



2026 Emergency Watchlist

NEW WORLD DISORDER

- 01** Sudan
- 02** occupied Palestinian territory
- 03** South Sudan
- 04** Ethiopia
- 05** Haiti
- 06** Myanmar
- 07** Democratic Republic of the Congo
- 08** Mali
- 09** Burkina Faso
- 10** Lebanon



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COVER: A man walks through a damaged section of Omdurman, Sudan. The country, where 33.7 million people are in humanitarian need, tops the Emergency Watchlist for the third year in a row.

OPPOSITE: Refugees from Sudan, a mother and son, stand beside their makeshift shelter in Adré, Chad. They are among hundreds of thousands of people who have left Sudan since the brutal conflict broke out in April 2023.



IRC President and CEO David Miliband and leaders from the IRC's country program in Sudan listen to the experiences of IRC clients at Al-Nahda Shelter in River Nile State, Sudan. Since 2023, the IRC has scaled up its response to support displaced people with cash assistance, health and water access.



Foreword

The IRC publishes this year's Emergency Watchlist at a time unprecedented in its history. Never before has the organization been forced to cut its budget by \$400 million in the space of one year. Yet that is what we had to do in 2025. While the U.S. funding cuts represent the largest in scale and impact, other governments also retreated from support for global aid, contributing to this global deficit.


The publication of this Emergency Watchlist speaks to something especially precious: that despite the loss of funds, we remain focused on the future, not the past, and on solutions that relieve suffering. And we do so not with our mission diminished, but with our finances stabilized and our commitment reinforced.

The pain of this moment, documented in the pages that follow in graphic detail, has been felt inside our own organization. Two million clients have lost access to services. Six thousand staff have been made redundant. But the 16,000 colleagues who remain are not just getting on with their jobs; they are delivering for people in the toughest places, raising new funds and driving innovations that push back against the forces of the New World Disorder we describe in the report.

This theme—cuts matched by recommitment—was evident on my recent trip to Sudan, the world's worst humanitarian crisis. I was in the east of the country, so I did not meet survivors of the terrible recent massacres in Darfur, but I did speak to clients from across Sudan whose lives have been ravaged by civil war. The loss they described was overwhelming, but so too was the unquenched desire for something better. One mother I met in the Atbara health center told me she had lost her husband, killed in front of her eyes, yet she was determined to ensure her sons would make it through university.

Sudan sits at the top of this year's Watchlist—and, tragically, at the top of all records for humanitarian crisis. Never before have so many people been left in such profound need. It is the clearest demonstration that we are in uncharted territory.

This year's Emergency Watchlist also brings into sharp relief some underlying trends that deserve far more attention. This is especially true of the economics of war—a trend that sits



alongside rising temperatures, failing peace efforts and the entrenchment of impunity in shaping what is happening to the world's most vulnerable people. There is profit in conflict as well as loss, and the incentives that drive today's wars stand in direct opposition to the values of the humanitarian movement. We do not pretend in our recommendations to offer a magic cure. But we do want to underscore that no cure is possible without confronting these structural forces.

The humanitarian imperative requires the IRC to forsake political gestures because our clients need help that is practical, not performative. The Emergency Watchlist sets the table for our continued partnership with all those whose actions affect our clients' lives. It lays out what we believe needs to change, what we must do together and what the IRC will do ourselves. The Emergency Watchlist is built on a commitment to credible data; likewise, the recommendations are grounded in evidence, not just imagination.

We welcome discussion with all those who seek to remedy the most alarming fact of all: that as the world has become more connected, empathy has become more divided, and as needs have grown, support has been withdrawn. Those trends are neither inevitable nor defensible. They must be confronted, challenged and reversed.



David Miliband
IRC President and CEO



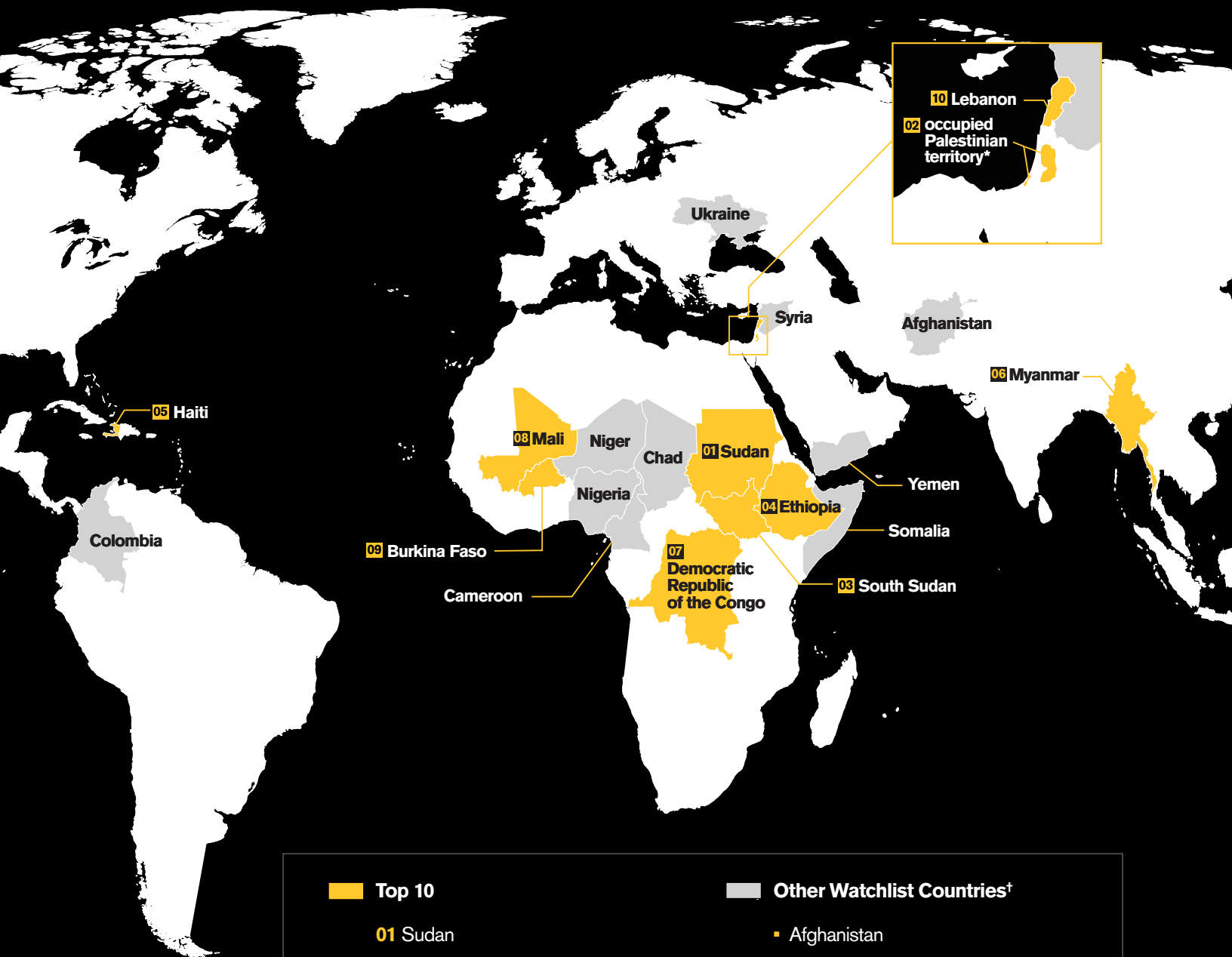
At a Glance

For over a decade, the Emergency Watchlist has served as the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) annual assessment of the 20 countries at greatest risk of new or worsening humanitarian emergencies.

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 how to rank them. Each year, this methodology allows the IRC to accurately identify 85-95% of the countries that then see the worst humanitarian deterioration over the following year.

This year's Emergency Watchlist comes at an unprecedented moment. Its theme, "New World Disorder," sounds the alarm on a dangerous divergence: as humanitarian crises are surging, the global support to address them is collapsing. The surging crises and shrinking support that IRC's clients face are not just a humanitarian failure, but instead the direct consequence of the geopolitical trends redefining how countries interact with one another.

The New World Disorder described in this year's report illustrates what IRC teams witness every day as they help crisis-affected people around the world to survive, recover and rebuild their future. The facts on the ground reveal a humanitarian system overwhelmed when it is needed most. Conflict is escalating dramatically, compounded by climate change and entrenched poverty, while global aid funding has collapsed. The 10 recommendations in this report offer practical and effective ways forward to protect communities in the 20 Watchlist countries from the staggering burden of this disorder and to build more sustainable, resilient systems for the future.



Top 10

- 01 Sudan
- 02 occupied Palestinian territory
- 03 South Sudan
- 04 Ethiopia
- 05 Haiti
- 06 Myanmar
- 07 Democratic Republic of the Congo
- 08 Mali
- 09 Burkina Faso
- 10 Lebanon

Other Watchlist Countries†

- Afghanistan
- Cameroon
- Chad
- Colombia
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Somalia
- Syria
- Ukraine
- Yemen

*The United Nations (U.N.) uses "State of Palestine" and "occupied Palestinian territory" interchangeably to refer to the West Bank and Gaza. We use occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) in this report for consistency with the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and many of our peer agencies.

†In alphabetical order

Key Facts

from the 2026 Emergency Watchlist

12%

of the global population live in the 20 Watchlist countries, yet they account for...

80%

of people who have been forced to flee their homes to find safety

50%

of people in extreme poverty

89%

of people in humanitarian need



18 countries recorded **MORE THAN 1,000 CONFLICT DEATHS** in 2025



44%

increase in attacks on schools in conflict zones between 2024 and 2025



239 million

people are in humanitarian need



50,000

people—mostly civilians—were killed in conflict in 2024, a 40% surge



117.3 million

people have been uprooted by conflict, violence or persecution



1,000

people were killed while seeking medical care in the first six months of 2025, almost 60 times more than during the same period in 2024



\$31.1B

fall in aid projected in 2025 from the 17 largest Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members (mostly due to U.S. and German cuts, although others, including France and the UK, have cut aid as well)



83%

of USAID programs were cancelled, including most funding for health programs between January and March 2025



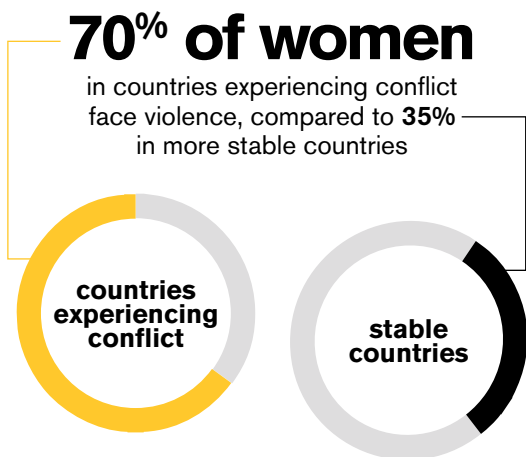
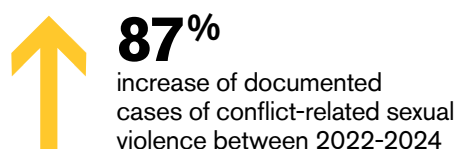
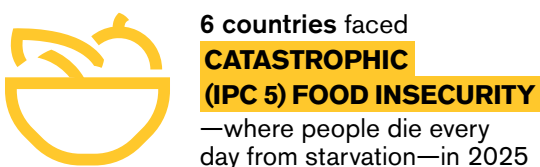
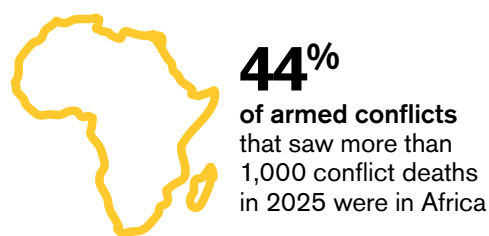
Less than 1%

of all climate finance goes to fund adaptation in conflict-affected and climate-vulnerable countries



Just 25% of aid

goes to the fragile and conflict-affected countries that are home to 50% of people living in extreme poverty



The IRC provides health services at a Sudanese refugee settlement in Farchana, Chad, where residents face sandstorms and rainstorms, as well as extreme heat.



New World Disorder

The International Rescue Committee's (IRC) 2026 Emergency Watchlist sounds the alarm on a dangerous divergence: as humanitarian crises are surging, the global support to address them is collapsing. The crisis-affected communities the IRC serves face catastrophic levels of food insecurity, near-record levels of displacement, and more active conflicts than at any point since World War II. Yet, this is all happening amid a dramatic collapse in international aid and a retreat from global cooperation.



A young Palestinian boy walks his bicycle past the ruins of destroyed buildings in the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood of Gaza City.



The core argument of the 2026 Emergency Watchlist is that the surging crises and shrinking support that IRC's clients face every day are not just a humanitarian failure, but instead the direct consequence of the geopolitical trends redefining how countries interact with one another.

The rules-based system and international order built after the Second World War always had winners and losers, not least in crisis-affected communities. Now it is disintegrating and the devastating situation in the 20 countries on the Emergency Watchlist—which are home to 12% of the global population but account for 89% of all people in humanitarian need—provides a clear warning that an even more dangerous era may be arriving.

A New World Disorder is emerging, defined by three key features. First, a wider cast of geopolitical and regional powers are competing for influence, creating new rivalries and new risks on every front. Second, constantly shifting short-term partnerships are replacing stable, long-term alliances, creating greater unpredictability for countries and communities navigating a turbulent world. Third, transactional, power-based deal-making has usurped basic protections for people.

The New World Disorder has created a global incentive structure that adds fuel to the fires driving crises in the countries appearing on this year's Emergency Watchlist. The new geopolitical order is marked by multiple centers of power. The pursuit of shared goals, like fighting the climate crisis or cooperating to tackle poverty, is being undermined. Conflict for profit and influence is being legitimized. Basic rights for individuals and protections for the most vulnerable are being trampled.

Communities in the 20 Watchlist countries are caught in the eye of this geopolitical storm, but the threats they face will not be contained by borders. Millions more people will be at risk in the years ahead, in Watchlist countries and beyond, if we do not take effective action now. The most urgent task is to find ways to protect people, particularly those in Watchlist countries, from the worst consequences of this New World Disorder. But we must also try to shape the emerging order so that communities can survive, recover and rebuild their futures.

This year's report details the stark reality of these crises, diagnoses their geopolitical drivers and provides a path forward. The 10 recommendations that follow offer concrete steps to protect the most vulnerable from this new disorder and build more sustainable, resilient systems for the future.

The Stark Reality

Surging crises in a world of shrinking support

The starting point for our analysis is what IRC teams witness every day as they help crisis-affected people in more than 40 countries around the world to survive, recover and rebuild their future. The stark reality they see is one of surging crises and shrinking support. This dangerous divergence is a result of the New World Disorder, and it has devastating consequences for the communities the IRC serves.

GRAPH 1

The 20 Watchlist countries will be home to the majority of people living in extreme poverty by 2030

Source: World Data Lab

Percentage of People Living in Extreme Poverty in 2016



Surging Crisis

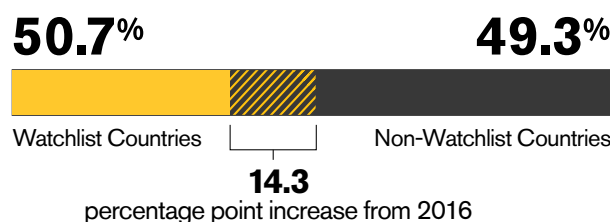
The facts on the ground reveal a humanitarian system overwhelmed when it is needed most. Conflict is escalating dramatically, compounded by climate change and entrenched poverty, creating overlapping crises on an unprecedented scale. The result is near-record levels of displacement, food insecurity and humanitarian need.

- **Conflicts are at record highs.** Armed conflict has **surged** to historic highs in 2025. The world is experiencing **more active wars** than at any point since World War II, with one in seven people globally living with the threat of armed conflict. Wars are more widespread, more persistent and deadlier than in recent decades, driving unprecedented humanitarian fallout. Combined with increasingly concentrated extreme poverty and climate shocks in these same communities, the result is over **239 million** people—1 in 34 people on the planet—requiring humanitarian assistance, according to the U.N.'s 2026 Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO).

The five countries at the top of the Emergency Watchlist account for an overall increase of around 5 million people in need, underlining both how dramatically the situations in these countries are worsening and how Watchlist countries account disproportionately for crises. Indeed, the 20 Watchlist countries are home to just **12%** of the world's population but **89%** of people in humanitarian need.

Extreme poverty is also disproportionately focused in Watchlist countries. While extreme poverty is falling at the global level, affecting **831 million** people in 2025—down from around a billion in 2015—progress is stalling as extreme poverty grows in conflict-affected countries like those on the Emergency Watchlist. These 20 countries will account for more than half (**50.3%**) of all people living in extreme poverty globally by 2029, whereas they accounted for roughly a third just a decade ago.¹

Percentage of People Living in Extreme Poverty in 2030



¹The 831 million figure is according to the latest World Bank data covering the number of people who are living on less than \$3 per day, which is the current threshold for extreme poverty. Due to limited availability of data, the Watchlist team calculated the percentage of people living in extreme poverty in Watchlist countries using the slightly older, \$2.15 per day, threshold for extreme poverty.

- **Conflicts are harder to resolve.** The problem is not only that more wars are starting, but that fewer wars are ending than at any point in the last half century, leaving communities trapped in persistent cycles of violence. More than **70%** of new conflicts since 2020 have lasted longer than a year, nearly double the rate in previous decades. Data collected by the **PA-X** Peace Agreement Database about global peace efforts shows a broad **reduction** in the number of peace agreements of all types being signed since 1990.

