

# Disasters and violence displaced two million people across the Americas in 2018

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**10 May 2019, Geneva – Weather-related disasters triggered 1.7 million new internal displacements in the Americas last year, mostly in the US. Armed fighting and criminal violence in Central and South America gave rise to another 400,000, according to a new report from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).**

California suffered the most destructive outbreak of wildfires in its history in 2018. More than 350,000 new displacements were recorded, 335,000 hectares of land burnt and more than 100 lives lost. The south-east coast of the US was struck by hurricanes Florence and Michael, which triggered nearly 850,000 displacements between them.

“The United States, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, is heavily affected by disasters year after year, which demonstrates that anyone can be impacted by internal displacement,” said Alexandra Bilak, IDMC’s director.

The Global Report on Internal Displacement reveals that disasters also triggered 67,000 new displacements in Colombia. Notably when fears of a dam burst led to mass evacuations. Despite the 2016 peace agreement between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), fighting between other armed groups led to 145,000 new displacements, an increase on previous years.

New displacement in Colombia was overshadowed, however, by the situation in neighbouring Venezuela. The government’s unwillingness to acknowledge the humanitarian crisis means that data on internal displacement is not available, but more than three million people are thought to have fled the country to escape economic meltdown, food shortages, service breakdown and increasing criminality.

Colombia is estimated to be hosting at least a million Venezuelan refugees and migrants, and as many as 500,000 Colombians have also returned. Around 5.8 million people were living in internal displacement in the country as of the end of 2018, a figure second only to Syria.

Gang and criminal violence continued to trigger new displacements in the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA). More than 240,000 were recorded in El Salvador and 950 in Honduras, though the latter is considered a significant underestimate. It was not possible to compile a reliable figure for Guatemala. Violence linked to the drug trade also led to 11,000 new displacements in Mexico, a similar number to those triggered by hurricane Willa in October.

Internal displacement is an increasingly urban phenomenon. Conflict, climate shocks and large-scale development projects often drive people from rural to urban areas. The California wildfires were also a reminder of how urban expansion and the effects of climate change combine to increase people’s vulnerability to disasters and displacement.

Many cities in the region are among the most dangerous in the world and the urban poor are particularly at risk of displacement by criminal violence and forced evictions, but new ways of dealing with the issue are emerging in cities such as Medellín in Colombia, where local governments and communities have taken the lead.

“The fact that cities have become sanctuary to more and more internally displaced people represents a challenge for municipal authorities, but also an opportunity. Leveraging the positive role that local government can play in finding solutions to displacement will be key to addressing this challenge in the future,” said Alexandra Bilak.

## NOTES TO EDITORS:

### Regional press releases:

Regional press releases detailing more specific displacement within geographical areas are available for sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas, Asia and Middle East and North Africa.

### About IDMC:

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) is the world's authoritative source of data and analysis on internal displacement. Since its establishment in 1998, as part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), IDMC has offered a rigorous, independent and trusted service to the international community. Their work informs policy and operational decisions that improve the lives of the millions of people living in internal displacement, or at risk of becoming displaced in the future.

### For interviews please contact:

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Live interviews can be arranged today with Alexandra Bilak, IDMC's Director and Jan Egeland, NRC's Secretary General.

### Landing page:

From 10 May, visit [www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2019](http://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2019) to read and download the full report and summary; explore stories of displaced people and access a media pack, containing global and regional press releases, biographies of spokespeople, photos and b-roll.

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