



—

AFGHANISTAN [24]

ETHIOPIA [26]

YEMEN [28]

NIGERIA [30]

SOUTH SUDAN [32]

DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC OF  
THE CONGO [34]

MYANMAR [36]

SOMALIA [38]

SYRIA [40]

SUDAN [42]

+



2022 —

# EMERGENCY WATCHLIST/

SYSTEM FAILURE —

—

AFGHANISTAN [24]

ETHIOPIA [26]

YEMEN



# CONTENTS

Foreword	[4]
What is the Watchlist?	[6]
What we are seeing in Watchlist countries	[7]
The underlying cause: System Failure	[13]
What we can do about System Failure	[19]

## TOP 10 COUNTRIES

Afghanistan—The crisis after the conflict	[24]
Ethiopia—A case study in climate and conflict	[26]
Yemen—Cumulative impact of protracted conflict	[28]
Nigeria—Growing insecurity across the country	[30]
South Sudan—Regional tensions raise risks	[32]
Democratic Republic of the Congo—Conflict and disease compound crisis	[34]
Myanmar—Violent deadlock leaves millions in need	[36]
Somalia—Humanitarian access worsens as needs rise	[38]
Syria—Economic crisis compounds a decade of war	[40]
Sudan—Political tensions amid regional drought and conflict	[42]

## UNRANKED COUNTRIES (presented alphabetically)

Burkina Faso—A protracted crisis in the making	[44]
Cameroon—Multiple crises in a downward spiral	[46]
Central African Republic—Renewed conflict deepens decade-long crisis	[48]
Haiti—Earthquake strikes amid political uncertainty and violence	[50]
Honduras—Criminal violence and climate shocks deepen crisis	[52]
Lebanon—Fallout from explosion and economic crisis continues	[54]
Mali—Political tensions create humanitarian uncertainty	[56]
Mozambique—Climate shocks and insurgency fuel crisis	[58]
Niger—Regional crisis and conflict	[60]
Venezuela—Crisis endures as needs go unmet	[62]
Annex: Methodology	[64]



# System Failure.

Each day that the system for guaranteeing peace and prosperity fails, human suffering grows. Business as usual is not good enough. For the people the IRC serves, now is the time for a total system upgrade.





## FOREWORD FROM DAVID MILIBAND

If 2020 taught the world what it's like to live through a crisis, then 2021 has taught us what it's like when a crisis becomes protracted, normalized, even routinized. For those living in the world's most fragile and conflict-affected countries, the IRC's 2022 Emergency Watchlist shows that near-permanent crisis is the new normal.

The analysis underpinning the Watchlist sets out the shocking toll of humanitarian emergency around the world. The data gathered here represents more than 60 different qualitative and quantitative indicators, validated by insights and analysis from among the IRC's 30,000 staff and volunteers working in crisis zones around the world. A record 80 million people have been forced to flee their homes. 41 million people are on the brink of famine. 274 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance—a 63% increase in just two years.

We hope you will study the story we present from the 20 countries featured in the Watchlist. These countries are home to 800 million people, of which more than 200 million are in humanitarian need. Globally, these countries account for 89% of humanitarian need, 80% of people who have fled across borders to find safety and 76% of people displaced within their country of origin. These are the clients the IRC serves every day through our humanitarian programs.

The crises we document in these countries are more than a series of unfortunate events. The story told by the Watchlist makes a bigger argument: not just that there are more people living in poverty and more people forcibly displaced, but that the scale and nature of humanitarian distress around the world constitutes a “System Failure.”

**ABOVE:** IRC president David Miliband observes operations at a medical facility for migrants in San Salvador.



This is a big claim. But the facts warrant it.

We argue that states are failing in their duties to their citizens; diplomacy is failing to resolve conflicts; the legal regime is failing to protect well-established rights for civilians; and humanitarian operations are failing to fill the widening gaps.

The system for preventing and addressing humanitarian crisis, built on the twin pillars of, first, state sovereignty and responsibility, and second, international law and rights, is failing. It is failing for reasons that are structural not superficial, and that means things are going to get worse, not better, unless action is taken.

"The system" is meant to ensure an upward path towards peace, prosperity and the rule of law through a combination of responsibility from states, cooperation between states, and accountability of states. For the populations that the IRC and the wider humanitarian sector serves in Watchlist countries, that system is failing, and now is the time to call it out. We need a Total System Upgrade.

The Watchlist shows that we need significant changes to the humanitarian system. We make arguments for what is needed: reallocation of funds, better spending of funds, more integration of funds, more attention to the malfeasance of conflict actors who use hunger as a weapon of war and civilian suffering as a tool of control.

But we also speak to a fundamental truth: every humanitarian emergency is a political emergency. As humanitarians, we do not take sides in politics. But we do take sides against the abuse of civilians. So we therefore argue that the commitments of the United Nations Charter need new lines of defense: abandoning the U.N. Security Council veto in cases of mass atrocity; taking the politics out of arguments for humanitarian access; grounding security partnerships in respect for international humanitarian law; expanding the use of universal jurisdiction cases to prosecute war crimes; and reducing the role of social media in fanning the flames of conflict.

Albert Einstein founded the IRC in 1933 to take action and to speak up. Nearly 90 years later, that is precisely what the IRC's 2022 Emergency Watchlist seeks to do. The 800 million people living in Watchlist countries demand it.



David Miliband,  
President and CEO  
International Rescue Committee



# WHAT IS THE EMERGENCY WATCHLIST?

The IRC has produced an annual Emergency Watchlist each year for over a decade. Over this time, the Watchlist has evolved from a purely internal aid for emergency preparedness planning into a public report that warns global leaders, policymakers and concerned citizens not just where crises are deepening but why they are deepening and what we can do about it.

The Watchlist is underpinned by a unique methodology. The IRC's Crisis Analysis Team consolidates 66 different qualitative and quantitative indicators and reviews them alongside insights from the IRC's over 30,000 staff and volunteers working in crisis zones around the world. This approach—which is now tried, tested, and shown to work—allows the IRC to identify the 20 countries at greatest risk of experiencing a significant deterioration in their humanitarian situations over the year ahead.

## COUNTRIES ON THE IRC'S 2022 EMERGENCY WATCHLIST

The Watchlist countries are divided into a ranked Top 10 and an unranked second half (the latter presented alphabetically).

### TOP TEN COUNTRIES

- |                |                                     |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Afghanistan | 6. Democratic Republic of the Congo |
| 2. Ethiopia    | 7. Myanmar                          |
| 3. Yemen       | 8. Somalia                          |
| 4. Nigeria     | 9. Syria                            |
| 5. South Sudan | 10. Sudan                           |

### UNRANKED COUNTRIES

- |                            |              |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| + Burkina Faso             | + Lebanon    |
| + Cameroon                 | + Mali       |
| + Central African Republic | + Mozambique |
| + Haiti                    | + Niger      |
| + Honduras                 | + Venezuela  |



# WHAT WE ARE SEEING IN WATCHLIST COUNTRIES

At a global level there are record numbers of people in need of humanitarian assistance. Record levels of people forced to flee their homes. And record numbers of aid workers experiencing major attacks.

The 20 countries on Watchlist 2022 provide a unique lens for understanding what is going wrong. These countries are home to 10% of global population yet account for 89% of humanitarian need,<sup>1</sup> 80% of people who have fled across borders to find safety, and 76% of people displaced within their country of origin. If we can understand what is happening in these 20 countries—and what to do about it—then we may, finally, have a chance to start reducing the scale of human suffering in the world.

## GROWING HUNGER

Currently, an estimated 41 million people in 43 countries teeter on the brink of famine. And in Watchlist countries, over 100 million people—1 in 8 of their residents—can only survive by depleting their key assets. Three key drivers are pushing up food insecurity:

- + Conflict is not just the leading cause of hunger (WFP), but in many cases hunger is being used as a deliberate weapon of war to break the will of opposition groups.
- + Climate change is a critical threat multiplier as higher temperatures, wildfires, irregular rainfall, flooding and droughts all help to drive food insecurity to unprecedented levels.
- + COVID-19—and in particular the pandemic's economic shocks—have set back progress toward ending hunger by at least five years, according to IRC research.



In Niger, Fandaou Malam Abba's 18-month-old daughter displays signs of malnourishment.



Aisha, 10, and Na'aem, 11, help to cook for Aisha's family in an IDP camp in Yemen. (ECHO)

<sup>1</sup>IRC analysis of data from 2022 Global Humanitarian Overview

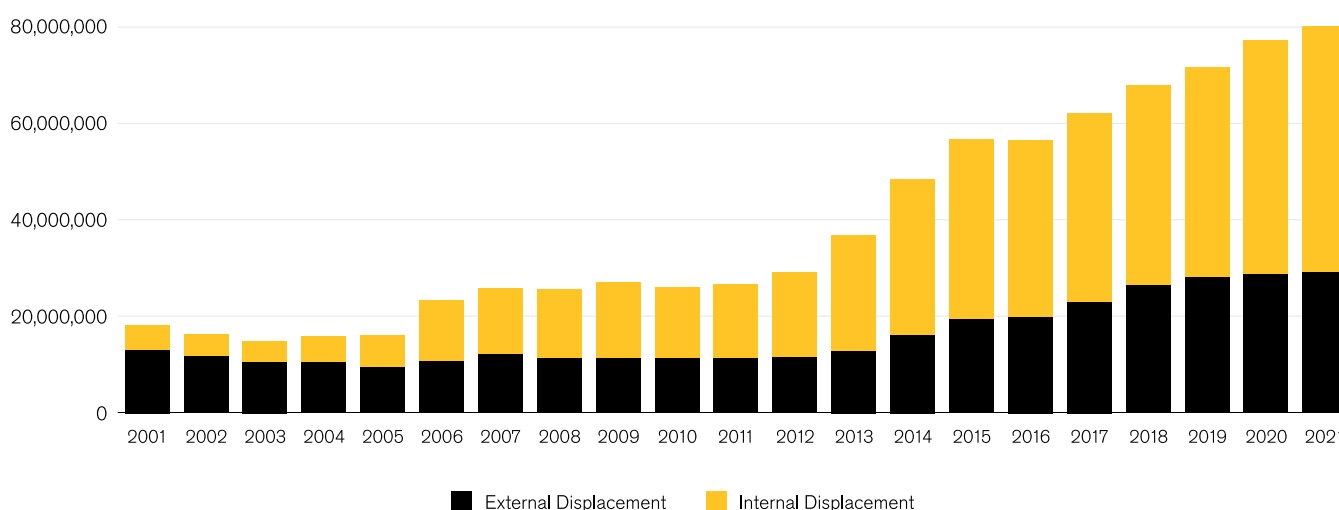
<sup>2</sup>IRC analysis of data for 2021 from UNHCR Refugee Data Finder

## RECORD DISPLACEMENT

More people than ever before—80 million—have been forced to flee their homes due to violence, oppression and other economic, social or climatic shocks.

Over 50 million are now displaced within their countries of origin, while a further 30 million have fled across an international border, mostly as refugees or asylum seekers. Since 2011, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has risen by 230% (driven by a 430% rise in Watchlist countries) and the number of people externally displaced is up by 160% (driven by a 300% rise in Watchlist countries). Watchlist countries account for 80% of external displacement (i.e. refugees and asylum seekers) and 76% of internal displacement, according to the most recent [UNHCR](#) data.

### FORCED DISPLACEMENT IS GROWING RAPIDLY

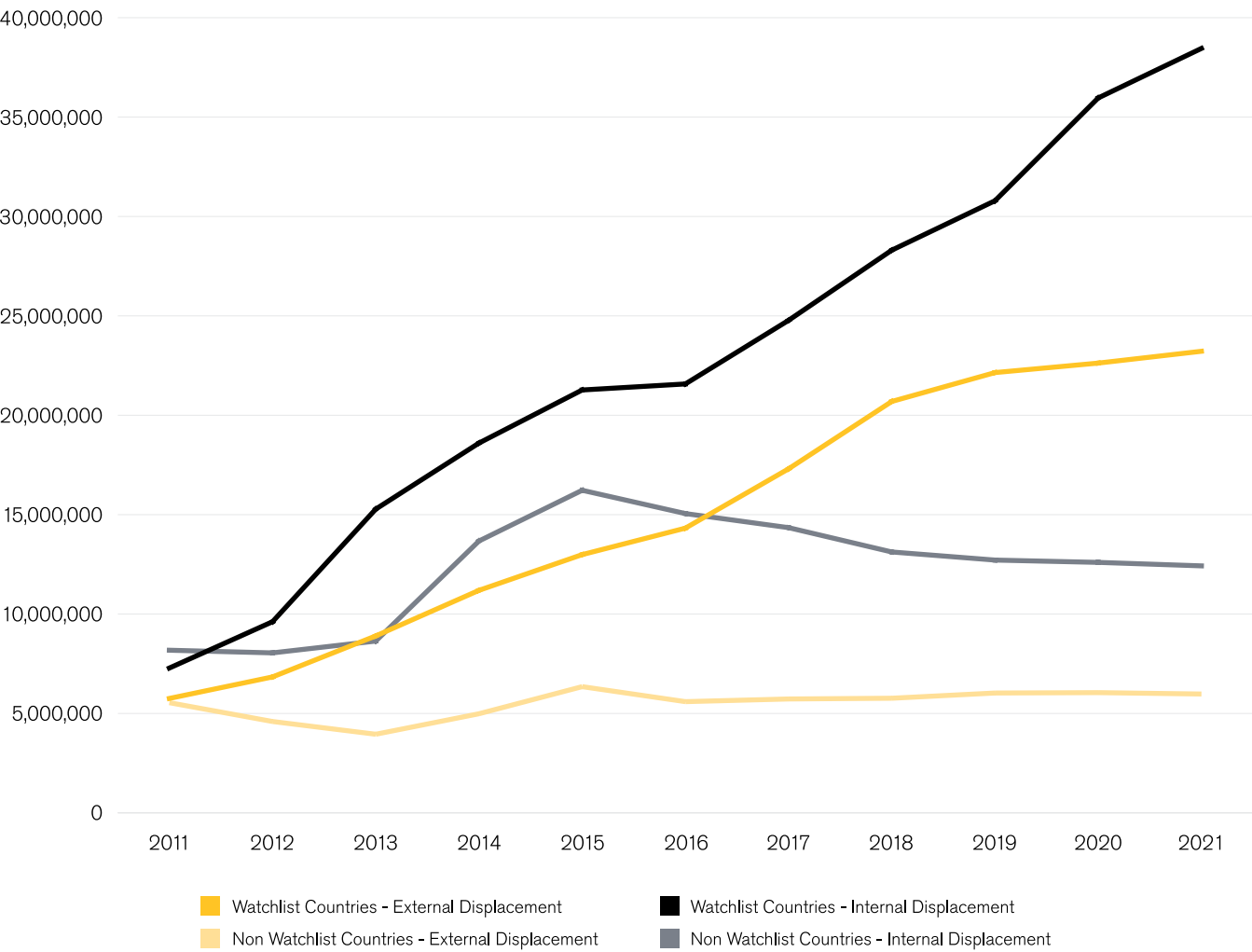


Source: [UNHCR](#)

Few displaced people have access to durable solutions, like returning home or being resettled. Fewer than 1 million internally displaced persons and only 126,700 refugees were able to return home in the first half of 2021 ([UNHCR](#)). Indeed, fewer than 1% of refugees are ever resettled. The number was particularly low in 2020—34,400 refugees were resettled globally compared to 107,800 in 2019—as borders were closed due to the pandemic. With conflicts proliferating and climate change accelerating, the number of displaced people will continue to rise. According to the World Bank, without immediate and concerted action, climate change could force 216 million people into internal displacement by 2050.



WATCHLIST COUNTRIES DRIVE RECORD LEVELS OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT



Children who have missed school due to conflict and displacement are given access to an education in Gouria village in Cameroon. (ECHO)



Faisal, 10, and his father fled their home in Syria three years ago, but experienced shelling again in a displacement camp, forcing them to return to their hometown.

## WOMEN, GIRLS AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS FACE GREATEST RISK

Women and girls often pay the greatest cost during humanitarian crises, along with minority and marginalized groups:

- + Of the 10 countries where it is least safe to be a woman or girl ([WPS Index](#)), six are on Watchlist 2022. A recent [IRC report](#) based on research in three Watchlist countries (Cameroon, South Sudan and Yemen) found that the risk of gender-based violence has risen during the COVID-19 pandemic, while critical prevention and response activities have been disrupted.
- + Entrenched gender roles and structural inequalities expose women and girls to greater risks of food insecurity and hunger. While women and girls may be expected to provide and care for their families, they often receive the least to eat. And women's livelihoods in low-income states are overwhelmingly dependent on agriculture, which is increasingly threatened by extreme weather patterns.
- + The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the economic situation for women. [IRC and ODI research](#) illustrates how discriminatory social norms impact women's economic opportunities and increase the burden of unpaid care work: women had 47% lower odds of earning an income during the COVID-19 pandemic and 45% lower odds of being employed or self-employed.

LGBTQI people also face particular risks in humanitarian settings. Another recent [IRC report](#) found that exposure to violence from family members may drive LGBTQI people to leave their homes, only to face discrimination and exclusion in the public sphere, ranging from economic exclusion to physical and sexual violence from armed groups. Moreover, nonrecognition of LGBTQI partnerships and family structures, devaluation of the needs of LGBTQI people, limited social support, poor treatment from humanitarian staff, and fear of consequences to oneself or loved ones due to visibility as an LGBTQI person all serve to marginalize and exclude LGBTQI survivors of conflict and displacement.

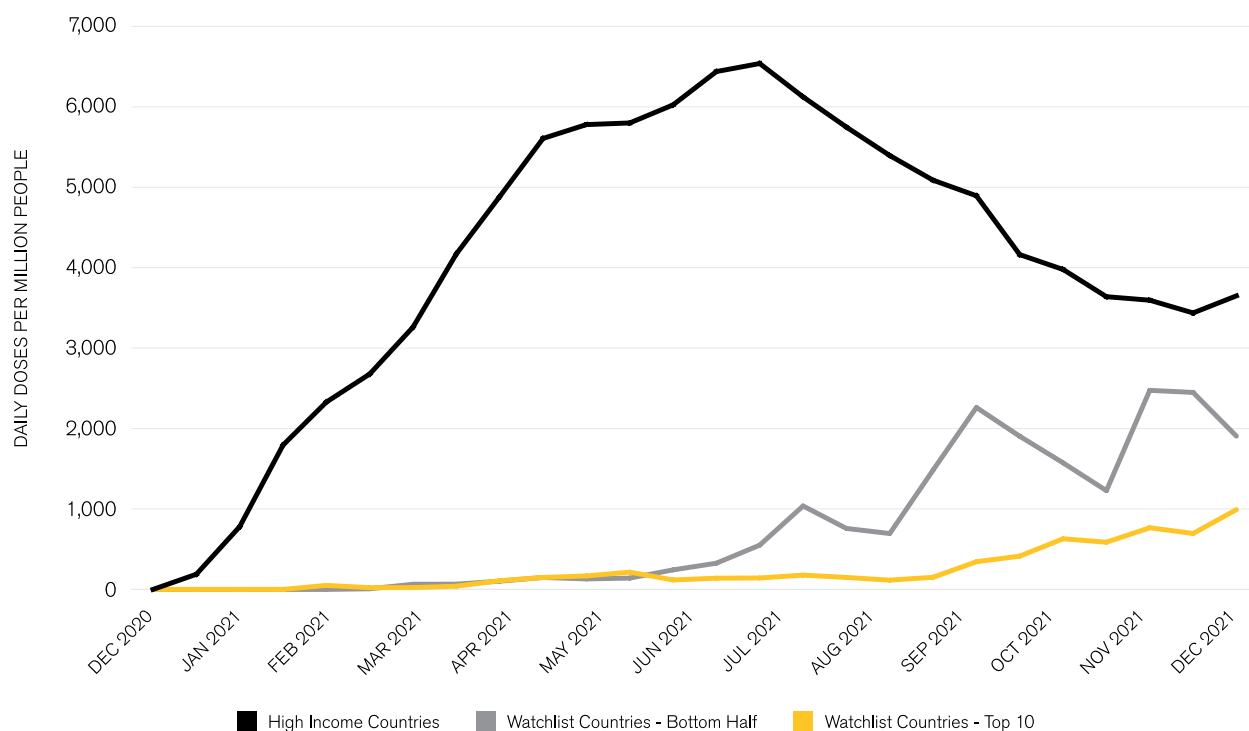


Peter, 2, benefits from the IRC's nutrition program in Northern Bahr El Ghazal, South Sudan, after he and his mother were displaced by flooding.



