UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Figure Analysis – Displacement Related to Disasters

SUMMARY OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN 2019

As one of the largest countries in the world by population and physical size, the US is exposed to various natural hazards. Disasters occur frequently, affecting people and property and costing the country billions of dollars in damages and reconstruction. Floods are the most common disaster in the US, but the country is also affected by earthquakes, landslides, tornadoes, thunderstorms and hurricanes. The mission of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is to help people before, during and after disasters by coordinating the federal government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from disasters. Various levels of government, however, are also involved in disaster preparedness and prevention, and there is a strong civil society component. According to IDMC's global risk model, more than 232,000 people on average are at risk of being displaced by disasters every year, but this is an underestimation. The country in recent years has experienced many more new displacements and 2019 is no exception.

Table 1. 2019 summary of internal displacement in United States

Number of events that triggered displacements[1]	230
Total new displacements[2]	916,000
Estimated IDPs as of 31 December 2019[3]	37,000
Houses destroyed[4]	7,300
People pre-emptively evacuated before events[5]	240
People officially sheltered after events[6]	2,900

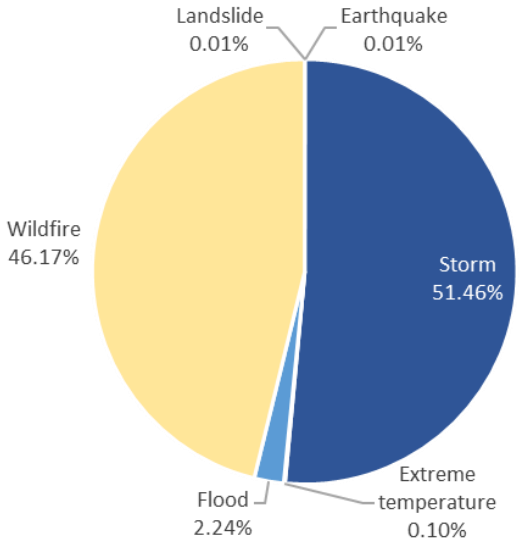
Notes

[1] *This corresponds to the number of disaster events that triggered displacement during 2019*
[2] *This corresponds to new instances of total internal displacement related to the disaster event during the year*
[3] *This corresponds to the total number of individuals living in a situation of internal displacement as of 31 December 2019 as a result of disasters*
[4] *This corresponds to the number of houses destroyed during the year*
[5] *This corresponds to the number of people that have been detected as pre-emptively evacuated before the disaster events*
[6] *This corresponds to the total number of people that have been sheltered following the disasters events*

New Displacement in 2019 by hazard type

The US experienced displacement as a result of several natural hazards, including storms, wildfires, flooding, extreme temperature, earthquakes and landslides in 2019. The bulk of new displacements were caused by storms. This included Hurricane Dorian, which caused more than 450,000 people to evacuate their homes in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida and Virginia between the end of August and early September. Although the hurricane was the major disaster event of the year, numerous wildfires displaced more than 320,000 people in 2019. The majority of people were displaced in California during the wildfire season, and specifically October, when about 300,000 people fled their homes. There was also major flooding across the United States this year, especially in the Midwest region where floods triggered more than 20,000 new displacements. Tornadoes caused almost 10,000 people to be displaced, including the destruction of 5,800 people's homes in Montgomery County, Ohio in May. There were as many as 555 preliminary tornado reports that month, with at least one tornado reported on 28 out of 31 days. May 2019 had the second highest number of reported tornadoes of any month on record, behind April 2011.

Fig. 1. Distribution of new displacements by hazard types in United States in 2019



DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

IDMC uses various sources to estimate displacement in the US. This includes local media reports; FEMA daily situation reports, which include shelter data from the American Red Cross; and, where possible, information provided by local or state emergency management offices. The main reason for this use of different sources is that, given the size and governance structure of the US, there is no central information source for all types of disasters. Local media and local/state authority reports are useful for small-scale events and may have information on evacuations and housing destruction. FEMA, meanwhile, provides an overview of displacement metrics, such as numbers of people sheltered or under mandatory evacuations for medium-to-large scale events.

Main caveats and monitoring challenges

The amount of information generated for the country is substantial because of the existence of numerous media outlets and other sources of information, the decentralized nature of the 50 states and 14 territories and the size of the population. This creates a monitoring challenge. Internal displacement can also be classified in the form of evacuation orders, people sheltered, or housing destroyed based on the different types of disasters that affect the population. Another challenge is that despite the fact that local governments issue evacuation orders during hurricanes, wildfires and flooding, people in many cases do not heed these orders. This makes it difficult to understand the full extent of displacement. People's reasons for not following evacuation orders are complex and multifaceted. They range from practical challenges for the poor, elderly and those with disabilities, to a lack of timely and accessible information for the general public, and the perception and communication of disaster risk.

As a result, IDMC's estimates use reports of evacuation orders and people in shelters as its primary indication of displacement. This gives some idea of movement. We are also aware, however, that these orders cover more people than are accounted for in temporary shelters. In the absence of this information or to improve our estimates, we also use housing destruction as a proxy for displacement. Evacuation orders may overestimate displacement in the country, but authorities who only report on people at official shelters may underestimate it. This is because of a gap in knowing who is displaced elsewhere, whether, for example, they are staying with family or friends, in hotels or in other unofficial locations.

Another challenge comes from not fully understanding how long it takes people to return home. This is compounded by the increasingly problematic issues that go along with disasters: housing affordability, the ability to rebuild one's home or to afford a new one. Recent disasters have highlighted that, while poor households are disproportionately affected, people who live in exposed areas and are displaced as a result of the collapse or destruction of their homes face long-term challenges when it comes to their return.

