



OCHA

No Return to Normal: The Growing Humanitarian Climate Emergency

KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

① **The climate crisis is a humanitarian crisis NOW and not a problem of the future.** It is unfolding NOW on humanitarian front lines around the world. Many of its impacts are irreversible and it threatens to grow in unprecedented proportions. Climate change is not just another global challenge: it is an existential crisis for tens of millions of people, endangering their lives and livelihoods and drastically increasing needs, compound risks and vulnerabilities. As humanitarian workers, we see these impacts daily, and not only in fragile contexts.

- The first 20 years of this century witnessed nearly 7,000 disasters, a rise of **83 per cent** from the previous two decades. Over the same period, flood events increased by **134 per cent**, extreme-temperature events by **232 per cent**.ⁱ
- Economic losses from climate-related disasters skyrocketed in tandem with these more frequent and intense disasters, increasing by **82 per cent** over the same period.ⁱⁱ

② **In a world that is 1.1-1.2°C warmer, humanitarian workers already struggle to keep pace with climate-related disasters and the dramatic rise in humanitarian needs.** A 1.5°C temperature increase would test the current humanitarian system to its limits. An increase of 2.4-2.7°C, our current trajectory, would lead to a runaway global humanitarian crisis that could provoke the system's collapse.

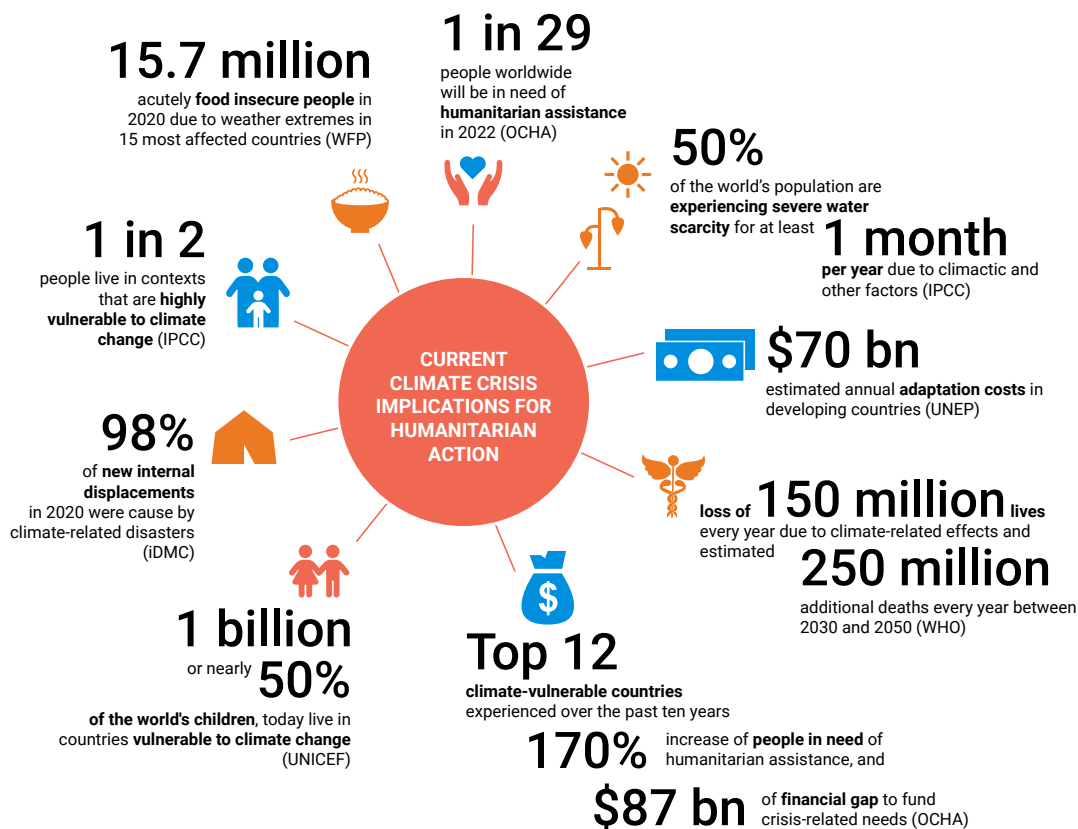


They are pledging for the future, yet we are experiencing the crisis right now. We want them to act now. We want solutions, not promises. We want implementations, not pledges, [...] Their negotiations are running on how not to top 1.5 [degrees Celsius], but 1.2 is already hell to us.