## WATCHLIST COUNTRIES LEFT FAR BEHIND AS VACCINATION TARGETS MISSED

Limited testing makes it impossible to understand how many cases of COVID-19 there have been in Watchlist countries. But we can say for certain that Watchlist countries have been left far behind in COVID-19 vaccination campaigns, exposing them to future waves of transmission and delayed economic recovery.

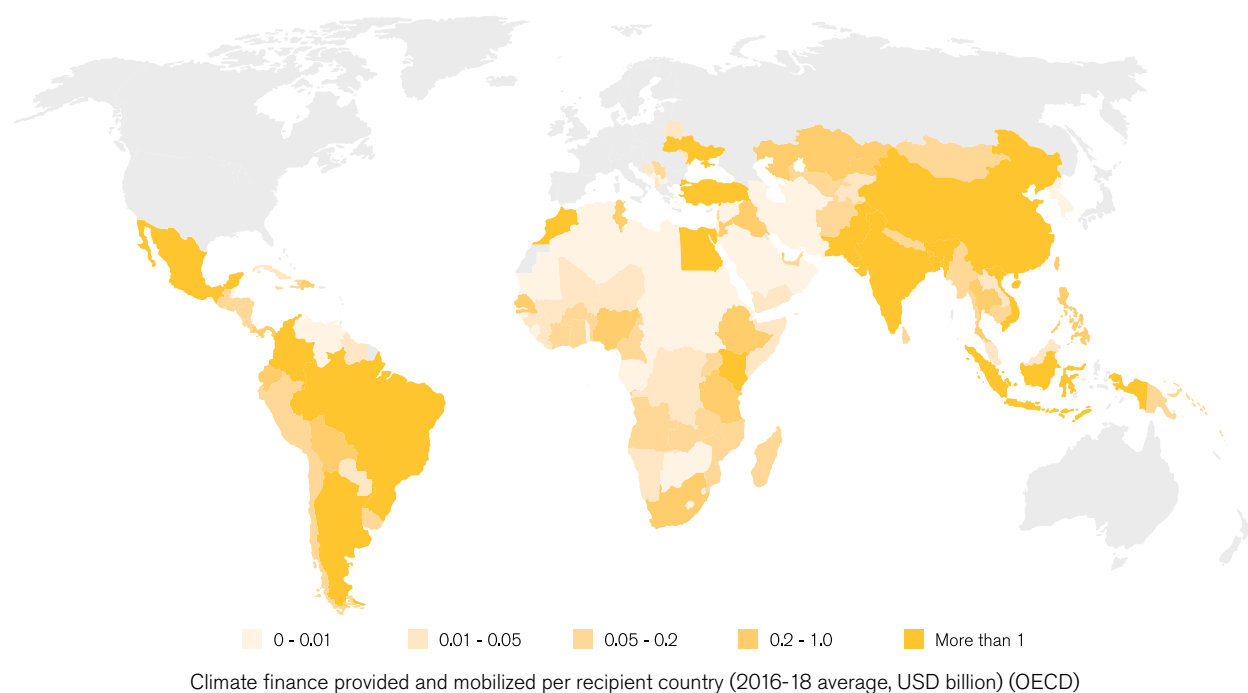


Seventeen Watchlist countries did not meet the World Health Organization's (WHO) target of fully vaccinating 10% of population by the end of September 2021, representing a significant subset of the 56 countries globally that failed to meet the target. As of early December 2021, only Honduras (39%) and possibly Venezuela (34%) are on track to meet the WHO target of 40% of their population fully vaccinated by the end of 2021. Lebanon has vaccinated 25% and Myanmar 21%. Just 3% of residents of the Top 10 Watchlist countries have been vaccinated and 5% across all Watchlist countries. Meanwhile, high-income countries have now delivered over 130 million "booster" shots, more than triple the number of people in Watchlist countries who have been fully vaccinated (43 million) (OWiD).

## WATCHLIST COUNTRIES ABANDONED TO FACE THE CLIMATE CRISIS THEY DID NOT CREATE

Climate change is a crisis that Watchlist countries did not cause, but they are paying the greatest cost. Of the 10 countries least prepared for climate change according to ND-GAIN, six are on Watchlist 2022 (Central African Republic, Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Sudan and Niger). Yet all 20 Watchlist countries, home to 10% of the global population, produced just 5.4% of total carbon dioxide in 2018. In contrast, the G7 nations produced 20% and the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (China, France, Russia, the U.K. and the U.S.) produced 41% (Climate Watch).

Key climate risks include increasingly frequent and severe drought and flooding—the risk of protracted drought in East Africa contributes to four countries appearing in the Top 10. Countries on the Watchlist desperately need support to adapt and build resilience, but a mere 20% of climate finance is spent on that goal—even though every dollar could yield four dollars in benefits (U.N.). And only 8% of climate finance in 2016-2018 went to low-income countries, with a small fraction of that going to conflict-affected communities.





# THE UNDERLYING CAUSE: SYSTEM FAILURE

Our analysis for this year's Watchlist leads us to a new diagnosis of what is going wrong. There is not just the quantitative evidence of more extreme poor and more displaced people. There is a qualitative judgment as well. We deliberately use the term System Failure to indicate something more serious than "things are getting worse." The system for preventing and addressing humanitarian crisis, built on the twin pillars of (1) state sovereignty and responsibility and (2) international law and rights, is failing. It is failing for reasons that are structural not superficial. And that means things are going to get worse unless action is taken. System Failure has four components:

## STATE FAILURE

More states are failing to fulfill their basic responsibilities toward their citizens and increasing numbers of governments are making things worse through sins of commission, not just omission.

## DIPLOMATIC FAILURE

Peacemaking is in retreat, geopolitical rivalry is on the rise, the global commons is mismanaged, and non-state armed groups hold increasing sway.

## LEGAL FAILURE

The system of international law, with rights for citizens and responsibilities for states, is in retreat, with growing crimes against humanity and attacks on humanitarians occurring without accountability.

## OPERATIONAL FAILURE

The system of humanitarian aid, which exists to fill the gaps created by state, legal and diplomatic failure, depends on access as well as funding, independence as well as legitimacy, global cooperation and redistribution in recognition of global interdependence and inequality. But the system has been overwhelmed by economic, social and political breakdown.

The system is meant to ensure an upward path toward peace, prosperity and the rule of law through a combination of responsibility from states, cooperation between states, and accountability of states. For the populations that the IRC and the wider humanitarian sector serve in Watchlist countries, that system is failing, and now is the time to call it out.



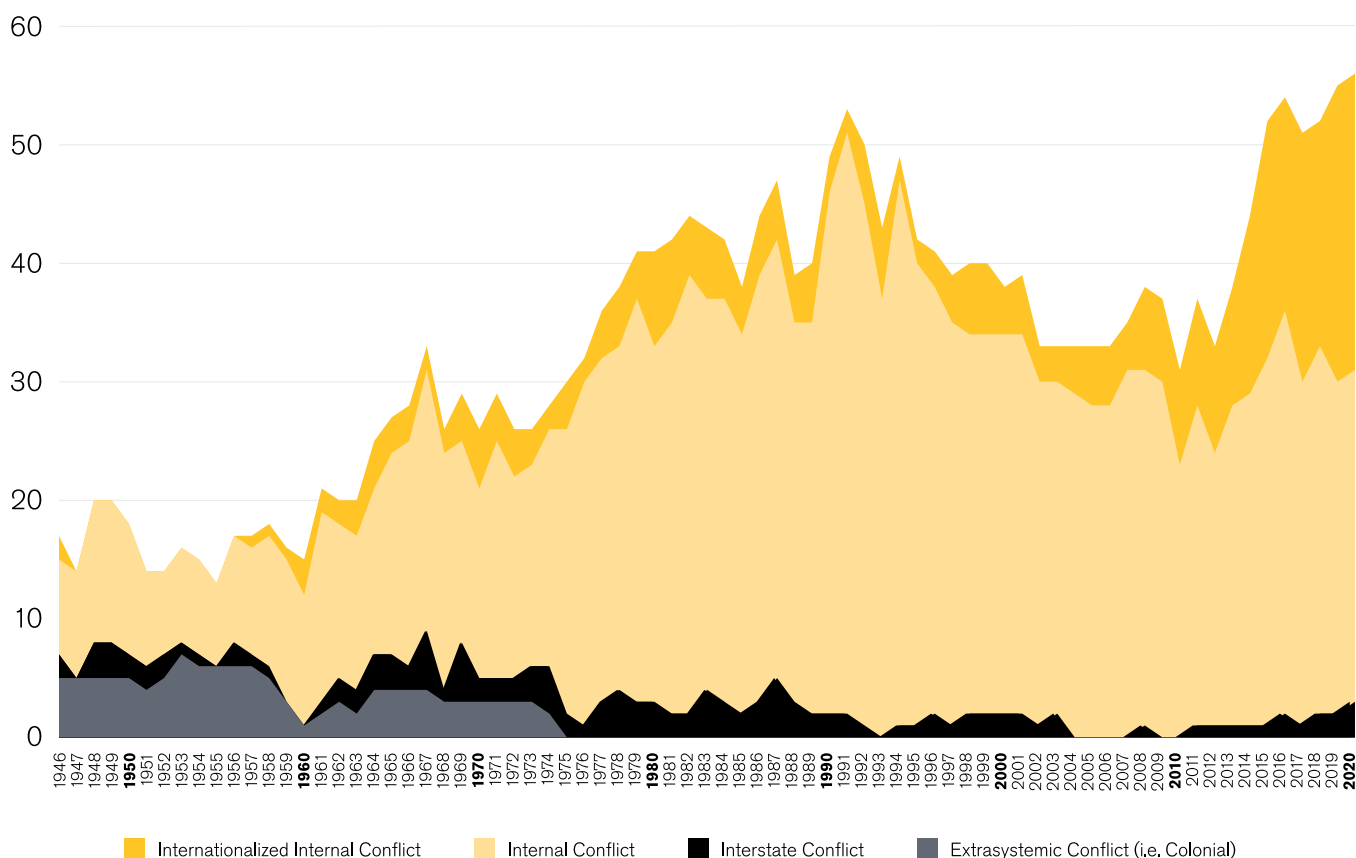
## THE DRIVERS OF SYSTEM FAILURE

Conflict, abuse of power and extreme poverty are as old as humankind. The humanitarian sector has emerged to address the consequences. But the record levels of need, hunger, displacement and violence against humanitarians indicate that the system to prevent and address humanitarian need is no longer working. The countries on Watchlist 2022 provide a window into what has gone wrong. Three interlocking changes have weakened and ultimately overwhelmed the system. Since these three drivers are global, system failure will continue to mutate and spread, throwing ever more people into crisis, unless the international community takes urgent action.

### THE RISE OF INTERNATIONALIZED CIVIL CONFLICTS

At present, more conflicts are raging than at any time since World War II, driven by an unprecedented growth in internationalized internal conflicts—wars between the government of a state and one or more non-state armed groups, where at least one other state has intervened on one side. These interventions are not positive peace efforts; rather, they are destructive support for various factions within these conflicts. In many cases, there are multiple external actors involved—up to a dozen.

### RAPID GROWTH IN INTERNATIONALIZED INTERNAL CONFLICTS LEADS TO RECORD NUMBER OF CONFLICTS



Nearly all the “severe” conflicts happening in the world—ones that have seen over 1,000 battlefield deaths—are currently internationalized civil conflicts, according to the latest data from [UCDP](#) (examples include Afghanistan, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria and Yemen). These conflicts drive the crises in most of the Watchlist’s Top 10. Civil conflicts—and particularly internationalized ones—lie at the heart of “System Failure” for three key reasons:

- + **Civil conflicts create different classes of citizen—friends and enemies.** If states have primary responsibility to protect their citizens’ rights, what happens when different factions compete to control the state? Or when one subset of the population receives support from a third-party state to fight the government? Too often government forces come to see certain populations not as citizens to be protected but as “the enemy”—as in Nigeria, where the military has detained children as young as 5, alleging that they are terrorists ([HRW](#)).

Even where conflict-affected states intend to meet their responsibilities, war erodes their capability to do so. And in too many cases they have no such intent. Destruction of health care facilities and systems and other infrastructure is a key reason that for every battlefield death we expect to see nearly twice as many civilian deaths from preventable disease, hunger and other non-combat causes. The economic and systemic impacts of conflict accumulate as wars drag on, resulting in high levels of dependency on aid. This in turn retards global progress in the fight against child mortality and poverty, and in the efforts to boost education and economic growth.

- + **Traditional diplomacy cannot cope with internationalized civil wars.** Negotiating an end to a war is never easy, but it becomes much harder in the case of civil wars, and especially so once third-party states intervene, since their interests must be factored into any peace deal. Moreover, intervening states, and any parties they support on the ground, pay lower costs, not only increasing their capacity to continue the conflict but also decreasing their incentives to pursue peace ([Cunningham, David E.](#)). Agreements therefore are harder to reach and less likely to survive. It is no coincidence that the rise of internationalized civil conflicts has coincided with longer wars. According to David Armitage’s book *Civil Wars*, intrastate wars now often last up to four times longer than interstate war. Just 21 peace agreements were signed or declared in 2020, the lowest at any point since the end of the Cold War, and the number of peace agreements (excluding localized agreements) has been falling each year since 2014.

Also, many “peace deals” are no such thing. Of the 610 peace agreements signed in the decade 2011-2020, 412 (68%) were in Watchlist countries, including 99 in Syria, 49 in South Sudan and Central African Republic, 48 in Yemen and 36 in Myanmar—all countries which still see high levels of conflict. In many cases, the conflicts have grown more complex as traditional diplomacy has failed, as illustrated by the proliferation of armed groups in Yemen, or the growing intervention of third-party states in Syria.

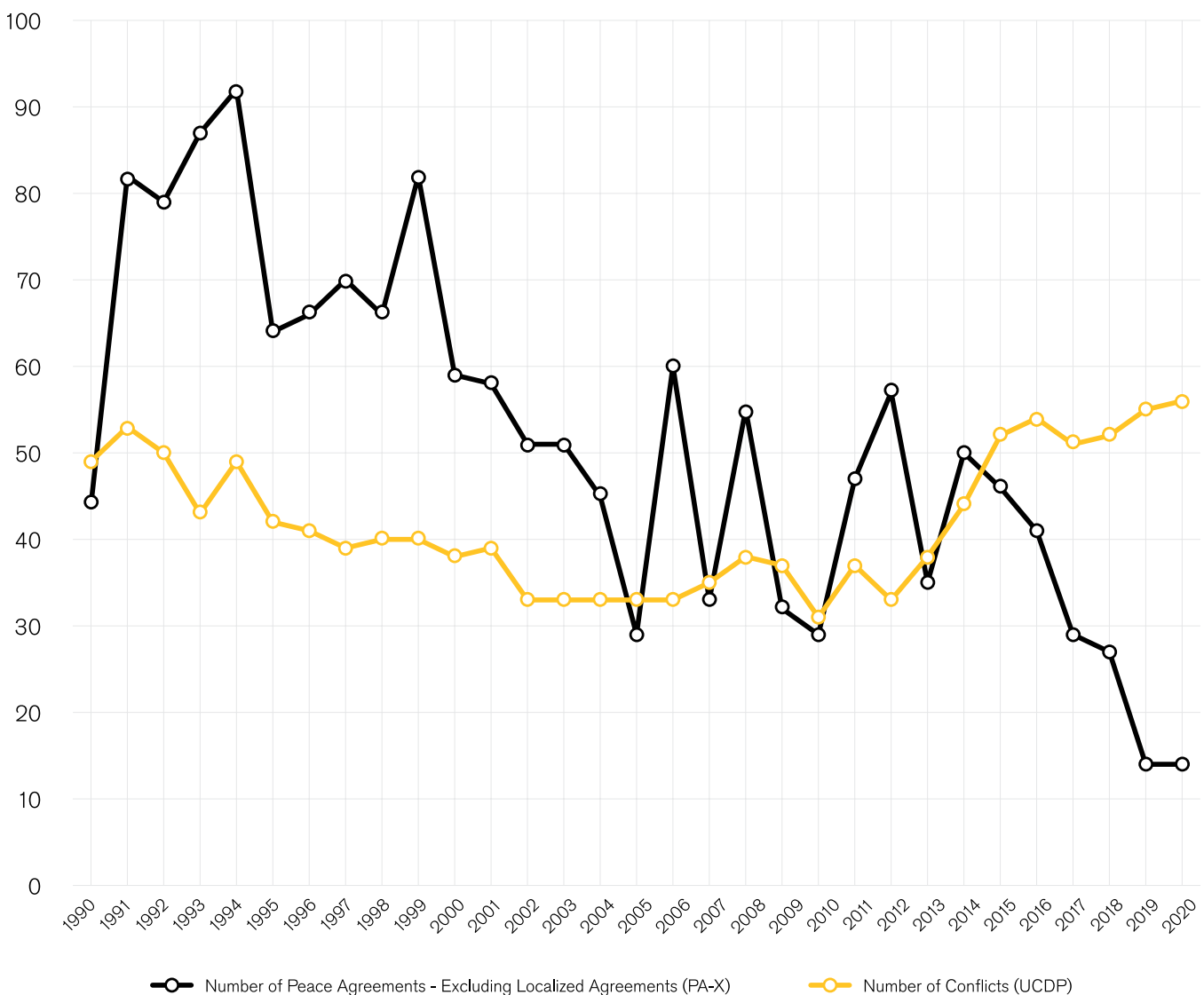
- + **The length of internationalized civil wars and proliferation of actors lead to war without law.** The IRC’s experience in Watchlist countries underlines that, as civil conflicts are internationalized, abuses become more likely. War without law has multiple causes. The line between civilian and armed groups may be less clear, or at least parties to conflicts may be more willing to blur that line. The growing length of internationalized civil wars also means that armed groups form and splinter, leading to a proliferation of actors and a security vacuum that criminals can exploit. The proliferation of actors makes it hard to identify who is engaged in a conflict, let alone who is responsible for specific acts. Moreover, the applicability of international humanitarian law is not always clear in situations involving non-state armed groups ([ICRC](#)), who are often not the focus of existing treaties ([DCAF & Geneva Call](#)).



State failure to provide security can also lead to the establishment of local militias and self-defense groups often implicated in abuses. In the central Sahel states of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger (all on Watchlist 2022), militias have become a leading cause of civilian harm. Civilian deaths linked to militias increased by 8,500% in just four years (from 2015 to 2019), with a 26,800% rise in Burkina Faso. Government and armed group attacks intentionally targeting civilians killed 83,000 people in the decade 2011-2020 (83.5% in Watchlist countries), over 20% more than in the preceding 10 years (UCDP).

Finally, states intervening in other countries' civil wars—and the local forces they support—are not as accountable to affected communities. Instead, they report to commanders who are often physically and emotionally far removed from the battlefield. As a result, fighters on the ground—and pilots in the air, or remotely operating armed drones—do not have the same incentives or ability as individuals closer to affected communities to distinguish civilians from legitimate military targets.

