



Watchlist
Midyear
Update

THE NEW WORLD DISORDER: MORE SHOCKS, FEWER SHOCK ABSORBERS

Six months after the IRC Emergency Watchlist warned of rising global disorder, crises are spreading faster than the systems designed to contain them.



A Deepening Disorder in 2026

Six months ago, the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) 2026 Emergency Watchlist warned that a New World Disorder was emerging.

Since then, wars have spread, food and fuel prices have surged, humanitarian supply chains have fractured, and diplomacy has faltered, all against the backdrop of ever-shrinking aid budgets.

The result is a world with more shocks—and fewer shock absorbers.

The Emergency Watchlist listed the 20 countries that are at greatest risk of humanitarian crisis in the coming year. Together, these countries are home to just 12% of the global population, but account for 89% of people in humanitarian need. Today, many of those same countries are being hit hardest by shocks they did little to create.

COVER: A woman walks past homes and commercial buildings damaged by Israeli airstrikes in Tyre, Lebanon in March 2026. Intensified airstrikes across the country have driven a sharp rise in civilian harm, displacement and humanitarian need. Photo: Guy Smallman/Getty Images

The Iran War is the clearest example of how modern crises now cascade rapidly across economies, supply chains and aid operations far beyond the immediate conflict zone. The first two months of U.S. strikes on Iran are estimated to have cost \$25 billion. By comparison, this cost is:

5x more than the cost to treat every child suffering from acute malnutrition worldwide

11x more than the cost to reach children in Sudan, the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt*) and South Sudan with early childhood development programs

15x more than the cost of vaccinating all zero-dose children worldwide

But the Iran war is far from the only warning sign.

So far in 2026, a deadly new round of conflict between Israel and the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah has forced more than 1 million people in Lebanon to flee their homes; armed groups have taken control of several towns and cities in northern Mali, threatening the stability of the state; and South Sudan is rapidly falling into a new civil war. The most alarming Ebola outbreak since the 2013-2016 West Africa outbreak, which killed more than 11,000 people, is taking hold in the east of Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and has already spread to Uganda. Without urgent international action, it threatens to spread uncontrollably.

At the same time, the increasing availability and reduced cost of drone technology is exposing civilians from Ukraine to Myanmar to new forms of violence with few meaningful constraints, while rising food and fuel prices are pushing millions closer to hunger.

Many of the systems that once helped contain crises before they spiraled—humanitarian aid, diplomacy, refugee protections, public health capacity and multilateral cooperation—are weakening. The result is not simply more instability, but a world becoming progressively harder to stabilize.

Disorder in 2026 has already brought negative trendlines:



45 million

additional people are expected to be pushed into acute hunger



50 million

more people have been impacted by conflict



18.2 million

more people could fall into extreme poverty



Jamil, 5, stands with his mother, Jawaher, 31, at the displacement camp where they live in Gaza. Jamil received treatment from the IRC for moderate acute malnutrition and his health is steadily improving. Photo: Abdulhakem Abu Raish for the IRC

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

Where Have Global Shocks Been Driving Crisis?

In December 2025, the IRC published its 2026 Emergency Watchlist, highlighting the 20 countries at greatest risk of new or worsening humanitarian emergencies in the coming year. The report is based on an analytically rigorous process that deploys 74 quantitative and qualitative variables, as well as qualitative insights from the IRC's experience of working in more than 40 countries, to identify which countries to include on the list and how to rank them.

This map highlights some of the ways in which global disorder has impacted the countries ranked in the top 10 of the 2026 Emergency Watchlist since it was published six months ago.

Top 10

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

Other Watchlist Countries†

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

†In alphabetical order

05 Haiti

- **120% increase in fatalities** from drone attacks and airstrikes in the first quarter of 2026, compared to the last quarter of 2025.

08 Mali

09 Burkina Faso

07 Democratic Republic of the Congo

- The World Health Organization declared the Ebola outbreak a global emergency on May 17. **More than 1,000 suspected cases and 200 deaths** were reported within the following two weeks.
- **Nearly two in five people** in Ituri and North Kivu provinces, the main areas affected by the current outbreak, are facing crisis or worse levels (IPC 3+) of food insecurity.
- 2026 has already seen more drone attacks and airstrikes (**95**) than the total for all of 2025 (94).

02 occupied Palestinian territory

10 Lebanon

- **More than 3,000 people** have been killed since conflict between Israel and Hezbollah resumed in early 2026, and more than **1 million** people have been forced to flee their homes.
- **65% of Lebanon's population** has been exposed to conflict so far in 2026, compared to 21% in the last four months of 2025 (ACLED).
- **Nearly a quarter** of the population is expected to face crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC 3+) from April-August 2026.
- Call volumes to the national mental health hotlines **doubled** in the first 10 days of the escalation. Of those calling for support, **55% report acute emotional distress, 30% report suicidal ideation, and 40% require urgent referrals** to emergency or community-based services.

01 Sudan

- **Two in five people** are facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (levels 3-5 of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, IPC), putting them at increased risk of starvation, hunger and preventable disease.
- **Nearly 200,000 people** are facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity (IPC 5). At this level people are starving to death every day due to the extreme lack of food.

04 Ethiopia

03 South Sudan

- **Nearly 2.5 million people** (17% of all South Sudanese) are facing emergency levels of food insecurity (IPC 4), where urgent action is required to save lives.
- **Over 400,000 people** were displaced during January-April 2026 due to growing conflict.
- There has been a deterioration of **security and civilian protection** since the start of 2026.

06 Myanmar

5 Shocks Hitting Watchlist Countries

Disorder is now escalating dangerously, with communities in Watchlist countries caught in the crossfire.

Unchecked and unaddressed, these trends will continue to cause massive destruction and humanitarian catastrophe over the next six months and beyond.

“Currently, nothing is available—everything is expensive. There’s nothing you can get like before. People are fed up with lentil soup. You crave other things, like cabbage or cauliflower, but you might not be able to afford them because of the astronomical prices.”

– **Jawaher**, 31, displaced from Khan Younis, Gaza

01 Conflicts are spreading, exposing more people to harm.

In the four months after the Emergency Watchlist was published in late 2025, 406 million people, or 5% of the world's population, experienced deadly violence near their homes according to data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data project (ACLED)—46 million more people than in the preceding four months.

The Middle East has seen some of the sharpest increases in civilian exposure to violence. In Lebanon, renewed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah has killed more than 3,000 people, displaced more than 1 million, and left more than 127,000 living in collective shelters, as of late May 2026. One in four Lebanese women and girls were displaced within the first month of the conflict in Lebanon, exposing them to increased risk of gender-based violence, exploitation and other threats to their safety.

In Lebanon:



>3K
people
have been
killed



>1M
people
have been
displaced



>127K
people living
in makeshift
shelters

Drones are making it easier for warring parties to target more people at greater distances with fewer constraints. For instance, waves of U.S. and Israeli air, drone and missile attacks in Iran—and Iranian drone strikes in Israel and Gulf states—underscore how drones are reshaping and expanding the reach of modern warfare. What often receives less attention is how drones are also driving civilian harm in Watchlist countries.

In **Sudan**, drones killed more than 880 people between January and April 2026, accounting for more than 80% of civilian deaths. In **Haiti**, more than 1,200 people, including at least 17 children, have been killed by drone strikes since 2025.

All parties to conflicts have a responsibility under International Humanitarian Law to distinguish between civilians and combatants, and to take all feasible precautions to avoid civilian casualties. But because drones are cheap, accessible and poorly regulated, they make it much easier for warring parties to launch explosive attacks in cities and towns far beyond traditional frontlines, often with devastating consequences for civilians.

02 A global food catastrophe is unfolding.

A staggering 363 million people worldwide are at risk of acute hunger in 2026, including an additional **45 million** people at risk because of the recent conflict in the Middle East.

Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz—a critical route for global energy and agricultural supplies—are driving food, fuel and fertilizer price increases worldwide, with the heaviest impacts falling on low-income and fragile states. If these disruptions continue, a severe **global food-price crisis** will be triggered within six months to a year. Fertilizer prices are projected to **increase by 31%** this year, particularly affecting African countries that rely heavily on imported fertilizer and fuel.

↑ 31% Expected increase in fertilizer prices

According to the **World Bank**, energy prices are projected to increase by 24%, the highest level since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, even assuming shipping resumes flowing through the Strait of Hormuz from the start of June 2026. Price increases could be even greater if there are further disruptions throughout the year.

In **Lebanon**, renewed conflict has deepened the country's economic crisis, leaving nearly a quarter of the population (1.24 million people) facing crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity in 2026. This marks a major escalation from the 874,000 people experiencing acute food insecurity between November 2025 and March 2026 as conflict, displacement and rising prices place basic food increasingly out of reach for many families.

In Sudan, two in five people are facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity, putting them at increased risk of starvation, hunger and preventable disease, according to the **most recent** national data. Nearly 200,000 people are currently facing catastrophic levels of hunger, where there is such an extreme lack of food that people are starving to death every day.

2 in 5 
people in Sudan are facing acute food insecurity

Food insecurity will worsen further from mid-2026 as El Niño is forecast to come into effect, causing flooding in some areas and reduced rain in others.



An IRC staff member speaks with two women during a clothing distribution in Khan Younis, Gaza on May 8, 2025. As part of the IRC's emergency response in Gaza, the IRC provides clothing to conflict-affected children ages 6-17 to help them meet their basic needs with dignity. Photo funded by the European Union. Photographer: Mohammed Abo Samra for the IRC.

03 Humanitarian supply chains are fracturing.

The same shocks driving humanitarian crises are increasingly disrupting the systems meant to respond to them. Conflict linked to the war in Iran has disrupted both commercial shipping routes and humanitarian logistics.

Dubai is one of the world's most critical humanitarian aid hubs, and it has been significantly impacted by the Strait of Hormuz blockade. This has simultaneously disrupted logistics, driven up costs and created supply shortages, further stressing aid budgets already severely constrained by donor cuts, all while needs continue to rise in places like Sudan. A shipment of essential medical supplies for Sudan, for example, was delayed for two months at the Dubai humanitarian hub.

↑ 50%
IRC's operational costs

The IRC's operational costs have increased by a **staggering 50%** as fuel, shipping, insurance and commodity prices surge. Air freight capacity on key routes has fallen by half, while freight and insurance on some shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz have risen by 300%. Additionally, fuel shortages and rising transportation costs are also directly disrupting last-mile delivery across many crisis-affected countries.

As logistics costs rise and aid budgets remain constrained, humanitarian agencies are being forced to stretch fewer resources across growing needs—weakening one of the world's most important shock absorbers.

“ The fuel crisis significantly restricts both the movement of people and the supply chain of goods, including the timely delivery of medicines—which is of utmost importance for people who solely depend on humanitarian assistance for access to healthcare.

There are regular shortages of medicines in Sittwe, Rakhine State, but our supplier was unable to deliver pharmaceuticals within the approved delivery timeline. We also have reduced the frequency of travel to project sites, which diminishes our ability to maintain in-person contact with our clients.”

– **Mohamed Riyas**, IRC Myanmar Country Director



An IRC mobile medical team provides health services to people in Mandalay Region following the devastating earthquake that struck Myanmar on March 28, 2025. In the aftermath of the disaster, the IRC provided healthcare, water and sanitation programming, and other critical services. Photo: Rita Khin/Fairpicture for DEC

04 The systems designed to contain conflicts, disease outbreaks and other crises are weakening.

The drastic humanitarian budget cuts from the U.S. and some European donors in 2025 have not recovered. On the U.S. side, \$5.4 billion is **already allocated** for the State Department's Bureau of Disaster and Humanitarian Response, yet those funds remain unspent as of May 2026.

This speaks to a continued lack of global cooperation to address humanitarian crises, a key feature of the New World Disorder. The Ebola outbreak in the DRC, first reported in May 2026, is an example of how the sudden decline of global health funding, most significantly by the U.S., puts everybody at risk by undermining the ability to train more community healthcare workers and maintain infrastructure for disease surveillance and testing. Following the funding cuts from March 2025, the IRC has been forced to nearly halve the number of health facilities it supports in Ituri province, where the Ebola outbreak began, from seven to four. The **U.S., EU** and **UK** have all announced some funding for the Ebola response, which is welcome, but in far smaller sums than during the 2018-2020 Ebola outbreak in the DRC.

Local governments, Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), international and local non-governmental organizations, and U.N. agencies have the skills and experience to prevent a repeat of the devastating 2018-2020 outbreak, or something even worse. However, they can only do so if donors step up and parties to the conflict in eastern DRC prioritize halting this epidemic over their narrow political, military and economic interests. Even with the existence of international agreements meant to maintain standards for health systems in developing countries, namely the Global Health Security Agenda, those standards can only be enforced with strong investment from its member states.

Conflict rose sharply in the African regions that had previously relied most heavily on United States Agency for International Development support—an **increase of 12.3%**.

Conflict in African regions that relied on U.S. aid **↑ 12.3%**

The weakening of international cooperation is seen in more than the failure to prevent the Ebola outbreak and in the funding cuts. Diplomatic efforts, including on humanitarian issues, are increasingly ad hoc and transactional, often prioritizing short-term deals over sustained conflict resolution. The result is a failure of collective action to prevent and address conflicts. Most notably, persistent deadlocks in the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) have prevented effective multilateral engagement on key crises such as those in Sudan and Myanmar.

