EMERGENCY WATCHLIST 2023
AT A GLANCE

TIME TO BUILD BACK THE GUARDRAILS

The International Rescue Committee's (IRC) mission is to help people affected by humanitarian crises to survive, recover and gain control of their futures. The Emergency Watchlist report is the IRC's assessment of the 20 countries at greatest risk of new or worsening humanitarian emergencies each year. For the past decade, this report has helped the IRC determine where to focus our emergency preparedness efforts,

successfully predicting on average 85-95% of the 20 countries facing the worst deteriorations. Unprecedented levels of need are concentrated within the small number of Watchlist countries. If we can understand what is happening in these 20 countries — and what to do about it — then we may, finally, have a chance to start reducing the scale of human suffering in the world.

THE 20 WATCHLIST COUNTRIES ACCOUNT FOR:
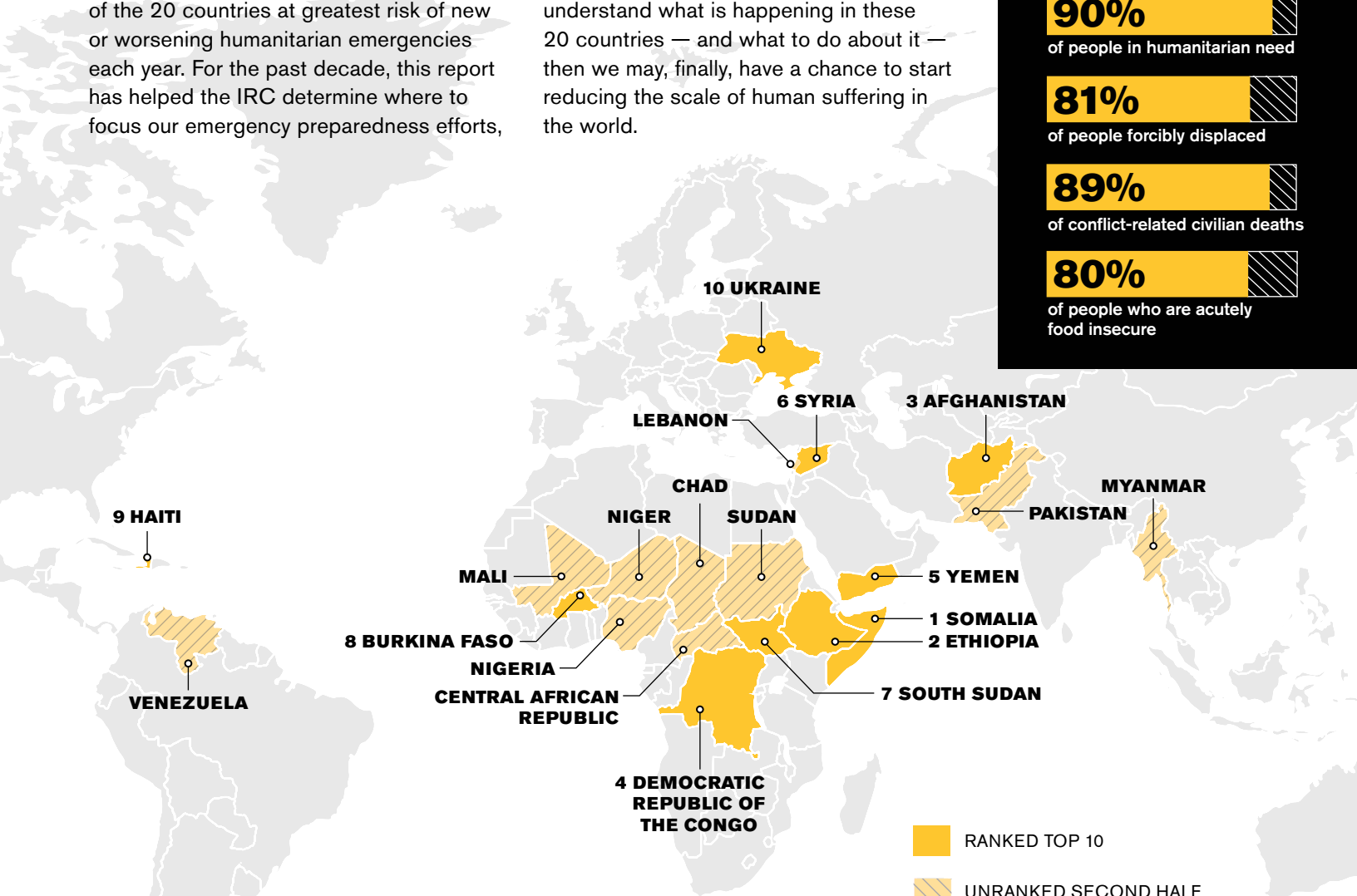
13% of global population

