

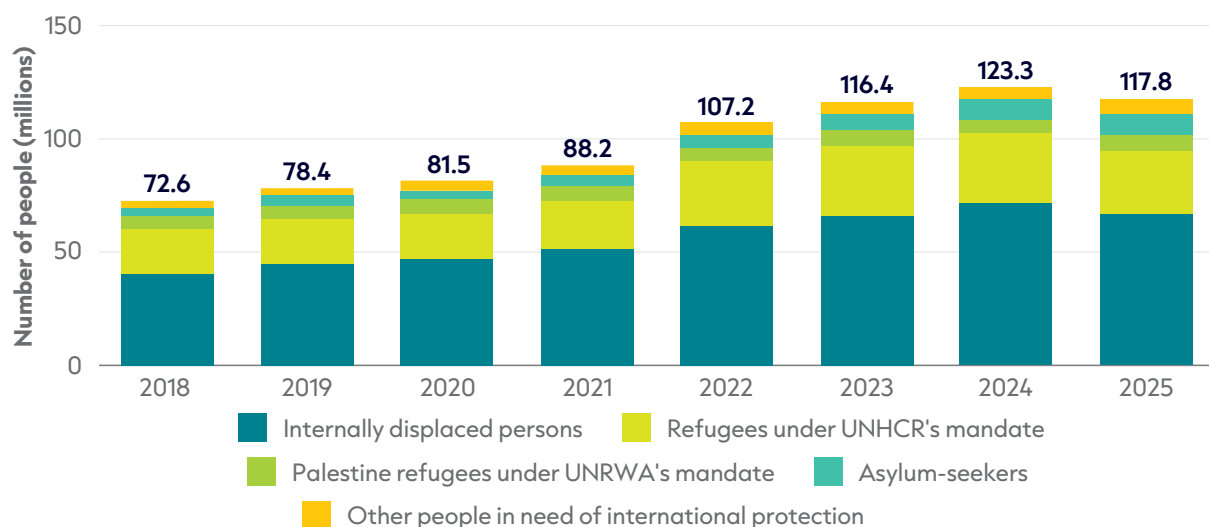
HUMANITARIAN CRISES AND GLOBAL SHIFTS, 2022–2025

At the start of the 2022–25 study period, sustained effort had reduced global suffering to historic lows by many measures: extreme poverty had fallen from 38% of the world's population in 1990 to around 9% by 2019, child mortality had more than halved between 2000 and 2022, and deaths from natural hazards had fallen dramatically over the preceding half-century.¹ Yet across this period, violence outpaced disasters as a driver of internal displacement for the first time, global temperatures rose and catastrophic hunger was reported in Sudan, Gaza and Haiti. At the same time, the humanitarian system faced a structural rupture, including the largest-ever annual contraction in aid funding and the closure of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This section sets out the crises, trends and events that shaped the humanitarian system in this period.

Violence outpaced disasters as a driver of internal displacement for the first time

Displacement

Forced displacement increased over the period. By the end of 2025, 117.8 million people were displaced: a slight decrease from 2024, but still close to record highs.² Of these, 68.7 million were internally displaced by conflict and violence. A further 13.6 million people were living in displacement after disasters. Large displacement movements in 2025 included approximately 10.8 million people in the Philippines (mostly displaced by cyclones and flooding), 10 million in Iran (linked to temporary evacuations from Tehran) and 9.7 million in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (the consequence of M23 violence).³ Disasters triggered 29.9 million internal displacements in 2025 – a drop from the unprecedented 45.8 million displacements in 2024 – and weather-related events accounted for 91% of disaster displacements.⁴ Forty-two countries recorded internal displacements linked to both conflict and disaster triggers.⁵

Figure i: Number of people forcibly displaced, 2018–2025

Source: UNHCR (2026) Global Trends, 11 June. Geneva: UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/global-trends>

Notes: Some Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate in Gaza have also been internally displaced in 2023 (1.2 million), 2024 (1.4 million) and 2025 (1.4 million). In this graph, these internally displaced refugees under UNRWA's mandate are only counted once, under the figure for 'Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate'. UNHCR = United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; UNRWA = United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.