### CONFLICTS PROLIFERATE AS PEACE AGREEMENTS FALL



## CHANGING SHAPE OF GEOPOLITICS

In parallel with the changing nature of armed conflict has come a fundamental shift in global politics. The “unipolar” world that came into effect with the end of the Cold War, with the U.S. as the lone superpower, has given way to a multipolar, truly multidimensional world. This shift presented a unique opportunity to establish new ways of collaborating to prevent and resolve humanitarian crises. Instead, global politics has fragmented in three key ways:

- + **Mid-level powers that want to assert themselves militarily are increasingly free to do so.** The U.S. is (or recently has been) a key party to some of the conflicts in Watchlist countries, not least Afghanistan at the top of the list, but it is certainly not the foreign state with greatest involvement across many other Watchlist countries, which are seeing interventions by a diverse set of foreign states and actors. This shift is consequently a contributor to the first change: the rise of internationalized civil conflicts.
  - + **States increasingly try to disrupt the international system, which they see as a threat to their interests.** This trend is most evident at the U.N. Security Council. The Council's five permanent members (P5) are increasingly willing to deploy their vetoes to prevent action on conflicts where they have an interest. In the 1990s, the veto was used just nine times; this rose to 14 in the 2000s and 22 times in the 2010s. Russia and China have consistently used their vetoes to prevent discussion of Syria, and in 2019 they also vetoed a resolution about Venezuela, both countries on Watchlist 2022. Meanwhile, the U.S. consistently blocks Council discussion of the situation in Palestine, which was on the IRC's Watchlist 2021. Rather than resolving the world's worst crises, the Council is at best a bystander and at worst complicit in their perpetuation.
- Undermining international diplomacy and bodies is not unique to the Security Council. In October 2021, members of the U.N. Human Rights Council voted against renewing the mandate of the U.N. Group of Eminent Experts in Yemen, the only independent and impartial mechanism operating in the country, removing the only real mechanism for ensuring accountability for abuses. In trade, protectionism is rising while growing U.S.–China rivalry has triggered calls by U.S. lawmakers to pull out of the World Trade Organization—the very body created to support smooth, predictable and free trade. The Trump administration withdrew from the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Global Compact on Migration, the U.N. Human Rights Council, and the World Health Organization, among others.
- + **Non-state actors have growing influence.** Across Watchlist countries, it is often non-state actors—some backed by states, others not—that play a central role in the conflicts that are driving humanitarian crises. But it is not just “traditional” armed opposition groups of the kind fighting in Yemen, Syria and Myanmar. In Haiti and Honduras, criminal gangs—some transnational—can often out-gun state security forces. In the Sahel states of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, we see the rise of both transnational jihadist groups and community “self-defense” militias. Similarly, private military contractors are influential actors in both the Central African Republic and Mozambique. This proliferation of armed actors contributes to the lawlessness of war discussed above, and it also presents fundamental questions for an international system designed to regulate relations between states.



## RETREAT FROM UNIVERSAL RIGHTS AS THE PENDULUM SWINGS BACK TO SOVEREIGNTY

The third driver of System Failure is a shift in worldview. On the one hand, there has been a cynical and deliberate assault on the rules-based system put in place after World War II, following a brief reassertion following the horrors of Rwanda and Srebrenica. The enforcement of universal rights proclaimed in the U.N. Charter is increasingly demonized as threatening the self-interest and freedom of states. At the same time, the very ideas of who deserves rights, who deserves help, and who deserves protection are all being questioned, in part driven by the growing gulf between needs and available assistance. States of all types—authoritarian and democratic, conflict-affected and peaceful, from the Global North and from the Global South—cite the concept of national sovereignty to chip away at both the substance and the universality of key protections that international human rights law (IHRL) and international humanitarian law (IHL) provide for civilians and humanitarian actors in conflict zones.

- + **Normalization of attacks on humanitarian action.** States are increasingly asserting their sovereignty to constrain, control and ultimately instrumentalize humanitarian access: the ability of crisis-affected communities to access humanitarian assistance and the ability of humanitarian actors to reach crisis-affected communities. Despite both IHL and IHRL protections, targeting and harassment of humanitarians is rising. 2021 saw significant deteriorations in humanitarian access in six Watchlist countries: Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria and Somalia (ACAPS). The number of countries with the highest level of access constraints (on par with Yemen or Syria) more than doubled in 2021 relative to late 2020. Additionally, 2020 saw more humanitarian personnel suffering serious attacks than ever before—484, of which 94% were local staff (AWSO). These restrictions on aid are increasingly seen as normal, and do not attract the international outrage as do other violations of international law.
- + **Collective responsibility to address humanitarian crisis is shirked.** U.N. agencies and NGOs come together each year to understand the scale of humanitarian needs and to plan how to respond. But donors are not just failing to keep up with growing needs; in many cases they are turning inward and contributing less. For example, the British government cited the impacts of COVID-19 on the U.K.'s economy to justify reneging on a 2015 commitment—enshrined in U.K. law—that 0.7% of gross national income be spent on foreign aid. As a result of these and other cuts by donors, funding levels are stagnant or falling. So far in 2021, just 47% of required humanitarian funding has been received—down from 50% in 2020 and 63% in 2019.

Wealthier countries are compounding the situation by turning their backs on refugees, too. UNHCR was able to resettle just 22,800 people in 2020, down 82% from nearly 127,000 in 2016. Over the same time period, the number of refugees under UNHCR's mandate increased by 25%, from 17 million to nearly 21 million. An estimated 1.5 million people are expected to be awaiting resettlement in 2022. The result is that countries hosting refugees—mostly ones of low or lower middle income—face a double squeeze, from their own populations and from the refugees dependent on them. For example, 90% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are living in extreme poverty.

- + **Blocking accountability for rights violations.** The most obvious manifestation of the assault on the rules-based system is the drive to prevent accountability for rights violations by weakening and rejecting the authority of the International Criminal Court (ICC). In 2020, the Trump administration went so far as to sanction ICC employees, claiming that an investigation into alleged abuses by U.S. troops in Afghanistan was infringing on U.S. national sovereignty. Several African countries have likewise accused the ICC of being biased against Africans and undermining their sovereignty.

# WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT SYSTEM FAILURE

The “System Failure” seen in Watchlist countries requires a dual response. There is pressing need for more—and more effective—humanitarian action that tackles the symptoms and better serves the victims of system failure. There is also a requirement to try to tackle the root of the problem. That is what we mean by “Total System Upgrade.” This will take years of dedicated work. Business as usual will not be enough. The IRC sets out here an agenda for immediate help for those in need.

## ADDRESSING THE SYMPTOMS OF SYSTEM FAILURE

**Redirect official development assistance (ODA) to target contexts hit hardest by System Failure. Donors should commit 50% of ODA to fragile and conflict-affected states.**

To date, significant ODA funding has flowed to more stable states, where reductions in poverty and development are boosted by their growing economies. Donors currently direct approximately a quarter of bilateral ODA to fragile and conflict-affected states.<sup>3</sup> Yet these are the contexts where states most lack the ability to meet basic needs or strengthen systems. These are also the places where the Sustainable Development Goals are most off track and where foreign direct investment and other financial flows remain limited. As such, strategic aid policy can have the greatest impact in these places, but it will require a wider set of economic and development support beyond humanitarian aid.

Committing half of bilateral ODA to fragile and conflict-affected states would direct as much as USD 25 billion per year to these contexts. Only by investing—meaningfully, creatively and effectively—in the places that drive the most global humanitarian need will there be a chance of reducing the scale of human suffering. These efforts should be bolstered by donors meeting the U.N. target to spend 0.7% of their gross national income (GNI) on ODA—up from the current level of 0.32% of combined GNI. If G7 countries alone met the 0.7% target, they would have nearly doubled annual ODA in 2020 by contributing an additional USD 155 billion.



Qolaji IDP camp is situated in the Somali region of Ethiopia. (ECHO)

<sup>3</sup> Analysis of [OECD](#) data of bilateral ODA in 2019 from member countries of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) to countries [classified](#) as fragile or conflict-affected by the World Bank.



**Combat global COVID-19 vaccine inequity by redistributing excess vaccines from wealthy countries, removing obstacles to states in the Global South manufacturing vaccines, and financing distribution in fragile and conflict-affected settings.**

The race between variants and vaccines is being lost in poorer parts of the world. Resetting the international response requires the urgent redistribution of excess vaccines to states that are being left behind. 74% of all vaccines have gone to high- and upper-middle income countries, while less than 0.8% have flowed to low-income countries. Donation commitments should be fulfilled quickly and contracts with COVAX, a worldwide initiative aimed at equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, prioritized since only 13% of doses contracted by COVAX and 7% by the African Union's Vaccine Acquisition Trust (AVAT) had been supplied by November 2021.

States in the Global South will be critical to launching an effective, truly global response. Greater and diversified production is essential as the world faces the risk of new variants and future booster shot requirements that may spur more vaccine nationalism by wealthy states. Late 2021 saw major pharmaceutical companies sign license agreements to expand global production of their COVID-19 treatment pills. A similar commitment is required for vaccines. This should include voluntary licensing, the sharing of technology and knowledge, and logistical support to scale up manufacturing in poorer countries. If global production is not significantly scaled up by voluntary action, then a World Trade Organization waiver of intellectual property protections for COVID-19 vaccines should be enacted.

Vaccine production alone is not enough to end the pandemic. Turning vaccines into vaccinations in fragile and conflict-affected states requires a concerted effort to expand distribution. Directing greater funding to frontline responders is essential in contexts where health systems and governmental reach are weak. Frontline responders can bridge the gap and access hard-to-reach populations. Otherwise, a continued failure to achieve vaccination globally could leave the world vulnerable to dangerous new variants that are resistant to current vaccines and could jeopardize vaccination progress to date.

**Bring crisis settings into the fight against climate change by increasing the proportion of financing directed to them and dedicating half of the annual USD 100 billion commitment to developing countries for adaptation needs.**

Populations in fragile and conflict-affected states are bearing the brunt of the climate crisis with limited support from the states that have contributed the most to global emissions. All signs indicate that donors missed their 2009 U.N. Climate Change Conference target to provide USD 100 billion per year in climate financing to developing countries by 2020. In sharp contrast, wealthy states quickly mobilized USD 11 trillion for their own COVID-19 recovery packages within the first six months of the pandemic—more than 100 times the amount required to meet their climate commitment. The severity of the deterioration in Watchlist countries, exacerbated by climate change, should spur greater climate funding for these crisis settings.

These countries also require investments tailored to the challenges they face. For fragile and conflict-affected states in particular, climate change is not a future challenge to prepare for, but rather their current reality. Yet even the states hit hardest by climate change today still receive disproportionate funding for mitigation efforts. Only 40% of climate funding for the least developed countries went towards adaptation; at least 50% of the annual USD 100 billion commitment for climate financing should be devoted to adaptation to ensure these populations are not left behind. A truly global response should both support those already suffering from the effects of climate change today and commit to mitigate the future effects for all.

**Commit to a “New Deal for Those Forcibly Displaced” by resettling 400,000 refugees in 2022 and supporting debt relief for states on the frontlines of the world’s refugee crisis.**

Rising levels of displacement have been met by a race to the bottom in resettlement, closed borders, detention and forced returns of asylum seekers to unsafe situations. Reversing this trajectory should start with a new deal for refugees, committing to resettle 400,000 displaced people in 2022. The U.S. has raised its resettlement ceiling to 125,000 refugees and welcomed an additional 70,000 Afghans, a de facto commitment of nearly 200,000. The rest of the world should meet this ambition by pledging to collectively resettle an additional 200,000 people in 2022. Resettlement is both a life-changing intervention for the most vulnerable and a symbolic show of solidarity with the countries hosting the

majority of refugees.

The protracted nature of displacement today also merits a new deal with refugee-hosting states, who are providing a global public good. Around 85% of refugees are hosted in developing countries. These states are among those least equipped to fulfill their responsibilities toward their citizens, much less support large refugee populations. Yet many of them are more likely to focus on repaying debt rather than making investments in health, education and other vital services. In the year before the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of major refugee-hosting states were among 64 developing countries that spent more on debt payments than on health services. International financial institutions and major donors should respond to the generosity shown by refugee hosts by committing to more ambitious aid and beyond-aid solutions, including greater debt relief measures to states willing to host refugees and adopt inclusive refugee policies.

## **TACKLING THE DRIVERS OF SYSTEM FAILURE**

The measures outlined above would help. But the System Failure in Watchlist countries makes for clear priorities that require political will, steely resolve and united action that goes well beyond the treatment of symptoms. The agenda for reform needs to be wide-ranging. The recommendations below are indicative of what is necessary to arrest the global trend towards System Failure. These recommendations are not a cure-all, even if they were all implemented. However, each would strike a blow against the rise in impunity.

### **Support the French proposal to suspend the veto in the U.N. Security Council in cases of mass atrocities in order to overcome the Council's paralysis around some of the world's most severe conflicts.**

The Council's credibility and international standing in humanitarian crises has been compromised by its failure to act on the most egregious violations of international humanitarian law and abuses of civilians. In response, over 100 member states have already endorsed the proposal put forward by France, with the support of Mexico, for the five permanent members of the Council to voluntarily refrain from using their veto power in cases of mass atrocities.

The Council's permanent members should commit to this proposal and agree to a clear system to trigger cases of veto suspension. The determination of mass atrocities should be set by a new standing, independent panel in order to minimize the risk of politicization or disagreement over the applicability of veto suspension. A first order of business for this panel should be defining "mass atrocities." Both the French proposal and the U.N. Framework of Analysis for the Prevention of Atrocity Crimes have defined atrocities as including genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Limiting the veto in these situations would be a critical first step to ease gridlock and start to depoliticize Council action on some of the worst humanitarian crises and conflicts.

### **Establish an Organization for the Protection of Humanitarian Access to bring new status and force to exposing the strangulation and weaponization of humanitarian aid.**

Humanitarian access has for too long been treated as an optional extra, rather than an obligation under international humanitarian law. The denial of aid and the collective punishment of communities has become a weapon of choice in modern conflicts as the gridlocked Security Council has sat idly by. Public and unequivocal documentation of the current state of humanitarian access is the first step toward accountability and improved access.

Those in the crosshairs—NGOs and even the U.N. system—cannot take on these threats alone given the risks to their aid operations in difficult operating environments and to the safety of their staff. The establishment of an independent organization could help guard lifesaving humanitarian work from the politics of member states, including those perpetrating access constraints. Such an organization could take on fact-finding missions and systematic reporting on barriers imposed around the world, establishing an independent assessment of the realities on the ground. In cases of particular large-scale or severe harm, this organization should report to the U.N. Security Council and the U.N. General Assembly.

### **Build commitment to international humanitarian law (IHL) into global military partnerships.**

Addressing System Failure requires more than dealing with the aftermath of violence. It requires confronting the nature of conflict itself to limit civilian harm. The U.S. talks about ending endless wars; we need an end to "lawless wars." The rise of internationalized civil conflicts has often seen foreign countries intervening by, with and through local security



partners rather than directly. These partnerships have often diffused responsibility and lessened accountability for civilian harm. Instead, security partnerships should be leveraged to improve the understanding of and adherence to IHL by local security forces (state and non-state) to minimize civilian harm that drives displacement and humanitarian need.

A number of countries have made strides to condition security partnerships and arms transfers on human rights violations. This includes the “Leahy Laws” in the U.S. which restrict U.S. government funding for foreign security forces implicated in gross violations of human rights. Now is the time to do the same for international humanitarian law. Conditionality for security assistance tied to adherence to IHL could incentivize greater prioritization of civilians and civilian infrastructure like health facilities and schools. Adopting such a policy would send a powerful signal that IHL is not just an issue relegated to humanitarians and the donor arms of governments, but a matter of strategic importance to the military and diplomatic branches of governments. Realizing that ambition also requires reinvigorated diplomatic efforts that draw on this framework to induce behavior changes in militaries around the world.

**Use the legal principle of universal jurisdiction to prosecute those committing egregious abuses and violations of international humanitarian law as a blow against impunity and a warning to would-be violators of humanitarian law.**

Many member states have spoken up against perpetrators of mass atrocities, even as the international system has failed to follow through with meaningful accountability. Now is the time for those states to follow through with bilateral action to fill the gaps in accountability caused by the swing to sovereignty and the limitations of international courts. There have been laudable examples, including cases in Germany on war crimes committed in Syria. But these efforts have been limited and have lacked the coordination necessary to attract global attention and create significant reputational and financial costs to perpetrators.

A coalition of countries should publicly commit to undertake this work and expand the scale and reach of this accountability to both substantive and symbolic effect. States should strengthen these efforts by establishing universal jurisdiction for war crimes in their national legislation to ease prosecutions; by standing up and resourcing investigation units dedicated to IHL universal jurisdiction cases within justice and interior ministries; and by linking these accountability efforts to other tools at their disposal, including their control of financial assets. By systematizing and coordinating their efforts, states could send a powerful message against impunity.

**Combat the fueling of hate and division by pressing social media companies to prioritize conflict-affected settings where tensions online risk spilling over into real-world crisis dynamics.**

As social media has become a dominant platform for information sharing, there has been growing recognition of the ways it has driven or exacerbated misinformation, hate speech and other harm. But this focus has been disproportionately centered on western and wealthier countries. For instance, while 90% of Facebook users are outside of the U.S. and Canada, nearly 90% of the time spent identifying and removing misinformation in 2020 focused on the U.S. Yet in fragile and conflict-affected states, social media has the potential to act as an accelerant to conflict by colliding with pre-existing crises, communal and ethnic divisions, and limited information flows.

Social media companies should urgently scale up resourcing dedicated to conflict-affected settings to avert the worst outcomes. Initiatives should include staffing with expertise on local dynamics and more diversified language abilities; investments to efforts online and offline to combat misinformation; and partnerships with local actors and others on the ground to contextualize information and identify high-risk periods when social media may be weaponized to drive civilian harm.



## WATCHLIST COUNTRY PROFILES

The following pages contain profiles of all the countries on the 2022 Watchlist. They are divided into a ranked Top 10 and an unranked second half. Each profile describes both the current situation in the country and key risks in 2022. The profiles also feature a quantitative risk scorecard which illustrates both the likelihood of a human-driven or natural shock occurring and the likely impact that any shock would have, given the existing pressures on the population and constraints on the country's ability to respond.

All scores are based on a scale from 1 to 10. Please note that these scores only represent the quantitative aspects of the Watchlist's mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology. Some countries may therefore be ranked higher or lower than their scores alone might suggest. Read more about Watchlist methodology in the Annex.

### LIKELIHOOD OF A SHOCK

**Human threat:** The likelihood of the country experiencing disruptive human-driven events such as political instability, armed conflict and/or economic collapse.

**Natural threat:** The likelihood of the country experiencing natural events such as flooding or storms.

### IMPACT OF A SHOCK

**Constraints on country response:** Whether a country has the governance structures and infrastructure to respond to new shocks.

**Existing pressures on population:** The extent of factors like poverty that already exist before a shock occurs.





# AFGHANISTAN

## THE CRISIS AFTER THE CONFLICT —

### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **10**



NATURAL THREAT: **7**



### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **9**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **7**



RANKING:

**01**

POPULATION:

**41.7 million**

**24.4 million** people  
in need of humanitarian aid

**97%** of the population at  
risk of sinking into poverty  
in 2022

**2.6 million** Afghans  
displaced across borders

**22.8 million** people  
facing crisis (IPC 3) or  
worse levels of food  
insecurity in 2022

**170<sup>TH</sup>** of 170 countries  
for women's equality

ABOVE: Fatima was able to purchase a bag of grain with IRC cash assistance.

**Afghanistan rises to the top of Watchlist as the population increasingly cannot meet basic needs and the economy and public services collapse, despite the end of major conflict.**

In August 2021, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA, commonly known as the Taliban) took control of Afghanistan. This shift in power followed a major escalation in conflict between the IEA and Government of Afghanistan over the course of 2021 and a U.S.-IEA deal that saw American forces depart the country rapidly. The IEA's control of the country led international donors to immediately suspend most nonhumanitarian funding and freeze billions of dollars' worth of assets. Without this funding, most health clinics have closed and the economy has spiraled downward (risking near-universal poverty) as the country confronts an ongoing drought, hunger crisis and possible fourth wave of COVID-19. Four decades of crisis have weakened the country's ability to cope with new shocks. Afghans may increasingly resort to leaving the country if they cannot meet their needs inside Afghanistan.

“The IRC is witnessing an unprecedented economic crisis in Afghanistan that is harming the most vulnerable Afghans more than anyone. The international community has turned its back on us. The healthcare system is on the brink of collapse; most Afghans can't afford to feed themselves or their families, and, with millions marching towards famine, I am desperately concerned for the people of my country.”



Awesta\*  
Emergency Support Officer  
International Rescue Committee

\*Pseudonym, name has been changed.



# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**The ongoing collapse of the economy could further deepen the humanitarian crisis.** Donors' halt in funding and freezing of Central Bank assets have created a major financial crisis for Afghanistan. A cash shortage means Afghans are running out of money while prices of basic items—from food to medicine—are skyrocketing. Afghanistan could see near universal poverty by mid-2022, with 97% of Afghans impoverished ([UNDP](#)). Unaddressed, this economic crisis will drive up humanitarian needs, from food insecurity and malnutrition to health crises. Humanitarian operations are not spared from the economic crisis; cash is needed to pay staff and suppliers, purchase items and provide cash programs for the most vulnerable.