However, there has been a particular drop in the number of “comprehensive” peace agreements that resolve a conflict by addressing substantive issues. There were just 7 “comprehensive” agreements in the five years from 2020-2024, down from 20 in the preceding five years. This suggests that peace efforts have not been abandoned entirely, but rather that diplomacy is failing to resolve the substantive issues driving modern conflicts—likely because wars are harder to resolve as they become increasingly internationalized and, in many cases, are shaped and sustained by economic interests rather than purely political or territorial ambitions. It remains to be seen whether ceasefires agreed in 2025—for example

in Gaza—will, in time, lead to comprehensive agreements, or whether the underlying issues will remain unresolved and therefore conflict will risk recurring.

- **External involvement in conflicts is driving violence.** **Ninety-eight** countries were involved in conflicts beyond their borders in the five years to 2024, up from 59 countries in 2008, whether acting alone or as part of a coalition (including peacekeeping forces). This includes **36** of the 44 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa being involved in external wars between 2018 and 2023, up from just seven countries in the region between 2002 and 2006.²

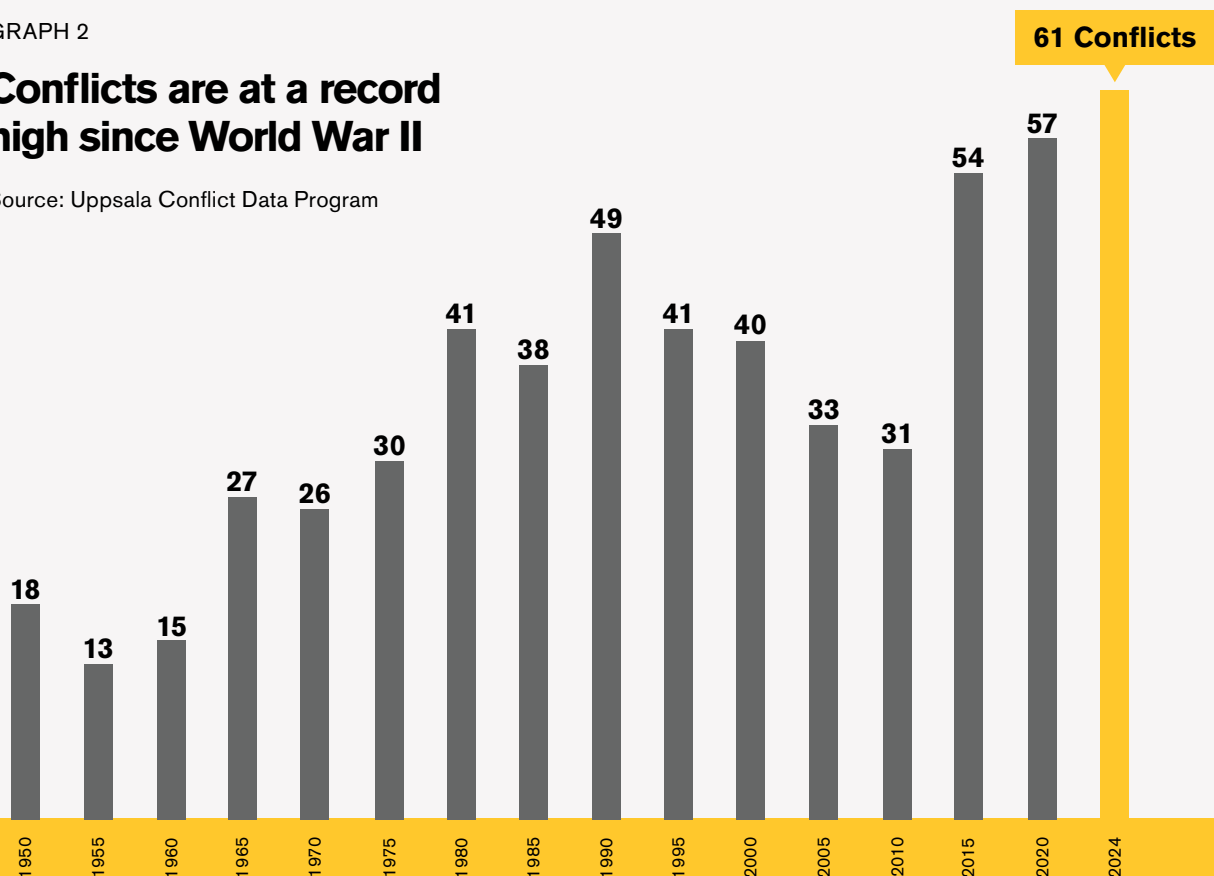
The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is the prime example of this trend, with United Nations (U.N.) experts **reporting** in 2025 the direct involvement of forces from three key regional powers (Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi) as well as two separate multinational interventions led by the U.N. and the Southern African Development Community (SADC)—representing a further 10 countries. Protracted conflict in eastern DRC since the 1990s is also a case study in how the involvement of external powers makes conflicts harder to resolve, since the interests of more actors need to be considered in any peace agreement.

²According to the Institute for Economics & Peace's **Global Peace Index 2025**

GRAPH 2

Conflicts are at a record high since World War II

Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program



- **Domestic wars have gone global.** Even so-called “domestic” wars such as in Sudan or Myanmar are fueled by **external** sponsors who provide weapons, financing and political cover, embedding the conflicts in wider economic and diplomatic networks and rivalries. These overlapping international layers of the conflict create political and economic incentives to perpetuate violence. Moreover, the technology shared by external parties, including access to the weaponized drones that are now used across nearly all Watchlist countries, can be an important factor increasing civilian harm.

“ In Goma, life is becoming more difficult every day. Insecurity persists, peace feels out of reach and the economy is impacting everything: banks are closed, food prices have skyrocketed. Those of us who are still lucky enough to have a job are struggling to get by. Simply eating or getting medical care has become a daily struggle.

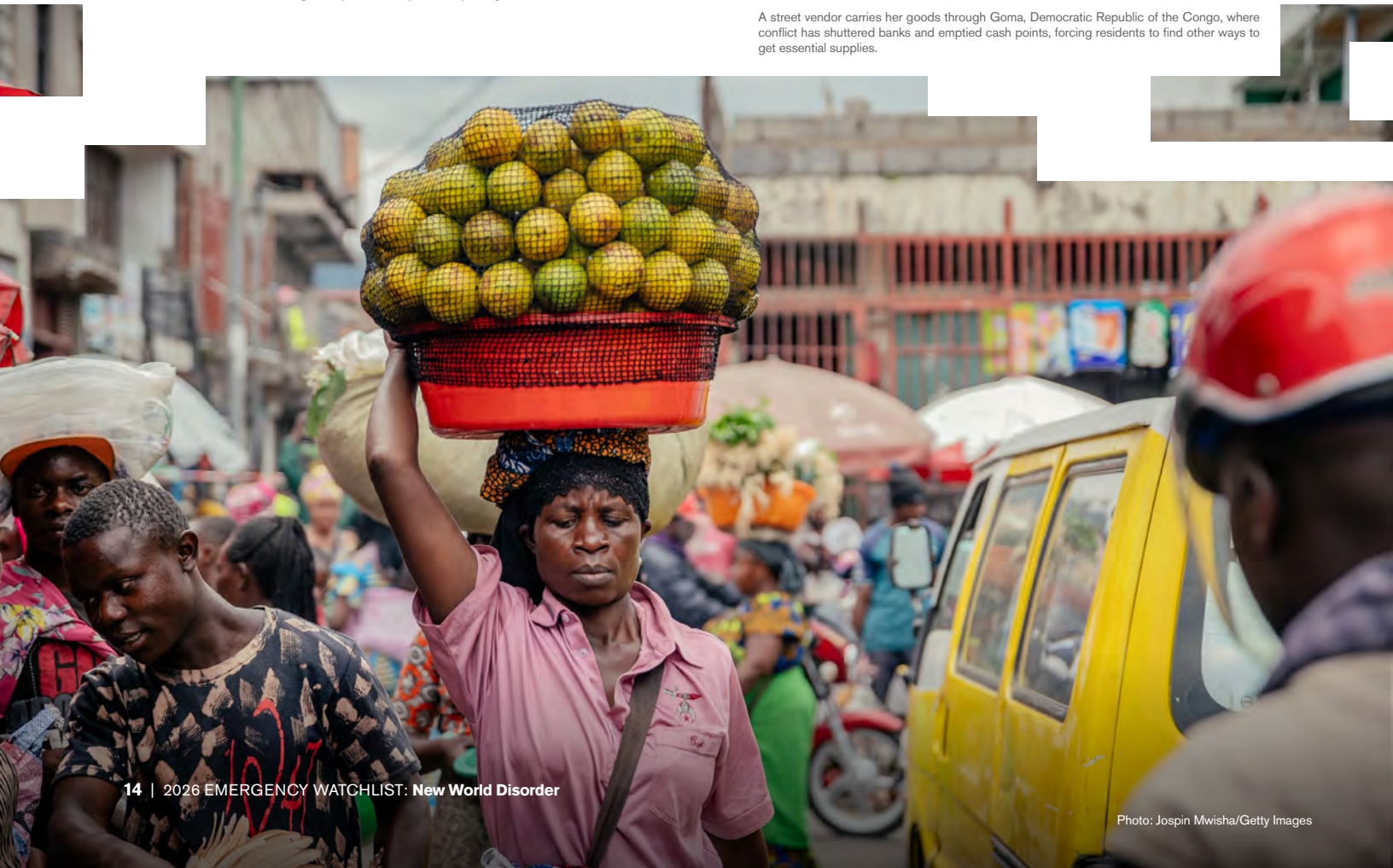
— Jean Claude Kahindo*, Staff member at a local IRC partner organization in DRC

*Name has been changed to protect the person's privacy

- **Civilians pay the price of conflict.** Open-ended violence fueled by money and weapons from external actors makes these conflicts more destructive. **Eighteen** countries recorded more than 1,000 conflict deaths in 2025, the highest number since 1999. Nearly **half** of all conflicts with more than 1,000 deaths in 2025 are in Africa, where wars in Sudan, the Sahel and DRC are devastating civilian livelihoods, displacing millions and worsening food crises. In Burkina Faso, more than **6,000** people were killed in 2024, and violence continues to escalate into 2025. And the longer conflicts persist, the greater the harm to the systems and services on which civilians depend.

While everybody in a conflict-affected country feels the effects of the violence, not everyone is affected in the same ways. The IRC's experience on the ground shows that violence against women and girls surges during conflicts or displacement—**70%** of women in crisis-affected countries face violence, compared to 35% in more stable countries. And the long-term impacts of conflict on health care systems also have a disproportionate impact on women and girls. **Fifty-eight percent** of global maternal deaths and **37%** of newborn deaths occur in countries with humanitarian emergencies.

A street vendor carries her goods through Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, where conflict has shuttered banks and emptied cash points, forcing residents to find other ways to get essential supplies.



- **Catastrophic hunger is spreading.** Hunger is becoming deeper, deadlier and more concentrated in crisis-affected countries. **Thirty-seven million** people are now facing IPC phase 4, the emergency level of food insecurity, where families face extreme food gaps, malnutrition and rising deaths. This is the highest figure since 2021, and 86% of these cases are in Watchlist countries, up from 79% in 2024. IPC phase 5 food insecurity, where people are already starving and at imminent risk of death, affected **1.4 million** people in 2025 across **six** countries. This is the largest number of countries seeing IPC 5 at any point since global-level data started to be collected in 2016.

Extreme hunger at this scale is the result of human action, and its primary cause is conflict. The year 2025 saw the first ever **confirmed** famine in the Middle East—in Gaza City. Attacks directly affecting food security (including strikes on warehouses, supply convoys and agricultural sites), have surged globally, from just 38 incidents in 2020 to over **1,000** in the first half of 2025. The shocking level of food insecurity across millions of communities in Watchlist countries will have irreversible impacts on health, economic outcomes and livelihoods.



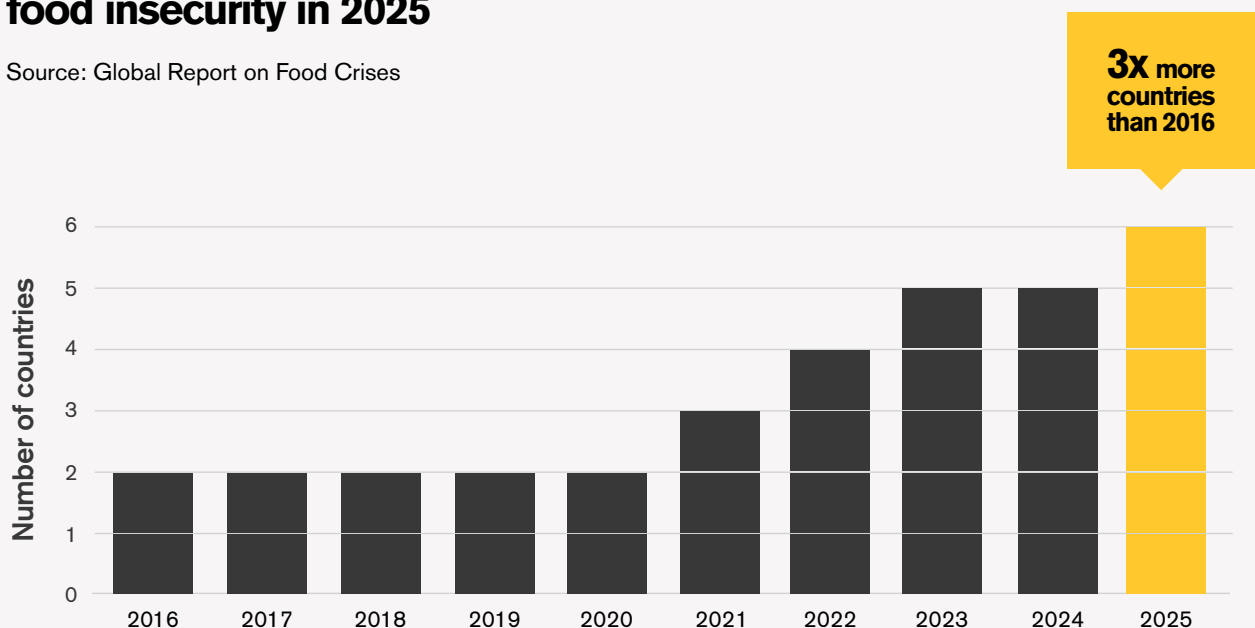
“ Food insecurity is at crisis levels. Many households are eating just one meal per day or less, with some resorting to eating leaves or animal feed to survive... In besieged communities, there is almost no food at all. Every day, the families we support have to worry about both violence and hunger.

– **Ebtihal Ghanem**, Emergency Cash and Basic Needs Coordinator, IRC Sudan

GRAPH 3

A record number of countries experienced catastrophic food insecurity in 2025

Source: Global Report on Food Crises



- **People are forced to flee their homes at record levels.** The number of people forcibly displaced worldwide reached a new **peak** in 2024 before dropping slightly in 2025, to **117.3** million people. The slight reduction in 2025 reflects a mix of both shifting conflict dynamics (making it possible for people to return) and increased efforts by some host countries to push out refugees. Iran deported more than **1 million** people to Afghanistan over the course of 2025, despite the protracted crisis in that country.

Four out of five people displaced globally (**80%**) have been uprooted by conflict, violence or persecution in Watchlist countries. From 2010 to 2025, displacement rose 186% globally, but nearly all of this was driven by crises in Watchlist countries, where displacement increased by 261% compared to just 53% elsewhere.

Contrary to public narratives, only a small share of the world's displaced ever reach Europe or the United States. **Nearly 60%** of displaced people remain within their own countries. Of those who have fled across an international border, **66%** stay in countries neighboring their countries of origin. Critically, **71%** of all displaced people are hosted in low- and middle-income countries. Sudan and Gaza illustrate the speed and scale of today's crises. Since Sudan's war began in April 2023, more than **11.8 million** people have been uprooted, including 7.5 million people displaced inside the country. In Gaza **1.9 million** people, nearly the entire population, have been displaced, often multiple times. Most are women and children. The longer conflicts remain unresolved and civilians are put in harm's way, the more people are forced to flee their homes each year.

