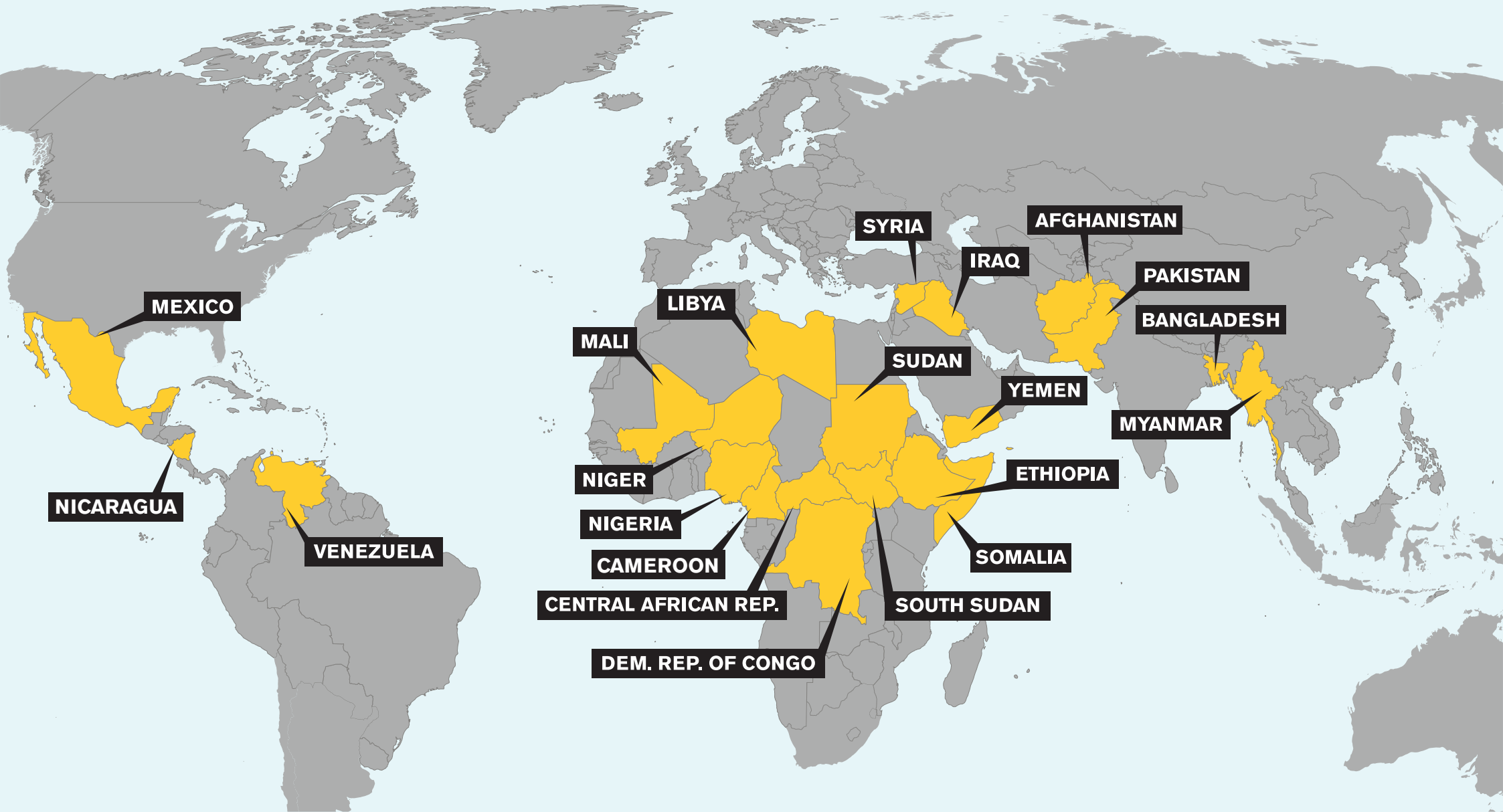




# 2019 | EMERGENCY WATCHLIST



**MEXICO**

**NICARAGUA**

**VENEZUELA**

**MALI**

**NIGER**

**NIGERIA**

**CAMEROON**

**CENTRAL AFRICAN REP.**

**DEM. REP. OF CONGO**

**LIBYA**

**SYRIA**

**SUDAN**

**IRAQ**

**YEMEN**

**ETHIOPIA**

**SOMALIA**

**SOUTH SUDAN**

**AFGHANISTAN**

**PAKISTAN**

**BANGLADESH**

**MYANMAR**


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A photograph of a woman with dark skin and short hair, wearing a white wrap with orange geometric patterns. She is holding a young child in a similar wrap. They are standing in front of a textured, brown wall. The woman has a serious expression.

*Thou Deng Akuei with his mother at their home in Panthou, Aweil South State, South Sudan after being recently discharged from the Panthou primary health care center where he was treated by the IRC for malnutrition.*

*Credit: C. Lomodong/International Rescue Committee*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The IRC's Watchlist 2019 highlights the countries we believe are at **greatest risk of experiencing the worst humanitarian crises over the coming year.**

- This year the Watchlist has 21 countries on it, down from 23 for Watchlist 2018. There **are two new additions to the Watchlist (Cameroon and Nicaragua) and four countries have dropped off** (El Salvador, North Korea, the occupied Palestinian Territories, and the Philippines). These changes reflect both our evolving analysis of the developing situations in these countries and the partially updated methodology used for this year's Watchlist.
- The **IRC is responding to the crises in all Top Ten countries, mostly with a dedicated country program.** The IRC's Colombia country's program is leading our response to the emergency in Venezuela by working with Venezuelans who have fled across the border. The IRC is not currently responding to the crises in Mexico, Nicaragua or Sudan, but decisions about where and how the IRC responds are constantly kept under review.
- **All countries that appear in this year's Top Ten appeared somewhere in last year's Watchlist.** Likewise, all of the countries from last year's Top Ten appear somewhere in this year's Watchlist. The only changes to the Top Ten are that **Ethiopia and Somalia have been added while Iraq and Myanmar have dropped out.** We did not rank the Top Ten for 2018 so it is not possible to compare the rankings.
- The **Top Ten is dominated by countries that are experiencing internal conflict**, whether across large parts of the country or localized to specific areas. The key exception is Venezuela, where the country's economic collapse has driven a deterioration in living conditions that has been as rapid as declines only previously observed in conflict zones.
- **Food insecurity is a major factor in many countries in the Watchlist and nearly all of the Top Ten, illustrating the strong links between conflict and food insecurity.** During 2018, crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity have been reported in parts of Yemen, DRC, South Sudan, Afghanistan, CAR, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Somalia. Severe food shortages have also been reported in Venezuela (where there is insufficient data to make reliable assessments) and, at times, in locations in Syria that have been isolated due to conflict (for example, the Rukban settlement on the Jordanian border).
- **Internal and external displacement are also important trends.** [UNHCR](#) says around 40 million people are displaced internally around the globe, and that the **Top Ten accounted for nearly 22 million (56% of the total).** Figures for refugees provide a less accurate picture, given they do not include most of the 3 million people who have fled Venezuela in recent years (who are designated as migrants), but the **Top Ten have still produced at least 13 million refugees, 65% of the global total.**
- **Communicable diseases** are also an important factor affecting the humanitarian situation in many Watchlist countries, particularly in areas where political or conflict-related developments have undermined the local health system. Most notably, Yemen is currently in the middle of the world's worst cholera outbreak while DRC is battling the second worst Ebola outbreak in history.
- Several countries on the Watchlist, most notably Afghanistan, Bangladesh, DRC, Libya and Nigeria, are due to hold **elections in 2019 (or late 2018) that could be a prompt for greater instability and thus humanitarian needs in 2019.**

# PURPOSE AND USE

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The Watchlist provides an **analytically robust basis for the IRC to make decisions about where to focus its monitoring, preparedness and other efforts**. The IRC already has a presence in some of the countries on the Watchlist; in others it does not. Under the IRC's 2020 strategy, we intend to establish by the year 2020 a Country Emergency Team in all Watchlist countries where the IRC has a presence. Read more about the IRC's Emergency Preparedness work on [Rescuenet](#).

The list is divided into a **ranked Top Ten, which are the countries we believe – on the basis of a mixture of qualitative and quantitative analysis – are the ones at greatest risk of deterioration leading to the most serious emergencies** in 2019. The other countries are ones we are also deeply concerned about, but which we were not able to rank because they may have been included for distinct reasons. For example, Mexico has very high scores for human and natural risk but much lower scores for the vulnerability of its population and the country's lack of coping capability. In contrast, Niger has lower human and natural risk but its population is significantly more vulnerable and the country scores more highly for lack of coping capability. Both countries merit inclusion, but they cannot confidently be compared and ranked one above the other.

This document contains a **brief overview of the current humanitarian situation, and the human and/or natural risks shaping it, in each of the countries on this year's Watchlist**. This is intended to provide background to why a country has been included and (where relevant) its ranking, not to provide an exhaustive assessment of the current situation. It reflects only the available information, which varies widely from country to country.



*Children sit in a camp for displaced people in Northeast Syria.  
Credit: International Rescue Committee*

The **inclusion of countries in the Watchlist and their ranking represents our best guess of the level of humanitarian risk in 2019**.

The situation in all of the countries will be serious, as it will be in others that were not included, and so emergency preparedness work will happen regardless of a country's ranking. The IRC will continue to track emerging crises globally and will make decisions about where to respond on the basis of the scale and severity of an emergency, as measured by the IRC's Emergency Classification System, not the Watchlist.

*If you have any questions about the Watchlist please contact the IRC's global Crisis Analyst, [George Readings](#).*



Countries appear on the Watchlist because our analysis suggests they are at **high risk of experiencing 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.

NB, the scorecards in the main part of this document reflect only the quantitative part of the analysis and so some countries may be ranked above others that have seemingly scored more highly. The full description of each country's situation should be read to understand why it has been ranked where it has, since the text draws on the qualitative analysis as well.

**Step 1. Initial quantitative analysis.** 74 different numerical indices were compared, including data from INFORM, UNDP, 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 Emergency Unit's accountability and analysis team also compared the preliminary long list with crises they had been monitoring throughout 2018. This enabled further countries to be flagged for inclusion in the long list.

**Step 3. Scoring each country on the long list for both "risk" and "impact" through a secondary process of quantitative analysis.** 60 indices were then brought together in different groupings to develop four different measures for each country.

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** to which the IRC would be likely to respond:

- iii. **Vulnerability** – the existing vulnerability of the population in that country, this includes 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 2019 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.

# HOW THE LIST WAS DRAWN UP

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## **Step 5. Combining quantitative and qualitative analysis to develop the final shortlist and ranking of the 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 2018 (such as major battles) that are unlikely to recur in 2019.
- iii. **Qualitative analysis by the IRC's Crisis Analyst** to identify the relative risk of further deterioration in the humanitarian situation in countries on the preliminary short list.
- iv. **Qualitative inputs from senior IRC leaders, the IRC Middle East region's Humanitarian Context Analyst 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.



*Aman Yassin, 12, arrives at a water point to fill his jerry cans after a four hour trek in Gurage zone, Ethiopia.  
Credit: M. Ayene/International Rescue Committee*

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

# 2019 | TOP TEN WATCHLIST COUNTRIES

*Farmina sits in the IRC's comprehensive women's centre in Kutapalong Refugee Camp in Bangladesh.*

*Credit: J. Wanless/International Rescue Committee*

# 1. YEMEN



28,250,000



Yes

Yemen has been embroiled in a **bitter civil war** since 2015, pitting the internationally recognized government and forces aligned with it (including the US-supported, Saudi and Emirati-led Coalition, SLC) against the Houthi movement, which controls much of the north of the country, including the capital Sanaa. This conflict has **already triggered the world's worst humanitarian crisis** and the UN warned in late 2018 that the country risked facing a "massive famine."

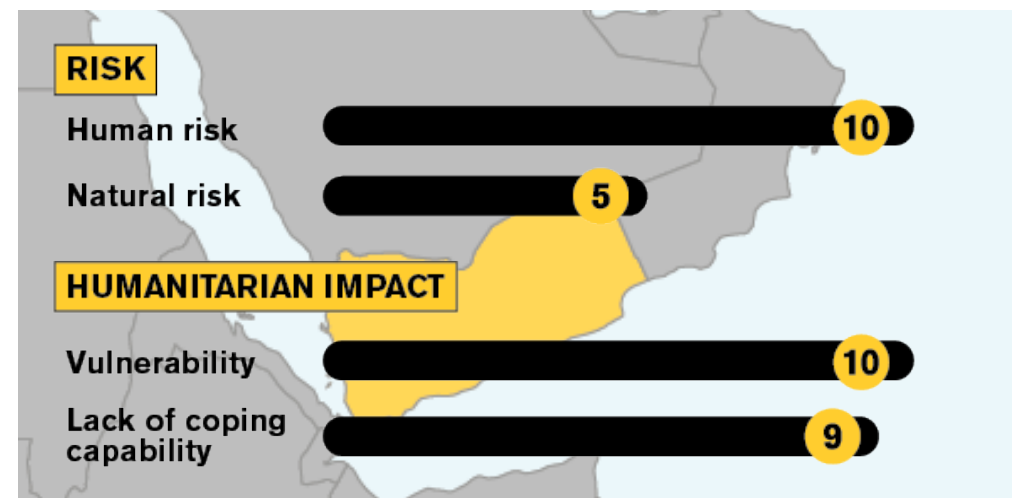
**24 million Yemenis (nearly 80% of the population) are in need of some kind of humanitarian assistance (OCHA).** It is difficult to obtain detailed, high quality data about food insecurity in Yemen (FEWS). Nonetheless, an assessment in late 2018 found that **15.9 million people (53% of Yemenis) were experiencing crisis (IPC 3) levels of food insecurity or worse.** This included 63,500 people at the catastrophe (IPC 5) level (IPC Info). Yemen is also suffering from a **cholera outbreak that has affected over 1.2 million people** since April 2017. In late 2018, 10,000 new cases were being reported per month, double the rate seen earlier in the year.