**Afghanistan is nearing the breakdown of virtually the entire health sector and other basic services, jeopardizing the well-being of millions of Afghans.** For the past two decades, Afghanistan has been highly dependent on foreign funding to pay civil servants like health care workers and teachers and operate essential public services. The previous government had relied on foreign funds for around 75% of its public spending. In particular, around 30 million Afghans depended on health services through a World Bank-managed program. Now, over 90% of the country's health clinics are expected to shut down, depriving millions of basic care, threatening all aspects of the COVID-19 response and creating a major risk of disease outbreaks, malnutrition and preventable deaths.

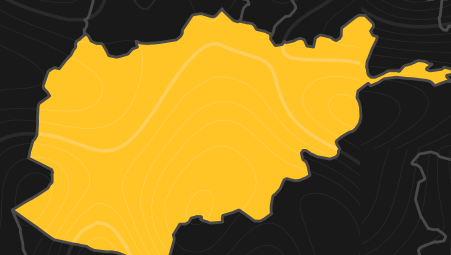
**An unprecedented hunger crisis is emerging in the wake of the economic collapse and ongoing drought.** By late 2021, nearly half of Afghans were experiencing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity—the highest level ever recorded in Afghanistan and a 37% rise compared to six months earlier ([IPC Info](#)). Throughout early 2022, 55% of Afghans will face acute food insecurity, including nearly 9 million people at emergency levels—one step before famine conditions. Food insecurity is likely to deepen in 2022 as the country is facing shortages of food, rapidly rising food prices and an ongoing drought. Hunger may drive further displacement, as evidenced by [IRC assessments](#) in five provinces in mid-2021 that identified lack of food and livelihoods as the top reasons for population movements.

**A shadow crisis for Afghan women and girls is looming.** Women and girls are now at higher risk of gender-based violence, child marriage, and exploitation and abuse as resources become scarce and needs go unmet. The collapse of the health system could unravel gains made in areas like maternal health. These risks will be magnified by any gender-specific restrictions—on women's ability to work and ensure self-sufficiency or girls' ability to receive an education. Any national or localized constraints on female aid workers would jeopardize the humanitarian response, as many women would be unwilling—or not allowed—to access services from male staff.

**Despite an end to nationwide conflict in 2021, Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) could drive greater violence and civilian harm.** IS-K has sought to expand its operations in the aftermath of the IEA taking power. The group presents a significant security threat and could seek to take advantage of the shift in power and numerous crises in the country to drive greater insecurity. IS-K intensified its attacks soon after IEA took control. It remains unclear how well the new government will be able to address these kinds of security threats and mitigate the harm to Afghan civilians.

## THE IRC IN AFGHANISTAN

The IRC has been working in Afghanistan since 1988, providing aid to Afghans impacted by conflict and disaster. We work with thousands of villages across nine provinces and provide education, protection, water and sanitation and economic recovery programs. The IRC is responding to COVID-19 and other health needs by supporting over 100 health facilities, installing hand-washing stations at communal gathering points, and providing information and training sessions about COVID-19. In recent years, the IRC has become a leader in women's protection and empowerment in Afghanistan. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Afghanistan response.





## ETHIOPIA

### A CASE STUDY IN CLIMATE AND CONFLICT

#### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **7**



NATURAL THREAT: **5**



#### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **8**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **7**



RANKING:

**02**

POPULATION:

**117.9 million**

**25.9 million** people  
in need of humanitarian aid

**4.2 million** people  
internally displaced at the  
end of 2021

**1.2%** of population  
fully vaccinated against  
COVID-19

**5/5** score for severity of  
access constraints

#### Ethiopia rises toward the top of Watchlist as scientists warn of a risk of drought due to La Niña amid continued conflict.

Ethiopia rose into the Watchlist Top 5 last year as conflict escalated in the northern Tigray region. A year later, the risk of drought due to the “La Niña” effect, combined with continuing conflict in Tigray and the neighboring Amhara and Afar regions, are pushing the country even further up the list. Conflict broke out between the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in November 2020. Since then, there have been several rounds of fighting. In June 2021 the federal government declared a “unilateral ceasefire,” but this has not brought an end to the conflict. Instead, fighting continues to affect parts of Tigray, Amhara and Afar. The U.S. has claimed that 900,000 people are facing famine conditions in Tigray, although these figures cannot be verified due to restrictions on humanitarian access. What can be said with more certainty is that Ethiopia is highly exposed to the impacts of climate change, which is causing increasingly frequent and severe drought and flooding that are likely to drive up needs for millions across the country.

“Conflict in northern Ethiopia has led over 2 million people to be displaced and left millions in need of humanitarian assistance. Coupled with weather shocks, COVID-19, no end in sight for the conflict and insufficient humanitarian access, millions of people will fall into further need if the crisis continues unabated.”



Madiha Raza  
Senior Global Communications Officer for Africa and Yemen  
International Rescue Committee

ABOVE: Halima raises awareness of the rights of women and girls in Helowyn camp in Ethiopia.



# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**The “La Niña” effect could bring drought in 2022 in a country where climate change is already increasing the frequency of drought and flooding.** Scientists have warned that the March-to-May rainy season is likely to be poor in 2022, due to the weather phenomenon known as “La Niña.” The event compounds risk in a country where IRC teams report that climate change is causing more frequent flooding and drought. Flooding affected 617,000 people in mid-2021 and caused large-scale losses of livestock and crops. Droughts can have a similarly serious impact, driving food insecurity and pushing people to urban areas for work.

**Low vaccine coverage means Ethiopia will be highly vulnerable to future waves of COVID-19.** In mid-2021 the Ministry of Health reported a third wave of transmission in the country, with over 6,700 confirmed deaths since the start of the pandemic at time of writing. Early in the pandemic, efforts to contain the virus had a major impact in driving up need, as people were unable to go to work. More recently, the World Bank has said that Ethiopia's economy is starting to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. However, just 1.2% of the population has been fully vaccinated, suggesting this recovery could falter if there are subsequent waves of transmission in the country.

**Conflict will continue to drive needs, particularly in northern Ethiopia.** There are now 5.5 million people in northern Ethiopia facing acute food insecurity and 63,000 people have sought refuge in Sudan. The U.N. has also said that 450,000 people have been displaced in Amhara and Afar as the conflict spreads. Until there is peace in northern Ethiopia, needs will continue to grow. Moreover, conflict affects other regions like Oromia—where OCHA has warned there are over 100,000 people displaced by conflict. Tensions with Sudan over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the continued presence of Ethiopian communities in Sudan's border area of al-Fashaqa could spark border tensions as well.

**The humanitarian response is struggling to clarify the scale of need, let alone respond at scale in northern Ethiopia.** The Ethiopian Ministry of Peace has described plans to deliver aid in Tigray as “impeded,” citing shortages of trucks to carry supplies, while the U.N. considers much of northern Ethiopia as “hard to reach” or “partially accessible.” Regardless of the causes of these constraints, their impacts are clear. In October 2021, the U.N. said five of the seven main partner agencies working in Tigray had temporarily been forced to suspend food deliveries due to shortages of fuel. Access constraints also mean that the humanitarian community does not have clarity about the precise food insecurity situation in northern Ethiopia, although the U.S. has said it believes 900,000 people are living in famine conditions.

**Ethiopia already hosts over 800,000 refugees and more could arrive depending on events in neighboring countries,** many of which are on Watchlist 2022. The largest refugee populations are from South Sudan (380,000), Somalia (217,000), Eritrea (155,000), Sudan (47,000) and Yemen (2,500)—all of which (apart from Eritrea) are on Watchlist 2022, indicating a risk of renewed population movements into Ethiopia over the coming year.

## THE IRC IN ETHIOPIA

Since 2000, the IRC has provided a wide range of assistance for refugees living in camps and for Ethiopian communities throughout the country that have been affected by drought, flooding, conflict and COVID-19. In strong partnership with civil society, we distribute cash and basic emergency supplies, including for women and girls, and build and maintain safe water supply systems and sanitation facilities. The IRC also supports government partners and community workers in primary health care clinics, constructs classrooms and trains teachers, and provides livelihoods-related training and job opportunities to youth and at-risk households. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Ethiopia response.





## YEMEN

### CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF PROTRACTED CONFLICT —

#### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **10**



NATURAL THREAT: **5**



#### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **9**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **8**



RANKING:

**03**

POPULATION:

**30.5 million**

**20.7 million** people  
in need of humanitarian aid

**15.6 million** people  
living in extreme poverty

**16.1 million** people  
facing crisis (IPC 3) or  
worse levels of food  
insecurity in 2022

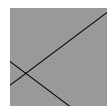
**1.2%** of population  
fully vaccinated against  
COVID-19

**168<sup>TH</sup>** of 170 countries  
for women's equality

#### Yemenis face an uncertain 2022 as the conflict-driven economic collapse deepens despite a relative lull in fighting.

Yemen drops from the top of the IRC's Watchlist for the first time in three years not because of an improvement in the humanitarian situation but because crises in other countries are worsening even more rapidly. In 2021, armed conflict escalated in Marib governorate and spread to new areas like al-Bayda and Shabwah, while tensions also escalated between the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) and the Southern Transitional Council (STC). Yemen is a case study of the cumulative impact of protracted conflict, which has progressively destroyed livelihoods and critical systems people cannot live without over the six years since the Saudi and Emirati-led Coalition (SELC) intervened to support the IRG against Ansar Allah (AA, commonly known as the Houthis). With humanitarian access heavily restricted in many areas, NGOs' ability to meet Yemenis' needs is constrained.

"Yemen is still one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. More than half of Yemen's population is unable to access food for survival, and the rate of poverty and hunger is increasing every day. The world must not forget Yemen is facing a critical humanitarian crisis due to seven years of war. Despite seven years of destruction, ordinary Yemenis are still hoping for peace."



Ebtihal Ghanem  
Economic Recovery and Development Manager  
International Rescue Committee

**ABOVE:** Aisha, 10, lives in Sahdah camp in southwest Yemen. Violence forced her and her eight family members to flee their home community.

# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**Conflict will persist in 2022 given the lack of diplomatic progress.** Localized ceasefires have not yet translated into a wider peace process. The 2018 Stockholm agreement ended the SELC-backed offensive toward the AA-controlled northern port city of Hodeidah, but it has not led to a wider agreement, and AA advanced in both Marib and al-Bayda governorates in 2021. Likewise, the 2019 Riyadh agreement between the STC and IRG ended major fighting in Aden, the IRG's capital, but significant tensions persist between the two and sometimes translate into fighting. Adding to instability throughout the south, protests driven by anger at the poor economic situation became increasingly violent in 2021. The AA-IRG and STC-IRG conflicts will continue and could trigger renewed major violence at any point as all sides seek to gain power via military operations given the lack of strong incentives to engage in a political process.

**Economic collapse and the destruction of health, education and other critical systems due to years of conflict will continue to push Yemenis deeper into need.** Needs are rising throughout Yemen, not just on the frontlines of conflict, underlining that the systemic impacts of the war are increasingly the core challenge in Yemen. In particular, 15.6 million people are now experiencing extreme poverty. Inflation is growing, particularly in southern Yemen, with 1 USD in December 2021 worth 1,670 Yemeni Rial in the south—a rise of 140% since the start of the year. But the economic crisis is not just a side effect of the conflict; parties regularly weaponize the economy, for example by competing for control of the Central Bank. Meanwhile, most doctors, teachers and other civil servants have not received reliable salaries for years, undermining critical public systems. Without salary subsidies paid by the IRC and other humanitarian actors, many of Yemen's existing public systems would collapse entirely. Moreover, 229 schools and 148 hospitals have been damaged by conflict or used for military purposes since 2015.

**Millions are and will continue to be food insecure, driven by the collapsing economy.** In the first half of 2021, 54% of the population faced crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity, including 47,000 at the worst (IPC 5) level. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the situation by disrupting supply chains and further reducing incomes. Food assistance is helping to avoid the crisis tipping over into famine, but persistent underfunding for the humanitarian response has led to repeated cuts in food rations. In 2021, the World Food Programme warned that it expected to reduce rations for 5 million Yemenis by the end of the year. At the same time, the cycle of crisis cannot be resolved until the conflict is addressed and Yemeni economic life is allowed to resume.

**Humanitarians' ability to address the needs of Yemeni people will continue to be limited by restrictions on humanitarian access, imposed by all sides to the conflict.** In the AA-controlled areas in the north, where around 70% of Yemenis live, the key concerns relate to bureaucratic impediments, such as months-long delays to receive permission to implement projects, demands for information about clients of projects, and more. In the south, the proliferation of actors and lack of central power has fed insecurity that regularly disrupts humanitarian activities. For example, 2021 saw multiple incidents where humanitarian vehicles were hijacked—including two IRC vehicles.

## THE IRC IN YEMEN

The IRC, which has worked in Yemen since 2012, is one of the largest nongovernmental health actors in the country. We support primary health facilities and mobile health teams, including in hard-to-reach areas. The IRC's programming provides general outpatient care, reproductive health care to pregnant women and new mothers, treatment for acute malnutrition, water and sanitation services, education for out-of-school children, and psychosocial and case management services for women and children. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Yemen response.





## NIGERIA

### GROWING INSECURITY ACROSS THE COUNTRY

#### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **7**



NATURAL THREAT: **5**



#### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **7**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **7**



RANKING:

**04**

POPULATION:

**211.4 million**

**8.3 million** people in need of humanitarian aid (plan covers northeast only)

**1 million** people living in inaccessible areas

**12.8 million** people facing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in 2022

**1.7%** of population fully vaccinated against COVID-19

**5/5** score for severity of access constraints

**Nigeria breaks into the Watchlist Top 5 as violence spreads across the regional power, driving a growing and multidimensional humanitarian crisis.**

More than 12 years of conflict and militant activity in northeast Nigeria has garnered global attention, but unrest and insecurity are spreading in other parts of the country too. Criminal activity and conflict in the northwest have sparked another growing humanitarian crisis, and separatist activity in the southeast has become increasingly violent. The various security crises in Nigeria are not separate issues but rather a manifestation of underlying tensions related to high rates of poverty, social marginalization, and the impacts of climate change that are playing out increasingly violently in a country whose population is projected to double to 400 million by 2050. The government's inability to address the underlying drivers of unrest threatens preparations for the 2023 elections as political tensions could add to instability.

“Escalation of violence in Nigeria, particularly in the northeast and northwest, has forced people to flee their homes; many of whom rely on agricultural to earn an income and feed their families and have not been able to cultivate their land. Combined with the economic impacts of COVID-19, many are facing severe food insecurity.”



Godiya Makama  
Senior Program Coordinator  
International Rescue Committee

ABOVE: Conflict-affected teenagers like Fatima learn coping techniques in Damaturu. (ECHO)



# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**Insecurity in the northeast shows no sign of slowing down.** Over a decade of conflict in the northeast between militant groups and the Nigerian military has led to about 350,000 deaths and has spilled over into neighboring Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Tensions between the two main armed groups, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-da'wa wal-Jihad (JAS), remain high, compounding instability. Nearly 2.2 million people have been internally displaced, and 4.4 million people were food insecure in the northeast in mid-2021 (of 12.8 million food insecure people across Nigeria) in a region also exposed to flooding and disease outbreaks like cholera. As conflict adds to forced displacement and deepens humanitarian need, insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic will exacerbate food insecurity.

**Restrictions on humanitarian access will further compound the situation for the 1 million people living in inaccessible areas of the northeast.** An estimated 1 million people live in areas effectively controlled by ISWAP or JAS. Limited humanitarian access in these areas—a consequence of both armed group attacks on humanitarians and government restrictions—means the humanitarian situation remains unclear. However, assessments of people who have recently left “inaccessible” areas indicate that over half of households struggle to have sufficient food and that health and sanitation services are restricted ([FMS](#)).

**A shadow humanitarian crisis is growing in the northwest region due to banditry and armed-group activity.** Violence in northwest and north-central Nigeria is growing and increasingly complex. It is driven by a range of factors, not least longstanding conflict between ethnic and cultural groups, tensions between nomadic pastoralists and farmers and banditry—including kidnapping and robbery along major highways. Militant groups are also seeking to exploit the insecurity to gain more of a presence. The growing conflict is driving up humanitarian and protection needs in the region—around 833,000 people are currently known to be displaced, more than double the 309,755 documented in 2019. Women and children are particularly affected, with education frequently disrupted by attacks on schools and instances of early/forced marriage, rape and sexual exploitation ([Amnesty International](#)).

**Unrest is growing in other regions, particularly in the southeast, straining the government's capacity to address multiple crises ahead of the 2023 election.** Calls for secession in the southeastern states are growing and increasingly leading to violence as factions of the separatist movement have carried out repeated attacks on police stations and electoral commissions offices. Government security forces are stretched thin, and tensions ahead of the 2023 election may add to the instability, as some local leaders seek to disrupt the polls or to use self-defense groups to mobilize support.

**The impacts of climate change are exacerbating local tensions as farmer-herder conflicts become more violent.** As Nigeria's population grows and annual rainfall across the country decreases ([World Bank](#)), which contributes to desertification and reduced availability of water resources, competition for arable land and pasture will continue to increase. Desertification has also forced nomadic herders to change their migration patterns, resulting in conflict over increased trespass on farmlands, particularly in the country's Middle Belt. Historically, community-level mediation was able to limit such conflict, but it has failed to do so as unrest spreads and climate pressures have grown.

## THE IRC IN NIGERIA

The IRC started working in Nigeria in response to severe flooding in 2012. Since then, the IRC has expanded its operations across northeast Nigeria's Borno, Yobe and Adamawa (BAY) states, transitioning from emergency to humanitarian response in 2014. Currently, we conduct integrated multisectoral programming in health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation, and protection for women, men, girls and boys who are internally displaced and in host communities. Over the next three years, IRC Nigeria plans to scale up its humanitarian assistance to meet the needs of more people in both the northeast and northwest. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Nigeria response.





## SOUTH SUDAN

### REGIONAL TENSIONS RAISE RISKS

#### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **6**



NATURAL THREAT: **4**



#### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **10**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **10**



RANKING:

**05**

POPULATION:

**11.4 million**

**8.4 million** people in need of humanitarian aid

**7.2 million** people facing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in 2022

**1.2%** of population fully vaccinated against COVID-19

**165<sup>TH</sup>** of 170 countries for women's equality

**South Sudan remains in the Watchlist Top 10 as conflict continues, natural shocks become more frequent, and crises proliferate in the wider region.**

South Sudan marked a decade of independence in 2021, but the country has been affected by conflict throughout that entire period. A 2018 peace deal is broadly holding between President Salva Kiir's Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement–In Opposition (SPLM-IO), led by his Vice President Riek Machar. However, violence persists in many areas, particularly involving groups that are not party to the 2018 agreement. While conflict remains far lower than the peak in 2013–2014, the World Food Programme (WFP) has warned that food insecurity is currently at its worst levels since independence, illustrating that the combined impact of natural shocks, COVID-19 and long-term damage to South Sudan's economy are driving needs.

“In South Sudan, people displaced due to conflict, drought and flooding are not able to access basic services, and many are going hungry and dying as a result of destruction of crops and cattle which they rely on to survive. COVID-19 has meant people have lost loved ones, schools have been closed and people have lost their livelihoods.”



Evalyn Obbu  
Economic Recovery and Development Officer  
International Rescue Committee

**ABOVE:** Abuk brought her daughter, Nyirou, 4, to an IRC-supported clinic where she was treated for illness and malnourishment after their home flooded.



# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**Conflict will continue to create need and erode coping capacity throughout the country.** Throughout 2021, there were outbreaks of violence in Warrap, Jonglei and Central Equatoria, displacing tens of thousands of people. But the long-term impacts of conflict in destroying and preventing investment in infrastructure are equally important. For example, international organizations deliver over 80% of health care in South Sudan. Gaps in coverage mean that outbreaks of easily preventable diseases like measles are common. 1.7 million South Sudanese have been displaced within the country, and 2.3 million have fled to neighboring countries.

**Hunger is growing, driven by conflict, natural shocks—particularly flooding—and the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.** 7.2 million people—over 60% of the population—were projected to face crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in 2021, with over 100,000 facing catastrophe (IPC 5) levels. While limited testing means the direct health impacts of COVID-19 are unclear, the pandemic has added to food insecurity by suppressing both economic growth and trade flows, while also constraining humanitarian action (FEWS NET). Furthermore, funding shortages forced WFP to cut rations for over 100,000 displaced people in South Sudan in late 2021.

