



Christians among refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

Author: Frans Veerman



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

Revised: 13 September 2016

research@od.org

www.opendoorsanalytical.org

Christians among refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

Author: Frans Veerman

Commissioned by World Watch Research (WWR), Open Doors International, Netherlands

No copyright - This report is the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge WWR as the source.

Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Using data from the two main sources available	2
2.1 Definitions available.....	2
2.2 Summary of data	3
2.3 No distinction on the basis of religious affiliation	4
2.4 The case of Nigeria.....	4
3. Reflections on the link between forced displacement and persecution	5
3.1 Causes of forced displacement and their relation to persecution as defined by WWR....	5
3.2 Comparison of ranking of total number of IDPs (conflict) and refugees with WWL 2016	6
4. Conclusion	6
5. Appendices:	7
Appendix 1: Overview of the countries with most IDPs (conflict) and refugees by origin	7
Appendix 2: Comparison of ranks by absolute values	9
Appendix 3: Comparison of ranks by proportions	10

1. Introduction

Many people worldwide are driven out of their homes “as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations.”¹ It is not always clear how many of them are Christians. Although important studies are available that list numbers of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), numbers are for totals of people affected. There are no distinctions made on the basis of religious affiliation.

This paper first looks at the two main sources of information on statistics for refugees and IDPs:

- [Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2015](#) by UNHCR.
- [2016 Global Report on Internal Displacement](#) by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

In a second section, the paper then offers certain reflections on the link between forced displacement and persecution. **It is important to realize that there is only a partial interface between forced displacement and the World Watch List (WWL) concept of persecution.**

2. Using data from the two main sources available

In 2016 the UNHCR published its report on *Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2015*, as did IDMC with its report *2016 Global Report on Internal Displacement*. After considering the definitions used for IDPs and refugees, this section presents a summary table using the data from these reports. The section closes with remarks about not distinguishing IDPs or refugees on the basis of religious affiliation and the situation in Nigeria.

2.1 Definitions available

The UNHCR report gives the following definition for *Internally Displaced Persons* (IDPs):

“people or groups of people who have been forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or man-made disasters, and who have not crossed an international border.”²

Refugees are those among them who have crossed international boundaries.

¹ UNHCR, *Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2015*, p.2.

² *Ibid.*, p.54.

2.2 Summary of data

The reports by the UNHCR and IDMC are important. They aggregate data on one of the most tragic facts of our time. At the end of 2015 the world had 65.3 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. This total is made up of:

- 21.3 million refugees
 - 16.1 under UNHCR's mandate
 - 5.2 million Palestinian refugees registered by UNRWA
- 40.8 million IDPs
- 3.2 million asylum-seekers.³

This paper focuses on IDPs and refugees under UNHCR's mandate. There is no clear data available to estimate the number of Christians among the Palestinian refugees registered by UNRWA and asylum-seekers.

The number of 40.8 million IDPs comes from the report by the IDMC.⁴ It only includes the number of people **internally displaced as a result of conflict and violence** as of the end of 2015, not those internally displaced by disasters.⁵

Sometimes the displacement may have occurred several years ago. The number of new displacements in 2015 caused by conflict and violence is 8.8 million. This is more than 20% of the total number of people internally displaced.

Appendix 1 gives an overview of the countries with most IDPs (including both new and older cases) and refugees.

One question which needs to be asked is: how complete is the data? Especially in the case of IDPs, it is not easy to know how many people have left their homes, where they are staying, and if they have returned home, or not. As far as Christians are concerned, anecdotal evidence suggests that they sometimes stay away from official IDP camps because they are afraid of meeting their potential persecutors there, be it as inhabitants of the camps or as camp staff. The same problem applies to refugee camps too. So, how can they be counted properly?

Another important fact is that the data does not include so-called migrants. Christians (as well as others) have been leaving the Middle East in a steady flow to look for better

³ Ibid. The report explains: "asylum-seekers (with 'pending cases') are individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined. Those covered in this report refer to claimants whose individual applications were pending at the end of 2015, irrespective of when those claims may have been lodged" (p.54).