Patience Nabukalu,
youth activist from
Uganda

Sayma Khatun and Sumaiya Khatun standing on the doorstep of their submerged house.

Figure 1: Humanitarian Impacts Now at 1.1-1.2°C of Global Warming



Sources: OCHA's *Financial Tracking Service*, OCHA's *Global Humanitarian Overview 2022*, ND-GAIN's *Country Index*, IDMC's *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021*, FSIN's *Global Report on Food Crises 2021*, WHO's *Climate Change and Health Dashboard*, UNICEF's *Children's Climate Risk Index*, UNEP's *Adaptation Gap Report 2020*, IPCC's *Sixth Assessment Report on Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*

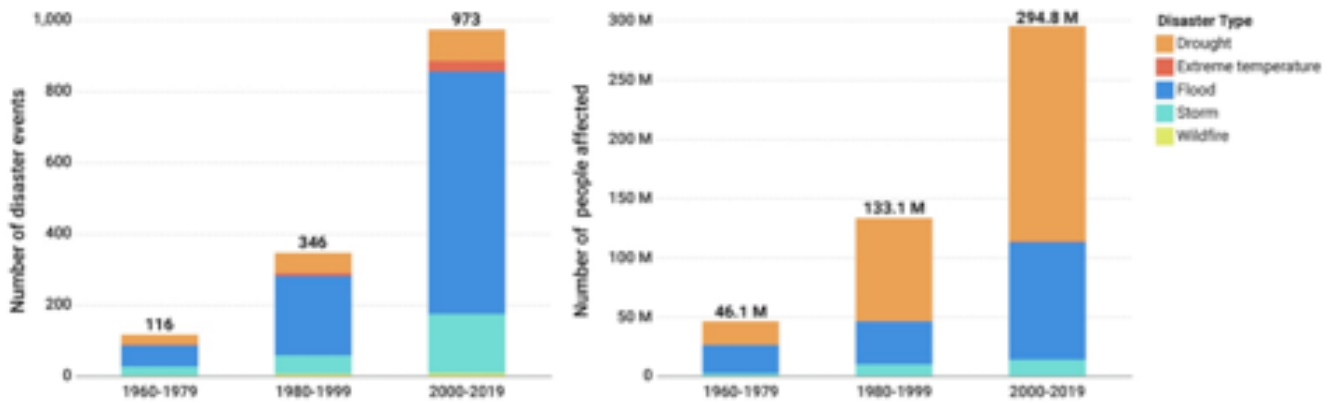
- **Of the top 15 countries most vulnerable and least ready to adapt to the climate change,¹ 12 had a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)² in 2021 for an emergency requiring international assistance.ⁱⁱⁱ Many are also among those countries most affected by climate-related disasters.^{iv} Most of these humanitarian crises are protracted.** Haiti, Mali, Niger and Yemen have had an HRP for at least **10 consecutive years**; Afghanistan, the Central African Republic and Chad for **15 years or more**; and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Sudan for at least **20 years**.^v
- The number of climate-related disasters and affected people in HRP contexts in the 2000-2019 period increased by more than **100 per cent** compared to the previous two decades and by more than **600 per cent** over the two decades prior to that, with floods and droughts as two of the most devastating climate-related disasters.^{vi}
- Compound needs in such contexts have more than **tripled** since 2010, while the funding gap has risen nearly **fivefold**.^{vii}
- **Only a small percentage of climate and adaptation finance is provided to the most vulnerable and fragile countries.** According to the OECD, of the total adaptation climate

¹ According to the *Notre-Dame Global Adaptation Initiative*. The ND-GAIN measure a country's vulnerability to climate change in combination with its readiness to improve resilience.

² A Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) is prepared for a protracted or sudden-onset emergency that requires international humanitarian assistance.

³ Data analyzes climate-related adaptation finance from bilateral, multilateral, and private philanthropic sources. Analysis excludes oPt as data is not available

Figure 2: Number of Climate-related Disasters and People Affected in 2021 HRP Countries Over Time



Sources: CRED’s EM-DAT, the International Disasters Database and OCHA’s Financial Tracking Service

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 We must go into emergency mode against the climate crisis. The battle to keep the 1.5-degree goal alive will be won or lost in this decade. And we are far off-track. [...] This year, we need an avalanche of action. [...] And we need a radical boost for adaptation.
 Antonio Guterres, Priorities for 2022



Pastoralists living in the Ewaso Ngiro river basin in central Kenya are digging for water and fear they will have to begin large-scale cattle destocking if the next rains are poor. With much of the river system totally dried up in Isiolo county for months, there is no option but to sink ‘shallow wells’ into the river bed and scoop out the filthy, mud-coloured groundwater with domestic utensils, then lug it on donkey carts to villages. © Denis Onyodi/KRCS

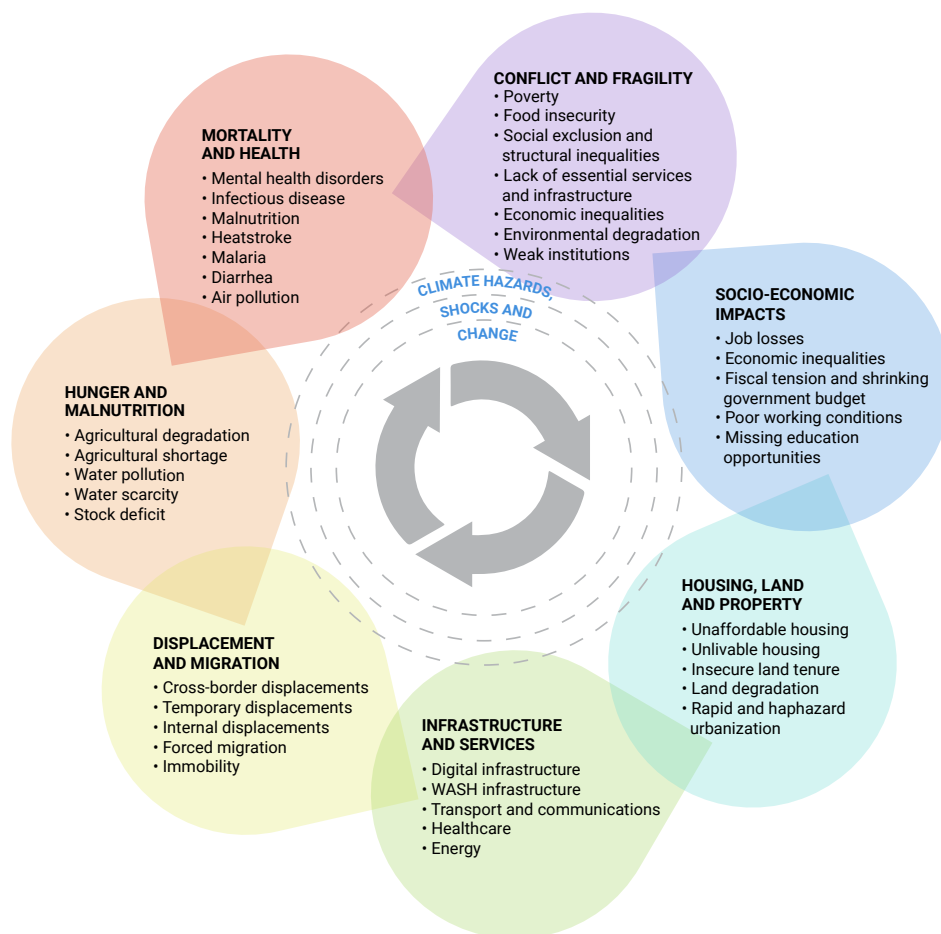
finance³ allocated in 2019, only some 26 per cent went to Least Developed Countries (LDCs), 3 per cent to Small Island Developing States (SIDS), 18 per cent to countries with an HRP, and less than 20 per cent to CERF-funded countries with a climate-related emergency.⁴ viii Humanitarian finance can reach the most climate-vulnerable countries and people. For example, 25 per cent of total CERF allocations since 2006 were provided in response to climate-related emergencies (droughts, storms, floods, heat/cold waves).

3 **The climate crisis is a threat multiplier, exacerbating and compounding vulnerabilities in places where humanitarian actors are already overstretched. Climate-related disasters interact with other drivers of humanitarian need to impact all areas of life: food security, health and**

nutrition, essential services, shelter, livelihoods and political stability. Impacts are greatest where recurring or overlapping disasters make it impossible for communities to recover between shocks. Left unabated, the climate crisis will lead to humanitarian needs of unprecedented proportions.

- In 2020, among the 15 countries most vulnerable and least ready to adapt to climate change, 12 had an **HRP**, 12 received funding from the **Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)**,⁵ all were in a state of conflict or high institutional or social fragility, and 12 had concurrent **public health emergencies** due to COVID-19. In 8 of these countries, at least 15 per cent of surveyed populations experienced acute **food insecurity** or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above). Fourteen

Figure 3: The Compound Risks of the Climate Crisis for the Most Vulnerable Communities

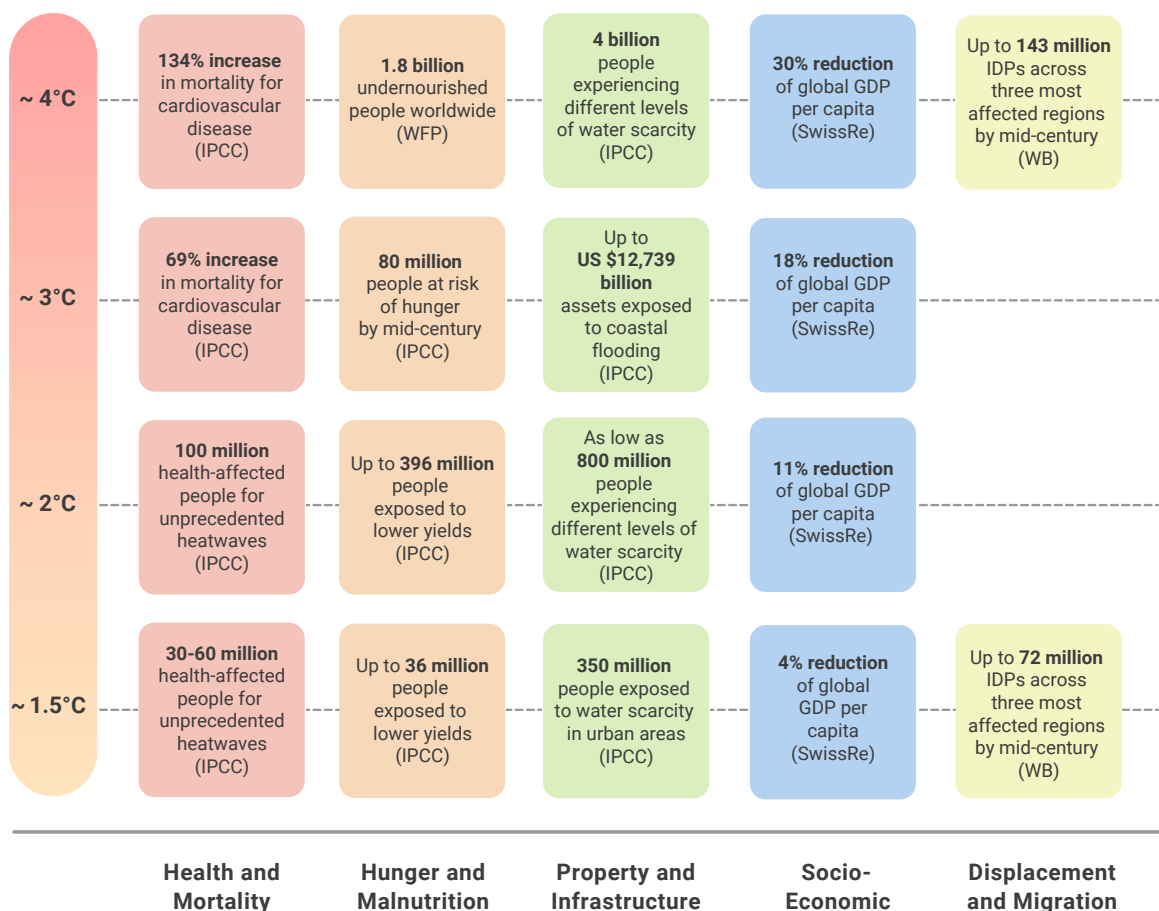


⁴ Climate-related emergencies include droughts, storms, floods, and heatwaves.

⁵ The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) was created in 2006 to enable timely and effective humanitarian assistance when new crises emerge.

- countries had moderate to high risk of **debt distress** or were already in debt distress.^{ix}
- **Disaster-related displacement risk has quadrupled** since the 1970s. In 2020, disasters triggered more than three quarters (30.7 million) of **new recorded internal displacements**, 98 per cent of which were climate related. Climate-related disasters caused an average of 23.1 million displacements every year from 2010 to 2019.^x Additionally, 95 per cent of new **conflict** displacements in 2020 took place in countries vulnerable or highly vulnerable to the climate crisis.^{xi}
 - Within this decade, climate change could cause some **250,000 additional deaths** annually from childhood undernutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat exposure in elderly people.^{xii}
 - Over 139 million people have been affected by both **COVID-19** and climate-related disasters since the start of the pandemic, and more than 650 million people have been exposed to **extreme heat**.^{xiii}
 - Climate-related disasters were the primary driver of **acute food insecurity** for 15.7 million people in 15 countries in 2020.^{xiv} A **2°C** rise in global warming would see a staggering **189 million** additional people in food insecurity. In a 4°C rise scenario, that number would reach **1.8 billion**.^{xv}
 - Nearly **half of the world’s children** — roughly 1 billion — live in 33 countries classified as “extremely high risk” due to climate change impacts.

Figure 4: Humanitarian Implications at Different Climate Futures by the End of the Century



Sources: IPCC’s *Global warming of 1.5°C*, World Bank’s *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration*, Swiss Re, ILO’s *Working on a Warmer Planet*, WFP’s *What a 2°C and 4°C warmer world could mean for global food insecurity*, IPCC’s *Sixth Assessment Report on Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*

4 **Climate change is creating new hot spots and conventional understanding of fragility is no longer valid, increasing demand for humanitarian assistance worldwide.** Risk projections show that certain regions are more likely to experience more severe and frequent climate hazards. The proliferation of non-traditional appeals, Flash Appeals,⁶ Regional Response Plans⁷ and climate-related CERF allocations already show ever more assistance arriving outside of traditional humanitarian contexts with HRPs. More frequent and intense climate-related disasters and slow-onset stresses undermine the capacity of systems to cope with change and put more countries and communities at heightened risk.

- Approximately **80 per cent** of countries receiving **CERF funding for climate emergencies** in 2020 **did not have an HRP**.^{xvi}
- INFORM risk projections show that countries in East Asia are most at risk of future tropical cyclones, while countries in Latin America and South-East Asia are most at risk of extreme floods. However, nearly all regions of the world will be at risk of severe droughts by 2050, with some **25 per cent** of all countries at **extreme risk**.^{xvii}

Figure 5: INFORM Risk Index 2020-2050 Projection of Droughts

2020 droughts



2050 drought projections



Source: INFORM, Risk Index 2020-2050 (forthcoming)

⁶ Flash Appeals (FAs) are a recognized tool used to rapidly raise funds to support urgent humanitarian and life-saving priorities, ensure that the most critical needs are prioritized, and provide support to a Government's response to an emergency.

⁷ Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plans (RRPs) and appeals are a key part of the humanitarian programme cycle (HPC) used by humanitarian country teams to plan and coordinate a response and to communicate the scope of response operations.

5 **A bold shift in our mindsets and approaches is needed if we are to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe of global scale.** A return to normal is no longer realistic. Climate change is real, and many of its impacts are irreversible. Nature's cycles have changed; disaster cycles are too frequent for the most vulnerable to recover; chronic vulnerability and never-ending crisis management are on the rise. **We must**

be more transformational in our ambitions, more integrated in our thinking and actions, more anticipatory, and more lasting and inclusive in our interactions with local governments and communities.

