

Number of displaced in the world reaches record high of 55 million

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Observers had expected the pandemic to push down displacement numbers in 2020 [File: Afolabi Sotunde/Reuters]

United Nations, May 20 (RHC)-- Conflicts and natural disasters forced someone to flee within their own country every second of last year, pushing the number of people living in internal displacement to a record high, according to a new report.

This came despite strict restrictions on movement imposed around the globe in efforts to halt the spread of COVID-19, which observers had expected to push down displacement numbers last year.

But 2020 was also marked by intense storms, persistent conflicts and explosions of violence, forcing 40.5 million people to become newly displaced within their countries, according to the joint report published on Thursday by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

That is the highest number of newly displaced reported in 10 years, and brings the total number of people living in internal displacement (IDPs) around the world to a record 55 million, the report showed.

The number of IDPs is now more than double the roughly 26 million people who have fled across borders as refugees. NRC chief Jan Egeland described the report's findings as "shocking." "We are failing to protect the world's most vulnerable people from conflict and disasters," he said in a statement.

The report found that three-quarters of the people who fled internally last year were victims of natural disasters, in particular ones related to extreme weather. Intense cyclones, monsoon rains and floods hit highly exposed and densely populated areas in Asia and the Pacific, while the Atlantic hurricane season "was the most active on record," it pointed out.

"Extended rainy seasons across the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa uprooted millions more." Experts say climate change is increasing the intensity and frequency of such extreme weather events.

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