⁴ Although the UNHCR report includes the data from IDMC in its totals (40.8 million), the detailed data on IDPs of UNHCR's report (pp. 62-65) are slightly different.

⁵ IDMC, 2016 Global Report on Internal Displacement. Data on replacement by disasters is not included in the 40.8 million because no cumulative data is available for people displaced by disasters (p.7). The report of IDMC gives an impressive overview of reasons for displacement, including reasons normally not accounted for such as displacement by criminal violence, drought-related disasters and development projects (p.43-64).

living circumstances elsewhere, long before the more recent violent conflicts erupted in the region.

2.3 No distinction on the basis of religious affiliation

The reports by UNHCR and IDMC count the numbers of people that are IDPs or refugees. They do not distinguish them on the basis of religious affiliation (or any other distinguishing characteristic). This has a positive side and a negative side. The positive side is that all are considered equally: whatever one's background, having to leave one's home or country is equally difficult for all. The negative side is that the data is not used to reveal underlying dynamics (see the case of Nigeria under 2.4).

The effects of not looking into the religious background of IDPs or refugees must be considered harmful. From different countries reports have come in about Christians being afraid of coming to formal IDP or refugee camps for fear of being too close to their actual or potential persecutors. These persecutors may be other inhabitants of those camps or even camp staff. As a result the Christians' situation as IDP or refugee becomes worse. Proper recognition of underlying religious dynamics could prevent this.

2.4 The case of Nigeria

The data stemming from the UNHCR and IDMC reports is unfortunately not used to its full potential. In its comments on Nigeria, the IDMC report fails to see the serious religious dimension of the attacks of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen on the Christian farmers. The report echoes scores of others saying that these conflicts are related to clashes between communities of cattle raisers and farmers:

“Displacement trends show that as the military pushed Boko Haram back during the year, people previously trapped by the militants moved to urban centres in search of humanitarian assistance. **20 Inter-communal clashes fuelled by ethnoreligious feuds, criminality, cattle rustling, land disputes and tensions between pastoralists and farmers** also continued to flare across the Middle Belt region, but were largely overlooked. There were 737,000 incidents of new displacement in the country during the year.” (Emphasis by WWR)

The UNHCR report hardly touches upon it, but says:

“Similarly, the violence and human rights abuses in northern Nigeria have continued throughout 2015, with the insurgency entering its sixth year. As a consequence, the total number of IDPs in the country rose from approximately 1.2 million at the end of 2014 to approximately 2.2 million by the end of 2015, an increase of around 964,000 (81%) **concentrated especially in the north-east of the country.**” (Emphasis by WWR)

A WWR report commissioned to a Nigerian team of researchers has clearly revealed the Islamic religious dimension of the violence in the Middle Belt region.⁶

3. Reflections on the link between forced displacement and persecution

Forced displacement involves people who are internally displaced and others who leave the country as refugees. This section explores the link between forced displacement and persecution. This link does exist but it is hard to qualify, let alone quantify. This makes it equally hard to know how many of the forcibly displaced are Christians. Still, it can be said that millions of them are Christians.

3.1 Causes of forced displacement and their relation to persecution as defined by WWR

UNHCR sees a link between persecution and forced displacement. Their report claims that “Global forced displacement has increased in 2015, with record-high numbers. By the end of the year, 65.3 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. This is 5.8 million more than the previous year (59.5 million).”⁷

It is impossible to know how many of these 65.3 million people forcibly displaced are Christians. Looking at the population rates of the countries with forcibly displaced people and at the proportion of Christian populations in those countries, and considering the specific contexts of those countries, a very quick estimation would be that between 15 to 20 million of these 65.3 million displaced people could be Christians.

However, it is important to realize that the concept of “persecution” as used by UNHCR is mostly related to what WWR calls the “smash” dimension of persecution (i.e. violence only). The “squeeze” dimension of persecution (pressure) does not normally lead to high numbers of internally displaced persons or refugees.