Our stock estimation in 2019: Providers of disaster displacement data tend not to include information about when, how and for how long people were displaced. One of the main gaps and challenges in accurately estimating the number of IDPs is the lack of measurement of return flows. Nor does data tend to be collected on people who have achieved durable solutions by integrating locally or resettling elsewhere in the country.

Our year-end estimate is based on time series data and housing destruction data for specific disaster events, as well as aggregated figures about the number of people displaced by disasters recorded by governments and other stakeholders. In addition to the people displaced by disasters in 2019, this figure includes cases from previous years where there was information on the number of people still displaced. (more information on - http://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/2020-GRID-methodology.pdf)

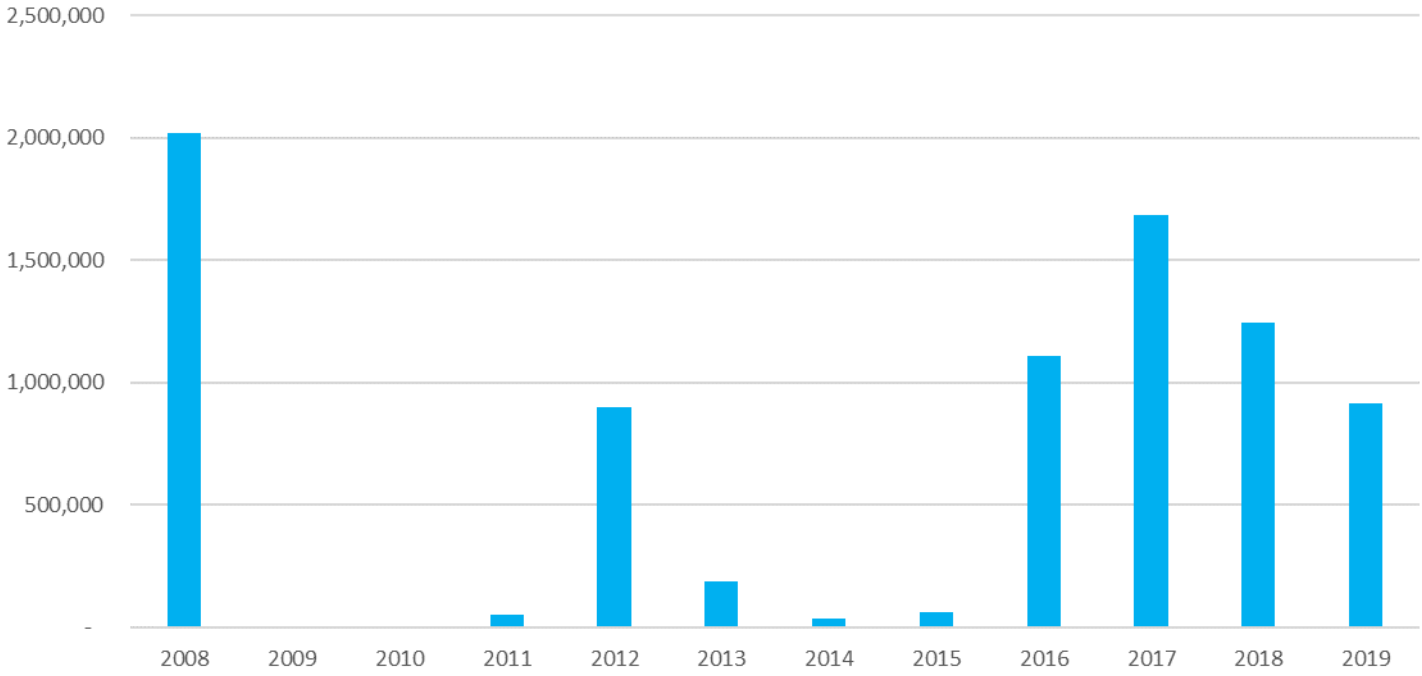
CONTEXT

Weather and climate-related disasters killed more than 13,000 people and cost the US more than $1.7 trillion in damages between 1980 and 2019. There were more than 250 disasters where the overall damages/costs reached or exceeded $1 billion during this period. This is a conservative estimate, however, as the data does not include smaller-scale disasters or ones that are geophysical in nature, such

as earthquakes. It does, however, provide insight into the scale of disasters, as well as the country's financial and social vulnerability. Apart from efforts to help people prepare and plan for a disaster, there are a variety of programs for those affected by disasters. These include providing support for displaced people or those who have lost their homes, especially in the form of temporary housing and financial assistance, such as FEMA's Transitional Sheltering Assistance (TSA) and the Individuals and Households Program (IHP).

Trends analysis 2008-2019

Fig 2. Historical displacement trends in United States



Based on an assessment of annual displacements over the last 10 years, the trend of new displacements is very different from year to year. Part of this irregularity is a result of the availability of data. A majority of displacement is temporary, but it is unclear whether those who are most vulnerable continue to be displaced or have achieved durable solutions. There are various challenges to returning home, including the lack of affordable housing and, in some cases, the lack of finances, resources and support to relocate or rebuild. As the impacts of climate change intensify, it is not only the magnitude of a disaster that is important. It is also the amount of time between disasters that would allow for recovery. With longer wildfire and hurricane seasons and more intense fires and storms, the amount of time for people to return to normalcy, to reconstruct, or to find a new home may not be enough before another disaster strikes.

For the full country profile on the United States please visit:
http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/united-states