GRAPH 4

The majority of displaced people in the world are from Watchlist countries

Source: UNHCR

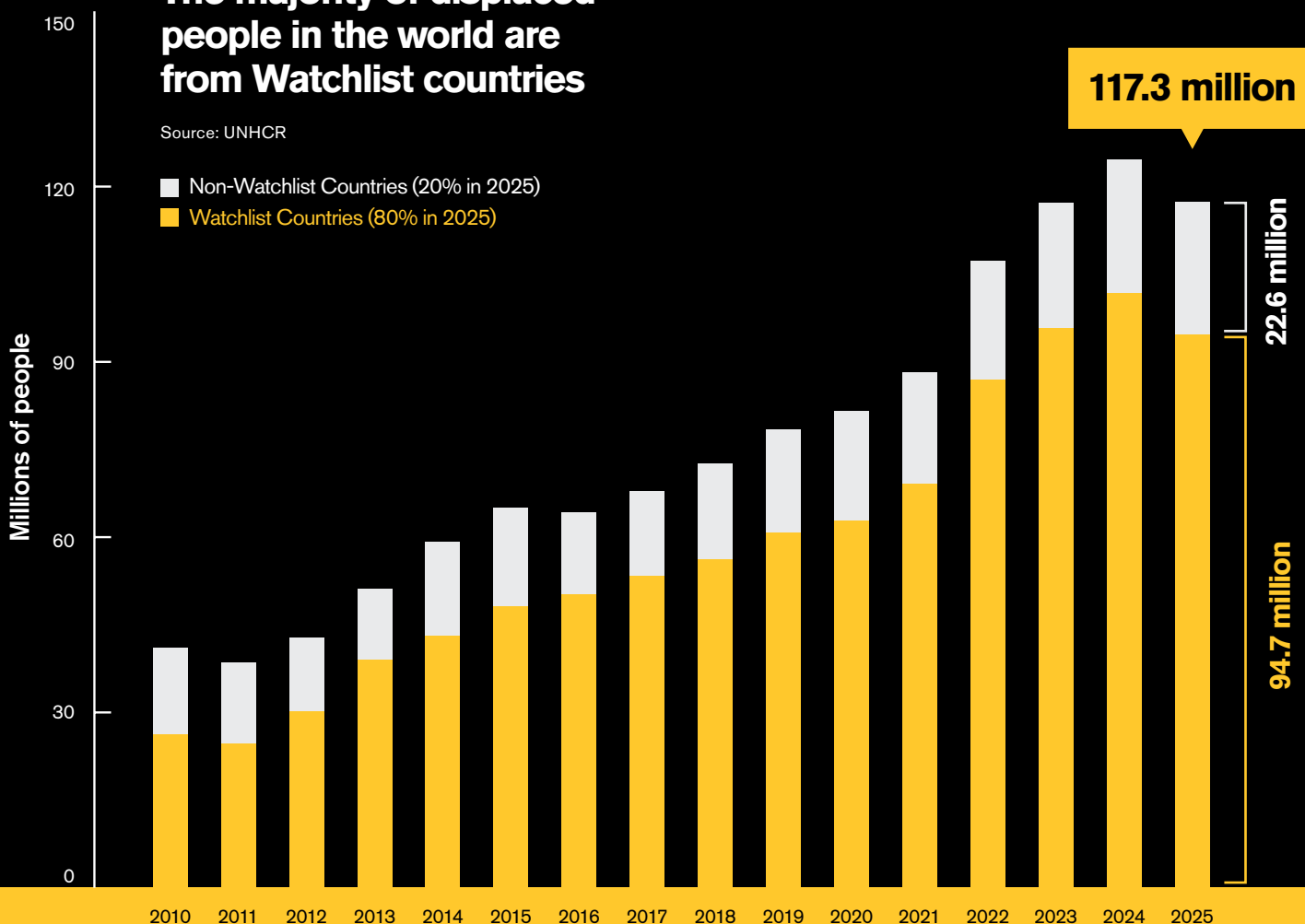




Photo: Eduardo Soteras/Getty Images

- **Climate change is fueling new weather extremes and shocks.** Natural shocks like flooding and droughts are increasing in both frequency and severity. For example, Afghanistan is enduring its **worst drought in 30 years**, having recorded less than half of its usual rainfall this past winter. These conditions pose a direct threat to both food security and economic stability in a country where **over 80%** of the population depends on agriculture for their livelihoods. Climate-related economic losses exceeded **3 billion** during severe droughts in Afghanistan, equivalent to nearly a fifth of the country's GDP. And the climate crisis has long-term impacts for crisis-affected communities, reducing access to water and agricultural land and increasing their exposure to diseases like malaria and cholera.

- **Preventable diseases are spreading rapidly.** Progress on global disease prevention is stalling in many cases and reversing in some. Between 2000-2023, an estimated **60.3 million** measles deaths were prevented and measles was almost eliminated globally. Yet today, **57 countries** face large measles outbreaks. In 2024, **109 million** infants worldwide (roughly 17 out of 20) received three doses of the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP3) vaccine. That figure is lower than before the COVID-19 pandemic and represents nearly 20 million children missing out on a full course of this lifesaving vaccine. Of the 10 countries with the lowest rates for DTP3 coverage at age 1, **half** are Watchlist countries (Sudan, Yemen, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Haiti). The most recent reporting also shows increases in malaria cases globally, up by **11 million** cases in 2023. These setbacks reflect both the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and growing disruption to health services as conflict spreads and aid projects are cut.

ABOVE: A man surveys the carcasses of livestock in Antalale, Ethiopia, a village still struggling to recover from its worst drought in decades.

Shrinking Support for Affected Communities

While humanitarian crises trend incessantly upwards, driven by record-high conflicts, the global effort to support affected communities is collapsing. What emerges is an historic retrenchment of international aid funding and growing attacks and restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid, creating the central, alarming divergence that defines the New World Disorder's human cost.

- **Aid funding is being cut.** The United States, historically the single largest donor, has slashed support for aid under the new administration. By March 2025, **83%** of USAID programs were cancelled, including most funding for maternal and child health, malaria, tuberculosis, family planning, gender-based violence prevention and response, child protection programming and epidemic surveillance. Other major donors such as the UK, Germany and France have also cut back on their aid budgets. In total, aid from the 17 largest members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) was projected to fall by **\$31.1 billion** in 2025—primarily due to cuts made by the U.S. and Germany. And these cuts came after years of aid budgets being stretched increasingly thin; just **25%** of aid now goes to the fragile and conflict-affected countries that are home to **50%** of people living in extreme poverty.

These cuts are deadly: **1.8 million additional deaths** are projected in 2025 alone, including nearly 700,000 children under five, if the resulting gaps go un-filled. If sustained, the cuts could cause 14 million preventable deaths by 2030. Humanitarian Response Plans are dramatically underfunded: As of November 2025, just a **quarter** of the funding required for coordinated response plans had been received globally. Appeals for Myanmar (funded at 17%) and Mali (18%) are even more strained. The mismatch is stark. Just as fragile states face their steepest rise in need, aid is shrinking and being redirected elsewhere.

- **Humanitarian access is being strangled.** Between late 2024 and mid-2025, aid operations in at least **36 countries** faced high to extreme access constraints, where aid could only be delivered sporadically—often through dangerous and ineffective methods such as air drops. There have always been efforts to weaponize humanitarian access, but now it has become a widespread and deliberate strategy of war and control.



In our nutrition clinics in Khartoum, I see children arriving weaker each week as food support is cut. Mothers are desperate because the therapeutic food and medicines we rely on are running out. We are holding the line as best we can, but without new funding these children will not survive.

– **Kelly Kisarach**, Senior Health and Nutrition Coordinator, IRC Sudan

Across Watchlist countries, aid has been turned into a bargaining chip. Authorities and armed groups are restricting movement, blocking convoys, and taxing or diverting supplies to consolidate power. In Sudan, fighting and deliberate obstruction by authorities have blocked aid since 2023. In Myanmar, the military authorities have crippled operations through visa delays, internet cuts and expulsions. In Afghanistan, the Taliban's ban on female aid workers has forced the suspension of lifesaving health and nutrition programs. But some of the most extreme constraints on access have been in Gaza. For months, the territory faced a naval blockade and sweeping land and air closures, severely restricting aid. Even when limited access was granted, delivery systems were heavily militarized, forcing civilians to cross dangerous zones just to reach food. The **U.N. reported** that since May 2025 more than 1,800 Palestinians were killed while seeking aid.

While the international humanitarian system has long had its failings, the rapid acceleration of crisis and cuts to aid over the past year have pushed crisis-affected communities into an untenable position. The widening gap between human need and available support is the most devastating feature of this New World Disorder. Understanding why it is occurring requires examining the broader geopolitical trends that are leaving behind the IRC's clients around the world.

The New World Disorder is defined by **three key features** that are increasingly shaping the world.



More rivals, more risks:

A growing cast of ambitious global and regional powers are competing for influence, creating new points of tension across the international system.



Shifting alliances: Constantly shifting short-term partnerships are replacing long-standing strategic alliances and multilateral institutions, creating greater unpredictability in global politics.



Transactional deal-making:

The principles driving international engagement have shifted away from long-term, rules-based cooperation towards short-term, power-based deal-making.

These three features create a cascade of **destructive consequences and dangerous incentives**, directly causing the surging crises and shrinking support that are devastating Watchlist countries.

1 Dismantling global cooperation on shared goals:

The New World Disorder has undermined cooperation on shared global issues like climate change, poverty alleviation and pandemic prevention.

2 Normalizing conflict for power and profit:

The New World Disorder is incentivizing more actors to use war to achieve territorial gain, political power and profit. This new landscape has transformed profit-making from conflict into a multibillion-dollar global industry, resulting in longer and more deadly wars and reducing the motivation to pursue peace.

3 Trampling individual rights and protections:

The New World Disorder is eroding the basic rights and protections that once shielded civilians from war and abuse. This is leading to more attacks on civilians, aid workers and refugees as deliberate strategies of war.

Climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather. In 2024, devastating floods in Niger caused significant damage to homes, livelihoods and infrastructure, including in the town of Filingué. The IRC provided cash transfers and shelter materials to over 2,000 flood-affected households.

The New World Disorder

A fracturing global system fueling crisis

The stark reality of surging crises and shrinking support is more than simply generalized chaos. It is the direct consequence of a fracturing global system and the incentives created by what is emerging. The rules-based international order built after World War II is disintegrating, and a “New World Disorder” is taking its place.

In foreign policy circles, the erosion of the post-World War II international order is often discussed as an abstract debate. In Watchlist countries, it is a lived reality. The global commitments to human rights and international cooperation once gave hope, and sometimes leverage, to people in need. As those commitments are flouted, the consequences are measured in lives lost and futures diminished.

What is emerging to replace that order remains uncertain, but the early signs suggest it may be even more dangerous because it creates a new incentive structure that actively normalizes and rewards the very trends devastating Watchlist countries.

The New World Disorder is defined by three key features that are increasingly shaping the world:

- **More rivals, more risks:** The U.S., China and Russia continue to compete for geopolitical advantage, but a growing cast of ambitious regional powers are increasingly pushing their own agendas as well, dispersing global power across a wider range of rivals. This trend has been accelerated by a rising wave of nationalism globally that leads political forces in many countries to define national interest in increasingly narrow terms. The result is a messy, unpredictable global landscape where cooperation is increasingly inconsistent, and rivalry and competition are the norm.
- **Shifting alliances:** Long-standing strategic alliances and multilateral institutions, often united by a broad set of shared interests and values, are giving way to a new pattern of **“multialignment.”** Governments, local elites and non-state actors can now “shop” for external backers or institutions in a marketplace of influence, securing weapons, investment or diplomatic protection from whomever offers the most advantageous terms. This fluid system of pragmatic, issue-based partnerships and ad hoc coalitions is eroding any sense of a globally shared set of norms and institutions.
- **Transactional deal-making:** The principles driving international engagement have shifted away from long-term, rules-based cooperation towards short-term, power-based deal-making. States are increasingly prioritizing bilateral bargaining over multilateral consensus, making narrow deals that serve immediate material gains, often with a zero-sum mindset.

These features of the New World Disorder create a system that is fractured, fluid and often unpredictable. The fluidity of this system combined with the marketplace of new actors leveraging their power opens up both new opportunities and new risks for crisis-affected communities. For example, newly prominent powers like Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar and Saudi Arabia have all played important roles in mediating between parties to conflicts, but these same powers have also directly fueled many of the same conflicts. China has also been filling in gaps in development funding but with substantial strings attached. For instance, developing nations owe China **\$3.9 billion in net debt payments** annually based on China’s loan system.



The three features of the New World Disorder create a cascade of destructive consequences and dangerous incentives, directly causing the surging crises and shrinking support that are devastating Watchlist countries. The aggregate global levels of need and crisis described earlier in this report are the product of thousands of individual choices made by diplomats, donors and conflict actors—each one shaped by the trends towards more rivalry, shifting alliances and transactional deal-making.

The geopolitics of the New World Disorder are exacerbating humanitarian needs by undermining global cooperation, normalizing conflict for profit and trampling individual rights. These dangers cascade from the global level to the human level. The IRC's teams around the world see firsthand the impacts that conflict, hunger and disease have on the communities we work with, specifically those in Watchlist countries.

“Across Somalia, the rise in armed activity and shifting alliances have made it harder and more dangerous to reach communities in need. As international attention fragments and power dynamics shift, civilians are caught between armed groups and competing security forces. Every day, our teams work in an environment where uncertainty has become the norm.

— **Abukar Mohamud**, Deputy Director of Programs, IRC Somalia



Azizo Ali Barre, 54, leads a meeting for local women who are working to build job skills and become more financially secure in Dinsoor, Somalia.

The Incentive to Retreat

Dismantling cooperation on shared goals

All three of the New World Disorder's defining features have fundamentally changed the calculus on issues of shared global challenges or global goods, encouraging countries to retreat from commitments and disincentivizing cooperation on issues like climate change, poverty alleviation and pandemic prevention. Nationalist political forces have encouraged this shift by arguing that aid spending, international institutions and collective action are not integral to global stability and instead treating them as exceptional acts to be justified only when they serve immediate domestic or strategic gains.

International institutions designed to prevent crises from spiraling out of control are increasingly gridlocked and unable to act. In this New World Disorder, states are instead adopting selective engagement, an “à la carte” approach to multilateralism, pulling out of global bodies they disagree with or sidelining their mandates.

Multilateral institutions, notably the U.N. and World Health Organization (WHO), are meant to coordinate global responses to shared threats—whether those threats are a localized conflict engulfing a whole region or a viral outbreak turning into a global pandemic. But those institutions are only as effective as the political support and funding they receive from member states. The U.N. Security Council (UNSC) has also become paralyzed by rivalry and geopolitical competition among its permanent members, preventing collective action on some of the world's worst crises. Between 2016 and 2025, the Council's five permanent members used their veto **49 times**—compared to just 19 vetoes in the previous decade—most often on resolutions related to the crises in Ukraine, Gaza, Syria and Sudan.

■ **Collective action on climate change is failing to help climate-vulnerable, conflict-affected states to adapt.**

Transactional deal-making and shifting alliances have eroded global efforts to coordinate a shared response to the climate crisis—today and in the future. The widely welcomed adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015 to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius has been replaced with geopolitical competition to “win” the green economy, while the U.S. has simply pulled out of the agreement. The failure to deliver on commitments made in Paris leaves mitigation targets off track and the world more likely than ever to face a radically different climate in the future.

Communities at the epicenter of the twin crises of conflict and climate change are simply not receiving the investment they need to adapt to and build resilience against climate change's worst impacts. Considering all **\$1.9 trillion** of climate finance in 2023, just \$7.8 billion—less than 1%—went to fund adaptation in the **conflict-affected and climate-vulnerable** countries that are on the frontline of the climate crisis. More than 90% was invested in middle-income countries.³ The result is that all Watchlist countries assessed in the 2025 **Climate Adaptation Finance Index** are either “extremely underfunded” (15 countries) or “severely underfunded” (3 countries) and the five most underfunded countries are all on the Emergency Watchlist.⁴ This means that communities in Watchlist countries are left with insufficient support to adapt to the devastating climate threats they face, like floods and drought.



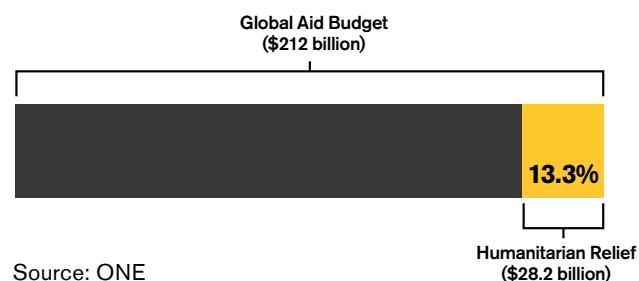
Less than 1%
of the \$1.9 trillion
of climate finance went to fund
adaptation in conflict-affected
and climate-vulnerable countries.

- **Poverty reduction, food security and vaccination campaigns have all stalled as donors seek a “return” on aid.** Official Development Assistance (ODA) played an important role in supporting the significant progress seen throughout the 20th century and early 2000s towards a future where extreme poverty, famine and deadly childhood diseases like polio were all relics of the past. This progress brought benefits for all. But as these challenges of development have become more concentrated in conflict-affected countries like those on the Emergency Watchlist, the progress of the past century has stalled. The number of people living in extreme poverty in Watchlist countries is projected to rise by nearly **9.7 million** over the next five years, acting as a significant brake on global efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. As a result, just **13.5 million** people will escape extreme poverty globally over the next five years.

“ Significant cuts to U.S. humanitarian assistance for Yemen...continue to have devastating consequences for millions of vulnerable people, especially those in need of food, medical care, protection and clean water. The IRC has witnessed firsthand how these cuts have forced the shutdown of lifesaving services, leaving communities in desperate need without support or hope.

— **Dr. Ahmed Abdullatif**, Nutrition Coordinator,
IRC Yemen

Despite the well-documented return that aid generates from the long-term investment in our shared humanity, donor governments are increasingly adopting a more transactional mindset, viewing aid as an economic vehicle for immediate “returns.” This short-term thinking is driven also by rising economic pressures and a narrowing definition of national interests defined by ascendent nationalist politics. The result has been devastating cuts to aid described in the opening section of this report. Some donors are also diverting ODA away from poverty reduction and economic development to instead serve domestic economic and political interests. Donors use a growing portion of ODA to cover the domestic cost of hosting refugees—in both 2023 and 2024, costs associated with hosting refugees accounted for more than **13%** of total ODA (around \$30 billion).



Source: ONE

Notably, aid from DAC member countries is increasingly going towards projects in middle-income countries instead of low-income countries. Donors focus on middle-income countries because their stable institutions and thriving private sectors make it easier to disburse aid. These features of middle-income countries also increase the likelihood that donors will benefit economically from aid, whether in terms of returns on their investments or from the dividends of increased trade.

³ The total of \$1.9 trillion is calculated by **Climate Policy Initiative** and includes all climate finance flows both between and within countries. The \$7.8 billion figure is based on IRC analysis of adaptation finance provided by developed countries to conflict-affected, climate-vulnerable countries using **OECD** data.

⁴ Afghanistan, Chad, South Sudan, Somalia and Niger. The Climate Adaptation Finance Index covers neither Ukraine nor oPt.



The Incentive to Profit

Normalizing conflict for power and profit

The New World Disorder is similarly altering the calculus of conflict, making war a more attractive instrument of policy and profit as rivalries grow. The collapse of shared norms amid transactional deal-making and the fragmentation of alliances has normalized the use of violence for territorial and economic gain.