The “smash” dimension of persecution, as expounded by WWR, often occurs on a (very) small scale in comparison to the results of UNHCR and IDMC. Although the numbers are not high, forced displacement occurs particularly among Muslim Background Believers (MBBs), for instance, who are often forced to leave house or country because of their conversion to Christianity. It follows that the available data on IDPs and refugees is a far cry from capturing the full meaning of persecution of Christians, as expounded by Open Doors.

⁶ Adamu A. and Alupse B., Migration and Violent Conflict in Divided Societies, Nigeria Conflict Security Analysis Network (NCSAN), 1 March 2015, available at: <http://theanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Migration-and-Violent-Conflict-in-Divided-Societies-March-2015.pdf> (last accessed 25 August 2016).

⁷ UNHCR, Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2015, p.2.

There is another reason why the data on IDPs and refugees do not sufficiently highlight the plight of Christians in conflict situations. In situations where violence and conflict cause high numbers of IDPs or refugees, hostilities are normally not against Christians alone, even when the drivers of the conflict have an anti-Christian agenda. Conflicts tend to reach an advanced phase when everyone who is not absolutely loyal to the militants is affected. Boko Haram in northern Nigeria is an example. Its members first attacked security personnel and Christians but then also turned against the broader Muslim population.

There are however exceptions. If the main drivers of a conflict are (for instance) turning against ethnic groups that are majority Christian, even in far advanced phases of the conflict, a relatively big proportion of the IDPs or refugees will be Christian.⁸ This is the case in Myanmar. It is also the case in the Middle Belt of Nigeria where Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kill or expel Christian farmers from their fields in a never ending human tragedy. In these cases the link between IDPs/refugees and persecution is clear.

3.2 Comparison of ranking of total number of IDPs (conflict) and refugees with WWL 2016

Looking at the data it is important to realize that sometimes the situations that led to forced displacement happened many years ago. People are still counted as displaced, because their situation has not yet been resolved as per 31 December 2015.

The tables presented in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 compare the ranks (1 to 20) of the *total number of IDPs (conflict) and refugees* from the UNHCR and IDMC reports with the ranks of the WWL 2016. Appendix 2 compares these ranks for the absolute values of the total number of IDPs (conflict) and refugees, while Appendix 3 compares the ranks for the *proportion of the total number of IDPs (conflict) and refugees of the country population (%)*.

Looking at absolute numbers, Appendix 2 shows that 11 countries out of the 20 presented are ranked in the Top 20 of the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. Focusing on the ranks 1 to 10, 5 out of these 10 countries are also ranked in the Top 10 of the WWL 2016. Looking at proportional numbers, Appendix 3 indicates that 8 out of the 20 presented are ranked in the Top 20 of the WWL 2016, while 4 out of the countries ranked 1 to 10 are also ranked in the Top 10 of the WWL 2016.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the tables presented in the appendices show a partial overlap between the phenomenon of forced displacement, producing numerous IDPs and refugees in many different countries, and persecution as defined by WWR, and presented in the WWL 2016. However, persecution according to the WWL 2016 is more comprehensive

⁸ Whether the focus is first on the ethnic group or on the fact most of them are Christians is sometimes difficult to say.

than suggested by the data for the IDPs and refugees alone. It follows that the evil of forced displacement should not be used to gauge persecution of Christians worldwide.

5. Appendices:

Appendix 1: Overview of the countries with most IDPs (conflict) and refugees by origin