1.6% of global GDP

90% of people in humanitarian need

81% of people forcibly displaced

89% of conflict-related civilian deaths

80% of people who are acutely food insecure

10 UKRAINE

6 SYRIA

3 AFGHANISTAN

LEBANON

MYANMAR

9 HAITI

CHAD

PAKISTAN

NIGER

SUDAN

MALI

5 YEMEN

8 BURKINA FASO

1 SOMALIA

NIGERIA

2 ETHIOPIA

VENEZUELA

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

7 SOUTH SUDAN

4 DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

RANKED TOP 10

UNRANKED SECOND HALF

ABOVE: Malabey Baube, a mother of seven children, came to the Torotorow IDP camp in Somalia because of severe drought.

TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2023

The world is seeing record levels of humanitarian need because the guardrails that protect communities from humanitarian catastrophe are being weakened, leaving three key accelerators of humanitarian need — conflict, economic turmoil and climate change — unchecked:

Conflict remains the key accelerator of humanitarian crisis, driving 80% of humanitarian need. Conflicts are increasing in both duration and size. Watchlist countries have experienced armed conflict for an average of 12 years — fueled in part by a large number of internationalized intrastate conflicts, where at least one foreign country contributes troops. The internationalization of conflict tends to make them deadlier and last longer. Parties to conflicts are also operating with impunity, attacking civilian infrastructure and weaponizing aid. Nearly 40 countries, including every single Watchlist country, are experiencing high to extreme constraints on humanitarian access.

Economic turmoil across Watchlist countries is deepening food insecurity and rapidly exacerbating poverty. The ripple effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on global food and fuel prices, and long-term impacts of COVID-19 are putting necessities out of reach for many. Seven Watchlist countries imported an average of 66% of their wheat from Russia and Ukraine — with this percentage rising to 90% in Somalia.
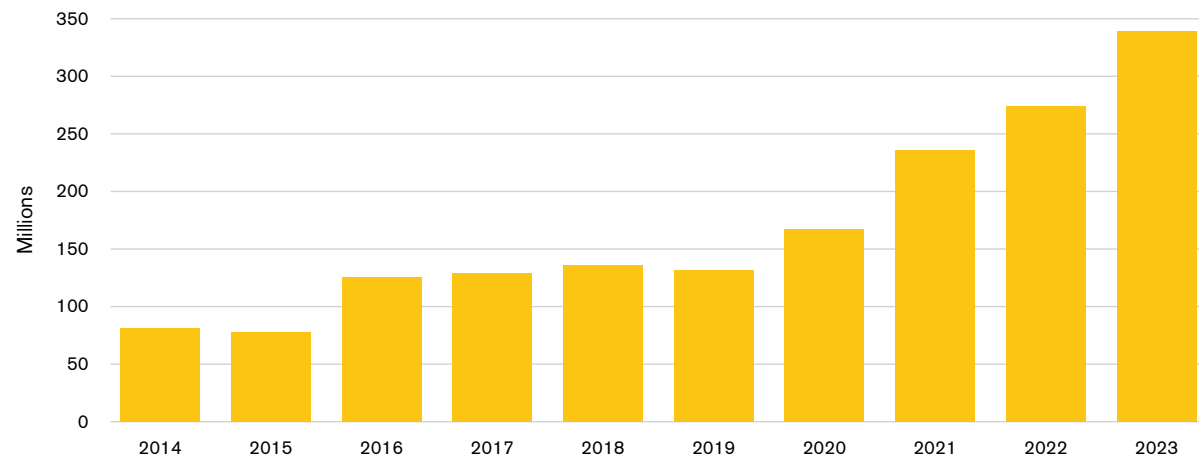
Climate change is rapidly accelerating humanitarian emergencies despite the fact that Watchlist countries bear little responsibility for climate change. They contributed just 1.9% of global CO_2 emissions in 2019 and emit just a fifth of the CO_2 per capita when compared to global averages. Despite this, they face some of the worst climate related disasters. The climate preparedness of Watchlist countries is steadily declining. In 2020, climate financing per capita for conflict-affected countries was a third of what other countries received.

Syrian refugee children in Lebanon where severe winter storms completely flooded many of their makeshift homes.