People who have been forced to flee their homes to find safety also now face new attacks on their legal rights and protections. The lifesaving function of the global refugee system is increasingly under pressure as many countries seek to weaken their legal protections and responsibilities. The U.S. has enacted overlapping new rules and regulations that **aim to close** access to asylum, which coincides with the EU moving to pass a new Return Regulation. This law essentially shapes a new EU deportation policy, which is likely to result in more criminalization, raids on communities and the establishment of detention facilities in non-EU countries where people risk being exposed to abuse and human rights violations after being deported from EU territory.

“ Sudan is deteriorating across every front, with sectors including food security, health, water and economic access in jeopardy. The humanitarian system is losing ground faster than it can respond. Donor funding cuts will force the closure of 34 IRC-supported health facilities by July 2026, cutting off almost half a million people from healthcare.

Water trucking has already ceased for 100,000 people in Central Darfur, raising the immediate risk of cholera outbreaks and leaving women and girls to travel longer distances to find water. Without urgent and flexible funding, hundreds of thousands of people will be cut off from lifesaving support and the risk of widespread preventable death will only grow.”

– **Richard Data**, IRC Sudan Country Director

Shama's mother feeds him ready-to-use therapeutic food at their home in Al-Azaza, Blue Nile State, Sudan, as part of his ongoing malnutrition treatment provided by the IRC. Shama receives nutritional supplements and ongoing monitoring, which has helped him regain weight and recover. Photo funded by the European Union. Photographer: Mohammed Abdulmajid for the IRC



05 Economic shocks are hitting Watchlist countries and other conflict-affected states the hardest.

An additional **18.2 million** people could be pushed into extreme poverty as a result of the economic impacts of the war in Iran if the U.N.'s worst-case projections are realized.

Extreme poverty leaves people struggling to afford even basic necessities, and **50%** of all people facing extreme poverty are living in fragile and conflict-affected states—many of them on the Emergency Watchlist. These countries are less able than many others to shield their populations from the impacts of sudden price increases—through subsidies, for example—both because of entrenched underdevelopment and because they spend so much money on debt repayment.

Collectively, Watchlist countries spent a total of **\$67.6 billion** on debt repayments and interest in 2024, at which rate they will have spent nearly \$30 billion on servicing debt since the Emergency Watchlist report was released in December 2025. This, compounded with drastic price increases making basic goods prohibitively expensive for households in Watchlist countries, will further hinder economic growth and opportunity.

The grave consequences of disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz for the **least-developed countries** highlight the risks associated with other key maritime chokepoints such as the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which connects the Arabian Sea to the Red Sea. Any further proliferation of violence in the wider region could further disrupt global trade and humanitarian supply chains, amplifying crisis conditions in already-fragile settings.

+18.2M more people could be pushed into extreme poverty

At an IRC distribution in a collective shelter in Akkar, Lebanon, 5-year-old Nargis and her sister, 1-year-old Sara, were displaced with their grandfather, 58-year-old Sayyed, and 15 other family members, from Chehabiyeh town, located in the Tyre District of the South Governorate in Lebanon, on March 3. It took them five days to make the journey, between looking for available shelters and their old car breaking down every hour or so, until they reached Akkar, where they could find a school that had been turned into a shelter for displaced people.

Sara was born in a collective shelter in November 2024, just one week before the 2024 Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreement, and she was displaced for a second time before her second birthday. Sayyed says, "We lack money to buy food for the kids. They distribute food here, but sometimes children refuse to eat it. We also lack medications. I have severe heart problems, and they told me they will get me the medicine in a week and I don't know if I will be okay until then." Photo: Ahmad Al Jarery for the IRC

5 Shock Absorbers Needed to Protect Communities

Without targeted action, the deepening disorder will push even more people in Watchlist countries into crisis.

The following actions will protect those most at risk and mitigate the worst impacts of the global disorder. With political will, they can be delivered immediately.

“The tools to prevent further unraveling exist: cash assistance, sustained investment in fragile states, functioning multilateral institutions. The question is whether governments will choose to use them, or stand aside and allow this deepening disorder to claim more lives and livelihoods over the next six months.”

– David Miliband, IRC President and CEO

01 Direct 60% of global aid to fragile and conflict-affected states.

Donors such as the European Union (EU) have made positive commitments to humanitarian aid and aid that serves fragile and conflict-affected states. Globally, however, the share of official development assistance (ODA) going towards countries affected by fragility and conflict declined from 43% in 2013 to 25% in 2024, according to IRC analysis of **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development** data. **The test of donors’ positive commitments—and their best chance of mitigating the worst effects of the deepening disorder—will be if they ensure that at least 60% of ODA reaches countries affected by fragility and conflict, and at least 30% reaches Watchlist countries.** This target for ODA allocation has been established through IRC analysis of poverty levels, self-financing ability and absorptive capacity.

