2025 Emergency Watchlist Technical Notes

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) developed the 2025 Emergency Watchlist by building on methodologies implemented in previous years to identify the countries at greatest risk of major deterioration in their humanitarian situation over the coming year. The methodology used for the 2025 Watchlist is described here to ensure transparency and reproducibility.

The main sections in the technical notes are:

1. Source selection
2. Indicator selection
3. Identification of long-list countries
4. Qualitative review of countries
5. Ranking the top 10 countries
6. Drafting the Watchlist

1. Source selection

The Watchlist team identified the following sources as producing indicators, either in the form of quantitative indices or qualitative data (for example, lists of "countries of concern"), that are relevant to the formulation of the Watchlist. The sources were selected on the basis of relevance, availability, minimal missing data and credibility. Most sources have been used in previous Watchlists. A description of each source and notes on the type of data are included below:

INFORM (Quantitative)[1]

INFORM is a tool that was developed as a collaborative effort by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Risk, Early Warning and Preparedness and the European Commission. The tool combines data from various sources and produces indicators related to the conditions that lead to conflict and natural disasters. The data used for this year's Watchlist include a combination of quantitative indices and indicators such as INFORM's Natural Hazards Index, INFORM's Governance indicator and the Global Crisis Risk Index.

Responsibility to Protect (Qualitative)[2]

The establishment of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect was backed by various governments, human rights campaigners, the International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, Oxfam International, Refugees International and the World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy. The center identifies situations where populations are experiencing, or are at risk of, genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and/or crimes against humanity. These are also events that warrant monitoring by the IRC, as they could potentially cause humanitarian needs that would trigger an IRC response. Responsibility to Protect provides a qualitative overview of the situation in each country, classifying

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[1] http://www.inform-index.org/
[2] https://www.globalr2p.org/what-is-r2p/

countries as "current crisis," "imminent risk" or "serious concern." The majority of countries receive no classification.

International Crisis Group (Qualitative)[3]

The International Crisis Group (ICG) is an independent organization that engages directly with various conflict actors to gather information and to provide analysis and advice on how to prevent, resolve or better manage conflict. ICG produces a global conflict tracker tool known as Crisis Watch, which provides a qualitative overview of how the context in a country is evolving, classifying each country as "unchanged situation," "improved situation" or "deteriorated situation."

Council on Foreign Relations (Qualitative)[4]

Information from the Council on Foreign Relations' Global Conflict Tracker, which was developed by the Center for Preventive Action (CPA), highlights the relationship between risk and current crises. The conflicts featured in the Global Conflict Tracker are identified through a Preventive Priorities Survey that asks government officials, foreign policy experts and academics to assess ongoing and potential conflicts based on their likelihood to occur in a given year. The robust qualitative nature of the assessment of the conflict and the types of sources and experts that CPA has access to justify including the source for the IRC's Watchlist. Countries are classified as either "unchanging," "worsening" or "improving," or are not listed at all if they are not of high concern.

ACAPS (Qualitative)[5]

The ACAPS Humanitarian Access Overview assesses countries with existing crises and the level of humanitarian access constraints present in a limited set of countries. ACAPS Access is an ordinal ranking of the ease of humanitarian access in a country. Countries with extreme humanitarian access constraints are rated as five, while those without constraints are rated as zero.

ACLED (Quantitative)[6]

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) collects, analyzes and maps conflict and political incidents in a large range of countries globally. ACLED collects the dates, actors, types of violence, locations and number of fatalities in all reported instances of political violence and protest events across Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Latin America.

Verisk Maplecroft (Quantitative)[7]

Providing global risk analytics, Verisk Maplecroft offers numerous quantitative indices that range from political risk to human rights, economic and environmental issues, sustainable sourcing and the investment

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[3] https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch
[4] https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker#!/
[5] http://humanitarianaccess.acaps.org/
[6] https://www.acleddata.com/data/
[7] https://www.maplecroft.com/

landscape. The specificity of the dataset, as well as the comprehensiveness of the data for all countries, enabled the Watchlist team to develop dimensions that were specifically relevant to the needs of the IRC.

The Fund for Peace (Quantitative)[8]

The Fund for Peace works to prevent conflict and promote sustainable security globally by building relationships and trust across diverse sectors. The Fragile States Index not only highlights the normal pressures that all states experience, but also identifies when those pressures outweigh a state's capacity to manage them, by including pertinent vulnerabilities that increase the risk of state fragility.