**Regional tensions put the 2018 peace deal at risk, which would drive further conflict.** The “Revitalized Peace Agreement” signed by the main parties to South Sudan’s civil war in 2018 has remained in effect largely due to the support and continued engagement of regional powers, particularly Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda. However, Ethiopia and Sudan are both facing major challenges (as evidenced by their ranking in the Watchlist Top 10), while Uganda’s involvement in the 2013-2014 fighting in South Sudan means it is no longer seen as a neutral actor. Without regional mediation, there will be a greater risk of the peace agreement collapsing.

**Any reduction in South Sudan’s ability to export oil via Sudan will rapidly reverse economic gains made in recent years.** South Sudan’s oil sector is its primary driver of growth, but all oil currently must be exported via Sudan (ranked tenth on the Watchlist) to terminals on the Red Sea. The political uncertainty in Sudan thus creates new uncertainty for South Sudan’s economy

**South Sudan saw the worst flooding in 60 years in late 2021 and will remain highly vulnerable to natural shocks.** Nearly 800,000 people were affected by flooding between May and November 2021, which left communities needing food, water, shelter and hygiene, as well as health and protection services. IRC teams on the ground reported that climate change contributed to particularly intense rains which then led to flooding and, in turn, a major outbreak of Hepatitis E. Over two-thirds of flood-affected counties are seeing high levels of food insecurity.

**The growing economic crisis is increasing resentment of humanitarians, contributing to “very high” constraints on humanitarian access.** In addition to more economic grievances—particularly demands for employment and resentment at the perceived wealth of aid workers, both of which have grown as the economic impacts of the pandemic have deepened—key access issues include the ongoing conflict and the efforts by parties to the conflict to interfere in humanitarian assistance (ACAPS).

## THE IRC IN SOUTH SUDAN

The IRC is one of the largest aid providers in South Sudan, operating there for over 30 years. We deliver emergency assistance and support at-risk populations in hard-to-reach areas. Our health response includes capacity-building in state clinics, training of local health workers, provision of sexual and reproductive health services, nutrition programs, and water and sanitation services. We provide support to children and survivors of sexual violence in addition to community-level engagement to promote peaceful coexistence. The IRC helps empower people, particularly the youth, by providing job and livelihoods training, increasing agricultural productivity, and encouraging adaptations given the reality of climate change and its impact on traditional livelihoods. [Learn more](#) about the IRC’s South Sudan response.







# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

## CONFLICT AND DISEASE COMPOUND CRISIS

### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **7**



NATURAL THREAT: **5**



### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **9**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **8**



RANKING:

**06**

POPULATION:

**92.4 million**

**27 million** people in  
need of humanitarian aid

**25.9 million** people  
facing crisis (IPC 3) or  
worse levels of food  
insecurity in 2022

**5.6 million** people  
internally displaced

**0.1%** of population  
fully vaccinated against  
COVID-19

**The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) features on the Watchlist Top 10 for the eighth year in a row as one of the world's most protracted and complex crises.**

The complex crisis in DRC is likely to deepen in 2022 given the significant security, political, economic and humanitarian challenges facing the country. Conflict persists in many areas but is especially volatile in the eastern provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. Eastern DRC is also seeing the latest of several Ebola outbreaks, further straining a weak health system dealing with COVID-19. Moreover, political tensions in Kinshasa could set the stage for violent clashes leading up to the 2023 general elections. Given these risks, ongoing food insecurity and displacement, and the spread of Ebola, COVID-19 and other diseases, funding gaps for the humanitarian response threaten to leave the needs of millions unmet and deepen the humanitarian crisis.

“With several emergencies unfolding in DRC including COVID-19, new outbreaks of Ebola, armed conflict as well as a volcanic eruption in Goma, which all lead to displacement, it is not surprising DRC is placed so high in the IRC's 2022 Watchlist. In response to this year's emergencies, IRC in DRC carried out programming through infection, prevention and control interventions, provision of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, protection services for women and children as well as cash support.”



Lievin Bangali  
Senior Health Coordinator  
International Rescue Committee

ABOVE: Women in North Kivu have banded together to grow crops, using the shared income to pay for their children's schooling.

# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**Persistent violence will prolong the humanitarian emergency in eastern DRC.** The eastern provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu are worst affected, where more than 100 armed groups operate. Key drivers of conflict include desire to control lucrative natural resources, particularly minerals, as well as intercommunal tensions over land and other matters. Moreover, in November 2021 government forces blamed an attack on two villages in North Kivu province on the M23 armed group, which launched a major military campaign in eastern DRC in 2012-2013. Details around this latest incident remain uncertain, but it illustrates the persistent risk of a major resurgence in fighting—particularly if regional powers decide to sponsor escalation, as Uganda and Rwanda did in 2012-2013, according to the U.N.

**Civilians are often the target in armed conflict.** UNHCR recorded 1,200 civilian deaths and 1,100 rapes in just North Kivu and Ituri, the two most-affected provinces, between January and October of 2021. As a result, 1.9 million people were displaced, bringing the total number of internally displaced persons to 5.6 million (third highest globally, behind only Colombia and Syria). Moreover, 94% of forcibly displaced people stay with host families and communities who may have insufficient resources to support them, increasing the risk of people returning home prematurely, where they may continue to face threats. UNHCR documented 25,000 human rights abuses in the first nine months of 2021 and, of the most serious abuses, 65% were directed at people who had returned to their homes.

**Lack of funding threatens efforts to address one of the largest food insecurity crises in the world.** 27 million people need humanitarian assistance, making the DRC the largest humanitarian crisis on earth in 2022. However, the humanitarian response in 2021 was just 37% funded, suggesting that humanitarian actors may struggle to meet growing needs. Persistent conflict, the spread of disease including COVID-19 and this underfunding have all contributed to a situation where 25.9 million people will experience crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in early 2022. This makes DRC the largest food insecurity crisis in the world, surpassing Yemen, according to WFP.

**The continued threat of Ebola in the region strains a health system recovering from previous outbreaks and facing COVID-19.** New cases of Ebola were confirmed in eastern DRC in February and October 2021. The combination of a fragile health system and persistent conflict complicates efforts to contain disease outbreaks, whether Ebola or COVID-19. In particular, mistrust of the government and security forces can translate into reluctance to seek medical treatment. Moreover, the weak health system means that the COVID-19 pandemic's impact in DRC is likely underreported. DRC also faces major challenges in its COVID-19 vaccine rollout, having vaccinated less than 1% of its population, while outbreaks of illnesses such as cholera, measles and malaria continue to present a major threat.

**Ongoing political tensions risk violence ahead of the 2023 general election.** A new government was formed in April 2021, ending the coalition between President Félix Tshisekedi and his predecessor, Joseph Kabila. However, political tensions are running high. The perception that Tshisekedi has given top positions at key institutions to loyalists has sparked demonstrations, some of which have turned violent. The risk of pre-electoral violence during 2022 will rise further if the government uses force to suppress protests.

## THE IRC IN DRC

The IRC has operated in DRC for over two decades (since 1996). We provide lifesaving health services, including reproductive health services, as well as epidemic control, water and sanitation, education, and support for survivors of violence. We work with communities on peacebuilding projects aimed at conflict reduction and economic recovery. In recent years, the IRC has launched emergency responses to contain Ebola, including the latest outbreak in eastern DRC. The IRC's response to COVID-19, Ebola and other health crises includes training health workers, rehabilitating hospitals and clinics, and providing essential medicine. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's DRC response.







## MYANMAR

### VIOLENT DEADLOCK LEAVES MILLIONS IN NEED

#### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **9**



NATURAL THREAT: **8**



#### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **7**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **6**



RANKING:

**07**

POPULATION:

**54.8 million**

**14.4 million** people  
in need of humanitarian aid

**60%** loss in value  
of Kyat currency since  
September 2021

**8,000** arrested, 1,100  
killed in crackdown

**5/5** score for severity of  
access constraints

**Myanmar returns to the IRC's Watchlist after the military seized power in February 2021, leading to unrest and conflict throughout the country.**

Escalating conflict in Myanmar since the military seized power has resulted in a violent deadlock between the military government and multiple opposition forces. While the government continues to use violent tactics to quell protests, anti-government groups have engaged in both peaceful protests and a campaign of assassinations and bombings. This vicious cycle of government repression and armed resistance is driving up needs, constraining humanitarian access and contributing to both the collapse of basic services and an economic crisis. Meanwhile, humanitarian actors face limited access and funding from international donors. Against this backdrop, climate-induced volatility puts Myanmar, which relies heavily on agriculture, at risk of economic hardship and food insecurity.

“Humanitarian needs caused by years of conflict were exacerbated by the widespread instability, renewed violence and displacement that followed the military seizing power on 1 February. The economic impacts of the military taking power and COVID-19 have been enormous; public services are failing, and more than 14 million people will need humanitarian assistance in 2022. Many people continue to face severe constraints in accessing services and support.”



Alan Moseley  
Myanmar Country Director  
International Rescue Committee

ABOVE: Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh is home to Rohingya refugees who have fled conflict and violence in Myanmar.



# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**Political tensions will drive continued conflict, increasing needs.** Conflict and civil unrest have spread throughout the country since the military took over the government, displacing nearly 285,000 people. Street protests and civil disobedience have disrupted major cities, leading to increased crackdowns by the government—over 8,000 people have been arrested and 1,100 killed (U.N.). As the military's rule continues to be strongly contested, the cycle of unrest and violence will persist, displacing additional people and exacerbating humanitarian needs. An estimated 14.4 million people—up from about 1 million prior to February 2021—need basic humanitarian assistance, and this number will rise if instability persists.

**The collapse of basic services like health care will compound risks for millions.** Following the takeover of the government, thousands of health care workers walked out in protest. Physicians for Human Rights reported almost 300 attacks and threats against health workers and facilities between February and October 2021, most carried out by the military. These developments have led to a near-complete collapse of the health sector, including disruptions to medical supply lines. Meanwhile, Myanmar has one of the lowest COVID-19 vaccination rates in Southeast Asia—currently 21% are fully vaccinated—leaving people (particularly those without access to health care, for example in conflict-affected areas) vulnerable to outbreaks.

**A free-falling economy plunges people further into poverty, exacerbating food insecurity for millions.** Myanmar is also experiencing a socioeconomic crisis worsened by COVID-19. The Kyat has lost more than 60% of its value since September 2021, driving up the cost of food, fuel and other essential goods. While the Central Bank has made progress in addressing the crisis, a significant reversal is unlikely, increasing the likelihood of high unemployment and spikes in poverty, particularly in agricultural areas and among garment factory workers in informal urban settlements. Agriculture contributes 38% of Myanmar's GDP, meaning any disruptions to food production and availability will increase the needs of the millions already facing food insecurity and poverty.

**The international backlash to the military taking power is deepening the economic crisis.** Myanmar finds itself increasingly isolated after the military took power. Myanmar's military leader was blocked from attending an October 2021 ASEAN summit over his failure to bring an end to conflict. The U.S. responded to the removal of the previous government by announcing new sanctions, while many foreign companies have said they will pull out of the country—moves that will further compound the economic crisis.

**Restrictions on humanitarian actors could put thousands more in need.** The humanitarian community is responding to the multidimensional crisis in Myanmar, but restrictions on both humanitarian actors and people in need are impeding access. ACAPS describes Myanmar as having extreme constraints on humanitarian access, reflecting the limitations on humanitarian actors' ability to travel to those most in need, as well as the collapse of public-service provision in conflict-affected areas.

## THE IRC IN MYANMAR

The IRC began work in Myanmar in 2008, providing humanitarian relief in response to Cyclone Nargis. Since then, the IRC has expanded its work to support communities affected by conflict and disaster and provides services directly and in partnership with local organizations and service providers. The IRC currently works in six states across the country to provide health care, protection, women's protection and empowerment, and water and sanitation, as well as shelter and emergency relief materials to newly displaced populations. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Myanmar response.



## SOMALIA

### HUMANITARIAN ACCESS WORSENS AS NEEDS RISE —

#### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **8**



NATURAL THREAT: **7**



#### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **9**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **9**



RANKING:

**08**

POPULATION:

**16.4 million**

**7.7 million** people in need of humanitarian aid

**3.5 million** people facing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in 2022

**2.9 million** people internally displaced

**3.4%** of population fully vaccinated against COVID-19

**Somalia has been on the Watchlist for nine consecutive years but has moved into the Top 10 due to escalating political tensions and the risk of both drought and renewed violence.**

Delays to the presidential election originally scheduled to take place in late 2020 have added to political tensions, leading to clashes with opposition forces as President Mohamed Abdullahi “Farmajo” Mohamed's term ended in early 2021. Divisions between the president and Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble have exacerbated the overall political polarization, as have the delayed presidential elections, which are now not likely to take place until the first half of 2022. Meanwhile, fighting continues between al-Shabab and government and international forces. Somalia also ranks among the top five internal displacement crises globally, with conflict and climate change displacing 2.9 million people. Drought conditions are expected to worsen during the next year as the U.N. says the number of people in need has grown from 5.9 million to 7.7 million.

“The number of people in need this year in Somalia has increased by 48% compared to last year due to conflict and natural disasters such as severe drought which have displaced thousands more people. If the international community fails to help manage the crisis in Somalia, more people will fall into further need.”



Abdurazak Hussein Abdulahi  
Emergency Preparedness and Response Coordinator  
International Rescue Committee

ABOVE: A mother brings her child to receive nutrition support at the IRC's health clinic in an IDP camp.



# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**Between political disputes, election delays and violent disruptions by armed groups, the security situation in Somalia will remain fragile.** Parliamentary and presidential election delays led to armed confrontations, with 207,000 Somalis displaced in April 2021 alone. Civilians have borne the brunt of this violence as clan militias, security forces and al-Shabab have all been accused of human rights violations ([HRW](#)). As elections are pushed deeper into 2022, there is a significant risk of additional disputes and armed confrontations that will cause more violence against civilians and displacement.

**Any rapid change in foreign military engagement could add to political tensions and to fighting with al-Shabab.** The African Union's Amisom peacekeeping force has played a central role for 14 years, but discussions about extending its mandate beyond 2021 have been delayed amid reports that the Somali government opposes African Union proposals to bring in more foreign troops. Meanwhile, Ethiopia—number two on Watchlist 2022—has contributed soldiers to Amisom and separately deployed troops in Somalia. Given the various crises facing Ethiopia, it is unclear what role Ethiopian forces will play in 2022. A rapid departure of Amisom or Ethiopian forces could destabilize the country and lead to both greater political tensions and escalation with al-Shabab.

**Food insecurity remains a top concern in 2022, with environmental shocks deepening food needs.** An estimated 3.5 million Somalis were experiencing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of acute food insecurity at the end of 2021, and at least 3.4 million people were projected to be affected by drought by the end of the year. Somalia experienced its third consecutive below-average rainfall season since late 2020, contributing to below-average crop production, worsening rangeland conditions and raising the cost of cereal, a staple food ([FSNWG](#)). Desert locusts remain a serious risk to crops and pastureland and could lead to reduced food availability. Given these conditions, food insecurity and malnutrition are likely to increase in 2022, putting millions at risk.

**Communicable diseases like COVID-19 will continue to pose a threat, particularly for IDPs and the urban poor.** Somalia's preparedness for disease outbreaks ranks among the lowest globally, 194th (of 195 countries) on the [Global Health Security Index](#). As of December 2021, just 3.5% of Somalis were fully vaccinated against COVID-19, signaling vulnerability to future waves of transmission. Other communicable diseases such as cholera and measles continue to pose serious health risks to the country.

**Humanitarian action is increasingly constrained.** Humanitarian access worsened between 2020 and 2021, from “very high” (4/5) to “extreme” (5/5) constraints ([ACAPS](#)). Attacks by al-Shabab—sometimes targeted at humanitarians—inter-clan conflict, administrative and bureaucratic barriers, and poor infrastructure are all factors in limiting access and movement of humanitarians across the country, hampering efforts to serve the 7.7 million Somalis in need.

## THE IRC IN SOMALIA

The IRC first began assisting Somalis in 1981. The IRC supports communities in Galmudug, Southwest and Puntland states, as well as in the Banadir (Mogadishu) region. The IRC supports Somalis' economic well-being through job training, food vouchers and direct cash assistance to farmers, shepherds and small business owners. We also partner with communities to identify, plan and manage development projects. Our work with groups like children and women who are particularly at risk of violence is informed by the promotion and protection of human rights. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Somalia response.





## SYRIA

### ECONOMIC CRISIS COMPOUNDS A DECADE OF WAR

#### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **10**



NATURAL THREAT: **5**



#### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **8**



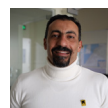
CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **5**



**Syria is at the center of a catastrophic mix of economic crisis, conflict and COVID-19 that promises further deterioration in 2022.**

Syrians are enduring the worst economic crisis since the war began, with record levels of food insecurity and rapidly rising prices of basic goods. At the same time, water shortages in northern Syria are creating drought-like conditions for millions and jeopardizing already compromised health, water and other systems. Levels of conflict remain lower than during the peak of civil war, but violence remains a major threat to civilians and civilian infrastructure in frontline areas. And there is an enduring risk of a major military offensive targeting areas outside government control. Moreover, years of conflict have deprived people of the resources to withstand additional shocks, which include the looming threat of the expiration of aid operations from Turkey.

“The humanitarian situation inside Syria is fragile and has been further compounded by the global COVID-19 pandemic and the sharp economic downturn. The estimated number of people in need of health care has increased in 2021 by around 5% and is expected to increase further in 2022. As a health professional, I hope that the international community will scale up their efforts to protect health care professionals and health care services.”



Khaldoun Al-Amir  
Health Technical Advisor  
IRC Middle East and North Africa Regional Office

RANKING:

**09**

POPULATION:

**21.7 million**

**14 million** people in  
need of humanitarian aid

**6.9 million**  
Syrian refugees  
and asylum-seekers

**6.8 million** people  
internally displaced

**82%** loss in value  
of Syrian pound since  
October 2019

**169<sup>TH</sup>** of 170 countries  
for women's equality

ABOVE: Ten-year-old Omar's education has been disrupted by repeated displacements and COVID-19 restrictions.

# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

## **Syria is facing the worst economic crisis since the war began—a situation that is likely to deepen in 2022 and exacerbate food insecurity for millions.**

The crisis is driven by a range of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic collapse in neighboring Lebanon (also on Watchlist this year). The average price of essential food items increased by 236% between December 2019 and December 2020, while the Syrian pound lost 82% of its value against the dollar as the Lebanese economic crisis deepened between October 2019 and October 2021. The economic situation has contributed to record levels of food insecurity; 60% of the population are now facing food insecurity. As Syrians run out of options, they are increasingly forced to adopt negative coping mechanisms that include child labor and child marriage.

## **Syrians' access to basic goods and services—from health care to clean water to food—is likely to be further compromised.**

The war has been defined by the systematic targeting of civilian infrastructure, which has rendered half of health facilities and half of sewerage systems dysfunctional and many more in need of repair (OCHA). Essential services are further undermined by severe water shortages in northern Syria due to higher-than-average temperatures and a depleted Euphrates River (OCHA). The water crisis already affects 5 million Syrians. There is not enough water to maintain electricity across the region, compromising health facilities. The lack of clean water brings higher risk of disease and the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, prolonged water shortages for agriculture will force Syrians to abandon farmlands and livestock, destroying their livelihoods and self-sufficiency and exacerbating the hunger crisis.

## **Conflict remains intense in frontline areas, with an enduring risk of major escalation if the government attempts to retake areas outside its control.**

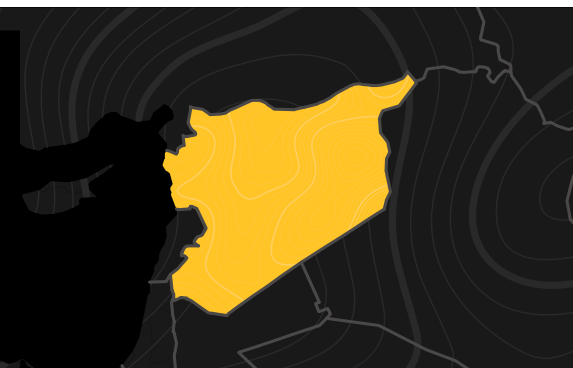
Overall conflict activity has lessened, with a ceasefire holding in the northwest since March 2020 and one in the northeast since October 2019. However, airstrikes, shelling and other conflict activity continue on a regular basis, regularly killing civilians, destroying critical infrastructure, and at times forcing the suspension of schooling and other basic services. Moreover, the government could launch an offensive in 2022 to retake territory that remains outside its control. An escalation is particularly likely in the Idlib governorate, putting 3 million people at risk. Despite localized agreements, parts of southern Syria have also seen lower-level conflict and tensions since the government regained control over the area in 2018. Localized conflict may continue in these areas, as well as any areas that come under the government's control.