There were also increases in the number of refugees globally. In 2025, 41.6 million people were refugees, 65% of whom were hosted in neighbouring countries.⁶ For refugees, durable solutions – including voluntary repatriation, local integration and third-country resettlement – all declined over the period. That year, 70% of refugees were in protracted situations.⁷ Host countries increasingly opposed local integration, and resettlement opportunities had 'long failed to meet the needs of even a tiny percentage of the world's displaced'.⁸ There was also a sharp rise in forced returns; 2.9 million Afghans returned to Afghanistan in 2025 alone, driven by policy changes, tightening documentation requirements, misinformation, disinformation and deteriorating protection conditions.⁹

The 2025 Global Peace Index found that the world became less peaceful for the sixth consecutive year

Conflict

The number of state-based conflicts rose to 65 in 2025 – a new record. Interstate conflicts doubled for the second year running, from 2 in 2023 to 8 in 2025.¹⁰ The 2025 Global Peace Index found that the world became less peaceful for the sixth consecutive year.¹¹ The violent intensity of conflict also grew, with the number of conflict events nearly doubling between 2020 and 2024: from 104,371 to nearly



200,000.¹² In 2024, analysts estimated that, globally, one in seven people were affected by conflict.¹³

Between 2022 and 2025, four conflicts dominated the humanitarian landscape. The period began with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which, by mid-2025, had displaced 9.4 million people, caused over 49,400 verified civilian casualties and left 12.7 million people in need.¹⁴ Beyond its scale, the crisis reshaped the system itself, distorting donor funding patterns and generating an unprecedented European refugee response that bypassed the usual humanitarian architecture.¹⁵ Hamas' attack on 7 October 2023 was followed by over two years of conflict in Gaza that killed more than 71,000 Palestinians,¹⁶ and Israel's obstruction of access led to intense debates about humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law. Sudan became the world's largest displacement crisis, uprooting some 14 million people¹⁷ and leaving more than half the population in need in 2025.¹⁸ In Myanmar, the post-2021 conflict continued alongside Cyclone Mocha and the 2025 Sagaing earthquake and amid prolonged internet shutdowns that obstructed assessment and response.¹⁹

Beyond these conflicts, the period saw a growing number of protracted crises lasting for five or more years. The DRC saw renewed escalation in its eastern provinces.²⁰ Crises in Ethiopia, Somalia, Haiti, Lebanon, Syria and the Sahel layered conflict, displacement and climate shocks. By 2025, around 80% of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity lived in countries whose food crises had persisted for more than a decade.

