

GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN REVIEW AND HORN OF AFRICA OUTLOOK

Crisis Convergence, Systemic Risk, And The
Imperative For Integrated Humanitarian-
Development-Peace Action

1. Global Humanitarian Context: Escalating Needs Amid Systemic Fragmentation

As of the end of Q1 2026, the global humanitarian system is operating under unprecedented strain, driven by the convergence of multiple large-scale and protracted crises. Escalating geopolitical tensions involving Iran and the wider Middle East, alongside the ongoing war in Ukraine and the deepening humanitarian catastrophe in Sudan, now widely recognized as the largest crisis globally, are collectively reshaping both the scale and nature of humanitarian need. Together, these dynamics are reinforcing a broader pattern of protracted conflict, geopolitical fragmentation, and weakening multilateral response systems.

Current estimates indicate that over 239 million people worldwide require humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2026), reflecting both the expansion of crisis contexts and their increasing duration. Conflict remains the primary driver of displacement and food insecurity, but it is increasingly compounded by climate variability, macroeconomic shocks, and declining humanitarian financing (World Bank, 2026; IRC, 2026). This convergence is widening the gap between needs and response capacity, forcing humanitarian actors to prioritize immediate life-saving interventions while scaling back broader recovery and resilience programming. Increasingly, these crises are interconnected through global food systems, energy markets, and migration dynamics, giving rise to a systemic humanitarian risk environment in which shocks are interdependent and compounding.

2. Regional Overview: The Horn of Africa as a High-Intensity Crisis System

Within this global context, the Horn of Africa and the wider Great Lakes region remain among the most structurally stressed humanitarian systems worldwide. By the close of Q1 2026, more than 70 million people across the region require urgent humanitarian assistance (European Commission, 2026), driven by the cumulative effects of conflict, climate stress, displacement, and economic fragility.

The defining feature of the current context is the simultaneity of shocks. Unlike in previous periods, when crises unfolded sequentially, the region is now experiencing overlapping drought and flood risks alongside localized conflict dynamics and constrained public and humanitarian financing. Seasonal forecasts for March–May 2026 indicate a high probability of above-average rainfall across large parts of the Greater Horn, including Ethiopia, South Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, and parts of Kenya and Burundi, while also projecting above-average temperatures (ICPAC, 2026). This dual exposure creates a non-linear escalation of vulnerability, in which shocks compound rather than resolve, and recovery windows are increasingly limited.

3. Country-Level Analysis: Intensifying and Context-Specific Crisis Dynamics

3.1 Ethiopia: Multi-Dimensional Crisis with Protracted Displacement

Ethiopia continues to face one of the most complex humanitarian crises globally, with over 22 million people requiring assistance and more than 5 million internally displaced persons (OCHA, 2026). The crisis is shaped by the interaction of localized conflict, prolonged

drought conditions, disease outbreaks, and macroeconomic pressures. In regions such as Afar, Somali, Tigray, and Oromia, humanitarian needs are embedded within weakened service delivery systems and disrupted livelihoods. The persistence of displacement and limited reintegration pathways highlights the need to move beyond short-term humanitarian response toward integrated approaches that combine relief with livelihood recovery, service restoration, and institutional strengthening.

3.2 Kenya: Dual Crisis of Drought Persistence and Flood Emergence

Kenya's humanitarian profile reflects a dual crisis dynamic. In northern ASAL counties, including Turkana, Marsabit, Wajir, and Mandera, prolonged drought has resulted in severe food insecurity, livestock losses, and water scarcity (WFP; FEWS NET, 2026). The erosion of pastoral livelihoods has become structural, as recovery cycles are increasingly unable to keep pace with repeated shocks.



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At the same time, seasonal rainfall has triggered flooding in other parts of the country, resulting in displacement, infrastructure damage, and increased public health risks. This divergence underscores the need for geographically differentiated programming that integrates humanitarian response with long-term investments in climate resilience, water systems, and livelihood diversification.

3.3 South Sudan: Persistent Fragility and Escalating Humanitarian Needs

South Sudan remains one of the most fragile humanitarian contexts globally, with over 10 million

people in need of assistance (OCHA, 2026). The crisis is driven by localized conflict, large-scale displacement, and recurrent flooding, compounded by weak governance structures and limited-service delivery capacity. In states such as Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Unity, repeated displacement and food insecurity continue to undermine stability, while flooding disrupts agricultural production and humanitarian operations. These dynamics reinforce the need for integrated humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding approaches that address both immediate needs and structural drivers of fragility.



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3.4 Somalia: Severe Food Insecurity Amid Funding Constraints

Somalia continues to face a severe humanitarian crisis, with millions experiencing acute food insecurity and high levels of malnutrition (OCHA, 2026). The crisis is driven by drought, conflict, and economic vulnerability, and is increasingly exacerbated by declining humanitarian funding. Regions such as Bay, Bakool, and Lower Shabelle remain critically affected, while displacement continues to strain urban areas. The sensitivity of Somalia’s humanitarian system to external financing underscores the need for more predictable and sustained funding models, alongside investments in resilience and institutional capacity.



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3.5 Djibouti: Strategic Humanitarian and Migration Hub Under Strain

Djibouti faces humanitarian challenges linked to drought, food insecurity, and migrant protection, particularly along key transit routes (UNHCR; IOM, 2026). While smaller in scale, its strategic role as a regional logistics and migration hub amplifies the impact of humanitarian gaps. Emerging risks, including potential disruptions in assistance pipelines, carry broader regional implications for migration management and humanitarian operations.

3.6 Democratic Republic of the Congo: Escalating Conflict and Severe Funding Gaps

The Democratic Republic of the Congo remains one of the largest humanitarian crises globally, with approximately 15 million people requiring assistance (OCHA, 2026). Escalating conflict in eastern provinces continues to drive displacement, restrict humanitarian access, and exacerbate food insecurity.



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Funding shortfalls have forced humanitarian actors to prioritize limited resources, leaving significant unmet needs and underscoring the need for sustained international engagement.

3.7 Burundi: Increasing Pressure from Regional Displacement



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Burundi is increasingly affected by refugee inflows linked to instability in eastern DRC, placing pressure on health systems, social services, and local economies (UNICEF; UNHCR, 2026). While not a primary crisis epicenter, its exposure to regional displacement

dynamics highlights the interconnected nature of humanitarian challenges across the Horn and Great Lakes regions.

4. Response Landscape: Emerging Shifts and Persistent Gaps

The humanitarian and development response landscape is evolving, with notable improvements in climate forecasting and early warning systems that enable anticipatory action (ICPAC, 2026). However, financing mechanisms remain insufficiently aligned to support early intervention at scale. Multilateral institutions, including the World Bank and regional development banks, are increasingly prioritizing investments in resilience, particularly in water systems, health infrastructure, and climate adaptation (World Bank, 2026). At the same time, there is growing emphasis on regional and cross-border programming frameworks, reflecting the transnational nature of contemporary crises. Despite these advances, institutional fragmentation and funding constraints continue to limit the effectiveness and scale of response efforts.

5. Strategic Outlook: From Humanitarian Response to Systems Transformation

The evidence from Q1 2026 points to a clear conclusion: the crisis in the Horn of Africa is fundamentally systemic rather than sectoral. Fragmented interventions are no longer sufficient to address the scale and complexity of challenges facing the region. There is an urgent need for integrated approaches that align humanitarian assistance with climate adaptation, sustainable livelihoods, water and natural resource management, institutional strengthening, and peacebuilding. Without such integration, the region risks remaining trapped in cycles of recurrent crisis and incomplete recovery, with each successive shock further eroding resilience and development gains.

6. Call to Action: Reframing International Engagement

The current moment represents a critical inflection point for international development partners. The prevailing model of fragmented, project-based interventions is increasingly misaligned with the systemic nature of risks facing the Horn of Africa. There is an urgent need to transition toward integrated, system-level investments that address the root causes of vulnerability, align financing with anticipatory action, and strengthen local institutional capacity. This requires expanding regional and cross-border programming frameworks and prioritizing long-term resilience outcomes over short-term outputs. Without such a shift, humanitarian needs will continue to outpace response capacity; with it, there is a clear pathway to move from reactive crisis management to proactive systems transformation.

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