339.2M
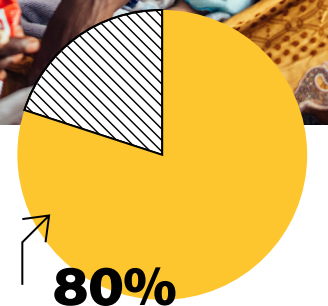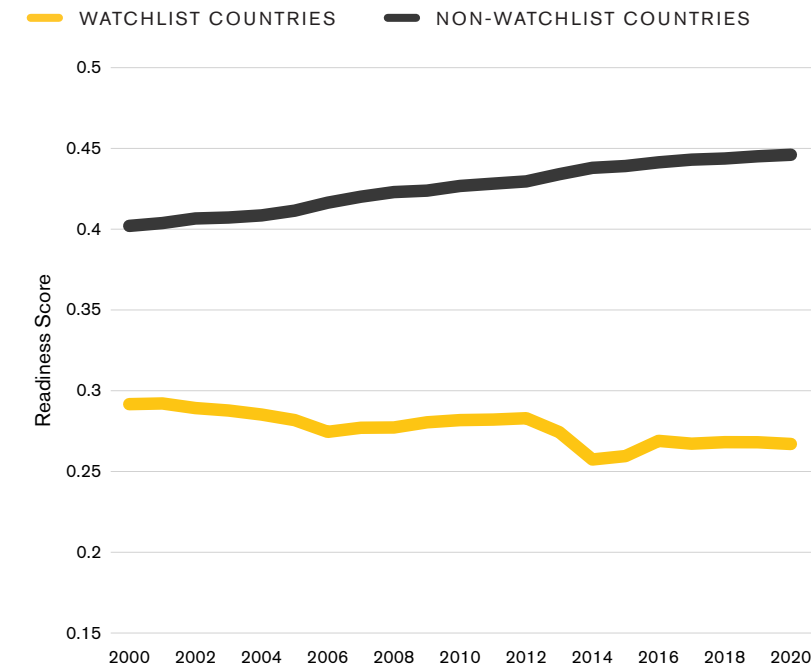people identified globally as being in humanitarian need

NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN HUMANITARIAN NEED WORLDWIDE

(Bar chart, Millions, years 2014–2023)

SPOTTING THE NEXT HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

The IRC deploys a unique methodology to identify crises before they deteriorate. The IRC analyzes 67 indicators, including measures of fragility, economic resilience, conflict intensity, natural hazard and pandemic risks, and displacement. This data analysis is complemented by the insights of IRC staff on the ground and external partners and experts. Countries are selected according to their risk of deterioration, not based on whether they are the largest or most severe crises.
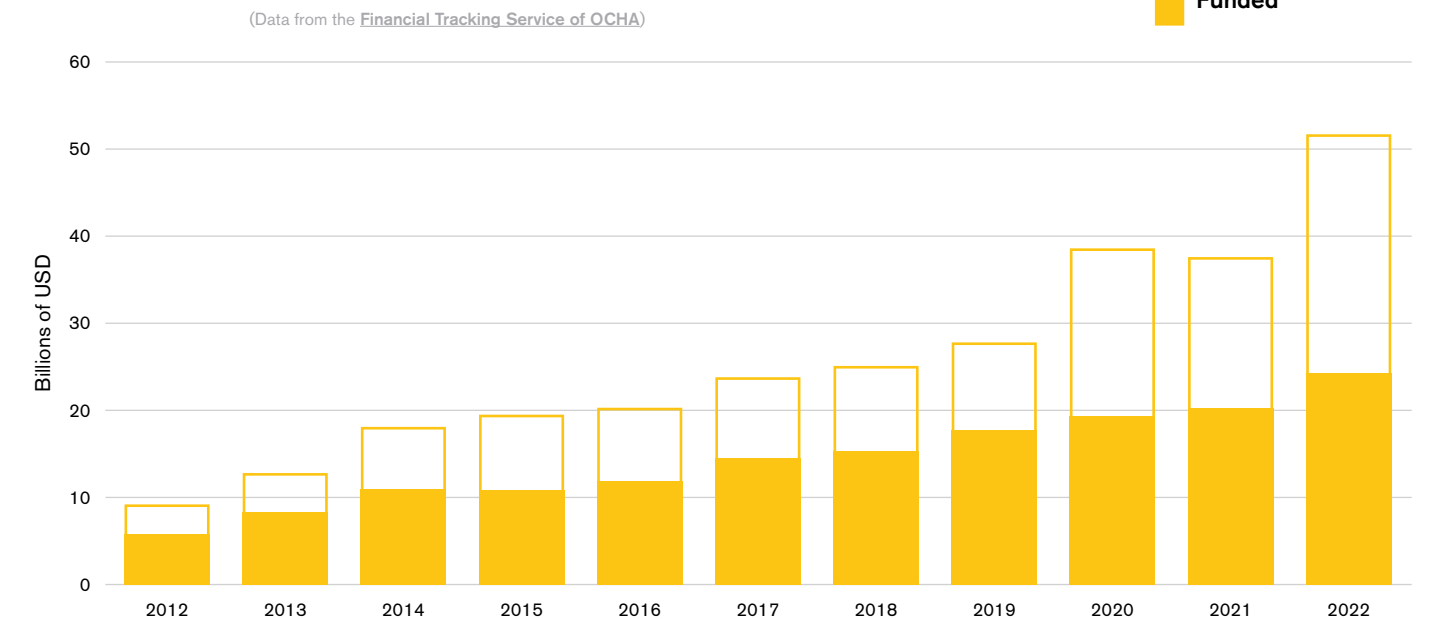
THE UNEQUAL BURDEN OF CRISIS