This new landscape also increases the return on investment for war. As alliances shift, aggressors can now shop for patrons to lower the costs of conflict—securing weapons, funding and diplomatic cover—while simultaneously finding more buyers for the spoils of war. Consequently, conflict economies are evolving from simply a byproduct of war into a professionalized, multibillion-dollar global industry. Conflict economies incentivize a diverse range of state and nonstate actors to capture resources, control trade routes and tax local populations to fund and profit from war. Under the New World Disorder, there is immense wealth and influence to be gained from sustained instability.

- **Conflict is being normalized as a legitimate tool for territorial gain, political power and profit.** Violence has always been both a political strategy and a source of revenue, but the record number of conflicts in the world currently indicates that more and more actors are incentivized to use conflict as the means to achieve their objectives. If they come under pressure from a previous ally to avoid conflict then—in the transactional

geopolitics and shifting alliances of the New World Disorder—they can instead pursue new alliances with other states and nonstate actors that do not share those concerns. The result is that parties to conflicts in many Watchlist countries—from Sudan and DRC to Myanmar and beyond—have little incentive to cooperate with peace efforts.

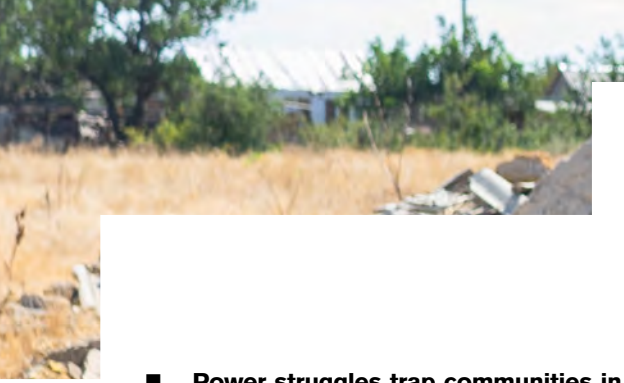
- **Conflict has become a sophisticated, multibillion dollar global industry.** In Sudan, both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) are fighting to capture gold mines, smuggling routes and other economic resources that provide revenue and leverage. In DRC, the M23 and allied groups tax the mineral trade, earning around **\$800,000 a month**. Across the Sahel, armed groups and local militias levy informal taxes and traffic goods across borders, creating a regional economy built on violence

These cross-border networks show how conflict, trade and displacement are increasingly intertwined—driving instability far beyond national frontiers. In many cases, external powers seeking to amass influence and money supercharge these networks by intervening in other countries' civil wars, selling weapons to and buying resources from parties to the conflicts, which has increased the number of countries involved in wars beyond their borders to record levels. The increased profitability of war in the New World Disorder is deepening local instability, prolonging wars, diverting resources from humanitarian priorities and ultimately driving the surging crises described earlier in the 2026 Emergency Watchlist.

“Throughout Myanmar, conflict and displacement is driven by armed groups that fund their operations through vast economic networks and exploitation of natural resources. The resulting instability has put the economy, social protection system and critical infrastructure in jeopardy, furthering humanitarian needs across the country.

– **Anteneh Gemechu**, Senior Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Coordinator, IRC Myanmar

ABOVE: Men work at a coltan mining site in Rubaya, Democratic Republic of the Congo, a town entangled in armed conflict because of its mineral wealth.



The Incentive for Impunity

Trampling individual rights and protections

- **Power struggles trap communities in cycles of exploitation.** As disorder supercharges the growth of conflict economies, armed groups and political elites across conflict-affected states have new opportunities to expand their economic control, fueling instability and weakening the systems people rely on to survive. In Somalia, Al-Shabaab's taxation of trade routes and the government's fragmented authority are pushing prices up. Power struggles over resources, enabled by a fractured global order, are driving up humanitarian needs while constraining the ability to respond.

“ It is girls like me who have to collect the water for our households. Even though organisations have built water points, water is only available early in the morning and late at night. What's more, with the clashes in the area, life has become very difficult. The economy is in ruins, many have fled, but we stayed. There are armed groups here, and that makes everything dangerous.

– 16-year-old client from Ituri region of DRC

For crisis-affected communities, conflict economies translate into daily harm—scarce aid, rising prices and collapsing safety nets. In mining towns, IRC teams report women and girls at greater risk of sexual exploitation and abuse, for example while accessing work or essential goods. Meanwhile the lack of protection and economic options leaves them vulnerable to further abuse. Armed groups' desire to control resources across eastern DRC and the Sahel leads to greater recruitment of children and young men into mining or armed activities as schools close and families are uprooted. These patterns reveal how conflict economies are embedding exploitation into everyday life, trapping communities in cycles of poverty, violence and neglect.

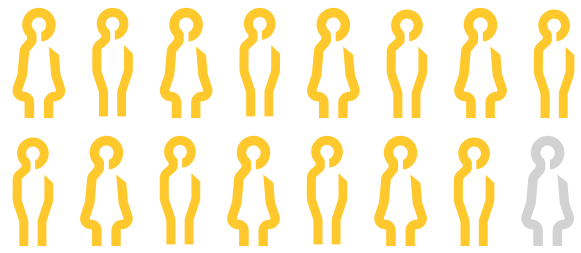
The New World Disorder is also eroding the basic rights and protections that once shielded civilians from war and abuse. As global rivalries grow, cooperation diminishes, alliances fragment and diplomacy become increasingly transactional, the shared values that underpin norms and international laws that protect the most vulnerable decay. In a multialigned world, perpetrators of atrocities can simply find new partners, rendering accountability mechanisms powerless. This creates a system that encourages the **“Age of Impunity”** ethos that the “rules are for suckers.” Attacks on civilians, aid workers and refugees are no longer violations to be hidden but are increasingly used as deliberate, cost-free strategies of war.

- **Aid workers are under attack.** In the New World Disorder, rivalry and transactional politics have eroded the respect and protection once afforded to humanitarian actors. As alliances shift and states or armed groups prioritize power and profit over human welfare, aid workers are increasingly viewed through a political lens. By September 2025, **617** aid workers had been killed, kidnapped, detained or wounded, 96% of them in Watchlist countries, making 2025 one of the deadliest years on record for humanitarian aid workers and on track to be the deadliest ever. As of this writing, more than 300 aid workers have already been killed this year, including 198 in Gaza, 36 in Sudan and 15 in South Sudan, showing how delivering aid has itself become a risky act.
- **Attacks on healthcare mirror this trend.** In the first six months of 2025, **nearly 1,000 people** were killed while seeking medical care, almost 60 times more than during the same period in 2024. Since the Gaza war began in October 2023, WHO documented the deaths of at least **1,580** health workers in the territory. **Insecurity Insight** has recorded the deaths of 158 health workers and over **150** attacks that damaged or destroyed health facilities in Sudan since the start of that country's civil war in April 2023.
- **Civilians are increasingly in the line of fire.** Civilian deaths in conflicts surged **40%** globally in 2024 and nearly 50,000 people—mostly civilians—were killed in conflict. In Gaza, **15 of every 16** Palestinians killed by Israeli military operations between March and September 2025 were civilians. The number of explosive weapon attacks in populated areas **has doubled since 2019**, driving mass casualties and destruction in countries such as Sudan, Gaza, Ukraine and Myanmar. The normalization of urban bombardment, drone warfare and siege tactics is devastating civilian populations and eroding the last remaining limits on how wars are fought.



■ **Gender-based violence has surged across conflict zones, although monitoring and provision for survivors remain shamefully limited.** The U.N. verified only **4,600** cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2024, clearly underestimating the situation massively. Nonetheless, even this limited data represented an increase of **87%** over just two years. Women and girls make up more than **90%** of survivors. In countries such as the DRC, Somalia and South Sudan, sexual violence is being used systematically as a weapon of war, while impunity remains the norm. At the same time, women and girls experience high levels of violence in their own homes. The erosion of accountability leaves survivors without justice or support, compounding the trauma and social breakdown caused by conflict.

■ **Children are no longer protected from disorder.** Even the norms and protections offered to children in conflict are being violated. The **U.N. reports** that between 2024 and 2025, there was a staggering 44% increase in attacks on schools in conflict zones, resulting in the death or abduction of thousands of school-aged children. These attacks are at their highest rates in Gaza, DRC, Somalia, Nigeria and Haiti. Gaza remains one of the most dangerous places in the world for children, where UNICEF estimates **over 50,000 children** have been killed or injured between October 2023 and March 2025. The surviving children are facing a mental health crisis, with UNICEF finding that **100% of children** were in need of mental health and psychosocial support after multiple years of war. Mechanisms to safeguard children, including multilateral conventions and peacekeeping mandates, are no longer abided by in the context of the New World Disorder, leading to continued atrocities against children in conflict settings.



15 of every 16 Palestinians

killed by Israeli military operations between March and September 2025 were civilians.

■ **People on the move face new barriers to safety.** Governments are violating international laws and legally enshrined protections for refugees and asylum-seekers by tightening borders and outsourcing migration control to other states under the guise of national security. Across Europe and the United States, aid and diplomacy are increasingly tied to migration enforcement, leaving refugees and asylum seekers trapped in unsafe conditions or forcibly returned to danger. The United States has also sought to deport migrants and asylum seekers, not just to their home countries, but to any state willing to accept them. It is even encouraging cooperation by offering economic incentives in the form of **cash payments** or **grants**, or leniency on **criticism**, **travel bans** or other punitive measures.

“ In Gaza, after months of conflict, the collapse of global norms is felt every day. Hospitals, schools and shelters, where civilians sought refuge, have been targeted and are now in ruins. Families remain displaced, uncertain where to return or if they still have a home. Women and girls face the greatest risks as violence, exploitation, and impunity continue.

– **Yahya Mansour**, Senior Supply Chain Officer, IRC oPt



Yehor and Ivan's local playground in Mykolaiv, Ukraine, was destroyed by a missile. Their village was nearly leveled by bombing, including their school. Children have nowhere to gather and play; even the open fields are dangerous because they are peppered with land mines.

The Path Forward

10 recommendations for a disordered world

The New World Disorder is the reason why and how humanitarian need, conflicts and food insecurity have all grown worse, with devastating, real-world consequences for the communities described in this Emergency Watchlist. The problems we have identified are not lacking solutions. What is lacking is the political will to make them a reality and protect those living in Watchlist countries. The following recommendations offer a practical path forward. They are based on evidence of what works in delivering assistance in the most difficult contexts and what our clients tell us will make a tangible difference to their lives. Rallying support for effective action should be a priority of all states committed to addressing crises.

From Profit to Protection

Equipping peacemakers to resolve conflicts

A record number of conflicts drives the humanitarian crises described in this year's Emergency Watchlist. These conflicts—incentivized by the geopolitical trends of the New World Disorder and profitable war economies—are becoming harder to resolve through the traditional diplomatic playbook. A reinvigorated diplomatic approach is essential to actively dismantle conflict economies and hold spoilers accountable. This requires a shift from traditional approaches to peacemaking to building broader, more inclusive consortiums for peace that can adapt to a multi-aligned world, dismantle the conflict economies that fuel violence and ensure women are at the table, ultimately building more sustainable peace.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Dismantle the conflict economies

To resolve conflicts fueled by profitable war economies, peace efforts must shift from focusing solely on political tracks to actively dismantling the illicit networks that fund violence, making peace more profitable than war.

► **Address economic drivers of conflict.** Governments and U.N. peacemaking efforts should directly address the economic drivers of conflict. All diplomatic initiatives should include a hard-nosed analysis of who is profiting from the violence, moving away from a state-centric approach, to one that reflects the cross-border, regional and transnational dynamics at play in war economies, to enable the more effective use of targeted sanctions, anti-money laundering tools and other diplomatic channels to disrupt these complex networks.

► **Increase financial pressure.** Global and regional bodies like the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)**, the **EU high-risk third country list**, and the Council of Europe's **MONEYVAL** should apply sustained scrutiny to increase the financial and reputational costs for states that facilitate the laundering of “conflict minerals” and other illicit goods. “Gray-listing” and “black-listing” non-compliant actors to induce credit ratings downgrades and difficulties accessing global finance have proven effective incentives for national policy reform. For example, after being **gray-listed** by **FATF** in 2022 and by the EU in 2023 for its role in the illicit gold trade, the UAE closed some non-compliant gold refineries and established an anti-money laundering (AML) office. However, the relatively limited nature of these reforms—combined with the **UAE's ongoing** role in business networks connected to the war in Sudan—underscores the need for deeper reform. States should also advocate for bodies like MONEYVAL to expand their country assessments beyond financial institutions to sectors vulnerable to money laundering like real estate and trade zones.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Reinvest in diplomacy and peacemaking

To keep pace with the fracturing of power in the global system, peacemaking approaches must shift from rigid, state-centric diplomacy to building broader, more creative coalitions for peace and ensuring women are at the negotiating table.

► **Build “consortiums for peace.”** In a multialigned world, states committed to peace should harness opportunities to work with, and support the efforts of, newly prominent powers to create a united front for peace. Newly prominent powers like Türkiye, the UAE and China all play a complex role in conflict zones, at times reinforcing conflict dynamics but at others mediating. States committed to international norms should build what Majed al-Ansari of Qatar **describes** as “consortiums of countries willing to work for peace,” placing civilian protection at the center of de-escalation efforts and ensuring coordination so that conflict actors cannot choose to engage only with whichever diplomatic processes they believe will best serve their interests.

► **Put women at the peace table.** G7 states and other key actors should fully implement their Women, Peace and Security (WPS) National Action Plans, ensuring women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all peace processes. The **WPS** Agenda, established 25 years ago, recognizes the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and their critical contribution to peace. Evidence shows women's participation leads to more **durable** and **inclusive** outcomes. At the U.N., Member States should demonstrate steadfast support for the WPS agenda. At the national level, all signatories should commit to practical actions, including the publication of National Actions Plans in collaboration with civil society.

► **Revitalize the U.N.** The U.N. is only as strong as its members and its leadership; dismissing its role only weakens the protections for the most at-risk countries and people. In a disordered world, member states should support reforms that allow the U.N. to collectively address global challenges. The IRC reiterates again its support for the suspension of the veto in the UNSC in cases of mass atrocity. France has already proposed this. **One hundred and twenty** countries support it. Civilians in Syria, Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine need the UNSC to be active in solving peace and security challenges. U.N. leadership needs to be empowered and independent. To avoid the threat of de-selection, which puts the Secretary General in a weakened position in their first term, the position should be a one-term, seven-year appointment. The Security Council should present two names—not just one—including women and those with lived experience of global crises to the General Assembly for the choice of the next Secretary General.



Zahra is an Afghan refugee, journalist and single mother. She and her two children were forced to flee Afghanistan when the previous government collapsed in August 2021. After arriving in the UK, Zahra participated in a leadership training course with the IRC and now advocates for women's rights on a global scale, including telling her story at the U.N.

From Danger to Dignity

Protecting people in crisis

In an **Age of Impunity** encouraged by the New World Disorder's disregard for values-based cooperation or adherence to global rules, the rights and protections of individuals are trampled without consequence. International norms break down, and perpetrators gain access to a wider marketplace of supporters and increasingly advanced and destructive weapons. Civilians are caught in the crosshairs and bear the worst consequences. War crimes, restrictions on aid access and abuses and denial of migrant's rights are all on the rise. The international community must move from the normalization of these abuses to a recommitment to the laws and norms that protect people in war, their ability to receive aid and their ability to find safety.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Restore respect for international humanitarian law (IHL)

To reverse the normalization of “à la carte” compliance with IHL, states must shift from rhetorical commitments to tangible compliance and accountability, using all levers to set clear standards and impose costs on those who violate the laws of war.

► **Rebuild accountability for war crimes.** States should recommit to upholding IHL and hold violators accountable. This includes using domestic policy frameworks to limit, withhold and condition security assistance and arms sales when violations occur or when they are at serious risk of occurring. All states should support and fully fund U.N. accountability mechanisms, such as Commissions of Inquiry and Fact-Finding Missions, to gather evidence on violations and identify opportunities to use and amplify their work at forums including the U.N. Security Council. Member States should collectively expand the use of **Voluntary Reporting on domestic IHL compliance**, including humanitarian access commitments, and make it a condition of security partnerships. Heads of States should participate in the International Committee of the Red Cross **Global Initiative** and attend the 2026 High-Level Meeting to Uphold Humanity in War and endorse and report on how they are implementing the agreements reached.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Guarantee safe access for humanitarian aid

To ensure aid workers can deliver lifesaving aid to people in need, states need to move from allowing aid to be a bargaining chip to preserving access through direct support to frontline responders and humanitarian diplomacy that is “firewalled” from political and military negotiations.

► **Support frontline responders.** Investment in the ability of humanitarians to negotiate their own access is the most efficient and cost-effective way of maintaining assistance delivery. The IRC's experience shows that with the right support to build the knowledge and skills of operational teams, access can be expanded and sustained, even in the most difficult contexts. **Stichting Vluchteling** and the **Swedish International Development Association** have already invested in NGO access capacity. Other donors should now increase support for frontline organizations to institutionalize access capacity, allowing them to pursue bold access goals that ensure acceptance of aid delivery and the safety of aid workers. By improving the ability of frontline humanitarians to expand and sustain access, donors will reduce delivery delays and associated operational costs, with every dollar spent on access unlocking the impact of millions in aid.

► **Firewall aid from politics.** Governments should “firewall” humanitarian access from political and military negotiations and stop life-saving aid being used as a bargaining chip. Access should be a standalone, non-negotiable priority. **The IRC's analysis** shows that humanitarian diplomacy for access is most effective when diplomats ensure regular and open communication with humanitarians, and access is maintained as a standalone priority, so progress does not become beholden to political or military agreements.

