

World Refugee Day 2024 sees record numbers of people fleeing conflict, wars and persecution

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World Refugee Day 2024, the United Nations' annual event on June 20, sets a new record for the number of refugees, at more than 41 million. Under international law, refugees are people who are forced to flee their home countries to escape persecution or a serious threat to their life, physical integrity or freedom.

When the UN established the Refugee Convention in 1951 to protect the rights of refugees in Europe in the aftermath of World War II, there were 2.1 million refugees. In 1967, the Convention was expanded to cover displacement throughout the world. By 1980, the number had surpassed 10 million and in 1990, 20 million.

The US-led invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, along with the civil wars in South Sudan and Syria, and other wars, caused the number of refugees to surpass 30 million by the end of 2021. The wars in Ukraine and Sudan are leading some of the fastest growing refugee crises since World War II. Around 5.7 million people were forced to flee Ukraine in less than a year. Nearly 6.5 million people have crossed into neighbouring countries, including Poland, Hungary and Moldova.

Around 72 percent of all refugees came from just five countries: Afghanistan (6.4 million), Syria (6.4 million), Venezuela (6.1 million), Ukraine (6 million) and Palestine (6 million). Most refugees live in neighbouring countries, with Iran hosting 3.8 million, Turkey 3.3 million, Colombia 2.9 million, Germany 2.6 million and Pakistan 2 million. Nearly all the refugees living in Iran and Pakistan are Afghans, while most refugees living in Turkey are Syrians.

Other countries hosting refugees include Lebanon,

Jordan, Kenya and Uganda, despite their very limited resources. Even war-torn countries such as Yemen are hosting people fleeing conflict in the Horn of Africa via the Red Sea. The number of migrants arriving in Yemen in an effort to reach Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States rose from 27,000 in 2021 to more than 90,000 in 2023, according to the UN's International Organisation of Migration (IOM), which estimates that about 380,000 migrants are currently in Yemen.

Europe and North America, with their vastly greater resources, are doing everything in their power to abrogate the Refugee Convention, turning away those seeking refuge from violence and making it all but impossible to seek asylum in their countries. Last year, 4,114 people died or were reported missing while trying to cross the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, according to the IOM.

But these 41 million souls are just some of those driven from their homes. Last year the number of people forced to flee their homes due to wars, conflicts and persecution rose to an all-time high of at least 117.3 million, and was expected to reach 120 million by last April, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This is an increase of 8 percent, or 8.8 million people, compared to 2022, continuing 12 years of consecutive rises.

Of these 117 million people, 68.3 million were internally displaced (IDPs) within their own countries. The number of asylum seekers has risen from 4.1 million in 2020 to 5.4 million in 2022, an increase of more than 30 percent, according to the IOM's latest *World Migration Report*.

It is not just from war-torn countries like Syria and Afghanistan that people are fleeing. Of particular note

is the number of Turkish citizens—more than 100,000—who applied for asylum in European Union (EU) countries last year, an 82 percent increase from 2022, although 75 percent of applications were rejected. They now form the third largest nationality seeking protection in the EU after Syrians and Afghans. Last year, around 15,500 Turkish citizens were arrested while irregularly crossing the US-Mexico border, up from around 1,400 in 2021.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's (IDMC) annual *Global Report* notes that in addition to the 68.3 million IDPs due to violent conflicts, a further 7.7 million were displaced by floods, storms, earthquakes, wildfires and other disasters at the end of 2023. Some 148 countries, including some high-income countries, reported disaster displacement.

Climate change is making disasters more frequent and intense. Storm Daniel in the Mediterranean officially killed 4,000 people, with 10,000-100,000 people missing in Libya.

Globally, the numbers of forcibly displaced persons are staggering. They are the outcome of wars and conflicts frequently stoked or directly waged by the imperialist powers or their local allies, as well as natural disasters created or exacerbated by the activities of the world's giant corporations and their governments.

In all, one in every 69 people worldwide remain forcibly displaced. This is more than the entire 117 million population of the Philippines, the world's 13th most populous country, or more than 1.5 percent of the world's 7.9 billion population.

According to the UNHCR, the number of those internally displaced within their own countries reached 68.3 million at the end of 2023, nearly double the one in 125 people displaced a decade ago. Nearly half of all IDPs live in sub-Saharan Africa, forced to flee conflicts that are barely reported in the Western media.

The Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip has uprooted at least 1.7 million Palestinians, or 75 percent of the Strip's population. Most of them have been forced to move several times.

The wars in Sudan, Gaza and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) accounted for nearly two-thirds of the new displacements. At the end of 2023, fighting between rival factions of the Sudanese military that are backed by regional powers had forced 10.8

million Sudanese to flee their homes, one of the largest numbers ever recorded in a single country.

Some 13 years after the CIA, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Turkey and Israel backed rival militias in a bid to topple the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, Syria remains the world's largest displacement crisis, with 13.8 million forcibly displaced in and outside the country.

The suffering encompassed by these statistics is impossible to fully grasp, but international funding for humanitarian relief is a pittance. While military spending rises—in 2023, the world's total military outlay was \$2.4 trillion—the UN and other aid organizations were only able to rustle up \$24 billion for humanitarian aid. This was just 43 percent of the amount required to meet the most urgent needs of hundreds of millions of people.

The international media have barely mentioned the lack of funding, or the latest displacement figures. Wars, conflicts and disasters and their ensuing misery are not only normalized but have become preferred policy for the major imperialist powers and their puppet regimes in the world's poorest countries.

The global refugee population is set to reach a new record by the end of 2024 as the US and NATO expand their proxy war in Ukraine, and as Israel, backed by Washington and the European powers, continues its genocide against the Palestinians, opening up new fronts against Lebanon, Syria and Iran. The ever-deepening crisis of capitalism poses the urgent necessity of building a global anti-war, anti-capitalist movement and a socialist leadership in the working class that will put an end to imperialist war and poverty.



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