As a result of the ongoing armed conflict, **Yemen scores a maximum of ten for human risk**, one of just three countries on the Watchlist to do so. Natural risk is significantly lower (five), but the country still faces the possibility of drought and typhoons. Yemen also scores extremely highly for the vulnerability of its population (another maximum score of ten) and for its limited ability to cope with crises (nine), reflecting the destructive impact of years of conflict on critical infrastructure and the economy.

Moreover, there are **strong reasons to expect the humanitarian crisis to worsen.** Food insecurity is already rising. The **rapid depreciation**



Health staff care for malnourished children at an IRC-supported Al Sayla health center in Sana'a, Yemen. A 3.5 year long war in Yemen has left more than 22 million people in need of aid and 5 million children on the brink of starvation. Credit: K. Ryan/International Rescue Committee



## Other countries that could be affected:

Potential for population movements from Yemen to **Somalia** and **Djibouti** (both Yemeni refugees and returning Somali nationals)



**of the Yemeni currency** throughout 2018 and reduced commercial and humanitarian shipping to the country (due to the chilling effect of the conflict and restrictions imposed by the SLC) are driving food and fuel prices ever higher. The conflict is also disrupting markets and civilian life more broadly, particularly in flashpoint areas like the western port of Hodeidah. **SLC airstrikes have regularly struck civilian locations**, at times damaging medical facilities. In one June 2018 incident, an [MSF](#) cholera treatment center was destroyed before it could begin operating. **Failures by all parties to respect International Humanitarian Law** combined with administrative restrictions that parties to the conflict impose on humanitarian actors like the IRC further complicate the logistics of addressing civilians' needs.

The SLC is also supporting its allies on the ground to advance both around Hodeidah and in the far north, near the Saudi border, forcing thousands of Yemenis to leave their homes. **UN-led peace efforts continue but have yet to bring about a lasting reduction in fighting – which is the key cause of the humanitarian crisis.** A shift in rhetoric from the US in October 2018, whereby Washington called for a cessation of hostilities, may overall increase prospects for peace. However, it triggered an escalation, particularly around Hodeidah, in the immediate term.

*Outlook for 2019:* The **civil war is highly likely to persist in 2019, driving a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation.** Key humanitarian concerns are likely to remain food insecurity, conflict-driven displacements and the spread of cholera. A **particular crisis point could arise if SLC-backed fighters seek to besiege and/or advance into central Hodeidah and its port** – as is a significant risk at some point in 2019 – and possibly other major urban centers. The [UN](#) has warned that around 250,000 of Hodeidah's estimated pre-escalation population of 600,000 could “lose everything – even their lives” if clashes break out within the city.

Moreover, **around 70% of all Yemen's commercial and humanitarian imports arrive via the port of Hodeidah.** [FEWS](#) has warned that famine (IPC 5) could affect large numbers of Yemenis if fighting or a siege-like situation in Hodeidah results in populations being cut off from trade and humanitarian assistance (including key wheat storage facilities) for an extended period. Famine could also occur in parts of Yemen if the financial crisis persists, making food unaffordable for many Yemenis.

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<sup>1</sup> The Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) is the globally accepted standard scale for describing the severity of food emergencies within a specific area of a country. From least to most severe, the five levels are Minimal (IPC 1), Stressed (IPC 2), Crisis (IPC 3), Emergency (IPC 4) and Famine (IPC 5). Declaring famine is a particularly rigorous process that requires three specific criteria to be met. Further information on the IPC phases is available from the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET).

## 2. DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)



81,340,000



Yes

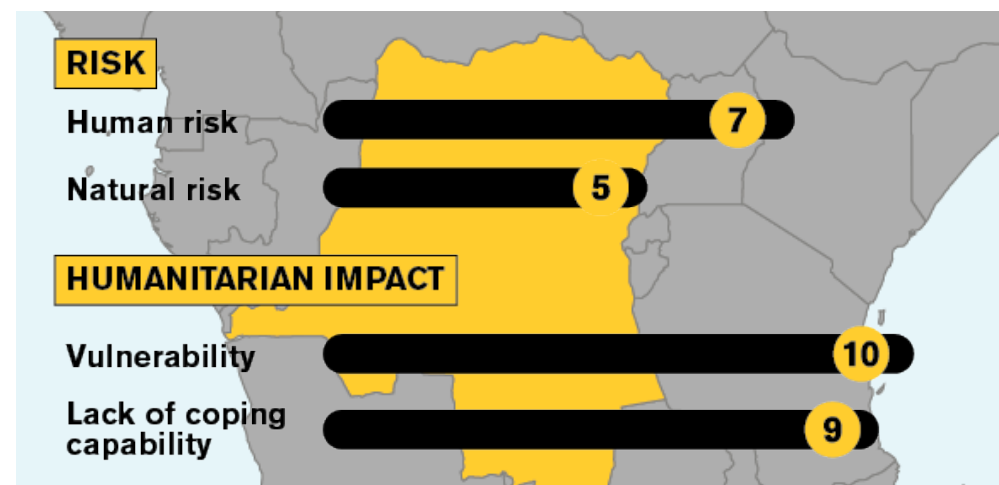
Large parts of the DRC have been experiencing **persistent conflict and a protracted humanitarian crisis for at least two decades**. The country has not experienced national-level conflict since its last civil war came to an end in 2003 and the government of President Kabila has not faced a credible, externally backed military threat since the M23 rebellion in eastern DRC collapsed in 2013. However, **large areas – particularly in the east, where hundreds of armed groups operate – have remained marginalized, under-developed and affected by persistent instability**, which in turn drives displacements and food insecurity. Moreover, the country is currently in the middle of both **political turmoil ahead of the 23 December presidential election** and the **second largest Ebola outbreak in history**.

Despite not having the highest scores for risk (seven for human, five for natural), the DRC's high ranking on the Watchlist reflects the **high scores on the impact side of the scorecard** (ten for vulnerability and nine for lack of coping capability). Its ranking has also been driven by our **qualitative assessment that there is a significant risk of further, major deterioration of the humanitarian situation** in 2019.

This risk of deterioration is, in part, linked to the country's **delicate political situation**. Kabila has remained in office since his second (and final) elected term officially expired in December 2016. This has driven a **rise in both localized armed conflict and protests by the opposition and civil society movements** calling for reforms. Kabila has said he will step down after elections finally due to happen on 23 December 2018, but the DRC's outlook is highly unstable. In particular, there is **widespread discontent at the government's efforts to constrain opposition activity** ahead of the 23 December vote and **mistrust that it will interfere in the conduct**



A health worker disinfects Case Du Salut health facility in Mabalako, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, one of the 51 health facilities being supported by the International Rescue Committee. Credit: K. Ryan/International Rescue Committee



### Other countries that could be affected:

Potential for population movements from eastern DRC to **Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania** and possibly others in the region such as **Zambia** and **Kenya**. Renewed violence in the Kasais (south-central DRC) could lead refugees to head to Angola. Ebola could potentially also affect all neighbouring countries and the wider region if the outbreak in DRC spreads uncontrollably.

**of voting and the result**, particularly given the relative unpopularity of Kabila's preferred successor, Ramazani Shadary. The DRC's weak institutions and lack of established rule of law mean that **the election will inevitably be a time of high tension**, but it could also see an escalation in unrest and localized conflict.

**As the DRC's political crisis has intensified, so have humanitarian needs** – though the official **number of people in need dropped slightly to 12.8 million at the end of 2018** ([OCHA](#)) from 13.1 million earlier in the year ([OCHA](#)). The number of people living in crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity reached 13.1 million in mid-2018 ([IPC Info](#)), up from 7.7 million in late 2017 ([IPC Info](#)) and 5.9 million in early 2017 ([IPC Info](#)). The **Kasai region in south-central DRC is currently experiencing the most severe food insecurity in the country, reflecting its experience of major politically driven conflict in 2016-2017** (after a militia led by a local traditional leader came into conflict with pro-Kinshasa forces) and persistent instability since then. Moreover, the situation in the Kasais was further complicated in October 2018 when **Angola pushed over 380,000 Congolese nationals back across the border**, mostly into the Kasais ([RRMP](#)), which could spark renewed violence there.

Political tensions and the instability around the elections have contributed to displacements as well. The [UN](#) publicly said in 2017 that there were **4.5 million IDPs in DRC, up from 2.2 million in 2016 and 1.5 million in 2015**. 1.7 million people were newly displaced in 2017 ([IOM](#)). However, there has been [controversy](#) about efforts to update these numbers. The UN is now using a figure of 1.37 million IDPs ([UNHCR](#)), but this only refers to new displacements in 2018 and only in camps; it was not included in [OCHA's](#) 2019 Global Humanitarian Overview. The government rejects claims that the number of IDPs may have surpassed 5 million and argues instead that the situation in the country is normalizing ahead of the elections. The government also **interferes in the activities of humanitarian actors at times, for example forcing the closure of some IDP camps and withholding administrative permissions for work with IDPs**.

Another key factor driving a risk of major deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the **DRC is that the east of the country is currently the epicenter of the second largest Ebola outbreak in history**, behind the massive outbreak in West Africa in 2013-2016. In late November 2018 the number of cases in North Kivu province and neighboring Ituri surpassed 425, previously the second largest number of cases seen in an outbreak. **For the first time, Ebola is spreading in an active conflict zone**. This has complicated the Ebola response, and indeed the spread of the disease more than doubled after a major attack in Beni, the hub for responders, forced many activities to be paused. The Ebola response has also at times failed to take fully into account entrenched mistrust of the central government and UN across eastern DRC. This has contributed to community suspicion about some efforts to contain Ebola – particularly safe burials of people who have died from the disease. [WHO](#) has warned there is a **high risk of Ebola spreading nationally and regionally**.

*Outlook for 2019:* The timing of the presidential elections on 23 December means that **2019 is likely to begin with intense political disagreements, protests and possibly increased militia violence**. This will drive rising **displacements and food insecurity**, given the resulting disruption to harvests. The Kasais and eastern DRC are likely to be particularly badly affected, given their recent history of politically driven conflict.

That said, **tensions unleashed by the election could lead to new areas of instability and thus increased humanitarian needs emerging as well**. For example, Ituri province has seen several unexplained outbreaks of violence throughout 2018 between members of the Lendu and Hema ethnic groups – a historic fault line in the area but one that had seemingly calmed for a decade before this largely unexplained resurgence. Finally, the challenges facing efforts to control the **Ebola outbreak in eastern DRC mean there is a very real risk of the disease spreading more widely, both within the DRC and to neighboring countries, in 2019**.

### 3. SOUTH SUDAN



12,576,000



Yes

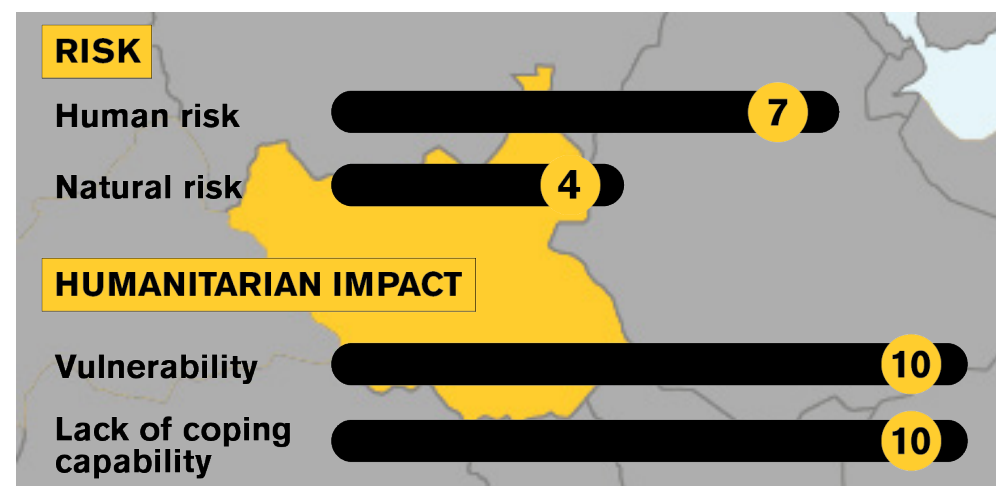
South Sudan has been subsumed by civil war since shortly after it gained independence from Khartoum in 2012. The **conflict is estimated to have killed more than 380,000 people and its humanitarian impact has been disastrous** in a country that remains massively under-developed. Conflict levels reduced somewhat throughout 2018, in part because the government achieved many of its key military objectives in 2017 and also thanks to a September 2018 agreement between the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the rival Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO). However, **violence persists in many areas across the country. This presents massive risks for civilians and complicates access to those in need of humanitarian assistance.** There is also a **real possibility of peace efforts breaking down, which could lead to a re-escalation of conflict.**

Like the DRC, South Sudan does not have the highest risk **scores among Watchlist countries (seven for human risk, four for natural) but it does score extremely highly for both the vulnerability of the population (ten) and the country's lack of response capability (also ten).** Its human risk score also reflects a wide range of challenges, including **low government stability and effectiveness, exposure to regional conflict and the intensity of conflict ongoing** within the country.