► **Invest in humanitarian diplomacy.** Effective diplomacy to address the intentional manipulation of access requires a deep understanding of the strategies employed and the impacts on humanitarians and civilians. States should ensure relevant ministries and country missions are staffed with full-time humanitarian affairs officers and diplomats are trained to engage with all conflict parties. In addition, donors should build on efforts of donors like the EU's directorate for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (**ECHO**) who fund access staff in the Sudan International NGO (INGO) forum, to expand NGO participation in mechanisms, like Access Working Groups and Civil Military Coordination Functions, to ensure regular dialogue between senior decision-makers, armed groups and local authorities and humanitarian responders. Experience shows that when NGO and frontline responders are included in these forums, they are successful in developing shared solutions to access challenges, keeping assistance flowing.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Protect people who face the greatest risks in conflict

Not everyone is affected by conflict in the same ways. It is essential that governments recognize and respond to the specific threats facing different groups in conflict-affected countries, particularly those who already face marginalization.

► **Prioritize women and girls.** Donors should increase direct funding to women-led organizations leading the frontline response to violence against women and girls. Experience shows that partnerships with such organizations enhance the quality, reach and acceptance of programming and support sustainable, resilient systems. Innovative funding instruments—like the Dutch **“Leading from the South”** and the French Support Fund for Feminist Organizations (**FSOF**)—show how to effectively support and resource local civil society. **IGNITE**, an IRC-led consortium funded by the FSOF, illustrates this, supporting 86 women-led organizations to build their capacity and enhance girls' access to education.

► **Protect civilians from war economy exploitation.** In conflict-affected states, war economies often emerge as critical sources of employment yet frequently expose civilians to dangerous conditions. Donors should support better assessment of the humanitarian impacts of conflict economies, including risks such as increased levels of gender-based violence, and links to climate shocks. These assessments should be used to design and fund programs that enable communities to access safe, alternative livelihoods through start-up capital, skills training and market-based interventions, recognizing the specific protections risks and economic roles played by women.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Defend the rights of refugees and displaced people

For 75 years, the 1951 Refugee Convention has **enshrined** essential protections for refugees and displaced people, saving lives. Yet, the New World Disorder is characterized by attacks on these principles. It is vital that governments recommit to co-operative efforts that protect those forced from their homes.

► **Recommit to international refugee protections.** The basic standards established by the Refugee Convention—that refugees should not be returned to countries where their lives are in danger—should not be controversial and should be defended. By adhering to and defending International Refugee Law, and particularly the right to asylum, states can

At an IRC-run safe space for women and girls in Khairpur, Pakistan, women can learn new skills and connect with their neighbors while their children play.



guarantee protections for those who require it. Simply put, processes for establishing rights to asylum should be fair and efficient. The decision by the U.S. Government to step back from its commitments to refugee protection and from regional cooperation efforts, as laid out in the **Los Angeles Declaration**, will undermine both refugee protection and migration management in the region. Such efforts should not become the playbook for other states. Regional instruments like the **EU Pact on Migration and Asylum** provide an opportunity to share responsibility for refugee hosting and speed up processing, but it is incumbent upon member states to implement systems that are both orderly and humane, fulfilling the promise of the Convention, not upending it.

► **Expand safe, legal pathways.** Punitive measures and enforcement have done little to reduce migration and only benefited smuggling networks. In contrast, safe pathways such as resettlement, humanitarian admissions and family reunion reduce dangerous journeys and save lives, promote responsibility sharing and enable safe and managed migration.

With global resettlement commitments projected to decline precipitously, more host nations should step up and reverse the trend of declining support. The EU's Union Resettlement Framework is an opportunity for ambitious goals. Meanwhile, the pausing and narrowing of safe routes—like the suspension of the U.S. resettlement program, the German Federal Admissions Pathways and UK family reunion routes—should be reversed.

► **Aid is for people, not states; migration needs fair and effective management.** The aid system exists to serve people in need, and it can do that job far better by following the recommendations in this report. Aid for vulnerable people should not be tied to their government's cooperation in migration management. That needs its own fair, fast and effective systems. Fairness means those seeking asylum have a full opportunity to present their claims and have them adjudicated. Speed is vital for stability and integration of those allowed to stay. Those who are not should be returned in an orderly and dignified manner. The UK-Rwanda deal, which sought to transfer responsibility for processing asylum seekers, and others like it, have cost millions of dollars but not delivered. Effectiveness takes international cooperation.



In Tigray, Ethiopia, IRC health worker Tirhas Amare administers a vaccine to 2-year-old Hayelom Tewolde at an immunization outreach site in Adi Hutsa village.

From Retreat to Recommitment

Redefining the future of aid

The stark divergence between surging crises and a retreating aid system demands a strategic shift in both the focus and form of aid in order to stand up to the headwinds of the New World Disorder. Donors should shift from a shrinking budget spread thinly across reactive responses to prioritized, impactful investments that empower local responders and protect decades of progress. This vital transformation ensures scarce resources reach those most in need by channeling funding to proven, high-impact solutions, addressing critical gaps like climate resilience, and fostering strong local partnerships. By adapting the aid system's approach, we can effectively recommit ourselves to addressing surging crises and building sustainable, resilient systems for the future.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Prioritize aid funding to maximize impact and sustainability

As shrinking support dismantles cooperation on shared goals, the aid system must adapt. This means shifting from a model of limited resources spread thinly to a more sustainable approach built on a broader donor base and a targeted focus on the greatest needs.

- **Prioritize greatest needs through a new target.** A target for ODA allocation is an effective tool for prioritizing a reduced global aid budget. Factoring in poverty levels, self-financing ability, and absorptive capacity, the IRC estimates that fragile and conflict affected states should receive at least 60% of ODA and Watchlist countries at least 30% of ODA—double what they received in 2023 (excluding Ukraine).⁵
- **Broaden the donor base.** Scaling aid to rising needs requires additional funding. The G7 constitutes **28%** of global GDP and **75%** of foreign aid. The U.S. remains the largest donor in the world's biggest crisis, **Sudan**. While the BRICS countries, with **27% of global GDP**, contribute far less. Wealthy countries, notably in the Gulf, are playing an increasingly prominent role and should continue to expand their support. Global donors should follow the example of ECHO, which has made broadening the donor base a key priority. New approaches to aid funding also have a role to play. **Humanitarian debt** swaps can bring in money to support basic services. By buying parts of a country's debt and—backed by political risk insurance from development finance institu-

tions or private insurers—restructuring it, they create a cash flow for public goods. Models such as parametric insurance also bring additional pre-arranged finance to prepare and respond to climate hazards.

- **Deliver on commitments to aid reform.** Reform efforts, including the **Grand Bargain** were designed to drive the quality and effectiveness of aid spending, in part through quality funding. **Evidence** shows that multi-year and flexible humanitarian funding supports better outcomes and delivers efficiencies. Yet, reporting on the Grand Bargain shows that progress on increasing the availability of flexible funding has **stagnated**. Levels of flexible funding remained static from 2023-24 whereas the level of tightly earmarked funding slightly increased, from 53.5% in 2023 to 56% in 2024. Today, with resources constrained and budget cuts undermining longer term planning, reaffirming commitments to quality multi-year, flexible funding is more important than ever.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Invest in proven, high-impact solutions

To maximize the impact of every dollar in an era of surging crises, the aid system must shift from investments spread thinly across standard appeals to scaling up proven, cost-effective solutions like cash assistance and preventative health that can maximize the impact of the aid budget.

- **Scale up cash assistance.** Governments and donors should increase the use of cash and voucher assistance (CVA). It is a **proven**, dignified and cost-effective way to help people in crisis, allowing them to buy what they need while supporting local markets. Cash improves food security and helps recipients invest in livelihoods and avoid debt or selling assets. Despite donor commitments, CVA as a share of humanitarian assistance **fell from 23.9% in 2022** and is forecast to fall further. Reversing this decline requires donors to adopt a cash-first approach and commit to scale, which creates cost efficiencies. ECHO, Switzerland and the UK are among donors whose **reaffirmed** collective donor commitment to cash assistance as a core modality of humanitarian response is a valuable endorsement. Where local authorities oppose cash, humanitarian diplomacy channels should be used to make the case for its use.
- **Prevent health risks to children.** Donors should invest in preventative measures, like routine immunization, which are far more cost-effective than emergency response. Infectious diseases cost almost **\$60 billion** annually, while vaccination averted an estimated **60.3 million** measles deaths between 2000–2023. Community and primary health workers form the backbone of early disease prevention and detection, delivering

⁵Fragile and conflict affected states refer to 61 countries included in the **OECD's 2025 States of Fragility** report. The IRC applied a variety of specialized models for aid allocation to countries to establish this target. These models factor in current and estimated future extreme poverty levels, a country's ability to self-finance, differing impacts of aid on poverty reduction and GNI growth and limits to absorptive capacity. The calculations in our most conservative allocation model, based on total DAC ODA in 2024 (**\$212.1 billion**) with strict constraints on what fragile and conflict-affected states are able to absorb, result in a rounded allocation target of 60% to FCAS and 30% to Watchlist countries, excluding Ukraine. For more information please contact the IRC.

an estimated **10:1 return on investment** for every dollar spent. However, progress on preventing infectious disease is stalling, with large measles outbreaks in **57 countries**. Even where insecurity limits access, adaptations have proven effective. Since 2022, the IRC-led REACH consortium, funded by Gavi and powered by a robust network of local partners, has administered over **20 million** vaccine doses and put nearly 2 million children on the path to full immunization, including 750,000 zero dose children. As of September 2025, all **171** target communities have vaccine access, up from 16% at the start. The program delivers over 1 million doses monthly, and as it scaled, the average cost per dose fell to around \$2.30, on the low end of the \$1-11 range in low-income countries, building the case for expansion.

► **Treat child malnutrition.** Extreme hunger and malnutrition is one of the leading causes of **death** among children in crisis settings. Even for survivors, malnutrition has lifelong effects on a child's growth, health and ability to learn. Treatment for malnutrition among children is essential for future development. Prior to the aid cuts, only a **minority** of the 45 million children worldwide facing acute malnutrition received lifesaving and life-changing treatment. But thousands, if not hundreds of thousands more children could be reached for the same financial resources with a simplified system for diagnosis and treating malnutrition that would allow us to bring treatment to children by caregivers and community health workers. The IRC has tested this simplified protocol in research trials in multiple countries. Across every study, our analysis has



proven **85-95%** recovery rates alongside 21% cost savings. We believe treatment of acute malnutrition can be delivered at least 30% more cost-efficiently than the standard community-based management of acute malnutrition care.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Transform partnerships to unlock impact

To effectively serve communities affected by surging crises, the aid system must evolve from a top-down, risk-averse model to one that empowers local and frontline responders including women-led organizations through genuine partnerships.

► **Diversify delivery partners.** Multilateral development banks (MDBs), like the World Bank, should expand funding beyond governments to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), which are often better equipped to deliver services in conflict zones and regions beyond government control. The Bank faces a delivery challenge in conflict states where overreliance on government partners can interrupt programs, particularly when conflict erupts or when de facto authorities take over. While the World Bank has **reiterated** the value of civil society partnerships in contexts afflicted by conflict and instability, now they should be expanded. The Bank can build on its experience of partnerships including with the NGO Consortium building climate resilience in **Somalia**, and the IRC's work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to combat sexual and gender-based violence. Expanding CSO partnerships requires increasing flexibility in providing funding directly and indirectly to INGOs, CSOs and women-led or refugee-led NGOs to help the Bank deliver evidence-based services and expand its reach.

► **Support transformational local leadership.** In crises, local responders are a lifeline. In Sudan, community-led **Emergency Response Rooms** are delivering essential services to millions of people. While the U.N.-led **Humanitarian Reset** has emphasized local leadership as a priority, structural barriers persist that impede a bold, principled transformation to locally led delivery of aid. INGOs, donors and the U.N. have an important role to play in this transformation by prioritizing technical collaboration, allyship and quality funding. Donors should reverse the trend of transferring financial and operational risk onto local partners. This requires effective risk sharing, providing budgetary support for risk monitoring and staff safety and security, and the willingness to carry financial losses when partners take agreed steps to mitigate risks. In addition, donors should collectively endorse a standard model for partnership agreements to cut paperwork, particularly for smaller local partners. Finally, they should assess which pooled funding structures (U.N.-led, locally led funds, feminist funds)

Shama feeds her son Anwar ready-to-use-therapeutic food, a nutritious peanut-based paste, as treatment for his acute malnutrition in Al-Azaza, Sudan.

can effectively reach different types of local organizations. While U.N.-led mechanisms can absorb and distribute large volumes of funding, they are often inaccessible to marginalized organizations. Whereas locally led funds and feminist funds that prioritize support for women-led organizations, and NGO-managed funds offer more easily accessible funding.

RECOMMENDATION 10

Build resilience against climate shocks

To address climate shocks in Watchlist countries, humanitarian and climate action must shift from a siloed, reactive approach to an integrated model that proactively builds resilience. This involves funding locally led adaptation and anticipatory action, particularly in conflict-affected areas where current climate adaptation efforts are severely underfunded despite extreme vulnerability.

► **Fund climate adaptation in fragile states.** Donor governments should increase climate finance and ensure a significant portion is directed to fragile and conflict-affected states, which are the most vulnerable but receive the least support. Donors should set a target for these countries to receive 19% of all climate adaptation finance committed to developing countries. Additionally, the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change and donors should prioritize support for these countries in developing and implementing ambitious National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) that account for local community needs.

► **Invest in “early action.”** Donors should scale up funding for “anticipatory action” systems. This approach releases funds before a predicted climate shock hits, allowing communities to prepare and mitigating the humanitarian impact. Germany and the UK have demonstrated leadership in early action. Germany is a core donor to the **Global Shield against Climate Risks**—an initiative to expand pre-arranged finance—and the first donor to commit **5%** of its humanitarian budget to anticipatory action, while the UK has launched a new global **coalition** to scale up the use of pre-arranged finance. Funding for anticipatory action should be accessible to local organizations and NGOs, long-term and flexible to enable a **“Follow the Forecast”** model that prioritizes cash responses where climate hazards are most likely to occur.



Kime Kachallah, 69, participates in IRC programs around sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture. Here, he stands with his workers next to a peanut field in Baga Sola, Chad





2026 Emergency Watchlist

Country Profiles

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT:

A Palestinian girl clasps the pot she will use to collect food from an aid organization in Gaza City. Two years of conflict have destroyed the the basic conditions needed to sustain life, putting the occupied Palestinian territory second on this year's Emergency Watchlist.

A displaced Haitian woman sits on the roof of a theater in downtown Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where gang rule fuels record hunger and displacement.

A woman walks past a destroyed mosque in Omdurman, Sudan, the top country on the Emergency Watchlist for the third year in a row.

A girl stands inside her family's heavily damaged home in Sidon, Lebanon, following an Israeli strike in October 2024. More than 70% of Lebanon's population needed humanitarian assistance in 2025.

01

Sudan

Brutality reigns as impunity deepens

Sudan tops the Emergency Watchlist for the third year in a row as its catastrophic civil war moves towards its fourth year. Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has killed over **150,000** people since April 2023, potentially many more, and the two sides are now locked in a brutal deadlock. The SAF secured control of the capital Khartoum and much of the east of the country over the course of 2025. However, the RSF dominates the Darfur region in the west, where they overran the last pocket of SAF-held territory—El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur—in late 2025. The conflict has sparked a devastating hunger crisis. Famine is now entrenched in parts of the country and catastrophic food insecurity is causing deaths every single day. Meanwhile, outside powers fuel the conflict to advance their own economic and strategic interests.

Key data points



50.4 million population



33.7 million people including
15 million children in humanitarian need
(67% of the population)



19.2 million people facing crisis
or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity
between October 2025 and January 2026



207,000 people in catastrophic (IPC 5)
levels of food insecurity between October 2025
and January 2026



7.3 million people internally displaced
since the start of the conflict in April 2023



100,000+ suspected cholera cases
since December 2024, the largest outbreak ever
in the country



Key Risks for 2026

- **Sudan's war is trapped in a brutal deadlock, causing mass civilian casualties.** RSF fighters overran the last SAF-held pockets in western Sudan in late 2025 amid reports of widespread attacks on civilians and sexual violence. Some estimates put the death toll in El Fasher over **60,000** people in the immediate aftermath of the RSF capturing the city. There are already signs of the conflict spreading deeper into the resource-rich Kordofan region in the south of the country, where similar brutality may now be repeated. The warring parties face zero accountability. The number of people at risk of gender-based violence has **tripled** in two years. More sieges are likely as the conflict spreads, cutting off towns from aid and forcing displaced individuals to **pay to** reach safety. With no sign of de-escalation, millions continue to face grave threats to their safety.
- **Foreign powers are bankrolling the war and undermining peace efforts.** Diplomacy is paralyzed as both SAF and RSF leaders have little incentive to do a deal since they and their regional backers continue to profit economically and politically from Sudan's war. Large quantities of gold flow out of the country, while weapons move in the opposite direction. Over the course of 2025, both the RSF and SAF have received more advanced weapons, particularly drones, that are then used to target electricity and water infrastructure, increasing harm to civilians. For example, damage to critical infrastructure was a key factor in Sudan seeing its worst cholera outbreak in decades in 2024 and 2025, which killed more than **2,500 people and affected over 100,000**.
- **Year-long famine persists with no end in sight.** Violence and siege warfare have driven **19.2 million** people, 40% of the population, into crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity. Over **200,000** people have endured catastrophic (IPC 5) levels of food insecurity for over a year. Some agricultural production in the east of Sudan shows signs of recovery, but it can only partially offset the full scale of food insecurity. Further, as Khartoum stabilizes, returning families face a city in ruins—without services, jobs, or safety.

“Sudan remains in deep crisis, with over 10M people displaced and nearly half the population in need due to conflict, hunger, collapsed shelter and sanitation services and constrained health services. Combined with restricted humanitarian access, it is extremely difficult for many displaced people to return, even in accessible or stable areas.



