INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

2020 | EMERGENCY WATCHLIST

SYRIA

IRAQ

AFGHANISTAN

LIBYA

CHAD

MALI

SUDAN

YEMEN

BURKINA FASO

MYANMAR

NIGER

ETHIOPIA

NIGERIA

CAMEROON

SOMALIA

VENEZUELA

CENTRAL AFRICAN REP.

SOUTH SUDAN

DEM. REP. OF CONGO

BURUNDI

TOP 10 WATCHLIST
COUNTRIES

OTHER COUNTRIES
ON THE WATCHLIST

INTERNATIONAL
RESCUE
COMMITTEE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

An IRC staff member puts on his protective equipment at an IRC-supported Ebola triage point in Goma, eastern DRC.

Credit: O. Acland/IRC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Watchlist 2020 highlights the countries where the IRC assesses there to be the **greatest risk of a major deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the coming year**. The countries on Watchlist 2020 have changed little since last year, underscoring both the protracted nature of many of these crises and collective failure of the international community to resolve their root causes. In many cases, constraints on humanitarian access contribute to the already precarious conditions of Watchlist 2020 countries.

- **Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Syria, Nigeria and Venezuela are Watchlist 2020's Top Five crises**. These five countries were also featured in the Top Ten of last year's Watchlist.

- **Yemen tops the IRC's Watchlist for the second year running**, reflecting the impact of the country's prolonged and internationalized civil war. While there are some positive signs that diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict may be taking root, these are yet to translate into a major reduction in humanitarian need. Yemen's top ranking indicates the persistent risk of further deterioration of the humanitarian situation due to renewed conflict or constraints on humanitarian action.

- There are **three new additions** (Burkina Faso, Burundi and Chad) to this year's Watchlist. **Four countries have dropped off since last year** (Bangladesh, Mexico, Nicaragua and Pakistan). This year's Watchlist has 20 countries on it, one fewer than in 2019. These changes reflect both the IRC's evolving analysis and the changing situations in these countries.

- **Burkina Faso is a new addition to not just the Watchlist as a whole but also to the Top Ten**. The IRC deployed an emergency team to Burkina Faso to respond to the rapidly intensifying conflict and deteriorating humanitarian situation in early 2019 and is now establishing a new country program.
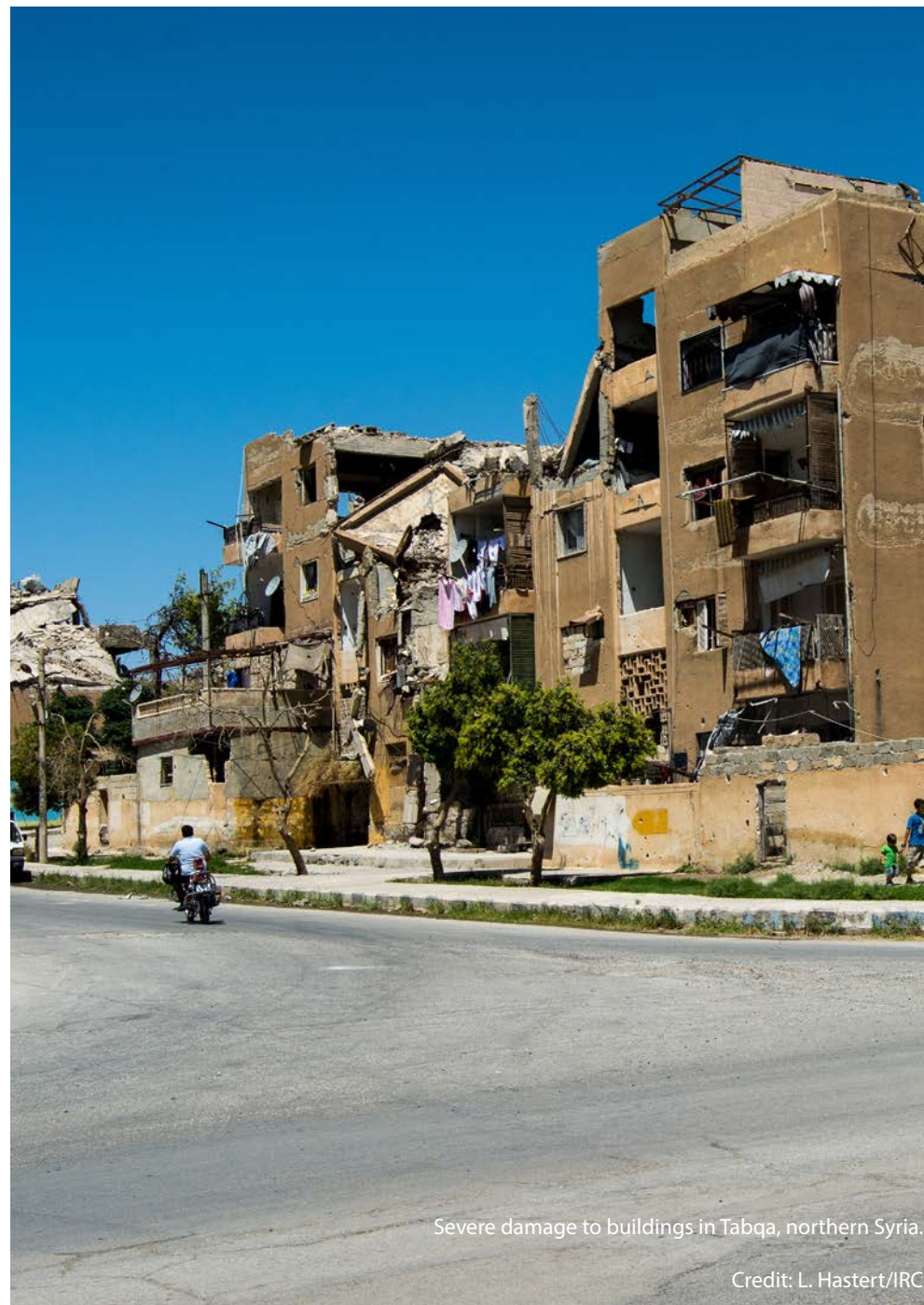
Severe damage to buildings in Tabqa, northern Syria.

Credit: L. Hastert/IRC

Countries on Watchlist 2020 disproportionately host populations in need of humanitarian assistance and are among the states least equipped to respond to new crises or sudden deterioration in crises.

- **The Top Ten countries on the Watchlist are home to less than 6% of the global population, but host 55% of all people identified as being in need in the 2020 Global Humanitarian Overview**. In 2018 they produced 54% of the world's IDPs and 74% of the world's refugees - over 17 million including refugees under UNHCR's mandate and Venezuelans displaced abroad. They are doing so with just 1.2% of global GDP and their appeals for humanitarian funding in 2019 were nearly 40% underfunded on average.

- Overall, the **20 countries on IRC's Watchlist 2020 are home to just over 10% of the global population but host 80% of all people identified as being in need**. In 2018 they produced nearly 74% of the world's IDPs and over 86% of the world's refugees - over 20 million people including refugees under UNHCR's mandate and Venezuelans displaced abroad.

- The **IRC is responding to the crises in all of the countries on the Watchlist** with the exception of Sudan, where the IRC is now registered and moving forward with the re-launch of humanitarian programs.

Most of these humanitarian crises have been characterized by large-scale conflict, mass displacement and violations of International Humanitarian Law – all with severe impacts on the civilian populations.

- **Watchlist 2020 is dominated by countries that are experiencing internal conflict.** Nigeria has risen into the top five in part because of escalating conflict and resultant humanitarian need both in the northeast and elsewhere in the country, particularly the northwest. Venezuela is the only country in the Top Ten not to be experiencing major conflict.

- Many of the countries on Watchlist 2020 are experiencing protracted crises, rooted in ongoing, large-scale conflicts. **Protracted conflicts**

have severely degraded civilian infrastructure in many of these contexts with immediate and long-term impacts on civilians' basic needs and their ability to rebuild their lives.

- **Several countries on the Watchlist are due to hold elections in 2020**. This could drive political instability and even conflict that compounds humanitarian need in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia and Mali.

- **Nearly all countries in the Sahel region, from Mali in the west to Sudan in the east, are on Watchlist 2020**. This reflects the impact of rising conflict – driven by militancy and competition for resources as well as natural shocks such as drought and flooding which may be influenced by climate change.

- For the first time, this year's Watchlist includes a brief section outlining the access challenges humanitarians confront in each country. **Restrictions on humanitarian access are a major concern across all Watchlist countries and could significantly undermine the ability of humanitarian actors to respond to these crises and meet growing needs in 2020**. According to ACAPS, there are "very high" or "extreme" obstacles to humanitarian access in all of the Top Five countries and in 14 of the 20 Watchlist countries. While ongoing hostilities and threats to the safety of humanitarian personnel can impede humanitarian access in some countries, far more often it is deliberate bureaucratic disruptions and interference that delay and deny humanitarian aid from reaching those most in need.

- **Communicable diseases** are also an important factor affecting the humanitarian situation in many Watchlist countries. The Ebola outbreak continues in eastern DRC and presents a threat to several other countries on the Watchlist: Burundi, South Sudan and Central African Republic. Cholera is present in several more, including Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. In many Watchlist countries, prolonged armed conflict has damaged health, sanitation and other infrastructure, increasing the risk of disease outbreaks. In Venezuela, the economic collapse experienced in recent years has had similar consequences.

PURPOSE AND USE

The **inclusion of countries in the Watchlist and their ranking represents the IRC's best assessment of the level of humanitarian risk in 2020.** As well as raising concern externally, the Watchlist provides the IRC with an analytically robust basis from which to make decisions about where to focus monitoring, preparedness and other efforts. The IRC continues to track emerging crises globally and decisions about where the IRC will respond are based on the scale and severity of an emergency as measured by the IRC's Emergency Classification System, not on the Watchlist.

The list is divided into a **ranked Top Ten, which are the countries we assess to be at greatest risk of deterioration leading to the most serious emergencies** in 2020. While we are also deeply concerned about the remaining countries on the list, we do not have as substantial reasons to believe they face a high risk of major escalation in humanitarian needs in 2020.

This document profiles all of the countries appearing on Watchlist 2020. Each section provides:

- A **qualitative snapshot of the current situation** in the country intended to explain both its ranking (where relevant) and why each country has been included. It provides brief summaries of the existing humanitarian situation, any concerns about humanitarian access and the country's outlook for 2020. The country sections are not intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the situation in each country.

- A **quantitative scorecard with two components: risk and impact**. The "risk" side is comprised of scores for "human risk" and "natural risk", while the "impact" side is made up of scores for the existing vulnerability of the population and the country's lack of response capacity. This is intended to illustrate the likelihood that a major human or natural-driven event will occur in the coming year ("risk") and, if it does, whether this should be expected to cause a humanitarian emergency ("impact").

For example, a country like Japan may score highly for natural risk but lowly on all other aspects of the scorecard and would thus not be included.

IRC staff Yagena working in one of the IRC's stabilization centers in Maiduguri, northeast Nigeria.
Credit: A. Oberstadt/IRC

Please note that the **Watchlist is drawn up on the basis of a mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative analysis** and the scorecard reflects only the quantitative side. More qualitative assessments have therefore led to some countries appearing above others in the rankings despite having lower quantitative scores. The Watchlist also reflects only the available information and data which varies widely from country to country. See more on how the Watchlist was drawn up in the Annex.

If you have questions about the 2020 Emergency Watchlist please contact the IRC's Global Crisis Analyst, George Readings at george.readings@rescue.org.

A child is screened for malnutrition at a makeshift clinic for displaced people on the outskirts of Aden, southern Yemen.

Credit: W. Swanson/IRC

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

2020 | TOP TEN WATCHLIST COUNTRIES

1. YEMEN

30.5 million

Yemen continues to experience the world's largest humanitarian crisis. The country has faced nearly five years of large-scale civil war since the Saudi and Emirati-led Coalition (SELC) intervened to support the internationally recognized Government of Yemen against the Houthi movement in 2015. The conflict has been marked by attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, limiting access to basic health, education, water and sanitation systems with immediate and long-term consequences for Yemen's population. Negotiations for a political resolution to the crisis continued in 2019 following an agreement signed in Stockholm in December 2018 but progress remains highly fragile. Even if a peace deal is reached, improvements to the humanitarian situation will be slow as the country recovers from widespread conflict and the devastation of civilian infrastructure and the economy.

Over 24 million Yemenis (80% of the population) are in need of humanitarian assistance in 2020, **making it the world's largest humanitarian crisis** both in absolute numbers and the proportion of the population affected (OCHA). That said, precise data breakdowns of need are not currently available because key assessments in northern Yemen have been delayed (OCHA). The humanitarian crisis is exacerbated by continued fuel and food shortages driven in part by reduced and erratic imports related to bureaucratic constraints. Since the war began, food imports have declined by 40%, fuel imports by 70% and medicines by 50% in a country that largely relied on imports for basic goods even before the conflict (UN). Over 1.2 million Yemenis face crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity, including 406,000 in emergency (IPC 4) levels (IPC Info). Over one third of the population is malnourished (OCHA). Conflict has produced 3.65 million IDPs since 2015 with over 80% displaced for more than a year. Yemen also hosts over 266,000 refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants (UNHCR).