More qualitatively, South Sudan's ranking reflects the reality that **the deal between SPLM and SPLM-IO is still not yet being fully observed, even if it is broadly holding for now.** While numbers are difficult to verify, the IRC's Emergency Classification System has tracked steadily rising **displacements – many of them driven by conflict – throughout 2018.** As of September 2018, [UNHCR](#) reported that **1.96 million South**



Thou Deng Akuei with his sister at their home in Panthou, Aweil South State, South Sudan after being recently discharged from the Panthou primary health care center where he was treated by the IRC for malnutrition. Credit: C. Lomodong /International Rescue Committee



#### Other countries that could be affected:

Any resurgence in fighting could see new waves of refugees heading to **Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, DRC** and, to a lesser extent, other countries in the region.

**Sudanese were internally displaced and 2.47 million were refugees** in neighboring countries, overall representing more than 10% of the population.

Moreover, a **similar agreement between SPLM and SPLM-IO in 2016 actually contributed to major violence** that year, when clashes broke out in Juba after SPLM-IO leader Riek Machar returned to take up the position of Vice President. The key difference between then and now is that **relations are improving between Juba and Khartoum**, which had been a key supporter of SPLM-IO but actually helped mediate the September 2018 agreement. This **reduces the risk of South Sudan experiencing another major, nationwide and sustained escalation in violence**, hence the country not appearing even higher in this year's Watchlist. However, escalation could still occur, for example if disagreements emerge – whether domestically or with Sudan – about how profits from South Sudan's oil industry are shared.

South Sudan's ranking is also informed by the country's major and persistent experience of food insecurity. During the lean season in 2018 (July-August), an estimated **6.1 million people (59% of the population) faced crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity**, including 47,000 at the catastrophe/

famine (IPC 5) level, although this situation was forecast to improve by the end of 2018. **Seasonal patterns suggest there will be an increase in food insecurity in early 2019, and predictions at this stage suggest this will be worse than in 2018.** At this stage, 5.2 million people (49% of the population) are expected to be in crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity, and 36,000 in catastrophe (IPC 5, [IPC Info](#)).

*Outlook for 2019:* Even without an escalation in fighting, a **significant proportion of South Sudanese will be facing at least crisis (IPC 3) levels of food insecurity**, particularly during seasonal lean periods. Additionally, conflict will continue to displace tens of thousands of civilians whose safety remains threatened by the activities of armed groups. The **humanitarian situation could deteriorate rapidly and significantly in the event of any escalation in fighting on the ground, particularly if it causes disruption to crop planting or harvesting.** Famine (IPC 5) was declared in some northern parts of South Sudan in early 2017, particularly in areas that had seen major fighting between government and SPLM-IO fighters. A similar situation could arise in 2019 if there is a significant re-escalation of the civil war.

## 4. AFGHANISTAN



35,530,000



Yes

Afghanistan has seen **persistent conflict since the NATO invasion in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in 2001**. Once on the brink of defeat, the **Taliban has been steadily advancing since foreign combat troops withdrew in 2014**. The movement can now exert influence of some kind in **70% of the country**, more than at any other point since 2014 ([BBC](#)), and it carried out a massive assault on the city of Ghazni in August 2018. Further destabilizing the situation, a local affiliate of Islamic State (IS) has emerged in recent years and clashes with both the Taliban and government forces. **Conflict is a major contributor to displacements and food insecurity, both of which are further compounded by chronic drought that has depleted food stocks in some areas**. In late October 2018 the [UN](#) highlighted that more people (263,330) were displaced by drought at that point than by conflict – though the **number of people displaced by conflict surpassed 300,000** at the end of November ([OCHA](#)).

Afghanistan scores the highest of any country on the Watchlist on a purely quantitative basis, with the maximum rating of ten for human risk and a moderately high natural risk score (seven). It also has very high scores for vulnerability and lack of coping capability (both nine). This reflects the **impact of years of war and weak governance since 2001**. The key reason that Afghanistan does not rank even higher on this year's Watchlist is that the IRC's experience in Afghanistan suggests that emergencies (as measured by the Emergency Classification System) do not tend to be on the same huge scale as in Yemen, DRC or South Sudan, likely because **conflict and drought tend to have the most significant impact away from major population centers**.



Girls attend class at a small school supported by the IRC in eastern Kabul's Pul-i-Sheena area. Credit: A. Quilty/International Rescue Committee

### RISK

Human risk 10

Natural risk 7

### HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

Vulnerability 9

Lack of coping capability 9

### Other countries that could be affected:

There are nearly 1.4 million Afghan refugees in **Pakistan** and 3 million in **Iran**. These numbers are currently falling, but that trend could halt or reverse depending on the situation in Afghanistan throughout 2019.

That said, **2.6 million Afghans were facing emergency (IPC 4) levels of food insecurity** in September 2018 ([IPC Info](#)). Putting further pressure on the country, **over half a million Afghan refugees have returned from Iran during 2018** ([IOM](#)), many encouraged to leave by the Iranian authorities and/or and the deteriorating Iranian economy. Pakistan also sporadically pushes back across the border some of the 1.4 million Afghan refugees that [OCHA](#) says it is hosting. Returning refugees generally become IDPs, given their limited ties to local communities and Afghanistan's limited capacity to absorb new arrivals.

*Outlook for 2019:* The capabilities demonstrated by the **Taliban in 2018 indicate that it will likely continue to advance** in 2019, and may even overrun some population centers such as Ghazni, at least temporarily. International and Afghan forces have adopted a strategy of focusing on protecting urban centers, so **Taliban**

**gains are likely to be most pronounced in rural areas.** The **presidential elections due in April 2019** will also coincide broadly with the start of the spring fighting season. The elections are likely to be a prompt for increased Taliban offensives and attacks aimed at disrupting the election and exploiting splits between different factions and figures in Kabul.

As a result, **conflict-driven displacements are likely to continue rising across large parts of the country** and may include some rapid, large displacements. **Violence will also exacerbate** food insecurity by disrupting harvests and markets. **Much will depend on whether the drought seen in 2018 persists into 2019, but at the very least the number of people facing emergency (IPC 4) levels of food insecurity is currently expected to rise to 2.9 million at the start of 2019** ([IPC Info](#)).

## 5. VENEZUELA



31,977,000



No

*Living standards in Venezuela have collapsed in recent years at a rate generally only previously observed in war zones, triggering a humanitarian crisis that has driven at least 3 million Venezuelans to leave their home country (UNHCR). The cause of Venezuela's crisis is an economic collapse that the IMF believes will lead the country to experience inflation rates of 1.37 million percent in 2018. The consequences have been dire; the main reason that Venezuelans give for leaving the country is that they can no longer afford to feed their families. The economic situation has also led to a collapse in the health system and a rapid rise in criminality and violence. However, the available data is inadequate to get a clear picture of the precise depth of the humanitarian crisis. The government has demonstrated neither the intent nor the capability to address the economic collapse, so the situation is only likely to worsen.*

The country's extremely **precarious political and economic situation** has resulted in it receiving a moderately high score for human risk (eight), despite the lack of armed conflict. There have been strong indications of discontent with President Maduro within the military, but he has bought the loyalty of senior officers by giving the army a dominant position within the economy, particularly the critical oil sector. He has also reportedly worked with close ally Cuba to position intelligence agents throughout the security forces. There is consequently only a **limited risk of Maduro's government facing a threat from within the country** – unless close allies within his administration turn against him.

However, **Maduro has directed increasingly belligerent rhetoric towards other countries in the region and deployed troops to the Colombian border** after a failed apparent assassination attempt in August



39-year-old Deyuuix fixes shoes on the side of the road in Barranquilla, Colombia. He learned to fix shoes after fleeing Venezuela. Credit: J. Wanless/International Rescue Committee

### RISK

Human risk

8

Natural risk

7

### HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

Vulnerability

6

Lack of coping capability

5

### Other countries that could be affected:

The main countries receiving Venezuelans are **Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Chile** and **Peru** and this is likely to remain the case. However, more Venezuelans could start to head to **Central America, Mexico** or even the **USA** if Venezuela's closer neighbors adopt more hostile policies towards the influx. The collapse of Venezuela's health system also exposes its neighbors to the risk of diseases such as measles spreading across the border.



2018. Brazil has also elected Jair Bolsonaro, a right-wing former military officer, as its next president. He will take office on 1 January 2019 and has threatened to adopt a much more aggressive stance towards Venezuela. Meanwhile, the Trump administration in the US has been strongly critical of Venezuela, even reportedly planning to add the country to its list of state sponsors of terrorism. Whether regional powers have the genuine intent to enter into more substantial or even armed confrontation with Maduro is far from certain. At the very least, **Venezuela's increasingly hostile external relations may well lead to the country facing ever tightening economic sanctions**, which – if not carefully directed – could aggravate the country's economic and thus humanitarian crisis.

Finally, Venezuela has a moderate score for natural risk (seven) and its scores for vulnerability (six) and lack of coping capability (five) are the lowest (and thus least bad) among countries in the Top Ten of the Watchlist. However, the **lack of reliable data coming out of Venezuela in recent years means that we believe these figures for vulnerability and coping capability understate the situation, likely significantly**. Certainly, the Lancet medical journal has documented a “shocking decline in health-care performance” that has forced patients to source their own surgical instruments and drugs in a country that just

a few years ago had a high-performing health-care system. **Rates of infection of diseases like measles, diphtheria and malaria have also increased rapidly** in recent years, while care for chronic conditions has also collapsed according to the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO).

*Outlook for 2019:* Venezuela's **economic crisis is only likely to deepen in 2019** because the Maduro government has shown no intent to change course and it seemingly faces no credible internal or external threats. The most plausible prompt for the country's political and economic trajectory to change would be if senior figures within Maduro's government turned against him, but such a move is inevitably opaque and difficult to predict.

In the absence of such an event, the **humanitarian crisis in Venezuela will worsen, with diseases spreading** due to the collapse of the healthcare system and increasing numbers of people facing **food insecurity because they cannot afford to feed their families**. PAHO has highlighted the spread of measles, diphtheria and malaria in particular, among many other diseases. These challenges, along with the rising violence and criminality, mean that the **exodus of Venezuelans to neighboring countries** will continue.

## 6. CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)



4,659,000



Yes

CAR has experienced **persistent instability** since the mostly Muslim Seleka armed groups overthrew the government of President Francois Bozize in 2013, exacerbating the situation in a country that was already very under-developed. In the 2017 Human Development Index CAR ranked 188th out of 189 countries. A political transition, UN peacekeepers and ongoing African Union (AU)-led mediation efforts have helped calm the major clashes between ex-Seleka factions and anti-Balaka militias seen in 2013-2014, but many **civilians remain at the mercy of predatory armed groups. Intense but localized clashes regularly break out** in population centers in northern and eastern CAR, where the government – and UN peacekeepers – have limited or no influence. These are also the areas that are worst affected by food instability, accounting for many of the 550,000 people facing emergency (IPC 4) levels of food insecurity in September 2018 (IPC Info).

CAR's ranking in the top half of the Watchlist reflects its elevated human risk score (seven) and our qualitative assessment that – **given the weakness of the security forces and the unstable political situation - there is a persistent risk of wider-scale instability.** The UN peacekeeping force, MINUSCA, is simply too small to stabilize all of CAR; it has instead focused on securing the capital Bangui and some other population centers. CAR also has a low score for natural risk (three) but the persistent instability and lack of development over several decades results in CAR receiving **maximum scores (ten) for both the vulnerability of the civilian population and the country's lack of coping capabilities.**

**Throughout 2018 there has been persistent violence in parts of northern and eastern CAR. There have also been growing signs that some armed groups believe they can target NGO staff and facilities**



### RISK

Human risk

7

Natural risk

3

### HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

Vulnerability

10

Lack of coping capability

10

### Other countries that could be affected:

Refugees from CAR typically head to **Cameroon, DRC, Chad** or the **Republic of Congo**. However, any increase in instability in eastern CAR could lead civilians to flee to **South Sudan** or **Sudan** as well. Armed groups in CAR will also continue to contribute to instability in neighboring states, particularly Cameroon and DRC.

**(and UN peacekeepers) with impunity.** CAR was already one of the most dangerous countries for humanitarians and this is further worsening the situation. Moreover, UN experts have highlighted how the UN Security Council's decision to allow Russia to send military equipment and training support to the government of President Touadera (as an exception to a general arms embargo against CAR) **prompted armed groups to rearm** from other sources.

