



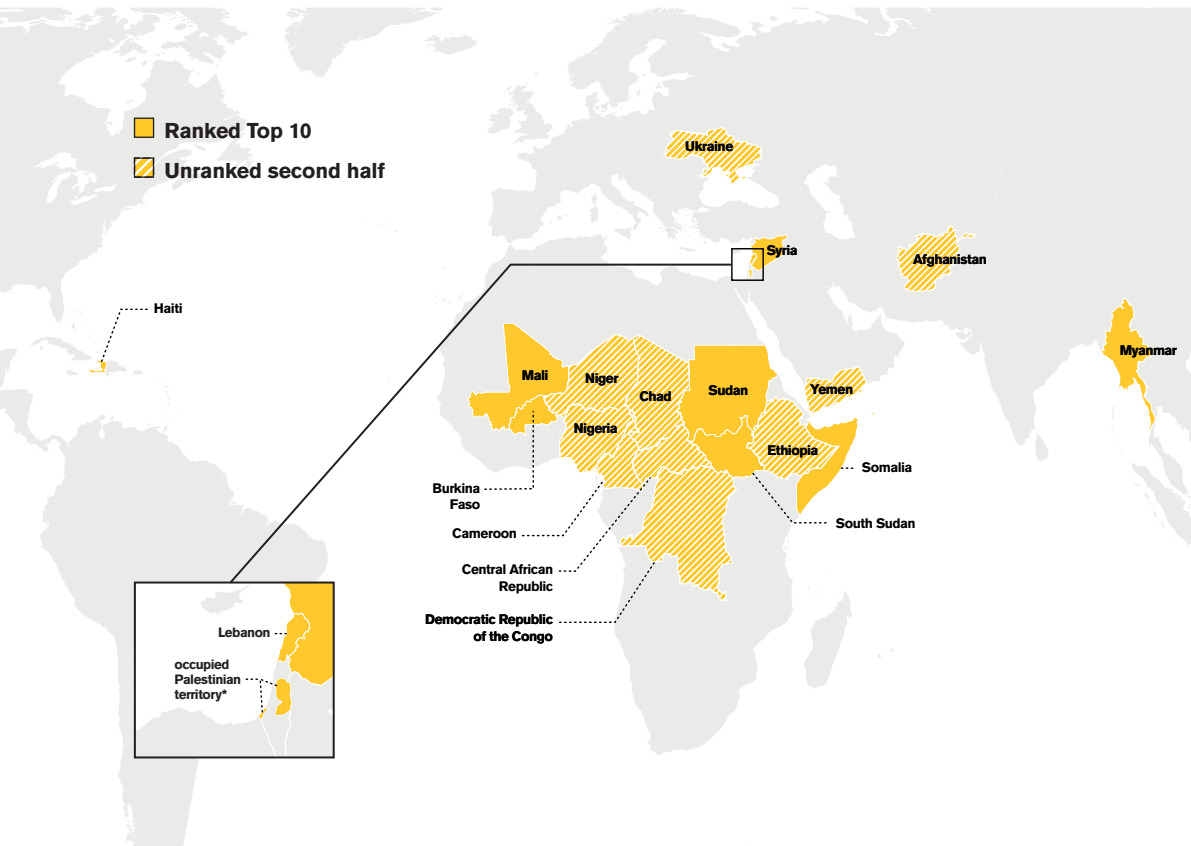
# 2025 EMERGENCY WATCHLIST AT A GLANCE

# a world Out of Balance



The **Emergency Watchlist report** is the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) assessment of the 20 countries at greatest risk of new or worsening humanitarian emergencies each year. The report is based on an analytically rigorous process that deploys 74 quantitative and qualitative variables, as well as qualitative insights from the IRC's experience of working in more than 40 countries, to identify which countries to include on the list and where to rank them.