Yemen scores a **maximum of ten for human risk as a result of the ongoing conflict – one of just three countries on the Watchlist to do so**. Since 2015 around **250,000 people have died due to the civil war, most due to indirect impacts like the degradation of health infrastructure but 100,000 directly due to fighting** (OCHA). Diplomatic efforts are underway to resolve the conflict, contributing to a reduction in violence including SELC airstrikes in the second half of 2019. Nonetheless, fighting and civilian

| RISK | 10 | HUMAN RISK | 5 | NATURAL RISK |
| IMPACT | 9 | VULNERABILITY | 8 | LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY |

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Displacement in Yemen remains largely internal, but escalations in conflict could lead refugees from **Somalia** who are currently in Yemen to return home.

harm persist on multiple frontlines. Tensions also resurged in 2019 between the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the Government of Yemen, despite nominally being allies against the Houthis, though these may reduce following a November 2019 deal between the two sides. There is a significant risk of renewed escalation in 2020 if diplomatic efforts fail.

Yemen scores highly on the "impact" side, with a nine for vulnerability and an eight for lack of coping capacity. Weak governance and institutions drive the

lack of coping capacity while vulnerability is exacerbated by limited healthcare capacity, gender inequality and more. **The collapse of the economy and basic public services have disrupted people's access to essentials** such as water, sanitation, healthcare and education. For instance, the conflict has caused half of health facilities to close, leaving 68% of people without access to basic healthcare (OCHA).

Yemen scores a moderate five for natural risk, driven by the risk of drought. Meanwhile, weak health infrastructure (much of it damaged by years of conflict) has **contributed to cholera becoming endemic** in Yemen. Yemen reported over 765,000 suspected cases of cholera between 1 January 2019 and 3 November – far above the 380,000 suspected cases in Yemen in all of 2018 (WHO).

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

According to ACAPS, Yemen scores a maximum five for extreme access constraints driven by conflict and bureaucratic constraint. This leaves over six million people in "hard-to-reach" districts. In 2019, conflict forced key roads between Sanaa and Aden to close, causing aid transportation to take four times longer and increasing transportation costs by 60% (OCHA). Shifting frontlines left the IRC intermittently unable to access some project sites. Bureaucratic impediments continue to undermine access; during a two-month period in 2019, 75% of all constraints on humanitarian access were due to bureaucratic requirements while only 7% were due to active conflict (OCHA). Continued restrictions on major sea ports and the continued closure of Sanaa airport slow the humanitarian response. Fuel and gas shortages disrupt electricity, water, sanitation and health services and raise the cost of basic goods.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

Continued conflict will place Yemen at risk of further deterioration in the humanitarian situation. If the conflict lasts until 2022, the UN estimates it will lead to half a million deaths and set back Yemen's human development by 26 years (UNDP). Even if conflict does not intensify, any reduction in humanitarian harm will require massive improvements to civilian infrastructure, the economy and bureaucratic policies. Renewed and potentially more inclusive nationwide negotiations with the Houthis following the November 2019 deal between the Government and the STC could even contribute to increased conflict as all sides are incentivized to posture around the talks. Should peace talks make progress, the exclusion of other key Yemeni actors could create spoilers that are incentivized to escalate conflict to secure a spot in the talks or otherwise protect their own interests.

A displaced woman stands with her twin daughters outside the house they rent at a settlement for displaced people on the outskirts of Aden, southern Yemen.
Credit: W. Swanson/IRC

There has been a major humanitarian response in eastern DRC for nearly 30 years, reflecting decades of under-development and investment as well as persistent instability. There are over 100 armed groups present in parts of eastern DRC, some of them opposition factions from neighboring countries. Their conflicts with the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) and each other are a major driver of both displacements and food insecurity. The country avoided a major crisis after the contested December 2018 presidential election but the national political situation remains uncertain. The ongoing Ebola outbreak in eastern DRC is already the second-largest in history and has not yet been contained, which exacerbates an already delicate situation.

15.9 million Congolese (17% of the population) currently need humanitarian assistance (OCHA). There are 5.01 million people in the DRC who are internally displaced - the largest IDP population in Africa - and 940,000 were displaced in 2019 alone (OCHA). In particular, 2019 saw 360,000 people forced to leave their homes in Ituri province in the northeast due to conflict (UNHCR) and over 100,000 in South Kivu in the east (OCHA).

Conflict-triggered displacements are a major driver of food insecurity because agricultural activities are disrupted when people flee their homes. The latest food insecurity assessment (covering July-December 2019) found that **15.6 million Congolese (18.5%) are currently experiencing crisis (IPC 3) or higher levels of food insecurity - the second-highest levels in the world** (OCHA) - including 3.9 million at the emergency (IPC 4) level. Conflict-affected provinces in eastern DRC, particularly Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika are most impacted (IPC Info). The Kasais region also sees elevated food insecurity, though the situation there has been slowly improving since 2018 as conflict activity has reduced.

Adding to the complex humanitarian emergency in the DRC, North Kivu and Ituri are the epicenter of the **second-biggest Ebola outbreak in history**. As of the start of December 2019 there had been over 3,300 probable or confirmed cases of the disease leading to more than 2,200 deaths (WHO). The spread of Ebola has slowed since a peak in early-mid 2019, but new cases continue to be reported. Efforts to contain the outbreak are hampered by both logistical challenges and outbreaks of violence against the response. The DRC
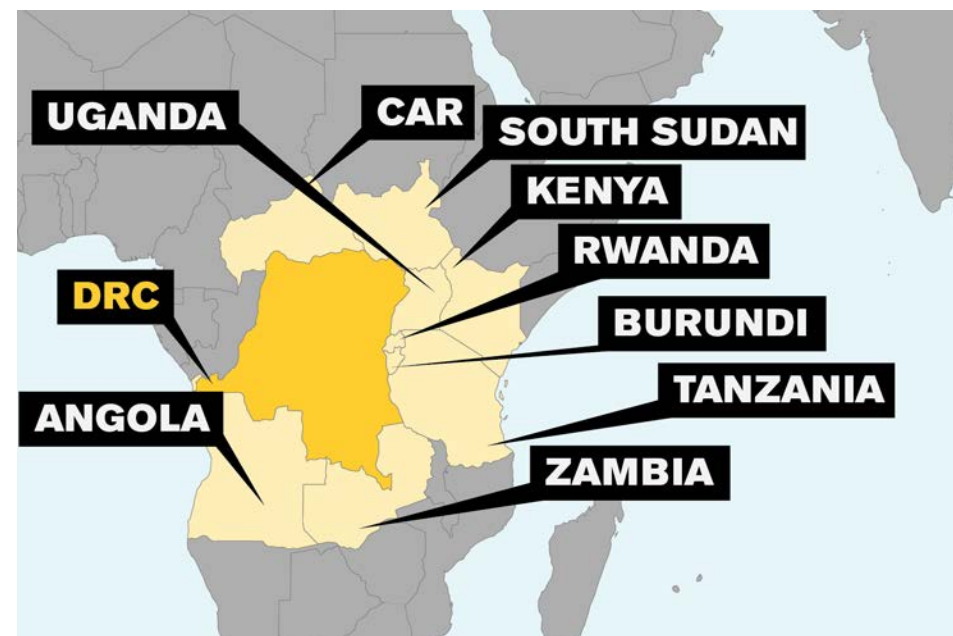
RISK	7	HUMAN RISK	5	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	9	VULNERABILITY	9	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Uganda, **Burundi**, **Rwanda** and **Tanzania** already host Congolese refugees and are likely to receive any new outflows. Any renewed conflict in the Kasai region could also trigger displacements into **Angola**. **Burundi**, **Rwanda**, **Uganda** and **South Sudan** are WHO "priority one" countries most at risk from the Ebola outbreak centered in eastern DRC. **Angola**, **Central African Republic**, **Republic of the Congo**, **Tanzania** and **Zambia** are all "priority two" countries because they are at risk but do not border Ebola-affected provinces of the DRC.

is also experiencing the **largest outbreak of measles in the country's history,** with over 200,000 cases and 4,000 deaths so far in 2019 - far more than the Ebola outbreak has caused since it began in mid-2018 (OCHA).

The DRC scores moderately highly for human risk (seven) and, while natural risk is a moderate five, this still reflects a risk of drought and major storms. The **DRC scores highly on the impact side of the scorecard** with nine for both the existing vulnerability of the population and the country's lack of response capacity. This reflects the decades of under-development which have resulted in weak infrastructure (including the health system) and a population who tend to depend on subsistence farming or are otherwise vulnerable to external shocks like conflict or natural disasters.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

The DRC was scored as a four ("very high access constraints") out of five by ACAPS, reflecting the risk of violence against humanitarian actors and their assets, ongoing insecurity and conflict and physical constraints. Large parts of the country can only be accessed through unpaved roads that can be near-impassable in the rainy season. UNHAS flights serve some population centers but certainly not all. The Ebola response has faced particular difficulties accessing some areas because of these logistical challenges and also due to community mistrust which has reduced locals' cooperation and triggered violence against individuals and facilities associated with the response.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

A range of different factors could trigger a major crisis in the DRC in 2020. The presence of different armed groups in eastern DRC that are either hostile to or receive support from regional powers means that persistent Rwanda-Uganda and Rwanda-Burundi tensions could lead to greater instability over the coming year. Likewise, national and regional-level politicians in the DRC have fomented instability in the east to weaken their rivals and profit illicitly from mineral resources. Local-level dynamics such as the willingness of armed groups to cooperate with disarmament and demobilization programs will also be critical since these processes can trigger fragmentation and are prone to collapse if armed groups feel they have been treated poorly. Finally, there is a risk that the spread of Ebola will accelerate again, particularly if the disease reaches a major city like Goma, any of the active conflict zones in eastern DRC or continues to spread in areas that are difficult to access - for example because of their sheer remoteness.

An Ebola survivor turned health worker stands outside an Ebola treatment facility in Beni, eastern DRC.

Credit: K. Ryan/IRC

3. SYRIA

Syria remains the largest displacement crisis in the world, with over half of Syrians still displaced – whether internally or outside their country – since conflict broke out in 2011. Civilians have been caught in the middle of multiple crises dominated by the conflict between forces backing the government of President Assad and armed opposition groups, with many actors backed by regional and international powers. The situation remains volatile with military offensives both by pro-Government forces in the northwest and Turkish-backed fighters in the northeast driving new and secondary displacements in 2019. In the northwest, many people have been displaced five or more times. The conflict has been characterized by wide-scale displacement and violations of International Humanitarian Law. Syria will continue to face massive immediate and long-term humanitarian needs even if levels of active conflict reduce.

11 million Syrians (65% of the population) are in need of humanitarian assistance - the third-largest number of people in need in the world after Yemen and the DRC and the second largest (after Yemen) in terms of the proportion affected (OCHA). The conflict has produced over 6 million IDPs (36% of the population) and 5.7 million refugees, making it the **largest refugee crisis in the world** (UNHCR).

In 2019, the situation remained volatile with major military offensives in the north driving mass displacements. In April 2019, the Government of Syria launched a military offensive to retake areas in the northwest, displacing 400,000 people - the **largest wave of displacement in eight years of conflict** (OCHA). Many of these people have been displaced repeatedly which greatly reduces their resilience. In October 2019, Turkish-backed forces launched an incursion into northeast Syria following the US's decision to withdraw many of its troops from the region. The incursion displaced approximately 200,000 people initially with 70,000 still displaced as of mid-November including over 15,000 who fled into neighboring Iraq (OCHA). Turkey has announced plans for a so-called "safe zone" in areas of northeast Syria bordering Turkey. One of the stated objectives of the zone is the return of two million or more Syrians currently residing in Turkey.

Syria is **one of just three countries to score a maximum ten for human risk** due to ongoing conflict, the threat of terrorism, criminality and human

RISK	10	HUMAN RISK	6	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	7	VULNERABILITY	6	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY
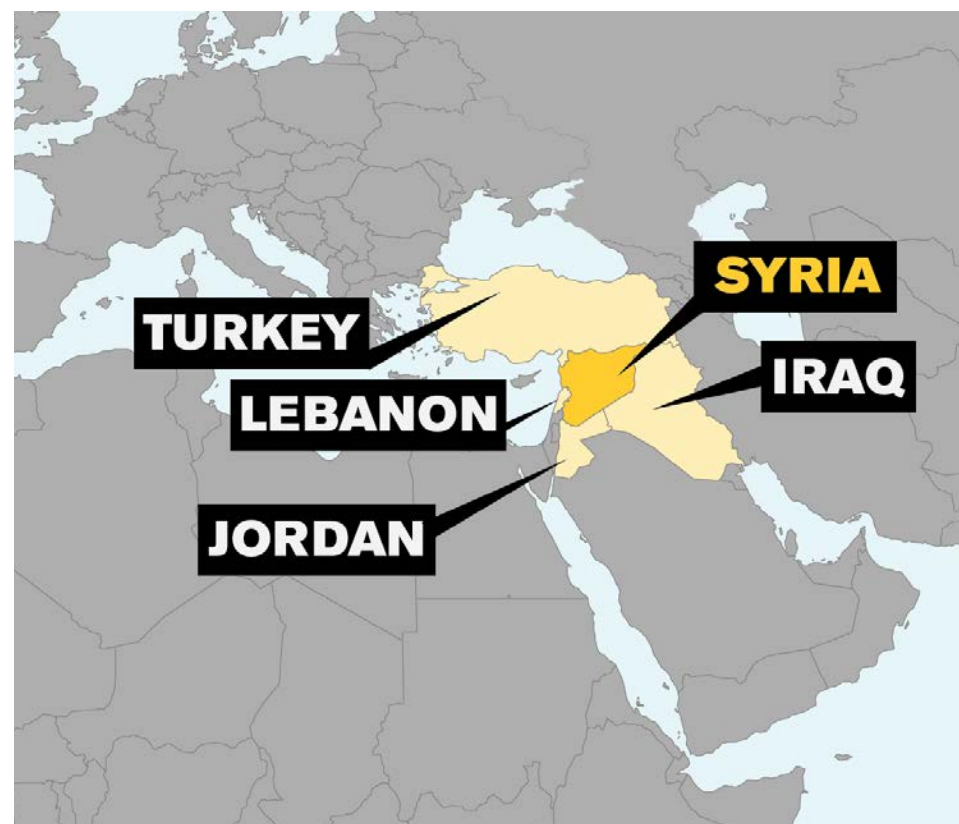
OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Turkey, **Lebanon**, **Jordan**, and **Iraq** host large numbers of Syrian refugees and are likely to be most affected by an escalation in violence and related displacement. Continued conflict in northeast Syria could drive greater numbers of Syrians into the Kurdish Region of Iraq in particular.

rights abuses. The crisis has long been defined by attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure with 588 attacks reported on 350 health facilities between March 2011 and November 2019 (Physicians for Human Rights). Syria also scores moderately highly for natural risk at 6, with elevated risks for drought and wildfire. Syria scores moderately highly for both vulnerability (seven) and lack of coping capacity (six), reflecting weak governance and institutional capacity including poor access to health care. **Years of conflict have caused serious damage to civilian infrastructure** and the economy with only 46% of health facilities fully operational, more than one in three schools damaged or destroyed and only 50% of sewage systems functional (OCHA).

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Syria scores a maximum five for extreme access constraints, driven by the direct and indirect effects of conflict (ACAPS). Military operations have repeatedly forced the suspension of humanitarian operations throughout 2019 while changes in the lines of control can prevent humanitarian actors from returning to areas where they previously reached people in need. In areas under Government of Syria control, administrative challenges hinder humanitarian operations. Cross-border aid, authorized by UN resolution 2165 in 2014 which is due to expire in January 2020 but may be renewed in December 2019, reaches around 4 million people in need in areas outside the government's control (UN). Attacks on aid workers and civilian infrastructure also continue to undermine the response while the presence of unexploded ordnance presents a continued risk to civilians.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

The situation in Syria remains volatile with the ongoing risk of conflict in both the northwest and northeast. Violence has persisted in the northwest, centered on Idlib, since the major military offensive earlier this year. While levels of violence have reduced since then, there remains a risk of major escalation and subsequent displacement in 2020. In the northeast, there is a risk of the Governments of Turkey and Syria coming into conflict as both sides increasingly become involved in that area of the country. Conflict may eventually subside as the Government of Syria consolidates control over more of the country. The humanitarian crisis will persist even if conflict levels reduce. Real or perceived stability could also drive forced or premature returns from Turkey into the northeast "safe zone" which could set the precedent for accelerated returns from other refugee-hosting countries.

A group of displaced children outside their tent in Areesha camp, northeast Syria.

Credit: L. Hastert/IRC

4. NIGERIA

Nigeria faces multiple sources of instability, most prominently a decade-long insurgency in the northeast, communal violence in central areas and rising violence in the northwest. The northeast is seeing a major humanitarian crisis, with high levels of food insecurity, a cholera outbreak and large-scale displacement. Moreover, 1.2 million Nigerians live in inaccessible areas of the northeast which are effectively under the control of armed groups. Only limited information is available about the conditions of civilians living in these areas but all indications suggest the humanitarian situation is even more serious there.

7.7 million Nigerians in the conflict-affected states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) are currently in need of some form of humanitarian assistance (OCHA). While this represents just 3.9% of the country's total population, it is over half of the 13.4 million people living in the BAY states. There are also just over two million IDPs in the northeast as of November 2019 and 243,000 Nigerians have fled the northeast to neighboring countries, particularly Niger and Cameroon (UNHCR).

Over 4 million Nigerians are experiencing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity as of October-December 2019, of which nearly 400,000 were experiencing emergency (IPC 4) levels (Cadre Harmonisé). Many of these are concentrated in the BAY states. However, there is insufficient data to assess the situation in "inaccessible" areas of the northeast, where **1.2 million people reside** (OCHA). However, all indications suggest food insecurity is even worse in those areas so it is possible that populations there could be experiencing famine (IPC 5) (FEWS NET).

There are also significant needs elsewhere in the country, even though the country's humanitarian response focuses primarily on the BAY states. In October 2019, IOM reported that **540,000 people were displaced internally in northwest and north-central Nigeria** while a further 41,000 had fled northwest Nigeria across the border into Niger's Maradi region as of 23 September (UNHCR). This region has seen rapidly escalating violence throughout 2018 and 2019 with unclear causes. The authorities have blamed "bandits" – and certainly cattle-raiding and kidnapping for ransom appear to drive some of the instability – but northwest Nigeria's proximity to conflict-affected parts of the

RISK	8	HUMAN RISK	4	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	8	VULNERABILITY	7	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Niger, **Cameroon** and **Chad** all host Nigerian refugees and are likely to see more arrivals if conflict escalates in northeast Nigeria. Greater instability in north-central or northwest Nigeria may also drive more refugees into south-central Niger.

Sahel have raised fears that organized armed groups may be moving into the area as well.

Nigeria scores highly for human risk (eight) as a result of several factors, not least the ongoing internal conflict across the northeast and other areas. Its natural risk score is relatively low (four) but there is still a risk of drought. Major flooding also regularly occurs in the center, northeast and around major rivers (Niger and Benue) during the rainy season, most recently affecting about

300,000 people in the northeast as of November 2019 which contributes to a persistent risk of cholera (OCHA).

Nigeria also has a high score for vulnerability (eight) and moderately high score for lack of coping capability (seven). While this indicates weak infrastructure and healthcare capacities in addition to a population that was already vulnerable, it should be noted that these scores are for the entirety of Nigeria. There is a sharp contrast between more developed areas like Lagos or Abuja and the situation in less developed parts of the northwest and northeast. The latter areas likely face more vulnerable populations and limited response capacity than the national-level scores would suggest.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

ACAPS gives Nigeria a score of four ("very high") out of five for access constraints, highlighting in particular restriction of movement within the country, violence against humanitarian personnel and facilities and the impact of ongoing conflict. The 1.2 million people living in "inaccessible" parts of the northeast face a double bind; government forces prevent humanitarians from entering these areas and, even if this restriction were removed, it is unclear if NGOs could negotiate safe and principled access with armed groups.

Even in ostensibly "accessible" parts of the northeast, attacks by armed groups and restrictions imposed by the authorities present a growing challenge to humanitarian access in the northeast. The Nigerian military even temporarily forced two major international NGOs - Action Contre la Faim (ACF) and Mercy Corps - to suspend their activities in September-October 2019 after accusing them of assisting armed groups. Insecurity also means humanitarian personnel can often only travel to field sites by helicopter.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

Conflict activity has been rising in the northeast throughout the second half of 2019 alongside increasing constraints on humanitarian access. This suggests that humanitarian needs will continue to grow in the region in 2020 and that the ability of humanitarian actors to respond will be even more limited. Moreover, conflict in the northwest may continue to escalate, particularly if links start to emerge between bandits in the northwest and armed groups active in the Sahel, which could trigger a more significant humanitarian crisis. Perennial issues like communal conflict in central Nigeria as well as seasonal flooding will further compound the situation in Nigeria.

Fatima is an IRC teacher working with children who have lived through conflict in Maiduguri, northeast Nigeria.

Credit: T. Sater/IRC

5. VENEZUELA

Venezuela faces a rapidly escalating humanitarian crisis rooted in political turmoil that has caused the near collapse of the country's economy. Tensions between President Maduro's government and the opposition escalated with National Assembly President Juan Guaido declaring himself acting President in January 2019. Since then, no progress has been made on a political resolution and internationally mediated talks have broken down with no signs they will resume. The economic crisis is limiting basic services and driving severe shortages in food, medicine and clean water. The humanitarian crisis has already produced the largest external displacement in Latin America's modern history and is the second largest in the world at present after Syria.

Within Venezuela, **7 million people - nearly a quarter of the population - are in need of humanitarian assistance** (OCHA). The economic crisis has left 94% of households in poverty while hyperinflation has driven sharp increases in the prices of basic goods and services (US State Department). While IPC analysis has not been conducted inside the country, around 80% of the population is estimated to face some level of food insecurity and 90% of households have an income that is insufficient to buy food (FAO). The crisis has driven significant increases in malnutrition and mortality rates, including a 63% increase in infant mortality between 2012 and 2016 and levels of moderate and severe malnutrition among children under five have risen from 10% to 17% - crisis levels (Human Rights Watch).

4.6 million Venezuelans have fled the country as of November 2019 and the crisis continues to cause an estimated 5,000 people to leave the country every day. 80% of displaced Venezuelans remain in the region which puts significant economic, social and political pressure on host countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (R4V). External displacement is expected to **reach 5.5 million by the end of 2020**, according to the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan. There is no sign that the crisis within Venezuela will end in the near term. Even after it does it will likely take years before Venezuelans can safely return home.

Venezuela ranks highly despite moderate quantitative scores because **existing data sets underestimate the scale of the crisis**, in part as a result of the Venezuelan authorities limiting the publication of official data. Venezuela scores

RISK	6	HUMAN RISK	7	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	6	VULNERABILITY	5	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: States in Latin America and the Caribbean are hosting the majority of 4.6 million displaced Venezuelans and will be most impacted by the expected displacement of Venezuelans in 2020. The largest hosts include **Colombia**, **Peru**, **Chile**, **Ecuador** and **Brazil**.

a moderately high six for human risk, driven up by high levels of criminality, corruption, arbitrary arrest, torture and civil unrest. The score is brought down by low conflict intensity: **it is the only country in the top ten that does not experience major internal conflict**. Venezuela scores moderately high on natural risk (seven) due to the risks of severe storms and drought.

On vulnerability, Venezuela scores a moderately high six, driven by weak healthcare capacity and income inequality. The moderate score of five for coping capacity is primarily driven by weak governance. Only 18% of people consistently have access to clean water (ACAPS), which combined with weakened health services has contributed to disease outbreaks, including malaria, tuberculosis, measles, and diphtheria.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Venezuela scores a four out of five for humanitarian access, classified as having "very high" access constraints (ACAPS). The government has imposed a difficult registration process for humanitarian organizations, restrictions on visas and a ban on some imports. The economic crisis further undermines the humanitarian response as the country faces frequent blackouts and shortages of fuel, medicines and basic goods. Humanitarian access varies across Venezuela as armed groups from neighboring countries and organized crime groups have significant influence in some more remote areas, particularly the south.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

The humanitarian crisis in Venezuela is expected to worsen as there are still no signs of progress towards resolving either the economic or political crises. Escalating tensions between the ruling government and opposition may drive greater domestic unrest while increasing sanctions from the international community could deepen the economic crisis. Consequently, the outflow of Venezuelans is likely to grow, further straining the capacity and resources of host governments in the region. In response, these states could impose greater restrictions and close borders, preventing Venezuelans from accessing humanitarian services and driving them to use illegal routes which would increase their vulnerability.

A Venezuelan child is fed by a family member in Cucuta, eastern Colombia.

Credit: A. Brenner/IRC

6. AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan faces immense humanitarian needs driven by the continued conflict and political instability seen since the 2001 NATO invasion that ousted the Taliban. The Taliban now controls more territory than at any point since 2001 while Islamic State has been able to gain a foothold in the country. The US and the Taliban were close to signing a peace deal in 2019. However, it collapsed at the last minute and this, along with the presidential election in September 2019, triggered greater violence and civilian casualties in the latter half of the year. Elections once again ended in low voter turnout, delays in results and accusations of fraud. The country is now at risk of a repeat of the contested 2014 election, which produced a months-long political stalemate that ended in a fragile power-sharing agreement.

9.4 million Afghans (25% of the population) are in need of humanitarian assistance (OCHA). Conflict has produced nearly 400,000 IDPs since the start of 2019 (OCHA) and there are almost 2.5 million registered Afghan refugees outside the country (UNHCR). Despite continued instability, over 450,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan and Iran during 2019 (OCHA). The country continues to face a **widespread food insecurity crisis** with nearly 10.23 million people (33% of the population) estimated to face crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity, including nearly 2.4 million in emergency (IPC 4) levels, according to an assessment covering August to October 2019 (IPC Info).

Afghanistan is one of three countries to score the maximum ten for human risk as a result of the severity of conflict, terrorism and human rights violations. During the third quarter of 2019 and in the lead up to the election, the UN reported **3,800 civilian casualties - the highest number in a single quarter in a decade** (UNAMA).

The natural risk score for Afghanistan is moderately high (seven) due to the risk of drought, landslides and seismic activity. The 2018 drought continued into early 2019, undermining the livelihoods, food insecurity, and health of millions of Afghans. The drought was then followed by flooding and landslides in the first half of 2019 that affected over 300,000 people (HRP update).

RISK		10	HUMAN RISK	7	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT		**9**	VULNERABILITY	**8**	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Pakistan and **Iran** host the majority of Afghan refugees and are likely to be the states most impacted by an escalation of violence that forces greater displacement, or at the least slows return movements.

Afghanistan also **scores highly on the "impact" side** with a nine for vulnerability and eight for coping capability, reflecting the impact of decades of conflict. The vulnerability score is driven by weak healthcare capacity, low fi-

nancial development and susceptibility to pandemics. The coping capacity score is driven by poor governance and physical infrastructure. Afghanistan does not feature even higher in the Watchlist, however, because qualitative analysis does not indicate as significant a risk of major further deterioration in the humanitarian situation as the countries that were included in the top five.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Afghanistan scores a four out of five for humanitarian access, classified as having "very high" access constraints (ACAPS). Continued clashes between the government and armed groups, particularly the Taliban and Islamic State, undermine access by limiting population movements, driving new displacements and disrupting access to services. Humanitarian actors also face unpredictable and varied access in areas outside of government control.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

Instability and conflict are likely to continue, particularly if there is prolonged uncertainty around the peace talks or results of the 2019 elections – which have still not been announced, as of publication. The US-Taliban peace talks could culminate in a new deal in 2020 but equally could collapse. The success of a peace process will depend on subsequent negotiations between the Taliban and Afghan government anyway, which will be even more fraught. Moreover, all sides may try to strengthen their negotiating positions by increasing military operations in 2020. This could drive another escalation in civilian casualties and displacements while also reducing access. 500,000 people are expected to be displaced in 2020 (OCHA). Continued instability will also undermine an effective response to existing needs, such as the food insecurity crisis, and increase the risks of secondary displacement for IDPs and returnees.

A mother rocks her sick child at a camp for internally displaced people in the Muqur district of Badghis Province, northwest Afghanistan.

Credit: S. Glinski/IRC

7. SOUTH SUDAN

Civil conflict in South Sudan since 2013 has killed almost 400,000 people, displaced millions and driven a massive food insecurity crisis. South Sudan is currently experiencing a period of relative calm following a September 2018 deal to create a transitional power-sharing unity government and a nationwide ceasefire since June 2018. However, President Salva Kiir and opposition leader Riek Machar have twice pushed back the deadline, now set for February 2020. Key issues remain unresolved, namely the creation of a unified national army and agreement on the number and borders of states. The continued failure to resolve these issues and form a transitional government could jeopardize the entire peace deal and put the country at risk of falling back into major civil conflict.

7.5 million people (64% of the population) in South Sudan need humanitarian assistance (OCHA). Conflict has resulted in 2.2 million refugees and 1.5 million people internally displaced since 2013 (OCHA). Nonetheless, the current ceasefire has been largely successful in ending large-scale violence and displacement, contributing to increased returns of South Sudanese refugees and IDPs; an estimated 594,000 displaced people have returned home since the signing of the peace agreement (UN Mission in South Sudan).

Conflict reduction has also contributed to improved food insecurity levels since 2018, both because it has allowed civilians to resume agricultural activities and because humanitarian access has increased. **South Sudan still faces a massive food insecurity crisis with 4.54 million people (39% of the population) experiencing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity**, including 875,000 in emergency (IPC 4) levels. This number is expected to rise to 5.5 million at IPC 3+ in January-April 2020, with a continuing risk of famine (IPC 5) (IPC Info).

South Sudan scores moderately highly on human risk (seven) due to continued conflict, exposure to regional conflict, corruption and human rights abuses. South Sudan scores lowly on natural risk at four, with elevated risks of severe storms and drought. 2019 saw unusually heavy seasonal flooding that affecting 908,000 people and displaced 420,000 people, leading to increased cases of malaria and diarrhea, among other diseases (OCHA). **South Sudan is one of**

RISK	7	HUMAN RISK	4	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	10	VULNERABILITY	10	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: If conflict resumes, greater numbers of refugees are likely to move to **Sudan**, **Ethiopia**, **Kenya**, **DRC**, and **Uganda**.

only two countries on the Watchlist to score the maximum ten on both indicators on the "impact" side: vulnerability and lack of coping capacity. The country's vulnerability is driven by its susceptibility to pandemics, financial under-development and more. Weak governance, institutions, physical infrastructure and healthcare systems all contribute to the country's limited coping capacity.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

South Sudan scores a four out of five for humanitarian access, classified as having "very high" constraints (ACAPS). Access is undermined by conflict and bureaucratic impediments from both the government and armed groups. But there are indicators that access is improving, with access incidents dropping by a third in January-August 2019 compared to the same period in 2018 (OCHA). Improved security has enabled greater access, with humanitarian actors reaching parts of the country previously inaccessible. 115 humanitarian workers have been killed since 2012 and in October 2019 three UN personnel were killed, leading to the suspension of Ebola screenings (OCHA).

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

South Sudan's humanitarian situation in 2020 will be largely shaped by the implementation of the peace deal. If talks break down, South Sudan faces a high risk of falling back into civil conflict which would drive large-scale displacement and food insecurity. Even if a crisis is averted, instability will continue to drive humanitarian needs not least because of ongoing localized conflict involving armed groups that did not sign the peace deal. The country's existing vulnerability also means it is ill equipped to cope with the potential spread of Ebola, which remains a risk so long as the disease continues to spread in eastern DRC; the WHO considers South Sudan a "priority one" country because it neighbors the DRC's Ituri province, where Ebola is spreading.

An infant who is suffering from pneumonia and acute watery diarrhea undergoes a daily medical check at an IRC stabilization center in Panthou, northern South Sudan.

Credit: J. Wanless/IRC

The humanitarian situation in Burkina Faso has deteriorated rapidly over the past year, driven by insecurity that is now affecting large parts of the north and east of the country. Armed groups, some of them associated with the global jihadist movements al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS), now carry out regular attacks and effectively control some of the territory outside major population centers. This has driven a massive rise in internal displacement, from under 9,000 IDPs at the start of 2018 to 47,000 at the start of 2019 to over 560,000 as of December 2019 (OCHA). Moreover, 2020 is a politically delicate year for Burkina Faso with the country due to hold presidential elections. The IRC established a presence in the country in 2019, starting with an emergency team which is now transitioning into a full country program.

Burkina Faso's position at eight on Watchlist 2020 is driven principally by the rate of deterioration seen in 2019 and the qualitative judgment that there is a significant risk of this downward trend continuing in 2020. The speed with which the situation has evolved means that the country's quantitative score for human risk (five) likely significantly understates the real situation. In particular, armed groups have launched a major insurgency in parts of Burkina Faso over the past two years, exploiting security structures that were weakened after the country saw wide-scale political instability in 2014-2015. Armed groups are now entrenched in parts of the country and are carrying out increasingly frequent attacks, particularly targeting the security forces and individuals associated with the central government. At times, they are also forcibly displacing civilian populations and/or compelling young men to join their ranks.

Burkina Faso was under-developed prior to 2019 - UNDP's 2018 update of its Human Development Index ranked the country at 183 out of 189 - but it has historically experienced low levels of acute humanitarian need. **This situation has changed rapidly as conflict has intensified over the past year, but the rate of change and relative lack of existing humanitarian actors in Burkina Faso have complicated efforts to establish a clear picture of the situation**. Nonetheless, existing figures point to a serious - and rapidly deteriorating - humanitarian situation in Burkina Faso. 2.2 million people

RISK	5	HUMAN RISK	4	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	8	VULNERABILITY	7	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Refugees leaving Burkina Faso have mostly fled to **Mali**, but some have also gone to **Ghana** and **Niger**. These numbers are likely to rise as conflict continues. Some Malian refugees in Burkina Faso may also return to Mali or move on to other countries.

(11.1% of the population) are currently in need of humanitarian assistance - a doubling in one year (OCHA). Of the nearly 560,000 people currently displaced, 300,000 were displaced within just four months in late 2019 (OCHA).

According to the Cadre Harmonisé, **687,456 Burkinabes were facing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in mid-2019**, including over 25,000 at emergency (IPC 4) levels (Cadre Harmonisé). As conflict activity disrupts agricultural and other livelihood activities, food insecurity is expected to worsen (FEWS NET). Nearly **2,000 schools have been forced to shut due to the insecurity**, leaving 270,000 children without formal education (OCHA). Likewise, 91 healthcare facilities have been forced to close, depriving over 1.2 million people of healthcare (WHO).

Burkina Faso has a relatively low natural risk score (four) but is still exposed to risks including drought. The country's high vulnerability score (eight) illustrates a population that was already vulnerable before the conflict-driven humanitarian crisis developed, while the moderate-high score for "lack of response capability" (seven) indicates weak infrastructure that is now complicating the humanitarian response.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

ACAPS rates Burkina Faso as two out of five for access constraints ("moderate access constraints"). While this implies a significantly better situation than many of the other countries on the Watchlist, the IRC's experience on the ground suggests that access to people in need - and their ability to reach assistance - is still heavily limited. In particular, regular attacks by armed groups - including roadside bombings and ambushes on key routes between the capital and places like Djibo, home to many IDPs, present a significant threat to the safety of civilians and humanitarian personnel. As a result, the UN's Resident Coordinator formally requested the activation of UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) operations in the country (WFP), but this has not yet happened.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

The growing activities of armed groups suggest that insecurity and related humanitarian needs - particularly displacements and loss of access to education, health and other services - are likely to continue to rise. The IDP population alone is projected to grow to 900,000 by April 2020 (OCHA). Moreover, food insecurity will steadily worsen if agricultural and other livelihood activities are disrupted. The situation could also deteriorate even more rapidly if the planned presidential elections in November 2020 spark more significant instability, as happened around the last such polls in 2015.

An IRC-supported water station near Djibo, northern Burkina Faso.

Credit: IRC

9. SOMALIA

👤 12.3 million

Somalia has seen persistent instability and conflict since the fall of President Muhammad Siad Barre's government in 1991, driving displacements and leaving Somalis extremely vulnerable to food insecurity and other risks. The country hopes to hold direct parliamentary and presidential elections in late 2020/early 2021. The last direct elections in Somalia were in 1969, so these plans suggest the political situation is stabilizing somewhat. Nonetheless, persistent divisions between familial clans and violence by the militant group al-Shabab represent significant domestic threats to security. Moreover, rival Gulf states are increasingly competing for influence in Somalia, exacerbating both political divisions in Mogadishu and tensions within and between the self-declared state of Somaliland and autonomous Puntland region in the north.

5.2 million Somalis, 42% of the population, currently need some form of humanitarian assistance (OCHA). Moreover, conflict has led over 740,000 Somalis to flee to other countries in the region (256,000 in Kenya, 251,000 in Yemen and 186,000 in Ethiopia) (UNHCR) and a further 2.6 million people are displaced within the country (IOM). Flooding in late 2019 could push internal displacement even higher, to reach record levels (FEWS NET). As of late 2019, 1,197,000 Somalis were experiencing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity, of which 215,000 were experiencing emergency (IPC 4) levels (IPC Info).

Somalia has the highest quantitative scores of any country on the Watchlist, with its high score of nine for human risk reflecting the current intensity of the conflict – not just with al-Shabab but also a local affiliate of Islamic State (IS) – as well as the general weakness of the central state. Natural risk is moderately high (seven), driven up by the risk of drought in particular. A prolonged drought in 2018-2019 affected the wider Horn of Africa region, worsening food insecurity and driving displacements (ACAPS). When rains arrived in late 2019, they then caused flooding in south and central Somalia that affected nearly 550,000 people (OCHA), though rainfall remains limited in the north (FEWS NET).

RISK	**9**	HUMAN RISK	**7**	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	**10**	VULNERABILITY	**9**	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY
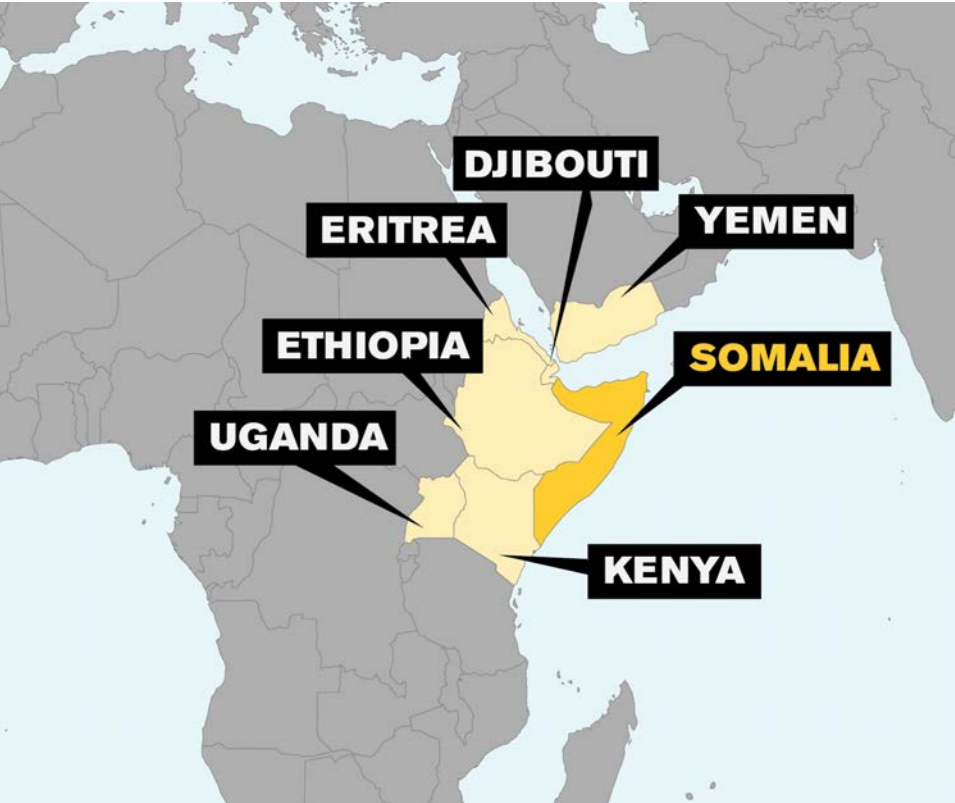
OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Kenya, **Yemen** and **Ethiopia** host the largest numbers of Somali refugees, though there are also smaller Somali populations in **Uganda**, **Djibouti** and **Eritrea**. These are the countries most likely to receive refugees from Somalia if the situation there deteriorates.

Somalia also scores highly on the "impact" side of the scorecard, with an extremely high **score of ten for the existing vulnerability of the population and a high score of nine for the country's limited response capacity**, underlining the country's under-development which leaves the population particularly vulnerable to climatic or conflict shocks. It should be noted, however, that several sources used for the Watchlist do not cover Somalia, as a result of extended periods of data not being collected in the country. Somalia does not appear higher in the Watchlist's top ten both because of this missing data and because, more qualitatively, there are fewer reasons to expect major deterioration when compared to other countries higher on the list.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

ACAPS gives Somalia a score of four for "very high access constraints", highlighting in particular restrictions on access to services, restriction of movement within the country and violence against humanitarian personnel and facilities. Active conflict and insecurity on key routes are a major factor restricting humanitarian access, but the HNO for 2019 also highlighted interference in humanitarian activities by parties to the conflict and bureaucratic impediments.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

Rainfall in late 2019 means that food insecurity is likely to worsen at the end of 2019 and start of 2020 before improving again in February to May 2020 (FEWS NET). The planned parliamentary elections could trigger greater conflict and instability, which would compound displacements and food insecurity, as well as increasing risks for humanitarian actors. If regional tensions contribute to greater tensions within or between Somaliland and Puntland then this could allow the local Islamic State affiliate to expand from its bases in mountainous parts of Puntland, triggering greater humanitarian needs and threatening humanitarian access.

A mother sits with her children at a hospital near the Somali capital, Mogadishu.

Credit: K. Ryan/IRC

10. CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)

5 million

CAR has seen persistent instability since an alliance of armed groups known as Seleka overran the capital in 2013. Over two thirds of the country's territory is now effectively controlled by armed groups rather than government forces. A peace deal signed in Khartoum by the government and fourteen armed groups in February 2019 suggested some willingness to prevent renewed major escalation. However, it has only been partially observed and conflict over control of power and resources continues to drive displacements and food insecurity in a country that is highly under-developed; CAR has the second lowest Human Development Index ranking in the world (UNDP).

2.6 million Central Africans - more than 50% of the country's population - require some form of humanitarian assistance (OCHA). Over a quarter of all Central Africans have been forced to leave their homes; just over 600,000 have displaced internally while a further 600,000 have left to neighboring countries (UNHCR). The majority of refugees have fled to Cameroon (292,000), DRC (171,000) and Chad (104,000) as of late 2019. Around 35% of the population (1.6 million people) experienced crisis (IPC 3) or higher levels of food insecurity in September 2019, with 375,000 of those facing emergency (IPC 4) levels (IPC Info).

These **humanitarian needs and CAR's appearance on Watchlist 2020 are principally driven by the persistent instability in CAR since 2013, which helps explain the country's high score (eight) for human risk.** This score also reflects a range of other factors including the weakness of the central government and CAR's exposure to regional conflicts. CAR scores lowly for "natural risk" (three) but there is nonetheless a risk of drought and major storms. The country also saw its worst flooding in two decades in late 2019, affecting 97,000 people and underscoring that natural risks should not be ignored (OCHA).

CAR scores highly on the "impact" side of the scorecard. Its maximum score of ten (equal only to South Sudan and Chad) for vulnerability reflects the high pre-existing needs of the population and broader underdevelopment of the country. The high score of nine for lack of response capacity reflects generally weak infrastructure across most of the country.

RISK	8	HUMAN RISK	3	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	10	VULNERABILITY	9	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Refugees from CAR have mostly fled to **Cameroon**, the **DRC** and **Chad** in the past and so these countries could see new arrivals if there is an escalation in conflict. That said, there are also smaller refugee populations in the **Republic of the Congo**, **Sudan** and **South Sudan**, all of which could see new arrivals as well.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

ACAPS rates CAR as a four out of five ("very high") for access constraints, driven in particular by restrictions on movement within the country, ongoing insecurity and physical constraints – such as the very limited availability of paved roads. CAR is also one of the most dangerous countries for humanitarians to work in, accounting for more incidents affecting humanitarians than any other country in 2018-2019 (610), and for eleven deaths of NGO staff members - 9% of the total during that period (INSO).

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

There is little probability of a substantive improvement in CAR's stability and thus the humanitarian situation in 2020. The peace agreement remains only partially observed and there is a real risk of it breaking down further. Elections planned for December 2020 will drive tensions between armed groups and the government as all sides try to increase their sway ahead of the polls - and to retain influence if the vote goes against them. Moreover, attempts by the government to rearm could trigger a backlash from armed groups. Any rise in instability will drive an already highly vulnerable population into even greater need and likely lead to increased restrictions on humanitarian access. Moreover, CAR is a "priority two" country that is at risk of the spread of Ebola from the DRC (WHO).

A displaced family in a makeshift camp near Kaga Bandoro, northern CAR

Credit: P. Biro/IRC

2020 | OTHER COUNTRIES ON THE WATCHLIST

The following countries are presented in alphabetical order. Humanitarian needs will likely be high in many or all of them, and they may experience some emergencies. However, at this stage we do not believe they face as high a risk of experiencing the scale of deterioration or severity of emergencies as the Top Ten.

A woman collects water from a well in Sirakoro Niaré, southwest Mali.

Credit: E. Rasmussen/IRC/Panos/EU-ECHO

BURUNDI

Burundi has long faced development and humanitarian challenges and tensions have persisted since the last presidential election in 2015 during which President Nkurunziza set aside constitutional limits to be re-elected for a third term. The resulting waves of violence and unrest drove 400,000 people to flee the country. As Burundi prepares for 2020 elections, there are concerns of escalating tensions and instability that could lead to displacements. Burundi is just one of three new countries on this year's Watchlist.

RISK	6	HUMAN RISK	4	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	8	VULNERABILITY	7	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

1.7 million people (15% of the population) in Burundi need humanitarian assistance (OCHA). The political situation since 2015 has led to displacement as well as a sharp deterioration in the economy. These factors have driven up food insecurity as food production is disrupted in a country where over 90% of people depend on agriculture for their livelihoods (WFP). As a result, 1.6 million Burundians (15% of the population) faced severe food insecurity (IPC 3) or worse, including 291,000 people at the Emergency (IPC 4) level as of April 2019 (WFP). **Chronic malnutrition among children under five has caused a stunting rate of 56% - the highest in the world** (WFP).

Burundi scores moderately highly on human risk at six, driven up by weak institutions as well as shrinking freedom of speech. Political tensions are rising ahead of the 2020 election. Nonetheless, 75,000 Burundian refugees have returned since September 2017 (OCHA). The country already hosts 103,000 IDPs (IOM) and 90,000 refugees from the DRC (OCHA), while 325,000 Burundian refugees remain in neighboring states, with the majority hosted in Tanzania (UNHCR). In August 2019, the governments of Tanzania and Burundi agreed to repatriate around 200,000 Burundian refugees starting in October 2019, raising concerns of premature returns – though only a few thousand have left Tanzania so far.

Burundi scores lowly on natural risk at 4, with elevated risks of severe storms and landslides. Nonetheless, **77% (over 79,000) of Burundi's IDPs are displaced due to natural disasters** (IOM). While this number is much lower
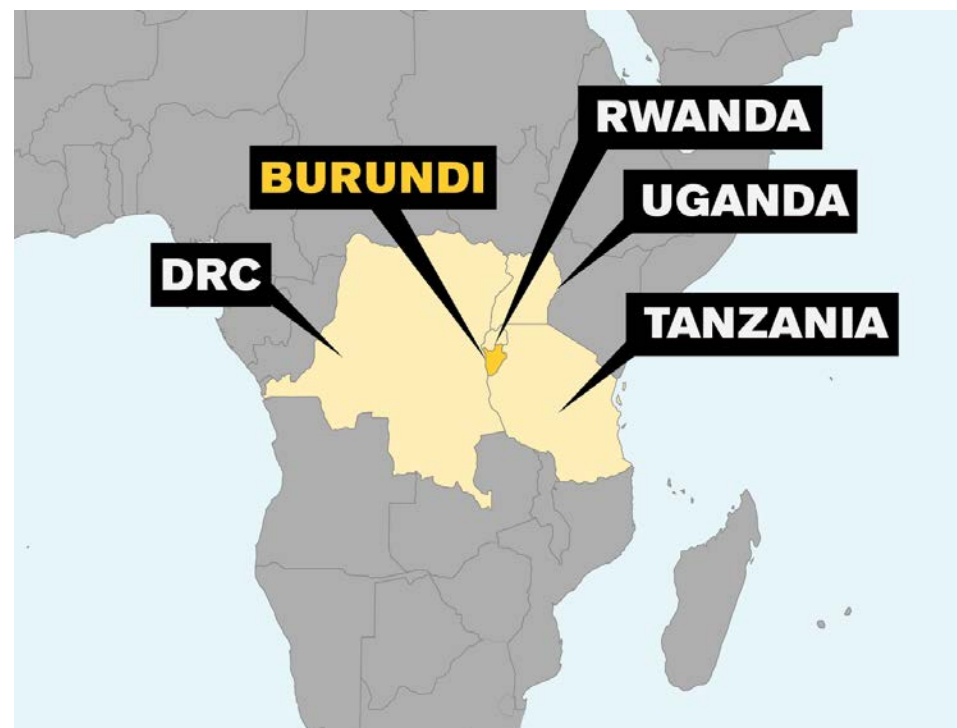
OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Tanzania, **Rwanda**, the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, and to a lesser extent **Uganda**, received the greatest number of Burundian refugees after the 2015 crisis and are likely to receive more if conflict and displacement intensifies.

than the hundreds of thousands of refugees that fled the country due to conflict, this breakdown of IDPs reflects the Burundian population's particular vulnerability to the impact of natural disasters, for example due to many people living in areas affected by flooding.

Burundi scores highly on the "Impact" side with an eight for vulnerability reflecting limited social progress and susceptibility to disease outbreaks. Burundi has a history of major malaria outbreaks - the 2019 outbreak reached over 7.2 million cases (65% of the population) by mid-October and resulted in 2,691 deaths (WHO). The WHO also classified **Burundi as one of the "priority one" countries that are most at risk from the Ebola outbreak in eastern DRC**. Burundi also ranked at 185 out of 189 countries in the 2018 Human Development Index. This combined with weak governance and infrastructure contributes to the country's moderate high seven for lack of coping capacity.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Burundi scores a three out of five for humanitarian access, classified as having high access constraints (ACAPS). Access is undermined by ongoing insecurity, criminality and restrictions imposed by the authorities. In September 2018, the government suspended all international NGOs and required them to re-apply for permission to operate in Burundi, contingent on meeting ethnic and gender quotas for national staff, which led some NGOs to leave the country.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

Burundi's 2020 elections could lead to greater instability. There are some indications of the government engaging opposition leaders outside the country, raising the possibility of some returning to compete in the elections. Together with President Nkurunziza publicly saying he will not seek re-election in 2020, this could ease tensions and the risk of political violence - but he could still run. The lead up to 2020 elections may therefore see increased instability, which would drive further displacement and humanitarian needs.

A child collects water for his family in Muyinga Province, northeast Burundi.

Credit: T. Koene /IRC

CAMEROON

👤 25 million

Cameroon faces one of the fastest-growing displacements in Africa as a result of three distinct humanitarian crises: a separatist conflict in the Northwest and Southwest, militancy in the Far North, and an influx of refugees from neighboring Central African Republic in the east. Eight of Cameroon's ten regions are affected by one or more of these crises (OCHA). The crises threaten decades of development gains and shows no signs of slowing down.

4.4 million people (18% of the population) in Cameroon are in need of humanitarian assistance (OCHA). Cameroon hosts 800,000 IDPs produced by the two crises in the Far North and Northwest-Southwest and a significant number of refugees from neighboring states, namely the Central African Republic (291,000) and Nigeria (108,000) (UNHCR). Food insecurity is pronounced in conflict-affected areas, while drought and floods compound the crisis and loss of livelihoods. Over one million people faced crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity, including 47,000 in emergency (IPC 4) levels during June-August 2019 (Cadre Harmonisé).

Cameroon scores moderately highly on human risk at six largely due to the intensity of ongoing conflict, as well as the threat from militant groups and exposure to regional conflict, namely spillover from neighboring Nigeria and Central African Republic. In the Far North, the activities of armed groups chiefly based in northeast Nigeria have resulted in over 2,000 deaths and driven humanitarian need: 270,000 people are displaced in this area (IOM) and 1.9 million people (50% of the region's population) were in need of humanitarian assistance as of early 2019 (OCHA).

In the Northwest and Southwest regions, **the humanitarian situation has deteriorated rapidly over the last three years**, driven by historical marginalization of the two majority English-speaking regions by the government. The crisis has displaced 700,000 people and left **2.3 million people in need** – nearly fifteen times higher than in 2018 (OCHA). For the third year, the separatists have enforced lockdowns that now prevent around 90% of primary schools and 80% of secondary schools in the regions from opening, leaving over 855,000 children out of school (UN). Despite a relatively low "natural risk"

RISK	6	HUMAN RISK	4	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	8	VULNERABILITY	7	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Nigeria has received some Cameroonian refugees, mainly from Northwest and Southwest Cameroon and would likely receive more if the situation there continues to deteriorate.

score of four, the country saw heavier than normal rains in late 2019 that led to flooding.

Cameroon scores much higher on the "Impact" side with a high eight for vulnerability, driven by weak healthcare capacity, susceptibility to pandemics, and low financial development. Its moderately high score of seven for lack of coping capacity is rooted in weak governance and poor physical infrastructure. Insecurity is further eroding the coping capacity in the Northwest and Southwest, where 40% of health facilities are no longer functional (OCHA). Such weak capacity and pre-existing vulnerability could exacerbate the impact of natural disasters that do occur, though Cameroon scores low on natural risk (four), with potential for severe storms and droughts.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Cameroon scores a four for humanitarian access, classified as having "very high" access constraints (ACAPS). Continued clashes between the government and separatists have led to violence, roadblocks, and lockdowns that all restrict movements, including the humanitarian response. Aid workers cannot access an estimated 65% of the Northwest and Southwest regions (UN), mostly due to insecurity, while nearly 90% of health districts in the two regions are deemed unsafe for health workers (OCHA). Aid workers have increasingly come under attack and been taken hostage. Even without conflict, the existing weak infrastructure reduces access to many communities, particularly during the rainy season.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

The humanitarian crises in Cameroon are likely to persist in 2020, as conflict and displacement show no sign of slowing down and the multiple conflicts remain unresolved. Continued conflict is likely to drive food insecurity and constrain humanitarian access. The crisis in the Northwest and Southwest has seen the greatest deterioration over the past year and government-led dialogue efforts have not secured buy-in from many key parties to the crisis. Additionally, any escalation in conflict in Nigeria and Central African Republic, both of which are in the Top Ten of Watchlist 2020, is likely to result in an influx of displaced populations into Cameroon, further straining weak capacity.

A Central African woman who is now living with her family in a vacant municipal building in Ndim, CAR after spending several months as refugees in Cameroon.

Credit: D. Belluz/IRC

CHAD

 16 million

Chad is one of the most under-developed countries in the world, ranking 186 of 189 on UNDP's Human Development Index in 2018. Humanitarian needs are intensified by militancy in the Lake Chad Basin, Chadian armed opposition groups operating from southern Libya, and communal conflicts driven by competition for resources. Nonetheless, Chad's relative stability compared to some countries in the region means it also hosts nearly half a million refugees, mostly from Sudan, CAR and Nigeria. Chad re-enters Watchlist in the 2020 edition, having made the list previously for 2018 but not 2019.

4.8 million people (30% of the population) are in need of humanitarian assistance in Chad (OCHA). Food insecurity and malnutrition, population displacement and health emergencies cause more than **7.5 million people, representing half of the Chadian population, to be either acutely or chronically vulnerable** (HNO). 18 of 23 provinces in the country faced malnutrition rates above emergency levels in 2019 (OCHA). At present, 564,000 people (21% of the population) are experiencing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity (OCHA). There are also 175,000 Chadians internally displaced (OCHA) and Chad hosts 464,000 refugees, including 344,000 from Sudan, 104,000 from CAR, and 16,000 from Nigeria (UNHCR).

Chad scores moderately highly for human risk (seven), reflecting ongoing conflict in multiple parts of the country. The western Lac region is often affected by the armed group violence from Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon. Tibesti in the far northwest is seeing rising instability both due to the influence of Chadian armed opposition groups based in southern Libya and due to tensions between local communities and the government over distribution of resources, particularly gold, in the Miski area.

Communal violence between traditional herding and farming communities is also seen throughout the country. In mid-2019, such violence led the government to declare a state of emergency in Ouaddai and Sila, regions neighboring Sudan. As in other Sahel countries, farmer-herder conflict may be exacerbated by climate change and desertification which increases competition for water and other resources. Food insecurity in Chad is driven by this insecurity

RISK	7	HUMAN RISK	5	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	10	VULNERABILITY	10	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY
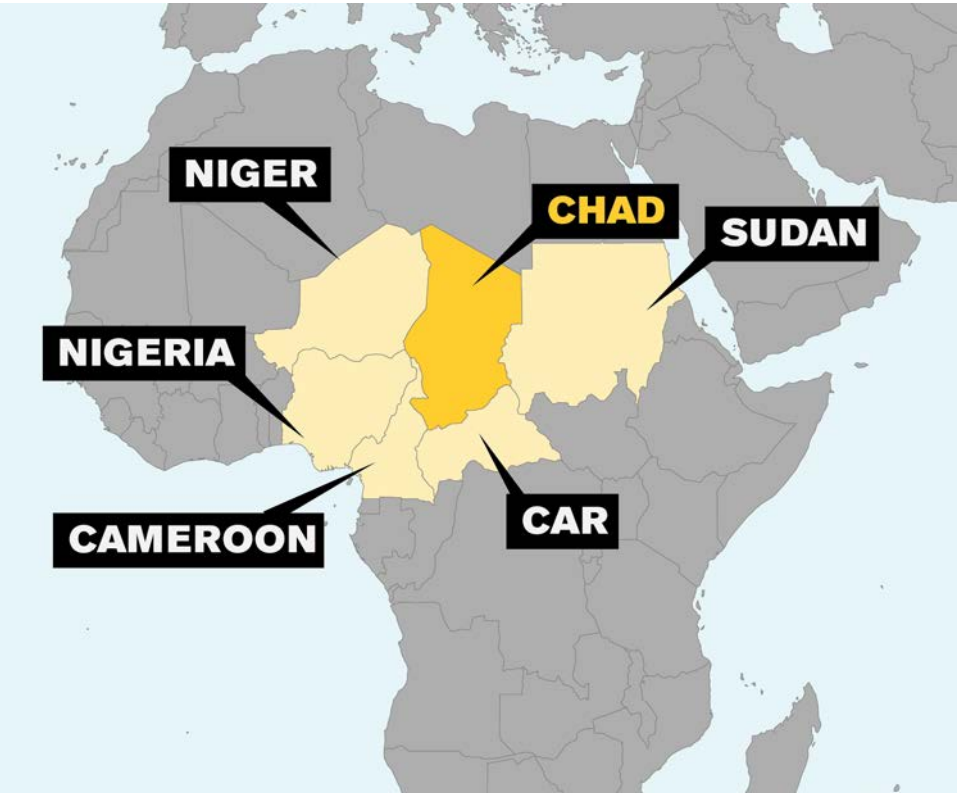
OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Further deterioration could lead to displacements to neighboring countries - both of Chadians fleeing and refugees hosted in Chad returning to their home countries. **Sudan**, **CAR** and **Nigeria** are most likely to be affected, although **Cameroon** and **Niger** host some Chadian refugees while Libya could also see some population movements.

and its consequences, particularly displacement, disruption of livelihoods, and security measures that impede trade, such as the closure of the border with Nigeria.

Chad has a moderate score for natural risk (five), but nonetheless is exposed to the risk of drought - which also contributes to food insecurity. However, **it is on the "Impact" side of the scorecard that Chad scores highest with the maximum ten for both "vulnerability" and "lack of coping capacity."** Only South Sudan scores as highly for "Impact". This reflects the country's economic under-development which has not only left the population highly vulnerable to shocks - whether from conflict or natural events - but also means there is weak road, medical, communications and other infrastructure.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

ACAPS rates Chad as a three out of five ("high") for access constraints, with its key concern being the impact of ongoing conflicts. Poor road infrastructure means some areas are hard to reach during the rainy season (OCHA) while the HNO for 2019 also reported bureaucratic impediments and attempts to interfere in humanitarian assistance as major challenges, without specifying who was responsible.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

Chad is due to hold parliamentary elections in the first few months of 2020, though they have repeatedly been delayed since November 2018 so further postponement is possible. Either way, tensions around the election may add to insecurity within the country and so exacerbate need. Instability and conflict activity is also currently rising in the Sahel, in the Lake Chad Basin region, and within Chad in the north and east (both due to armed group activity and farmer-herder tensions) suggesting Chad is at risk of seeing greater conflict in 2020 than 2019. Good rains in June-October 2019 will likely improve the food security outlook for Chad in the first months of 2020, but conflict will continue to disrupt livelihood activities and drive need across many parts of the country.

IRC field staff and community health workers lead a counseling session with clients in Mangalme, Guera region, Chad.

Credit: T. Nesmoth/IRC

ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia faces two key challenges: localized conflicts that often play out along ethnic lines and can spark mass displacement and erratic weather patterns that leave people exposed to the impact of both drought and flooding. Since taking office in April 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has initiated a transitional period which has seen repeated outbreaks of localized conflict as some opposition groups have returned from exile and tensions have grown both within and between the country's different regions, which are divided up along ethnic lines.

8 million people (7.3% of the population) in Ethiopia need some kind of humanitarian assistance (OCHA). Conflict-induced displacement - and returns - have a major impact on livelihoods, compounding the impact of years of drought. A total of 8 million people (27% of the population analyzed) are currently experiencing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity, 1.9 million of those at emergency (IPC 4) levels (IPC Info). As of mid-2019, there were 1.6 million IDPs in Ethiopia, with most (1.1 million) driven by conflict but nearly 500,000 linked to drought or seasonal flooding (IOM). Conflict and drought have caused Ethiopia to face the **largest IDP growth in the world over the last two years**, though there have also been major return movements of IDPs as well (OCHA). Ethiopia hosts over 700,000 refugees, including 315,000 from South Sudan, 182,000 from Somalia, 147,000 from Eritrea and 51,000 from Sudan (UNHCR).

Ethiopia has a moderately high score for human risk (seven), reflecting both the domestic conflict within the country and its exposure to regional conflicts, particularly Somalia to the east and South Sudan to the west; historical tensions with Eritrea have receded since Abiy Ahmed became Prime Minister. Ethiopia's more moderate score for natural risk (five) is driven upwards by the risk of major storms but down due to factors such as the limited risk of seismic events. It should also be noted that Ethiopia, along with the rest of the Horn region, saw drought in 2018-2019 due to below average rainfall (OCHA) while flooding late in 2019 affected 570,000 people (OCHA).

RISK	7	HUMAN RISK	5	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	8	VULNERABILITY	7	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Most Ethiopian refugees reside in Kenya, though there are also cases of Ethiopians fleeing to **Sudan**, **Somalia**, **Djibouti** and **South Sudan**.

Ethiopia scores more highly on the "impact" side of the scorecard. The existing vulnerability of Ethiopia is high (eight), reflecting the relative under-development affecting many areas of Ethiopia, as well as the population's susceptibility to pandemics. The lack of coping capacity score of seven is moderately high, pushed upwards in particular by limited communications and physical infrastructure. That said, the score is brought down somewhat by the state's existing institutional capacity and efforts that have been taken on disaster risk reduction.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Ethiopia's ACAPS score of three out of five ("high") indicates a relatively easier operating environment than many other countries on the Watchlist, though there are still challenges such as impediments to entering the country, interference with humanitarian activities and the impact of ongoing hostilities in parts of the country. ACAPS indicates a low risk of violence against humanitarian personnel or assets. Nonetheless, in September 2019 two aid workers were killed in an attack targeting their vehicle in what OCHA described as the "first deliberate attack against a humanitarian partner in Ethiopia in recent times."

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

The high likelihood of political tensions rising ahead of the planned May 2020 elections means that there will be a persistent risk of localized conflict in the first few months of the year - and it could then rise or fall depending on the conduct and outcome of the vote. Conflict-driven displacements may therefore rise. At the same time, however, the government may try to push more IDPs to return ahead of the election - which could also lead to greater humanitarian needs if these movements are premature, for example if their homes and livelihoods have been destroyed. Meanwhile, above average rains across most of the country in the second half of 2019 suggest that food security outcomes will improve at the end of 2019/start of 2020, though some regions had lower rainfall and so crisis (IPC 3) levels of food insecurity will persist in many areas (FEWS NET).

Children gather for lunch at a school the IRC has provided with a water system in Silte zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region of Ethiopia.

Credit: M. Ayene/IRC

Iraq faces continued political, security, and economic challenges as it recovers from persistent conflict and instability. Iraq has faced ongoing conflict since the US-led invasion in 2003 with violence spiking again in 2013-2014 as the militant Islamic State group seized territory. Years of conflict and instability have left the country facing large-scale displacement and systematic destruction and damage of basic infrastructure. The recovery of the country will be complicated by political, tribal, and sectarian tensions, while mass protests in late 2019 that led the Prime Minister to resign underscore the level of public discontent over socioeconomic grievances and the fragility of Iraq's political situation.

4.1 million people (11% of the population) in Iraq need humanitarian assistance, with over half of those experiencing acute needs concentrated in the two governorates of Ninewa and Anbar in the west and northwest of the country (OCHA). Iraq has 1.44 million IDPs, though this number is falling since many are returning home after years of displacement (UNHCR). The country hosts 234,831 Syrian refugees (UNHCR) including 15,000 who fled the violence triggered by the Turkish-backed incursion in northeast Syria in October 2019 (IOM).

Iraq scores highly on human risk (eight) due to conflict, human rights violations, criminality and corruption. This score may somewhat overstate the situation given that some of the indices used for this measure will still be affected by the country's recent history of large-scale conflict to end Islamic State's territorial control. The government has also moved to consolidate and close a number of IDP camps in 2019, raising concerns of forced or premature returns. **Living conditions in many areas remain challenging; years of conflict have left destroyed and insufficient infrastructure in many locations**, reducing access to health, education, and livelihoods. IDPs that are perceived to have associations with Islamic State can face additional persecution and secondary displacement.