**Debate at the UN Security Council has also highlighted differences between France and Russia's visions for CAR,** culminating in a failure to agree the extension of MINUSCA's mandate for more than a month in mid-November. The body was historically united on CAR, in part because the country was simply seen as having little geopolitical importance. However, Russia has increasingly engaged politically, militarily and commercially in CAR throughout 2018 as part of a wider strategy of global Russian engagement. Russia is also now sponsoring its own process of dialogue between armed groups in CAR, raising the possibility that it will **undermine the AU-sponsored process** by encouraging different factions to engage in “forum shopping” to better secure their own interests. Nonetheless, the **AU-led mediation process remains alive** and various armed groups, particularly in the west of the country, have signaled their willingness to cooperate with disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) efforts, although this has not yet begun.

*Outlook for 2019:* There are no substantive reasons to expect an improvement in the conflict and/or humanitarian situation in 2019, so intense but localized **conflicts – and resulting displacements and food insecurity – are likely to persist in much of northern and eastern CAR.** MINUSCA's mandate was renewed in mid-November 2018 but only for a month, due to disagreements between Russia and France. MINUSCA is likely to have its mandate extended again in mid-December, providing a level of relative stability in Bangui and other central/western population centers, but this episode has highlighted the increasing vulnerability of CAR to tensions within the UN Security Council.

Divisions at the UN Security Council and the creation of an alternative to the AU-led peace process could create conditions that increase the likelihood of wider-scale conflict. CAR is also scheduled to hold a general election in 2020 which could contribute to instability in 2019. Any increase in the intensity of violence – or areas affected by it – will likely lead to a swift increase in displacements and food insecurity; similar has been seen on many occasions previously in CAR. Moreover, the **underlying vulnerability of CAR's population and the country's lack of coping capabilities means that even relatively minor human-driven or natural events will have major humanitarian implications.** It would not take much to push an already bad humanitarian situation in CAR into something catastrophically worse, even famine.

# 7. SYRIA



18,270,000



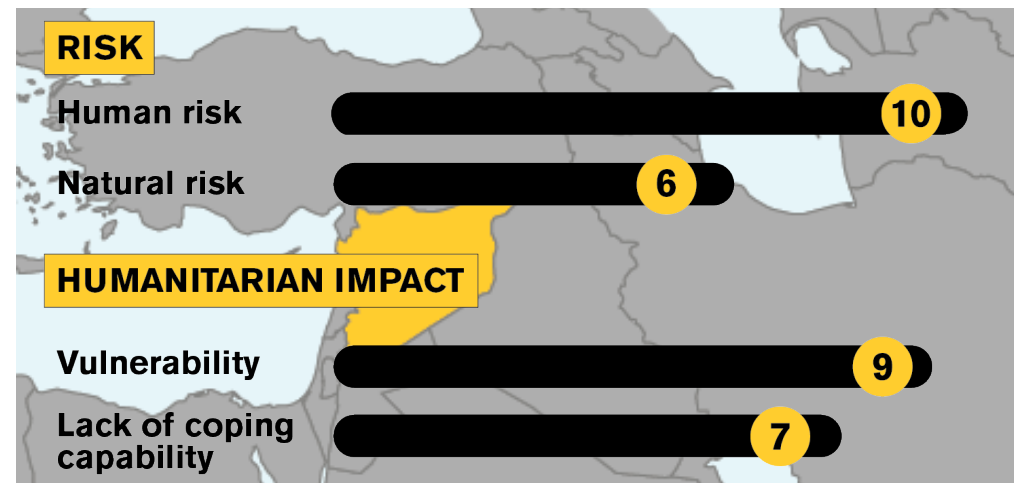
Yes

Syria has been **riven by armed conflict since 2011**, when protests against the government of President Assad escalated into violence that, over time, has drawn in both regional and international players. While international attention has focused on the rise of Islamic State (IS) since 2013-2014, **much of the fighting has pitted pro-government forces against a wide array of armed opposition groups**, some of which have received external support. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are also a key player and control much of the northeast, receiving US support to fight IS while also facing diplomatic and military pressure from the US's NATO ally Turkey (and Turkish-backed groups). The humanitarian impact of this complex war has been catastrophic. **6.2 million Syrians are displaced internally (OCHA) and a further 5.6 million are registered as refugees elsewhere in the region (UNHCR), out of a pre-war population of around 23 million.** The health and education systems have also collapsed due to both the scale of physical destruction and large numbers of medical and teaching professionals fleeing the country

Syria is **one of just three countries on the list to score a maximum of ten for human risk.** It also has a moderate natural risk score and, after years of destruction wrought by conflict, the population is highly vulnerable (nine) while the country also scores relatively highly for lack of coping capability (seven). However, Syria does not feature higher in the list because our qualitative assessment is that **the human risk score is likely to fall in the coming months.** In particular, some of the indices that contributed to the score of ten were driven upwards by intense fighting seen as the government advanced in 2017 and early 2018. IS is now a marginal force, the armed opposition only controls parts of the northwest, and both the SDF and the government have indicated a willingness to negotiate over some form of autonomy for the northeast. As such, these indices can be expected to trend downwards.



Many Syrian children living in camps don't have toys. To give them a chance to play and be kids again, the IRC runs creative activities for children in northeast Syria such as making kites from recycled plastic. Credit: International Rescue Committee



### Other countries that could be affected:

Escalation in the northwest is most likely to affect **Turkey**, though it is unclear if Ankara would allow Syrian refugees to enter. Conflict between the SDF and Turkey (or Turkish-backed forces) could lead some Syrians to flee to the **Kurdish Region of Iraq**.

The **scale of fighting seen in 2017 and early 2018 is consequently unlikely to recur in 2019**, at least across the same range of **geographical areas of the country**. That said, there are still multiple unresolved tensions that have the potential to escalate. These include:

- The armed opposition presence in the northwest, which the government is keen to end, and the collapse of internationally backed efforts to mediate between the government and the opposition (whether the UN-backed Geneva process or the parallel Russian-backed Sochi talks).
- Competition between rival armed groups in the northwest, some of which have close links to al-Qaeda and others that receive support from Turkey
- The SDF's control over much of the northeast, which the government would like to end.
- Rivalry between Turkish-backed groups and the SDF.
- IS's enduring presence in eastern Syria and western Iraq allows it to present an enduring insurgent threat even though it now controls little territory.
- Deep-seated mistrust of the government in many areas, which IS and/or other jihadists could exploit to develop more of an insurgency and which – at the very least – will reduce the willingness of many civilians to return to their homes.
- Israel's desire to limit the influence of Iran and Iranian-aligned groups (particularly Hezbollah) in Syria.

*Outlook for 2019: Needs will remain significant in large parts of the country, with millions of Syrians still displaced.* Needs are likely to be particularly severe in areas where the government has only recently reasserted control, given that these generally suffered most destruction from conflict, and international NGOs often have very limited access to people in need. In some areas there may also be returns of refugees and IDPs to their homes.

**The key area where major conflict could well occur in 2019 – and would likely spark major displacements as well as destruction of critical infrastructure – is northwest Syria.** This is the only area remaining under armed opposition control and, while Russia and Turkey have publicly agreed a plan to demilitarize parts of the northwest, this could well fail, triggering major violence and mass displacements at some point in 2019 (or even starting in late 2018). Not only is there a risk of clashes between government forces and armed opposition groups, but rival factions within the opposition could come into conflict.

Any **fighting would present major protection risks for civilians**, not least given the heavy usage of airstrikes by the government and its allies during previous significant battles and the reality that civilians would have few options to flee this time. A **level of instability will likely persist in the northwest**, even if there is some kind of resolution to the situation there, whether because there is major fighting and/or a more permanent deal is negotiated. There will be far less potential for major escalation in Syria once the situation in the northwest has been resolved, however that occurs – and however imperfectly.

**Tensions between Turkey and the SDF could also escalate into more significant fighting**, particularly if the US reduces or ends its presence in northeast Syria. Finally, there is also a **potential – but still low – risk of conflict between the government and the SDF**, which could be expected to trigger major displacements, particularly away from areas that came under government control. Moscow and Washington will continue to mediate to avoid such a scenario, limiting the risk of it for now, but the government may turn its attention to the northeast if/when it reasserts control in much or all of the northwest.

# 8. NIGERIA



190,886,000

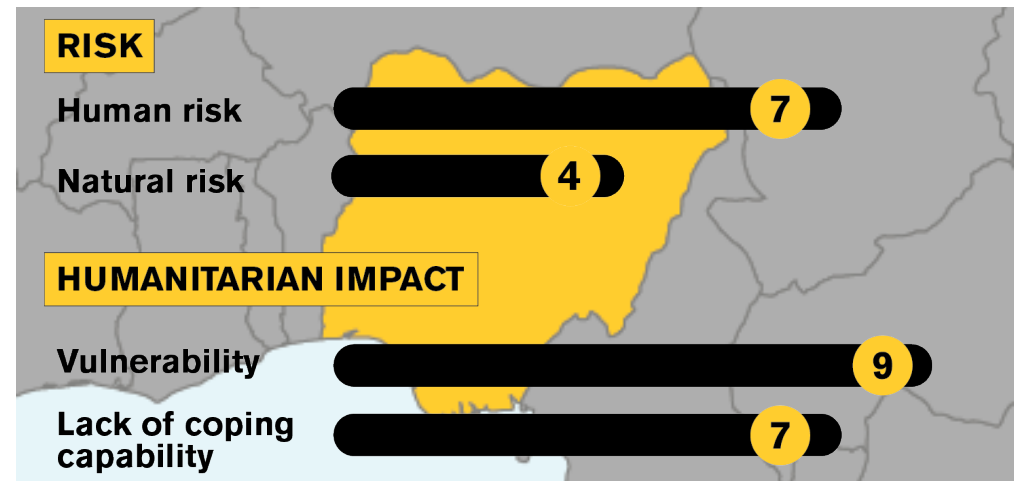


Yes

Nigeria faces multiple political and conflict-related challenges in 2019, despite having the largest economy in Africa (IMF). The jihadist insurgency in the northeast gets most international attention, unsurprisingly given that it is a key contributor to the **over 2 million Nigerians that UNHCR says are internally displaced and the 231,504 it believes have sought refuge in neighboring countries**. Conflict makes humanitarian access to some areas in the northeast impossible. This lack of access contributed to a famine that affected parts of the region in 2017. Nigeria also faces communal violence in central areas, which a study by [International Crisis Group](#) found **killed more people in the first half of 2018 than the violence in the northeast**. The government also regularly deploys the military to combat banditry in the northwest. The country is also seeing persistent militancy in the oil-rich Niger delta along with renewed Biafran separatist sentiment in the east.

Nigeria's inclusion on the Watchlist is driven by the **high vulnerability of its population** (nine) and moderately high human risk and lack of coping capability (both seven). The human risk score is a consequence of the multiple conflicts affecting Nigeria simultaneously as well as risks to the country's political and economic stability. Natural risk is relatively low (four). However, the vulnerability of the population to natural disasters is one of the factors contributing to a high overall vulnerability score, so the potential occurrence of natural disasters **can be expected to have a significant impact** on Nigeria's population. For example, around 90,000 people were displaced in September 2018 due to flooding of the Niger and Benue rivers.

During 2018, Nigeria experienced persistent conflict in the northeast, where government security forces are fighting jihadist factions that grew out of the Boko Haram movement. There are now **multiple factions**



### Other countries that could be affected:

**Niger** and **Cameroon** are likely to receive an influx of Nigerian refugees from any rise in violence in the northeast, and some could also head to **Chad**.

**operating in the region**, one of which operates as the local affiliate of Islamic State. This conflict is a major contributor to displacements and food insecurity and makes it even more difficult both to collect precise data and to access communities in need.

Meanwhile, the **communal violence in central Nigeria has escalated in 2018**. There are multiple potential explanations for why this longstanding phenomenon has recently intensified. These include environmental pressures increasing competition for water resources, commercial cultivation of land (and mining activities) exacerbating disputes over land rights, and also political and communal tensions rising ahead of the February 2019 presidential election.

*Outlook for 2019:* The conflict in the northeast is far from over, and in fact there are **signs that militant groups operating there have been rebuilding their capabilities and retaking some territory**. This suggests 2019 could see an intensification of the violence in Nigeria, which would exacerbate food

insecurity, trigger internal displacements and prompt some civilians to flee into neighboring countries. Any such **crises will be difficult to understand and respond to given the immense risks that humanitarians face** in Nigeria; in 2018, cases were reported of humanitarians being abducted and even killed in the northeast.

Nigeria's **presidential election in February 2019 is also likely to have a destabilizing impact**. It is unclear whether President Buhari will be re-elected, but competition for influence between regional and national-level powerbrokers around the polls could well exacerbate any or all of the security challenges currently facing Nigeria. This could force the government to divert its attention away from existing crises like the situation in the northeast. The country will consequently face multiple challenges throughout the year, any of which could cause a rapid rise in humanitarian need.

## 9. ETHIOPIA



104,957,000



Yes

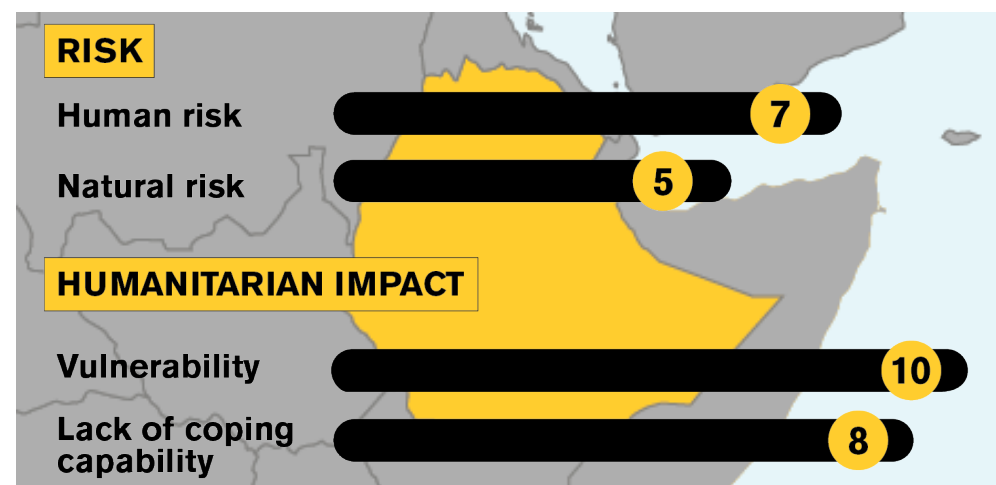
Ethiopia is going through a period of rapid transition following the appointment of a new Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, in March 2018. He has brought about a swift thawing in relations with Eritrea and introduced political reforms, particularly removing multiple opposition movements from the list of designated terrorist groups. However, this has also been accompanied by **increased internal conflict** according to [ACLED](#) data. As a result, an [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre](#) report found that **1.4 million people were displaced internally in the first half of 2018**, more than in any other country. Many of these occurred over a period of just a few weeks, illustrating Ethiopia's exposure to rapid onset violence and displacements.

The Ethiopian authorities have promoted local reconciliation efforts in many areas, reducing the period of time that some of these IDPs were forced to remain out of their homes. However, there are [reports of the government pressuring displaced communities to return before they feel safe](#) doing so. Moreover, any human-driven or natural events are likely to have a major impact given the **underlying vulnerability of the population** (Ethiopia scores a maximum ten for vulnerability). Its high score for **lack of coping capability** (eight) reflects the country's relatively under-developed health, communications and other infrastructure in many areas. Ethiopia features relatively lowly within the Top Ten, however, because of its moderate scores on the risk side of the score card; it has a seven for human risk and a five for natural.

The immediate prompts for conflict across the country are various and often unclear. However, the underlying cause appears to be Abiy Ahmed's moves to introduce reforms and increase political freedom within a **system that has been dominated by regional ethnic parties since the current ruling coalition took power in 1991**. As a result, political and land



South Sudanese girls participate in activities at the IRC Women and Girls Safe Space in Bombassi Refugee Camp, Ethiopia. Credit: M. Hutchinson/International Rescue Committee



### Other countries that could be affected:

Conflict within Ethiopia could trigger movements of refugees to neighboring countries, particularly **Kenya** and **Djibouti** (which is also a route used by Ethiopians seeking to travel onwards, for example to the Gulf or Europe).



disputes often play out along ethnic lines. Abiy Ahmed's reforms appear to be unleashing tensions – and possibly resistance from entrenched interests in the political and security establishment – that are increasing the risk of localized conflict and could threaten national-level political stability as well.

*Outlook for 2019:* Abiy Ahmed has indicated his intent to continue reforms to allow (what he has promised will be) free and fair elections in 2020. This suggests that the political context will remain volatile throughout 2019, with a **high likelihood of further outbreaks of localized conflict that will play out along ethnic lines and spark major displacements**. If conflict coincides with poor rains/harvests then it could exacerbate the country's persistent food insecurity challenges. [FEWS](#) expects 2019 to start with several parts of southern and eastern Ethiopia experiencing crisis (IPC 3) levels of food insecurity.

# 10. SOMALIA



14,743,000

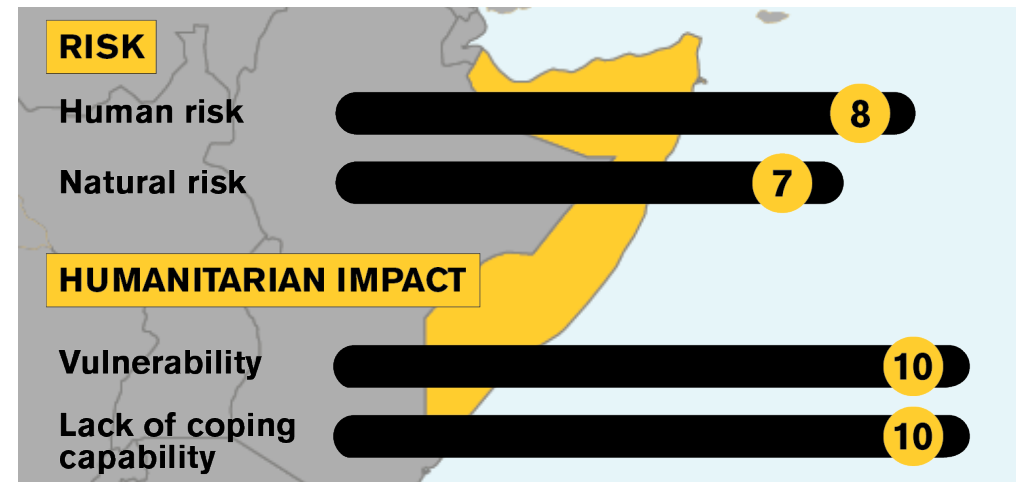


Yes

Somalia had **no permanent government between 1991 and 2012**, when the Federal Government of Somalia was inaugurated – though this has no control over the Somaliland region (which declared independence in 1991) nor much more than symbolic influence in the autonomous Puntland region, both in the north. Somalia consequently has a long experience of conflict that has, at times, drawn in both international and regional powers. Since 2007 the UN has endorsed an African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM), into which Ethiopia integrated its forces in 2013. **Somali government and AMISOM forces continue to fight the main insurgent force, the jihadist al-Shabab movement, across large parts of the country**, but have driven it back from its 2011 peak when it controlled parts of the capital Mogadishu.

Persistent conflict, the country's lack of economic development and the risk of drought all leave Somalis vulnerable to food insecurity and conflict-driven displacement. According to [UNHCR](#), **2.6 million Somalis are displaced internally and 870,000** have registered as refugees elsewhere in the Horn of Africa and Yemen. This situation is likely to persist given the country's exposure to conflict and drought. There are also **enduring tensions between Somalia's various regions and the federal government**, which led the federal states to suspend cooperation with Mogadishu in September 2018.

In the north of the country, **relations are increasingly hostile between Puntland and its neighbor, Somaliland**. This is driving clan conflict in areas disputed by Puntland and Somaliland and could destabilize Somalia more broadly if fighting escalates significantly, not least because it could provide opportunities for al-Shabab to expand its influence and control on the ground.



## Other countries that could be affected:

Any new displacements from Somalia are likely to affect **Ethiopia** and **Kenya**, and possibly **Eritrea** and **Uganda** as well. Somali refugees have also historically fled to **Yemen**, although this may be less common in 2019 given the deteriorating situation there.

Unsurprisingly, Somalia scores highly on nearly all measures used for the Watchlist. Its eight for human risk reflects the **ongoing threat from al-Shabab** across large parts of the country, as well as the weakness of the central government, while its seven for natural risk is also moderately high. It has **maximum scores of ten for both vulnerability and lack of coping capability**, a consequence of the decades of domestic conflict and weak (or absent) governance.

Somalia was not ranked higher on the Watchlist because – compared to the other countries in the Top Ten – there are **fewer clear, qualitative reasons to expect a major deterioration in the humanitarian situation in 2019**. Al-Shabab will certainly remain a threat, but the risk of it significantly expanding its control on the ground in 2019 is limited by [UN Security Council](#) voting in July 2018 to extend the mandate of the AMISOM peacekeeping mission in the country until early-mid 2019.

There are also some tentative positive signs. For example, in September 2018 the [World Bank](#) agreed its first four-year country partnership framework for Somalia, the **first International Development Association assistance for the country in 30 years**. The World Bank described this as a reflection of the country's progress on economic reform and institution building since 2013, when it reengaged with the country.

*Outlook for 2019:* Somalia will remain **unstable and conflict-affected throughout 2019**, though a major al-Shabab resurgence is unlikely so long as AMISOM remains at full strength. The country will therefore experience periodic conflict-driven displacements. **Food insecurity will remain a persistent problem:** in the second half of 2018 1.5 million people were projected to be facing crisis (IPC 3) levels of food insecurity or worse ([IPC Info](#)). **Residents of IDP camps are particularly likely to face food insecurity.**

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

# 2019 | OTHER COUNTRIES ON THE WATCHLIST

The following countries are presented in alphabetical order. They are all countries about which the IRC is concerned. 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 worst kinds of emergencies as the Top Ten. Some have been included because they are at particular risk from human or natural events, but have relatively lower vulnerability and/or coping capability scores. Others have lower human and/or natural risk but, if a notable event did occur, it would likely have a major impact given the vulnerability of the population and/or the country's limited coping capability.



*Storm clouds gather over Kutapalong Refugee Camp in Bangladesh.*

*Credit: T. Nesmith/International Rescue Committee*

# BANGLADESH (COX'S BAZAAR)



164,670,000

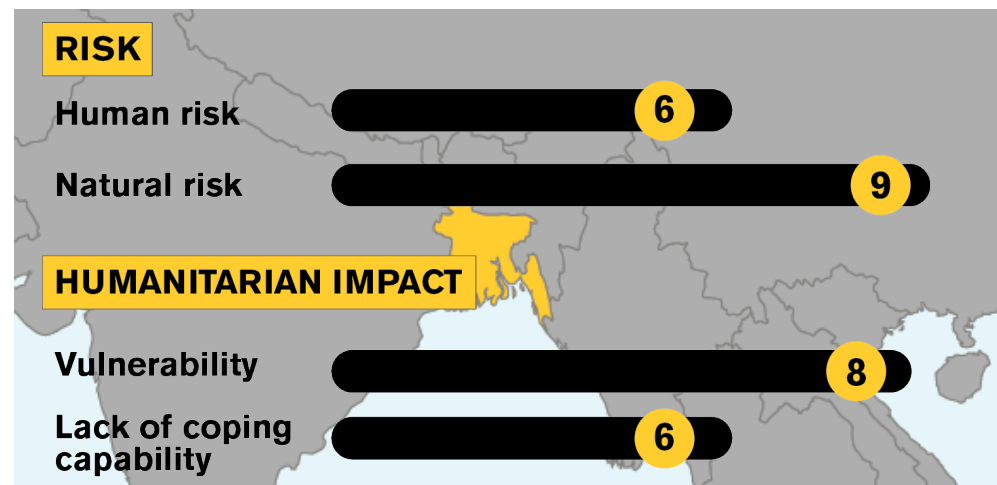


Yes

Bangladesh has a **long history of natural disasters causing humanitarian catastrophes**. Following Cyclone Sidr in 2007, which killed at least 3,400 people, the government invested in early warning systems and response mechanisms. These have, at least somewhat, helped mitigate the impact of disasters that have occurred since then. The [IMF](#) has described the **country's macroeconomic performance as "robust"** and political developments, while often tense, do not risk triggering humanitarian concerns. However, the situation is radically different for the **nearly 900,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar (UNHCR)** who are largely confined to a small area in Cox's Bazaar, near the Myanmar border, where the Bangladeshi authorities have not invested in the same early warning systems.

Bangladesh is only included on Watchlist 2019 because of the situation in Cox's Bazaar. On a national level, **Bangladesh has a very high score for natural risk (nine) and a high score for the vulnerability of its population (eight)**. However, human risk and the country's lack of response capability both score at six, so are above average but not particularly elevated. All of these scores would likely be even higher if we were looking specifically at Cox's Bazaar. For example, **large parts of the camps in Cox's Bazaar are in flood-prone areas**; over 23,000 people are at risk of landslides; 93% of the population lives below the UNHCR emergency standard of 45 square metres per person; and **infrastructure such as roads can be poor**. **Acute malnutrition** among children of 6-59 months exceeds the emergency threshold of 15% ([UNHCR](#)). Moreover, there are some initial indications of militants trying to recruit from among residents of the camps in Cox's Bazaar.

The **Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazaar are also caught between the hostile policies of the authorities in Myanmar** – who consider



## Other countries that could be affected:

Depending on Bangladeshi policy, Dhaka may start to deport highly vulnerable Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar. Militancy and displacements of Rohingya may affect all parts of the tri-border area with Myanmar and India.

the Rohingya largely to be illegal immigrants – and **increasing discontent with their presence in Bangladesh including pressure from the Bangladeshi authorities** to return. This has become a growing issue ahead of Bangladesh's parliamentary election, which is due on 30 December 2018, and so **Dhaka has been pushing for Rohingya to start returning**. However, as discussed with Myanmar further on in this report, conditions are not yet conducive to the safe and principled return of Rohingya refugees across the border. When returns were due to start in mid-November 2019, no Rohingya could be found who were willing to go back to Myanmar. The Bangladeshi authorities' plans sparked both protests in Cox's Bazaar and international criticisms. Dhaka now says returns will be paused until 2019.