The 20 countries on Watchlist 2023 disproportionately account for rising humanitarian needs. Those displaced, women and girls, and LGBTQI+ communities are often hit hardest. These populations also face a growing gap between their needs and the support provided. Without aid, those most vulnerable face a heightened risk of gender-based violence, child marriage and labor, and exploitation and abuse as resources become scarce.

AVERAGE READINESS TO RESPOND TO CLIMATE CHANGE

— WATCHLIST COUNTRIES — NON-WATCHLIST COUNTRIES

(Line chart, Readiness Score, years 2000–2020)

80%
of people displaced by climate change are women and girls

GAP BETWEEN FUNDING AND NEED
(Data from the Financial Tracking Service of OCHA)

☐ Total Requirement ■ Funded

(Bar chart, Billions of USD, years 2012–2022)

ABOVE: Adama Wudaa, a mother who sought health care services from the IRC for her malnourished child in northeast Nigeria.
LEFT: Mokube is an activist against gender-based violence from the south-west region of Cameroon. She helps women and girls in her community.

IRC'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Break the cycle of crisis

1. Reboot the global response to extreme hunger. The international community should start by reenergizing the Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on Preventing Famine to target the countries most at risk of famine and also by adopting a simplified protocol to scale up access to malnutrition treatment.

2. Stop the slide from fragile to failed state. Donors should prioritize crisis settings by committing 50% of bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) to fragile and conflict-affected states. A top priority for the use of this additional funding should be restoring basic service delivery, like health and education systems, which are too often cut during times of crisis.

3. Fund the frontlines with a people-first MDB strategy. While Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) are accustomed to a government-first strategy, they should shift towards a people-first strategy and formalize strategies for funding nongovernmental organizations to better support areas without viable options for government programs.

Protect civilians in conflict

1. Re-establish people's right to aid. As parties to conflicts weaponize and politicize access to aid, the establishment of an independent organization, such as an Organization for the Promotion of Humanitarian Access, could document the denial of aid and speak truth to power.

2. Tackle impunity for mass atrocities. The most severe abuses of civilians require actions that transcend politics and polarization. Permanent members of the UN Security Council should suspend their veto power in cases of mass atrocities, with instances identified and triggered by a new standing, independent panel.

3. Empower women in peace and security efforts. The role of women should be centered at every stage of conflict. This includes providing greater funding to women-led organizations, empowering women in peace processes and supporting programs to address the disproportionate impact conflict has on women.

Confront shared global risks

1. Break down the climate-humanitarian divide. In fragile and conflict-affected settings, we need a better mapping of risks, innovation in climate resilience and coordinated funding. Donors should not only fulfill their long-delayed promise of $100 billion per year in climate financing to developing countries, but dedicate 50% of it to adaptation.

2. Pandemic-proof the world. Pandemic prevention, preparedness and response require whole-of-society action. As such, a Global Health Threats Council should be created and convened at the leader level.

3. Strike a new deal for the forcibly displaced. A record level of displacement merits a step change in support for these populations and their hosts. This requires scaling up funding for refugee-hosting states that commit to welcoming policies for refugees like access to work, education, and health services as well as dedicated strategies from donors in response to to internal displacement crises.

Read the IRC's full Watchlist 2023 report for more detailed analysis and profiles of all 20 countries: Rescue.org/Watchlist2023

THE INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is an international humanitarian organization founded at the call of Albert Einstein in 1933. We now work in over 40 countries, including nearly every Watchlist country. In 2021, the IRC and our partners reached over 31 million people with aid. We get help to those who need it most, despite politics, hostilities or harsh climates, and we stay as long as we are needed. Our programs span emergency response, health, education, economic wellbeing, protection and empowerment for women and girls, and other life-changing services.

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE