



2025 EMERGENCY WATCHLIST

- 01 Sudan
- 02 occupied
Palestinian
territory
- 03 Myanmar
- 04 Syria
- 05 South Sudan

a world

Out of Balance

- 06 Lebanon
- 07 Burkina Faso
- 08 Haiti
- 09 Mali
- 10 Somalia



Fatime Yussouf leaving an IRC health center in Chad where her 8-month-old received malnutrition treatment. She used to have a spacious home in Sudan and sold clothes in the market. But the conflict destroyed everything, forcing her to leave.

Contents

Foreword	4
At a Glance	5
Global trends are hitting Watchlist countries very hard	6
What explains the decade-long rise in the number of people facing humanitarian crises?	
A World Out of Balance	11
Redressing Imbalances: Six priorities for action	18
2025 Emergency Watchlist Country Profiles	31
01 Sudan	32
02 occupied Palestinian territory	34
03 Myanmar	36
04 Syria	38
05 South Sudan	40
06 Lebanon	42
07 Burkina Faso	44
08 Haiti	46
09 Mali	48
10 Somalia	50
Expanded Country List	52
Methodology	56
Acknowledgements	58

COVER: Amid the ongoing conflict, families across Gaza have been forced to shelter in makeshift tents that are ill-suited to weather conditions. In November 2024, heavy rains caused flooding in the tent camps of Deir al-Balah.

Foreword

Thank you for reading the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) 2025 Emergency Watchlist. Many people say, "The world is on fire." In this year's Watchlist, you will see the proof. You will understand the scale and breadth of humanitarian crises. You will get an insight into the causes. You will hear the stories of our clients. And you will learn about the IRC's humanitarian footprint in the places where we are needed most.

There are more resources to do more good for more people than at any time in history. This makes it all the more bewildering that the gap between humanitarian need and humanitarian funding is also greater than ever. Everything that we at the IRC do, and say, is driven by the humanitarian imperative: to save life where we must, and to improve life where we can.

While our work is driven by this humanitarian imperative, it is guided by humanitarian principles. They sound obvious but in fact are far from it: **impartiality** over who gets aid; **neutrality** between warring parties; **independence** from outside forces; and **humanity** of all. These principles are not just a value statement—they are an operational necessity. In 2024, there was more danger, more death and more displacement of humanitarian aid workers than ever before. The humanitarian principles help us navigate tough choices at tough times. They are supposed to be our shield.

In the world today, the absolute numbers are crushing. 305 million people in humanitarian need. 120 million people on the run from conflict and disaster—more than ever before. More coups d'état and violent non-state actors than ever before.

More than seven out of 10 people in the greatest need worldwide, whether measured by humanitarian need, food insecurity or conflict, live in the 20 Watchlist countries. This creates competition for resources and choices between the bad and the appalling, contributing to our theme, "A World Out of Balance."

The statistics can overwhelm, but the granularity of the Watchlist is designed not just to articulate the needs, but to provide a more manageable prism through which to understand them. We have organized the introductory thematic chapter around the four imbalances that we see driving crisis: more conflict, less diplomacy; more attacks on civilians, fewer consequences; more carbon emissions, inadequate climate crisis action; and more wealth accumulation, less poverty alleviation.

While the Watchlist was born more than 15 years ago as an internal IRC guide to plan future programming, it has developed into an external tool for discussion and dialogue, offering both analysis and prescription. In this Watchlist, our recommendations span the granular and humanitarian to the aspirational and institutional. The reason is simple: If you only look at the crisis, it is easy to get discouraged; but if you consider the recommendations, you can see a path forward. We hope that this year's Watchlist will therefore be an inspiration, not just an instruction. In addition to statistics about suffering, we feature stories of resilient clients and staff.



David Miliband, president and CEO of the International Rescue Committee, meeting with staff and clients supported by the IRC's water and sanitation programs in Pakistan.

We do not pretend to have all the answers, but we do think we're asking the right questions. At a time when politics is roiled by polarization, we want the Watchlist to bring people together with urgency and with agency. A world out of balance is not in a steady state. As events in Syria demonstrate, a crisis quieted is not a crisis "over." If we do not make things better, they will surely get worse. That is the motivation that brings the IRC community together every day in the work that we do, and we hope that this Watchlist inspires you to join us.

David Miliband
IRC President and CEO

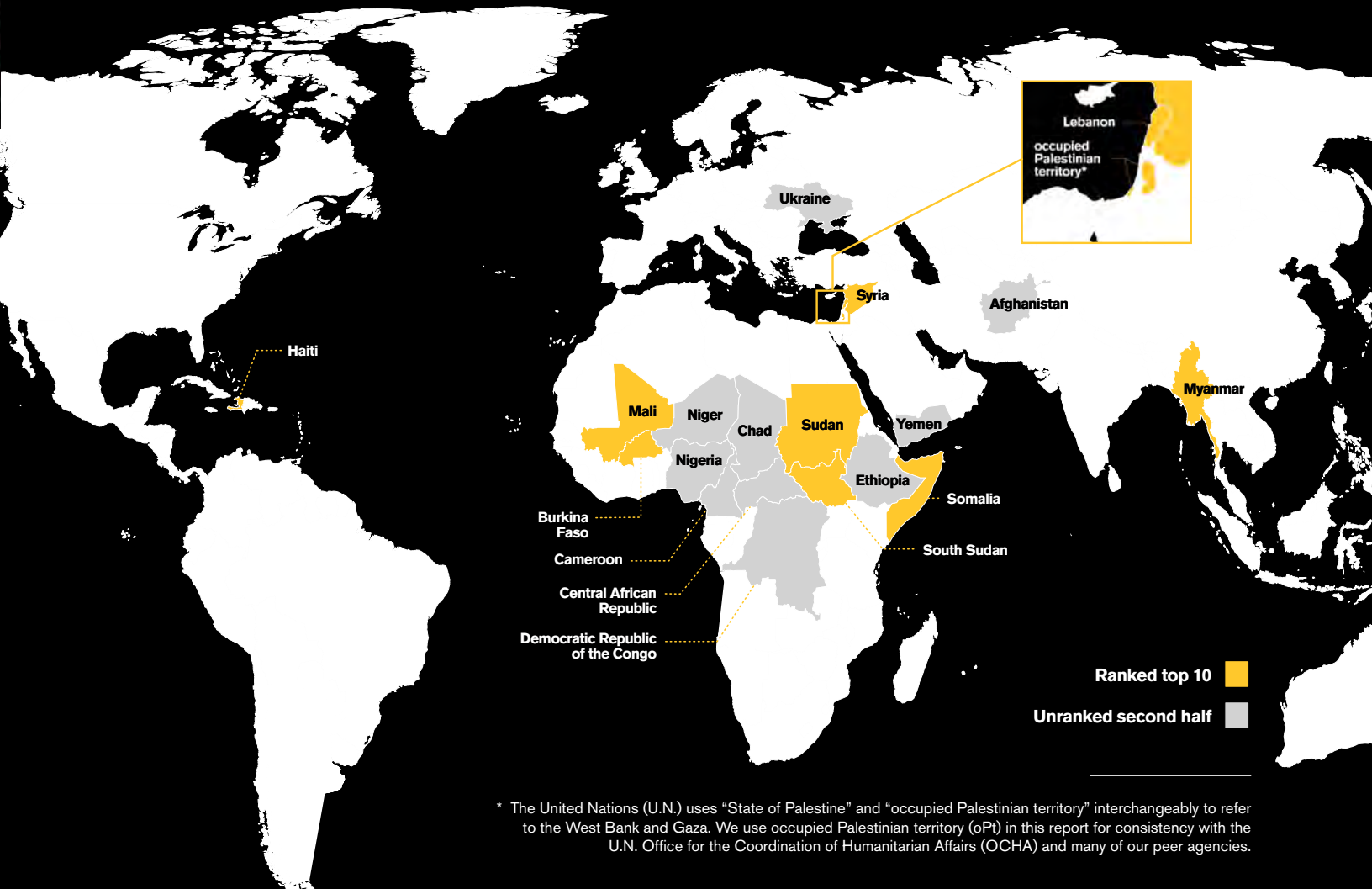
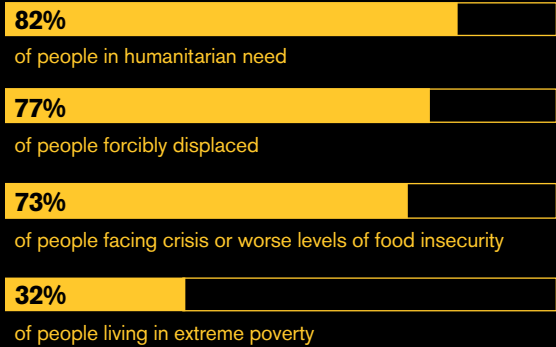
At a Glance

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

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

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

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



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

Global Trends

are hitting Watchlist countries very hard

Humanitarian needs, displacement and food insecurity have spiraled rapidly over the past decade. There are record numbers in each category. The evidence shows that the unprecedented humanitarian situation is not driven by unique or outlier events, and there is no return to the old “normal” in sight. Instead, the nature of crisis is changing—what’s driving crises, where they are, and what’s preventing their resolution.

Over the past 10 years, the IRC has tracked humanitarian needs through our Emergency Watchlist, which drives both our decision-making to meet those needs and our understanding of the changes in the world. One theme is especially important: humanitarian needs are increasingly concentrated in Watchlist countries. While there are specific complexities in different contexts, the global trends are clear.

Notably, 14 of the countries on this year’s Watchlist also appeared on the list a decade ago—highlighting the persistent and unaddressed nature of crises. But the situation within these countries has not stood still. New as well as older crises have emerged in the same countries, bringing fresh waves of need and vulnerability.

A decade of Watchlist analysis shows that crises left unattended will mutate, grow and spread. The persistence, recurrence and expansion of conflict in these countries trigger cycles of compounded crisis, often exacerbated by climate disruptions and economic instability that can in turn impact neighboring countries. The toxic feedback loop emerging from overlapping crises makes them harder to untangle and resolve.

This daunting reality takes a significant toll on the communities we serve. Every day in crisis means that people in need spend more time in search of aid and protection, relying on increasingly stretched humanitarian agencies. It means that displaced people are unable to find permanent, safe and welcoming environments that they can call home. It means more people going to bed hungry. And it means that people living in extreme poverty will continue to struggle to build lives of dignity and security.

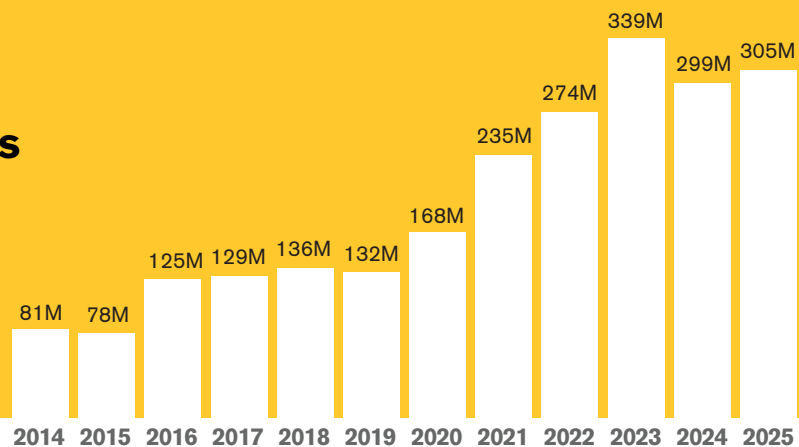
Numbers never fully convey the extent of suffering, but they tell us part of the painful stories of the communities we serve. This year, we show that Watchlist countries face an outsized burden of crisis despite containing only **11%** of the global population.

■ **305.1 million people are in humanitarian need, up from 77.9 million in 2015, and Watchlist countries account for 82% (242 million).** Being in humanitarian need means that people are facing threats to their life and health, physical security, rights and dignity—and they need protection and assistance from agencies like the IRC. The five countries with the most people in need of humanitarian assistance all appear on this year’s Watchlist: Sudan, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar and Yemen.¹ The humanitarian crisis in Sudan is now the largest since records began and the country accounts for **10%** of all people in humanitarian need, despite being home to less than **1%** of global population.

GRAPH 1

Growth in humanitarian needs

Source: Global Humanitarian Overview



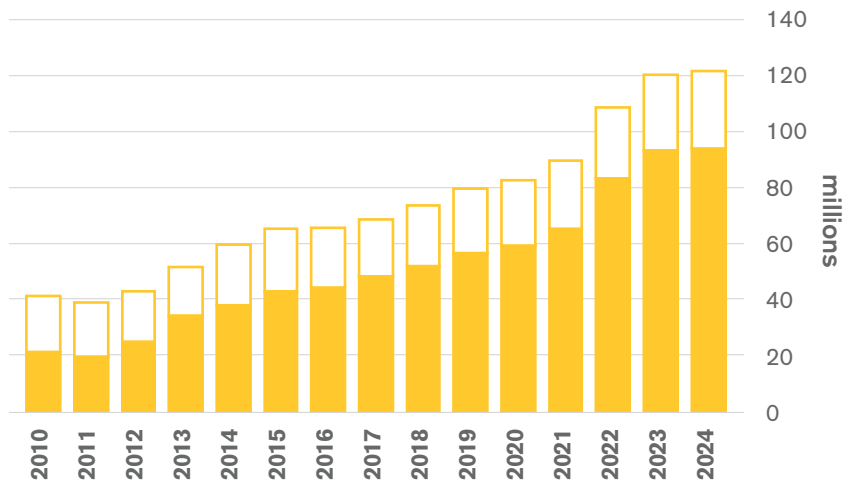
¹ This figure includes all people in need according to Humanitarian Response Plans and Regional Refugee Response Plans compiled by the U.N. for Watchlist countries.

GRAPH 2

Growth in the number of people forcibly displaced

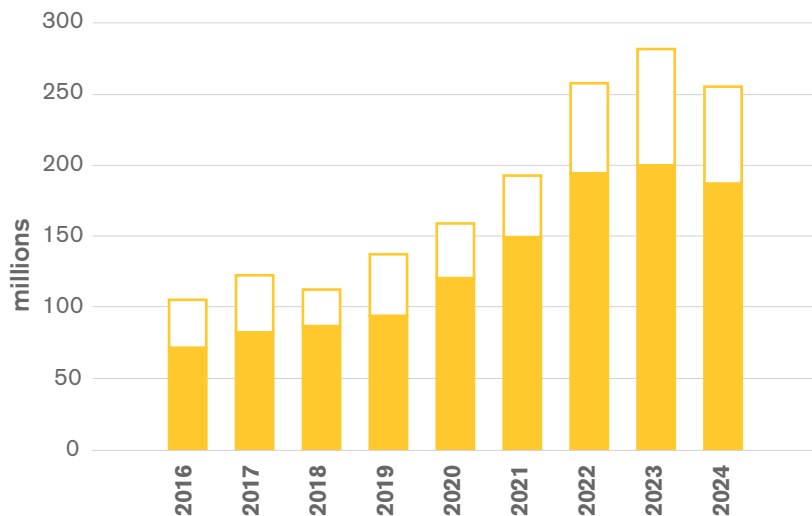
Watchlist countries ■
 Non-Watchlist countries □

Source: UNHCR



■ **123 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide, up from 65 million in 2015, including 94 million people displaced (77%) because of crises in Watchlist countries.** Crises in Syria, Sudan, Afghanistan and Ukraine had displaced the most people as of mid-2024. As the chart above illustrates, Watchlist countries account for the vast majority of the global increase in displacement. Indeed, the number of people who have been forced to flee their homes in Watchlist countries has increased more than **fourfold** since 2010. Additionally, Watchlist countries and their neighbors host the most displaced people (**74%**), despite often being the least resourced to host them. On average, there are **116** displaced people per 1,000 residents within Watchlist countries, compared to just 27 per 1,000 in Europe (including Ukraine), 13 per 1,000 in non-Watchlist countries worldwide, and just 11 per 1,000 in the U.S.

