

8. NIGERIA

Conflict and famine risk in the northeast



KEY FACTS

Population: **206.1 million**

8.9 million people in need of humanitarian aid

8.7 million facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC 3+)

1.2 million people living in areas “inaccessible” to humanitarians

2.8 million people internally displaced

300,000 Nigerian refugees, mostly in Niger and Cameroon

50% of health facilities in the northeast are fully functional

96th (of 195 countries) for capability to prevent and mitigate epidemics

145th (of 167 countries) for women’s equality

160th (of 181 countries) for resilience to climate change

4/5 score for severity of access constraints

50% of funding received for 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan

Above: Hawwa and her young twins at the IRC stabilization center for severely acutely malnourished children in Maiduguri, NE Nigeria.

PROBABILITY

8 HUMAN THREAT

4 NATURAL THREAT

IMPACT

7 CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE

7 EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION

Nigeria’s ranking among the top ten on Watchlist is primarily due to the crisis in the northeast, where humanitarian needs are only growing and deepening after ten years of conflict.

The main humanitarian crisis in Nigeria is in the northeast, where violence is still growing even after years of conflict, driving large-scale displacement and high levels of food insecurity. Civilians are bearing the brunt of the conflict; Nigeria was the deadliest crisis for civilians in 2020 out of all twenty Watchlist countries. Violence has also been rising in other parts of northern Nigeria, particularly in the northwest where signs of militant activity are starting to emerge. COVID-19 threatens to create famine conditions in the northeast in 2021, while protests against police brutality have sparked unrest in Lagos and other major cities in late 2020 that could continue into 2021. Despite rising needs, Nigeria remains a challenging operating environment for humanitarians.

“Northeast Nigeria has suffered volatile humanitarian crisis for over a decade with high levels of poverty, malnutrition and disease outbreaks now exacerbated by COVID-19. Growing conflict and severe weather shocks in recent years have increased displacement and restricted humanitarian access. Being a Nigerian citizen from Borno state, one of the areas worst hit by conflict, I have personally witnessed the level of suffering and humanitarian crisis. Whilst the situation is dire and seems to continue unabated, I consider myself very privileged to be on the forefront providing humanitarian services and giving back to my community.”

- Fatima Baba Isa
Senior Health Capacity Building Officer, IRC Nigeria



HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2021

- ▶ **Conflict in the northeast is escalating, driving greater humanitarian needs.** 8.9 million people - two thirds of the region's population of 13.4 million - are in need of assistance ([OCHA](#)). A decade of conflict has also decimated civilian infrastructure, leaving hospitals, schools, water and sanitation systems and other basic infrastructure damaged, reducing basic services for vulnerable populations. Despite the protracted nature of the crisis, conflict is once again increasing in intensity - a trend that may well continue into 2021. Indeed, the first nine months saw more fatalities from violence against civilians in the northeastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe than during the same period in any year since 2015 ([ACLED](#)).
- ▶ **Conflict involving communal and criminal groups is growing in northern and northwest Nigeria.** Violence from incidents identified by ACLED as targeting civilians killed more people in the northern states of Kaduna and Katsina in the first nine months of 2020 (699) than the northeastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe have seen in any full year since 2015 ([ACLED](#)). Moreover there are preliminary indications of militant groups from elsewhere in the region starting to establish a presence in northwest Nigeria, which could be a sign of greater and protracted insecurity to come ([International Crisis Group](#)). There is also a persistent risk of farmer-herder conflict in central areas of Nigeria and, separately, anger at police brutality sparked widespread - and at times violent - protests in Lagos and other major cities in late 2020.
- ▶ **All sides in the conflict are, at times, acting in ways that increase harm for civilians and constrain humanitarian access.** Nigeria was the deadliest of the Watchlist countries for civilians in the first nine months of 2020, with 1,856 deaths in "violence against civilians" incidents ([ACLED](#)). In a sign of the risks to aid workers, humanitarians are almost exclusively reliant on UN helicopters to reach many vulnerable populations as roads become too dangerous. Additionally, the conflict has left 1.2 million people in the northeast inaccessible to humanitarians since they are living in areas that are effectively under the control of armed groups ([OCHA](#)). Only limited information is available about the conditions of civilians in these areas but needs are likely even more severe there than in the rest of the northeast.
- ▶ **COVID-19 is pushing the country towards potential famine in 2021.** Vulnerable populations across the country face lost incomes due to lost livelihoods related to COVID-19 restrictions and conflict, climate change impacts on crop production and drops in remittances. In parts of the northeast, levels of acute malnutrition for children under five are already above emergency thresholds, leading to an average of three children dying of malnutrition every day in 2020 ([OCHA](#)). Northeast Nigeria is now at risk of famine in 2021 ([WFP](#)). Moreover, needs are also rising due to COVID-19 and conflict in other parts of the country too, particularly in central states and the northwest.

THE IRC IN NIGERIA

The IRC has been working in Nigeria since 2012. The IRC operates in all three states in northeast Nigeria (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe). We provide both immediate life-saving and life-sustaining activities as well as medium-term recovery programs. The IRC's programming includes primary health, nutrition and reproductive healthcare activities; educational support services for out-of-school youth, women's protection and empowerment activities, water and sanitation programming and economic recovery and development activities. Learn more about the [IRC's Nigeria response](#).



ABUJA