– Azza Ali,
Environmental Health Senior Manager,
IRC Sudan

- **Competing authorities and hardening frontlines will sever aid lifelines.** Both the RSF and SAF have bureaucracies and rival permit systems to direct and oversee humanitarian assistance, complicating efforts to reach people in need. Moreover, the U.N.'s limited presence in RSF-controlled areas is a key factor limiting the ability of NGOs in those places to deliver assistance proportionate to need. Attacks on aid workers also continue with impunity—Sudan is now the third most dangerous country for aid workers—accounting for **12%** of attacks against aid workers globally in 2025. As access shrinks, communities trapped in conflict zones are left to endure hunger and disease without lifesaving support.

The IRC in Sudan

When the conflict began in 2023, the IRC adapted its programs and scaled up our response to address increased humanitarian needs. Despite operational challenges, the IRC continues to provide support in Blue Nile, Gedaref, Khartoum, River Nile, South Kordofan and White Nile states and is working on re-establishing its presence in Jazera state. We have an office in Port Sudan and are expanding our presence into other states, including Darfur.

OPPOSITE: A woman walks past a mosque in Omdurman, Sudan, which has seen intense and heavy fighting in the ongoing civil war.

02

occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)*

Two years of conflict have destroyed the basic conditions needed to sustain life

The occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) ranks second on the Emergency Watchlist as the basic conditions necessary to sustain life have been destroyed. In October 2023, Hamas and other armed Palestinian groups attacked southern Israel, killing **1,200** people and taking 200 hostages. The resulting military conflict between Israel and Hamas has systematically destroyed infrastructure, markets and essential food, water, shelter and health services across Gaza. Almost **80%** of buildings have been damaged or destroyed and around **90%** of the population have been displaced, often multiple times. A U.S.-led and regionally-supported “peace plan” included a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in October 2025 and was backed by a U.N. Security Council resolution the following month, offering limited hope that external pressure may help reduce the intensity of conflict in 2026. Even if the conflict remains at lower levels, which is far from guaranteed given repeated violations of the October ceasefire in the weeks after it came into effect, catastrophic levels of humanitarian need remain a certainty. Meanwhile, in the West Bank, escalating settler violence, financial restrictions and territorial fragmentation are eroding Palestinian security and daily life.



Key data points



5.3 million population



70,000+ people killed in Gaza since October 2023, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health



100% of Gaza's population (2 million people) facing crisis or worse levels of hunger (IPC 3+), including **641,000** people in famine or catastrophic food insecurity (IPC 5) in late 2025



~\$53 billion required to reconstruct Gaza



130,000+ children under 5 are acutely malnourished



>90% of the population displaced in Gaza, most multiple times

Key Risks for 2026

- **Even if conflict remains at lower levels than 2025, civilians will face intense suffering and a struggle for survival amid what remains of Gaza.** The Israeli bombardment of hospitals, schools and housing since 2023 has eroded the very conditions required to sustain life. Even if external engagement helps to sustain some level of ceasefire throughout 2026, civilians in Gaza face colossal challenges. Over **10%** of the pre-war population has been killed or injured, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health. Healthcare has collapsed—over **800** attacks on health facilities have destroyed **22 out of 36 hospitals**—with zero hospitals fully functioning. Hundreds of thousands of people—including the world's **highest** per capita population of child amputees—lack lifesaving care. Civilians forced from their homes have nowhere to return to, as **92%** of residences have been destroyed or left uninhabitable. At least **10,000** civilians were killed in the six months following the collapse of an earlier ceasefire in March 2025, underlining the grave threats if current ceasefire efforts fail.
- **Hunger and disease will be pervasive threats throughout 2026.** Famine was **confirmed** in Gaza in August 2025. At the time, a third of the population faced catastrophic levels of food insecurity (IPC 5) and **1.4 million** people—nearly every remaining person—suffered emergency levels (IPC 4). These were the most **severe** rates of food insecurity per capita ever recorded globally. More food and aid has entered Gaza since then, suggesting the situation has since improved, but the effects of this hunger continue. Weakened bodies can no longer fight off viral infections—which have spread widely due to damage to sanitation systems and are now likely to be Gaza's **leading** non-conflict killer. For children, the impacts will be lifelong: at least **130,000** children under 5 are acutely malnourished, **double** 2024 levels. These children will experience stunted growth, weakened immune systems and lifelong disability.
- **Tight restrictions and militarized delivery will leave aid access limited.** Gaza is subject to a naval blockade and sweeping land and air closures that have pushed aid to critically low levels. While aid deliveries to Gaza have increased since the October 2025 ceasefire, they still consistently fall short of the **600** trucks entering Gaza per day specified in the agreement. Over **2,500** people were killed seeking aid and nearly **19,000 injured** after the introduction in 2025 of U.S. and Israel-run militarized food distribution sites. Israel has imposed onerous requirements on all NGOs delivering aid in Gaza, including tight restrictions on what can be brought in. Under the October 2025 ceasefire plan, Israel retains control over border crossings and thus the ability to limit the entry of goods and aid perceived to have potential military use, preventing a desperately needed scale-up of relief.

OPPOSITE: A young Palestinian girl waits in a crowded line to receive a meal distributed by aid organizations in Gaza City in July 2025.

Photo: Khamees Alrefi/Getty Images.

“ We were sheltering in tents. Diseases were spreading. Water was scarce. Food was scarce. My three children constantly suffered from malnutrition because of the lack of food. Water was contaminated. The situation was very difficult.



– Huda, IRC Client in Gaza

- **Settler violence and financial strangulation in the West Bank threaten Palestinian security and essential services.** Raids by the Israeli security forces and attacks by settler groups—already at **record levels**—continue to rise, suggesting Palestinian families will face even more frequent threats to their safety and livelihoods in 2026. Nearly **40,000** people have already been displaced since early 2024. Israel is also planning to expand settlements east of Jerusalem, carving the West Bank further into enclaves, displacing people, cutting communities off from basic services and heavily restricting the ability of NGOs to operate. The situation could worsen even further if Israel carries through with threats to revoke banking waivers, which could sever the West Bank's financial links and prevent salary payments by the Palestinian Authority to health workers and other civil servants—simultaneously blocking humanitarian agencies from purchasing and distributing urgently needed food and medicine.

The IRC in oPt

The IRC and our partners work to provide lifesaving services in the occupied Palestinian territory. In Gaza, we work to provide clean water, malnutrition treatment, protection and empowerment for women and children, early childhood development, psychosocial interventions, emergency reproductive health and address critical humanitarian needs. In the West Bank, the IRC and our partners continue to provide psychosocial interventions and early childhood development services, as well as build the capacity of community first aid workers.

*The United Nations (U.N.) uses “State of Palestine” and “occupied Palestinian territory” interchangeably to refer to the West Bank and Gaza. We use occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) in this report for consistency with the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and many of our peer agencies.

03

South Sudan

Economic collapse and Sudan war pile civil war risk on extreme poverty

South Sudan, a country blighted by extreme levels of violence and poverty since its independence, rises into the top three of the Emergency Watchlist as it risks sliding back into civil war. The 2018 peace agreement which ended the conflict that broke out in 2013 is collapsing and the unity government between former rivals Salva Kiir, who leads the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), and Riek Machar, who leads SPLM-In Opposition, is breaking down. Machar is now under house arrest and facing treason charges. Meanwhile, the civil war in neighboring Sudan has led to an influx of refugees, added to domestic tensions and disrupted vital oil exports, triggering economic turmoil and growing unrest among unpaid security forces. Simultaneously, relentless annual flooding devastates food production and traps millions in a deepening humanitarian crisis.

Key data points



11.9 million population



10 million people in humanitarian need
(84% of the population)



7.6 million people projected to face crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC 3+) between April and July 2026 (64% of the population)



28,000 people projected to face catastrophic (IPC 5) levels of food insecurity between April and July 2026



1 million+ refugees and returnees from Sudan have arrived since April 2023



Key Risks for 2026

■ The country is at real risk of slipping back into civil war.

There has been little or no progress on implementing key parts of the 2018 peace deal—the government postponed planned elections and is failing to make progress on either security sector reforms or disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts. There are also reports of growing splits within SPLM while Kiir's health is in decline—risking rivalries over who should succeed him. The economic collapse has also left security forces unpaid for months. Conflict risk is therefore rising significantly at a time when **10 million** people are already in humanitarian need and **2 million** are internally displaced.

■ Spillover from the Sudanese civil war threatens to destabilize South Sudan's borders and economy.

Both sides in Sudan's civil war—the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Force (SAF)—depend on supply lines that cross the wider region and so may exploit South Sudan's deep divides to mobilize militias, creating new frontlines in the border areas. Indeed, they may already be doing so given rising tensions in the north of the country that culminated in a militia that historically cooperated with SPLM-IO seizing a northern military base. Further, **nearly** all of South Sudan's exports and **90%** of its government income comes from oil, which is exported via a pipeline through Sudan, leaving the economy dangerously exposed to its neighbor's war. Pipeline damage in 2024 caused daily losses of **\$7 million**, driving up prices of all goods for South Sudanese families. With no end in sight to Sudan's conflict, South Sudan's oil-dependent economy remains highly vulnerable.

■ The country's fragile food system is at risk of collapse.

As they enter 2026, **28,000** people face catastrophic (IPC 5) levels of food insecurity, where people, especially children, are dying daily. Five **consecutive** years of economic decline, culminating in the economy shrinking by **30%** in 2025 alone, have made it difficult for nearly all families to afford sufficient nutritious food. Essential food costs have **quadrupled** while incomes have vanished, leaving millions of people, including many of the **1 million** refugees and returnees from Sudan, unable to afford basic food items. New shocks, whether from intensified floods or renewed conflict, could push the country deeper into the crisis. Clashes would devastate crop cultivation, while flooding could destroy harvests and livestock, leaving markets empty.

“It is deeply disheartening to witness the most vulnerable fleeing conflict and hardship, left without support... This neglect inflicts lasting harm. We call on well-wishers and authorities to rally behind these communities, ensuring access to a dignified life and sustainable livelihoods.”



– Amin Joseph Ismail,
Senior Field Manager,
IRC South Sudan

■ Forecasts of heavier rains risk disease outbreaks and flooding.

South Sudan suffered its sixth consecutive year of severe flooding in 2025, affecting over **900,000** people. The floods have worsened an already severe public health crisis, as the country battles its **longest-running** cholera outbreak of over **100,000** cases. These shocks also come with significant economic impacts for the **95%** of the population that depends on agriculture and pastoralism. With La Niña currently in effect, communities will likely face **heavier rainfall** in early 2026, leading to further flooding and new outbreaks of waterborne diseases.

The IRC in South Sudan

For over three decades, the IRC has stood as a lifeline for communities across South Sudan, responding to the urgent needs of those affected by conflict, displacement and disaster. As one of the country's largest humanitarian actors, we reach over one million people with health, protection, education and economic empowerment services. In an unstable nation, the IRC's work is not only lifesaving, it is life-restoring, helping individuals and families rebuild with dignity and hope.

OPPOSITE: South Sudanese families fleeing the war in neighboring Sudan arrive at a transit center for returning refugees in Renk, South Sudan.

04

Ethiopia

Renewal of major conflict looms as multiple flashpoints simmer

Ethiopia faces a growing risk of renewed major conflict as multiple flashpoints escalate simultaneously. Tensions are rising once again in the northern Tigray region, which saw a devastating war in 2020-2022, as well as in neighboring Amhara. A stand-off is also building between Ethiopia and its neighbor, Eritrea. These interconnected domestic and regional dynamics are driving instability across northern Ethiopia that could tilt into widescale conflict. Meanwhile, armed group activity continues to displace civilians in the central Oromia region, while climate shocks like droughts and floods cause even more harm to communities. With aid funding slashed, humanitarian agencies in Ethiopia are ill-equipped to address humanitarian needs, let alone to respond to these overlapping crises.

Key data points



132 million population



2.9 million people displaced within Ethiopia including 1 million refugees hosted as of September 2025



15% child malnutrition rate in Somali, Oromia, Tigray and Afar regions which exceeds emergency levels



2 million people missed food distributions in 2025



\$387 million in aid cut by USAID in 2025, more than in any other African country



Key Risks for 2026

- **Risk of renewed major conflict in the north threatens civilians still recovering from 2022 conflict.** The 2020-2022 conflict primarily pitted the ruling party in Tigray, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), against the federal government, which was backed by forces from Eritrea and the Amhara region. However, splits within the TPLF and rising tensions between the federal government and both Amharan and Eritrean forces are destabilizing the 2022 peace deal. Moreover, Ethiopia and Eritrea remain locked in a dispute over contested borders. Eritrean troops continue to occupy parts of Tigray, raising fears that the northern region could become a proxy battlefield. Any one spark could trigger major conflict, which would devastate civilians. Tigray has seen very limited reconstruction since 2022 and nearly **800,000** displaced people are still living in dire conditions. If fighting expands, it will quickly overwhelm the humanitarian system, leaving millions without food and shelter.
- **Oromia, Ethiopia's largest and most connected region, faces escalating armed group activity that risks triggering new waves of displacement.** In 2025, clashes between the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and government forces led over **288,000** people to flee their homes to find safety as fighting spread across Oromia. Livelihoods are collapsing; severe child malnutrition has reached **emergency levels** and migration is surging as families flee from violence and poverty. Oromia's central location means that insecurity there disrupts Ethiopia's national economy as well as supply routes used by both traders and humanitarian agencies—threatening a further deepening of humanitarian need.
- **Climate shocks are set to drive acute hunger and disease outbreaks.** The global **La Niña** weather pattern is expected to bring flooding to northern Ethiopia and drought to the south through early 2026. Floods could destroy crops, contaminate water, and worsen a cholera outbreak that has already affected over **6,800** people, while droughts in southern pastoral areas could wipe out harvests and livestock pasture. Years of accumulated drought damage mean even normal rainfall cannot restore lost herds or groundwater, leaving indebted households unable to recover. As flooding intensifies in 2026, both displacements and waterborne diseases could increase, putting millions at risk of disease-related death.

“After being displaced...we fled into the desert... I went into labor and went to a farmer's home, where I delivered my baby....We escaped with nothing. Everything was left there, even our money. I brought nothing with me.



– **Birhe Gush Weldebkiel**,
IRC Client in Ethiopia

- **Aid cuts are straining the delivery of critical basic services.** USAID slashed **\$387 million** in funding to Ethiopia in 2025, the largest cut in Africa. The shortfall has strained several state-led service programs, disrupting food distributions and forcing the dismissal of over **5,000** health workers. It has also deeply affected the humanitarian response. **Two million** people already missed food distributions in 2025, and the World Food Program warns **3.6 million** could lose food aid and **650,000** women and children could lose critical malnutrition treatment. The gap between growing needs and shrinking assistance is widening rapidly, leaving critical services out of reach for vulnerable populations.

The IRC in Ethiopia

The IRC began its operations in Ethiopia in 2000, providing support to refugees from neighboring countries as well as Ethiopians living in crisis-affected and underserved communities. The country continues to face recurring challenges, including conflict, natural hazards and climatic shocks, all of which disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. We respond through multi-sectoral programming in health and nutrition, child protection, education, women's protection and empowerment, economic recovery and development, and environmental health.



OPPOSITE: In the village of Afdera, Ethiopia, an internally displaced man carries his belongings to the school where he is taking shelter.

05

Haiti

Gang rule fuels record hunger and displacement

Gang rule and failing aid push Haiti into the Emergency Watchlist top five as millions of Haitians face worsening violence, hunger and displacement in 2026. The political chaos following the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse left the country without effective government and security. Armed gangs have been able to seize control of nearly all of the capital city Port-au-Prince and are now expanding their operations further north and west, particularly across the West, Artibonite and Centre departments. Internationally supported attempts to restore order have consistently failed and the mandate of the Transitional Presidential Council that currently rules Haiti will expire in February 2026, leaving a vacuum for gangs to exploit. Civilians are both targeted by gangs and at risk from the crossfire as gangs clash with the security forces. Gang rule and failing aid leave millions of Haitians in 2026 facing worsening violence, hunger and displacement in a country that is also highly exposed to environmental shocks.

Key data points



11.8 million population



6.4 million people in humanitarian need (54% of the population)



5.7 million people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity between March and June 2025



1,000% increase in sexual violence against children since 2023



<40% of 2,500 U.N. support mission personnel deployed due to funding shortages



Key Risks for 2026

- **Civilians face growing threats from gang violence and the security forces' ineffective response.** As gangs expand control across 90% of the capital and beyond, running extortion and kidnapping markets to extract profits from the chaos, civilians have few options for seeking safety in 2026. Over 800 civilians were killed in the first nine months of 2025, more than double the same time period in 2024, while the state security forces increasingly resorted to using small, explosive kamikaze drones—several of which have detonated in residential areas—resulting in mass civilian killings. A new U.N. “gang suppression force” authorized in October 2025 is intended to improve security in 2026. However, international support missions for Haiti have consistently failed to deliver a sustainable end to violence; a multinational stabilization mission deployed in 2024 achieved little as it was underfunded and under-equipped. This new intervention could even drive new levels of harm as civilians are caught in the crossfire between gangs and security forces.
- **Violence is driving record displacement and hunger as it spreads beyond the capital.** As gang activity expands beyond the capital, civilians are being forced from their homes to seek safety in other parts of the country. Displacement has reached record levels, with 1.4 million people, over 10% of the population, having fled their homes—half of whom are children. People are increasingly seeking refuge in newly established spontaneous displacement sites where they have only limited access to food and aid, propelling hunger to record levels. Over half of the population already face crisis levels of hunger after an increase of nearly 1 million in 2025, with catastrophic food insecurity conditions (IPC 5) now present in displacement sites—conditions in which people are dying every day. Starvation risks will worsen in 2026 as violence and displacement continue to grow, expanding communities with limited access to aid.
- **Women and children face rising sexual violence and forced recruitment.** Gangs are increasingly using sexual violence to systematically consolidate control and strike fear in communities. Violence towards women and girls is drastically escalating, with at least 6,000 cases of gender-based violence recorded in the first half of 2025 compared to 4,000 in 2024—figures that likely represent significant

“Haiti faces an unprecedented multifaceted crisis driven by political instability and expanding gang violence that has led to more than 1.3 million people internally displaced. Half the population is in desperate need of life-saving assistance, yet funding doesn't even reach a quarter of humanitarian requirements.