Five key transformational shifts in our thinking and actions are needed:



- Humanitarian programmes must contribute to boosting the resilience and adaptive capacities of vulnerable communities, ensuring that climate change adaptation funds reach them.
- As many of the effects of the climate crisis are irreversible, urgent action is needed to reach the US\$100 billion target in climate financing for developing countries. Multilateral and bilateral flows need to be scaled up dramatically, with priority to climate-vulnerable, fragile and conflict-affected countries and communities. Funds need to be targeted according to need, and humanitarian actors are critical in identifying those needs.
- Above all, humanitarian action has a critical responsibility to look beyond emergency response to contribute to the resilience and adaptation of those communities most devastated by the climate crisis and at risk of being left behind. More adaptation financing for humanitarian action in support of strengthening community resilience, particularly in fragile contexts, is needed.

Bol, Chad: Workers of the Societe du developpement du Lac (SODELAC) come to the shore of the lake every morning to measure the water level. The lake has significantly shrunk in the last 40 years to only one tenth of its size.
© OCHA/Ivo Brandau



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Climate change is contributing to humanitarian crises where climate hazards interact with high vulnerability.

Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability, Working Group II Contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report

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ENDNOTES

- ⁱ CRED, UNDRR, *Human Cost of Disasters (2000-2019)* Available at: <https://www.undrr.org/media/48008/download>
- ⁱⁱ CRED, UNDRR, *Human Cost of Disasters (2000-2019)* Available at: <https://www.undrr.org/media/48008/download>
- ⁱⁱⁱ According to data from the OCHA Financial Tracking System Humanitarian Response Plans 2021. Available at: <https://fts.unocha.org/>
- ^{iv} According to data from the GermanWatch Global Climate Risk Index 2021. Available at: <https://www.germanwatch.org/en/19777>
- ^v According to data from the OCHA Financial Tracking System Humanitarian Response Plans 2001-2021. Available at: <https://fts.unocha.org/>
- ^{vi} See CRED's EM-DAT, the International Disasters Database and OCHA's [Financial Tracking Service](#).
- ^{vii} See OCHA's [Financial Tracking Service](#) and ND-GAIN's [Country Index](#).
- ^{viii} According to data from the OECD DAC External Development Finance Statistics. Data analyzes climate-related adaptation finance from bilateral, multilateral, and private philanthropic sources. Analysis excludes oPt as data is not available. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/climate-change.htm>. And: https://public.tableau.com/views/Climate-RelatedDevelopmentFinanceRecipient2019/CRDFRP?%3Alanguage=en-US&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link&%3AshowVizHome=no#1
- ^{ix} See OCHA's [Financial Tracking Service](#), ND-GAIN's [Country Index](#), OCHA's [Central Emergency Response Fund](#), FSIN's [Global Report on Food Crises 2021](#), WHO's [Health Emergency Dashboard](#), World Bank's [List of Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations](#), and IMF's [List of LICs Debt Distress Levels](#).
- ^x IDMC, *GRID 2021: Internal Displacement in a Changing Climate*. Available at: https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/grid2021_idmc.pdf
- ^{xi} UNHCR, *Global Trends in Forced Displacement*. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/>
- ^{xii} World Health Organization, *Climate Change and Health*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>
- ^{xiii} IFRC, *The Compound Impact of Extreme Weather Events and COVID-19*. Available at: https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/RCCC%20IFRC%20Climate%20disasters%20COVID-20210910_V2.pdf
- ^{xiv} Food Security Information Network, *Global Report on Food Crises 2021*. Available at: <https://www.wfp.org/publications/global-report-food-crises-2021>
- ^{xv} World Food Programme. *What a 2 Degree and 4 Degree Warmer World Could Mean for Global Food Insecurity*. Available at: <https://www.wfp.org/publications/2017-2-and-4-degrees-infographic>
- ^{xvi} According to data from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund and [OCHA's Financial Tracking Service 2020](#).
- ^{xvii} According to the INFORM Risk Index 2020-2050. *Forthcoming*