Institute for Economics and Peace (Quantitative)[9]

The Institute for Economics and Peace develops global and national indices, calculates the economic cost of violence, and analyzes country-level risk and fragility. The Global Peace Index covers 99.7% of the world's population, using 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators from highly respected sources, and measures the state of peace across three domains: the level of societal safety and security, the extent of ongoing domestic and international conflict, and the degree of militarization.[10]

Danish Refugee Council (Quantitative)[11]

The Danish Refugee Council released the Global Displacement Forecast report in 2024,[12] which utilized predictive models to produce estimates of forced displacement. The majority of countries globally are not covered by these predictive models.

ND-GAIN (Quantitative)[13]

The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Country Index summarizes a country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges, in combination with its readiness to improve resilience. It aims to help governments, businesses and communities better prioritize investments for a more efficient response to the immediate global challenges ahead. The vulnerability index measures the propensity of human societies to be negatively impacted by climate hazards.

The Early Warning Project (Quantitative)[14]

The Early Warning Project is a joint initiative of the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum[15] and the Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College[16] that uses quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the risk of mass atrocities in

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[8] https://fragilestatesindex.org/about/
[9] https://www.economicsandpeace.org/about/
[10] https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GPI_2020_web-1.pdf
[11] https://drc.ngo/
[12] https://pro.drc.ngo/resources/documents/global-displacement-forecast/
[13] https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/
[14] https://earlywarningproject.ushmm.org/
[15] https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/simon-skjodt-center
[16] https://dickey.dartmouth.edu/

countries around the world. The Early Warning Project aims to detect the warning signs of mass atrocities and genocide so that they can be addressed and prevented.

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (Quantitative)[17]

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime produces the Global Organized Crime Index,[18] which is a multi-dimensional tool that assesses the level of criminality and resilience to organized crime for 193 countries based on quantitative and qualitative methods. The Global Organized Crime Index aims to provide metrics-based information to allow policymakers to prioritize interventions based on assessments of vulnerabilities.

World Bank Open Data (Quantitative)[19]

The World Bank's Development Data Group aims to provide high-quality national and international open-source statistics. They provide free and open access to global development data on a range of topics, including global health, gender, climate and economics. The IRC uses several indicators from the World Bank for the Watchlist report, including infant mortality rate, oil rents and youth populations.

In addition, a few Watchlist indicators from the above sources required dividing by the total population to calculate proportions. For that reason, the Watchlist team also compiled population data from the World Bank.

2. Indicator selection

After compiling a range of data sources for the Watchlist, the team then selected specific indicators based on their relevance to the Watchlist report. To avoid skewing the country selection toward countries that performed the worst in one particular area, the team removed indicators that most overlapped. This reduced the number of indicators to 74 from the above sources. *Table 1* includes the sources and the indicators the Watchlist team utilized to identify "at risk" countries for this year's process.

Table 1

	Source	Indicator
1.	INFORM	Natural hazard
2.	INFORM	Human
3.	INFORM	Ethnic fractionalization
4.	INFORM	Empowerment Rights Index
5.	INFORM	Size of excluded ethnic groups
6.	INFORM	Democracy status
7.	INFORM	Gender Inequality Index
8.	INFORM	Income Gini coefficient
9.	INFORM	Conflict intensity

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[17] https://globalinitiative.net/
[18] https://ocindex.net/
[19] https://data.worldbank.org/?name_desc=false