Bibuya Eric, an IRC logistics officer, prepares infection prevention and control kits in Bunia, DRC, on May 26, 2026, as part of the IRC’s rapid response to the Ebola outbreak. Photo: Moses Sawasawa for the IRC



02 Ensure outbreaks do not turn into pandemics by recommitting to the Global Health Security Agenda (GHS).

The GHS was launched in 2014 to bring countries together to advance a world safe from infectious disease threats, but it has been undermined by funding cuts. The Ebola outbreak in the DRC is a critical reminder of how relevant the GHS nonetheless remains. **Member countries and organizations of the GHS must, at minimum, honor their financial and technical commitments to invest in basic health-care systems and to strengthen health security.** This investment will support the immediate response needed to contain the spread of the current Ebola outbreak, including support for community health workers and the establishment of surveillance and data systems, while building long-term global protections from new outbreaks through strengthening local- and national-level health systems. Additionally, a pandemic agreement was adopted at last year’s World Health Assembly, but negotiations on the details of the agreement have been pushed to 2027 at the earliest. Finalizing and implementing this agreement could not be more urgent.



An IRC health worker prepares a vaccine to be delivered to a child at the Qenef outreach site in Tigray, Ethiopia. Outreach sites play a vital role in reaching zero-dose and displaced children with lifesaving vaccines in parts of Tigray. Photo: Martha Tadesse for the IRC

03 Invest in cash assistance and early action to help communities absorb future shocks.

Donors and implementers must prioritize cash transfers as an essential tool for limiting food insecurity. A single cash transfer can be spent on nutritious food from local markets and can prevent people from skipping meals to make ends meet. **Cash and voucher assistance is a proven, dignified and cost-effective way to help people in crisis.** If half of humanitarian assistance were given as cash (instead of ~20% as it currently stands), **2.7 million additional people** in humanitarian settings could be helped. Cash can also support resilience to future shocks and recovery by building markets and strengthening national social-protection systems.

Effective early action to mitigate the effects of rising food insecurity is possible through leveraging forecasts to deliver anticipatory action. IRC programs demonstrate that households receiving cash and early warning information before a shock occurs are less likely to resort to negative coping strategies and more likely to invest in long-term adaptive practices, such as irrigation and climate-resilient crops.

04 Channel more World Bank funding through local responders.

As the economic consequences of the Iran war risk pushing an additional 18.2 million people into extreme poverty, community-level and locally led action—like the Emergency Response Rooms in Sudan and civil society networks that quickly mobilized in Ukraine after the Russian invasion—can serve crisis-affected communities suffering from the compounding impacts of the war and strengthen local service delivery. An effective response to economic volatility in crisis-affected countries depends on **flexibility from donors and multilateral institutions like the World Bank as it implements its refreshed Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV) strategy. The Bank must continue to seize the opportunity to increase and mainstream third party implementation via civil society organization partnerships in 2027** to ensure World Bank programs are supporting communities affected by fragility, conflict and violence.

The World Bank, along with other multilateral development banks, governments and development finance institutions, must facilitate humanitarian debt swaps for fragile countries and streamline the process for doing so. This includes working with countries to integrate debt conversion into national budget plans and provide partial credit guarantees to support debt swaps that can direct proceeds towards humanitarian priorities.



05 Rebuild shock absorbers which protect civilians in conflict.

The UNSC remains deadlocked in its efforts to hold perpetrators of atrocities and violations of international law to account. France, supported by 120 countries, has tabled a proposal for the suspension of the veto in cases of mass atrocity. **The permanent members of the UNSC should lead by example and endorse this proposal.**

Additionally, the Human Rights Council-mandated documentation efforts, including Commissions of Inquiry, are important to circumvent UNSC politics, while the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group (ACA) for Ukraine demonstrates the scope for member states' leadership when political will exists. Such efforts should be expanded to identify perpetrators of violations and increase the cost to those that violate civilian protections. The UK's creation of the Coalition for Atrocity Prevention and Justice in Sudan is a welcome step. **Members should ensure that the Coalition advances robust steps that support local responders—including human rights defenders and women-led organizations—to identify atrocity early warning signs to trigger international action.** Public condemnation, sanctions, and efforts to address the flow of weapons and funding to the warring parties should all be pursued. As more people globally are being impacted by conflict, implementing these mechanisms and strengthening accountability will protect civilians from harm.

IRC teams pack infection prevention and control kits at the Regional Association for the Supply of Essential Medicines in Goma, DRC. Kits are being delivered to Bunia to support health facilities in preventing and controlling the transmission of Ebola. Photo: Esther Kashemwa for the IRC

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

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

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