Iraq scores moderately highly on the "**Impact**" side with a **seven for both vulnerability and lack of coping capacity**. Vulnerability is exacerbated by

RISK	8	HUMAN RISK	6	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	7	VULNERABILITY	7	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Renewed conflict in Iraq could drive some displacement to **Syria**, but more likely would undermine the ability of Syrian refugees to find safety in Iraq.

poor financial development and weak healthcare capacity. Weak coping capacity is rooted in weak governance and institutional capacity. Such high scores can reduce the country's response to natural disasters, as it scores moderately high on natural risk at six driven by the risk of drought.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Iraq scores a three out of five for humanitarian access, classified as having high access constraints (ACAPS). This reflects the way conflict has destroyed or damaged infrastructure and enduring poor road conditions and the presence of explosives. Bureaucratic impediments can also limit humanitarian activities while aid workers can face harassment and intimidation at security checkpoints (OCHA).

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

Political instability is likely to continue into 2020, hampering economic growth and stability needed for the country's recovery from prolonged crisis. As Iraqi IDPs return home and try to regain control of land and homes, pre-existing tensions between tribal, sectarian, and political groups may grow – which may impede some displaced communities' ability to return to their homes or drive secondary displacements, increasing the vulnerability of these populations and potentially disrupting humanitarian access. Meanwhile, the ongoing crisis in neighboring Syria may drive more Syrian refugees into Iraq and delay the return of Syrians already in Iraq, with disproportionate impact on the autonomous Kurdish Regional Government.

A child walks through Domiz camp, which was established in response to the arrival of refugees from northern Syria to the Duhok area of northern Iraq.

Credit: P. Biro/IRC

LIBYA

Major conflict is currently underway around Tripoli, the latest of several rounds of fighting in the country since the 2011 civil war, when long-term President Muammar Gadhafi was ousted. Forces loyal to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and backed by the UAE have been trying to wrest the capital from armed groups nominally loyal to the internationally recognized Government of National Accord since April 2019. Pro-Haftar forces have had little success so far but do not appear willing to give up. This conflict has not only affected many Libyan civilians but has also increased the risks for people seeking to move through Libya to reach Europe; up to 90% of people crossing the Mediterranean depart from Libya (UNHCR).

880,000 people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Libya (OCHA). Libya hosts 300,000 IDPs and 650,000 migrants, many without regular status (OCHA). According to the HNO, the highest priority needs in Libya are protection, access to critical services, and access to basic household goods and commodities. These needs are a consequence of the conflict, both the direct impact of fighting and the way it has empowered armed and criminal groups that may engage in human rights violations with little or no accountability.

Migrants can be particularly vulnerable because they generally lack the legal right to be in Libya. They are often mistreated - with women exposed to serious risks of gender-based violence - while being transported through the country. If caught, they are liable to be sent to a detention center where conditions are often extremely poor, contributing to the spread of diseases like tuberculosis. Migrants held in detention centers have also been affected by the conflict, most notably when an airstrike killed at least 53 people, including six children, at the Tajoura detention center east of Tripoli in July 2019 (OCHA).

Libya scores highly for human risk (nine), reflecting the ongoing conflict around Tripoli, which displaced 128,000 people in 2019, as well as insecurity elsewhere such as the activities of fighters loyal to Islamic State (IS) (OCHA). The score is also a function of the weakness of the central government and widespread criminality and corruption. The natural risk score is much lower (four) but still indicates a risk of drought. Flooding also displaced

RISK	9	HUMAN RISK	4	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	5	VULNERABILITY	6	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: During periods of major conflict in the past, Libyans have fled to **Tunisia**, **Egypt** and **Chad**. Instability in Libya can also lead to greater numbers of Libyans and non-Libyans crossing the Mediterranean to reach southern Europe, both because of the increased incentives for Libyans to leave and because instability in Libya makes it easier for human smugglers to operate. Any further escalation in conflict in Libya in 2020 could see more people moving along these routes.

2,500 people in southwest Libya in May 2019, illustrating the risk of flash floods in the largely desert country (UNHCR).

Libya scores much lower on the "Impact" side of the scorecard. The existing vulnerability of Libyans is scored at just a moderate five, reflecting - among other factors - the relatively developed economy of Libya prior to 2011 and its continued oil wealth. The moderately high score for lack of coping capacity (six) reflects the reality that Libya previously had a highly functioning health system which, while it has been heavily degraded by years of conflict and corruption, has still not completely collapsed. However, it should be noted that these scores are only for Libyans, whereas migrants passing through Libya are likely to be far more vulnerable and, because of their status, are unlikely to have access to the same services and infrastructure.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

ACAPS rates Libya as a four out of five ("very high") for access constraints, driven in particular by persistent insecurity, presence of unexploded ordinance and mines and the influence of a wide range of armed groups often with unclear chains of command. Repeated airstrikes have regularly forced operations to be suspended at the sole remaining functional airport in Tripoli, Mitiga which further undermines the ability of humanitarian actors to work in Libya.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

The conflict around Tripoli has not progressed significantly since it began in April 2019, with neither side able to secure a clear advantage over the other - in no small part because UN Experts suggest they have both received external support, despite an arms embargo in place since 2011. Diplomatic efforts have gathered some momentum during 2019 but there is still no sign of a breakthrough. This suggests there is a real probability of conflict persisting throughout 2020 and potentially escalating and spreading to more parts of the country. This would drive displacements and increase the threats to the safety of both Libyans and non-Libyans, while smuggling networks could exploit the instability to bring more migrants through the country.

Khal sits with his Eritrean mother in the IRC's Community Development Center in Ain Zara, Tripoli, Libya. This facility has now been forced to close due to conflict In the Ain Zara area.

Credit: A. Ohanesian/IRC

MALI

19 million

The persistent instability seen in Mali since a military coup in 2012 has escalated since late 2016 as conflict activity increasingly extends from the north into more central regions. Militant groups are now firmly entrenched not just in central and northern Mali, but also in adjacent parts of Burkina Faso and Niger. The weakness of the central government has at times led it to rely on informal armed groups to fight militancy, which in turn has triggered a cycle of communal conflicts concentrated in the center of the country. As well as driving humanitarian need, insecurity makes it increasingly difficult for humanitarians to access people in need.

3.6 million Malians (nearly 19% of the population) are in need of some kind of humanitarian assistance (OCHA). The central Mopti region is most affected, with a third of the population there currently targeted for humanitarian assistance (OCHA). Over half a million Malians were facing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in mid-2019 (Cadre Harmonisé). More than 800 schools are currently closed due to insecurity, leaving almost a quarter of a million children without a formal education (UNICEF). As of late October 2019, 199,000 Malians are displaced within the country and 139,000 have fled to neighboring countries (IOM).

These **humanitarian needs, and Mali's appearance on Watchlist 2020, are driven in part by the rising insecurity in the country** - which resulted in it scoring six for human risk. The Mopti region is most affected by humanitarian needs due to communal conflicts, particularly between traditional Dogon hunter communities and ethnic Fulani. While this conflict has been somewhat calmed by a locally mediated peace agreement in August 2019, militant groups continue to try to exploit these divides, for example by recruiting within Fulani communities and targeting members of other groups.

Mali scores relatively low for natural risk at four, but there is still a real risk of both drought and flooding. **Mali scores particularly highly on the "Impact" side of the scorecard**, with a high eight for the existing vulnerability

RISK	**6** HUMAN RISK	**4** NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	**8** VULNERABILITY	**7** LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: **Mauritania**, **Niger** and **Burkina Faso** all currently host Malian refugees and may receive more depending on developments within Mali.

of the population and moderately high seven for the country's lack of response capacity. These scores indicate a weak healthcare system (and the population's limited ability to access it), limited communications and physical infrastructure, and a population that is susceptible to pandemics.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

ACAPS rates Mali as a four out of five ("very high") for access constraints, driven in particular by ongoing insecurity and hostilities, violence against personnel and facilities, and physical constraints such as poor roads. Military operations against armed groups often force humanitarian assistance to be suspended and disrupt the daily lives of civilians. Armed groups frequently respond with roadside bombings that present a major collateral threat to civilians and humanitarian personnel. Amid this insecurity, criminality is also rising. Underlining these risks, nineteen aid workers have been abducted so far in 2019, more than the previous three years put together (INSO).

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

The continued presence of militant groups both in Mali and in neighboring countries means that conflict activity is highly likely to continue throughout 2020, with areas bordering Burkina Faso and Niger particularly affected. Levels of violence in Mopti will depend heavily on whether localized peace efforts are able to constrain communal tensions in the region, but there is a significant risk of renewed conflict. This insecurity will continue to drive displacements and disrupt commercial and agricultural activities, worsening food insecurity, while access constraints will undermine the ability of humanitarians to meet rising needs.
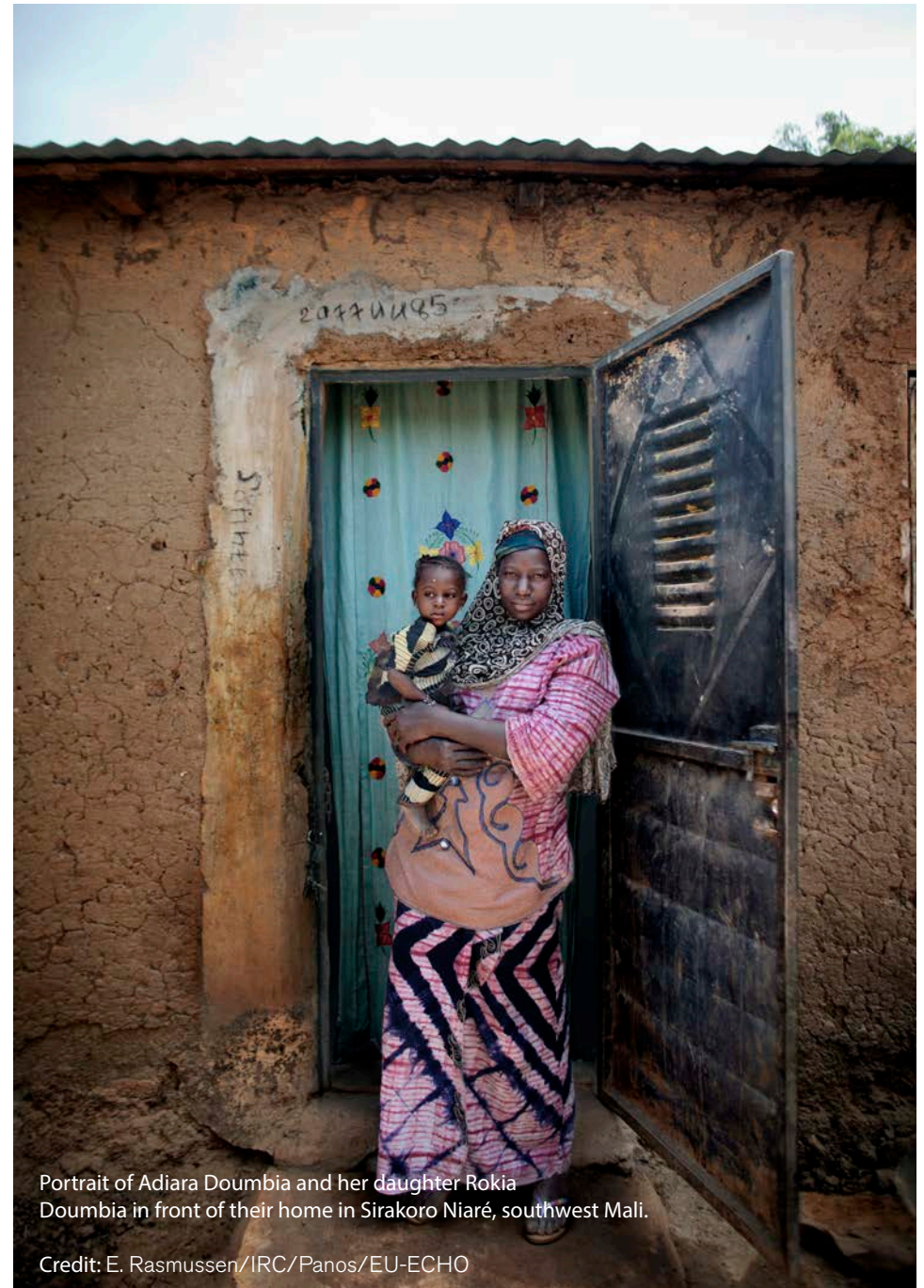
Portrait of Adiara Doumbia and her daughter Rokia Doumbia in front of their home in Sirakoro Niaré, southwest Mali.

Credit: E. Rasmussen/IRC/Panos/EU-ECHO

MYANMAR

Myanmar faces ongoing armed conflict between the Army and various armed groups, largely formed along ethnic lines, despite military rule ending three years ago. 2019 saw particular clashes between the military and the Arakan Army based in Rakhine state. While conflict and violence continue on a regular basis, they have not risen to the level of the 2017 violence that led hundreds of thousands of members of the Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority to flee to neighboring Bangladesh. Rohingya remaining in Myanmar continue to face limited access to basic services and severe restrictions, while humanitarian actors are constrained by bureaucratic impediments.