10.	INFORM	Rule of Law: The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index
11.	INFORM	Rule of Law: Worldwide governance indicators
12.	INFORM	Corruption Perception Index
13.	INFORM	Lack of coping capacity
14.	INFORM	Overall risk
15.	INFORM	Risk trend
16.	INFORM	Food security
17.	INFORM	Projected conflict risk
18.	Responsibility to Protect	Population at risk
19.	International Crisis Group	Crisis Watchlist
20.	Council on Foreign Relations	Global Conflict Tracker: Conflict status
21.	ACAPS	Access
22.	Danish Refugee Council	Projected displacements
23.	Danish Refugee Council	Change in displacement from 2024 to 2025
24.	ND-GAIN	Vulnerability score
25.	Fragile State Index	Index score
26.	Fragile State Index	Factionalized elite index
27.	Institute for Economics and Peace	Global Peace Index
28.	Early Warning Project	Risk score
29.	Early Warning Project	Chance of mass atrocity
30.	Global Organized Crime Index	Criminality
31.	Global Organized Crime Index	Criminal markets
32.	ACLED	Number of incidents of violence against civilians
33.	ACLED	Proportion (incidents/population) of violence against civilians
34.	ACLED	Number of fatalities
35.	ACLED	Proportion (fatalities/incidents) of fatalities in incidents of violence against civilians
36.	ACLED	Number of all incidents
37.	ACLED	Proportion (incidents/population) of all incidents
38.	ACLED	Number of fatalities
39.	ACLED	Proportion of fatalities/incidents
40.	ACLED	Conflict Index results
41.	ACLED	Armed group fragmentation
42.	V-Dem	Equal Rights Protection Index
43.	V-Dem	Political party ban
44.	World Bank	Infant mortality rate
45.	World Bank	Youth bulge
46.	World Bank	Oil dependence
47.	Verisk Maplecroft	Arbitrary arrest and detention
48.	Verisk Maplecroft	Challenges to government authority
49.	Verisk Maplecroft	Civil unrest (historic)

50.	Verisk Maplecroft	Climate hazard and vulnerability 2050
51.	Verisk Maplecroft	Conflict intensity
52.	Verisk Maplecroft	Dependence on fossil fuel exports
53.	Verisk Maplecroft	Drought hazard
54.	Verisk Maplecroft	Exposure to regional conflict
55.	Verisk Maplecroft	Extra-tropical cyclone hazard
56.	Verisk Maplecroft	Flood hazard
57.	Verisk Maplecroft	Forced labor
58.	Verisk Maplecroft	Governance
59.	Verisk Maplecroft	Government effectiveness
60.	Verisk Maplecroft	Interstate tensions
61.	Verisk Maplecroft	Kidnapping
62.	Verisk Maplecroft	Minority rights
63.	Verisk Maplecroft	Natural hazards: Impacts
64.	Verisk Maplecroft	Natural hazards: Population exposure (absolute)
65.	Verisk Maplecroft	Natural hazards: Vulnerability
66.	Verisk Maplecroft	Pandemic susceptibility
67.	Verisk Maplecroft	Political violence
68.	Verisk Maplecroft	Public debt
69.	Verisk Maplecroft	Seismic hazard
70.	Verisk Maplecroft	Severe storm hazard
71.	Verisk Maplecroft	Sexual minorities
72.	Verisk Maplecroft	Terrorism threat
73.	Verisk Maplecroft	Trade sanctions
74.	Verisk Maplecroft	Women's and girls' rights

3. Identification of long-list countries

High-risk countries were initially identified by combining the 74 indicators based on face validity (i.e., the expertise of IRC analysts and statistical correlation with key outcome indicators), followed by a series of robustness tests to explore challenges and evidence of the validity of the model, in the following steps:

1. **Data importing and scaling:** Indicators that were not on a scale of one to 10 were transformed utilizing min-max scaling.
2. **Red flagging:** For each indicator, countries were then sorted from high to low, and the top 25 values were highlighted. A country was not included in the analysis if there were missing data on the country for that indicator (complete case analysis). If the 25th and following values were the same, then all values equal to the 25th value were highlighted. For qualitative sources, countries were highlighted if the source indicated a negative or unchanging trend, or if a country was otherwise identified as being somehow "of concern."
3. **Robustness testing:** This testing involved combining the indicators in various ways, by including or excluding different indicators to create models. Each model (combination of indicators) was tested by counting how many times a country had been highlighted. The count of highlighted cells was then sorted from high to low. This step identified which countries appeared most frequently

on the top 25 for the indicators that were included in each model. In total, 15 models were developed, and the top 25 countries from each of the 15 models were documented. Finally, an iteration count was calculated for the total number of times a country appeared on the 15 models. The 30 countries that appeared most frequently across the 15 model combinations were selected for the long list. This was to prevent over-indexing to one type of indicator, ensuring that countries were selected because they were flagged in various combinations of indicators.