■ **256 million people are experiencing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC 3+), up from 105 million in 2016, and 73% (187 million) are in Watchlist countries.** The past three years have seen the largest ever recorded numbers of people enduring crisis-level food insecurity. Crisis-level food insecurity means that families are unable to buy enough food to meet their needs, children become thinner than they should be, child mortality starts rising, and diseases related to malnutrition start spreading. Further illustrating the concentration of crises in Watchlist countries, all of the nearly **2 million** people worldwide who suffered catastrophic levels of food insecurity (IPC 5) at some point in 2024 were living in Watchlist countries: Sudan, South Sudan, occupied Palestinian territory, Haiti and Mali.² At these most extreme levels of food insecurity, more than half of families lack the means to buy enough goods, and thus people start to die from hunger and diseases.



GRAPH 3

Growth in the number of people experiencing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC3+)

Watchlist countries ■
 Non-Watchlist countries □

Source: Food Security Information Network

² There are often several food insecurity (IPC) assessments released per country each year. We use data compiled by the Food Security Information Network to calculate the largest number of people who experienced the different IPC levels at some point during the year, not necessarily the most recent assessments.

■ **Extreme poverty is rising in Watchlist countries even as it falls elsewhere.** Globally, **714 million** people are living in extreme poverty, down from **789 million** in 2015. Nearly **half** live in fragile and conflict-affected states, and **32%** (more than 231 million) live in Watchlist countries. Living in extreme poverty means having less than \$2.15 per day per person. Extreme poverty deprives people of basic human needs like food, shelter, education and health care. The world has made progress in reducing extreme poverty, driven by successes in large developing countries like India—the country with the **highest** absolute number of people living

in extreme poverty, which has seen extreme poverty fall by **61%** since 2004. However, Watchlist countries have missed out on this progress. On average, poverty levels in Watchlist countries are now almost **85%** higher than they were in the mid-2000s, whereas they have fallen **37%** in the rest of the world over the same period.³ The global population living in extreme poverty is forecast to continue falling, down to **599 million** in 2030. However, the number of people living in extreme poverty in Watchlist countries will rise, reaching **301 million** over the same period.⁴

3 The IRC Global Crisis Analysis team used [World Bank data](#) on extreme poverty to calculate these changes over time. As most countries do not have data available for every year, the team used the average number of people living in extreme poverty per country category (Watchlist or non-Watchlist countries) per decade. If a country had data available for multiple years in a decade, the team used the data for the year closest to the midpoint of the decade.

4 The IRC Global Crisis Analysis team used [World Data Lab projections](#) for 2030 to calculate this figure.



Less than 20% of women in conflict areas have paid work, compared to nearly 70% of men

Youma Traoré, 78, breeds sheep and goats at her home in Mali. Cash support from the IRC's Norad project has enabled Youma to expand her herd and better support her family.



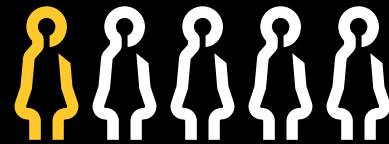
Fleeing violence in Myanmar, a mother holds her baby girl as they head toward the Thailand border in search of safety, following a one-week journey by foot. Photo: UNOCHA/Siegfried Modola

■ **Women and girls face disproportionate and distinct impacts.** Humanitarian crises have wide effects on communities across Watchlist countries, but present specific risks for women and girls:

- Women and girls experiencing conflict and displacement face disproportionately high risks, particularly of gender-based violence and discrimination. Rates of intimate partner violence **spike** in areas close to conflict. For example, displaced women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo face a **20%** higher risk of intimate partner violence than women who have not been displaced. In humanitarian settings more broadly, sexual violence is alarmingly widespread, affecting **one in five** refugee and displaced women.

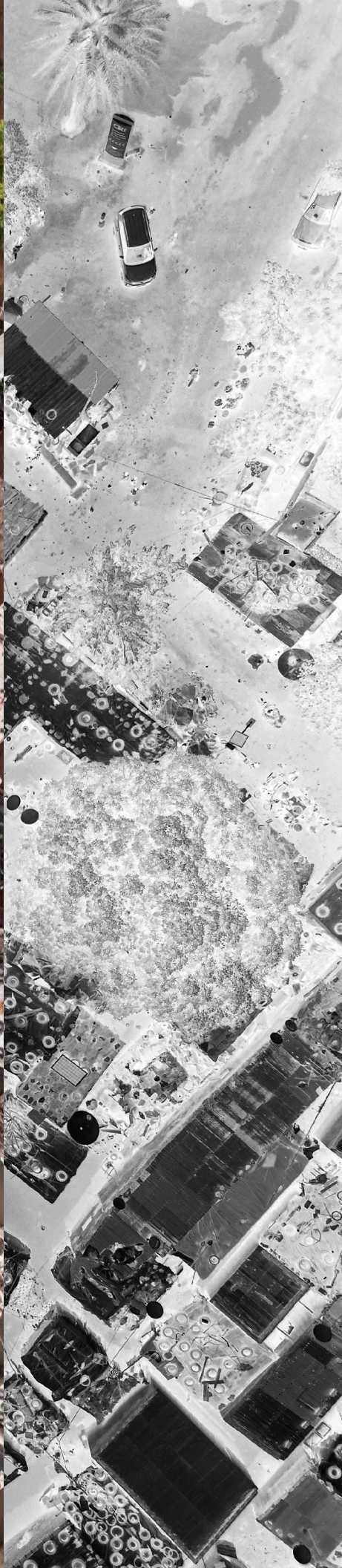
- Food insecurity also hits women and girls hardest, as they are often the first to go without food in their households. The United Nations (U.N.) and humanitarian agencies report that moderate to severe food insecurity is **10%** more prevalent among women than men.⁵

1 in 5 refugee and displaced women are affected by sexual violence



- Crises and conflicts also have long-term consequences for women's economic futures. Girls in humanitarian settings are more likely to be out of school than boys, with **21%** of girls out of school compared to **15%** of boys. Employment prospects for women are starkly limited, with less than **20%** of women in conflict areas engaged in paid work, compared to nearly **70%** of men. This disparity contributes to the gender gap in extreme poverty: In 2022, **383 million** women lived in extreme poverty, compared to **368 million** men.
- On top of these inequities, women encounter significant barriers to accessing humanitarian aid. Cultural norms and the risk of sexual and other types of violence restrict the movement of women and girls as they try to reach aid distribution sites. Across low-income countries, including Watchlist countries, **35%** of women lack an ID compared to **27%** of men, hindering their ability to register for aid and exacerbating their vulnerability during crises.

⁵ These rates are calculated using the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) **Food Insecurity Experience Scale**, which relies on survey results regarding individual experiences with difficulties accessing food due to resource constraints. This data is disaggregated by gender, unlike IPC assessments.



Bozo village, on the outskirts of the Malian capital Bamako, is submerged underwater following heavy rains. In 2024, Mali has faced some of its worst flooding since the 1960s.

What explains the decade-long rise in the number of people facing humanitarian crises?

A World Out of Balance

The proximate causes of the striking rise in the number of people facing humanitarian crises over the past decade—conflict, climate change and the economic consequences of the pandemic—are well documented. Conflicts are becoming more frequent, prolonged and deadly for civilians. Climate change exacerbates these problems, pushing communities toward displacement, hunger and disease. Meanwhile, mounting debt burdens are compounding extreme poverty as Watchlist countries struggle to fund social welfare, tightening the grip of crises on affected populations and complicating humanitarian efforts. These factors account for intensifying crises and also for persistent obstacles—and threats—to humanitarian efforts to address needs.

However, we need to go deeper. The theme of this year’s Watchlist is “A World Out of Balance.” Four deep-seated global imbalances reinforce each other. These imbalances spark new crises, spur crises to spread, and undermine efforts to bring these crises under control. The result is not only the growth of humanitarian needs globally each passing year, but also the concentration of these needs in the world’s

most fragile contexts as a toxic feedback loop takes hold. Without urgent action to address the following imbalances, even more people will be pushed into crisis.

IMBALANCE 1

More conflict, less diplomacy

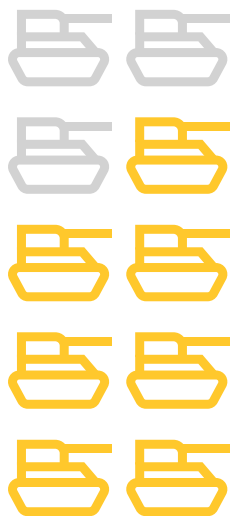
The rapid growth of humanitarian crises over the past decade has been accompanied by a similarly stark rise in the number of armed conflicts. There were a record **59** conflicts in 2023, the highest since World War II and up by nearly a third in just a decade. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the escalation of conflicts involving nonstate actors in Myanmar, Niger and Cameroon, and new wars in Sudan and Gaza all attest to this trend.

There were a record

59 conflicts in 2023



Not only are new conflicts erupting—old ones are not ending. Conflicts in Watchlist countries **last** an average of 11 years, compared to around eight years in non-Watchlist countries. External intervention plays a central role in these prolonged conflicts. Increasingly, regional powers are intervening in civil wars by sending troops. For example, between **3,000 and 4,000** Rwandan soldiers are reportedly fighting alongside the M23 armed group in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have militarily supported Yemen’s internationally recognized government since 2015 against Ansar Allah, which receives weapons from Iran. In 2023, internationalized civil wars accounted for **34%** of all conflicts, up from 26% in 2013 and from just 9% in 2003. Among wars that lead to more than 1,000 battle-related deaths, internationalized wars tend to last **30%** longer, according to data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (**UCDP**).



More than
70% of
“new”
conflicts
in the 2010s were
actually recurrences
of previous ones

As international actors increasingly choose intervening in wars over brokering peace, diplomacy is failing to end conflicts. In the 1990s and 2000s, around a third of all conflicts ended with a ceasefire or peace agreement. By the 2010s, this figure had **dropped** to just one in five. Worse, **60%** of these purportedly “ended” conflicts risk reigniting, having merely slowed into “low activity” levels with fewer than 25 battle-related deaths

per year. More than **70%** of “new” conflicts in the 2010s were actually recurrences of previous ones, highlighting that the absence of conflict does not necessarily give communities the conditions to recover and rebuild their lives.

Paralysis at the United Nations Security Council is further weakening diplomacy. On top of intervening directly in conflict, the most powerful countries in the world are paralyzing the body charged with protecting global peace and security. The Council has particularly struggled to address conflicts in geopolitically divisive war zones, like Ukraine, the occupied Palestinian territory and Syria. In the past 10 years, the permanent members used their powers to veto resolutions at least **36 times**, compared to only 14 times in the 10 years prior.

The willingness to resort to force rather than peaceful means to resolve disputes is also evident within states, where military leaders and nonstate armed groups attempt to **seize** control of some or all of the territory of a state. Over the past three years, there have been **23** coups or coup attempts, an average of nearly **eight** per year—double the rate of the previous decade. Many post-coup regimes remain unrecognized, governing as “de facto authorities” (DFAs). Meanwhile, nonstate armed groups are building and expanding their military capabilities. Between 2018 and 2023, the number of nonstate armed groups using drone attacks at least once **increased** from six to 91. As nonstate armed groups become more militarily powerful, they are increasingly able to take control of territories and establish DFAs within them.

The growing number of DFAs in humanitarian settings—which reached **42** in 2024, up from just **14** in 2012—presents challenges for multilateral agencies responding to the needs of crisis-affected communities. Aid is for people, not governments, but civilians living within DFAs can be cut off from systems of aid and development. An IRC **analysis** found that there is no consistent response from multilateral and bilateral development actors following coups and the formation of DFAs. Following the 2023 coup in Niger, World Bank International Development Association (IDA) disbursements were suspended completely for nine months, including those for climate adaptation and mitigation projects. In Burkina Faso and Mali, suspensions lasted only a few months. Long suspensions of aid threaten communities’ access to development funds that can mitigate the effects of power transitions on their economic well-being.

IMBALANCE 2

More attacks on civilians, fewer consequences

Civilians have always borne the worst impacts of widespread conflict, but wars in the past decade have become more explicitly wars on civilians. Attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure are increasingly central to battle strategy, making the rules of war seem toothless.

International humanitarian law (IHL) was designed to limit and mitigate the effects of armed conflict by protecting civilian lives, infrastructure and aid workers. However, parties to conflict

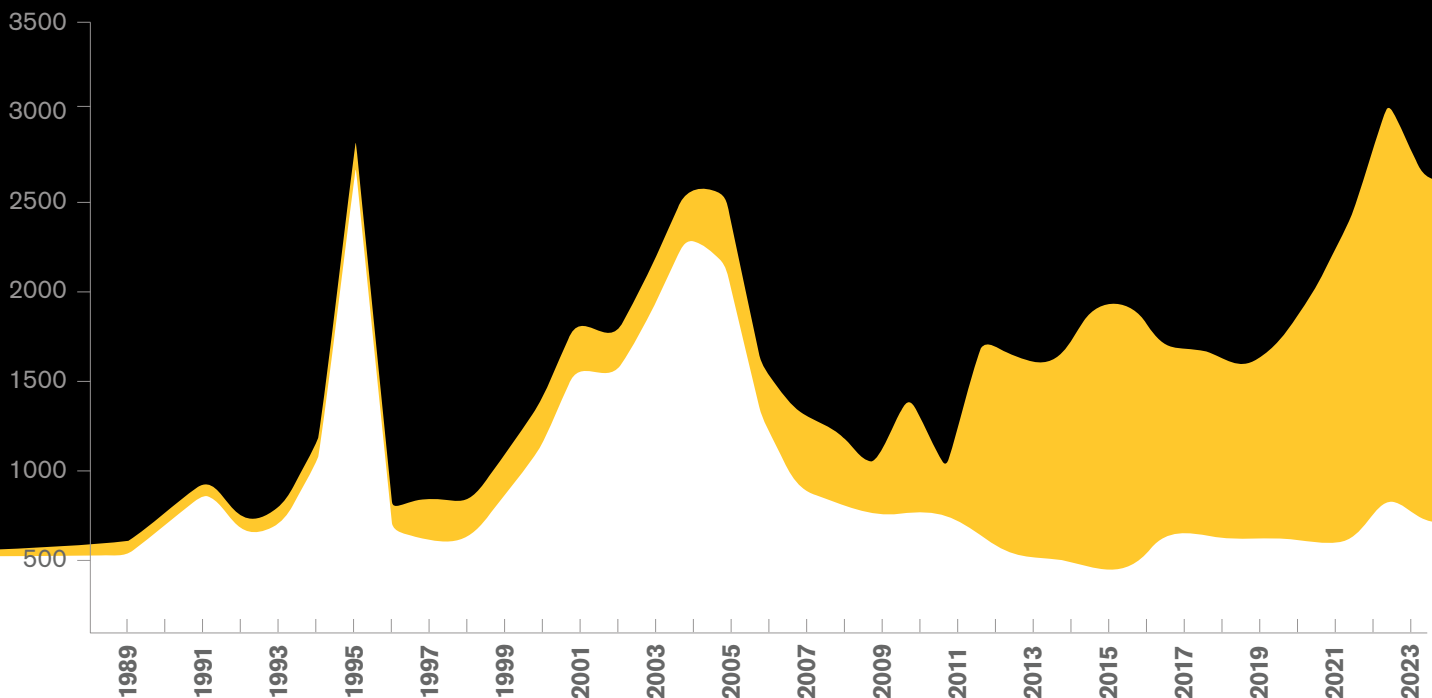
increasingly violate these laws. The number of attacks on civilians by state and nonstate armed groups around the globe rose by **66%** between 2013 and 2023 to reach almost 2,600 attacks, and **74%** (around 1,900 attacks) were in Watchlist countries.⁶

Far too often, parties to conflict harm civilians either by directly targeting them—a war crime—or by interpreting rules of proportionality in military use of force so narrowly that civilians bear the inhumane brunt of death and destruction. The widespread breach of IHL destroys the civilian social fabric and extends to the destruction of critical and lifesaving infrastructure like water, power and health care, leading to even more deaths and suffering over time. Since 2016, global attacks on health care facilities and workers have increased fivefold, reaching around **2,950** in 2023—and over **90%** of these occurred in Watchlist countries.⁷ Attacks on schools have risen by **45%** globally since 2013, and of the nearly 3,000 incidents in 2023, approximately **88%** (around 2,620) took place in Watchlist countries.⁸ These attacks deprive communities of critical health care when they need it most and deny children the chance to continue their education amid conflict. Schools and hospitals also often serve as shelters for displaced people, meaning attacks on them can further increase the civilian toll in conflicts.

