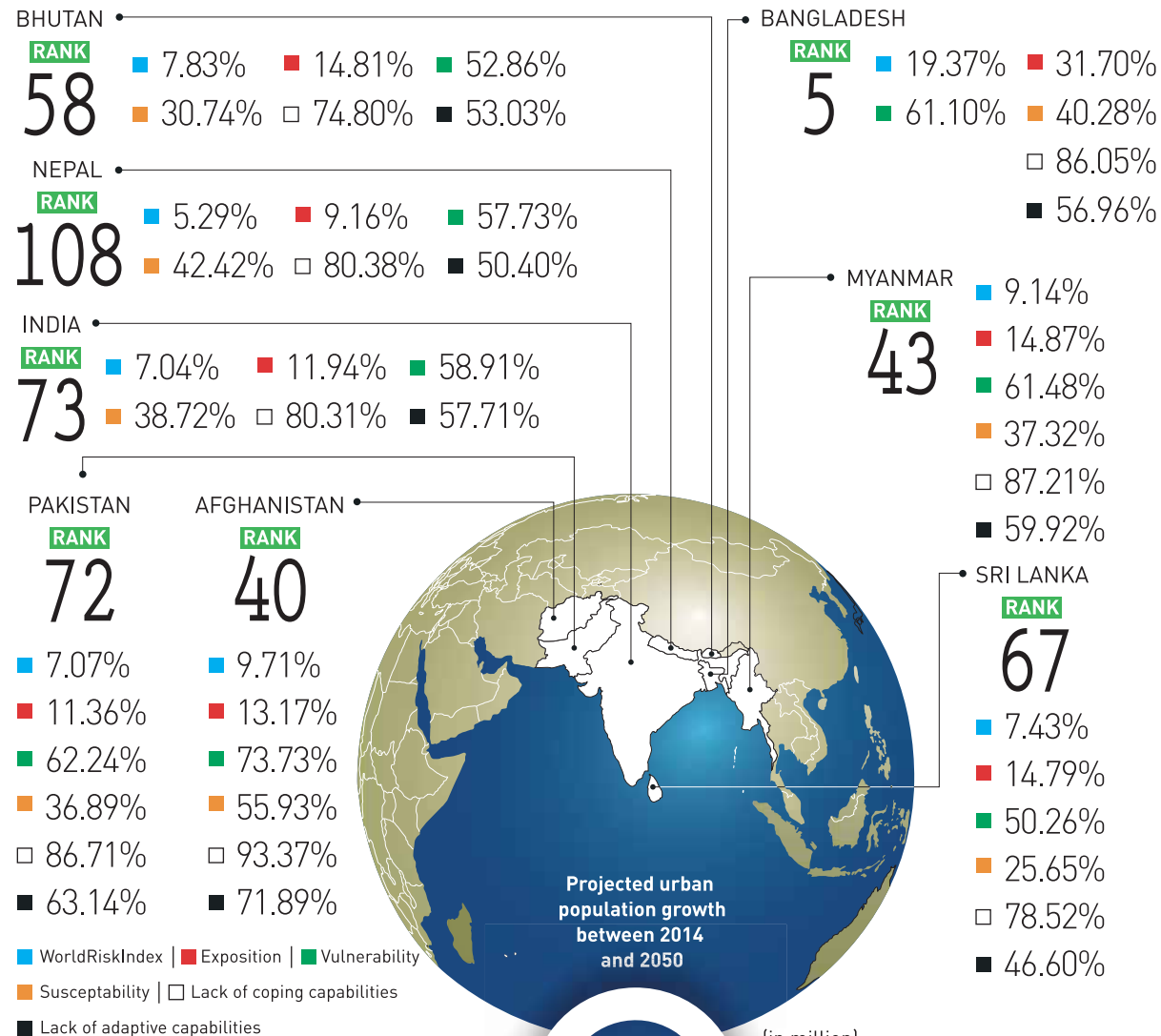


# Disasters and displacement

The growing global phenomenon of displacement caused by natural disasters is aggravated by urbanisation, unsustainable development and climate change.