– Pasteur Ruberintwari,
Deputy Director of
Programs, IRC Haiti

underreporting. Children are increasingly at risk as gang recruitment is surging. The U.N. now assesses half of all gang members to be children, with a 700% rise in recruitment in the first three months of 2025 compared to the same period in 2024. This explosive growth signals looming gang offensives and even greater danger ahead for women and children in 2026.

- **Plummeting aid and any new environmental shocks will drive Haiti's crisis deeper.** Haiti's humanitarian response is among the least funded globally. People in need risk not having sufficient access to food and medical supplies as hunger rises in 2026. Cuts to funding are at risk of leaving 1.7 million people without aid amid a substantial risk in 2026 from the mid-year hurricane season. Haiti is highly vulnerable to earthquakes, floods and storms, and even one major shock could push millions more into catastrophe at a time when aid capacity is at its lowest.

The IRC in Haiti

The IRC has a history of providing humanitarian support in Haiti since 2010, working with a strong network of civil society organizations and local actors to respond to the needs of communities affected by internal displacement and longstanding gang violence. Since December 2022, our services have focused on cholera prevention for internally displaced people and support for survivors of violence, including gender-based violence.

OPPOSITE: Exson protectively holds his 6-year-old daughter, Francesca, who was injured during gang clashes near their home in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

06

Myanmar

Conflict and earthquake fallout leave millions stranded in need

Uninterrupted conflict, recurring disasters and collapsing aid keep Myanmar firmly in the top ten of the Emergency Watchlist for a third consecutive year. Nearly half a decade after the military took power in early 2021, violent conflict between nonstate armed groups and the central military authorities drags on with no end in sight. Since 2023, three of the major nonstate armed groups have shown greater unity in their fight with the central authorities over the future leadership of Myanmar, allowing them to contest territory deeper into the country. China has brokered a series of limited ceasefires between elements of these groups and the military authorities to deescalate fighting in specific areas while leaving large swaths of the country in active conflict. Meanwhile, the humanitarian response faces dire challenges in 2026 as international donors slash aid and the devastating impacts on infrastructure from the 2025 earthquake are still being felt.

Key data points



54.5 million population



16.2 million people in humanitarian need (30% of the population)



~90,000 people killed since 2021



16.7% of 2025 humanitarian needs and response plan (HNRP) funding received as of December 2025



1,000+ air and drone strikes in the four months after the March 2025 earthquake



\$11 billion of damage from March 2025 earthquake—15% of Myanmar's GDP



Key Risks for 2026

- **Huge swaths of Myanmar's population will be trapped in contested areas, facing growing threats to their safety.**

Millions of civilians remain caught in the crossfire between nonstate armed groups and the military authorities—nearly all of these armed actors fund their activities by exploiting natural resources including minerals, natural gas and timber. Civilians are left isolated in conflict zones across the country, as clashes along Myanmar's borders with Bangladesh and Thailand both limit safe movement and push people to flee across the border to find safety. Nearly 90,000 people have been killed since 2021, including at least 6,700 civilians. The military authorities have attempted to restore their control over contested central regions of the country ahead of elections due to start in late December 2025, which armed groups vowed to obstruct. The result is that civilian populations enter 2026 facing increased threats of displacement and targeting from the violence—including from airstrikes—with civilian fatalities from explosive weapons having risen more than eightfold since 2021.

- **Catastrophically low donor funding threatens to leave tens of millions at risk, particularly women and girls.**

Nearly 17 million people needed humanitarian assistance in 2025 but limited resources left humanitarian actors only trying to serve about a quarter of people in need. But even this narrow humanitarian response struggled as global cuts to aid left Myanmar the second lowest funded country humanitarian needs and response plan in 2025. Women and girls stuck in overcrowded, poorly lit shelters face particular threats, with reports that early marriages, intimate partner violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse while trying to access dwindling services are all becoming more frequent. All these risks will grow further in 2026 as funding for gender-based violence and reproductive assistance programming declines.

- **Climate shocks threaten greater harm due to infrastructure damage from relentless conflict and the 2025 earthquake.**

Myanmar is extremely vulnerable to cyclones, flooding, landslides and earthquakes. These natural threats both create new needs and degrade the resources and services that communities depend on to withstand new shocks. In March 2025, a 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck, driving 2 million more people into humanitarian need and killing

over 3,800. This event illustrated how armed conflict and natural shocks compound one another to heighten the threat to civilians, with the U.N. reporting that airstrikes continued even in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. The conflict is also worsening the flood risk as some armed groups fund their campaigns through logging—stripping away key forests that previously absorbed heavy seasonal rains.

“The prices of basic goods have increased almost three times since the earthquake, so it is a struggle for us to make ends meet.”



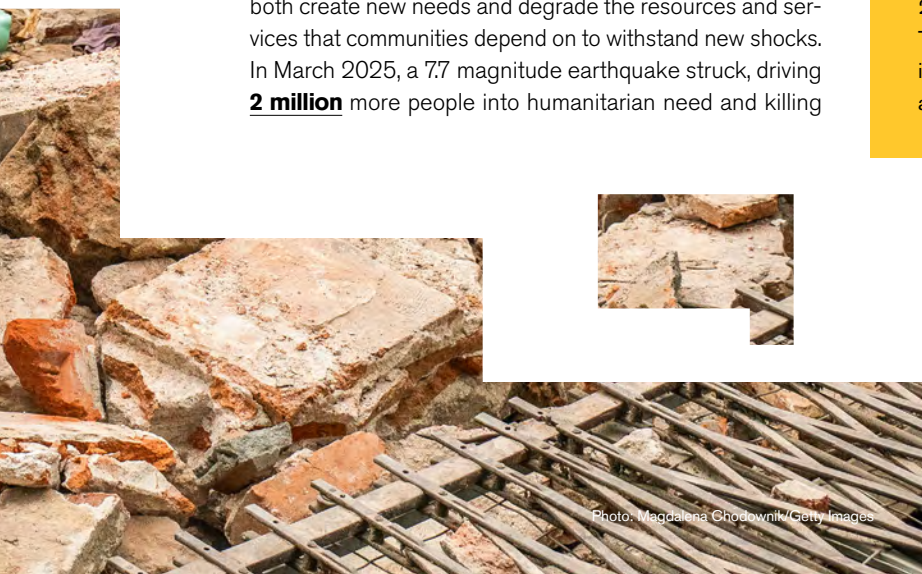
– **Than Zin Thwe,**
IRC Client in Myanmar

- **Delivering aid to communities in need is becoming harder due to conflict, physical barriers and economic challenges.**

Active fighting and bureaucratic controls by conflict parties make Myanmar one of the most complex places to deliver humanitarian aid. The March 2025 earthquake also damaged several key roads, making it harder for some remote communities to access aid. Meanwhile, earthquake damage to both infrastructure and the wider economy have limited support for displaced and unemployed people in need, and driven up the prices of essential goods for Myanmar's war-weary population.

The IRC in Myanmar

The IRC initiated an emergency response in Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis in 2008. The IRC has worked with local partners to expand its activities since then, serving people affected by the escalating conflict since February 2021, as well as marginalized and stateless communities. The IRC currently works across multiple sectors in six states, including providing emergency response to communities affected by the earthquake in March 2025.



OPPOSITE: A man in Mandalay, Myanmar, searches through the rubble of an earthquake-ravaged building in April 2025.

07

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Peace agreement fails to curb violence and natural resource exploitation in east

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) returns to the top ten of the Emergency Watchlist as a fragile peace agreement fails to end violence in the east. Despite a June 2025 peace deal between the DRC and Rwanda, armed clashes have intensified between government forces and the Rwanda-backed March 23 Movement (M23), which continues to expand its territorial control in eastern DRC and to exploit valuable rare earth and gold mining sites. Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda all have forces deployed within eastern DRC while a range of other armed local groups are also active in the area, often competing for control of minerals and other resources. Civilians are regularly forced to flee clashes to find safety—sometimes repeatedly—and they face further threats from record food insecurity and recurrent outbreaks of cholera, measles, mpox and Ebola.



Key data points



109.2 million population



14.9 million people in humanitarian need



26.7 million people in crisis or worse food insecurity (IPC 3+) including 3.9 million people in emergency (IPC 4+)



58,000+ suspected cases of cholera and **1,700+** deaths by October 2025



120+ armed groups operating in eastern DRC



37% rise in price of staple foods in 2025

Key Risks for 2026

- **Armed groups seek to control territory and profit from mining, leading to violence and exploitation.** The DRC-Rwanda peace agreement has brought no reprieve from violence, with over **2,100** people killed since it was signed. The deal does not address how armed groups fund their activities by exploiting mining sites across the east. More than **10,000** artisanal miners—including children—work daily to extract coltan from just one site in M23-controlled territory. As talks to end the violence continue, **unprecedented** levels of conflict minerals have been smuggled out in 2025, according to U.N. experts. M23 has expanded recruitment, armed local proxy militias and **doubled** its ranks since early 2025—indicating preparation for further offensives. Violence is set to outpace diplomacy with civilians facing the worst of the atrocities and abuse.
- **New records of hunger and malnutrition likely as economic inequality leaves conflict-weary population without respite.** Congolese communities already face record hunger, as nearly **27 million** people now suffer from crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity. Hunger will likely intensify through 2026 as food prices remain high and ongoing conflict shatters communities' food security. The M23 offensive in eastern DRC disrupted essential agriculture, markets and trade, causing hunger to spike earlier in the year than normal. Hunger is entrenched well beyond the conflict-affected east, as the DRC's mineral wealth and economic growth fail to reach ordinary people. **73%** of the population continue to live in extreme poverty. Families will continue to go hungry as food insecurity grows across rural and urban communities, with over **8.2 million** children and pregnant women in need of nutritional assistance.
- **Collapsing health services will struggle to cope with new disease outbreaks.** One of the worst cholera outbreaks in a **decade** is spreading and will threaten even more communities in 2026 as the overstretched health system buckles. The country also faces other diseases—for example, the country recorded its **16th** Ebola outbreak in 2025. Insecurity has left communities in eastern DRC ill-equipped to face new outbreaks. **85%** of clinics across the conflict-affected regions of North and South Kivu report severe medicine shortages and nearly **40%** have lost critical staff. In North Kivu, conflict left **70%** of health facilities non-functional by mid-2025. High displacement, shattered water and sanitation systems, and regular flooding impacting millions set the stage for further outbreaks in 2026.



After fleeing, I lost all contact with my parents. I lived on the streets. The IRC welcomed me and placed me in a foster family. I feel safe, supported. But my greatest wish is still to find my parents.



– **Gentile**, 14-year-old
IRC Client in DRC

- **Drastic aid cuts and worsening access threaten to unravel a vital humanitarian response.** Shrinking funding and worsening access will hollow out humanitarian operations in eastern DRC as needs rise. The DRC was the African country with the **second largest** funding cut due to USAID shuttering, and the third-most impacted globally. At the same time, aid workers face increasing attacks, with security incidents in the first nine months of 2025 rising by **33%** compared to the same time period in 2024. The U.N. peacekeeping operation in the region is reducing its presence, raising the risk of further instability and attacks on aid convoys. Without a rapid funding reset and improvements in security, millions could lose access to assistance.

The IRC in DRC

The IRC has been operating in the DRC since 1996 to improve the well-being of crisis-affected communities, with a particular focus on women and children. In 2024, the IRC supported more than 305,000 people through its health, nutrition, WASH and education programs, while also strengthening child protection, advancing women's empowerment and promoting community governance.

OPPOSITE: Safi Kisingila's daughter, Feza, has suffered from malnutrition, but was treated by the IRC in Kalemie, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

08

Mali

Communities left without support as armed groups advance

Mali remains in the Emergency Watchlist top ten for the third year in a row as armed groups target key supply routes around the capital.

Mali has faced growing political and diplomatic turmoil over the past five years, including two military takeovers of government, steep rises in armed group activity, the withdrawal of French forces and the arrival of Russian paramilitary personnel. The military government now fights on multiple fronts—both against armed groups linked to al-Qaeda and Islamic State and against groups seeking greater autonomy for the Tuareg ethnic group. Over the course of 2025, the armed group Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) advanced across central and southern regions of Mali, increasingly restricting the movement of fuel and goods into the capital Bamako. As the frontlines of conflict shift, markets and agriculture are being disrupted, people are increasingly forced from their homes and a nationwide hunger crisis is deepening.

Key data points



24.5 million population



5.1 million people in humanitarian need



400,000+ people internally displaced



1.5 million people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity in mid-2025, including nearly 3,000 people facing catastrophic (IPC 5) levels



1.5 million children under five acutely malnourished, including 315,000 suffering from severe acute malnutrition



1.9 million people did not receive essential health services in 2025 due to access and funding constraints



Key Risks for 2026

- **Shifting conflict frontlines and blockades leave communities without essential services.** Civilians will face rising barriers to basic services as armed groups' presence near major transit routes limits critical imports. JNIM's advance has allowed the group to regularly attack trucks along major highways linking Mali to Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire—routes that supply **95%** of Mali's fuel. The resulting shortages are already undermining the function of hospitals, schools and water systems that depend on generators. Insecurity forced schools educating over **600,000** children to close in the first half of 2025—joining an estimated **2 million** already out of education. The government is also facing renewed pressure from Tuareg separatists in the north, further stretching its capacity. Without restored access to supply routes and an easing of conflict, millions are at risk of going without basic services.
- **Hunger will deepen as insecurity disrupts markets, transport and availability of fuel.** As violence spreads, farming cycles are disrupted, and roadblocks choke transport and trade—making it even harder for hundreds of thousands of people to obtain food. Prior to JNIM's advance across southern Mali, **1.5 million** people already faced crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity, including almost **3,000** people in northeast Menaka State facing catastrophic (IPC 5) levels. As the military government prioritizes fighting armed groups, the collapse of services and market instability underline that food insecurity risks worsening substantially in 2026, particularly in rural areas.
- **A struggling humanitarian system is less able to meet civilians' needs.** Aid delivery faces two critical challenges: escalating insecurity and dwindling donor support. Funding for the response in Mali dropped to catastrophically low levels in 2025, with just **18.5%** of U.N. response requirements received by December—the lowest levels in a decade. Meanwhile, insecurity is straining aid delivery around the country. Violence against humanitarian personnel, movement restrictions and other restrictions on access were all consistently **higher** throughout the first six months of 2025 than in 2023 and 2024. As conflict deepens, millions risk going without increasingly needed aid.

“Where humanity recoils, I plant my feet.” This is the commitment of the IRC in Mali to serve the most vulnerable populations in areas with difficult access...More than a thousand [food] producers now have technical and financial capacities to access improved seeds, better withstand the effects of climate change and reduce their dependence on food aid.



– **Hamadou KOMOU**,
Economic Recovery and Development
Coordinator, IRC Mali

- **Women and girls risk being abandoned amid mass displacement and security turmoil.** Over **400,000** people, **more than half of whom** are women and girls, are now displaced within the country—many sheltering in makeshift camps and lacking safe spaces or protection services. In these challenging conditions, women and girls face particular risks of violence and abuse. Spreading insecurity leaves more women and girls facing heightened risk of abductions, forced marriages and sexual violence. Yet services for protecting women and girls are scarce—fewer than **a quarter** of health facilities are able to provide care or support for survivors of gender-based violence. With basic services paralyzed and protection funding falling to **new lows**, survivors of gender-based violence will face these challenges increasingly without support.

The IRC in Mali

Since 2012, the IRC has been providing humanitarian assistance to crisis-affected populations in Mali, focusing on children, women and internally displaced persons. Our holistic approach integrates programming focused on health and nutrition, economic support, protection against violence and displacement, education, food security and equitable access to essential services.

OPPOSITE: In southeastern Mauritania, two men walk past temporary shelters at Mbera camp, which hosts refugees fleeing violence and instability in Mali.

09

Burkina Faso

Escalating violence and siege tactics push communities deeper into crisis

Burkina Faso remains in the top ten of the Emergency Watchlist for the fourth consecutive year. Armed groups linked to Islamic State and al-Qaeda have engaged in an escalating campaign of kidnappings, forced recruitment and attacks on civilians for the past eight years. The government's reliance on local armed forces known as Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) is increasing violence and displacement. Meanwhile, armed groups are blockading towns and cutting off more than a **million** people from food, water and health care. Aid agencies' ability to serve affected communities is severely limited by insecurity, movement restrictions and declining funding, while recurring floods and droughts are compounding displacement and deepening the humanitarian crisis in conflict-affected regions.