GRAPH 4

Number of attacks against civilians

■ Watchlist countries ■ Non-Watchlist countries



Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)

6 These figures are based on an IRC analysis of data recorded by the [Uppsala Conflict Data Program](#) in the georeferenced event dataset.

7 These figures are based on an IRC analysis of data recorded by [Insecurity Insight](#) on attacks on health care. Other country-specific sources might report higher numbers, but we chose this dataset for consistency and coverage of global data.

8 These figures are based on an IRC analysis of data recorded by the [Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack](#).



"I came to this area after walking for over five weeks with my eight children, 60 camels and 80 cattle because of the drought," says Abdi Hussien, 60, a pastoralist who became displaced in the Somali Region of Ethiopia.

IHL aims to protect aid workers, but attacks on aid workers have surged alarmingly. Since 2010, such attacks have risen by **136%**, with almost 600 incidents in 2023; in Watchlist countries, the increase was almost **200%**, with around 560 attacks in 2023. Barriers to humanitarian access in Watchlist countries have also worsened. In 2024, Watchlist countries averaged **4.2** out of five on the ACAPS humanitarian access measure (in which higher scores indicate more barriers to humanitarian access), up from **3.75** in 2020, while scores in non-Watchlist nations remained stable. Such worsening restrictions harm civilians by blocking humanitarian actors from delivering vital services, food and medical care—often in violation of IHL and the humanitarian principles of humanity and impartiality. As a result, many civilians are left unable to access critical services meant to mitigate conflict's effects and protect their basic rights.

Impunity feeds on itself. As IHL violations go unpunished, they are being normalized in the conduct of war. Between 2013 and 2023, the number of countries facing attacks on civilians **increased** by 42%, from 33 to 47. The number of countries seeing attacks on hospitals and health care workers **increased** by 57.5%, from 40 to 63, between 2016 and 2023. Since 1997, the number of countries seeing attacks on humanitarian aid workers jumped by **136%**, from 14 to 33. The erosion of accountability means that civilians are increasingly dying in conflict and that survivors lose access to essential infrastructure and services, often for years.

With the brunt of conflict so heavily borne by civilians, wars are devastating whole communities, compounding other imbalances and making it harder to resolve and rebuild when the fighting stops.

IMBALANCE 3

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

The world is losing the battle against climate change. Carbon emissions continue to rise, and the highest price is being paid by those who have contributed the least to the problem. Watchlist countries contribute less than **4%** of global carbon emissions despite representing **11%** of the global population. Yet when it comes to the consequences of climate change, the poorest communities are cursed by outsized exposure.

Watchlist countries are on the frontline of the climate crisis—**16** are among the top 25% most vulnerable to the climate crisis and least prepared to face it. Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and Chad rank among the top five most vulnerable countries. Additionally, **27%** of all people affected by natural hazards and **35%** of all people made homeless or displaced by natural hazards over the past five years were in Watchlist countries.

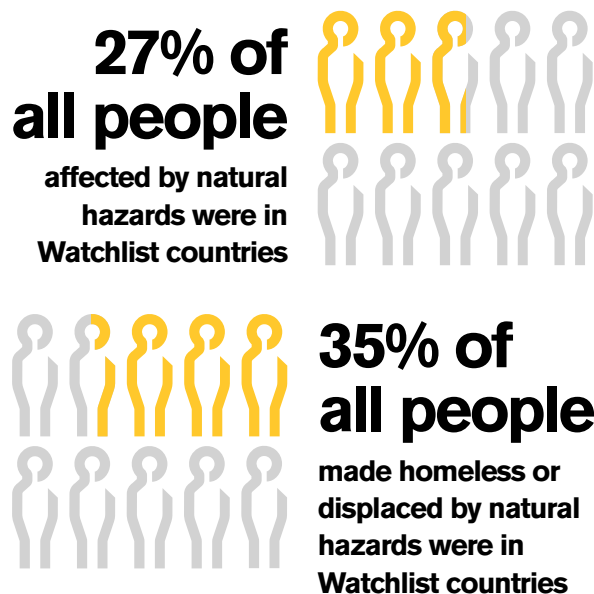
The climate crisis is a critical threat multiplier, intensifying existing political, social and economic pressures, heightening competition for scarce resources, and fueling long-standing

grievances. The pressure that climate change puts on already vulnerable communities, particularly those experiencing violence, increases the likelihood and severity of conflict, displacement, extreme poverty and food insecurity.

Watchlist countries receive a fraction of the support they need to confront the impacts of climate change. Wealthy nations and global financial institutions are falling short: Only **13%** of total global climate financing reaches these high-risk countries, equating to about **\$4.70** per capita, compared with over **\$95** per capita in non-Watchlist countries. Most funding aimed at Watchlist countries is directed toward reducing their already modest carbon footprints, with just **24%** allocated to adaptation efforts. As a result, Watchlist countries receive only **\$1.51** per capita in climate adaptation funding, compared to more than **\$24** per capita in non-Watchlist countries—hardly enough to help these nations face the challenges they already confront.⁹

On top of these disparities, there is a climate financing delivery gap in conflict-affected settings. Much of climate financing is channeled through national governments that often lack the capacity or control to deliver aid where it is needed. Climate financing and action are rarely tailored to conflict risks, leaving the humanitarian sector to manage climate crises. With inadequate resources, this imbalance compounds the impacts of conflict and extreme poverty, further reinforcing the vulnerability of these communities to the climate crisis.

OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS:



⁹ The figure for non-Watchlist countries includes donors to climate funding mechanisms, significantly bringing down the average. Despite this, the average for non-Watchlist countries remains much higher than for Watchlist countries.

¹⁰ Limited data make it challenging to accurately calculate the number of people living in extreme poverty in all Watchlist countries over this time period; however, where data are available, they show extreme poverty rising.

IMBALANCE 4

More wealth accumulation, less poverty alleviation

While global extreme poverty has fallen sharply, from **1.8 billion** people in the 2000s to **714 million** in the 2020s, this progress has bypassed Watchlist countries. These states experience an entirely divergent reality, where extreme poverty has soared by nearly **85%** over the same period.¹⁰

Limited aid and little access to affordable credit have left Watchlist countries trapped in cycles of high debt and low growth. Watchlist countries on average see growth rates of just **1.84%**, slightly over half the global average of **3.36%**. They are also seeing rapidly growing debt burdens. The ratio of debt to gross domestic product (GDP) for Watchlist countries **reached** 68% in 2023, indicating a higher risk of debt distress than non-Watchlist countries, which have an average ratio of **59%**. The situation has worsened rapidly for Watchlist countries over a decade. In 2013, they had an average debt-to-GDP ratio of **39%**, lower than the **43%** average at the time for non-Watchlist countries.

Rising debt burdens are making it harder for Watchlist countries to build resilience to both current and future risks. As global interest rates climb, these nations are forced to allocate more resources to debt servicing, limiting their ability to invest in social welfare. The impact is stark: Watchlist countries score just **48** out of 100 on the Sustainable Development Goal for government spending on education and health, well below the global average of nearly **64**. Low-income nations, on average, spend five times more on debt repayments than on climate initiatives—hardly a foundation for long-term resilience.

The economic doom loop of slow growth and high public debt facing Watchlist countries is, in part, a consequence of global economic shocks—including the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic aftermath. But it also reflects the massive economic disruption that wars cause and how conflict drives out human capital. Following the onset of war, the average conflict

causes GDP to drop by 30% within five years and inflation to increase by 15 percentage points within one year. The two countries at the top of this year's Watchlist are emblematic of the devastating economic consequences of conflict. Sudan's growth rate decreased by around **11** percentage points, from -0.1% in 2022 to less than -12% in the year after its civil war began. And between 2022 and 2023, the occupied Palestinian territory's growth rate dropped by nearly **9** percentage points, from more than 4% to -5.5%.



**Following the onset of war,
the average conflict causes**

GDP to drop by 30% within five years

Extreme poverty is increasingly concentrated in conflict-affected countries, including those on the Watchlist. Yet official development assistance (ODA) often remains largely inaccessible in conflict-affected states. In 2022, only **28%** of ODA funding from the 32 members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee reached conflict-affected countries. On top of that, only **seven** developed countries reached the long-standing U.N. target of spending at least 0.7% of their gross national income (GNI) on ODA as of 2023—when ODA dropped for the second year in a row, and an **increasingly** higher percentage of ODA was delivered in concessional loans rather than grants.

Multilateral development banks (MDBs) play an increasingly important role in driving inclusion and sustainable development in Watchlist countries. The World Bank has made significant progress by **increasing** funding to fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCS) from \$27 billion in 2018 to \$69 billion in 2022. The IDA—the World Bank's arm that offers concessional loans and grants to the world's poorest countries—has **increased** disbursements to Watchlist countries, from **24%** of all IDA disbursements in FY 2015 to nearly **30%** in FY 2024, reflecting an increasing commitment to conflict-affected states.

But the World Bank's leadership recognizes that the approach in conflict-affected states needs to be further adapted, and it has taken important steps to enhance flexibility. More finance should be spent in new ways to reach people in need. The traditional World Bank approach prioritized partnering with governments for project design and implementation. However, this approach is not always sufficient or feasible in conflict situations where governments are often stretched, absent or party to conflict. In Watchlist countries, where large segments of the population live beyond the access of the government, this approach risks depriving communities of essential services, undermining development outcomes, and driving them deeper into poverty. An IRC **analysis** found that the traditional government-centered delivery model and risk-averse approach can lead to project disruptions in times of conflict and insecurity, negatively impacting the delivery of development programs.

Unless and until donors and MDBs find additional ways to support economic development in conflict-affected states, progress on global efforts to fight extreme poverty will slow and stall. Finding effective ways to sustain and expand support that works for communities affected by armed conflict will be critical to allowing Watchlist countries to escape the doom loop of high debt and low growth—and enabling them to converge with the global-level trends of growing wealth and falling extreme poverty.

Humanitarian responses risk being

Overwhelmed in a World Out of Balance

A World Out of Balance has created a set of compounding economic, climate and conflict pressures driving humanitarian crises. As diplomatic and development actors disengage from Watchlist countries, humanitarians are left to address rising needs with reduced funding and the absence of humanitarian access and tools suited to the breadth and depth of challenges they face. Without increased support and reform, the humanitarian sector risks being overwhelmed.

- The humanitarian system was designed to respond to crises, and it has been slower to invest in action before crises hit. IRC research shows that anticipatory cash distributions in northeast Nigeria can protect livelihoods and prevent climate disaster-induced hunger.
- The current siloed approach to humanitarian coordination is ill-prepared to provide for multi-sectoral needs resulting from intersecting economic, climate and conflict crises. The cluster system coordinates response in sectors such as health, food and water, focusing on delivering what sectoral agencies can provide and less on understanding what communities need. Without steps to better consult and engage affected communities in the definition of needs and the design of response, the humanitarian system will struggle to close the gap between needs and assistance.
- The humanitarian system has not found the right balance of global, national and local actors. U.N. agencies received nearly three out of every five U.S. dollars available to humanitarian actors in 2024. Local and national nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)/civil society organizations (CSOs) received just 1% of funding tracked by the U.N. Financial Tracking Service (FTS). Empowering local response requires, as a first step, simplified funding. The IRC has worked with several donors to allow us to donate, rather than contract, funds to local partners employing a much simpler written agreement, which means less time is spent on negotiations and compliance and more on service delivery.



Baryalai, an IRC humanitarian access officer, speaks with Azim Khan, 35, and his daughter Bibi Zainab, 9, about the damages caused to their home due to heavy rains and flooding that impacted 32 out of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan.

Redressing Imbalances

Six priorities for action

The 2025 Emergency Watchlist reveals the growing divide between the countries and communities making progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and those being left behind. Ten years since the adoption of the SDGs, countries on the Watchlist are suffering from a growing share of global hunger, extreme poverty and conflict. Agencies like the IRC and our national partners are on the frontline of this divide—and in many cases, we are among the only international agencies present. Every day, we witness how the countries where we work are transformed by climate change, conflict and divisions in global politics, with devastating impacts for our clients. We see violence and impunity reign over diplomacy and accountability. We see the consequences of global policies that place profit before the planet. And we see how the responses to the needs of our clients are undermined by diplomatic and donor disengagement.

The international response to the crises affecting Watchlist countries continues to put faith and finances in 20th century tools. Yet the futures of these countries and those who live there are being forged by the 21st century trends illustrated in this report. The world's imbalanced institutions and business-as-usual approaches to aid delivery and financing are not moving quickly enough to meet the challenges our clients face.

An alternative approach is not only possible, it is essential. Civilians will continue to suffer the worst impacts of conflict and risk perilous journeys from Watchlist countries to relative safety elsewhere if their lives do not improve and there are no safe pathways to protection. Families and children will have their potential curtailed if basic health, nutrition and education services are not sustained in conflict-affected states. Emerging powers will continue to intervene in conflicts if the incentives for diplomatic engagement do not change.

We are right to be concerned about the risks of conflict and fragility, but if we do not change how we respond to crises, we are contributing to **system failure**. As the IRC has previously warned, the system built for preventing and addressing humanitarian crises is failing those it has set out to protect. An increasing number of states cannot fulfill their duties to citizens, diplomacy is failing to resolve conflicts, legal regimes are not protecting civilians, and humanitarian operations are unable to fill the widening gaps in needs.

Making the system work requires reshaping and rebalancing diplomatic and development approaches in Watchlist countries. These changes will take time, effort and commitment. It is not a quick fix.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Humanitarian aid is a vital, and good, investment

Humanitarian needs are surging, but funding is not keeping pace. This shortfall is devastating for civilians in Watchlist countries, who are reliant on aid for essentials like health care and malnutrition treatment. An insufficient humanitarian and development response sustains and begets further crises. The case for increased humanitarian funding is clear: directing resources to proven, effective programs that reach those most in need is not just moral, it is strategic.

The IRC has consistently called for the targeting of development assistance to where it is needed most.

Currently, **72%** of bilateral official development assistance (ODA) from OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors is delivered to countries *not* affected by conflict. DAC donors should commit half of all bilateral ODA to fragile and conflict-affected states, and they should provide funding in grants alongside highly concessional financing. These initial steps remain vital to addressing the increasing concentration of needs and extreme poverty in Watchlist countries.



Dr. Mohammed Isa Goni checks on a young patient at the IRC's stabilization center in Mashamari in Borno State, Nigeria. His focus is to reduce the levels of severe acute malnutrition among the children in his community.

Overall DAC donor funding must also increase. Only **seven** DAC donors fulfilled their commitment to spend 0.7% of their gross national income on ODA in 2023. Based on the most recent data, if G7 countries alone met their commitments to 0.7%, they would almost **double** the annual bilateral ODA by DAC countries, creating an additional \$150 billion.¹¹

It is also imperative that funding is spent effectively. Humanitarians know what works. The IRC is an evidence-driven organization: We account for **3%** of the humanitarian sector's budget, but we carry out more than **30%** of all impact evaluations. This combination of research and hands-on experience enables us to continually evolve and improve our interventions to save lives and make tangible, positive changes for the greatest number of people. We do this with a strong focus on efficiency as well as effectiveness. The IRC is committed to the best use of resources, and we have conducted over **400 cost-effectiveness studies** across 37 countries, examining more than \$300 million of humanitarian spending to inform program design and optimize programs for impact and scale.