*Outlook for 2019:* Bangladesh as a whole is likely to experience **protests, unrest and possible militancy around the elections** and announcement of results, but this is unlikely to cause wide-scale instability or humanitarian concerns. The country is also highly likely to experience some form of **natural**

**disaster**, though the state's capacity to pre-empt and respond means that the IRC and other humanitarian NGOs may not need to respond.

The situation for the Rohingya in Cox's Bazaar will be radically different, however. They will be **extremely exposed to natural disasters that could cause displacements and threats to their safety**. The policies of the Myanmar and Bangladeshi authorities will continue to leave them marginalized and highly vulnerable. Premature returns could lead to significant threats to the safety of individuals who go back, or of individuals who react to the risk of forced returns by seeking to travel by boat to Malaysia. That said, **pressure for returns may reduce somewhat once the 30 December election has passed** and the Rohingya issue becomes less politically charged. As the displacement drags on, the **cramped and unsanitary conditions in the camps** could increase the risk of disease spreading.

# CAMEROON



24,054,000

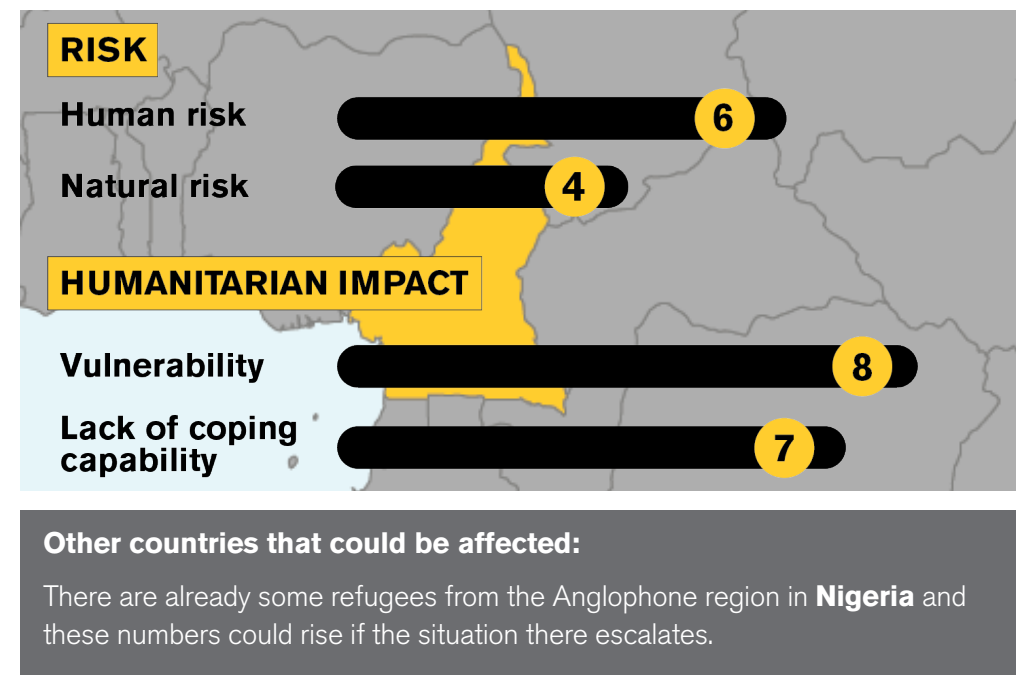


Yes

At a national level, much of the territory of Cameroon enjoys a level of relative stability and security. However, the country is **exposed to three separate challenges**. In the far north, violence regularly spills over from the **insurgency in northeast Nigeria**, causing displacements. Likewise, **pervasive instability in CAR** affects Cameroon's border areas. Cameroon has also been experiencing an **escalating insurgency in the Anglophone region, on the border with Nigeria, since early 2017**. There have also been protests since the disputed 7 October 2018 presidential election.

Cameroon has an above average score for human risk (six) as well as moderately high scores for vulnerability (eight) and lack of coping capability (seven). However, it is the **crisis in the Anglophone region and the resulting humanitarian emergency there which is the key reason for Cameroon's inclusion in Watchlist 2019**. In particular, there is a significant risk that the conflict in the Anglophone region will at least persist and could intensify.

**Violence between separatist groups in the Anglophone region has already displaced at least 437,000 people** ([OCHA](#)). There are also significant protection risks for civilians in the area. For example, separatists have sought to discourage residents from sending their children to government-run schools by targeting the facilities and even kidnapping children. An IRC needs assessment of areas particularly affected by internal displacement in September 2018 found the main needs were food and nutrition, shelter, and primary health. However, this assessment was limited by the reality that many IDPs were still sheltering in the forest or within communities rendered inaccessible to humanitarian organizations due to conflict.



*Outlook for 2019:* Following the presidential election there may now be an opportunity for mediation between the government and Anglophone separatists. If the opportunity is not taken, the **conflict in the northwest and southwest is likely to continue**. Separatists are deliberately targeting both economic and educational interests, which will make it **difficult for people to earn a living and send their children to school**. Thousands of people will also remain displaced, afraid of abuses by both sides as conflict between government forces and the separatists continues. As civilians' displacement

drags on, food insecurity may intensify as well. With few agencies responding, the crisis is likely to remain poorly understood and many needs may go unmet.

The risk of renewed jihadist violence in northeast Nigeria and instability in CAR could also lead to **greater instability spilling over into Cameroon** – causing displacements there and disrupting residents' livelihoods. Domestic political unrest is also likely to persist into 2019 following the arrest of opposition leader Maurice Kamto in November 2018, though there is no indication yet that this will result in major humanitarian needs.



# IRAQ



38,275,000



Yes

Iraq has experienced **years of instability since the US-led invasion in 2003**, with two major waves of jihadist insurgency – the first in the mid-2000s and the latest following the rise of Islamic State (IS) in 2013-2014, when the country's second city, Mosul, fell to the group. Millions of civilians were displaced during the battle to drive IS out of Mosul and other areas in western and northern Iraq. Around **1.87 million are still displaced internally (IOM)**. This number is falling, though progress on returns has been slow. This is partly because many Sunni Arab Iraqis do not feel safe returning to their homes; some fear being targeted by members of other communities over their perceived previous association with IS while others cannot go back because of the level of destruction to their homes. Moreover, **tensions that had been set aside while fighting IS have now returned to the fore**, including between different tribal and sectarian groupings, between rival political factions in Baghdad and also between the central government and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in the north.

Iraq has a high score for human risk (eight), reflecting not just **persistent violence between the security forces and IS** but also Baghdad's tense relationship with the KRG and persistent political instability in Baghdad. Additionally, tensions between rival Shia political factions have at times fed into unrest and violence in the south. The above average score for natural risk (six) is chiefly a consequence of the country's exposure to **drought**. Meanwhile, the elevated scores for vulnerability (seven) and lack of coping capability (eight) illustrate the impact of years of instability on the country's infrastructure.

Iraq scored at least relatively highly on all measures and the situation remains complex. In particular, the political context is delicate; MPs took five months to name a new President after the May 2018 parliamentary



Girls play inside IRC's safe space in Nargazilia camp, northern Iraq. The children and their families fled the battle for Mosul. Credit: E. Kinsky/International Rescue Committee

## RISK

Human risk

8

Natural risk

6

## HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

Vulnerability

7

Lack of coping capability

8

## Other countries that could be affected:

Most population movements in Iraq tend to be internal, although many civilians from federal Iraq have historically sought refuge in the autonomous **Kurdish Region of Iraq**, in the north. Should an escalation occur in the west or north, some Iraqis might flee to **Syria**.

elections. IS is also present in the country and carries out regular attacks. However, Iraq was excluded from the Top Ten because the **human risk measure was driven higher by indices that measured conflict activity in 2017 and 2018, when pro-government forces were pushing back IS and which is unlikely to recur for now given IS's relative weakness.**

*Outlook for 2019:* IS will remain a persistent security threat throughout 2019, contributing to a tense political atmosphere and providing a justification for militias (often largely Shia and some of which are closely associated with Iran) to remain deployed in Sunni Arab-majority areas. This will **slow**

**progress on returns, but not prevent them entirely.** At this stage we do not expect major conflict of the kind that could spark large and protracted new displacements. Many **IDPs and returnees will nonetheless have significant needs**, both due to their current status – for example because they do not have access to sufficient food or clean water in camps – and because of their experience living under IS, which has left many without key paperwork needed to access basic services in Iraq. Moreover, Sunni-majority areas may be under-served since the government is likely to focus on addressing grievances in Shia-majority regions.

# LIBYA



6,375,000

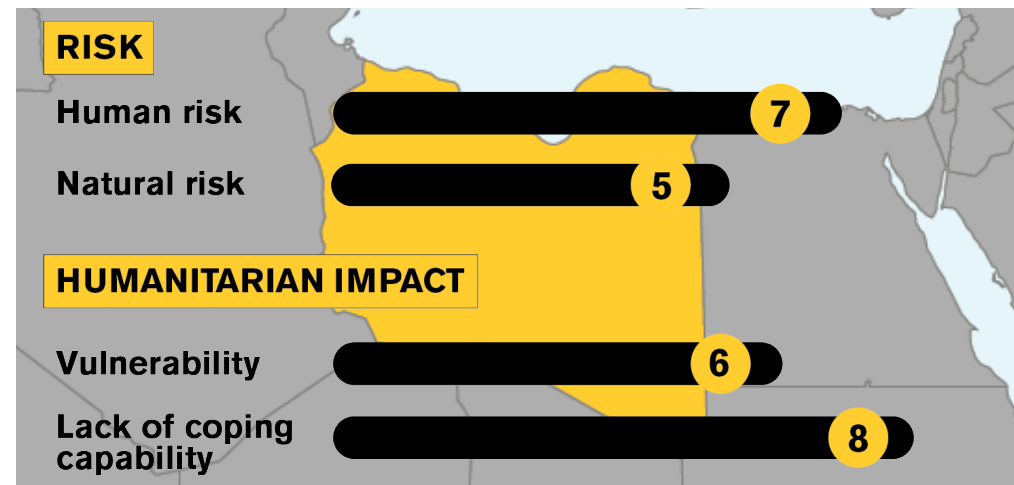


Yes

Libya has suffered persistent instability since NATO intervened in 2011 to support an uprising against longtime president Muammar Gadhafi. Much of the west of the country is controlled by a **patchwork of militias that show only nominal loyalty to the internationally recognized government** in Tripoli. There is **persistent militia violence**, including in Tripoli which is a major cause of **displacements**. As of October 2018, UNHCR said 187,423 Libyans were displaced internally. The violence also makes it difficult for NGOs to access people who are in need. Meanwhile, **much of the east of the country is controlled by forces loyal to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar**. Islamic State (IS) also has a presence in Libya and regularly carries out attacks there, though it lost control of its key stronghold in the country, Sirte, in late 2016. Finally, southern Libya is particularly affected by tribal conflicts, as well as smuggling and attacks involving armed groups operating around the Chadian border.

Libya scores moderately high for human risk (seven) while the years of conflict have likely contributed to the elevated scores for vulnerability (six) and lack of coping capability (eight). Amid the persistent instability, Libya has become a key route for migrants from across Africa and the Middle East seeking to reach Europe, as well as a destination for some who hope to find work in Libya. As of mid-2018 IOM said there were **at least 669,000 migrants in Libya**. Migrants are often at the mercy of **militias**, some of which have been documented to engage in abuses such as slave trading and torture.

Migrants are also highly vulnerable as they try to cross the Mediterranean to reach southern Europe. A UNHCR report in September 2018 found that 1,600 people had already died or gone missing in the Mediterranean that year. Compared to previous years, these figures underline that a **greater**



## Other countries that could be affected:

Many Libyans and migrants will continue to try and cross the **Mediterranean** to reach southern **Europe**. If violence occurs in western Libya then some refugees might move to **Tunisia**. Instability in the east is less likely but could drive people to head to **Egypt**.

**percentage of migrants are now dying while crossing – even as the total number of people making the journey is falling.** Meanwhile, European governments are working with the Libyan coast guard to gather migrants within Libyan waters and return them to the country, where they are often then detained.

