree subsided while Washington's attention is focused on Russia. The overall number of those fleeing evictions, death threats and ethnic cleansing perpetuated by sectarian violence—typically young jobless men, single mothers and unaccompanied children—remains very high.

While natural disasters triggered the most internal displacements, conflicts and violence compounded the scale of these disasters, forcing people to flee several times. There were multiple, overlapping crises in Mozambique, Myanmar, Somalia and South Sudan that affected food security and forced people from their homes. The knock-on effects of the COVID pandemic, including loss of employment and global travel restrictions, also exacerbated the situation.

Some 25.2 million (41 percent) of the world's IDPs are under the age of 18. They will suffer the lifelong disadvantages, including the psychological impact, that flow from being forced to live in squalid refugee camps—little more than prisons for the world's most vulnerable—rife with disease and exploitation.

More than 25 percent of the world's refugees are from Syria, with around 6.7 million Syrians in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey as a result of the imperialist-instigated civil war. In Lebanon, where there are no formal camps, more than one million Syrians are scattered around the country, often in overcrowded

temporary shelters.

Roughly 10 percent of the world's refugees, 2.6 million, are Afghan by birth and living in neighboring Pakistan and Iran. Of those Afghans still living in their home country, most are in areas directly affected by conflict, forcing continual internal displacement. The country has suffered natural disasters including floods, landslides, earthquakes and drought.

Nearly four million South Sudanese people have fled their homes, with around 2.6 million displaced to Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and the DRC. In December 2013, war erupted between rival factions of the ruling elite for control of newly established South Sudan's oil resources.

An increasing number of people are fleeing neighboring Sudan amid ongoing poverty, drought and famine that fueled mass protests in the run up to the pre-emptive military coup in April 2019 and the subsequent violence of the military junta. Sudan is at the same time the fifth largest country of asylum for refugees, including the largest population of refugees from South Sudan.

More than 1.1 million Rohingya refugees have fled ongoing violence in Myanmar since August 2017, with many of the stateless Rohingya ending up in the world's largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Another sectarian conflict—in the Central African Republic (CAR), ongoing since 2012—has displaced more than one million people, more than 20 percent of the country's five million population.

Around 10 percent of Eritrea's population—over 492,000 people—are living overseas as refugees due to the social and political instability and violence fueled by US and European imperialism's bid to control energy resources and the strategic location on the Red Sea, through which much of the Middle East's oil exports pass.

Thousands have died attempting to flee the war zones created by the imperialist powers throughout Africa and Asia in their quest for markets and mineral resources. The European Union has adopted a policy of mass murder, all but obliterating the right to asylum by refusing to accept refugees, leading to more than 3,000 people dead or reported missing while trying to cross the Mediterranean and the Atlantic last year according to the UNHCR.

The UN body appealed last April for \$163.5 million to assist and protect thousands of refugees and asylum seekers. This and similar appeals by UN agencies for humanitarian aid fell on deaf ears. The major powers are using the war in Ukraine and the recession engulfing the

world as a pretext for reducing already limited humanitarian aid available to people viewed as so much surplus labour.

There has been barely any mention of the latest displacement figures in the world's press. Wars, conflicts and disasters and the ensuing misery are not only normalized but becoming the policy of choice for the major imperialist powers and their puppet regimes in the world's poorest countries.

The numbers of IDPs and refugees are already out of date. The war in Ukraine that began on February 24 had by the beginning of May caused more than eight million of Ukraine's 44 million population to flee their homes, with a further 6.8 million taking refuge outside Ukraine. This far exceeds the UNHCR's initial estimate that four million Ukrainians—nearly 10 percent of the population—would be displaced internationally because of the war. Most have fled to neighbouring Poland, Romania, Moldova, Hungary and Slovakia.

Jan Egeland, the secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, commented, "The situation today is phenomenally worse than even our record figure suggests, as it doesn't include nearly eight million people forced to flee the war in Ukraine." The US/NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine has caused the largest displacement crisis in Europe since World War II.

The globally displaced and refugee population is likely to reach a new high by the end of 2022 as Washington and NATO massively expand the war in Ukraine and threaten China. The ever-deepening crisis of capitalism, exacerbated by the pandemic, poses ever more starkly the urgent necessity of building a massive anti-war, anti-capitalist movement and socialist leadership in the working class that will put an end to imperialist war and poverty.



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