Country ^{1/}	New internal displacements in 2015 (conflict)	Total number of IDPs as of 31 December 2015 (conflict)	Total number of refugees and people in refugee-like situations	Total number of IDPs (conflict) and refugees ^{2/}
Afghanistan	335,000	1,174,000	2,666,254	3,840,254
Azerbaijan		564,000	9,712	573,712
Bangladesh		426,000	12,173	438,173
Bosnia and Herzegovina		98,000	18,769	116,769
Burundi	23,000	99,000	292,764	391,764
Cameroon	71,000	124,000	10,581	134,581
CAR	210,000	452,000	471,104	923,104
Chad	36,000	107,000	14,940	121,940
China			212,911	212,911
Colombia ^{3/}	224,000	6,270,000	340,240	6,610,240
Côte d'Ivoire	3,200	303,000	71,105	374,105
Croatia			33,451	33,451
Cyprus		272,000	4	272,004
DR Congo	621,000	1,500,000	541,499	2,041,499
Egypt	78,000	78,000	17,930	95,930
El Salvador	500	289,000	14,778	303,778
Eritrea			411,342	411,342
Ethiopia	56,000	450,000	85,834	535,834
Georgia		239,000	6,498	245,498
Ghana			22,978	22,978
Guatemala		251,000	10,284	261,284
Haiti			34,774	34,774
Honduras		174,000	6,844	180,844
India	1,000	612,000	9,881	621,881
Iran			84,949	84,949
Iraq	1,114,000	3,290,000	264,107	3,554,107
Kenya		309,000	7,906	316,906
Libya	100,000	500,000	6,085	506,085
Mali		50,000	154,211	204,211
Mauritania			34,664	34,664
Mexico	6,000	287,000	11,333	298,333
Myanmar	16,000	644,000	451,807	1,095,807

Nepal		50,000	8,866	58,866
Niger	47,000	153,000	1,390	154,390
Nigeria	737,000	2,096,000	167,988	2,263,988
Pakistan		1,459,000	297,835	1,756,835
Palestine (Palestinian) ^{4/}	700	221,000	97,973	318,973
Peru		60,000	3,599	63,599
Philippines	288,000 ^{5/}	62,000	593	62,593
Russian Federation		27,000	67,050	94,050
Rwanda			286,366	286,366
Senegal		24,000	21,280	45,280
Serbia and Kosovo ^{6/}			38,637	38,637
Somalia	90,000	1,223,000	1,123,052	2,346,052
South Sudan	199,000	1,697,000	778,697	2,475,697
Sri Lanka		44,000	121,435	165,435
Sudan ^{7/}	144,000	3,264,000	628,770	3,892,770
Syria	1,300,000	6,600,000	4,872,585	11,472,585
Thailand		35,000	222	35,222
Turkey		954,000	59,559	1,013,559
Uganda		30,000	6,316	36,316
Ukraine	942,000	1,679,000	321,300	2,000,300
Vietnam			313,156	313,156
Western Sahara			116,541	116,541
Yemen	2,175,000	2,509,000	15,896	2,524,896
Zimbabwe			21,344	21,344
Stateless			37,426	37,426
Various/unknown			120,155	120,155
Others	3,200	60,800	261,684	322,484
TOTAL	8,820,600	40,809,800	16,121,427	56,931,227

^{1/} The data for the new internal displacements in 2015 (conflict) and total number of IDPs as of 31 December 2015 (conflict) are from IDMC's 2016 Global Report on Internal Displacement (pp.96-99). The data for the total number of refugees and people in refugee-like situations are from UNHCR's Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2015 (pp.62-65).

^{2/} This is the total number of IDPs (conflict) and refugees by origin, That means that only refugees are counted that have left the country, Refugees from another country that have entered the borders of the country are not counted under this specific country but under the country they originate from,

^{3/} IDMC states in its report that the estimate for Colombia for 2015 is likely to be significantly inflated and should be interpreted with caution (p.41).

^{4/} The IDMC report uses "Palestine" while the UNHCR report uses "Palestinian", The UNHCR report refers to Palestinian refugees under the UNHCR mandate only, This explains the small number given (97,973). The UNHCR report does not include data for IDPs, The IDMC report gives data for IDPs.

^{5/} Based on further analysis of the available displacement data by IDMC, This number of 288,000 is included in the total number of new displacements in 2015 (conflict), but not in the total number of IDPs as of 31 December 2015 (conflict), So, it is not included in the total number of IDPs and refugees (40,809,800) either.

^{6/} S/RES/1244 (1999).

^{7/} Includes the number of IDPs from Abyei area (82,000).