## **The expiration of the last remaining border crossing for U.N. aid into Syria in mid-2022 could jeopardize the humanitarian response.**

In July 2014, the U.N. Security Council authorized U.N. cross-border operations to bring aid from neighboring countries into Syria. Since 2020, the Council has reduced the number of permitted crossings from four to one despite rising needs, particularly in areas outside government control—the ones targeted by cross-border operations. In 2021, 81% of people in nongovernment controlled parts of the northwest and 69% in the northeast were in need of aid (OCHA). The final crossing expires in July 2022, and there are currently no viable alternatives to cross-border aid. Without U.N. cross-border operations, it will be nearly impossible for humanitarian actors to mount the swift, large-scale response required to address new crises in 2022, much less meet existing needs.

### THE IRC IN SYRIA

The IRC has been working in Syria since 2012, responding to needs in the northwest and northeast. The IRC promotes economic recovery with job training, apprenticeships and small business support. IRC teams support early childhood development and provide counseling and protection services for women and children, particularly for survivors of violence. We support health facilities and mobile health teams with lifesaving trauma services, and with primary, reproductive and mental-health services. Our COVID-19 response includes promoting awareness campaigns and training health workers in infection prevention and control. The IRC also supports Syrian refugees in Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Syria response.





# SUDAN

## POLITICAL TENSIONS AMID REGIONAL DROUGHT AND CONFLICT

### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **7**



NATURAL THREAT: **4**



### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **8**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **7**



RANKING:

**10**

POPULATION:

**44.9 million**

**14.3 million** people  
in need of humanitarian aid

**3 million** people  
internally displaced

**6 million** people  
facing crisis (IPC 3) or  
worse levels of food  
insecurity in 2022

**500-600%** higher  
than average food prices

**1.3%** of population  
fully vaccinated against  
COVID-19

**Sudan moves into the Watchlist Top 10 as political uncertainty compounds the risk of domestic and regional conflict, economic crisis and drought.**

Sudan enters 2022 facing multiple challenges. The military removed civilian political leaders in October 2021, significantly disrupting the political transition that followed the ouster of President Omar al-Bashir in 2019. Tensions had been growing for some time between civilian and military parts of the transitional government but escalated following an alleged attempt by members of al-Bashir's government to seize power in September 2021. This led the military to demand changes to the cabinet. The following month, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok made a deal with the military allowing him to return to office, but it is unclear whether this action will calm the situation. Political volatility could destabilize the government's efforts to revive the economy and to advance peace efforts with armed groups, as well as hamper its ability to cope with natural and man-made shocks.

“Already suffering from severe weather shocks, COVID-19 and an economic crisis, political violence increased the number of people in need. The civil unrest and uncertainty of the political situation risks disrupting the delivery of life-saving and essential services and limits the number of people that can be reached with humanitarian assistance.”



Eatizaz Yousif  
Sudan Country Director  
International Rescue Committee

ABOVE: Tunaydbah camp in Sudan is now home to thousands of refugees fleeing conflict in Ethiopia. (ECHO)



# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**Political uncertainty will persist following the military's seizure of power in October 2021.** Military and civilian leaders had been sharing power since the military ousted President al-Bashir in 2019. However, tensions between the two sides escalated in 2021, culminating in the military detaining Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and other civilian leaders. These changes led to protests throughout the country and Hamdok was returned to office the following month, but the situation remains tense and the likelihood of new protests in 2022 is high.

**Political volatility threatens peace efforts in conflict-affected areas.** In October 2020, the transitional government signed a peace deal with some of the main armed opposition groups active in Darfur and the Two Areas (South Kordofan and Blue Nile). However, the political uncertainty raises questions about the long-term survival of the peace process. Moreover, the U.N. African Union Mission in Darfur formally ended its operations in mid-2021, and some armed actors responded by increasing their attacks in the region.

**The economic crisis and COVID-19 restrictions will continue to drive up food prices and restrict access to food, medicine and other supplies.** Inflation is currently 388%, which is driving up the cost of food and medicine. Staple food prices are 500-600% higher than the five-year average. The IMF and World Bank approved debt relief in June 2021 that cut Sudan's debt in half but further debt relief promised for 2024 may be cancelled due to the political uncertainty. The U.S. and E.U. have suspended some aid and could impose new economic sanctions. Meanwhile, in 2021 the humanitarian response in Sudan was just 36% funded, indicating that it is unprepared to meet shortfalls in other areas.

**Any spread of drought or desert locusts in 2022 would compound food insecurity.** Drought is expected to persist in areas just south of Sudan due to La Niña, while desert locusts pose a persistent threat. With 6 million people expected to experience crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity into 2022, any climate shocks could have a catastrophic impact on food insecurity. Other risks include flooding—during Sudan's 2021 rainy season, over 62,000 homes and large areas of cropland were damaged or destroyed by flooding.

**Conflict in neighboring countries could trigger new influxes of refugees into Sudan.** Sudan hosts a total of 1.1 million refugees and asylum seekers, of which 800,000 are from South Sudan, 126,000 are from Eritrea, 93,000 from Syria, 71,000 are from Ethiopia (most of which arrived following the November 2020 escalation in northern Ethiopia) and 28,000 from Central African Republic. Escalations in any of these countries—which, apart from Eritrea, are all on Watchlist 2022—could swiftly drive new influxes into Sudan.

**Tensions with Ethiopia could lead to conflict.** Ethiopia has been filling its Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) over the last two years, raising tensions with Khartoum, which fears it will restrict water from flowing through Sudanese sections of the Nile. Meanwhile, in November 2020, Sudanese forces began to expel Ethiopian farmers who settled in the border area of al-Fashaqa (within Sudan), and this issue has sparked sporadic rounds of minor conflict. Tensions over the GERD and al-Fashaqa have the potential to trigger more fighting in 2022.

## THE IRC IN SUDAN

The IRC has relaunched its programs in Sudan since 2019. Current programming includes water and sanitation services and integrated protection support for women and child refugees. The IRC also builds and rehabilitates health facilities to provide reproductive health care and facilitate the treatment and prevention of communicable diseases, including COVID-19. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Sudan response.







## BURKINA FASO

### A PROTRACTED CRISIS IN THE MAKING —

#### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **6**



NATURAL THREAT: **4**



#### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **8**



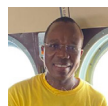
CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **7**



**Burkina Faso remains on the Watchlist for a third year in a row as conflict continues to spread across the country and civilians are increasingly targeted.**

Just four years ago, Burkina Faso experienced minimal mass conflict or displacement, but the escalation of conflict in 2018-2019 turned the country into one of the world's fastest-growing displacement crises. The escalation continued in 2021, signaling that violence may expand further. Self-defense groups and militias are growing in number, contributing to a cycle of violence that is characterized by attacks on ethnic groups perceived to support one side or another—and is mirrored by similar escalations in Burkina Faso's neighbors, Mali and Niger, which are also on Watchlist. In 2022, the country appears headed into a year of displacement, greater violence against civilians, and unaddressed grievances rather than recovery and stability. On the current trajectory, one of the world's newest crises is at risk of becoming a protracted one.

“Burkina Faso is going through an unprecedented crisis, and if nothing is done, we fear that armed groups will take over the country. This year we have seen a deterioration in the security situation with an increasing number of IDPs. In addition, the lack of rainfall during the agricultural season has had a significant impact on yields, leading to fears of pockets of famine.”



Kiema Leonard  
Health and Nutrition Coordinator  
International Rescue Committee

RANKING:

**Unranked**

POPULATION:

**21.5 million**

**3.5 million** people in  
need of humanitarian aid

**2.9 million** people  
facing crisis (IPC 3) or  
worse levels of food  
insecurity in 2022

**1.4 million** people  
internally displaced

**800%** increase in  
civilian deaths since 2017

**1.4%** of population  
fully vaccinated against  
COVID-19

ABOVE: Violence against civilians is causing the number of displaced people to rise rapidly in Burkina Faso.

# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**Conflict will not only continue but is likely to intensify and spread.** The conflict involves non-state actors—particularly the al-Qaeda-linked Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)—as well as government forces and local militias. While conflict deaths fell for most of 2020 and early 2021, there is a high likelihood of an escalation. The government was widely reported to have negotiated a secret ceasefire with JNIM in 2020. But this deal has seemingly fallen apart given the sharp rise in violence in 2021. While conflict in Burkina Faso has centered in northern and eastern parts of the country, there are signs that armed groups may be moving further south. Conflict activity also rose in the west and southwest areas of Burkina Faso bordering Mali and Ivory Coast, creating a risk of further regional spread.

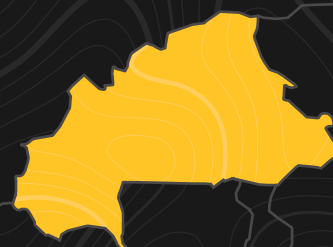
**Civilians are bearing the brunt of the conflict, which is likely to trigger greater unrest and cycles of intercommunal violence.** The actions of all parties to the conflict have driven up civilian harm. 2021 saw some of the deadliest attacks on civilians in recent years, leading to civilian deaths in 2021 being more than 800% higher than in 2017 (ACLEDD). Civilians in towns under the control of armed groups have endured embargoes and restrictions on movement. Burkinabes increasingly are organizing protests to demand greater security from the government, a trend that is likely to continue in 2022. Burkinabes are also turning to local militias, often formed along ethnic lines, to defend themselves. By one estimate, there are 40,000 self-defense groups in Burkina Faso. Such forces have been accused of targeting civilians from other ethnic groups, feeding a cycle of retaliatory violence.

**Conflict continues to drive mass displacement, and the likelihood that Burkinabes will flee the country grows.** In the first half of 2021, conflict displaced more than 230,000 people within the country, more than double the number in the previous six months. There were also 2.9 million people living in crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in 2021. With no end to the crisis in sight, Burkinabes are fleeing to neighboring countries. The total number of people who have left Burkina Faso to find safety elsewhere reached 38,000 in mid-2021, more than double the number of Burkinabe refugees and asylum seekers just six months earlier.

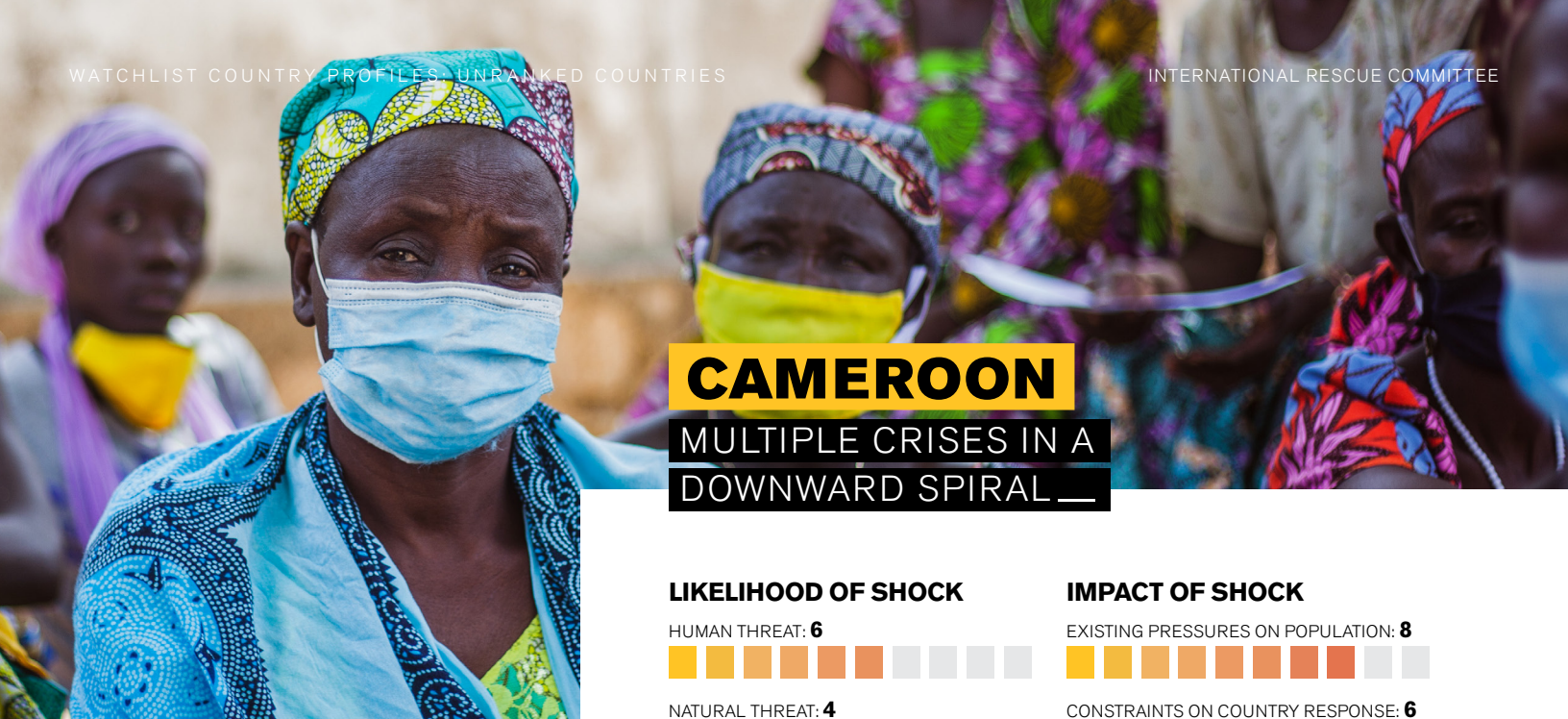
**The population's resiliency is being pushed to the brink as the crisis looks to become protracted.** Burkina Faso scores significantly higher on the “impact” side of the Watchlist scorecard, revealing the country's limited preparedness to withstand crises. Coping mechanisms of the past three years have been exhausted, while the humanitarian response is one of the most underfunded globally. Many people have been displaced for two or three years, leaving them without regular sources of income or consistent access to safe housing, education and health care. The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the situation by pushing up food prices and suppressing incomes.

## THE IRC IN BURKINA FASO

Burkina Faso is one of the IRC's newest country programs, launched in 2019 following an emergency response in Djibo (Sahel region), which hosts a large IDP population. We are delivering clean water and bolstering sanitation services, and have established a primary health care program, which includes reproductive health care and community-based services devoted to addressing childhood illnesses and disease prevention. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Burkina Faso response.







# CAMEROON

## MULTIPLE CRISES IN A DOWNWARD SPIRAL

### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **6**



NATURAL THREAT: **4**



### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **8**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **6**



RANKING:

**Unranked**

POPULATION:

**27.2 million**

**4 million** people in  
need of humanitarian aid

**1.9 million** people  
facing crisis (IPC 3) or  
worse levels of food  
insecurity in 2022

**1 million** people  
internally displaced

**44%** of funding received  
for 2021 Humanitarian  
Response Plan

**2.2%** of population  
fully vaccinated against  
COVID-19

**Cameroon reappears on Watchlist this year as insecurity in both the Northwest/Southwest regions and in the Far North show no signs of lessening.**

Cameroon is facing at least three distinct crises that will continue to deepen needs throughout 2022. The conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions has had devastating impacts on civilians and shows no sign of abating in the absence of agreements between the government and armed groups. Secondly, civilians in the Far North region remain caught in conflict between militant groups and state armed groups—conflict that is also affecting northeast Nigeria and adjacent parts of Chad and Niger. Rising ethnic tensions in the Far North are complicating the government's efforts to address widespread insecurity and contain conflict. And thirdly, Cameroon continues to host over 330,000 Central African refugees, mostly in the east of the country. Meanwhile, humanitarian actors face growing challenges in delivering critical aid as all sides to the conflict constrain humanitarian access.

“Cameroon is facing a variety of crises with ongoing conflict and attacks against civilians, a worsening drought, and new variants of COVID-19 killing more people. The government of Cameroon does not have the capacity to contain the humanitarian crisis, and the population will continue to suffer if nothing is done.”



Tabé Mbutabot Clayton  
Economic Recovery and Development Manager  
International Rescue Committee

ABOVE: Zara, a widow in Cameroon, has nine children in her care. She and the children participate in the IRC's education programs.

# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

## **Five years into the conflict, violence is growing in the English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions.**

Fighting has killed more than 4,000 people and displaced over 700,000 since it began in 2016. Separatist armed groups and government forces have both been accused of violence against civilians ([Amnesty International](#)). The humanitarian needs continue to grow, particularly for children: more than 700,000 have lost access to education due to school closures and attacks. In the absence of agreement between the government and separatist groups, conflict will persist.

**Militant groups will continue to pose a challenge in the country's Far North.** While militant groups, including Jamaat Ahl al-Sunnah lil-Dawah wal-Jihad (JAS), have operated out of Cameroon's Far North region since 2013, as well as nearby parts of Chad, Niger and Nigeria, the May 2021 death of JAS leader Abubakar Shekau provided an opportunity for other militant groups to expand their presence in the region. Poverty and limited employment opportunities provide recruitment opportunities and attacks against the Cameroonian military are on the rise, further stretching the ability of the government to respond to multiple crises.

**Intercommunal tensions are rising and will exacerbate the ongoing security crisis. Intercommunal conflict, at times falling along ethnic lines, could degenerate into wider conflict.** In August 2021, violence in the Far North region between Choa Arab herders and Mousgoum fishermen led to 32 deaths and displaced more than 18,000 people in what local officials described as one of Cameroon's worst-ever outbreaks of intercommunal violence. Climate change is exacerbating these tensions, particularly by worsening water scarcity in the Far North, where clashes between farmers and herders in September 2021 displaced over 23,000 people. As the government is focused on separatist violence in the Northwest and Southwest and militancy in the Far North, intercommunal tensions could create a broader security crisis that will add to ongoing displacement and hardship.

**Humanitarian access is increasingly challenging, especially in the Northwest and Southwest.** Armed groups have repeatedly imposed lockdowns in both regions, with one lasting almost three weeks in late 2021. These lockdowns restrict humanitarian activities and prevent civilians from moving freely to access aid and humanitarian services. The recent withdrawal of Doctors Without Borders ([MSF](#)) teams from the Northwest has left conflict-affected communities in dire need of health services, particularly as health facilities have been the target of attacks. Meanwhile, very low vaccination coverage means that COVID-19 will remain a persistent threat throughout 2022.

**The number of refugees in Cameroon could rise if insecurity deepens in neighboring countries, many of which are on Watchlist 2022.** Overall, Cameroon hosts over 450,000 refugees, of which over 330,000 are from the Central African Republic (most hosted in the east) and nearly 120,000 from northeast Nigeria.

## THE IRC IN CAMEROON

The IRC has responded to humanitarian needs in the Far North since 2016 before launching activities in the Southwest in 2018 and the Northwest in 2019. We work in communities with large displaced populations, where we provide basic supplies, cash assistance, clean water, improved sanitation facilities and protection services including case management and legal services. We support the restoration of livelihoods for crisis-affected populations, providing business grants and vocational training opportunities for youth, women and girls. The IRC's protection work includes community-based programming and counseling, referrals and other lifesaving services for women and girls affected by violence. We also help children access education through safe learning spaces in the Far North. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Cameroon response.





# CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

## RENEWED CONFLICT DEEPENS DECADE-LONG CRISIS

### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **7**



NATURAL THREAT: **4**



### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **10**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **9**



RANKING:

**Unranked**

POPULATION:

**4.9 million**

**3.1 million** people in  
need of humanitarian aid

**2.4 million** people  
facing crisis (IPC 3) or  
worse levels of food  
insecurity in 2022

**181<sup>ST</sup>** (of 182 countries)  
for resilience to climate  
change

**No.1** most dangerous  
place for humanitarians

**Conflict resurged between the government and armed groups in early 2021, deepening needs in what was already one of the world's most forgotten crises.**

There have been several rounds of conflict between armed groups and the government since 2013. The latest surge in fighting in early 2021 was sparked by electoral disputes and culminated in an attempt by an alliance of armed opposition groups to seize the capital. The deterioration has driven increases in humanitarian needs, displacement and food insecurity. Nearly two out of every three Central Africans (63%) are now in need of aid, a quarter have been forcibly displaced and 2.4 million will face crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of acute food insecurity in 2022. In October 2021, the president declared a unilateral ceasefire. The main leaders of armed groups later signed a pledge to halt combat activities, but the underlying drivers of conflict remain unaddressed and fighting persists. There will consequently be a continuing risk of violence in 2022.