The 2025 Watchlist countries represent an outsized burden of crisis. **These 20 countries contain only 11% of the global population but account for:**



### Ranked top 10

1. Sudan
2. occupied Palestinian territory
3. Myanmar
4. Syria
5. South Sudan
6. Lebanon
7. Burkina Faso
8. Haiti
9. Mali
10. Somalia

### Unranked second half

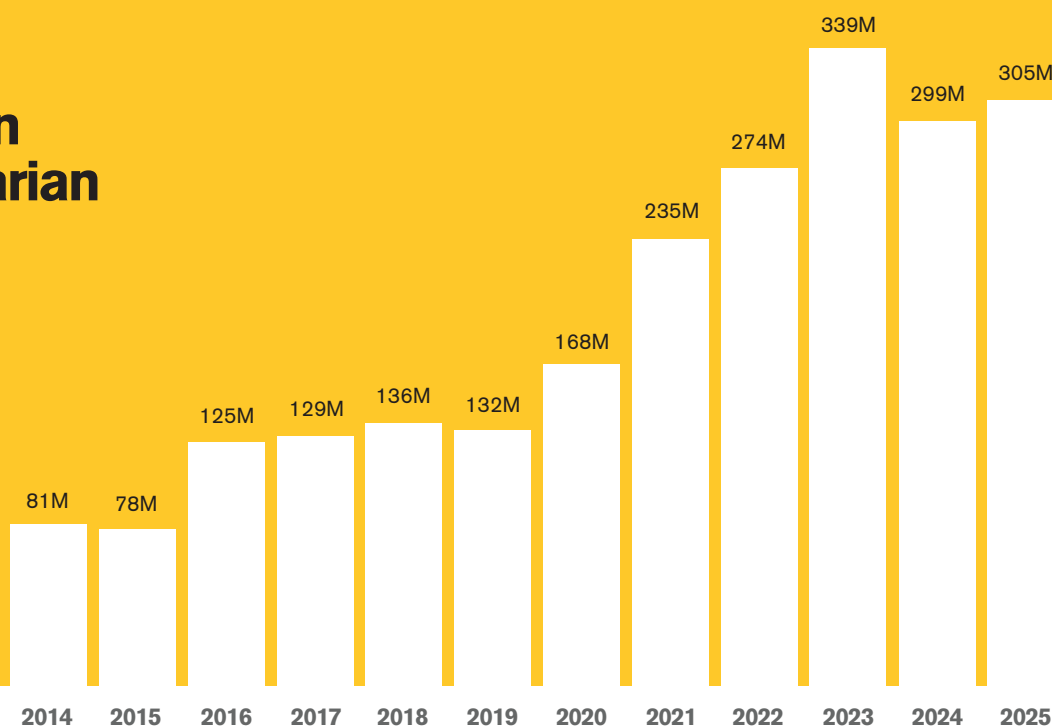
- Afghanistan
- Cameroon
- Central African Republic
- Chad
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Ethiopia
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Ukraine
- Yemen



FIGURE 1

# Growth in humanitarian needs

Source: Global Humanitarian Overview



For the past decade, the Emergency Watchlist has helped the IRC track humanitarian needs, driving both our decision-making to meet those challenges and our understanding of the changes in the world. One theme is especially important: Humanitarian needs are increasingly concentrated in Watchlist countries. While there are specific complexities in different contexts, the global trends are clear.

This year's Watchlist describes "A World Out of Balance," how four deep-seated global imbalances reinforce each other to spark new crises, spur crises to spread, and undermine efforts to bring crises under control. These imbalances drive both the growth of humanitarian needs and the concentration of such needs in Watchlist countries. Without urgent action to address the below imbalances, even more people will be pushed into crisis.

The immediate causes of humanitarian emergencies and civilian suffering are clear and well understood. Conflicts are spreading, lasting longer and causing more civilian casualties. The climate crisis is compounding the effects of conflict, causing loss of livelihoods as well as displacement, food crises and disease outbreaks. Debt crises are exacerbating extreme poverty and undermining basic service provision. At the same time, humanitarian efforts to address these needs continue to face access challenges and lack sufficient funding for program delivery and implementation.

These trends risk cleaving the world into two camps—between communities in stable countries and crisis-affected communities. While the challenges in Watchlist countries are complex, our analysis and operational experience show that there are ways to save lives, build resilience and preserve the livelihoods and well-being of those most vulnerable.