Climate and geological disaster

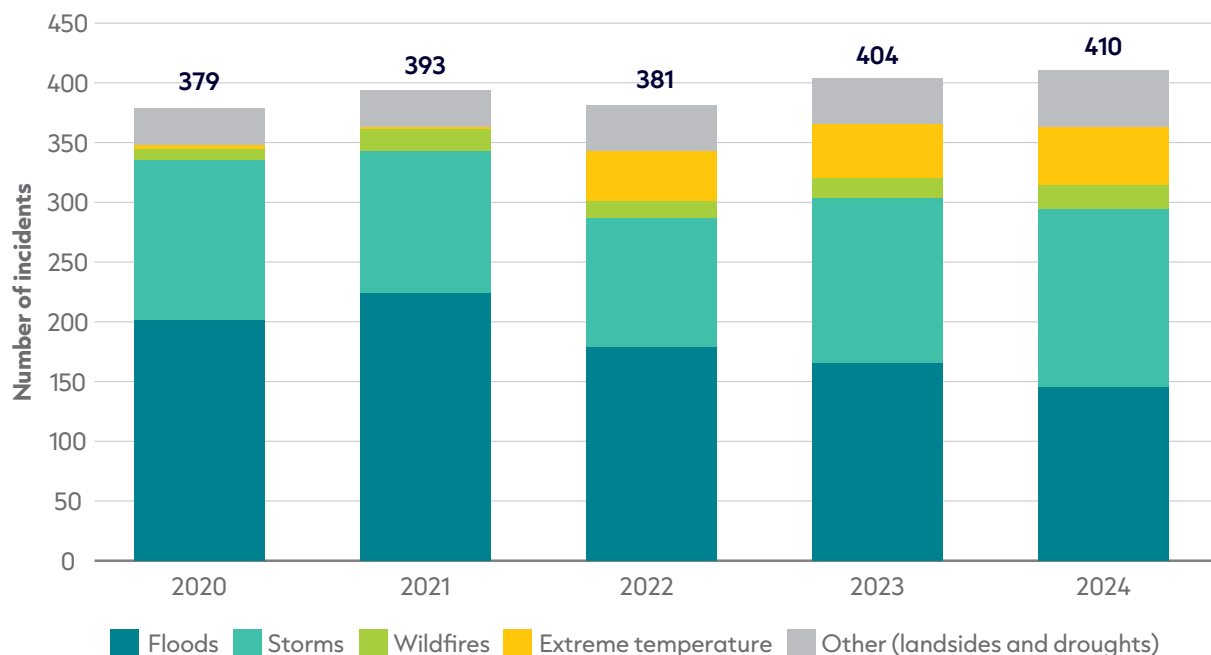


In 2025, the total cost of damages caused by natural and climate hazards was calculated at US\$224 billion



The climate crisis continued to accelerate: 2023, 2024 and 2025 were the three warmest years on the 146-year instrumental record.²¹ In 2024, the annual global average temperature exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for the first time,²² and the temperature increase from 2022 to 2024 was the largest two-year increase observed since the 1870s.²³ While a single year above 1.5°C does not constitute a formal breach of the Paris Agreement target (which is assessed over multidecadal averages),²⁴ greenhouse gas concentrations hit record levels.

Extreme heat was among the most common climate hazards faced by forcibly displaced people, affecting 86% of the 64 million people studied in one Red Cross/Red Crescent paper.²⁵ Between 2022 and 2025, the world experienced a succession of climate-driven and geophysical disasters. Pakistan's catastrophic

Figure ii: Global frequency of climate-related disasters, 2020–2024

Source: EM-DAT, CRED / UCLouvain, Brussels, Belgium <https://www.emdat.be>

Notes: Data version 7th August 2026



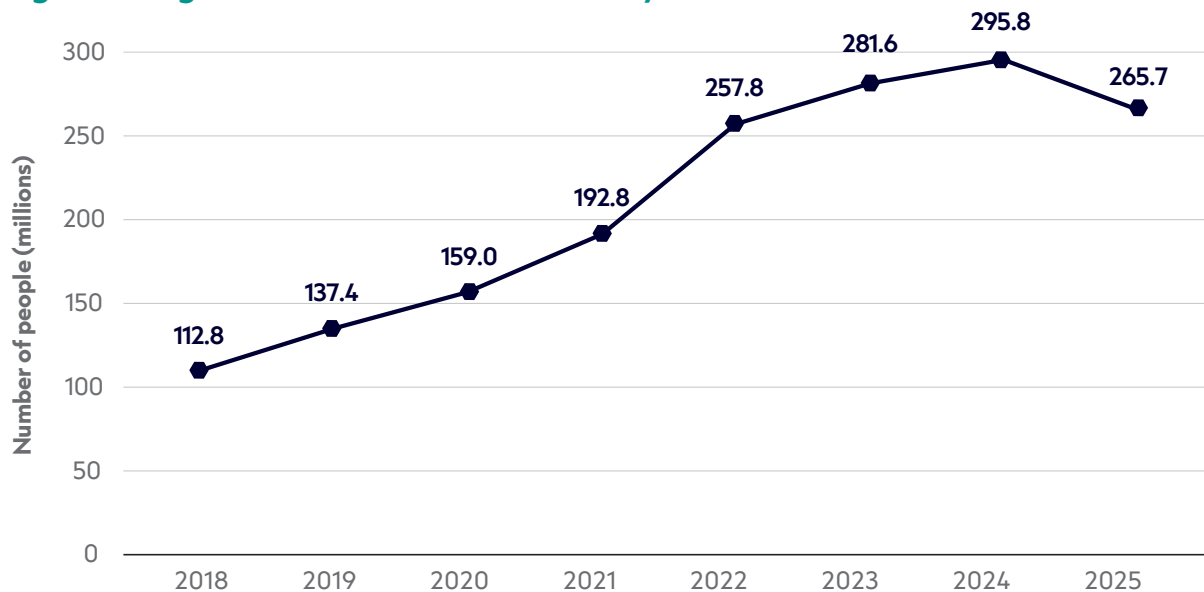
monsoon floods of 2022 killed 1,739 people and displaced 7.9 million;²⁶ the country suffered severe flooding again in 2025, when monsoon rains killed around 1,000 people and at least 1.9 million were evacuated.²⁷ In 2024, Brazil recorded its worst flooding in 80 years, which affected nearly every municipality in Rio Grande do Sul and displaced more than 600,000 people.²⁸ The following January, wildfires in Los Angeles destroyed over 16,000 structures, forced more than 200,000 evacuations and caused US\$53 billion in damage, making it the costliest wildfire event in US history.²⁹ Globally, 2024 was the worst year on record for forest fires with Brazil, Bolivia, Canada and Russia all experiencing the worst fires since satellite-based monitoring began in 2001.³⁰