“Heightened insecurity in recent months, including numerous attacks on civilians, has worsened the complex context in CAR. People need access to resources, to paid work, and a return of the rule of law across the country.”



Nadeje Passerendji  
Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Manager  
International Rescue Committee

ABOVE: Many Central Africans are displaced from their homes due to ongoing violence.

# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**Conflict will continue to drive humanitarian needs, particularly food insecurity. 2021 saw increased clashes throughout the country.** As of late 2021, fatalities were up 160% from 2020 ([ACLED](#)), driving increased food insecurity as civilians cannot access fields for cultivating or forests for hunting and gathering due to the threat of attacks by armed groups. [3.1 million](#) Central Africans are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection from violence while nearly half the population ([2.4 million](#) people) will face crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in the first quarter of 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic is adding to food insecurity by disrupting supply chains and reducing incomes.

**CAR is particularly vulnerable to climate shocks and natural events.** CAR is ranked 181st (of 182 countries) on the [ND-GAIN](#) Index for its resilience to climate change, lowest of all Watchlist countries. Further illustrating CAR's lack of readiness for natural shocks—which climate change is making more frequent—it has the worst possible score, 10/10, for existing pressures on its population, and 9/10 for lack of country response capacity. CAR is particularly susceptible to flooding. Over [203,000](#) people were at high risk from the impacts of flooding in the prefectures of Ouham and Kémo in late 2021. With the increase in extreme weather events, climate shocks will continue to pose a risk in CAR in 2022.

**Women and girls will continue to face particular risks.** Sexual violence targeting women and girls is widespread in CAR, perpetrated not only by parties to the conflict, but also by U.N. peacekeepers and community and family members. The U.N. recently withdrew 450 Gabonese peacekeepers following [allegations](#) of sexual abuse. Moreover, CAR is ranked 157th (of 170) on the [Women Peace and Security Index](#), which measures justice, inclusion and security of women in their communities. Renewed conflict in 2022 would present even greater risks for women and girls, both within and outside the home. Further indicating the risks for women, [829](#) Central African women die per 100,000 live births, the fifth highest rate in the world.

**Violence presents growing threats to humanitarian action.** CAR is one of the most dangerous places for humanitarians and access deteriorated between 2020, when [ACAPS](#) graded access constraints as “high” (3/5), and 2021, when it was scored “very high” (4/5). Attacks on aid workers and temporary suspension of humanitarian operations are common as armed groups engage in violence in different parts of the country. The number of incidents affecting humanitarian workers in the first nine months of 2021 was up nearly 20% over the same period in 2020 ([OCHA](#)).

**Operational challenges and lack of infrastructure will continue to undermine humanitarian action.** CAR has [600km](#) of paved roads, representing just 2.5% of the total network. Logistical challenges are immense, particularly during the rainy season, while air services are only a partial solution. Moreover, electrical supplies outside Bangui are extremely limited and just [3.4%](#) of households have access to the internet ([OCHA](#)).

## THE IRC IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The IRC has been working in the Central African Republic since 2006. We aid conflict-affected and internally displaced communities through emergency relief, food distributions, health care, psychosocial support to women survivors of violence, and the building and restoration of clean water sources. We also support children's well-being by building and supporting schools and safe spaces for children to learn and play. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Central African Republic response.







## HAITI

### EARTHQUAKE STRIKES AMID POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY AND VIOLENCE

#### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **3**



NATURAL THREAT: **7**



#### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **8**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **7**



RANKING:

**Unranked**

POPULATION:

**11.4 million**

**4.9 million** people in need of humanitarian aid

**27%** of funding received for 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan

**40%** of capital controlled by armed groups

**4.6 million** people facing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in 2022

**0.6%** of population fully vaccinated against COVID-19

**Haiti features on the Watchlist for the first time since 2015 as needs rise following a turbulent 2021 which saw the assassination of its president, an earthquake and a tropical storm all within a matter of weeks.**

While President Jovenel Moïse's assassination in July 2021 has led to political uncertainty, Haiti has long experienced high levels of insecurity. State weakness has allowed criminal gangs to become more powerful than the security forces, while impacts of an earthquake and subsequent tropical storm drove up humanitarian needs in the country whose Humanitarian Response Plan for 2021 was the least funded of all Watchlist 2022 countries (and second globally after Zimbabwe). Lack of investment in infrastructure means Haiti is ill-prepared for frequent environmental shocks; its ability to cope with these crises is further limited due to the country's economic recession—the world's longest—and the likelihood of increased poverty levels. Unaddressed, these crises could drive continued high levels of displacement within and outside Haiti.

**“The past year was marked by the terrible earthquake that caused thousands of deaths and left thousands more homeless, on top of a terrible sociopolitical crisis and indiscriminate violence. Haiti's hope in the face of repeated humanitarian crises lies in the great unity that characterizes the Haitian people.”**



Fritz Moise  
Executive Director  
FOSREF

ABOVE: A mother and child sit together in their temporary shelter in Haiti.

# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

## **Ongoing violence and insecurity threaten to drive increased displacement and humanitarian needs.**

Criminal groups control up to 40% of the capital city of Port-au-Prince and are growing more powerful. Killings and kidnapping for ransom are on the rise; almost 15,000 people were displaced by violence in June 2021 alone. After a short lull immediately following Moïse's assassination and the earthquake and tropical storm, gang violence is rising again, increasing the likelihood of people fleeing within Haiti and to other countries. An overwhelmed police force has trouble stopping criminal gangs from blocking ports and transport routes, which prevents the flow of aid and basic goods, including food and fuel, and hampers humanitarian access.

## **Elections and a referendum on a new constitution are unlikely to ease political tensions and could fuel further insecurity and conflict.**

The July 2021 assassination of President Moïse resulted in a succession crisis eventually resolved when Ariel Henry became prime minister. He then postponed elections and a constitutional referendum planned for November 2021 until February 2022. Elections and the constitutional referendum are unlikely to ease political tensions as many Haitians remain disappointed in the government's response to the twin natural disasters and its inability to address fuel shortages and worsening insecurity. Some political actors are linked to criminal gangs, and voting could be a catalyst for increased violence and insecurity.

## **Natural disasters are likely to have worsening impacts, particularly as essential services like health infrastructure have been decimated.**

The August 2021 earthquake killed over 2,000 people, displaced over 26,000 people and damaged or destroyed more than 60 health facilities and 1,060 schools (OCHA). Tropical Storm Grace hit Haiti days later, causing further damage and exposing affected populations to additional risks, including water-borne illnesses. The impacts of these twin crises put a strain on an overstretched health system previously weakened by a massive earthquake in 2010 and struggling to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. The risk that additional natural disasters pose to basic services, health care in particular, along with the country's crippled infrastructure and the government's dysfunction, assures that needs will grow in 2022.

## **Deteriorating economic conditions, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, will plunge Haitians deeper into poverty and food insecurity.**

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Haiti faced a steadily contracting economy amid one of the world's longest recessions and poverty rates estimated by the World Bank to be as high as 60%. The pervasive insecurity is a key factor restricting economic activity—it has already resulted in disruptions to transportation and shortages in food and fuel. Remittances account for nearly a quarter of GDP, so economic slowdowns in the wider region due to COVID-19 also affect Haiti. Meanwhile, inflation rates as high as 10% reduce purchasing power. This, in combination with the rising cost of consumer goods and low harvests, will likely exacerbate food insecurity in a country where nearly 4.6 million people are expected to face crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in 2022.

### THE IRC IN HAITI

While the IRC is not currently present in Haiti, we have a history of supporting the country since 2010, working with a strong network of civil society organizations to respond to the needs of communities. The IRC renewed this support in 2021, providing funding to three civil society organizations—FOSREF, FADHRIS and Kay Fanm—to implement a variety of activities to satisfy priority needs in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Haiti response.







# HONDURAS

## CRIMINAL VIOLENCE AND CLIMATE SHOCKS DEEPEN CRISIS

### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **3**



NATURAL THREAT: **7**



### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **6**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **5**



RANKING:

**Unranked**

POPULATION:

**10.1 million**

**2.8 million** people in need of humanitarian aid

**36%** of funding received for 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan

**One woman** killed every 36 hours

**937,000** disaster-induced displacements in 2020

**3.3 million** people facing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in 2022

**Chronic gang violence, climate crisis and the impacts of COVID-19 have deepened humanitarian needs and driven displacement.**

Since 2020, the number of Hondurans in need of humanitarian assistance has more than doubled, while food insecurity has increased due to consecutive climate shocks, rising food prices and the economic impacts of COVID-19. Nearly 3.3 million people, or one in three Hondurans, were experiencing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity by late 2021. Political instability is also on the rise, with elections in November 2021 causing civil unrest and discontent at the lack of economic development. While Honduras is not seeing the political armed conflict common in most Watchlist countries this year, criminal gang violence is widespread. Allegations that senior politicians are benefiting financially from the drug trade contribute to the unrest.

“Already vulnerable people in Honduras live in an evolving humanitarian crisis. Women, children, the LGBTQ+ community, and returnees face ever growing conflict and risks, from the effects of climate change to the impacts of COVID-19 and violence—at home and on the streets.”



Zuleyma Chahin  
Protection Coordinator  
International Rescue Committee

ABOVE: A woman and her two children walk across the Higuito River after a hurricane destroyed the bridge.

# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

## **Chronic violence will continue to cause major displacement and create particular risks for women and children.**

Gang violence and organized crime are leading causes of displacement from Honduras. While homicide rates have dropped in recent years, Honduras is still the most dangerous country in the region, with 38 homicides per 100,000 people (CFR). Gender-based violence in Honduras is also among the highest in the region and has increased during the pandemic. Indeed, Honduras is seeing a plague of “femicides”—a woman is murdered every 36 hours, mostly by an intimate partner. Many women are choosing to flee the violence in their communities. In addition, gang recruitment of minors has contributed to the increasing numbers of families and unaccompanied children leaving Honduras for Mexico, some planning to travel onward to the U.S. (CFR). So long as violence in Honduras continues without impunity, major displacement will persist in 2022.

## **Climate-induced crises will contribute to food insecurity and economic decline.**

Category 5 hurricanes Eta and Iota hit Honduras in November 2020 and have had enduring impacts on farmers—and the public generally—by destroying subsistence farms, killing livestock by the hundreds of thousands and reducing agricultural production (CFR). The storms, among other shocks, led to higher levels of food scarcity (WFP) while weakening the state's capacity to cope with displacement. Honduras is exposed to other climate shocks as well. Prolonged droughts have undermined food production, while in October 2021 a wildfire in the Guanaja region affected thousands (IFRC).

**COVID-19 is deepening health needs.** Access to health care services was a concern in Honduras prior to the pandemic, particularly for rural and economically marginalized communities. Poor health infrastructure and limited access to sanitation services has contributed to the spread of the virus. As a result, humanitarian needs for food, health, nutrition and protection have increased. With just 39% of the population fully vaccinated as of December 2021, the health risks associated with the pandemic will remain a concern long into 2022.

**Honduras faces rising political volatility.** The November 2021 vote to elect a new president, members of the National Congress and members of the Central American Parliament was clouded by corruption allegations and election distrust. Political violence increased in the months leading up to the election; at least 12 homicides were linked to the 2021 electoral process, among several other cases of threats and coercion. Violence and unrest may continue to grow in 2022 if political tensions persist, adding to humanitarian needs.

## THE IRC IN HONDURAS

The IRC implements its programming across northern Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras—in collaboration with a network of 280 partners in the region. IRC response teams provide assistance to refugees, asylum seekers and other people on the move. We also support partners to deliver critical services, including protection, economic recovery and development, mental-health and psychosocial support and cultural orientation. Our online platforms CuéntaNos and InfoDigna, both part of the Global Signpost project, help people access information about available services. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's northern Central America response.







## LEBANON

### FALLOUT FROM EXPLOSION AND ECONOMIC CRISIS CONTINUES

#### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **6**



NATURAL THREAT: **5**



#### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **5**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **4**



#### Crippling inflation and shortages of essential goods like food, fuel and medical supplies deepen the ongoing crisis.

Lebanon's spiraling economic and political crisis was brought to global attention by the August 2020 blast at Beirut port, which killed over 200 people, injured thousands and caused damages estimated at USD 15 billion. The government's enduring failure to introduce demanded reforms has stalled international funding, preventing economic relief from reaching the population. With half of the population now below the national poverty line and experiencing shrinking purchasing power amid shortages of essential goods, political uncertainty and social unrest are likely to continue in the coming year. Humanitarian needs will rise due to increasing levels of poverty and poor access to basic services, with refugee populations at significantly higher risk. Moreover, anti-government protests in Beirut have escalated and turned violent as the political and economic crises continue and accountability for the port explosion remains elusive.

"Lebanon has been going through great economic and financial hardship in the last couple of years, and the situation was aggravated when the Beirut port blast happened last year. Youth, the driving force, are leaving the country as they can no longer see a future for themselves here. If the population isn't assisted, the country will continue to plunge into deeper despair and many will seek to leave, whatever the cost."



Abdallah Farah  
Field Coordinator in Northern Lebanon  
International Rescue Committee

ABOVE: In Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, refugee families have to endure extreme weather, including flooding, with only their tents for shelter.

RANKING:

**Unranked**

POPULATION:

**6.8 million**

**1.9 million** people in need of humanitarian aid

More than **1 in 3** people in extreme poverty

**90%** of Syrian refugee households live in extreme poverty

**22%** of population facing acute food insecurity

**40%** decline in GDP per capita since 2018

# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**Lebanon's economic crisis is one of the most severe the world has seen for decades.** According to the [World Bank](#), Lebanon is potentially experiencing one of the three most severe financial and economic crises globally since the mid-19th century. From 2018 to 2020, the Lebanese GDP per capita fell by [40%](#), and this decline is likely to continue due to political inaction and disagreements. Donors are withholding funds until the government introduces reforms. Meanwhile, Lebanese people face long queues for essentials such as bread and fuel, pharmacies and hospitals frequently run out of basic drugs, electricity shortages are common and the water supply is on the brink of collapse ([U.N.](#)).

**The economic crisis is driving people into poverty and food insecurity.** Until recently, Lebanon was considered a high middle-income country. But economic collapse has eroded social safety nets, driven up unemployment, and sparked hyperinflation, leading to a [tripling](#) of extreme poverty levels between 2019 and 2020. [1.4 million](#) people, more than one in three Lebanese, now face extreme poverty. The economic shocks are having a particular impact on Syrian refugee households in Lebanon, [90%](#) of which live in extreme poverty, up from 55% in 2019; [50%](#) of Syrian refugees (and 33% of all other refugees) are food insecure, compared to [22%](#) of Lebanese people. More than [half](#) of families in Lebanon have at least one child who skipped meals due to lack of money (as of October 2021). This situation will only worsen as the economic crisis deepens.

**Social unrest is increasingly frequent and violent.** The compounding economic crisis and political instability has led to protests ongoing since 2019. October 2021 saw the worst civil violence in Beirut in over a decade, with [six people](#) killed in just one afternoon. As shortages of food, fuel, medicine and other essential goods persist, more protests could descend into violence. Moreover, tensions will likely escalate ahead of parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for 2022.

**The COVID-19 response is severely hindered by the economic crisis and its disruption to power, fuel and water supplies.** While COVID-19 cases have dropped following a high of nearly [4,800](#) per day in early 2021, the fragile health system remains vulnerable should another wave of transmission occur in 2022. There has been relatively limited progress on vaccinations—just [25%](#) of people in Lebanon are fully vaccinated—and the health system remains fragile. The Beirut port blast in 2020 damaged [292](#) health facilities. Power cuts are impacting oxygen machines used to treat severe COVID-19 cases. Moreover, the economic crisis has forced hundreds of nurses and doctors to leave the country.

## THE IRC IN LEBANON

The IRC provides support to both Syrian refugees and the Lebanese communities hosting them. Since 2012, we have been providing economic support, cash assistance, legal services, education, training and job placement for refugees and local communities, and protection for affected communities, including the elderly and people with disabilities. After the Beirut port explosion in August 2020, the IRC launched an emergency response to provide immediate cash, protection and economic assistance to those impacted and displaced by the blast. In light of the compounding health and mental crises in the country, the IRC has started a new health program. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Lebanon response.







## MALI

### POLITICAL TENSIONS CREATE HUMANITARIAN UNCERTAINTY

#### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **6**



NATURAL THREAT: **5**



#### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **8**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **7**



RANKING:

**Unranked**

POPULATION:

**20.9 million**

**6.3 million** people in  
need of humanitarian aid

**Ten-fold** increase  
in the number of IDPs  
since 2017

**38%** of funding received  
for 2021 Humanitarian  
Response Plan

**5/5** score for severity  
of access constraints

**1.5%** of population  
fully vaccinated against  
COVID-19

#### Political tensions persist while millions of Malians endure twin crises of conflict and climate change.

Mali's crises are both national and local, rooted in protracted crises and compounded by newly emerging threats. Political uncertainty around planned elections in 2022, after the military twice removed the government in two years, puts at risk the government's ability to respond to the wider deteriorating humanitarian crisis. Mali has faced persistent insecurity for more than a decade, rooted in conflict between non-state armed groups and the government that started in the north but in recent years has spread across the country and into neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. Simultaneously, Malians are confronting climate change, a threat multiplier contributing to conflict and exacerbating needs as essential resources become ever more constrained. Millions of people have not recovered from the past decade of crisis, limiting their ability to withstand further conflict or natural disaster.

“Insecurity, especially around the borders with other countries in the Sahel including Niger and Burkina Faso, is exacerbating the humanitarian crisis and increasing the number of people who are displaced as well as food insecure. We are seeing the degradation of the living conditions of the Malian population due to excessive deforestation, bush fires, water-related diseases, floods, arid lands and land degradation as well as COVID-19, and if the context does not improve, violence against civilians will continue, particularly affecting women and children.”



Mohamed Ag Tibi  
Field Coordinator  
International Rescue Committee

ABOVE: A child waits for a free consultation at a medical clinic in Gao, Mali. (Marco Domino/UN)



# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**Elections in early 2022 are likely to trigger further political tensions after the military twice removed the government in 2020 and 2021.** The current transitional period is set to end in February 2022 with presidential and parliamentary elections, but there are signs the military may postpone them despite pressure from the international community. At minimum, tensions around the elections and any subsequent fallout from delays or the result will worsen the humanitarian situation and could drive unrest—or even create an opportunity for armed groups to exploit, adding to humanitarian needs.

**Conflict is certain to continue as attempts at conflict resolution stall.** Over the past decade, violence between non-state armed actors and the government has spread from north to central Mali and, most recently, to southern areas—just as it has spread in neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger (both on the Watchlist). Around 400,000 Malians remain internally displaced, more than 10 times higher than in 2017. Ongoing conflict is further exacerbating and sparking intercommunal violence, political tensions and a rise in militia groups that are also often implicated in civilian harm. The military's removal of two governments has stalled progress in implementing Mali's 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement between the government and several armed groups.

**Growing insecurity also prevents communities from accessing livelihoods and social services.**

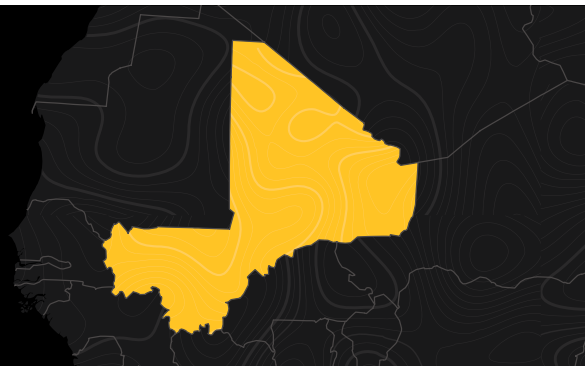
The education of half a million children and young people has been disrupted by the closing of 1,664 schools due to conflict and threats of violence. The violence also makes it difficult for Malians to access farmland, markets and job opportunities, increasing the vulnerability of households and contributing to a situation in which 27% of children face chronic malnutrition and 9% acute malnutrition. The COVID-19 pandemic is making it even harder for Malian families to obtain food by disrupting supply chains and reducing incomes.