Every year, malnutrition contributes to the deaths of approximately



2 million children under the age of 5

The humanitarian sector and donors have already responded to the evidence that cash transfers are effective in increasing food security, and now regularly and securely employ cash interventions in some of the world's most difficult contexts. **Further reforms can make tangible differences for those living in conflict-affected states.** For example, every year, malnutrition contributes to the deaths of approximately **2 million** children under the age of 5, but smart reforms can drive lifesaving efficiencies. Nearly a decade of **IRC research** shows that adopting simplified approaches to malnutrition treatment can help cut costs and reach more malnourished children using a shelf-stable, fortified peanut paste known as ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF). Expanding access to RUTF helps more than **90% of children** recover from this life-threatening condition.

¹¹ This figure is based on an IRC analysis of G7 gross national income reported in 2022, compared to ODA disbursed by G7 countries in 2022 reported to OECD.org.

Humanitarian action is more efficient and better tailored to the needs of affected people when it is delivered in partnership with local NGOs, civil society and grassroots organizations, and women- and refugee-led groups.

Reforms to drive increases in total funding are essential but should be matched with efforts to increase the level of funding that reaches frontline local responders. The proposals outlined in the **2024 Emergency Watchlist** to accelerate support to women-led organizations remain central and should be combined with the donor reforms proposed in this year's report.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Address the economic drivers of humanitarian needs to promote shared prosperity

The 2025 Emergency Watchlist illustrates the intersecting and compounding trends of rising debt, low growth and declining availability of aid. Delivering results for the world's most vulnerable citizens will require renewed levels of funding and new steps to mitigate the impacts of the macroeconomic trends that are contributing, alongside conflict and climate, to rising humanitarian needs.

With rising interest on debt impacting the ability of conflict-affected states to pay for basic services, addressing the burden of sovereign debt in Watchlist countries is vital. This requires an integrated effort. **Continued delivery of long-term debt relief**, including through the World Bank's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative is essential. States should also continue to pursue bilateral debt relief efforts, such as the recent **U.S. announcement** that it will cancel more than \$1.1 billion of outstanding loans to Somalia, a sum representing about a **quarter** of the country's remaining debt. Finally, **eligibility for pauses in debt payments should also be extended to Watchlist countries** to free up resources for essential public services, climate action and resilience in conflict-affected and climate-vulnerable countries.

There is precedent for the suspension of debt servicing due to crises and external shocks—for example, the Debt Service Suspension Initiative enacted by the Group of 20 during the COVID pandemic and the recently introduced Climate Resilient Debt Clauses included in the World Bank's **Crisis Preparedness and Response Toolkit**. To be effective, these debt-pause

mechanisms must apply to all official and private creditors. In addition, **creditors should explore innovative financing options, including debt swaps** that alleviate portions of a country's sovereign debt by restructuring it as bonds to drive new financing to humanitarian crises.

Evidence from countries that have experienced coups, such as those in the Sahel, demonstrates how long-term **suspensions** of international budget support and reductions in donor funding undermine basic service delivery amid worsening crises. With the increasing prevalence of de facto authority control over states and sub-regions of states, bilateral donors and MDBs, such as the World Bank, should take two steps:

First, they should **systematize partnerships with third-party implementers** to ensure continued support to citizens in conflict-affected states and in environments where states or territories become estranged (recommendation four provides more details on the role of partnerships).

Second, donors and MDBs should **establish internal protocols for political risk-mapping** to assess where there is a likelihood of a coup or new de facto authority control that may cause a suspension of essential services, and plan for alternative delivery methods—including through NGO or U.N. partnerships. The World Bank should integrate this mapping into qualitative assessments that trigger additional IDA crisis finance.

The World Bank should also take steps to retain and reform its most effective funding tools for conflict-affected states. The World Bank will soon begin working on its new fragility, conflict and violence (FCV) strategy. There is currently a window of opportunity to influence the strategy to further improve the delivery of finance, including via the FCV envelope, and increase the effectiveness of operations in FCV

countries. It is therefore vital that the World Bank consults with humanitarian organizations, CSOs and local organizations who work in FCV countries to ensure that the strategy provides operationally informed solutions to address delivery gaps in conflict-affected states.



Yasser Omar, 50, attaches an electrical switch to a classroom wall in Abyan, Yemen. An IRC cash-for-work project to rehabilitate a local school has enabled Yasser, a former fisherman, to make a more sustainable income.

Reducing humanitarian needs also requires actions to mitigate the impact of the macroeconomic trends that drive them. The U.N.'s Pact for the Future commits member states to supporting economic stability in conflict-affected states, and U.N. Security Council resolutions on Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Afghanistan all call for efforts to support state macroeconomic function. Yet, responsibility for action on both fronts remains diffuse and poorly defined.

In last year's Watchlist, the IRC called for **the creation of a new mechanism to forecast and address the impacts of economic shocks for humanitarian needs and response.** This mechanism could play a central role in operationalizing commitments

made in the Pact and responding to demand signals from members of the U.N. Security Council. Housed in the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the mechanism would fill a void in coordination between international financial institutions, MDBs, private sector actors, central banks and humanitarian actors. Partners could collectively share and develop analyses, forecast national and global economic trends, predict the implications for humanitarian needs and response, and evaluate the capacities of national economic institutions to respond, considering the consequences of indebtedness. Ultimately, the group would identify recommendations, such as expanding technical assistance, supporting civil servant salary payments, identifying opportunities to alleviate debt distress and unlock frozen assets, and encouraging early action through cash programs.



Shukri Ahmed, 15, at his home at the Kayra IDP site in Deder, Ethiopia. Conflict drove him and his older sister, both orphans, to flee the Somali region. The IRC supports Ahmed with cash assistance through our protection program.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Protect civilians by reforming international institutions

The lives of civilians in Watchlist countries are far removed from the diplomacy at the U.N. Security Council in New York. However, the Security Council remains the apex of the international system. It is charged with guaranteeing peace and security while upholding the U.N. Charter. Unfortunately, it has been paralyzed by global political fragmentation as it seeks to respond to a new and catastrophic wave of internationalized wars. There are no easy fixes, but the appetite for reforming the U.N. and other multilateral bodies is growing. The topic of U.N. Security Council reform featured prominently in the recent Summit of the Future and discussions at the U.N. General Assembly this year. Russian efforts to derail the Summit's Pact for the Future were rejected by states from the global south, many of whom support the necessary collective effort toward U.N. renewal.

Member states should **build upon proposals to make U.N. Security Council membership more equitable and representative, and agree on an agenda for reform** to give voice and power to countries most affected by conflict and climate change. In the Pact for the Future, all U.N. member states **committed** to enlarging the permanent membership of the Council. The Biden administration also proposed an **expansion** that would include permanent rotating seats for African and small island developing states; however, crucially, no new members would wield veto power. An alternative **proposal by Liechtenstein** would add elected members on renewable terms of eight to 10 years, thereby increasing the diversity of membership and institutional memory. While such efforts are necessary, they are insufficient unless combined with steps to reform the use of the veto, which has stymied Council action to protect civilians in conflicts such as Syria, Ukraine and, more recently, Gaza.

The IRC **continues** to support the political declaration led by France and Mexico to **suspend the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities**. The determination of what constitutes a mass atrocity would be made through an independent and neutral panel, as established by the U.N. General Assembly. This proposal would drive action on some of the most abhorrent crimes and contribute to Council legitimacy. Such efforts should be combined with more ambitious reforms. For example, **Liechtenstein** and **New Zealand** have called for the **full implementation of U.N. Charter Article 27 (3)**, which dictates that Security Council members must abstain from voting

if they are “a party to a dispute” and could therefore limit the malign influence of vetoes. This call has now been **echoed** in the Pact for the Future and should receive the full support of states that wish to end the abuse of the veto. However, to be effective, the initiative will require U.N. members to establish a clear working definition of when a state is “a party to a dispute.” Crucially, this definition should reflect the internationalization of conflicts and stop Security Council members from fueling a conflict with one hand while constraining diplomatic efforts to resolve it with another.

U.N. reform cannot be limited to the Security Council. Adherence to the U.N. Charter is vital to offer a countervailing force to the use of hard power. Building on the **Veto Initiative** that shifted some power toward the U.N. General Assembly, **the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace** has proposed a **General Assembly resolution that would set specific consequences for a state's violation of the U.N. Charter by using unlawful force**. The Assembly or a designated expert body would assess when violations have occurred, and each time a state is found guilty, it would progressively lose U.N. membership benefits such as suspension from U.N. committees, loss of General Assembly speaking rights or funding, and ultimately suspension from the U.N. itself.

The use of hard power over diplomacy does not only weaken the U.N.; it also sidelines regional bodies. These organizations have an important role to play in resolving conflicts, negotiating with de facto authorities and addressing growing humanitarian crises. However, due to an overall lack of support from members and limited financial resources, regional bodies are diplomatically weakened and increasingly reliant on donor funding.

Elevating the role of regional bodies in solving regional problems can be supported through two initial steps. First, joint initiatives such as **U.N. Security Council Resolution 2719**, which opens the door for U.N. funding of African Union (AU) peace operations, are important in establishing shared ownership of actions to address challenges facing the African continent and **should be appropriately funded**. Second, member states should demonstrate their commitments to the collective diplomatic and humanitarian actions of regional bodies, such as the AU's efforts in Sudan as well as the work of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance and the AU's African Humanitarian Agency. **Agreement on a roadmap that sees members gradually increase their financial contributions to these bodies would send a strong message of buy-in**. Efforts by AU members to fully fund the organization's operational budget and the Peace and Security Fund are important steps in the right direction.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Ease civilian suffering by promoting and protecting humanitarian access

Civilians endure the harshest impacts of increased reliance on hard power. Addressing these grim repercussions demands a concerted effort to secure unfettered access for humanitarian aid, ensuring that those in dire need receive the necessary support. It is equally crucial to hold accountable those who obstruct such aid, sending a clear message that denial of humanitarian access will not go unanswered.

For most humanitarian programs, access is negotiated by frontline, often national, staff. The ability of humanitarians to secure, maintain and expand access to populations in need is complicated by internationalized conflicts, criminalization by governments, the growing presence of nonstate armed groups, and repressive or de facto authority control over countries and regions. More than **520** nonstate armed groups now operate globally, with varying degrees of influence over humanitarian access. To build effective negotiation capacity at the operational level, **donors should increase funding for organizations like the IRC and its national partners to expand humanitarian access training and support for frontline delivery NGOs.** The IRC's experience shows that by investing in and supporting the expertise and knowledge of frontline staff, it is possible to maintain and increase access even in the most challenging humanitarian contexts.

To complement increased negotiation capacity, efforts to promote and protect access should be expanded. The IRC is **reiterating its call for the establishment of an Independent Access Organization** to augment U.N. access reporting

and advocacy. Existing U.N. reporting mechanisms, including those led by OCHA and the Secretary-General's "Protection of Civilians" and "Children and Armed Conflict" reports, do not adequately convey the trends and impact of access denial, delay and diversion. Further, the regular reliance on the metric of "trucks of aid delivered" as a proxy indicator for the quality of humanitarian access, rather than measuring outcomes for affected populations, illustrates the weaknesses of current efforts to understand access barriers and denial. A new Independent Access Organization would improve reporting, raise awareness of access barriers and denial, and—when local negotiation efforts fail—catalyze action by global, regional and national policymakers, including non-traditional actors and middle powers.



A small team of humanitarian workers takes a boat back to Nyal, South Sudan.

When humanitarian access is weaponized and national-level humanitarian-led negotiations are insufficient to maintain the delivery of aid, as witnessed in numerous contexts including Gaza, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, high-level diplomatic engagement can serve as a complementary effort alongside local engagement to improve humanitarian access. With the right incentives and political commitments, such efforts can play a positive role in supporting access. However, to do so, diplomatic processes must be carefully designed. Participating states, diplomats, regional bodies and the U.N. should coordinate their approaches and leverage to **deliver access agreements that are meaningful for the affected populations.**

To ensure alignment with the needs of people in humanitarian crises, diplomatic actors should **coordinate closely with NGOs, adopt transparent metrics for aid delivery that are not limited to "trucks on the road," and allow for monitoring of the impact of access agreements on the needs of affected populations.**

States should use all channels to ensure that conflict parties respect and follow IHL, including commitments to humanitarian access. **Leveraging non-humanitarian aid contributions through temporary suspensions provides one such opportunity.** During the Tigray war, the **European Union suspended** over €90 million in development aid and the U.S. extended its **pause** on non-humanitarian assistance to pressure the government of Ethiopia to allow aid into Tigray. **Military partnerships as well as arms sales offer another mechanism to support compliance and good practice.** States that arm conflict parties violating IHL may well also be in violation of international law themselves. Therefore, when violations occur or when they are at serious risk of occurring, states should **use domestic policy frameworks to limit, withhold and condition security assistance and arms transfers until compliance with international humanitarian law improves.** States reiterated their commitment to use national legislation in this way in the **Pact for the Future**, and there is wider legislative precedent. The Leahy Law prohibits the U.S. Government from providing military assistance to foreign security force units credibly accused of committing gross human rights violations. The United Kingdom's decision to **limit the transfer of arms** to Israel in response to the civilian impact of the war in Gaza was based in part on an assessment that Israel could reasonably do more to facilitate humanitarian access and distribution.

RECOMMENDATION 5

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

The most extreme impacts of the climate crisis are concentrated in a handful of conflict-affected countries. Wavering political commitment to robust climate action will only deepen this concentration of need. But even without a clear international consensus about climate action, states can still make existing climate efforts work better for conflict-affected communities. The severity of the crisis requires a recalibration of what we do, how we fund it and how we deliver it. Implementing these reforms will send a clear signal that leaders recognize their responsibilities and are willing to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with those on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

Available funding should be targeted to activities that address the needs of communities in conflict-affected states and be delivered in line with the Common Principles for Effective Climate Finance and Action for Relief, Recovery and Peace launched at COP29. Climate finance is

overwhelmingly designed to support stable governments, leaving fragile states to receive just one-third of the per capita adaptation finance that stable states do. Investments in anticipatory action, such as cash programs and early warning systems, have **proven effective** in helping communities prepare for climate shocks. Additionally, strengthening food systems by providing climate-resilient seeds is critical for rebuilding agricultural livelihoods in conflict zones, restoring food security and protecting vulnerable communities from further shocks. **Harnessing the expertise of civil society groups will be vital** in identifying the right investments for climate-affected communities and taking climate-sensitive, evidence-based technologies and interventions to scale in the places that need it the most.

To make climate finance work for conflict-affected regions,

50% of climate finance should be directed toward adaptation



To make climate finance work for conflict-affected regions, **the New Collective Quantified Goal must be structured to ensure that at least 50% of climate finance is directed toward adaptation, with a particular focus on building resilience in fragile states.** This is critical, as these regions are highly vulnerable to climate impacts but remain underserved by **existing finance mechanisms**. The IRC has identified a range of **additional steps** to bridge the adaptation finance gap, which is particularly pronounced in conflict-affected, climate-vulnerable countries and where investment is urgently needed. A more equitable allocation would deliver 18% of all adaptation financing earmarked for developing countries to these contexts.¹² Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. The IRC is calling for **88%** of all bilateral ODA climate finance to be gender sensitive, which means it is allocated to programs and investments that

¹² This target is based upon the estimated share of adaptation needs as defined by climate- and conflict-vulnerable countries. We identified the 18% target by comparing annual adaptation finance needs specified by 12 climate-vulnerable, conflict-affected countries in their available Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans (\$18.9 billion annually for 2021-2030) with the total adaptation needs for 85 developing countries as specified in the UNEP Adaptation Finance Gap Update (\$105 billion annually for 2021-2030).

Faiza Habibu was supported by the IRC's climate resiliency project in Nigeria, funded by Google.org. She was given anticipatory cash, so she could expand her fish farming business. The profit from her business has helped her pay for her children's school fees.





Nour, a psychosocial support officer with Nafs for Empowerment, facilitates a support session for displaced Palestinian children in Khan Younis, Gaza. Nafs and the IRC have partnered to establish a mobile community center to help people cope with the ongoing conflict.

recognize and respond to the specific inequalities and risks facing women and girls—a vital step in ensuring communities can adapt to the impacts of climate change. Flexible funding should also be prioritized for anticipatory action, enabling communities to proactively respond to climate risks.

Reforms to delivery are also required. The IRC has called for MDBs—a main source of climate finance—to increase the use of **partnerships** with civil society organizations to complement government-first delivery models. In Watchlist countries, these partnerships can help development banks as well as bilateral donors effectively and consistently deliver climate change adaptation projects while also supporting the delivery of basic services in conflict-affected states. The World Bank has acknowledged that partnering with U.N. agencies and NGOs has allowed it to **maintain** service delivery to conflict-affected populations, and the World Bank’s own **Partnership Charter** recognizes the comparative advantage offered by NGOs and CSOs.

The Bank’s attempts to partner with the U.N. and NGOs to reach communities in places like Afghanistan and South Sudan, and its focus on further systematizing third-party implementation (TPI) in both the negotiations of the **21st IDA replenishment** and the **Evolution Roadmap**, are important steps in the right direction. The Bank should continue to build on these efforts and experience to **bring these models to scale with a flexible and diverse approach to partnerships in FCV settings**.

In fact, TPI and partnerships offer numerous benefits. Working with NGOs that are led by women or refugees allows the Bank and other donors to ensure that project design is informed by the views of communities, particularly those most marginalized in crises and vulnerable to climate shocks. NGOs and CSOs can also operate even during spikes in insecurity, coups or periods when nonstate armed groups make regions inaccessible to state service providers. This allows services to reach communities where governments cannot.

Partnerships can also help improve long-term, essential government services by harnessing additional expertise and capacity. For example, working with the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, the IRC is pioneering a new **advisory model** approach in which humanitarians leverage their unique and contextually relevant skills to advise investors on how to enhance the inclusion and social impact of projects for crisis- and displacement-affected communities. This flexible model can be applied to strengthen the investments made by MDBs, development finance institutions or the private sector in refugee, internal displacement, or fragile and conflict settings. In Irbid, Jordan, the IRC is **advising** the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development on a €65 million wastewater infrastructure investment. The IRC is involved in all steps of the community engagement plan and has ensured the work effectively includes the views of Syrian refugees, resulting in a project that delivers safe water infrastructure for refugee and host communities alike.

Increase protection and assistance for refugees

By mid-2024, of the **37.9 million** refugees worldwide, 71% were hosted in low- or middle-income countries and only **158,700** were resettled to third countries. This pattern does not reflect the spirit of the Refugee Convention or commitments states have made under the Global Compact on Refugees. In recent elections, politicians have weaponized the rising numbers of asylum seekers at U.S. and European borders to justify new restrictions. While asylum claims were comparatively high last year, this is a symptom of systemic failures in two interrelated areas.

First, for many people escaping conflict or crisis, there are no safe or regulated alternatives to seeking protection at borders. Similarly, those seeking to migrate face long processing times and poorly functioning options for workers and family unification, forcing them into irregular migration across borders. As a result, the issues of asylum for people fleeing from danger and immigration for people who want to move to another country for a better life have become confused.

Second, the majority of those forced from their homes will stay within or close to their own countries, and yet, these relatively poorer countries receive inadequate support. To share the responsibility of refugee hosting with those least able to shoulder it, countries should take active steps to increase protection and assistance for those forced from their homes.

Rich countries should expand safe pathways for refugees and honor their legal obligation to avoid refoulement by abandoning deterrence policies that force people back into harm's way. Resettlement and complementary pathways provide lifesaving protection to some of the most vulnerable refugees. Turning away from these innovations would eliminate regular channels for protection-seekers that have contributed to a reduction in irregular crossings. In Europe, the newly adopted **EU resettlement framework** offers the potential to bring about a more coordinated, predictable and protection-centered approach to resettlement, especially for refugees. To fulfill its potential, **EU member states should increase the capacity and number of national resettlement programs, leading to increased pledges, more robust programs and better implementation.** In the United States, models such as **Safe Mobility Offices**, which process refugee referrals closer to initial displacement, have increased referrals from Latin America to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program by a factor of 10 in the

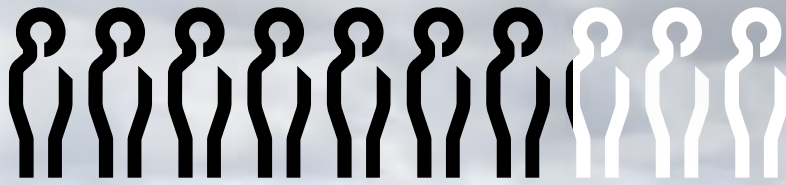
first half of 2024, saving refugees from the dangerous, irregular journey to the U.S. border. Evidence shows that providing safe pathways **incentivizes** protection-seekers to use regular migration routes and thereby creates more order at borders.

Expanded paths for protection-seekers should be complemented by broader reforms that offer routes for other groups who can fill critical labor shortages but may not meet the definition of refugee, and for those seeking to migrate. Establishing effective policy responses to migration will help relieve pressure on asylum systems. By scaling up resettlement and other pathways, wealthy countries can also enjoy the significant **economic** and cultural benefits that refugees bring. A recent study from the U.S. government shows that refugees added a net **\$124 billion** to the economy over 15 years, and newcomers also provide cultural richness and innovation to the communities that welcome them.

For those who arrive at international borders in search of protection, exercising their legal right to seek asylum, **investments by the U.S. and European states in humane reception to provide safe and orderly processing are also vital.** By establishing welcoming infrastructure, host governments can support asylum seekers to find safety and access services, while reducing pressure on asylum systems. For example, in the U.S., the IRC is piloting a new federal-level **case management program** that helps clients navigate the asylum system and address their emotional, psychological and economic concerns. A prior program resulted in 99% compliance with immigration proceedings, and we are already seeing similar results with this new initiative.

Assumptions that the West is the principal host of those in need are false. Around **two-thirds** of refugees and asylum seekers are hosted outside the U.S. or Europe. Of the top five refugee-hosting states (Iran, Türkiye, Germany, Pakistan and Uganda), only one is in the EU. Additional investments are therefore needed to establish accessible services and support self-reliance in these refugee-hosting countries.

The IRC continues to advocate for MDB-led advocacy to encourage policy reforms in refugee-hosting states that support inclusion and integration. Policy reforms that allow refugees to access services such as health, education and social protection, combined with freedom of movement and the right to work, are vital to facilitate refugee inclusion and underpin self-reliance. To make these reforms viable, policy dialogue should be backed up by predictable, multiyear funding that meets the needs of displaced people and their host communities. The IDA Window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR) has sup-



71% of the 37.6M refugees worldwide were hosted in low- or middle-income countries by the end of 2023



Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya was established in 1992 and is one of the largest refugee camps in the world.

ported essential services and helped accelerate policy reforms in some refugee-hosting countries. For example, in Ethiopia, WHR projects enabled thousands of refugees to access work permits. IDA21 should retain the focus on supporting action on forced displacement and refugee inclusion in IDA countries. Ring-fencing IDA financing for projects and policy reforms benefiting hosts and refugees would help the World Bank continue to make a positive contribution to these objectives.

Reforms are also needed to reflect the growing urbanization of refugee displacement. Over 60% of the world's refugees live in urban areas, mostly in low- and middle-income countries. An **IRC analysis** found that many donors have a siloed approach to sustainable and inclusive urbanization, and to addressing the impacts of forced displacement, in spite of the overlap between these issues. Projects delivering urban

infrastructure and services—such as housing, water and sanitation, and transport—should assess and improve refugee access to these services. To achieve this objective, **the IRC calls for donors and MDBs to provide direct financial support to city and local authorities, rather than solely national governments, to facilitate refugee inclusion and integration.** Such authorities are tasked with integrating urban-based refugees and have been important partners in fostering their inclusion. Support to local authorities for the assessment of the specific needs of urban refugee populations and the creation of comprehensive urban development plans (such as extending tenancy protections to refugees and encouraging service providers to recognize their documentation) will make a tangible difference in the lives of urban refugees and their hopes for self-reliance.



Fairuz Faiz Deng, 60, walks to the market with her grandchildren in South Sudan's Transit Center 2. She longs to find her daughter, whom she has lost contact with due to the war in Sudan.

2025 Emergency Watchlist

Country Profiles





01

Sudan

Devastation for Sudanese

as outside powers fuel conflict

Sudan is at the top of the Emergency Watchlist for the second consecutive year. The country's collapse is accelerating as a brutal civil war, fueled by outside powers, devastates civilians. The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) began in April 2023. Sudan now holds two distressing records as the crisis there has displaced more people (**14.6 million**) and left more people in humanitarian need (**30.4 million**) than any other crisis since records began. One in 10 people in humanitarian need globally is in Sudan. Experts **warn** Sudan is heading toward one of the world's worst famines in decades—making it emblematic of the world out of balance we describe in this year's Watchlist. SAF and RSF leaders have spurned diplomatic resolution, believing their interests are best protected by continued fighting. Outside powers, instead of devoting themselves to restoring peace, have escalated the war by supplying more weapons.

ABOVE: Altuma, 45, and her children have been displaced multiple times due to the war in Sudan. They now live in a roofless school building, which leaves them exposed to the varying weather conditions.

Key data

- **48.1 million** population
- **14.6 million** people forcibly displaced, the largest and **fastest** displacement crisis in the world
- **30.4 million** people in humanitarian need (64% of the population), the largest humanitarian crisis since records began
- **25.6 million** people experienced crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity during the June–September 2024 lean season
- **750,000** people experienced catastrophic levels of food insecurity (IPC 5) during the lean season in 2024
- **119** confirmed attacks on health care between April 2023 and October 2024, and likely many more

Key risks

for 2025

- **Humanitarian collapse looms as outside powers fuel war, not diplomacy.** Today, more than 64% of Sudan's population—**30.4 million** people—urgently need assistance, making it the largest humanitarian crisis on record. The conflict has sparked the world's largest displacement crisis, with **11.4 million** people displaced within Sudan and over **3 million** more fleeing into neighboring countries. Sudan starkly illustrates how far the balance can tilt sharply against civilians in conflict: **Sexual violence** is widespread, fighters on both sides regularly target civilians and infrastructure, and child soldier recruitment is common. Human rights groups accuse fighters in Darfur of **ethnic cleansing**, and as the conflict spreads, such violence threatens to escalate. Rather than pressing the SAF and RSF toward peace, outside powers are funneling weapons to their allies. Leaders of both factions seem to believe that continued fighting best serves their interests, putting Sudan on course for devastating humanitarian collapse in 2025.
- **Famine is present and will likely spread in 2025.** In 2024, food security experts confirmed the existence of **famine**—declared only in areas where food shortages lead to widespread deaths—in Zamzam camp in Sudan. During the 2024 lean season, some **750,000** people across Sudan faced the most extreme level of food insecurity (IPC 5),

“ We were sitting and they attacked us, killed people, and we ran with no choice but to flee. We just ran with our children. When you run, you carry one child and others help carry the others.

– Safa, 40
Sudanese refugee and IRC client
in Chad



The IRC in Sudan

When the conflict began in 2023, the IRC adapted our programs and scaled up our response to address the increased humanitarian needs. Despite immense operational challenges, the IRC continues to provide support in Blue Nile, Gedaref, Khartoum, River Nile and White Nile states. We also have a logistics and coordination office in Port Sudan and are exploring opportunities to expand our presence into other states. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Sudan response.

one of the highest levels in the world. IPC 5 means food insecurity is so severe that people are starving to death daily. Experts warn that without a halt to the fighting, which has devastated agriculture and disrupted trade, famine zones are set to rise sharply.

- **Sudan's health crisis will worsen in 2025 as health facilities remain under attack.** Illustrating the extent to which combatants on all sides are prioritizing military gain over protecting civilians, the World Health Organization (WHO) verified at least **119** attacks on health care between April 2023 and October 2024, but the true figure is likely much **higher**. The country's health care system is collapsing, with treatable diseases like cholera and malaria taking a deadly toll. Cholera death rates in Sudan are now **triple** the global average, and disease outbreaks are expected to increase in 2025.
- **Civilians' needs will grow as both sides choke humanitarian access.** Leveraging its status as the internationally recognized government, the SAF has blocked the United Nations and other agencies from reaching RSF-controlled areas. Meanwhile, RSF authorities impose bureaucratic restrictions that delay and block aid delivery. Fighters on all sides frequently loot aid convoys, and attacks on aid workers have surged, with at least **26** Sudanese aid workers killed in 2024. Without swift action to safeguard civilians and civilian infrastructure, many Sudanese will be left without the humanitarian assistance they desperately need.



02

occupied Palestinian territory

Gaza devastated

while West Bank sees record violence

The occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)¹³ remains second on the Watchlist after more than a year of conflict has devastated Gaza and significantly worsened conditions in the West Bank. The latest escalation began in October 2023, when Hamas and other armed groups launched a deadly attack in southern Israel, killing **1,200** people and taking over **200** hostages. Israeli forces then launched airstrikes and ground operations against Hamas, with the conflict sparking an ongoing humanitarian catastrophe. The latest round of fighting has had such a devastating humanitarian impact because it follows multiple previous conflicts as well as decades-long restrictions on commercial and civilian life that left **80%** of the population of Gaza dependent on humanitarian aid even before October 2023. Civilians in the West Bank have also faced **record-level** challenges as Israel intensified military operations and settlers escalated violence there throughout 2024.

ABOVE: After an airstrike in Gaza City, a Palestinian woman and young children flee the site of the attack.

Key data

- **5.2 million** population
- **1.9 million** people displaced in Gaza since October 2023
- **1.9 million** people in Gaza facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity, including **345,000** at the most extreme, (IPC 5) levels, at the start of 2025
- **Zero** hospitals in Gaza remain fully functional
- **1 in 50** people in Gaza killed since October 2023
- **3.3 million** people (all the 2.1 million people in Gaza as well as 1.2 million people in the West Bank and East Jerusalem) in humanitarian need (60% of the population)

¹³ The U.N. uses "State of Palestine" and "occupied Palestinian territory" interchangeably to refer to the West Bank and Gaza. We use occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) in this report for consistency with the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and many of our peer agencies.

Key risks

for 2025

- **More than one in 50 people in Gaza have been killed since October 2023, and this number will grow in 2025 without a lasting ceasefire**, which is the only way to protect civilians, secure the delivery of aid and enable the release of hostages. The Gaza Ministry of Health reports that Israeli airstrikes and ground incursions have killed at least **44,000** Palestinians in Gaza and injured more than **100,000**, while destroying homes, hospitals, schools, water systems, shelters and religious sites. There is no safe place in Gaza—an Israeli-designated “humanitarian zone” still sees **regular bombardment**. More than **1.9 million** people have been forced to flee, often many times. Psychological trauma is **widespread**, particularly among Gaza’s **1.2 million** children. As international attention shifts, for example toward Lebanon, the scales may tilt further away from diplomacy and, without stable security and governance, more conflict will result.
- **Catastrophic food insecurity will persist in Gaza and could lead to famine in 2025**. The ongoing conflict, notably Israeli airstrikes and fighting with remaining Hamas forces, has decimated food production, destroying bakeries and **70%** of Gaza’s cropland. Israel tightly controls the flow of aid and commercial supplies as part of long-standing restrictions and in 2024, Israel blocked **83%** of required food aid bound for Gaza, despite its obligation under international law as an “occupying power” to protect civilians and facilitate rapid, unimpeded humanitarian access. The breakdown of security in Gaza and desperation as people cannot find enough food have led to looting of some of the little aid that gets in. As 2025 begins, **1.9 million** people, nearly the entire population of Gaza, will face crisis-level or worse (IPC 3+) food insecurity, with **345,000** experiencing catastrophic levels (IPC 5). At this stage of hunger, people—especially children—starve to death each day.¹⁴ The situation is particularly severe in northern Gaza, where **100,000** people were cut off from aid for more than a month in late 2024. Food

“Gaza is deprived of all the necessities of life. Gaza is missing education, security, treatment, health. [...] This must reach the world outside, so that they can see the situation for what it is and find a solution.”

– Heba Raafat Mahmoud Al-Azami, 15
IRC client in Gaza



The IRC in oPt:

Despite the obstacles, the IRC and our partners continue to provide lifesaving services every day in the oPt. In Gaza, we provide clean drinking water, malnutrition treatment, child protection and mental health services, and we support emergency medical care in the few hospitals still functioning. In the West Bank, the IRC and our partners offer a range of mental health, protection and early childhood development services while also bolstering medical supplies and building the capacity of hospitals to handle mass casualty incidents. [Learn more](#) about the IRC’s oPt response.

security experts **warn** that if the conflict and restrictions on humanitarian and commercial supplies continue, famine could take hold across Gaza.

- **Collapse of the humanitarian system will leave civilians without the services they need in 2025**. Continued fighting has severely weakened the humanitarian infrastructure on which civilians depend. The WHO has reported over **560** attacks on health care, which have completely destroyed **19 of the 36** hospitals in Gaza and left the remainder only partially functional. There are also new threats to humanitarian work. In late 2024, the Israeli parliament passed a law **banning** Israeli authorities from coordinating with the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which provides a critical backbone of health, education and other services across oPt, and blocking the agency from working in Israel and East Jerusalem. At the time of publication, the implementation date for this legislation is unclear. However, its enforcement would deliver a devastating blow to humanitarian action across oPt since UNRWA cannot operate there without coordination and agreements with Israeli authorities and other agencies are not ready to take over its role.
- **The worst violence in the West Bank since U.N. records began in 2005 is set to continue into 2025**. Israeli military raids, illegal settlement expansion and severe movement restrictions surged throughout 2024. More than **700** Palestinians—one in five of them children—have been killed in the West Bank since October 2023, most by Israeli forces and some by settlers. **Seven** Israeli civilians and **17** members of the Israeli security forces have also been killed in violence in the West Bank over the same period. Rapid settlement growth and land expropriation will ensure tensions remain high and violence persists, threatening Palestinian communities’ access to essential services and their ability to earn money to feed their families.

¹⁴ This description of IPC 5 (Catastrophe) is informed by both IRC experience of responding to food insecurity and guidance from Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) on communicating about acute food insecurity (IPC Guidelines to Enhance Communication on Acute Food Insecurity and Malnutrition).



03

Myanmar

Devastating new phase of conflict deepens crisis

Myanmar has entered the top three of the Emergency Watchlist, driven by escalating internal conflict. Violence intensified after the military took political power in 2021, forming the State Administration Council (SAC) and prompting many long-standing insurgencies to spread and merge into a wider conflict across the country. Millions are now in humanitarian need, even in previously stable areas, and the number of people who have fled their homes to find safety has risen rapidly, surpassing **3 million** in 2024. Major cities face increasing threats as fighting worsens, and Myanmar's vulnerable infrastructure is struggling under both war and climate shocks. Communities experience regular cyclones and flooding, which the war-shattered water and health infrastructure are ill-equipped to manage.

ABOVE: An internally displaced family arrives to safety in Kayah (Karenni) State in eastern Myanmar after fleeing their home due to military activity. Photo: UNOCHA/ Siegfried Modola

Key data

- **54.6 million** population
- **19.9 million** people in humanitarian need (35% of the population)
- **3.2 million** people internally displaced
- **6,052** new cholera cases in 2024 as of October
- **1,500+** attacks on health care since 2021
- **0.25%** of global climate adaptation and mitigation funds received, despite being one of most climate-vulnerable countries in the world

Key risks

for 2025

- **Conflict is sweeping across Myanmar, threatening civilians throughout the country.** Nearly 900,000 people were forced to flee their homes to find safety in 2024, a 37% increase from 2023. Nonstate armed groups have shown unprecedented unity since late 2023 and now contest control of many previously stable areas. China brokered a short-lived ceasefire between the SAC and an alliance of nonstate armed groups in January 2024. While this agreement temporarily reduced fighting in some parts of the country, conflict continued elsewhere. The balance now tilts firmly toward more war, rather than diplomacy. According to the U.N., the number of civilians killed since the SAC took power reached 5,350 in June 2024, nearly **doubling** between April 2023 and June 2024, when the ceasefire failed. The U.N. also reports that sexual and gender-based violence against civilians has **“increased dramatically”** across the country since 2021.
- **Cholera and other diseases threaten to overwhelm Myanmar’s health system, which conflict has decimated.** SAC forces are increasingly relying on drones and airstrikes as they fight on multiple fronts. The result is that hospitals and water infrastructure are under attack, and medical staff face regular threats. Since 2021, over 1,500 health care attacks have been recorded, including 418 in 2023 alone, the last year on record. Health facilities

“ Myanmar is currently facing a severe humanitarian crisis. Since the military takeover in February 2021, the situation has significantly worsened due to the escalating conflict. Typhoon Yagi, which made landfall in September 2024, caused heavy rains and widespread flooding, further exacerbating humanitarian needs.



– Thant Sin Htet, Senior Emergency Response Coordinator, IRC Myanmar

The IRC in Myanmar

The IRC initiated an emergency response in Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis in 2008. The IRC has worked with local partners to expand its activities since then, serving people who have been affected by the escalating conflict since February 2021 as well as marginalized and stateless communities displaced previously. The IRC currently works across multiple sectors in Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, Shan, Kayah and Kayin states. [Learn more](#) about the IRC’s Myanmar response.

and water treatment plants, critical for disease prevention, will face new challenges in 2025 as domestic gas and electricity production **plummets**. Communities in areas outside SAC control already have limited access to health care and clean water. A widespread cholera outbreak threatens to further overwhelm the system, with over 6,000 new cases between January and October 2024.

- **Cyclones and floods are a constant threat in one of the world’s most climate-vulnerable countries.** In September 2024, flooding linked to Typhoon Yagi affected over 1 million people in Myanmar, destroying homes and causing soaring food prices due to damaged crops. Despite the country’s massive exposure to the climate crisis, to which it has contributed very little given its low carbon emissions, an IRC analysis of climate funding suggests that Myanmar receives just 0.25% of global climate adaptation and mitigation funds. Little of this funding will benefit communities in non-SAC areas, who are largely cut off from development projects.
- **Shifting and spreading conflict activity will continue to constrain humanitarian efforts.** Myanmar is already one of the most complex countries in the world for humanitarians, with violence against aid workers and extreme bureaucratic hurdles complicating and undermining aid delivery. These **extreme** barriers to humanitarian action are poised to worsen as conflict spreads in 2025 and parties to the conflict prioritize military gains over their duty to facilitate access. With underfunding and shifting frontlines, only a fraction of the 19.9 million people in need will receive help in 2025.



04

Syria

Massive uncertainty following rapid collapse of government forces

Syria re-enters the Emergency Watchlist's top five for the first time since 2021 after nonstate armed groups launched a surprise offensive in late 2024, triggering a rapid collapse of government forces. As the Watchlist goes to print, the situation is highly uncertain. Nonstate armed groups control the capital, Damascus, while President Bashar al-Assad has fled, **reportedly** to Moscow. The conflict, which had relatively stabilized in recent years, has taken a dramatic turn, with major consequences for all Syrians—who are enduring their 14th year of war. Even before this escalation, the conflict had forced **13.8 million** people to flee their homes—the second largest displacement crisis in the world—and plunged the population into near-universal poverty. Whether the latest shifts in the conflict will allow Syrians to start rebuilding their lives in 2025 or deepen the crisis remains an open question.

ABOVE: Yahya*, 15, and his father next to their tent in an internally displaced persons camp in northwest Syria. Originally displaced after losing their home due to airstrikes, their family was forced to relocate to another camp when a massive earthquake struck.

*Name has been changed to protect the client's privacy.

Key data

- **23.2 million** population
- **16.7 million** people in humanitarian need in 2024 (69% of the population)*
- **13.8 million** people forcibly displaced within or from Syria (59% of the population)
- **12.9 million** people facing food insecurity (56% of the population)
- **90%** of the population living in poverty
- **48%** of primary health care facilities and 35% of public hospitals either partially or not functional

*Data for 2025 is not yet available

Key risks

for 2025

- **Uncertainty about Syria's future could devolve into renewed conflict.** Armed groups advanced rapidly in late 2024 while the Government of Syria (GoS) forces collapsed. The GoS's external backers—Russia, Hezbollah, Iran and Iranian-linked militias—offered little or no support as armed groups burst out of their stronghold in the northwest, first seizing the second city, Aleppo, and then advancing on the capital. Armed groups also re-emerged in other parts of the country. Most urban centers fell with only limited and short-lived fighting. Armed groups now control the capital and the current prime minister has said that he will cooperate with the formation of a transitional government, but the outcomes are unpredictable. Infighting between nonstate armed groups historically weakened anti-GoS forces and could now reemerge. Turkish forces could also become directly involved in ongoing fighting between Turkish-backed groups and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northern Syria, as it seeks to expand its so-called "buffer zone." Other armed groups active in Syria's multi-actor war, such as Islamic State, could exploit the chaos. Syria consequently enters 2025 facing massive uncertainty that could devolve into a new phase of intensified conflict.
- **Syrians face extreme uncertainty ahead after years of war have undermined their resilience.** Humanitarian needs hit new records in 2024 with 16.7 million people in need, reflecting both the cumulative impact of the war

“ Northern Syria is home to a large, resilient population urgently in need of basic services—hospitals, schools, roads and sanitation. For many, these services are not just essential; they represent hope and a chance to rebuild lives disrupted by conflict.



– Yasser Alamen, Livelihoods Engineer
Officer, IRC Syria

The IRC in Syria

The IRC has been working in Syria since 2012 and is currently responding to needs in northern Syria, directly and in partnership with local organizations. We provide lifesaving health care, including support for health facilities and mobile health teams. We also deliver counseling and protection services for women and children, particularly survivors of violence, along with cash assistance, early recovery and early childhood development support. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Syria response.

and the 2023 earthquakes which affected 8.8 million people across Syria. The protracted war has devastated Syria's economy. Between 2010 and 2020, GDP shrank by more than half. Once a middle-income country, Syria has been designated as "low income" since 2018. Poverty is now nearly universal, affecting 90% of the population. The Syrian pound has collapsed against the dollar and hyperinflation is making food unaffordable for many. The toll on health is severe. According to IRC research, malnutrition among children under five years old, virtually nonexistent prior to the conflict, has reached alarming levels. Our teams also report that some displaced people have been forced to flee more than 20 times since the conflict began. The immense existing pressures on communities will further deepen the impact of any renewed conflict in 2025.

- **Hunger and disease will spread as drought further restricts many Syrians' access to water.** IRC analysis suggests that the first months of 2025 will see below average rainfall and above average temperatures. This will undermine food production, adding to hunger, and make it harder for families to access clean drinking water. Cholera is already present in Syria and could spread rapidly as new conflict forces even more people into crowded displacement sites and to use unsafe water sources. While cholera is both preventable and treatable, the war has put nearly half of all primary health care facilities and more than one in three public hospitals partially or fully out of operation. Malnourished children will face the greatest threats as their weakened bodies are less able to withstand cholera and other diseases.



05

South Sudan

Conflict and climate disasters deepen humanitarian crisis

A triple threat of conflict spillover from Sudan, political instability and the climate crisis keeps South Sudan in the top five of the Emergency Watchlist for a second year. An uneasy calm survives for now between the two main parties to the 2013-2018 civil war—the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) led by President Salva Kiir Mayardit and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO) led by Vice President Riek Machar. However, economic, political and regional tensions are all growing, and localized violence is widespread throughout the country, while an annual cycle of severe flooding ravages food production and pulls the population deeper into crisis. At the same time, the arrival of over **878,000** people fleeing Sudan's war adds to the challenges facing the country, and the conflict threatens economic turmoil in South Sudan.

ABOVE: Veronica, 31, is a mother of six who has benefited from the IRC's women's empowerment and protection program in South Sudan. Through the program, she learned about gender-based violence awareness and prevention.

Key data

- **11.1 million** population
- **9.3 million** people in humanitarian need (69% of the population)
- **7.6 million** people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity between April and July 2025
- **63,000** people facing catastrophic (IPC 5) levels of food insecurity between April and July 2025
- **878,000** returnees and refugees from Sudan arrived since April 2023
- **2.4 million** people internally displaced

Key risks

for 2025

- **The conflict in Sudan exposes South Sudan to growing economic crisis.** Nearly all of South Sudan's government revenue comes from producing oil, which must be exported via Sudan. As of this report's publication, South Sudan is hoping to resume oil exports following months of disruption due to a conflict-damaged pipeline in Sudan. The drop in oil exports caused a rapid decline in the South Sudanese economy and left the government unable to pay its staff. The economic turmoil has also left families facing hyperinflation, extreme currency depreciation and food prices that were over **95%** higher in July 2024 than in the previous year. The ongoing conflict in Sudan puts South Sudan's oil exports and thus its entire economy at severe risk of collapse.
- **Political and regional tensions threaten to escalate the localized violence that is already widespread across South Sudan.** Pervasive insecurity leaves civilians—especially women and children—vulnerable to high levels of violence, exploitation and abuse. Local conflict is likely to worsen in 2025 as economic collapse fuels additional violence. Broader political and regional tensions could also drag the country toward wider conflict. South Sudan's first-ever elections have repeatedly been delayed—sparking protests from President Kiir's rivals—while the agreement that ended the 2013-2018 civil war is set to **expire** in February 2025. Growing tensions across the region also threaten to draw South Sudan into the civil war in Sudan. Over **878,000** people fleeing Sudan have arrived since April 2023, raising the risk of violent disputes over land, housing and property.

“ Our teams serve over a million people with lifesaving aid, but chronic underfunding hampers our ability to provide the long-term, dignified support they deserve.

– Ladu Morris, Interim Country Director, IRC South Sudan



The IRC in South Sudan

Since the beginning of the conflict in Sudan, the IRC has been responding to the arrival of both refugees and returnees in South Sudan. The IRC delivers a range of lifesaving health, nutrition and general protection services to prevent and reduce excess mortality, ensuring that emergency needs are met and that acute protection concerns are addressed at points of entry. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's South Sudan response.

- **Violence against aid workers is undermining efforts to respond to extreme needs and catastrophic food insecurity.** Needs in South Sudan are at an extreme high, with **69%** of the population in humanitarian need. In 2025, there will be **63,000** people experiencing the worst, catastrophic (IPC 5) level of food insecurity, where people are starving to death every day, while **2.1 million** children are expected to be acutely malnourished. However, there were also at least **28** attacks on aid workers over the course of 2024 and over **260** incidents where humanitarian access was restricted during its first seven months alone. The reality that South Sudan is one of the most dangerous places for humanitarian personnel will make efforts to respond to the deepening crisis even more treacherous in 2025.
- **Devastating multiyear flooding means people in South Sudan will face disease outbreaks and hunger in 2025.** Five consecutive years of flooding have left **1 million** people each year in South Sudan vulnerable to waterborne diseases, displacement and **extreme** levels of malnutrition. In late 2024, over **76,000** people were displaced due to flooding and **53,000** farmers and cattle keepers lost their crops and livestock, damaging the food supply. If donors fail to prioritize climate adaptation in South Sudan, which is already considered the **second-most** vulnerable globally to climate risks, the nation will be unable to handle new rounds of floods in 2025. This could result in widespread hunger and potentially famine in hard-to-reach areas.