There were also several large geophysical events in the period. In February 2023, the 7.8-magnitude Türkiye–Syria earthquake killed over 56,000 people and destroyed thousands of buildings in a region already destabilised by conflict.³¹ In March 2025, Myanmar’s 7.7-magnitude earthquake killed at least 3,800 people and injured 5,100 more.³² In 2025, the total cost of damages caused by natural and climate hazards was calculated at US\$224 billion, of which less than half was insured.³³



Food security crises

Figure iii: High levels of acute food insecurity 2018–2025



Source: FAO et al. (2026) 2026 Global Report on Food Crises. Rome: FAO, WFP and GNAFC. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd9424en>

Notes: The chart shows the number of people facing high level of acute food insecurity in countries/territories with food crises and data meeting Global Report on Food Crises technical requirements between 2018 and 2025.



Acute food insecurity reached record levels in 2024 and remained at near-record levels in 2025.³⁴ In 2025, famine was confirmed simultaneously in two of the most politically complex and access-constrained contexts in the world – Sudan and Gaza.³⁵ In Sudan, over 25 million people faced crisis level acute food insecurity (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Phase 3 or above) in 2024, and 21.2 million in 2025. At its peak, Gaza's entire population of 2.2 million people was in need³⁶ and facing crisis level acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) – the highest share ever classified for a given area³⁷ – while 90% faced emergency level acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 4 or above).³⁸ The number of people facing catastrophe conditions (IPC Phase 5) globally reached a 2024 peak of 1.9 million.³⁹



In 2025, famine was confirmed simultaneously in two of the most politically complex and access-constrained contexts in the world – Sudan and Gaza



Technology, mistrust and shrinking space

The technology landscape has shifted significantly since the last *The State of the Humanitarian System* (SOHS), changing the context in which humanitarian operate. Drone attacks in conflict settings increased by 4,000% between 2020 and



2024, with drones used across a broader range of conflicts than ever before by both state and – increasingly – non-state armed groups⁴⁰ to harm civilians⁴¹ and civilian infrastructure, inflicting an enduring psychological toll.⁴² Militaries adopted artificial intelligence (AI), including in weapon systems, cyber and information operations, and military decision-support systems, raising fundamental questions about civilian harm and accountability under international law.⁴³



Online, harmful information shaped how people affected by crises understood those crises, who they trusted and whether they accessed assistance



Online, harmful information shaped how people affected by crises understood those crises, who they trusted and whether they accessed assistance.⁴⁴ Trust in institutions eroded sharply: the Edelman Trust Barometer 2025 found that nearly 70% of global respondents worried about being purposefully misled by authoritative sources.⁴⁵ For the third consecutive year, conflict was the main driver of internet shutdowns, 125 of which were recorded in 14 countries. Those responsible routinely cut connectivity to hide war crimes and atrocities and to intimidate civilian populations.⁴⁶ Humanitarian

organisations faced physical and reputational risks from misinformation and disinformation – and a growing workload and cost to manage this.⁴⁷

International humanitarian law violations and attacks on aid and health workers reached record levels (see [Chapter 3.1](#)). In 2024, violence against healthcare workers and obstruction of healthcare reached its highest recorded level.⁴⁸ The United Nations (UN) reported that 2024 was the deadliest year on record for aid workers,⁴⁹ while the Lancet Commission characterised deliberate attacks on civilians, health facilities and humanitarian access as ‘embedded features of contemporary conflict’ rather than occasional transgressions.⁵⁰



2024 was the deadliest year on record for aid workers



MULTILATERALISM

The 2024 Multilateralism Index found that participation in multilateral institutions had largely held steady or increased, while the performance of the multilateral system in addressing global challenges declined.⁵¹ Since then, US policy shifts have reduced both assessed contributions to the UN system and the predictability of financing. Deadlocks in the UN Security Council also defined the geopolitical landscape in this period: in 2024, seven draft resolutions failed due to a veto – the highest number since 1986 – with eight vetoes cast in total (four by Russia, three by the US, one by China).⁵²



The Pact for the Future, adopted at the UN Summit of the Future in September 2024 and described as the most wide-ranging international agreement in decades, was designed to make the international system more effective, inclusive and fit for 21st-century challenges. It included a Global Digital Compact, a Declaration on Future Generations and a commitment to Security Council reform – including redressing Africa’s historical underrepresentation. The Pact’s implementation prospects were complicated by the US withdrawing from the negotiations.⁵³



Between 2024 and 2026, the UN system’s overall financial resources were projected to shrink by approximately US\$16 billion – or nearly 25%



The UN80 Initiativeⁱ was the UN’s system-wide reform effort. Launched by Secretary-General António Guterres in March 2025 (when the UN marked its 80th anniversary), it aims to support the UN to become more agile amid tightening resources. Between 2024 and 2026, the UN system’s overall financial resources were projected to shrink by approximately US\$16 billion – or nearly 25%.⁵⁴ An internal memo from the UN80 Initiative task force in 2025 listed more than 50 suggestions on mergers and reforms, including streamlining the

operational responsibilities of the World Food Programme (WFP), the UNHCR, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO).⁵⁵ The action plan published in November 2025 set out 87 actions, stretching from peace operations and humanitarian response to technology, shared services and institutional mergers.⁵⁶

HUMANITARIANISM

The humanitarian system witnessed a series of reform agendas during this period. In June 2023, in recognition of evolving humanitarian needs, signatories endorsed Grand Bargain 3.0 for 2023–26, which focused on continued support of localisation, participation of communities affected by crisis and quality funding.⁵⁷ It also added several new themes to catalyse sector-wide transformation through anticipatory action and innovative financing.⁵⁸ As part of the 2023 update, the original workstreams were closed down in favour of a smaller structure. Several other initiatives designed to promote system change also gained prominence in the period, including OCHA’s Flagship Initiative, the Charter for Change and the Pledge for Change.

ⁱ UN80 was launched in rapid succession after the Humanitarian Reset. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is leading both for the humanitarian sector, which means substantial overlap in substance and leadership, though the two exercises are formally distinct.



Steep funding declines across the humanitarian and development systems in 2025 forced changes in the humanitarian architecture. The Humanitarian Reset (2025) was the reform framework active at the close of this period. Launched by OCHA Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher in March 2025 (and building on a 2024 efficiency review by Jan Egeland and Joyce Msuya),⁵⁹ it aimed to produce a lighter, faster, less bureaucratic system, including by closing Humanitarian Advisory Teams, reducing senior OCHA positions, simplifying the cluster system and devolving authority to Humanitarian Coordinators.⁶⁰ The main humanitarian proposal in the UN80 reform process that ran in parallel was a New Humanitarian Compact: a framework for structural change covering coordination, supply chains, data and role clarification across agencies.⁶¹

This 2026 *SOHS* report examines how the humanitarian system navigated these crises, operating environments and agendas, and what they meant for its performance.



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