Key data points



23.5 million population



4.4 million people in humanitarian need



4,600+ conflict-related fatalities in the first 10 months of 2025



2.1 million people internally displaced



29 towns under blockade, isolating over 1.1 million people



Key Risks for 2026

- **Escalating violence is trapping civilians between armed groups and government forces.** Burkina Faso is now the epicenter of conflict in the Sahel, accounting for more than **55%** of fatalities in violence tied to al-Qaeda or Islamic State-linked groups between June 2024 and 2025. Over **500** civilians were killed in the first four months of 2025. As the army struggles to contain armed groups and violence builds in neighboring Mali as well (ranked 8 on this year's Watchlist), the government is increasingly relying on local VDP forces to defend towns and supply routes, fueling communal tensions and civilian harm. Civilians are caught between multiple armed actors and, as violence spreads toward urban areas, face heightened risks of direct attacks and displacement.
- **Siege tactics and attacks on aid operations risk cutting off civilians from lifesaving assistance.** In 2025, armed groups blockaded at least **29** towns and villages, home to 1.1 million people, and attacks on convoys disrupted relief operations. Conflict activity and restrictions on civilian movement are forcing families to survive on limited food supplies and without essential services. Meanwhile, the restrictions on access prevent humanitarian actors from accurately collecting data about needs in blockaded areas, including food insecurity. Assessments in 2022 and 2023 showed **thousands** of people facing catastrophic (IPC 5) food insecurity, where people starve to death every day. Any expansion of blockades will cause these life-threatening conditions to affect even more communities in 2026.
- **Cuts to foreign aid and restrictive government policies are pushing Burkina Faso's fragile service system toward collapse.** The government has prioritized security operations over basic services, gutting service provision, and global aid cuts in 2025 risk compounding this crisis. Over **2 million** people need health assistance, yet **nearly 1 in 5** of health facilities are completely closed, compromising vaccination and emergency care. Meanwhile, new operational restrictions, including tighter controls on humanitarian movements and data collection, are delaying aid to communities most in need. With over **40%** of the population living in poverty and unable to afford essential care, 2026 risks entrenching a cycle of deprivation that accelerates disease, worsens hunger and destabilizes communities.

“When families flee violence, they lose everything: land, harvests, hope. Standing by their side, we help rebuild dignified livelihoods, relying on the national agropastoral initiative.”



– **Tani Corneille HARO**,
Senior Economic Recovery and
Development Officer, IRC Burkina Faso

- **Erratic rainfall and climate shocks are set to deepen the crisis in Burkina Faso.** The global weather pattern La Niña, which typically brings unpredictable and intense rainfall, is **expected** to continue into early 2026, threatening another cycle of flooding during the rainy season. After multiple flooding cycles, many families have lost food stocks and farmland, while herders' livelihoods face a particular threat as livestock struggle to survive. These climate pressures are compounding the challenges for communities in conflict-affected areas, leaving households with few safe options to earn or access food. As livelihoods collapse, limited coping options will push families deeper into poverty.

The IRC in Burkina Faso

Since 2019, the IRC has been operating in Burkina Faso to address the humanitarian needs of populations affected by conflict and food insecurity. Its interventions span several sectors: water and sanitation, health, nutrition, economic recovery, protection, women's empowerment and governance. In close collaboration with authorities and local and international partners, the IRC works in accordance with humanitarian principles across seven regions to help communities survive, recover and rebuild their futures.

OPPOSITE: A refugee from Burkina Faso walks past the mud-brick shelters of Niornigué camp, located near Ouangolodougou in northern Cote d'Ivoire.

10

Lebanon

Threat of conflict grows while the economy remains broken

Lebanon faces a growing threat of renewed conflict between Israel and the Lebanese nonstate armed group Hezbollah.

After a year of building tensions, the two sides fought a brutal conflict in late 2024, during which **1.4 million** people were forced to flee from their homes in Lebanon and over **96,000** Israelis were displaced. Israeli operations killed over **4,000** people in Lebanon while rockets launched by Hezbollah and other Lebanon-based armed groups killed **47** civilians in northern Israel. That conflict came to an end with a ceasefire in November 2024, but tensions rose again in late 2025. The conflict risk layers on top of the collapse of Lebanon's economy, which has left approximately **80%** of the population in poverty. A return to conflict in 2026 would overwhelm Lebanon's fragile services and sharply escalate humanitarian needs.

Key data points



5.8 million population



4.1 million people in humanitarian need in 2025 (71% of the population)



1.2 million people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity in July-October 2025



1.7 million refugees—the most per capita in the world



~\$11 billion in infrastructure damage from 2023-2024 conflict



Key Risks for 2026

- **Any renewal of conflict would risk new waves of civilian suffering and displacement.** The November 2024 ceasefire brought a sustained but incomplete reduction in violence—Israel carried out over **1,000** airstrikes in Lebanon in the months after it came into effect, killing **103** civilians, as well as periodic ground **incursions** into southern Lebanon. Military activity then increased along the demarcation line between Lebanon and Israel in late 2025 and Israel carried out its first airstrike in Beirut for months in November 2025. Israel and the U.S. are urging the Lebanese authorities to disarm Hezbollah—which the group refuses to do, citing Israel's continued military presence in southern Lebanon. With no resolution in sight, the mandate for U.N. peacekeepers in southern Lebanon expiring in 2026 and Israeli forces able to focus on Lebanon as the ceasefire in Gaza still largely holds, the risk of a new escalation is growing. Should Israeli ground forces once again advance into Lebanon, particularly beyond the U.N.-mandated buffer zone south of the Litani River, it would likely displace hundreds of thousands and devastate civilian infrastructure.
- **Economic collapse means families will struggle to afford enough food.** The Lebanese lira lost over **98%** of its value between January 2023 and March 2024, triggering hyperinflation. The 2023-2024 conflict then compounded Lebanon's economic woes, causing an estimated **\$11 billion** in infrastructure damage and devastating the agricultural, tourism and manufacturing sectors. The result has been catastrophic—**80%** of the population now live in poverty, lacking access to healthcare, electricity and education. Additionally, in late 2025 **1.2 million** people—more than one in five—faced crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity, where people are forced into desperate measures like skipping meals or pulling their children out of school to help feed their families.
- **Shattered services cannot keep pace with record needs.** The latest assessments show **4.1 million** people in Lebanon needing humanitarian assistance, primarily due to the long-term consequences of the 2023-2024 conflict. Israeli military operations in late 2024 damaged **67** hospitals and forced over **150** health facilities to close, cutting off access to healthcare and critical support services for thousands. With public services underfunded and strained, communities will continue to face threats to their livelihoods and safety with minimal support.

“Today, with mental health conditions affecting more than half of the population, the scale of suffering is a profound cry for help. What makes this even more troubling are the significant reductions in humanitarian funding and the gradual phase-out of humanitarian actors at a time when their presence is needed most.



– **Raymond Harb**, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Manager, IRC Lebanon

- **Syrian refugees face rising pressure to return despite challenging conditions in Syria limiting safe and dignified returns.** Lebanon hosts approximately **1.5 million** Syrian refugees—the **highest** number of refugees per capita in the world—most living in extreme poverty and legal insecurity, unable to work legally. In 2025, authorities intensified enforcement actions, including raids, evictions and arrests, compounding the situation for many Syrians. Economic collapse and continuing insecurity make conditions in Syria far from conducive for large-scale, safe, dignified and sustainable returns. Moreover, the plan to meet the needs of Syrian refugees around the region is dramatically underfunded, with just **10%** of funding required for 2025 received as of November 2025. Underfunded services and the growing threat of deportation will make life even more challenging for Lebanon's many Syrian refugees in 2026.

The IRC in Lebanon

The IRC has been working in Lebanon since 2012, delivering emergency and long-term support to Lebanese citizens and refugees. We offer legal services, protection, education and economic support, as well as mental, sexual and reproductive health services to people affected by and recovering from crises.

OPPOSITE: A girl stands inside her family's heavily damaged home in Sidon, Lebanon, following an Israeli strike in October 2024. More than 70% of Lebanon's population needed humanitarian assistance in 2025.

Photo: Murat Sengul/Getty Images

Other Watchlist Countries (in alphabetical order)



Afghanistan

- ▶ **22 million**
people in humanitarian need (52% of the population)
- ▶ **8.4 million**
people forcibly displaced within or from Afghanistan
- ▶ **12.6 million**
people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity (27% of the population)
- ▶ **35.2 million**
people living in extreme poverty (76% of the population)
- ▶ **177th/177 countries**
ranked on the Women, Peace, and Security Index for women's inclusion, justice, and security

Cameroon

- ▶ **2.9 million**
people in humanitarian need
- ▶ **2.1 million**
people forcibly displaced, including refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons
- ▶ **2.6 million**
people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity
- ▶ **626,000**
children out of school due to insecurity

TOP: Three children, aged 9, 14 and 12, stand in what remains of their home after floods swept through Laghman province, Afghanistan, in April 2024. Destroyed roads, bridges and power lines made delivering humanitarian aid even more difficult.

BOTTOM: Fanné Dogo stands among the makeshift shelters at Kourgui camp for internally displaced persons in northern Cameroon—an area deeply affected by ongoing conflict.

Chad

- ▶ **4 million**
people in humanitarian need
- ▶ **2.1 million**
people forcibly displaced in Chad, including refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons
- ▶ **3.3 million**
people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity
- ▶ **#1 most climate vulnerable**
country according to Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN)



Colombia

- ▶ **6.9 million**
people in humanitarian need
- ▶ **7.3 million**
people internally displaced—the 3rd largest IDP population globally
- ▶ **8.4 million**
people living in conflict-affected areas
- ▶ **1,000% increase**
in child recruitment to armed groups from 2021 to 2024
- ▶ **6.7 million**
people living in extreme poverty



Niger

- ▶ **2.6 million**
people in humanitarian need
- ▶ **938,000**
people forcibly displaced, including refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons
- ▶ **2.2 million**
people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity
- ▶ **47% of children under five**
are chronically malnourished including **400,000** children suffering from severe acute malnutrition
- ▶ **937** schools closed due to insecurity



TOP: Mediné Abbas Issak, a Sudanese mother living in the Milé camp in eastern Chad, feeds one of her malnourished sons a peanut-based therapeutic food that she got from an IRC mobile health clinic. Like many families who have fled the violence in Sudan, she is facing food insecurity in the overcrowded camp.

MIDDLE: In Tibú, Colombia, families displaced by violent clashes in the region wait to board canoes and cross the Tarra River into Venezuela.

BOTTOM: Women involved in sorghum farming await the arrival of a convoy from the U.N. in Sabon Machi, Niger, a community that has been affected by recurrent droughts.



Nigeria

- ▶ **5.9 million**
people in humanitarian need in northeast states
- ▶ **30.6 million**
people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity—the most in the world
- ▶ **3.5 million**
children expected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition—the second highest in the world
- ▶ **10.5 million**
children out of school due to insecurity
- ▶ **73 million**
people in extreme poverty—the most in the world



Somalia

- ▶ **4.8 million**
people in humanitarian need (25% of the population)
- ▶ **4.4 million**
people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity
- ▶ **1.85 million**
children expected to suffer from acute malnutrition, including **420,000** cases of severe acute malnutrition
- ▶ **2.5 million**
people living in drought affected areas
- ▶ **7,000+ conflict-related fatalities**
in 2025, a 40% increase from 2024



Syria

- ▶ **16.5 million**
people in humanitarian need (67% of the population)
- ▶ **6.1 million**
people internally displaced
- ▶ **9.1 million**
people are acutely food insecure
- ▶ **2.5 million**
children out of school due to insecurity
- ▶ **66% of the population**
is living in extreme poverty

TOP: Eleven-month-old Aisha Bulama clings to her mother at an IRC-supported health clinic in Maiduguri, Nigeria. Aisha had been diagnosed with severe acute malnutrition.

MIDDLE: Fadumo Abdinur Husen carries a jug of water for her family in Dinsoor, Somalia, a country plagued by a disastrous cycle of extreme weather.

BOTTOM: Civilians in Aleppo, Syria, flee the area because of intensified clashes between Syrian security forces and a nonstate armed group. The families will seek safety where they can find it—either in Aleppo or farther afield. More than six million people are internally displaced in Syria.



Ukraine

- ▶ **10.8 million**
people in humanitarian need (29% of the population)
- ▶ **9.1 million**
people forcibly displaced within or from Ukraine
- ▶ **2,000 attacks**
on hospitals, health infrastructure and staff
since February 2022
- ▶ **4/5 score**
for severity of access constraints

Yemen

- ▶ **23.1 million**
people in humanitarian need (57% of the population)
- ▶ **4.5 million**
people internally displaced
- ▶ **18.1 million**
people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food
insecurity, including **41,100** facing catastrophic
(IPC 5) food insecurity
- ▶ **50% of children under five**
are acutely malnourished, including **537,000** suffering
from severe acute malnutrition



TOP: Maryna and her son were wounded by flying glass and metal shrapnel when a bomb fell near their residential building in Kharkiv, Ukraine. Months later, they were still undergoing medical treatment.

BOTTOM: In Al-Dhale'e, Yemen, an IRC health worker measures 2-year-old Malek's mid-upper arm circumference to gauge whether Malek has fully recovered from his malnutrition.

Methodology

The IRC uses a multi-stage process of quantitative and qualitative analysis to identify which 20 countries should be included in the annual Emergency Watchlist because they face greatest risk of major deterioration in their humanitarian situation over the coming year. This process allows the IRC's Emergency Watchlist team to consider both the probability and impact of armed conflict, economic turmoil, the climate crisis and other natural and human-driven shocks.

A detailed description of the analysis conducted can be found [here](#). A brief overview of the process follows. If you have questions about the 2026 Emergency Watchlist or the IRC's other crisis analysis work, please contact Crisis.Analysis@Rescue.org.

STEP 1

Initial “red flagging” exercise using 74 quantitative and qualitative variables

The IRC's Emergency Watchlist team compiled 74 quantitative and qualitative variables from 14 different datasets including [Verisk Maplecroft](#), [INFORM](#), the [Danish Refugee Council](#), [Council on Foreign Relations](#), [International Crisis Group](#), Armed Conflict Location and Event Data ([ACLED](#)), the [World Bank](#), Varieties of Democracy ([V-DEM](#)) and [ACAPS](#). The team then identified which countries were consistently flagged across these variables, for example because they ranked in the top 25 countries, or the source qualitatively identified the country as facing a major risk over the year ahead.

STEP 2

Validating initial analysis with internal IRC experts

The Watchlist team then validated this preliminary analysis by setting it alongside insights from internal experts, gathered in the following way:

- ▶ Each IRC regional office (Middle East and North Africa, East Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, Latin America, and Asia) completed a survey, highlighting the countries they saw as facing the greatest humanitarian risk over the year ahead on a 1-3 scale (3 being greatest risk) and sharing qualitative insights on each country.
- ▶ Each IRC regional office shared their perspective on why humanitarian crises in their regions are deteriorating, to inform the thematic analysis of “New World Disorder.”

These steps allowed the Watchlist team to deepen its analysis with insights from among the IRC's 40,000 staff and volunteers. Their insights inform both the selection of the countries for the list and the more thematic analysis presented at the front of this report.



An IRC health worker writes a prescription for 9-month-old Bara'a at a camp for internally displaced people in Al-Dhale'e, Yemen.



STEP 3

Combining insights from step 1 and step 2 to develop the final Watchlist and top ten rankings

The Watchlist team then drew up a final, ranked shortlist of countries through a series of meetings allowing them to set qualitative and quantitative insights alongside one another. The key reference points for this stage were:

- ▶ The rankings produced through the data analysis in step 1.
- ▶ Quantitative rankings and qualitative inputs from the surveys in step 2.
- ▶ Qualitative analysis by the IRC's Watchlist team to identify the risk of further deterioration of humanitarian crises in countries on the preliminary short list.
- ▶ The scale and severity of emergencies that had occurred in those countries during 2025, as measured by the IRC's Emergency Classification System.
- ▶ Humanitarian needs data from the Global Humanitarian Overview and country Humanitarian Needs Overviews, via the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).
- ▶ Analysis of humanitarian access constraints from ACAPS data and reporting, combined with IRC teams' qualitative insights and expertise on access.

STEP 4

Drafting country sections and thematic analysis

The analysis of "New World Disorder" in the first half of Watchlist 2026 and the country profiles in the report's second half both draw on the analysis from steps 1-3 as well as data and analysis from the following sources:

- ▶ Food insecurity data from Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (**IPC Info**), the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (**FEWS NET**) and the Food Security Information Network (**FSIN**).

- ▶ Displacement data from the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (**UNHCR**), the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (**UNRWA**) and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (**IDMC**).
- ▶ People in need of humanitarian assistance data from **OCHA**.
- ▶ Data on attacks on humanitarian aid workers from the Aid Worker Security Database (**AWSD**), attacks on education from The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (**GCPEA**), and attacks on health care from the Attacks on Health Care News Brief (**Insecurity Insight**).
- ▶ Data on governance and extreme poverty from the World Bank (**WB**) and World Poverty Clock (**World Data Lab**).
- ▶ Conflict data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project (**ACLED**) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (**UCPD**).
- ▶ Climate disaster data from the International Monetary Fund's (**IMF**) Climate Change Dashboard and The International Disaster Database (**EM-DAT**).
- ▶ The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (**WPS**) index of women's wellbeing and their empowerment in homes, communities and societies more broadly.
- ▶ The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (**ND-GAIN**) index of countries' vulnerability and readiness to successfully adapt to climate change and other global challenges.
- ▶ Economic and financial data from U.N. OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (**FTS**), International Monetary Fund (**IMF**) and World Bank Group, U.N. Development Programme's (**UNDP**) Human Development Index (**HDI**) and Climate Funds Update Data Dashboard (**Climate Funds Update**).
- ▶ Other open-source humanitarian, media and think-tank reporting.

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As an IRC psychosocial caseworker in Hagadera Refugee Camp in Kenya, Mariam Abdi provides support to survivors of gender-based violence. She brings two years of experience and a passionate commitment to protecting and empowering women and girls.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people whose lives have been shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and rebuild.

In 1933, Albert Einstein helped found the organization that would become the IRC. We now work in over 40 crisis-affected countries as well as communities throughout Europe and the Americas. Ingenuity, fortitude and optimism remain at the heart of who we are. We deliver lasting impact by providing health care, helping children learn and empowering individuals and communities to become self-reliant, always with a focus on the unique needs of women and girls.

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