Policy Brief

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The human cost of disaster displacement

A life-year approach to understanding displacement impacts

- Bangladesh is among the countries most affected by disaster displacement worldwide, recording more than 21 million movements between 2008 and 2025
- Displacement is one of the least visible but most significant costs of disasters in Bangladesh, resulting in estimated human costs of 89,000 life-years lost, valued at approximately $1.7 billion
- Climate change will increase these costs, particularly those associated with riverine floods and storm surges
- The full costs of displacement must be accounted for and integrated in disaster risk reduction, recovery planning and climate adaptation

Disaster displacement generates substantial human costs

21 million internal displacements	between 2008 and 2025
89,000 life-years	lost between 2008 and 2025
$ 1.7 billion human costs	between 2008 and 2025

A life-year analysis estimates around 89,000 life-years lost across this period, corresponding to $1.7 billion in cumulative human costs. Annual human costs average $102 million, equivalent to rebuilding 60,000 disaster-resilient homes, supporting one million households with emergency cash assistance for one month, providing one month of food support to eight million people or constructing up to 80 kilometres of flood protection. These comparisons illustrate the costs of displacement and potential gains if addressed.

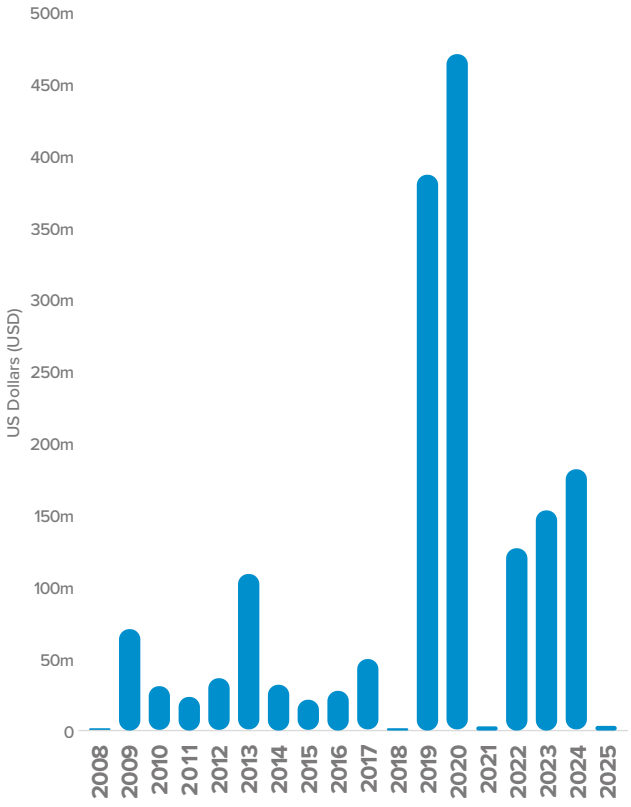
The severity and duration of displacement, combined with people's vulnerability, impact the costs

Displacement numbers alone do not determine human costs. Events that cause severe housing damage and livelihood disruption, and where recovery is slow, generate far higher costs than events that displace more people but allow faster return. Cyclones and storm surges account for nearly 60 per cent of total human costs; floods contribute a further 32 per cent.

Climate change is projected to increase the costs of disaster displacement

Climate change is projected to increase the risk of future displacement, particularly for riverine floods and storm surges, which are expected to account for a growing share of future displacement in Bangladesh under all climate scenarios. Annual human costs associated with riverine floods are estimated to rise from $22 million under current climate conditions to around $176 million under a pessimistic scenario of a 5°C temperature rise by 2100. The estimated annual costs for storm surges increase from $19 million to $186 million.

Estimated human cost of disaster displacement in Bangladesh by year for 2008-2025



Source: IDMC (2026)

Policymakers should integrate displacement in disaster risk reduction, recovery planning and climate adaptation

Prevention:
Account for the full costs of displacement in planning and finance

Loss and damage assessments do not fully capture the costs of displacement, including welfare losses people experience during displacement and recovery. The Government of Bangladesh should integrate life-year-based estimates into its National Adaptation Plan and disaster risk reduction frameworks to guide investments and support access to climate finance. Targeting investments at displacement hotspots, particularly in coastal and flood-prone areas, strengthens community resilience.

Response:
Target areas and communities at high and recurrent risk of displacement

Emergency responses and preparedness investments should reflect this pattern of recurrent, cumulative risk, not only large single events. Small and medium-scale events account for nearly 70 per cent of cumulative human costs.

Recovery:
Address persistent vulnerabilities

Income gains after rural-to-urban displacement may mask persistent poverty. Recovery programmes should distinguish between households that cross the poverty line and those that do not, and direct sustained support accordingly.

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