**Climate change has destabilized the historic balance between farming and herding communities, driving localized violence, displacement and humanitarian need.** Mali is among the dozen countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (ND-GAIN), while around 80% of livelihoods depend on agriculture. The Malian government has responded by adopting policies that increase the areas of central Mali dedicated to agriculture. Resource production in central Mali has increased as a result, but nomadic herder communities see these policies as unfairly favoring farmers (Crisis Group). Clashes between these communities frequently disrupt livelihoods, harvests, trade and food availability. Drought, flooding and other natural disasters are becoming more common and last longer, worsening the situation.

**Shrinking humanitarian access threatens the response in the coming year.** Humanitarian access significantly deteriorated in 2021, with ACAPS assessing Mali to have the maximum “extreme” constraints on access—on par with countries like Yemen and Syria. Mali remains in the top five countries globally for security incidents affecting NGO staff, in large part due to the world's highest rate of aid worker abductions (INSO).

## THE IRC IN MALI

The IRC provides lifesaving assistance to people displaced by conflict and facing food shortages by providing emergency relief, health care services including nutrition, clean drinking water and education. The IRC also supports local communities through village savings and loan associations and income-generating activities, particularly for women, and through the prevention and management of local conflicts. We support children and parents with psychosocial support to help them heal from trauma. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Mali response.







# MOZAMBIQUE

## CLIMATE SHOCKS AND INSURGENCY FUEL CRISIS —

### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **6**



NATURAL THREAT: **6**



### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **9**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **6**



**In 2021, military intervention pushed back armed groups, but instability is likely to continue in a country highly exposed to natural shocks.**

Conflict has had a devastating impact in the northern province of Cabo Delgado with nearly one in three people living there now displaced due to escalating violence seen since late 2017. Since mid-2021, Rwandan personnel and a Southern African Development Community (SADC) force have pushed back the armed groups, at least some of which now operate as the Central Africa Province of the global jihadist movement Islamic State. Entering 2022, however, the future of the conflict remains uncertain. Moreover, Mozambique was struck by two cyclones in 2019, illustrating the country's exposure to natural shocks, which are becoming increasingly frequent with climate change.

**“It is devastating that more than 860,000 people in north and central Mozambique have been internally displaced due to escalating conflict and natural disasters. Women and girls are facing increasing violence as the COVID-19 pandemic worsens levels of food security and economic well-being but the plight of Mozambicans remains neglected.”**



Lani Fortier  
Senior Director, Delivery in Emergencies  
International Rescue Committee

RANKING:

**Unranked**

POPULATION:

**32.2 million**

**1.5 million** people in  
need of humanitarian aid

**1.7 million** people  
facing crisis (IPC 3) or  
worse levels of food  
insecurity in 2022

**1 in 3** people displaced  
in Cabo Delgado

**70%** of population  
dependent on climate-  
sensitive agriculture

**ABOVE:** A woman and her child stand in front of the burned remains of a structure in the village of Aldeia da Paz after it was attacked by an unidentified armed group.

# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**External military intervention has pushed back the non-state armed groups in Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province, but civilians are paying a high price.** In October 2021, the SADC committed to an open-ended deployment of its force in Cabo Delgado, but it remains to be seen whether foreign military intervention will deliver a critical blow to the insurgency or just trigger a change in tactics that allows the armed groups to rebuild operations in 2022. Either way, civilians will continue to pay a high cost. An estimated third of all Cabo Delgado residents have been internally displaced—over 730,000 people—though conditions in IDP camps are dire due to lack of food and work. There are also reports of children being conscripted into armed groups and of women being abducted and exposed to sexual violence and exploitation. UNHCR has accused Tanzania of forcibly returning Mozambicans who crossed the border to seek asylum.

**Conflict is adding to food insecurity.** Any recurrence of major conflict before the May 2022 harvest in Cabo Delgado could have a devastating impact on food insecurity. According to the most recent projection, 1.7 million Mozambicans were facing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in late 2021, of which nearly 800,000 were in Cabo Delgado—and all 227,000 of the people facing emergency (IPC 4) food insecurity in Mozambique were in the conflict-affected province.

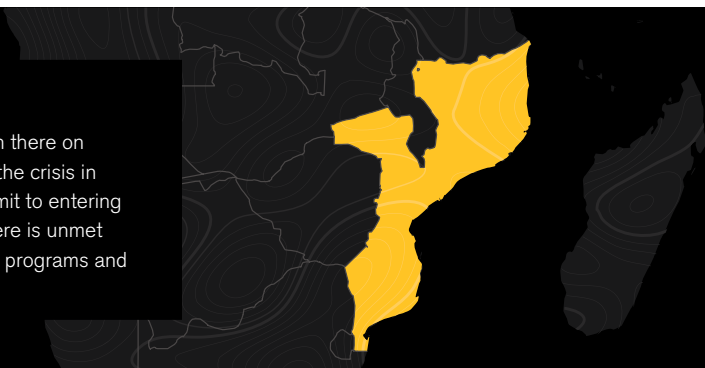
**Constraints on humanitarian action will undermine efforts to address growing needs.** In July 2021, ACAPS described Mozambique as experiencing “very high” (4/5) access constraints, a deterioration from “high” (3/5) access constraints in December 2020. The presence of ongoing conflict is a key issue in Cabo Delgado, but there are also more bureaucratic concerns, such as difficulty registering international NGOs or obtaining visas and work permits for humanitarian personnel. Moreover, the conflict has compounded the impact of decades of under-investment and the twin cyclones in 2019, leaving roads and other infrastructure in poor conditions.

**Mozambique is highly exposed to natural shocks.** Climate change is increasing both the intensity and frequency of shocks such as flooding, droughts and storms. Droughts are a particular concern in the south while central and northern Mozambique are at high risk from tropical cyclones. The most recent cyclone (Eloise) made landfall in January 2021, but consecutive cyclones (Idai and Kenneth) struck the country in 2019, leaving nearly 2 million people in need, damaging dozens of health facilities and schools and killing hundreds of people. Cyclones can also damage crop production in central areas, directly contributing to food insecurity. Moreover, 70% of the population relies on climate-sensitive agricultural production, underlining the significant impact that climatic events will have on a population that is already facing significant pressures. In the IRC scorecard, Mozambique has a very high score of 9/10 for existing pressures on the population.

**Mozambique is prone to disease outbreaks.** The population is highly exposed to diseases like malaria and dengue, while the capacity of the health system is limited and overstretched, particularly in conflict-affected areas. With COVID-19 still spreading, the health system will remain under significant pressure, making it harder to control other disease outbreaks.

## THE IRC IN MOZAMBIQUE

The IRC is not currently present in Mozambique, but we have been monitoring the situation there on an ongoing basis. An IRC team visited the country in September 2021 to assess whether the crisis in Cabo Delgado meets the entry criteria set out in the IRC's Strategy 100, in which we commit to entering places where there is conflict and organized violence driving humanitarian need; where there is unmet humanitarian need and we can add value; and where there is funding forecasted to deliver programs and ensure financial stability. [Learn more](#) about the IRC and our Strategy 100.







# NIGER

## REGIONAL CRISIS AND CONFLICT

### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **6**



NATURAL THREAT: **5**



### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **9**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **8**



**Niger's ability to overcome chronic poverty and insecurity is jeopardized by intensifying conflicts and climate change.**

Niger faces mounting challenges from intensifying conflict and COVID-19 in a country on the frontlines of climate change. The country must deal with multiple conflicts: violence in the tri-border area with Mali and Burkina Faso; criminal and militant violence in northwest Nigeria; and the longstanding conflict in the Lake Chad Basin, which affects Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger. Many of these neighboring countries feature on the IRC's Watchlist 2022, an indication that the conflicts are likely to significantly deteriorate and worsen the humanitarian situation for Nigeriens.

“The security situation in Niger has rapidly declined since 2014. The food and nutrition crisis in many parts of the country, increasingly recurrent floods, the cholera epidemic, the COVID-19 pandemic and continued attacks against civilians is driving humanitarian need.”



Adam Lewa  
Emergency Coordinator  
International Rescue Committee

RANKING:

**Unranked**

POPULATION:

**25.1 million**

**3 million** people in  
need of humanitarian aid

**25-fold** increase in  
civilian deaths since 2016

**176<sup>TH</sup>** (of 182 countries)  
for resilience to climate  
change

**2.3 million** people  
facing crisis (IPC 3) or  
worse levels of food  
insecurity in 2022

**1.9%** of population  
fully vaccinated against  
COVID-19

**ABOVE:** Maryama, 15, wants to be a journalist someday. In addition to attending school, she currently participates in an IRC tutoring program twice a week.

# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**Niger faces risks from all sides.** Niger's conflict risks are rooted in multiple neighboring crises that are spilling across borders. To the southeast, Niger's Diffa region (along with Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad) has been affected by insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin for more than a decade. To the west, Niger is caught in conflict that is centered in the tri-border region connecting Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso—a crisis that saw record levels of violence in the past two years and has a major impact in the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions. To the south, rising conflict activity in northwest Nigeria is already affecting south-central Niger. Over 80,000 Nigerians have fled to the Maradi region of Niger in the past two years, bringing the total number of refugees in the country to 250,000. Violence spilling across the border has also displaced nearly 20,000 Nigeriens, contributing to a total of 264,000 people now internally displaced within Niger.

**Threats to the safety of civilians are growing rapidly.** Civilian deaths rose to 688 by mid-November 2021, already surpassing levels seen in 2020 and more than 25 times the levels in 2016 (ACLED). One of the main armed actors in the conflict, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), intensified its attacks during 2021. In the first half of 2021, ISGS killed more civilians than any other single armed actor in Niger had for decades in a complete year (ACLED). This unchecked violence is leading to a rise in militias and self-defense groups, a trend already seen in neighboring Burkina Faso and Mali. These groups are often formed along ethnic lines and, as they become more involved in the fighting, contribute to a further cycle of escalation.

**Niger's high vulnerability to climate change is further limiting people's ability to meet their basic needs and exacerbating communal tensions.** Cycles of drought and flooding are eroding land and livelihoods, threatening the agriculture on which 80% of the population depends and worsening food insecurity and malnutrition. Violence is occurring along communal lines, particularly between farmers and nomadic herding communities, as shrinking natural resources add to tensions that armed groups seek to provoke, both to weaken state control and to increase recruitment. Niger ranks last in the world for human development (UNDP)—a reflection of widespread poverty and insecurity that has been compounded by climate change. Moreover, the economic impacts of COVID-19 are compounding this situation by disrupting supply chains and making it harder for families to earn an income.

**Humanitarian access is deteriorating.** Humanitarian access deteriorated further in 2021, with ACAPS recording “very high” constraints on access. Access is particularly limited by ongoing armed conflict, especially attacks by armed groups on civilian populations, as well as government requirements for humanitarian actors to use military escorts in certain areas of very high insecurity.

## THE IRC IN NIGER

The IRC started work in Niger in 2013. We support displaced populations and local communities in the Diffa, Tillabéri and Maradi regions by providing rapid-response emergency relief, cash transfers, food vouchers, agricultural support and protection programs for women and children. The IRC's health response includes education as well as the screening and treatment of severely malnourished children. We offer training in nutrition and hygiene and provide local health centers with essential equipment and medicine. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Niger response.





# VENEZUELA

## CRISIS ENDURES AS NEEDS GO UNMET —

### LIKELIHOOD OF SHOCK

HUMAN THREAT: **5**



NATURAL THREAT: **7**



### IMPACT OF SHOCK

EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION: **5**



CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE: **5**



### Economic and social crisis in Venezuela has driven the largest displacement in Latin America's recent history.

The humanitarian crisis in Venezuela has left a quarter of its population in need of aid and produced an external displacement that is the second largest globally (after Syria) and the largest in recent Latin American history. The lack of mass conflict in Venezuela makes it distinct from most of the countries on Watchlist—a testament to the severity of the economic crisis preventing millions of Venezuelans from meeting their most basic needs. The humanitarian crisis in Venezuela was triggered by the economic collapse that began in 2014 and has been deepening ever since. Years later, the collapse of the health system, hyperinflation and shortages of essential resources such as water, fuel and medicine continue unabated, causing persistent social unrest.

“The second year of the pandemic put even more pressure on services responding to the most urgent needs of Venezuelans. Despite a few promising steps by the international community, the second largest external displacement in the world continues to be severely underfunded and could become a forgotten crisis.”



Meghan Lopez  
Regional Vice President, Latin America  
International Rescue Committee

RANKING:

**Unranked**

POPULATION:

**28.4 million**

**7 million** people in  
need of humanitarian aid

**9.3 million** people  
facing crisis (IPC 3) or  
worse levels of food  
insecurity in 2019

**6 million** Venezuelans  
displaced abroad

**37%** of funding received  
for 2021 Humanitarian  
Response Plan

**1 in 3** hospitals with no  
access to drinking water

**ABOVE:** When Michel, a medical lab technician, became pregnant, an IRC-supported program helped her get the prenatal vitamins she needed to keep herself and her baby healthy.

# HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2022

**The economic crisis is pushing large swaths of the population into need, and many will choose to leave in 2022.** Hyperinflation has caused the price of food and other basic goods to soar. Water, fuel and medicine are in short supply and power shortages are common. Furthermore, the pandemic has halted any economic growth to remedy the crisis. With 7 million Venezuelans already in need of humanitarian assistance and no signs of economic improvement, the number of people in need will likely grow in 2022. Border closures by Colombia and other nearby countries to prevent the spread of COVID-19 cut off many Venezuelans from access to aid or livelihoods. The recent opening of the Colombia-Venezuela border could improve Venezuelans' access to essential goods and services, like food and health care, but could also trigger a renewed exodus of Venezuelans.

**COVID-19 is adding to economic challenges and burdening an already weakened health system.**

Latin America has been one of the regions hit hardest by COVID-19, and while Venezuela has made more progress vaccinating its population than many Watchlist countries, it lags far behind the U.S. and other countries in the Global North. Therefore, the pandemic will continue to impact Venezuela's economy and health system in 2022. The pandemic is a contributing factor to economic contraction, with projections estimating another 3% contraction in 2022 along with extremely high levels of inflation and unemployment (IMF). The economic crisis in Venezuela had also weakened basic public services well before the pandemic, with 30,000 doctors leaving the country over the past decade and a third of hospitals having no access to drinking water. The government's ability to properly respond to the pandemic, both through testing and treatment, has been severely challenged.

**Hunger is growing as the economic crisis deepens.** A third of the population, 9.3 million people, were acutely food insecure as of 2019 and, while data in Venezuela is often limited or missing entirely, this figure is likely growing; 14% of all children under age 5 in Venezuela suffer from global acute malnutrition; 57% of pregnant women are malnourished (ACAPS).

**Restrictions on humanitarian access will mean needs go unmet in 2022, though there are some positive signs.** In 2021, ACAPS assessed Venezuela to have "very high" access constraints, but there are some signs of progress, including a new agreement to allow the World Food Programme to start delivering food aid inside the country and a new NGO registration process. Both steps could enable the humanitarian response to significantly scale up if humanitarians can operate without undue restrictions.

**Conflict involving non-state armed groups along the Colombia-Venezuela border has worsened the humanitarian crisis and could threaten regional stability.** Clashes between Venezuelan forces and armed groups from Colombia, as well as between armed non-state groups over contested territory within Venezuela, increased in 2021. The violence has displaced thousands from border areas in Venezuela—mostly the southwestern state of Apure—into Colombia and could escalate further given rising tensions between Caracas and Bogotá.

## THE IRC IN VENEZUELA

Since 2018, the IRC has supported vulnerable populations inside Venezuela by working with local partner organizations. Our programming includes child and adolescent protection and education, cash assistance, health services and prevention and response to gender-based violence. Additionally, we have launched InfoPa'lante (part of the Global Signpost project), a digital platform to help displaced populations access information about civil and legal rights, employment, health care and COVID-19. We also support the COVID-19 response inside Venezuela by setting up mobile health clinics and providing personal protection equipment for doctors and nurses. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Venezuela response.





# ANNEX: METHODOLOGY

The IRC has drawn up the Emergency Watchlist annually since 2007 with the goal of identifying which countries face the greatest risk of major deterioration in their humanitarian situation over the coming year. The inclusion of a country in the Watchlist represents our best judgment of humanitarian risk based on available data, not just an assessment of the current extent or severity of humanitarian needs.

The IRC uses a multistage process of quantitative and qualitative analysis to draw up the annual Watchlist. This process allows the Crisis Analysis Team both to identify the countries at greatest risk from human-driven or natural shocks, and to understand, given the existing vulnerability of the population and/or the country's response capability, whether such an event is likely to trigger new or more severe humanitarian needs in the coming year.

A detailed description of the analysis conducted can be found [here](#). A brief overview of the process follows. If you have questions about the 2022 Emergency Watchlist or the IRC's other crisis analysis work, please contact [Crisis.Analysis@Rescue.org](mailto:Crisis.Analysis@Rescue.org).

## STEP 1: INITIAL QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Sixty-six different indices were compiled, including data from INFORM, Verisk Maplecroft, Danish Refugee Council, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), and ACAPS. Countries consistently flagged by these sources—for example, because they ranked in the top 25 across multiple indices—were then included in a preliminary long list.

## STEP 2: VALIDATING INITIAL QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AGAINST QUALITATIVE SOURCES

The preliminary long list was then compared with other lists warning of the risk of current or future crisis—for example, those drawn up by think-tanks like the Council on Foreign Relations and International Crisis Group. The Crisis Analysis Team also compared the preliminary long list with crises the IRC had been monitoring throughout 2021, while the IRC's program teams around the world provided ranked inputs and qualitative insights on countries to be considered. These insights from IRC programs and from the IRC's Emergency Classification System allowed the Crisis Analysis Team to flag other countries for inclusion in the long list, particularly those where deteriorating humanitarian situations late in 2021 might not have been captured by data sources used in Step 1.

## STEP 3: BETTER UNDERSTANDING BOTH RISK AND IMPACT BY CONDUCTING A SECOND ROUND OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND SCORING LONG LIST COUNTRIES

Fifty-six indices were brought together and grouped based on conceptual similarities to develop four unique measures for each country's scorecard. Two scores were developed to quantify the likelihood of a country experiencing a shock or shocks during the course of 2022:

**Human Threat:** The likelihood of the country experiencing human-driven events such as political instability, armed conflict and/or economic collapse.

**Natural Threat:** The likelihood of the country experiencing natural events such as a flood, earthquake or storm.

Two additional measures were developed to assess the likelihood that an event, whether human or natural, would cause new or more severe humanitarian needs:

**Existing Pressures on Population:** The existing vulnerability of the population in that country, including the IRC's existing "pre-crisis vulnerability" measure as well as indices produced by Verisk Maplecroft.

**Constraints on Country Response:** Whether a country has the governance structures and physical/communications infrastructure to respond effectively to a crisis. This measure is taken directly from INFORM's Index for Risk Management.

## **STEP 4: COMBINING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS TO DEVELOP THE FINAL WATCHLIST AND TOP 10 RANKING**

The key reference points for this stage were:

1. Weighted combinations of the scores produced for each country's scorecard (Step 3) to help understand risk.
2. Review of the data sources behind each country's scorecard indicators to identify gaps or potential over/understatement of the situation. For example, data for some countries was outdated or missing, and there were strong reasons to believe that the country would have scored more highly if recent data had been available. In other cases, data used to develop a score had been influenced by developments in 2021 that are unlikely to recur in 2022.
3. Qualitative analysis by the IRC's Crisis Analysis Team to identify the risk of further deterioration in the humanitarian situation in countries on the preliminary short list.
4. Quantitative rankings and qualitative inputs from IRC teams familiar with the countries on the preliminary shortlist.
5. The scale and severity of emergencies that had occurred in those countries during 2021, as measured objectively by the IRC's Emergency Classification System.
6. GeoQuant political risk trend data.
7. The Danish Refugee Council projected displacement data.
8. UNHCR IDP, refugee and asylum seeker trend data.
9. 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).
10. Inform Risk Trends.
11. Analysis of humanitarian access constraints from ACAPS.
12. Council on Foreign Relations, Responsibility to Protect and International Crisis Group countries at-risk reporting.





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

Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, 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.