06

Lebanon

Israel-Hezbollah conflict

drives massive crisis escalation

A deadly new phase of conflict between the Lebanese non-state armed group Hezbollah and Israel pushes Lebanon into the top 10 of the Emergency Watchlist for the first time.

On November 27, 2024, Israel and Hezbollah agreed to a ceasefire which is broadly holding as we publish this report. The agreement has brought a level of relative calm after two months of intense ground combat and airstrikes—and over a year of cross-border fire. However, a ceasefire alone does not end the acute humanitarian need. The conflict caused devastation, forcing **1.4 million** people to flee their homes in Lebanon and displacing **60,000** people in northern Israel, many for over a year. Some civilians are now returning to their homes on both sides of the border, but this process has been slowed by concerns over the durability of the ceasefire. Families across Lebanon must contend with the impact of conflict on top of a multiyear economic crisis that has weakened the health care system and left record numbers of people going hungry.

ABOVE: To flee the escalating conflict in Lebanon, a family of four crosses into Syria, a country already struggling with humanitarian need due to a 14-year conflict.

Key data

- **5.4 million** population
- **1.4 million** people displaced from their homes in Lebanon (including over **870,000** remaining within Lebanon and **510,000** having fled into Syria)
- **3.7 million** people in humanitarian need in 2024 (**64%** of the population)*
- **1.3 million** people faced crisis or worse (IPC 3+) food insecurity prior to the start of the recent hostilities (**24%** of the population)
- **Nearly 4,000** people killed and over **16,500** injured in Israeli attacks between October 8, 2023, and November 28, 2024. **48** civilians have been killed in northern Israel.

*Data for 2025 is not yet available

Key risks

for 2025

- **Any resurgence of conflict in Lebanon would present new threats for 3.7 million people already in need of humanitarian assistance.** Ground conflict and Israeli airstrikes in late 2024 forced over **1.4 million** people—a mix of mostly Lebanese and Syrian nationals—to flee their homes. Most (over **870,000** people) remained within Lebanon, while another **510,000** were displaced to Syria, which is also on the Emergency Watchlist. Many stayed with relatives, in overcrowded shelters with poor sanitation and limited health care, on the streets, or in unfinished buildings. Syrian refugees often faced restrictions on access to collective shelters. People started to return to their homes in Lebanon—and northern Israel—after the ceasefire was agreed. But with nearly **25%** of buildings in southern Lebanon destroyed and many more damaged, the effects will be long-lasting. The ceasefire is still fragile while tensions between Israel and Hezbollah’s ally Iran remain high and the conflict in Gaza continues, so there is a high risk of further rounds of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah during 2025.
- **The risk of preventable diseases is growing after Israeli airstrikes accelerated the collapse of Lebanon’s health system,** which was already weakened by years of economic crisis. As of November 2024, the WHO had reported **158** attacks on medical facilities, with **241** health workers killed and **292** injured. **Eight** hospitals had been

“ In Lebanon, families have been devastated by the crisis. Many have lost their homes, livelihoods and sense of security due to bombings and displacement. The emotional toll of such emergencies is immense.



– Batoul Chawich, Child Protection Caseworker, IRC Lebanon

The IRC in Lebanon:

The IRC has been providing life-changing support to both Lebanese citizens and refugees since 2012. In response to the September 2024 escalation of conflict, the IRC swiftly launched a comprehensive emergency response. Working alongside local partners, we have been supporting people displaced by conflict with hot meals, cash assistance, shelter materials, hygiene kits, and lifesaving protection, health and mental health services, reaching tens of thousands of affected people. [Learn more](#) about the IRC’s Lebanon response.

forced to close, and **seven** were only partially functioning. This collapse leaves civilians at greater risk from preventable diseases and untreated chronic conditions—particularly as water, sanitation and health infrastructure is damaged or destroyed. A confirmed **cholera case** in October 2024 suggests the disease may be returning after a previous outbreak in 2022. Cholera poses a major threat in overcrowded shelters, where poor sanitation allows the disease to spread easily.

- **As conflict accelerates the country’s economic collapse, more people will be pushed into poverty and food insecurity.** Before the latest escalation, nearly **25%** of Lebanon’s population faced crisis-level or worse food insecurity (IPC 3+), and **80%** lived in poverty. The World Bank reported that **8%** of Lebanese people lived in extreme poverty in 2004/2005; now, over a third of the population (**36%**) lives in extreme poverty. Lebanon’s economic collapse has had even harsher impacts for Syrian refugees, with **84%** of Syrian households in Lebanon in extreme poverty as of 2023. Between 2019 and 2023, the Lebanese pound lost over **98%** of its value, and food prices rose by **350%**—the **highest** food price inflation globally. The latest conflict has worsened the economic crisis by disrupting supply chains and agriculture, which will likely push even more people into extreme poverty and hunger. Additionally, the surge of people fleeing Lebanon into Syria and the mounting economic crisis may provide cover for Lebanese authorities to increase pressure on Syrian refugees to return to Syria, even as conditions there remain unsafe.



07

Burkina Faso

Civilians face massacres and sieges

Burkina Faso remains in the top 10 of the Emergency Watchlist for the third consecutive year. Millions have been forced to flee brutal campaigns of groups like the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which continue to devastate communities across the country and the wider Sahel region. Armed groups have also isolated nearly **40** towns—up sharply from just **one** in 2021—cutting off around **2 million** people from the rest of the country and humanitarian aid. Meanwhile, attacks on hospitals, schools and communities are tipping the balance ever-further toward greater civilian harm.

ABOVE: Aminata, second from left, is a Malian refugee and a mother of four children. Now residing in Burkina Faso, Aminata has increased her agricultural production with training and farming inputs provided by the IRC.

Key data

- **23.3 million** population
- **1,800+** civilians killed in the first six months of 2024
- **2.1 million** people internally displaced
- **5.9 million** people in humanitarian need (25% of the population)
- **2 million** civilians living in towns and cities encircled by armed groups
- **43%** of the population living in poverty

Key risks

for 2025

- **Civilians face increasingly brutal violence from armed groups.** Throughout 2024, JNIM, ISGS and other armed groups launched devastating attacks, massacring entire communities. Over **1,800 civilians** were killed in the first six months of 2024 alone. The brutal violence has forced more than **2 million** people to flee their homes. In August 2024, JNIM fighters carried out one of the deadliest attacks in Africa in decades—and the **largest** in Burkina Faso since its crisis began in 2015—killing **600 civilians** over just a few hours. Reports also implicate the regular military and “self defense” forces in similar mass killings. Human Rights Watch accused Burkina Faso’s military of killing over **200 civilians** in a single incident in February 2024. With fighters on all sides showing little respect for international law, the conflict is likely to escalate further, increasing the toll on civilians in 2025.
- **Millions in encircled towns will face growing needs as they are cut off from aid, food and key services.** Nearly **40** towns and cities, home to about **2 million** people, are entering 2025 with severely limited access to humanitarian aid, food, water, schools and hospitals. The true scale of needs in these areas is unclear due to the lack of international access. Humanitarian access is likely to worsen as armed groups increasingly target aid workers, viewing them as part of a hostile foreign agenda. In 2023, aid deliveries from international nongovernmental organizations reportedly reached just **1%** of civilians in half of the affected towns.

“ Health workers visited my neighborhood to train women, including me, how to screen their children for malnutrition. I learned that day that my child was malnourished.



– Zida Ramarou, 30
IRC client in Burkina Faso

The IRC in Burkina Faso

The IRC initiated an emergency response in Burkina Faso in 2019, before establishing a country program in 2020 in response to the mass internal displacement of people caused by the country’s security situation. The IRC implements lifesaving interventions and emergency assistance in health, nutrition, safety, education, economic recovery and power, with a particular focus on working with local partners, mainly women-led organizations. [Learn more](#) about the IRC’s Burkina Faso response.

- **Burkina Faso will continue to receive limited climate funds despite being on the frontline of the climate crisis.** In 2024, historic flooding across the Sahel, including in Burkina Faso, destroyed homes, farmland and access to clean water and sanitation. This likely contributed to a major dengue fever outbreak. Burkina Faso faces disproportionately high impacts from the climate crisis—yet it receives less than **1%** of all global climate mitigation and adaptation funding.
- **The collapse of international development risks trapping communities in extreme poverty.** Burkina Faso illustrates the growing gap between rich and poor countries. Conflict has severely disrupted the already-fragile economy, including the vital mining sector, which generates **77%** of Burkina Faso’s exports. As a result, poverty remains high, at over **43%**. Many key international development partners suspended budget support after the 2022 military takeover, striking a major blow to poverty-reduction efforts. Only the World Bank continues to support government spending and economic stabilization in Burkina Faso.



08

Haiti

Humanitarian collapse as gang violence spreads

Rampant gang violence and a government unable to maintain control have thrown millions of people into crisis in Haiti. Criminal violence is a long-standing challenge for Haiti, but it has intensified and spread since the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, which left the country without a fully functioning government. The emergence of stronger, more united gangs has tilted the scales toward more conflict and prevented the government from delivering health care, education and other critical services. Moreover, Haiti has endured repeated natural disasters since 2021. The combination of earthquakes, hurricanes and pervasive insecurity has driven nearly half of Haiti's population into severe food insecurity and millions more into extreme poverty.

ABOVE: Bendji Cadet, a farmer from Les Cayes, Haiti, has benefited from support provided by the OCHA PAPHYRUS CORN project. Photo: UNOCHA/Riguerre Noel

Key data

- **11.7 million** population
- **6 million** people in humanitarian need (50% of the population)
- **700,000+** people internally displaced
- **5.5 million** people facing crisis (IPC 3+) or worse levels of food insecurity between March and June 2025
- **85%** of Haiti's capital and its metropolitan area controlled by criminal gangs
- **2.7 million** people living in areas controlled by criminal gangs

Key risks

for 2025:

- **The political vacuum will leave Haiti's leaders struggling to contain growing criminal violence.** Haiti has experienced constant political paralysis since President Moïse was assassinated. The Transitional Presidential Council formed in April 2024 to exercise the powers of the president has been marked by internal splits and limited popular legitimacy, hampering its ability to restore security control over the country even with support from Kenyan police forces deployed to Haiti since June 2024. Instead, criminal gangs have become stronger and more organized, forming coalitions that rival the power of the state. As the gangs continue to fight for control over Haiti's resources and its population, 2025 will see high levels of insecurity and disruption to humanitarian aid, the movement of people and economic development.
- **The gangs' continued control of large swaths of territory will threaten the safety of millions of Haitians, particularly women and girls.** Nearly a quarter of Haitians (23%) live in areas controlled by coalitions of criminal gangs, which include 85% of the capital, Port-au-Prince, and its metropolitan area. For Haitians living under the control of criminal gangs, this means facing daily threats to their safety, including kidnapping, extortion and murder. Sexual violence against women and girls is particularly widespread as gangs have adopted it as a deliberate tactic to instill fear in communities and take control of neighborhoods. Children also risk being forced to join gangs.

“Haiti is my homeland, and I love it dearly, but there are difficulties. All the major cities are occupied by armed men. There are no opportunities.”

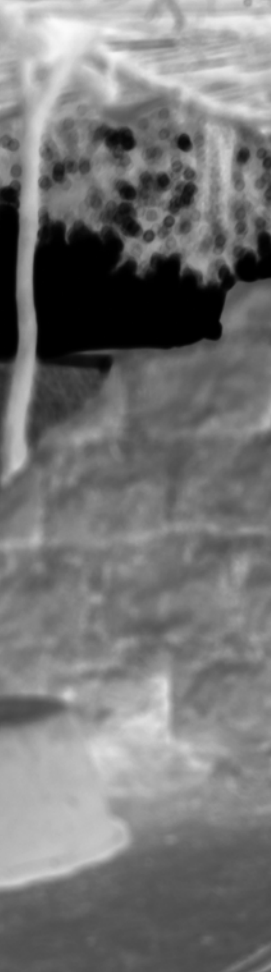


– Michelda, 26
Haitian refugee and IRC client
in Mexico

The IRC in Haiti

The IRC has a history of supporting Haiti since 2010, working with civil society organizations to respond to the needs of communities. In December 2022, the IRC launched a new emergency response, partnering with a strong network of organizations that have provided long-term support to Haitians. The IRC and partners focus on cholera prevention; health care; water, sanitation and hygiene; child protection; and gender-based violence awareness, prevention and response.

- **Communities will face growing hunger, humanitarian needs and outbreaks of preventable diseases in 2025.** As criminal gangs have become more organized, they have also taken control of the movement of goods, including food and humanitarian assistance, throughout the country. As a result, 5.5 million people will be food insecure and 6 million will need humanitarian assistance in 2025. However, many children cannot receive prompt treatment for malnutrition because criminal violence has forced some treatment centers to close, and those that remain open are often understaffed, inaccessible or lacking in crucial supplies. Moreover, residents of areas controlled by criminal gangs often lack access to health care and sanitation—21% of Haitian households do not have access to sanitation facilities—and medical and humanitarian workers struggle to reach and treat those in need. Gangs have also looted health centers. The result is that preventable diseases like cholera and tuberculosis, which are already present in the population, could spread rapidly in 2025, particularly in overcrowded settlements for displaced people.
- **Haiti is still rebuilding from past natural shocks, and more could strike in 2025.** Haiti's geographic location means it is frequently exposed to natural shocks such as storms and earthquakes. Due to poor infrastructure and conflict-weakened response capacity, these shocks often have a devastating human impact. The country is still recovering from its last major natural shock, a 7.2-magnitude earthquake in 2021 that killed over 2,000 people and displaced more than 38,000. Criminal violence has worsened since then, further reducing communities' ability to withstand any new shocks in 2025.



09

Mali

Unabating and spreading multi-front conflict

Hunger is deepening as Mali's multi-front conflict has expanded, leaving a growing number of cities besieged.

Twelve years since the conflict began, Mali's military government, with support from the Russian mercenary Wagner Group, is fighting against armed groups including ethnic Tuareg forces, ISGS and JNIM. Since the departure of U.N. and French military support, civilian fatalities have **risen** sharply, with Malian military and Wagner forces now reportedly responsible for **more civilian killings** than JNIM and ISGS. Meanwhile, ISGS and JNIM **blockaded** more towns and cities in 2024, leaving **hundreds of thousands** of civilians without consistent access to food, water and humanitarian assistance.

ABOVE: Youma Traoré, 78, breeds sheep and goats at her home in Mali. Cash support from the IRC's Norad project has enabled Youma to expand her herd and better support her family.