*Outlook for 2019:* Libya's political future is particularly uncertain following inconclusive Italian-hosted talks in November 2018. **Elections initially planned for 10 December 2018 are now due to happen in spring**

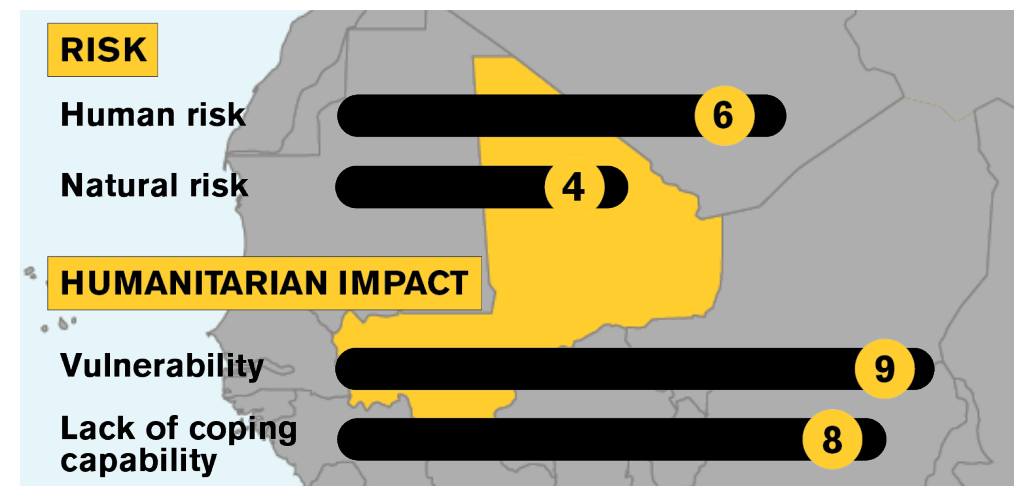
**2019, following another planned round of talks between Libyan actors.** Violence between rival militias is highly likely to remain endemic, **driving displacements and disrupting humanitarian activities in Tripoli.** Moreover, displacements could rise significantly if conflict escalates, for example if pro-Haftar forces launch renewed efforts to seize control of oil production or to assert themselves in western Libya ahead of the planned election. Libya will also remain a key destination and transit point for migrants.



There has been **persistent instability in northern Mali** since a military coup in 2012 weakened and distracted the central government in Bamako, allowing Touareg groups to seize much of the north of the country – a situation which jihadists exploited to gain significant influence across the country. A French-led military operation then pushed back the jihadists, but a range of groups – including some with links to al-Qaeda and others tied to Islamic State (IS) – remain active in northern areas. They **regularly carry out attacks on the security forces and their threats have forced 750 schools to shut** (OCHA). Moreover, the **situation has worsened in 2018 as instability has increasingly spread to central Mali**, where a range of factors (including drought and militants infiltrating from further north) have exacerbated longstanding communal tensions driven by competition for limited resources.

Mali's inclusion on the Watchlist is driven by the **high vulnerability of its people** (scoring nine) and the country's limited response capability (eight), as well as moderately high human risk (six). Natural risk is relatively low (four), at least compared to other Watchlist countries, but the country still faces risks such as drought and flooding. One factor preventing Mali from appearing in the top of the list is that, due to the low population density across much of central and northern Mali, violence **tends to create pockets of relatively limited displacements** (10,000-20,000 people).

The [UN](#) describes Mali as experiencing **chronic food insecurity** and malnutrition, and while [FEWS](#) expects an improvement in the availability of food in early 2019, flooding has caused families in some areas to lose their livelihood assets. Moreover, access constraints caused by **communal, jihadist and criminal violence makes it difficult for humanitarians to deliver assistance at times in many parts of central and northern Mali**, making life even more difficult for Malian civilians.



#### Other countries that could be affected:

Conflict has already driven over 140,000 Malians to seek refuge in **Burkina Faso, Mauritania** and **Niger**. Armed groups from Mali are also contributing to instability in Burkina Faso and Niger, exacerbating the humanitarian situation in those countries.

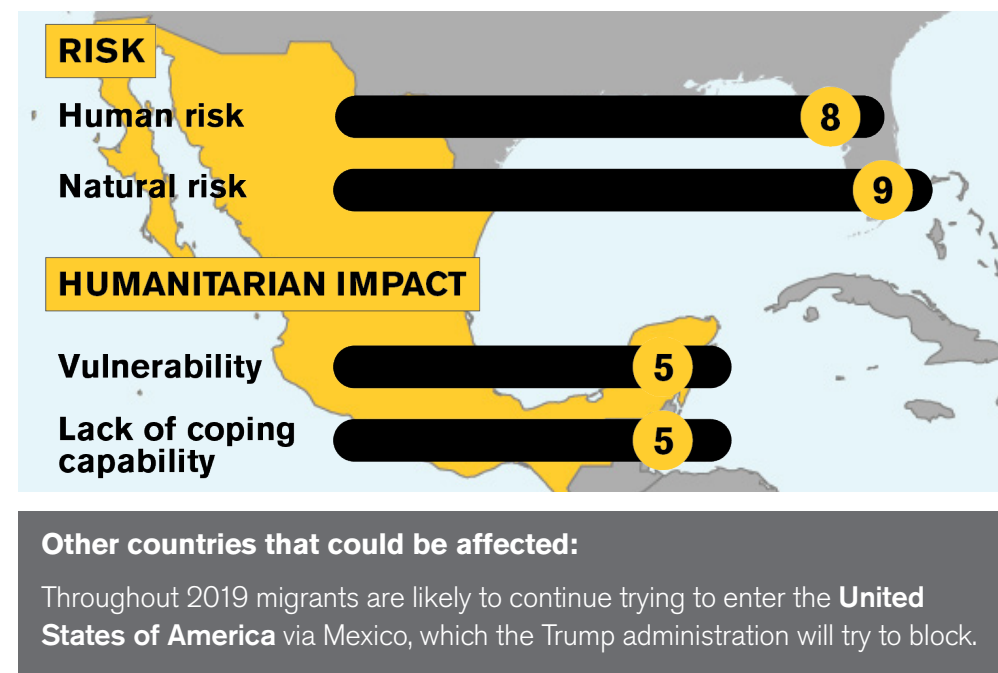
*Outlook for 2019: Jihadist and communal violence is likely to persist across large parts of central and northern Mali* in 2019. This will spark relatively limited, localized displacements and **exacerbate the chronic food insecurity** in Mali. Even if the scale of individual crises may be smaller than in some other Watchlist countries, **humanitarian actors may struggle to respond due to the significant obstacles – not least the security challenges – to accessing people in need.**



Mexico is an **upper middle income country** according to the [World Bank](#), **though over 43% of the population is in poverty** (IMF). While it is politically stable, it experiences **high levels of criminal violence**. In 2017 Mexico recorded its **highest number of homicides on record (25,340) and 2018 is on track to be even more violent** (Economist). It is also exposed to natural events such as **tropical storms and earthquakes**. Moreover, it is a key route for migrants seeking to reach the US, primarily fleeing criminal and/or political violence in the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras). [UNHCR](#) estimated in 2016 that as many as **400,000 people cross Mexico's southern border illegally each year**. Increasingly, Mexico is also a destination for Central American migrants.

Mexico has the **lowest scores for vulnerability and lack of coping capability** (both five) of any country on the Watchlist. However, it has **very high scores for natural risk** (nine, equalled only by Myanmar) **and human risk** (eight). The relative lack of vulnerability among Mexicans and the country's response capabilities would normally exclude it from the Watchlist, despite the high human and natural risk. However, **migrants face the significant human and natural risks discussed above**; [Amnesty](#) has warned that as many as 20,000 are kidnapped each year, for example. However, in **many cases migrants are not afforded the protections of the Mexican state**.

Some migrants try to cross Mexico on foot. This is an arduous journey and they often **sleep in the open**, which exposes unaccompanied children, women travelling alone and LGBTQI individuals in particular to risks such as **gender-based violence**. Migrants are often **dependent on local communities, and especially church groups, for food and other assistance**. Some then travel northwards on freight trains – where they are



often exposed to gender-based violence, kidnappings and injury. Criminal gangs have also started targeting migrants for violence, abduction and extortion. Migrants have also alleged violence by representatives of the local authorities and that **deportations are sometimes carried out without due process.**

*Outlook for 2019:* There is significant uncertainty about new President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's policies towards the economy, criminal violence and migrants. **If he adopts policies that are more positive towards migrants then more may both seek to stay in the country and to cross it to reach the US,** despite the human-driven and natural risks they

would face. High-profile and large-scale caravans travelling across Mexico in late 2018 may also inspire more Central American migrants to adopt such tactics in 2019, which could start to **undermine community acceptance of such movements** and **stretch (or even completely overwhelm) the response capacity of local authorities' and NGOs'**. The **policies of the Trump administration increase the risk of confrontations emerging at the Mexico-US border;** for example, it has deployed troops at the frontier to push back people trying to cross, which could further imperil migrants.

# MYANMAR



53,371,000



Yes

Myanmar experienced **decades of authoritarian military rule** before 2015 elections allowed the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Nobel Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, to come to power. Western promises of sanctions relief were a key motivator for the reforms that eventually allowed the NLD to lead the government. Relations with the west have been severely undermined after security operations in the western Rakhine state led to the **exodus of nearly 900,000 members of the Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority to Bangladesh** (UNHCR). These movements have now largely halted, at least in part because only a minority of Rohingya (estimated at around 600,000) remain in Myanmar's Rakhine state. However, western counties have re-imposed some sanctions, over both the Rohingya issue and slow progress on promised reforms. Conflict involving an array of largely ethnic armies and the government security forces also affects large parts of the country. Moreover, the UN describes Myanmar as **one of the countries in South East Asia that is most at risk of natural disasters**.

The persistent but often relatively low-level conflict in some parts of the country, along with mounting economic pressures from the imposition of sanctions, has resulted in Myanmar receiving a moderately high human risk score (seven). Myanmar (with Mexico) also has the **highest natural risk score of any country on the Watchlist** (nine), reflecting its exposure to earthquakes, landslides and flooding. The impact of any human-driven or natural events is then compounded by the **population's high vulnerability** (eight) and the country's **limited coping capabilities** (Myanmar scores seven on that measure).

**The persistent but largely distinct and localized conflicts across Myanmar cause small-scale regional displacements** on a regular basis. As of October 2018, 128,000 people were displaced in Rakhine state



A community health worker hands out the leaflets at an IRC clinic in a displacement camp in the outskirts of Sittwe, Myanmar. Credit: K. Htet/International Rescue Committee

## RISK

Human risk

7

Natural risk

9

## HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

Vulnerability

8

Lack of coping capability

7

### Other countries that could be affected:

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya are likely to remain in **Bangladesh**, despite increasing calls for them to return (likely influenced by the impending Bangladeshi general election, which is due before the end of 2018). Some Rohingya may seek to reach Malaysia, including via Thailand or in boats.



and nearly 106,000 were displaced in Kachin and northern Shan, in the north ([UN](#)). However, the government's authoritarian approach, particularly in Rakhine, makes it difficult for NGOs to operate there and thus to obtain accurate information about the humanitarian situation. **Constraints on humanitarian access prevented [UNICEF](#) from reaching all of the 9,000 children believed to be in need of assistance for severe acute malnutrition** in mid-2018.

Outlook for 2019: A further major exodus of Rohingya is unlikely, given that most have already fled, and political pressures in Bangladesh – which must hold a general election before the end of 2018 – have resulted in increased calls for Rohingya refugees to return home. **Progress on returns from Bangladesh**

**is likely to be limited and slow**, however. The [UN](#) has said Myanmar simply is not ready to receive them, given the lack of access to health care, continued displacements and concerns about protecting the rights and safety of any returnees.

Meanwhile, **conflict-driven displacements** will persist, particularly in the north and within Rakhine, and there may also be cases of **severe acute malnutrition** among children in some areas. Restrictions imposed by the authorities are likely to **hamper humanitarian assistance** into 2019 as well, at least in Rakhine, undermining efforts to address such issues. Finally, there may well be **natural disasters** that destroy homes, displace people and undermine livelihoods throughout the country.

# NICARAGUA



6,218,000

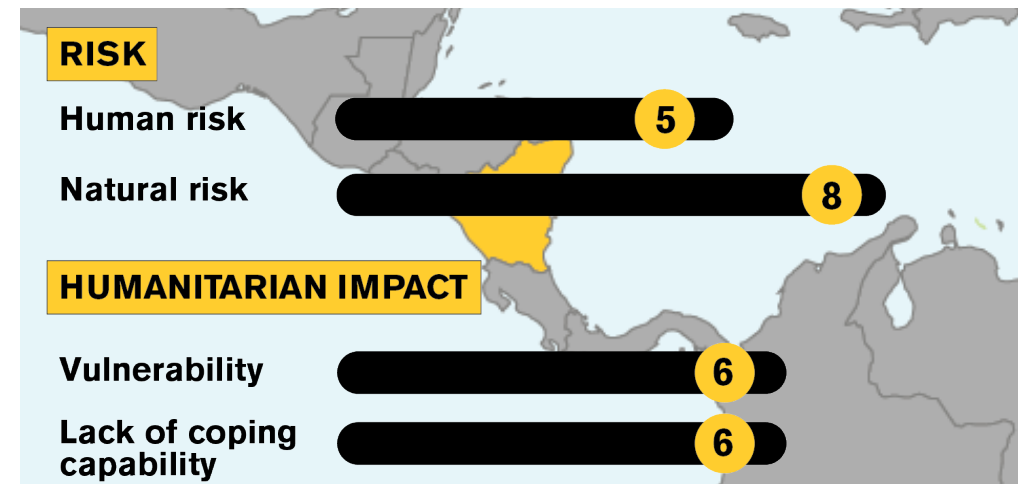


No

Unlike some other countries in Central America, Nicaragua has generally experienced relatively limited levels of criminal violence and, in recent years at least, a degree of political and economic stability. Humanitarian concerns previously were therefore focused on the impact of natural disasters. However, this has been changing since **anti-government protests broke out in April 2018 and were suppressed by the authorities, often violently**, resulting in at least 300 deaths according to the [Organization of American States \(OAS\)](#). The unrest has calmed since a peak in July 2018, when activists had blockaded many streets across the country, but shows no real sign of abating. Moreover, the **economy is in a sharp decline, which could push a principally political crisis in Nicaragua into a humanitarian crisis in the course of 2019.**

Nicaragua has a high natural risk score (eight), reflecting a **wide array of natural phenomena that can affect the country**, and a low/average score for human risk (five). It also has moderate scores for vulnerability and lack of coping capability (both six). On a purely quantitative basis, therefore, it would have been unlikely to feature in the Watchlist. However, data was missing for fourteen of the indicators that make up the **human risk measure and, given the deteriorating political situation** during 2018, we believe that the human risk score understates the situation. Moreover, Nicaragua historically relied closely on its ally Venezuela for economic and diplomatic support. This support is no longer available in the same way, making Nicaragua's position particularly delicate.