# Four Imbalances

explain the decade-long rise in the number of people facing humanitarian crises

## IMBALANCE 1

### More conflict, less diplomacy.

There were a record **59** conflicts in 2023, the highest since World War II and up by nearly a third in just a decade. Both leaders of states and non-state actors are increasingly resorting to force rather than using diplomacy and peaceful means to resolve disputes. Over the past three years, there have been **23** coups or coup attempts, double the annual rate of the previous decade. Many post-coup regimes remain unrecognized, governing as “de facto authorities.”

## IMBALANCE 2

### More attacks on civilians, fewer consequences.

Civilians have long endured the worst impacts of war, but in the past decade, conflicts have increasingly targeted them directly. Attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure are no longer just collateral, but a deliberate strategy, making the rules of war seem toothless.

## IMBALANCE 3

### More carbon emissions, less support for people suffering from the climate crisis.

The world is losing the battle against climate change. As carbon emissions continue to rise, the highest price is being paid by those who have contributed the least to the problem. Watchlist countries are on the frontline of the climate crisis: **16** are among the top 25% most vulnerable to the climate crisis and least prepared to face it.

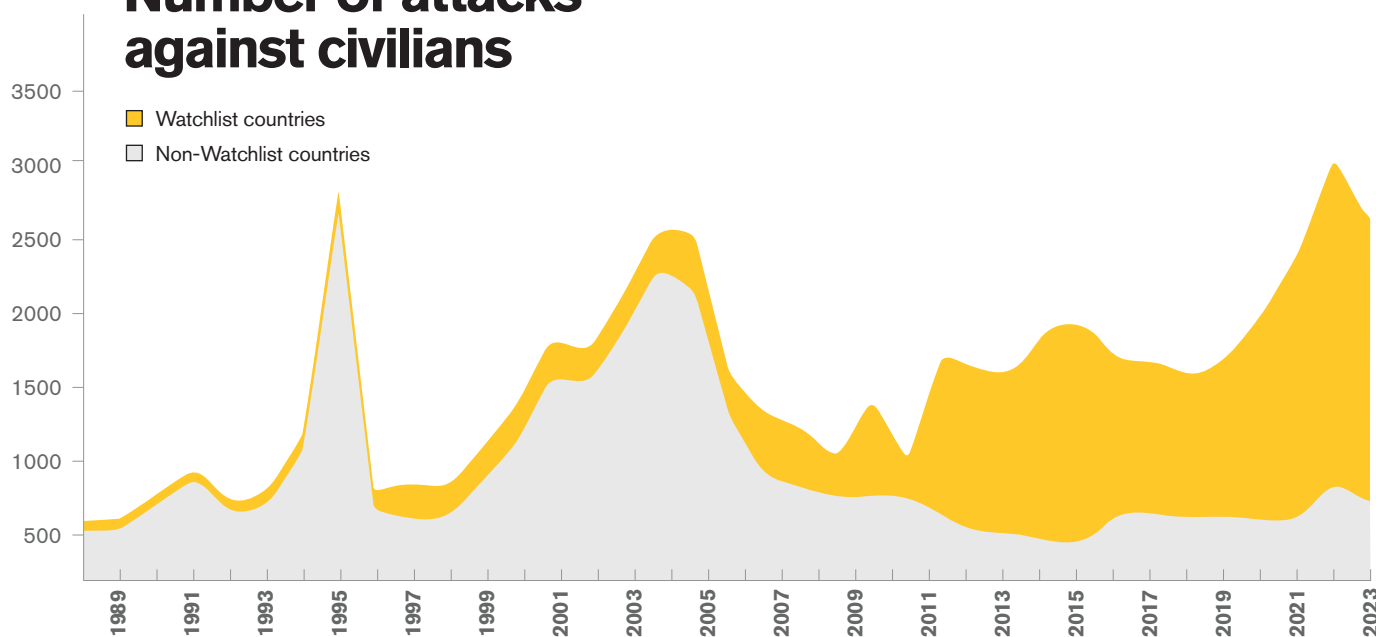
## IMBALANCE 4

### More wealth accumulation, less poverty alleviation.

While global extreme poverty has fallen sharply, from 1.8 billion people in the 2000s to 714 million in the 2020s, this progress has bypassed Watchlist countries. These states experience a divergent reality, where extreme poverty has soared by nearly **85%** over the same period.