Appendix 2: Comparison of ranks by absolute values

Comparison of the ranks (1 to 20) for the absolute values of the total number of IDPs (conflict) and refugees from the UNHCR and IDMC reports with the ranks of the WWL 2016:

Country	Total number of IDPs (conflict) and refugees (UNHCR & IDMC)	Rank UNHCR & IDMC	Rank WWL 2016	Population (WWL 2016 data; completed for other countries from same source)	Number of Christians (WWL 2016 data; completed for other countries from same source)
Syria	11,472,585	1	5	18,564,000	772,000
Colombia	6,610,240	2	46	48,654,000	46,004,000
Sudan (incl, Abyei area)	3,892,770	3	8	41,176,000	2,016,000
Afghanistan	3,840,254	4	4	33,370,000	thousands
Iraq	3,554,107	5	2	37,548,000	250,000
Yemen	2,524,896	6	11	24,478,000	a few thousands
South Sudan	2,475,697	7	-	12,733,000	7,368,000
Somalia	2,346,052	8	7	11,079,000	hundreds
Nigeria	2,263,988	9	12	186,988,000	84,133,000
DR Congo	2,041,499	10	-	79,723,000	73,384,000
Ukraine	2,000,300	11	-	44,624,000	38,509,000
Pakistan	1,756,835	12	6	192,827,000	3,850,000
Myanmar	1,095,807	13	23	54,363,000	4,437,000
Turkey	1,013,559	14	45	79,622,000	219,000
CAR	923,104	15	26	4,998,000	3,578,000
India	621,881	16	17	1,326,802,000	63,397,000
Azerbaijan	573,712	17	34	9,868,000	316,000
Ethiopia	535,834	18	18	101,853,000	63,760,000
Libya	506,085	19	10	6,330,000	20,000
Bangladesh	438,173	20	35	162,911,000	828,000
Total	50,487,378			2,478,511,000	392,841,000

Appendix 3: Comparison of ranks by proportions

Comparison of the ranks (1 to 20) for the proportion of the total number of IDPs (conflict) and refugees of the country population (%) with the ranks of the WWL 2016:

Country	Total number of IDPs (conflict) and refugees (UNHCR & IDMC)	Rank UNHCR & IDMC	Rank WWL 2016	Population (WWL 2016 data; completed for other countries from same source)	Proportion of total number of IDPs (conflict) and refugees of the country population (%)	Number of Christians (WWL 2016 data; completed for other countries from same source)
Syria	11,472,585	1	5	18,564,000	61.8	772,000
Cyprus	272,004	2	-	1,177,000	23.1	823,000
Somalia	2,346,052	3	7	11,079,000	21.2	hundreds
Western Sahara	116,541	4	-	584,000	20.0	880
South Sudan	2,475,697	5	-	12,733,000	19.4	7,368,000
CAR	923,104	6	26	4,998,000	18.5	3,578,000
Colombia	6,610,240	7	46	48,654,000	13.6	46,004,000
Afghanistan	3,840,254	8	4	33,370,000	11.5	thousands
Yemen	2,524,896	9	11	24,478,000	10.3	A few thousands
Iraq	3,554,107	10	2	37,548,000	9.5	250,000
Sudan (incl, Abyei area)	3,892,770	11	8	41,176,000	9.5	2,016,000
Libya	506,085	12	10	6,330,000	8.0	20,000
Eritrea	411,342	13	3	5,352,000	7.7	2,595,700
Palestine (Palestinian)	318,973	14	24	4,797,000	6.6	42,300
Georgia	245,498	15	-	3,980,000	6.2	3,411,000
Azerbaijan	573,712	16	34	9,868,000	5.8	316,000
El Salvador	303,778	17	-	6,146,000	4.9	5,902,000
Ukraine	2,000,300	18	-	44,624,000	4.5	38,509,000
Burundi	391,764	19	-	11,553,000	3.4	10,438,000
Bosnia and Herzegovina	116,769	20	-	3,802,000	3.1	1,840,000
Total	42,896,471			330,813,000		123,885,880