Key data

- **23.3 million population**
- **1,000+** civilians killed in the first half of 2024, a rise of 44% from the same time period in 2023
- **66%** increase in violence against women and girls in the first half of 2024 compared to the same time period in 2023
- **5.9 million** people in humanitarian need (25% of the population)
- **65+** granaries deliberately burned by conflict parties in first half of 2024
- **350,000+** people affected by flooding in 2024

Key risks

for 2025

- **Civilians face escalating threats as armed groups place more communities under siege and expand operations toward the capital.** Insurgencies across the country have strengthened, allowing JNIM and ISGS to encircle and control more cities and towns. This strategy is driving ever-greater civilian harm: U.N. monitoring groups reported a **288%** rise in human rights violations and a **66%** increase in violence against women and girls in the first half of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023. Armed groups are also now operating in and near the capital, Bamako. In 2024, JNIM launched the first major assault on Bamako since 2017, killing over **70** people and injuring more than **200**. With armed groups operating with impunity across more of the country, civilian harm will grow in 2025—whether through killings, kidnappings, sexual violence or forced displacement.
- **A catastrophic food crisis is taking hold as armed groups target food production and cut supply routes.** JNIM, ISGS and other armed groups intentionally set over **65** granaries on fire in the first half of 2024. Blockades of civilian areas are also restricting the delivery of key sup-

“ **The crisis in Mali limits financial access to income sources and essential services. When access to these basic social services becomes difficult, communities, particularly women and children, must travel long distances in dangerous areas, exposing them to violence along the way.** ”



– Djeneba Bathil, Project Manager, IRC Mali

The IRC in Mali

Since 2012, the IRC has provided lifesaving assistance to over half a million Malians who were displaced by conflict and facing the consequences of severe food shortages along with the collapse of basic public services such as health care and education. We are working with partners to gather evidence that will enable us to scale up simplifications to the current malnutrition treatment system so that we can reach more acutely malnourished children, in Mali and beyond. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Mali response.

plies, with rice prices **doubling** in some places. Flooding has worsened the situation by damaging croplands. The 2023 withdrawal of the U.N. stabilization mission also halted humanitarian flights that previously brought critical supplies into besieged areas. In 2024, Mali was one of the **few** countries where people were experiencing the most severe, catastrophic levels of food insecurity (IPC 5), with more than **2,500** people—mainly in areas cut off by armed groups—facing catastrophic food insecurity by mid-year. This level of food insecurity has such devastating impacts that it is typically accompanied by daily deaths from starvation.

- **Mali will face severe climate crisis risks with limited international support.** Mali is the **eighth-most** vulnerable country to the climate crisis. Record-breaking flooding in 2024, the **worst** seen since the 1960s, left **tens of thousands** of homes destroyed, **nearly 1 million** hectares of cropland flooded, and over **350,000** people in need of emergency support. There is a real risk of more climate shocks in 2025. Yet, an IRC analysis shows that Mali has received just **0.6%** of global climate adaptation and mitigation funding. As the military authorities contend with rampant insecurity, the balance is likely to tip further away from international investment in climate mitigation programs, leaving communities without support as they face a climate crisis they did not create.



10 Somalia

Disarray among international forces risks **conflict escalation**

Somalia remains in the top 10 of the Emergency Watchlist as long-standing challenges from armed conflict and the climate crisis threaten to surge again in 2025. The powerful al-Shabaab armed group has been fighting both government and external forces deployed in Somalia since 2006, when it seized control of large parts of the country. The conflict stabilized to a relatively lower level in recent years. However, changes to the external forces deployed in Somalia, combined with **increased** conflict between clans, risk tilting the balance toward more destructive conflict in 2025. Meanwhile, farming and herding communities are still recovering from Somalia's **worst** drought on record between 2021 and 2023, and with La Niña currently expected to come into effect, there is a risk of renewed drought in 2025.

ABOVE: Amina finds safety at Guuled IDP camp on the outskirts of Dhusamareb, Somalia after fleeing her home in Ceel Buur district. The IRC has provided emergency cash assistance to Amino and other vulnerable households in this camp, to help meet their urgent needs.

Key data

- **18.1 million** population
- **6 million** people in humanitarian need (37% of the population)
- **2,000** incidents of political violence in the first nine months of 2024
- **1.6 million** children expected to suffer from acute malnutrition in 2024 to 2025
- **22%** rise in severe acute malnutrition from 2023 to 2024
- **4.4 million** Somalis facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity

Key risks

for 2025

- **Conflict is likely to escalate in 2025 as government forces face growing threats with reduced external support.** Al-Shabaab remains a powerful force, launching over **120** attacks in the first eight months of 2024 that caused over **180** fatalities. Meanwhile, inter-clan violence **surged**, displacing **30,000** people in just one month. Yet, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) is scheduled to withdraw by December 2024, leaving behind a smaller, more defensively oriented force. Somalia's government has also demanded that up to **7,000** Ethiopian forces, deployed separately from ATMIS, withdraw after Ethiopia's recent recognition of Somaliland as a separate territory. With diminishing international backing and intensifying clan tensions, the balance of power could tip further toward conflict in 2025.
- **Somalia will remain highly vulnerable to both extreme droughts and flooding.** Climate change has made the cycle of dry and rainy seasons both less predictable and more extreme. Droughts are now **100 times** more likely—and, since 2025 is expected to start with the La Niña weather pattern in effect, there will be a particular risk of drought. Farming and herding communities are still recovering from the catastrophic drought of 2021 through 2023 and the consequences of both flooding and unexpected

“ The country has cycled through increasingly frequent droughts and floods that have left millions in need of humanitarian assistance.

– Abdurazak Hussein Abdulahi
Emergency Preparedness and
Response Coordinator, IRC Somalia



The IRC in Somalia

The IRC first began working in Somalia in 1981 but has been operating there continuously since 2007. The IRC is active in key areas of concern, including Banadir, Puntland, South West, Jubaland and Hirshabelle, and continues to support families with health care for malnourished children, unconditional cash transfers, rehabilitation of boreholes and water sources, and mobile health services to reach deeper into hard-hit areas. [Learn more](#) about the IRC's Somalia response.

dry seasons in 2024, which led to a **below-average** 2024 harvest season and would increase the impact of any new drought. Yet, an IRC analysis shows the country has received less than **0.1%** of global climate adaptation and mitigation finance to help manage such risks.

- **Severe hunger and childhood malnutrition are growing, especially in rural areas.** The number of children experiencing acute malnutrition—lacking enough nutritious food to grow and develop healthily—rose by **14%** between 2023 and 2024, to **1.6 million**. This includes some **400,000** children reported as being severely or extremely underweight, a **22%** rise over the same time period. Somalia's hunger crisis is set to worsen through the first months of 2025 due to both continuing conflict and the impacts of La Niña.
- **Debt relief will bring limited benefits for most Somalis in 2025.** Somalia was one of the most indebted countries in the world until December 2023, when World Bank- and International Monetary Fund-backed debt relief helped it cut **\$4.5 billion** from the cost of servicing its debts. Yet **more than one-fifth** of the population remains in extreme poverty and, with nearly **1 million** people estimated to be living in areas controlled by al-Shabaab, much of Somalia's population will nonetheless be cut off from recovery efforts.

Expanded Country List



TOP: Azim, 35, and his 9-month-old son Asghar standing in their home, which was damaged by the devastating flash floods in Laghman province, Afghanistan.

BOTTOM: Conflict between the Mousgoum-Arabe Choa ethnic groups in Cameroon has forced many to flee to IDP camps in search of safety, such as the Domayo IDP site in northern Cameroon. Photo: UNOCHA/Liz Loh Taylor

These ten countries appear on the unranked second half of the Watchlist and so are presented alphabetically.

Afghanistan

- **22.9 million** people in humanitarian need (50% of the population)
- **9.6 million** people forcibly displaced within or from Afghanistan
- **14.2 million** people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity (33% of the population)
- **27.7 million** people living in extreme poverty (64% of the population)
- **177th/177** countries ranked on the Women, Peace and Security Index for women's inclusion, justice and security

Cameroon

- **3.3 million** people in humanitarian need
- **2.2 million** people displaced, including refugees, returnees and asylum seekers
- **2.5 million** people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity
- **4/5** score for severity of access constraints

CAR

(Central African Republic)

- **2.4 million** people in humanitarian need (38% of the population)
- **1.2 million** people forcibly displaced within or from CAR
- **2.3 million** people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity (39% of the population)
- **4/5** score for severity of access constraints
- **186th/187** countries ranked on the ND-GAIN index for vulnerability to climate change, while receiving only **0.06%** of all climate financing

Chad

- **7.8 million** people in humanitarian need (41% of the population)
- **37%** of the population living in extreme poverty
- **1 million+** refugees hosted—the **largest** refugee population per capita in all of Africa
- **#1** most climate-vulnerable country according to Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN)

DRC

(Democratic Republic of the Congo)

- **21.2 million** people in humanitarian need (18% of the population)
- **7 million** people internally displaced, with **79%** of all internally displaced people in just four provinces in eastern DRC
- **25.5 million** people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity
- **120+** armed groups operating in eastern DRC
- **40,000** suspected mpox cases in 2024, 84% of all suspected cases in Africa



TOP: Children from a displaced family now live on the outskirts of Bangassou. Violence in the east of the Central African Republic has caused mass displacement across the country.

MIDDLE: Djindikwa, 25, works as a farmer on agro-pastoralist Kine Kachallah's farm in Chad. One of the farm's plots was chosen for a soil restoration project as part of a larger initiative to promote sustainable, climate-resilient agriculture.

BOTTOM: Anuarite Sheni, 12, was in the 5th grade when she had to drop out of school due to the violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She, her mother and younger brother now live in an internally displaced persons camp.



Ethiopia

- **21.4 million** people in humanitarian need in 2024 (17% of the population)*
- **4.2 million** people internally displaced
- **15.8 million** people facing hunger
- **4/5** score for severity of access constraints

*Data for 2025 is not yet available

Niger

- **2.7 million** people in humanitarian need (10% of the population)
- **924,000** people displaced, including refugees and asylum seekers
- **3.4 million** people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity
- **1.5 million** people affected by flooding

Nigeria

- **7.8 million** people in humanitarian need in northeast states
- **3.6 million** people internally displaced
- **31.8 million** people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity
- **4.4 million** children suffering from acute malnutrition, including one million suffering from severe acute malnutrition

TOP: Bekele Bersha, his wife and their 11-month-old baby walk to their home in Konso, Ethiopia. Their baby was diagnosed with severe acute malnutrition after visiting the IRC's mobile health and nutrition team, and admitted to the stabilization center to receive treatment.

MIDDLE: A violent attack led by nonstate armed groups forced Kailou Larabou to flee his home in Abadabda, western Niger. He now lives in the Ouallam IDP camp, where he found work through a WFP-funded project. Photo: UNOCHA/ Michele Cattani

BOTTOM: In Maiduguri, Nigeria, Fatima Umar and her daughter Zara sit in the waiting area of the Sulumburi Health Clinic. Zara recovered from severe acute malnutrition after receiving medication and treatment over a seven-week period.

Ukraine

- **12.7 million** people in humanitarian need (36% of the population)
- **10.3 million** people forcibly displaced within or from Ukraine (28% of the population)
- **1,539** attacks on hospitals, health infrastructure and staff since February 2022
- **5/5** score for severity of access constraints



Yemen

- **19.5 million** people in humanitarian need (56% of the population)
- **4.5 million** people internally displaced
- **4.6 million** people facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity
- **23.9 million** people living in extreme poverty (71% of the population)
- **176th/177** countries ranked on the Women, Peace and Security Index for women's inclusion, justice and security

TOP: Andriy, 51, stands in the ruins of a bombed school in Kharkiv Oblast, Ukraine. Many of the houses were bombed and the school and hospital were destroyed the year before as a result of the war. All green areas are mined.

BOTTOM: Ruwaidah lost her 8-month-old baby suddenly while pregnant with another, and she entered into a deep depression. With the help of Naziha, an IRC mobile health team member in Yemen, she learned techniques to overcome her depression and improve her mental health.

Methodology



Ahmed, an IRC nutrition officer, supervises the IRC's nutrition programming across the Galgaduud region in Galmudug state, Somalia. He makes rounds from site to site to ensure children receive the treatment they need to recover and thrive.

The IRC uses a multi-stage process of quantitative and qualitative analysis to identify which 20 countries should be included in the annual Watchlist because they face the greatest risks of major deterioration in their humanitarian situations over the coming year.

This process allows the IRC's Watchlist team to consider both the probability and the impact of armed conflict, economic turmoil, the climate crisis and other natural and human-driven shocks.

A detailed description of the analysis conducted can be found [here](#). A brief overview of the process follows. If you have questions about the 2025 Emergency Watchlist or the IRC's other crisis analysis work, please contact Crisis.Analysis@Rescue.org.

STEP 1

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

The IRC's Watchlist team compiled 74 quantitative and qualitative variables from 14 different datasets, including [Verisk Maplecroft](#), [INFORM](#), the [Danish Refugee Council](#), [Council on Foreign Relations](#), [International Crisis](#)

[Group](#), [Armed Conflict Location and Event Data \(ACLED\)](#), the [World Bank](#), [Varieties of Democracy \(V-Dem\)](#) and [ACAPS](#). The team then identified which countries were consistently flagged across these variables, for example because the source ranked them in the top 25 countries or qualitatively identified them as facing a major risk over the year ahead.

STEP 2

Validating initial analysis against internal IRC and external partner sources

The Watchlist team then validated this preliminary analysis by setting it alongside insights from both internal and external experts, gathered in two ways:

- Each IRC regional office (Middle East and North Africa, East Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, Latin America and Asia) completed a survey to highlight the countries they saw as facing the greatest humanitarian risk over the year ahead on a scale of one to three (with three being the greatest risk) and to share qualitative insights on each country.
- Regional offices in East, West and Central Africa organized “regional roundtable” events to bring together IRC staff, external partners and other experts in and from the different regions.

These two steps allowed the Watchlist team to deepen its analysis with insights from some of the IRC's 40,000 staff and volunteers as well as from external experts, including staff from partner organizations, academics and researchers, diplomats and more. Their insights informed both the selection of the countries for the Watchlist and the thematic analysis presented at the beginning of this report.

STEP 3

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

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

- The rankings produced through the data analysis in Step 1
- Quantitative rankings and qualitative inputs from both the surveys and roundtables in Step 2
- Qualitative analysis by the IRC's Watchlist team to identify the risk of further deterioration of humanitarian crises in countries on the preliminary shortlist
- The scale and severity of emergencies that had occurred in those countries during 2024, as measured by the IRC's Emergency Classification System
- Humanitarian needs data from the Global Humanitarian Overview and country Humanitarian Needs Overviews, via the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
- Analysis of humanitarian access constraints from ACAPS data and reporting, combined with IRC teams' qualitative insights and expertise on access

STEP 4

Drafting country sections and thematic analysis

The analysis of "A World Out of Balance" in the first half of Watchlist 2025 and the country profiles in the report's second half both draw on the analysis from Steps 1-3, as well as data and analysis from the following sources:

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

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

Acknowledgements

The Watchlist team wishes to express its gratitude to the range of both IRC and non-IRC colleagues who have contributed to this year's Watchlist. This report is the culmination of research and analysis that touch on nearly every aspect of the IRC's work, and much of the organization has made invaluable contributions to the analytical, programmatic, design and communication components of the report. We are extremely grateful to Irene Abarca, Shi Kai Chow, Fiona Charlton, Brook Dyson, Olivia Qiu, Amy Ma, Olivia Lai and Do Hyun Park for their contributions to this year's Watchlist.

We also want to thank colleagues from the IRC's regional offices in East, West and Central Africa who partnered with us in organizing roundtable events to engage internal and external experts on crises across the world. These events were held under the **Chatham House Rule**, so we are unable to thank all of the participants by name, but they include staff from partner organizations, community-based organizations, local academic institutions and think tanks. The insights shared during these events have added significantly to the analysis and recommendations contained in this report. We are very grateful to everybody who participated in the roundtable events.

Thank you also to Verisk Maplecroft, ACLED, Danish Refugee Council, OCHA and others for providing access to their data.



Dr. Oleg is part of a roving Mobile Medical Unit, providing basic medical care and medicines to clients in the "newly accessible areas" of Kharkiv Oblast, Ukraine, which were previously under Russian control. Conflict has led to a shortage of doctors and nurses in many of these villages, limiting access to this critical care.

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

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

© International Rescue Committee



**Scan the QR code to donate to the IRC,
or visit [Rescue.org](https://www.rescue.org).**



INTERNATIONAL
RESCUE
COMMITTEE