FIGURE 2

## Number of attacks against civilians



Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)

# IRC Priorities for Action

## 1 Humanitarian aid is a vital, and good, investment

- Donors should commit half of all bilateral official development assistance (ODA) to fragile and conflict-affected states and provide funding in grants alongside highly concessional financing.
- Overall donor funding should increase. If G7 countries alone met their commitments to spend 0.7% of their gross national incomes on ODA, they would create an additional **\$150 billion**.
- Donors should accelerate support to women-led organizations, in conjunction with broader donor reforms.
- Donors should invest in proven solutions that work even in the hardest-to-reach places. The IRC's evidence base of cost-effectiveness studies and impact evaluations demonstrates how to optimize humanitarian programs for impact and scale.

## 2 Address the economic drivers of humanitarian needs to promote shared prosperity

- The World Bank and other creditors should continue the delivery of long-term debt relief and eligibility for pauses in debt payments for Watchlist countries. This will free up resources for essential public services, climate action and resilience in conflict-affected and climate-vulnerable countries.
- Donors should improve their responses to new de facto authority control through risk-mapping to identify when service provision may be at risk, and adopt alternative means of delivery.

## 3 Create a new mechanism to forecast and address the impacts of economic shocks for humanitarian needs and response.

This mechanism could play a central role in operationalizing commitments made in the U.N.'s Pact for the Future and responding to demand signals from members of the U.N. Security Council.

## 3 Protect civilians by reforming international institutions

- The U.N. should expand Security Council membership to be more equitable and representative, and member states should agree on an agenda for reform to give voice and power to countries most affected by conflict and climate change.
- U.N. Security Council members should suspend the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities, with the determination of what constitutes a mass atrocity made through an independent and neutral panel, as established by the U.N. General Assembly.
- Member states should agree on a roadmap to increase their financial contributions to regional bodies. Efforts by African Union members to fully fund the organization's operational budget and the Peace and Security Fund are important steps in the right direction.

## 4 Ease civilian suffering by promoting and protecting humanitarian access

- Donors should increase funding to expand humanitarian access training and support for frontline delivery nongovernmental organizations to build effective negotiation capacity at the operational level.
- Member States should support the establishment of an Independent Access Organization to augment U.N. access reporting and advocacy.
- States should use domestic policy frameworks to limit, withhold and condition security assistance and arms transfers until compliance with international humanitarian law improves.

## 5 Invest in adaptation and resilience to limit the worst impacts of the climate crisis

- Donors should invest in climate adaptation and resilience efforts that align with the needs of communities in conflict-affected states. Climate finance is overwhelmingly designed to support stable governments, leaving conflict-affected regions with only a fraction of the per capita adaptation funding.
- Donors should direct at least 50% of the New Collective Quantified Goal toward adaptation, with a particular focus on building resilience in fragile states. These states are highly vulnerable to climate impacts but remain underserved by existing finance mechanisms.
- Multilateral development banks (MDBs) should increase partnerships with civil society organizations through people-first models to complement government-first delivery models. In Watchlist countries, these partnerships can help MDBs as well as bilateral donors effectively and consistently deliver climate change adaptation projects while also supporting the delivery of basic services in conflict-affected states.

## 6 Increase protection and assistance for refugees

- Rich countries should expand safe pathways for refugees and honor their legal obligation to avoid refoulement by abandoning deterrence policies that force people back into harm's way. Resettlement and complementary pathways provide lifesaving protection to some of the most vulnerable refugees, and turning away from these innovations would eliminate regular channels for protection-seekers that have contributed to a reduction in irregular crossings.
- EU member states should expand the capacity and number of national resettlement programs, leading to increased pledges, more robust programs and better implementation. Evidence shows that providing safe pathways incentivizes protection-seekers to use regular migration routes and thereby creates more order at borders.
- Donors and MDBs should provide direct financial support to city and local authorities, rather than solely national governments, to facilitate refugee inclusion and integration. Such authorities are tasked with integrating urban-based refugees and have been important partners in fostering their inclusion.