Underlining the deteriorating situation, an [estimated 52,000 Nicaraguans left to Costa Rica between January and September 2018](#). Tourism revenue has collapsed due to the unrest and the Central Bank is, according to some [reports](#), depleting its foreign reserves at such a rapid rate that



## Other countries that could be affected:

Nicaraguans have historically tended to move southwards, to **Costa Rica**, during times of trouble. However, a persistent deterioration in the situation in Nicaragua, and/or the adoption of policies in Costa Rica that make Nicaraguans unwelcome, could see more heading northwards, through the **Northern Triangle** to **Mexico** and onwards to the **US**.

they could entirely run out by mid-2019, at which point inflation could become a major concern. At the very least, the [IMF](#) is forecasting a 4% decline in real GDP in 2018 and warning of a contraction in the number of jobs.

*Outlook for 2019:* The **numbers of Nicaraguans fleeing the country, principally to Costa Rica, will continue to rise** given that the unrest (and crackdowns by the authorities) appear set to persist. Economic conditions will

remain challenging and, if the economy is allowed to decline throughout the year, this could start to trigger a humanitarian situation akin to Venezuela, where hyperinflation makes essentials like food and medicine unaffordable. It is **too soon to forecast confidently that Nicaragua will itself experience a major humanitarian crisis** in 2019, but this is a potential scenario for 2019 upon which Nicaragua's inclusion in the Watchlist is based.

# NIGER



21,477,000



Yes

Niger is an extremely under-developed country (in the 2017 [Human Development Index](#) it ranked 189th out of 189 countries). Moreover, the country is heavily affected by **instability in neighboring states** – particularly the separate jihadist insurgencies in northeast Nigeria and northern Mali. In recent years, violence, tensions and populations moving across the border have contributed to increasing instability – including inter-communal violence – in the Tillaberi region, which borders Mali. Moreover, Niger's position between north, west and central Africa means it has also long been a **key migration route**, although it is now also a key partner for the EU as European countries try to restrict the number of people crossing the Mediterranean.

Niger's lack of economic development has left its **population highly vulnerable**; it scores a maximum ten on that measure. The country is also highly **limited in its ability to address any emergencies that arise**, scoring nine for lack of response capability. Its above average human risk score (six) is influenced by the country's exposure to regional hazards in particular, and while it has a low natural risk score (four) it still experiences drought. Meanwhile, the weak healthcare infrastructure leaves **Nigeriens at risk of epidemics** such as cholera.

*Outlook for 2019:* Niger will continue to be **affected by instability in neighboring countries**, particularly Mali and Nigeria – and to receive refugees from them, putting further pressure on vulnerable host communities and adding to existing tensions in border areas. **Conflict-affected areas will also be at greater risk of displacements and food insecurity**, though that will continue to affect other parts of the country as well. Niger will remain an important route for people seeking to move northwards, towards Europe. Continued EU engagement and funding will provide some economic opportunities, but **many Nigeriens were economically reliant on the migration routes** and many will struggle to find new livelihoods – which is a factor that could contribute to political instability as well.



A woman walks through her village in Mangaize, Niger.  
Credit: P. Biro/International Rescue Committee

## RISK

Human risk

6

Natural risk

4

## HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

Vulnerability

10

Lack of coping capability

9

### Other countries that could be affected:

Migrants will continue to move through Niger to **Libya** and then towards **southern Europe**.

# PAKISTAN



197,016,000



Yes

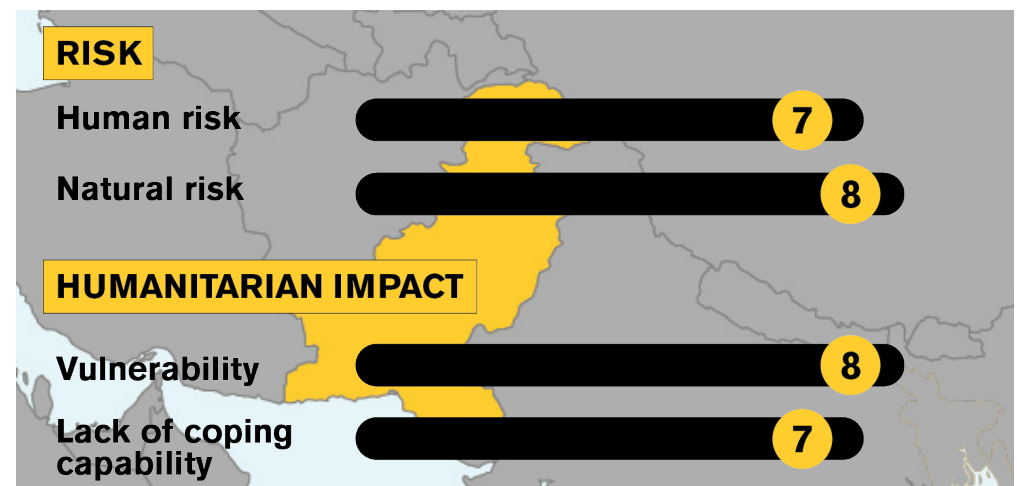
Since independence in 1947 development has been hampered by Pakistan's long history of military coups and rule. In 2013 the country had its first transfer of power from one democratically elected government to another. Nonetheless, the **political environment is volatile**; former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was arrested on corruption charges in July 2018 and, later that month, former cricketer Imran Khan was elected, in part because he pledged to clean up Pakistani politics. The country still faces **major security threats**, particularly from jihadists operating in areas along the Afghan border and Baluch separatist militants operating in Baluchistan on the Afghan and Iranian border. Insecurity can present barriers to humanitarian access in these areas, which remain highly under-developed and host many of the nearly 1.4 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. There are also regular confrontations with India along the eastern border.

Pakistan scores **moderately highly or highly across all measures**. Its complex political history has contributed both to its elevated human risk and lack of coping capability scores (both seven). Weak governance has left the country vulnerable to security threats while undermining its ability to respond to emergencies. As a result of this, the population is highly vulnerable (eight). It also receives eight for natural risk. This is driven in part by the **risk of flooding**, though Pakistan is vulnerable to a range of phenomena such as **avalanches, storms, earthquakes and drought**.

In the past, military operations near the Afghan border have displaced as many as 3.3 million people (as was the case in 2009), but the number of IDPs has dropped to around 207,000 in 2018 as major military operations have reduced ([ACAPS](#)). Pakistan is still **home to nearly 1.4 million Afghan refugees**, although some have been returning – albeit slowly –



Two girls show their text books at their school in Islamabad, Pakistan. Credit: A. Siddiq/International Rescue Committee



## Other countries that could be affected:

Pakistani government policy throughout 2019 could have a major impact on the pace with which Afghan refugees return to **Afghanistan**.

since 2016. Drought has also been an important factor in 2018, contributing to at least 500 [reported](#) deaths from drought-related malnutrition, water-borne diseases or viral infection.

*Outlook for 2019:* Pakistan's Finance Minister **formally requested financial assistance from the IMF** in October 2018, which may be granted in 2019.

This underlines that there is **unlikely to be any real improvement in the weak institutional capacity** that has, along with poverty, reduced Pakistan's resilience to emergencies. There is little to indicate a major increase in conflict-related humanitarian needs, for example due to displacement, though **persistent instability will continue to disrupt people's livelihoods in some areas.**

Should a natural disaster occur, it would likely have a major impact on the vulnerable population, sparking displacements and leaving greater numbers facing food insecurity. However, the government has recently denied permission for eighteen NGOs to work in Pakistan and it could seek to prevent others from working there as well, and/or to restrict access by **making it more difficult to overcome administrative hurdles** such as obtaining memorandums of understanding. This could restrict the humanitarian response to human or natural-driven events.

# SUDAN



40,533,000

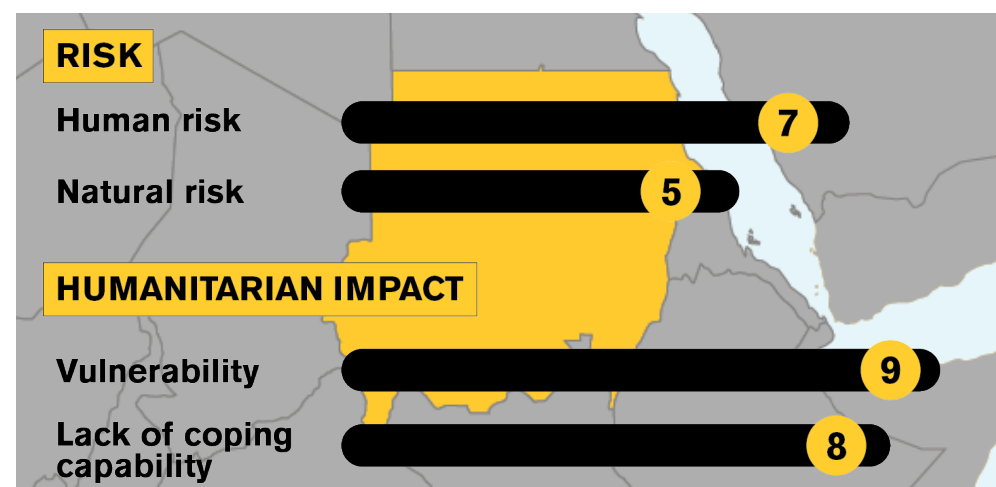


No

Sudan has been ruled by President al-Bashir since a military coup in 1989. For much of that time the country experienced a bloody civil war. The secession of South Sudan in 2012 ended major conflict within Sudan. Nonetheless, a **level of violence persists in three regions: Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile**. Armed groups in these areas have cooperated to fight Khartoum at points in the past, but are no longer doing so in any practical sense. Indeed, the main such group in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) has splintered into two factions that have clashed with each other at times, sparking displacements. **Armed conflict across Sudan has been much lower in 2018 than in previous years**, in part because the central government has been preoccupied with an escalating financial crisis. The value of the Sudanese pound collapsed against the dollar in late 2018, reaching a record low in November, putting significant pressure on livelihoods.

Sudan has deployed some of its Rapid Support Forces, which historically played a key role in violence in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, to Yemen as part of the Saudi and Emirati-led Coalition. Another major contributory factor to the lower conflict within Sudan is that **Khartoum is attempting to reposition itself geopolitically, in particular by presenting itself as an ally of western countries against terrorism and on controlling migration flows** towards Europe. Sudan hopes this will help it to be removed from US and other countries' list of state sponsors of terrorism and thus attract investment.

Sudan's inclusion on the Watchlist is driven by a moderately high human risk rating (seven) and high scores for both vulnerability (nine) and lack of coping capability (eight). Its natural risk score is not particularly



## Other countries that could be affected:

Improving relations with Juba and reducing domestic conflict could see the return of some of the nearly 280,000 Sudanese refugees in **South Sudan** and 335,000 in **Chad**. Alternatively, any major resumption of conflict in Sudan would see refugee numbers in those countries rising.

elevated (five) but indicates a **risk of drought**. There are also massive persistent humanitarian needs, particularly in Darfur where, despite a ceasefire theoretically being in place, violence has persisted in the Jebel Marra area in particular. As of spring 2018, **5.5 million people in Sudan were facing crisis (IPC 3) or higher levels of food insecurity, around half of these in Darfur (IPC Info)**. The [UN](#) says **more than 2 million people have been living in IDP camps in Darfur** since conflict began there in 2003.

Needs are also elevated in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, particularly in areas controlled by SPLM-N factions. However, these areas are cut off from the rest of Sudan – with access only from South Sudan – so needs are not always well understood and many go unmet. Sudan is also **home to over 760,000 South Sudanese refugees (UNHCR)**; whether these numbers rise or fall will depend on developments across the border.

*Outlook for 2019:* The **key challenges in 2019 appear likely to be connected to the declining economy**, which may aggravate food insecurity because it will make it more difficult for some Sudanese to earn a livelihood. **Persistent violence – and natural disasters – will also continue to drive displacements in Darfur**, though likely on a smaller scale than in previous years when there was wider-scale fighting.

At this stage, there are **few signs to indicate a risk of major escalation in 2019 between government forces and SPLM-N factions** in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Indeed, Khartoum's desire to rehabilitate its international reputation may limit its willingness to trigger major conflict during 2019. However, there has been **no real progress for years on negotiating access for humanitarians working from Khartoum to SPLM-N-held parts of these states**. As such, humanitarian needs there will remain significant and only partially met.