986,000 people (1.8% of the population) in Myanmar need humanitarian assistance (OCHA). While this represents a smaller proportion of the population than other countries on the Watchlist, **needs are disproportionately concentrated in ethnic minority groups**. Needs are driven by persistent conflict between the Myanmar Army and armed groups, with civilians often caught in the middle. Conflict escalated in 2019 between the Myanmar Army and a number of ethnic armed groups which drove further displacement and civilian harm particularly in Rakhine, Chin, Kachin and Shan (particularly its north) states. The crisis has left around 273,000 IDPs living in camps or camp-like situations in Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, Chin and Kaylin states (OCHA).

The humanitarian crisis has had a particular impact on the ethnic Rohingya population. An estimated 900,000 are now living in Bangladesh, including over 740,000 that fled in late 2017, while 600,000 Rohingya remain in Myanmar, where UN experts have said **they are still at "serious risk of genocide."** The Rohingya population also continues to face discriminatory policies, segregation, statelessness, movement restrictions, poor access to livelihood opportunities, health, education, and other services (OCHA-UNHCR) (UN Human Rights Council).

Myanmar scores moderately high on human risk at six largely due to conflict intensity, violations of human rights and minority rights and corruption. Civilians

RISK	**6**	HUMAN RISK	**9**	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	**7**	VULNERABILITY	**7**	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: **Bangladesh** received the vast majority of Rohingya refugees and is likely to receive any future displaced populations, while **Malaysia** and **Thailand** could receive smaller population movements.

also continue to face the threat of landmines and other explosives, with nine of fifteen states affected (UNICEF). Meanwhile, **Myanmar has the highest natural risk score of any country on the Watchlist** at nine, with high risks of severe storms, waves, seismic hazards, landslides and drought. The country is also impacted by seasonal monsoons. Myanmar's ability to respond to both sudden natural disasters or escalation in conflict is undermined by its high vulnerability and lack of coping capacity, both scoring a seven.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Myanmar scores a four out of five for humanitarian access, classified as having very high access constraints (ACAPS). Access in Myanmar is characterized by bureaucratic constraints, both on working within the country (particularly in Rakhine state) and when trying to enter the country at all. UN agencies have reported growing food insecurity as humanitarian actors are unable to access communities, particularly in northern Rakhine State (UNICEF). Limits on freedom of movement and segregation of ethnic populations further constrain their ability to access humanitarian services. Additional access constraints are created by ongoing clashes between the military and armed groups as well as seasonal monsoons as rains, flooding, and landslides can severely affect infrastructure across Myanmar.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

The lack of progress in addressing the security and humanitarian situation for ethnic minorities means the humanitarian crisis is likely to persist into 2020, with a risk of deterioration given some major armed groups remain outside the peace process. In the absence of sustained ceasefires, there are likely to be continued clashes, which will certainly produce attacks on civilians, civilian infrastructure, and aid workers – all of which will further constrain access. There may well also be natural disasters that destroy homes, displace people and undermine livelihoods throughout the country.

Given ongoing violence and the Myanmar government's unwillingness to guarantee greater protections or security for the Rohingya, it is unlikely that Rohingya refugees will voluntarily return from Bangladesh soon. But there remains a danger of forced or premature returns, which could be followed by violence and increased displacement both within the country and to Bangladesh.

Members of the IRC health team examine a child in Shadaw, Kayah State, eastern Myanmar.

Credit: P. Biro/IRC

NIGER

Niger is the least developed country in the world, ranking 189 of 189 on [UNDP](#)'s Human Development Index in 2018. Two separate areas of the country see regular activity by militant groups: Tahoua and Tillaberi in the western area bordering Burkina Faso and Mali as well as the Diffa region in the southeast in the wider Lake Chad Basin. These conflicts drive internal displacements and food insecurity. Escalating instability in northwest Nigeria in 2019 has also resulted in a new influx of Nigerian refugees to the Maradi region in the south of Niger.

3.2 million people - 15% of Niger's total population - need some form of humanitarian assistance ([OCHA](#)). As of late 2019, 1.4 million people are experiencing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity ([FAO](#)). **Niger also sees major conflict-driven internal displacement**. In total there are 187,000 IDPs within the country, of whom 109,000 are in Diffa while 55,000 are in Tillaberi and 23,000 in Tahoua. While the number of IDPs in Diffa has been falling since the start of 2018, the numbers in Tillaberi and Tahoua are steadily rising. Adding to these needs, Niger hosts 218,000 refugees, including 161,500 from Nigeria (119,500 in Diffa and 42,000 in Maradi) and 56,000 from Mali (mostly in border areas) ([UNHCR](#)).

Niger has relatively modest scores on the risk side of the scorecard - six for human risk and five for natural risk. Meanwhile, Niger's moderate natural risk score is principally a reflection of the potential for drought, though the country also regularly experiences flooding. Niger's presence on the Watchlist is heavily driven by the qualitative judgment that the situation in the country may deteriorate as militancy-linked instability rises and weather patterns continue to be erratic across the Sahel. Moreover, **Niger's high scores for vulnerability and lack of coping capability (both eight) underline that any conflict or natural shocks are likely to have a major humanitarian impact**.

RISK	6	HUMAN RISK	5	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	8	VULNERABILITY	8	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Population movements via Niger to **Libya** and then Europe may increase if instability distracts the security forces from their efforts to curb migration. There are currently few refugees from Niger but a major escalation within Nigeria could encourage refugees from **Nigeria** and **Mali** who are now living in Niger to return home – and some Nigeriens would likely flee with them.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

[ACAPS](#) rates Niger as a three out of five ("high") for access constraints, highlighting the impact of the ongoing conflicts. Throughout 2019 there were repeated thefts of NGO vehicles in the Mali border area, whether by criminal gangs seeking financial gain or for usage by militant groups. Government security measures in response to these threats are also a major concern. For example, the authorities periodically forbid movements by humanitarian actors in parts of Niger without military escorts - which then compels the IRC and other actors to suspend their movements.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

Insecurity has been steadily growing both in Niger and the wider Sahel in 2019 and this trend is likely to persist into 2020 given the increasingly entrenched positions of militant groups. This means internal displacements will continue and humanitarian needs will remain high. Moreover, the high risk of major deterioration in Nigeria (ranked four on Watchlist 2020) suggests that new influxes of Nigerian refugees - whether to Diffa, Maradi or elsewhere – could occur in the coming year.

Girls at school in Mangaize camp, near the Malian border in southwest Niger.

Credit: P. Biro/IRC

SUDAN

Sudan is in the midst of a fragile political transition following the April 2019 ousting of President Omar al-Bashir, who had ruled the country since a 1989 military coup. A power-sharing agreement was reached in August 2019 between the ruling Transitional Military Council and opposition Declaration for Freedom and Change alliance. They agreed to a three-year transition during which a Prime Minister will run the government while a mixed civilian-military Sovereign Council serves as the head of state. Sudan's new Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok faces mounting challenges: a deteriorating economic crisis, high levels of food insecurity, a growing cholera outbreak and continued armed conflict in Darfur in particular.

9.3 million Sudanese (21% of the population) need humanitarian assistance (OCHA). 5.8 million people (14% of the population) are in crisis (IPC 3) levels of food insecurity or worse, including one million experiencing emergency levels (IPC 4) (IPC Info). **This marks the highest food insecurity level recorded since the introduction of the IPC analysis in Sudan**. The continued economic crisis has driven up food prices with over half of all households now spending 75% of their total outgoings on food (OCHA).

Sudan also hosts displaced populations with elevated humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities. There are 1.9 million IDPs (OCHA) and over one million refugees in the country, including the largest South Sudanese refugee population in the region at 860,000 (OCHA). Sudan also faces a **growing cholera outbreak** with over 200 suspected cases as of September 2019 and projections of 5,000 to 13,200 cases in the following six months (OCHA).

Sudan's inclusion on the Watchlist is driven by a high score for human risk (eight), caused by continued armed conflict and exposure to regional conflict. Ongoing conflicts in three areas of Sudan (Darfur, Blue Nile state and South Kordofan state) are primarily responsible for internal displacement,

RISK	8	HUMAN RISK	5	NATURAL RISK
IMPACT	8	VULNERABILITY	7	LACK OF COPING CAPABILITY

OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MIGHT BE AFFECTED: Any escalation of conflict could see refugees fleeing to **South Sudan** and **Chad**, which already host significant populations of Sudanese refugees.

though the new government has entered into preliminary talks with armed opposition groups. Sudan's natural risk score is not particularly elevated (five) but reflects the risk of drought and wildfires. Flooding this year has also affected over 420,000 people (OCHA). Sudan scores highly on the "impact" side of the scorecard with a high score for vulnerability (eight) and a moderately high score for lack of coping capability (seven) which reflects both its susceptibility to pandemics as well as weak governance and physical infrastructure.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Sudan scores a four out of five for humanitarian access, classified as having very high access constraints (ACAPS). Conflict continues to undermine humanitarian access but ongoing efforts to negotiate peace agreements with armed groups could lead to lower levels of conflict activity and greater humanitarian access. In 2019, the government signaled a willingness to allow previously barred NGOs to return to the country, which, if realized, could improve the country's capacity to respond to new and existing humanitarian crises. Even as government policies improve and conflict subsides, the humanitarian response is undermined by explosive remnants of war, poor roads and flooding.

OUTLOOK FOR 2020

The ongoing political transition may allow Sudan's new government to improve the country's economic outlook, particularly if it can attract greater foreign investment and reduce insecurity, which could cause humanitarian needs to fall over time. The return of previously expelled NGOs could also enhance Sudan's capacity to respond to humanitarian needs. That said, if the transition process breaks down then humanitarian needs will persist and likely grow, particularly given the weak economy, high levels of food insecurity and the ongoing cholera outbreak.

Zam Zam camp for internally displaced people in North Darfur state, western Sudan.

Credit: Medhus.Creative Commons, Sudan

HOW THE EMERGENCY WATCHLIST WAS DRAWN UP

Countries appear on the Watchlist because our analysis suggests they are at high risk of experiencing conflict or natural events that, given the existing vulnerability of the population and/or the country's limited response capability, could trigger a humanitarian crisis. They were selected, scored and ranked by means of a multi-stage process of quantitative and qualitative analysis. A detailed description of the quantitative analysis conducted can be found here. A brief overview of the process follows. Note that the scorecards in the Watchlist reflect only the quantitative part of the analysis. The full description of each country's situation should be read to understand the qualitative analysis underpinning the final rankings.

STEP 1: INITIAL QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

76 different numerical indices were compiled, including data from INFORM, Verisk Maplecroft and ACAPS. Countries that consistently ranked in the top 25 on several of these indices were then included in a preliminary long list.

STEP 2: VALIDATING INITIAL QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AGAINST QUALITATIVE SOURCES.

The preliminary long list was then compared with comparable lists, for example those drawn up by think-tanks like the Council on Foreign Relations and International Crisis Group. The Watchlist team also compared the preliminary long list with crises the IRC had been monitoring throughout 2019 while the IRC's program teams around the world also provided inputs on countries to be considered. This enabled further countries to be flagged for inclusion in the long list, particularly those with deterioration late in 2019.

STEP 3: SCORING EACH COUNTRY ON THE LONG LIST FOR BOTH RISK AND IMPACT THROUGH A SECONDARY PROCESS OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS.

70 indices were brought together in different groupings to develop four different measures for each country's scorecard. Two scores were developed for the **"risk" of a country experiencing events that could trigger a humanitarian crisis:**

i. **Human risk** – the risk of the country experiencing human-driven events such as political instability, armed conflict and/or economic collapse.

ii. **Natural risk** – the risk of the country experiencing natural events such as a flood, earthquake or storm.

And two measures that help illustrate the likelihood that an event – whether human or natural – would cause a humanitarian crisis:

iii. **Vulnerability** – the existing vulnerability of the population in that country, including the IRC's existing "pre-crisis vulnerability" measure as well as indices produced by Verisk Maplecroft and UNDP's Human Development Index.

iv. **Lack of coping capacity** – whether a country has the governance structures and physical/communications infrastructure to respond effectively to a crisis. This measure is taken directly from INFORM's Index for Risk Management.

STEP 4: DEVELOPING MULTIPLE MATHEMATICAL MODELS TO COMBINE THE DIFFERENT SCORES.

By using several different approaches to combine and weight the four different scores, a preliminary short list and ranking of the countries was developed.

STEP 5: **COMBINING QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS TO DEVELOP THE FINAL SHORTLIST AND TANKING OF TOP TEN COUNTRIES.**

The key reference points for this stage were:

i. The **mathematical models** developed in Step 4, in particular seeing which countries consistently appeared at specific rankings across multiple different models.

ii. **Reviewing the data sources** lying behind each country's four scores to see if there were reasons they might over or under-state the situation. For example, data for some countries was outdated or entirely lacking, and there were strong reasons to believe that the country would have scored more highly if recent data had been available. In other cases, data used to develop a score had been influenced by developments in 2019 (such as major battles) that are unlikely to recur in 2020.

iii. **Qualitative analysis by the IRC's Crisis Analysis team** to identify the risk of further deterioration in the humanitarian situation in countries on the preliminary short list.

iv. **Qualitative inputs from senior IRC leaders, regional focal points and other IRC colleagues** familiar with the countries in question.

v. The scale and severity of emergencies that had occurred in those countries during 2018, as measured objectively by the **IRC's Emergency Classification System**.

vi. Where the IRC already has an established presence in a country, the scenarios set out in those **IRC country programs' Strategy Action Plans were considered.**