4. **Ranking:** After completing the above steps, a second test was developed and implemented to compare with the robustness test. In this method, each country was ranked for each of the 74 indicators used in descending order. The indicators were then arranged in five pre-selected groups. Each group included at least one indicator for each of 6 dimensions: gender, climate, socioeconomic status, complexity of the crisis, structural fragility and regional vulnerability. Each indicator was then weighted based on its relevance to Watchlist outcomes, as determined by statistical correlation tests and expert opinion. In each of the five groupings, the weighted rankings across indicators were averaged to create an average ranking per group. Those five averages were then combined to give each country a final ranking, creating a long list based on those rankings.

5. **Comparing:** The output of the robustness tests and the ranking method were then compared to finalize the initial long list. The 28 countries that appeared on both lists created the preliminary long list for further qualitative analysis and discussion.

6. **Validating against other sources:** The Watchlist team also compared the preliminary long list with crises the IRC had been monitoring throughout 2024, and the IRC's program teams around the world provided input on countries to be considered. This enabled additional countries to be flagged for inclusion on the long list, particularly those with deterioration in late 2024.

4. Qualitative review of countries

The Watchlist team reviewed the long list of countries to determine, based on the risks facing each country in the upcoming year, which countries should definitely appear on the Watchlist, which countries should be a point of discussion, and which countries should not appear on the Watchlist. This conversation was informed by an understanding of the context, factoring in the history of classifications by the IRC's Emergency Classification System, qualitative insights from the rest of the Watchlist team, and insights and rankings gathered from the IRC's staff and volunteers in over 40 counties. In addition, the Watchlist team and various regional IRC offices collaborated to organize online or in-person "regional roundtables" in East, Central and West Africa, to bring together IRC staff, external partners and other experts in and from the different regions. The insights from these roundtables contributed to qualitative judgments for shortlisting the countries.

Following this review, the Watchlist team selected 20 countries for inclusion on the 2025 Watchlist and determined that the remainder should not appear on this year's Watchlist.

5. Ranking the top 10 countries

The Watchlist team split the countries into two halves: a ranked top 10 and a "second half" of other countries with crises that have less severe risk of deterioration in 2025 but are still significant. The team

compiled the results and used a paired-ranking exercise to divide the list into top and bottom halves, then ranked the top 10, based on several factors:

1. The country's place on the preliminary long list based on the different models developed in step three
2. Qualitative analysis by the Watchlist team to identify the risk of further deterioration in the humanitarian situation in countries on the preliminary short list, drawing on insights from open-source media, think tank and other reporting, as well as ongoing internal IRC analysis
3. Quantitative rankings and qualitative inputs from IRC colleagues, regional focal points and other IRC colleagues familiar with the countries in question, in addition to the regional roundtables organized by the Watchlist team and IRC regional teams
4. The scale and severity of emergencies that occurred in those countries during 2024, as measured by the IRC's Emergency Classification System
5. U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) internally displaced person (IDP), refugee and asylum seeker trend data for the past five years
6. Humanitarian needs data from the Global Humanitarian Overview and country Humanitarian Needs Overviews, via the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
7. Data on food insecurity from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and Cadre Harmonisé
8. Analysis of humanitarian access constraints from ACAPS

The list was presented to and discussed with the IRC's vice president of emergencies, vice president of program delivery, vice president of policy & solutions, and senior vice president of crisis response, recovery and development to confirm the countries that were selected for inclusion and their ranking. The final result was a ranking of 10 countries as follows:

Ranking	Country
1.	Sudan
2.	occupied Palestinian territory
3.	Myanmar
4.	Syria
5.	South Sudan
6.	Lebanon
7.	Burkina Faso
8.	Haiti
9.	Mali
10.	Somalia

The remaining 10 countries (sorted alphabetically) were those that the team determined to not be facing as high a risk of large-scale deterioration in their humanitarian situation as the top 10:

- Afghanistan
- Cameroon
- Central African Republic

- Chad
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Ethiopia
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Ukraine
- Yemen

6. Drafting the Watchlist

The Watchlist team drafted the final report based on the analysis in the preceding steps, as well as data and analysis from the following sources:

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

Next, the Watchlist team drafted the country sections. They then compiled and compared key humanitarian and contextual data about each country, which allowed them to identify a set of themes that applied to the vast majority of Watchlist countries. The themes were identified by referring to both relevant datasets and the IRC's more qualitative understanding of developments in those countries.

For any questions or further information, please contact Crisis.Analysis@rescue.org