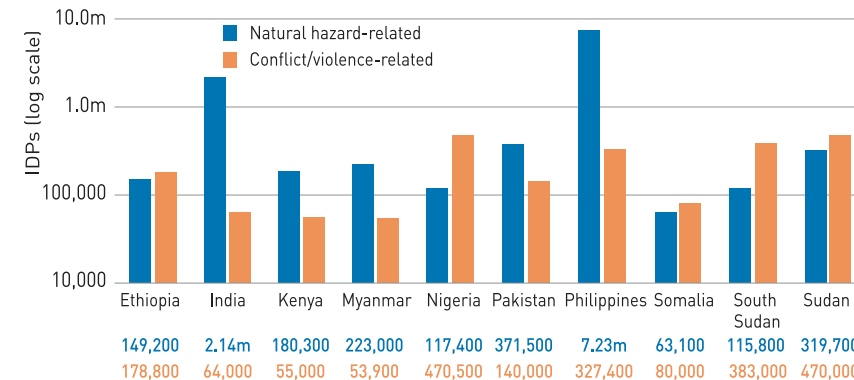
BY R.K. RADHAKRISHNAN

## WorldRiskIndex overview



Source: WordRiskReport 2014; UN-Habitat; IPCC; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

## Ten countries with new displacement related to both natural hazards and conflict during 2013



Note: Log scale. Figures in thousands rounded to the nearest 100. Millions rounded to two decimal points. All figures relate to new internally displaced persons (IDPs) only. Source: IDMC estimates, as of August 22, 2014



In June-October 2013, floods in Bihar, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh caused a displacement of 10,42,000 people, which amounts to 818 persons displaced per million inhabitants.

MORE than a few times every year, India gets a wake-up call in the form of a natural disaster. Every year, the loss of life and property seems to upstage the numbers of the previous year. Every year, the governments both at the Centre and in the States make earnest statements on the need to be better prepared to tackle natural disasters and take some incremental action. Every year, large areas of fragile ecosystems are swallowed up as earth movers continue their march into untouched territory. Every year, new studies state categorically how displacement by natural disasters will become unmanageable.

The latest region to be affected is Jammu and Kashmir, which faced its worst floods in 60 years after a bout of unseasonal and very heavy rainfall, which exceeded the monthly average precipitation by about 400 times. Official estimates put the number of dead at over 280. "We have no means at present to arrive at a firm figure," Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said on September 20. It was only a year ago that Uttarakhand was devastated by floods.

"Displacement by disasters is a global phenomenon that is growing in scale and complexity. Since 2008, an average of 27 million people have been displaced annually by disasters brought on by natural hazards," write Jan Egeland, Secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, and Alfredo Zamudio, Director of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, in the foreword to "Global Estimates 2014: People displaced by disasters".

As in previous years, the worst affected region is Asia, where 19 million people, or 87.1 per cent of the

global total, were displaced during the year. In 2013, as many as 22 million people were displaced by disasters brought on by natural hazards. This is three times the displacement caused by conflicts the same year.

Noting that by 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will be city-dwellers, the WorldRiskReport 2014 (WRR) notes that the risks faced by those living in informal settlements are exacerbated by the lack of infrastructure development, early warning systems and evacuation plans. In its assessment for 2013, the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) adds that in the absence of effective urban planning, high urban growth rates have most often resulted in a spiral of urban poverty and the spread of slums or informal settlements.

It is clear that with the predicted impact of climate change, cities will face growing challenges. The increase in extreme weather events and sea level rise with regard to cities in coastal areas, which account for 40 per cent of all urban settlements worldwide, will particularly raise pressure to take action, the WRR hoped.

Environmentalists and organisations insist that the time to act is now. Incentivising adoption of sustainable lifestyles, promoting clean technologies and tapping renewable energy sources are among the first steps that need to be taken. As the developed world dithers on accepting its responsibilities, and the developing countries place industrialisation over everything else, there is little hope that extreme weather events will recede in the coming years.

