

2020 GLOBAL SITUATION REPORT





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INTRODUCTION

InterAction presents the 2020 Global Situation Report as a resource highlighting pressing humanitarian and development challenges facing the world in the next year. This report is a compilation of information solicited from our nearly 200 member organizations based on their on-the-ground expertise working with communities in every region in the world.

The information found in these pages is not comprehensive—nor could it be—but instead provides a snapshot of key trends, countries, and issues to watch. In the global trends section, you'll find an overview of major trends influencing global development and humanitarian assistance. You will see how those themes are manifesting in the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and Eurasia regions.

We have also created one-page overviews of 34 countries and sub-regions—available online—where our members are responding to critical needs. In the areas to watch section, we highlight situations that have the potential to erupt in the next several months but are not otherwise covered by the report. Altogether, this report paints a picture of a world in turmoil but also brimming with opportunity for creativity and adaptation. The InterAction coalition hopes this compendium serves as a valuable resource and the start of a conversation on how to address needs around the world.





GLOBAL TRENDS

The global development and humanitarian community faces changing and expanding needs in an increasingly constrained operating space. While development efforts have made significant progress in health and poverty reduction in recent decades, unequal growth, a changing climate, and conflict are exacerbating needs and limiting opportunities. Moreover, a shifting international order and shrinking space for civil society complicate and disrupt non-governmental organization (NGO) operations and their ability to serve communities.

Below are five critical dynamics identified by the NGO community that will most influence the development and humanitarian landscape in 2020. The key themes do not offer a comprehensive view of global needs, but instead identify critical trends that cut across issues and regions.

Progress is possible, but gains are at risk.

Since 1990, more than 1 billion people have risen out of extreme poverty.¹ Overall, more people are surviving and thriving around the globe. Programs targeting HIV and AIDS have saved 17 million lives since 2003 and helped accelerate progress towards controlling the epidemic.² Development programs more than halved the number of children dying under the age of five, and girls are completing more years of school than ever before.^{3 4}

However, even with this progress, millions of communities and families continue to be left behind. In 2019, reported cases of polio increased, and gains against malnutrition stalled.⁵ After nearly a decade of decline, global hunger has been on the rise since 2015.⁶ Displacement from conflict and impediments to humanitarian assistance in conflict areas drive the continued threat of famine and emergency needs.^{7 8 9 10} Making matters worse, humanitarian needs have outpaced increases in donor generosity.¹¹



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Challenges of climate and conflict transcend borders.

Climate change and environmental shocks disproportionately impact the world’s most vulnerable populations. The number of climate-related disasters, including extreme heat, droughts, floods, and storms, has doubled since the early 1990s.¹² Severe weather has decreased crop yields, creating shortfalls in food availability and hiking food prices—one of the key factors in predicting political instability. Humanitarian needs and displacement have spiked in the past decade, which further speaks to the impact of climate, as well as the ongoing impact of protracted conflicts.^{13 14} More people are displaced from their homes today—over 70 million—than at any point since World War II, and 167.6 million people need humanitarian assistance and protection.^{15 16}

In sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, the impacts of climate change may force over 140 million people to migrate internally by the year 2050.¹⁷ While recent displacements in Syria, Myanmar, and Venezuela garner headlines, the largest number of displaced persons still come from and reside in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁸ Globally, nearly one-fifth of children are living in a conflict zone, a rise of almost 30 million children from 2016. The combined effect of climate shocks and conflict impacts across borders will continue to challenge development progress and humanitarian response in 2020 and beyond.¹⁹



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Growth and progress are unequal.

With a global population anticipated to reach 9.7 billion by 2050, inequality is a growing issue that has not been sufficiently resolved by the progress that governments and development actors have made.²⁰ By 2030, the majority of the world will no longer live in poverty, but 80% of the world's poorest are expected to live in fragile state contexts.^{21 22} Rapid urbanization will continue, with nearly 60% of the world's population projected to live in cities by 2030.²³ Over 1 billion people in the world live in slums, and most of the global population growth is occurring in Asia and Africa, where cities cannot easily absorb the increased population.²⁴

In particular, youth populations face challenges of unemployment and education access: 41%, or 25 million, of all out-of-school children who are primary school age have never attended a school and will probably never start if current trends continue.²⁵ Discrimination in many forms—gender, race, disability, against indigenous populations—exacerbates unequal growth by limiting the ability of people to reach their potential and live in dignity. Far too many women and girls, especially those from the most impoverished families, still face discrimination and exclusion concerning primary education, child marriage, early pregnancy, sexual violence, and unrecognized domestic work. An estimated 1.4 billion women and girls, or nearly 40% of all women and girls globally, live in countries with “very poor” scores on gender equality, with another 1.4 billion living in countries with “poor” scores.²⁶



By 2030, the majority of the world will no longer live in poverty, but **80%** of the world's poorest are expected to live in fragile state contexts.

The international order is shifting.

The international consensus that governed the post-World War II period is breaking down amidst a general decline in the trust of international institutions and a global rise of authoritarianism and populist nationalism. As the U.S. turned its focus inward, a global leadership vacuum opened, with China and Russia filling the gap. When the U.S. military partially withdrew from Syria in October 2019, Russia stepped in, running patrols to split warring factions and projecting itself as a global leader.²⁷ Meanwhile, China continues to expand its influence by building railroads, roads, ports, and bridges throughout Africa and redeveloping much of the Asian economy through its Belt and Road Initiative.^{28 29}

At the same time, the U.N. struggles to respond to the changing needs and new crises as great power politics often hamstringing the Security Council. While Russia and China advance their influence, democracy is backsliding; one-third of the world's population lives in countries experiencing a decline in freedom.³⁰ Yet, 2019 saw tenuous democratic improvements in individual countries—including Ethiopia—and protest movements from Chile to Lebanon to Hong Kong are demonstrating push back against corruption and repression.

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New players and technology present opportunities and challenges.

Nontraditional partners, advancements in technology, and an ever-expanding digital economy have the potential to make a transformative impact on development and present both opportunities and challenges for development and humanitarian actors. To help expand innovation and accelerate impact, private investors, corporations, and social enterprises are increasingly partnering with NGOs that implement development and humanitarian programs.

New approaches to development finance and new technologies continue to create space for exciting partnerships and creativity. Even though the digital access gap remains large, digital tools are making it possible to reach more people, advance freedom and transparency, and promote shared prosperity.³¹ Data have enabled more significant analyses of problems and the effectiveness of interventions. But authoritarian regimes are increasingly using the internet and social media as a means to surveil, manipulate, and censor populations.³² With the proliferation of technology and data, the NGO community is grappling with a fragmented media landscape that makes it difficult for messages to penetrate, malicious disinformation that undermines organizations and efforts, and data breaches that could put beneficiaries at risk.³³

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SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

REGIONAL TRENDS

As the world's largest free trade area and home to five of the world's top ten fastest growing economies, the countries of sub-Saharan Africa have the opportunity to create their development path at the start of the new decade.^{34 35} Unfortunately, slowdowns in global economic growth, challenges of growing debt, political unrest, protracted crises and conflict, climate impacts, and persistent inequality and poverty put potential progress at risk.³⁶

Challenges of climate and conflict transcend borders.

In 2018, sub-Saharan Africa hosted more than 26% of the world's refugee population and 14.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs).^{37 38} These numbers are only expected to grow.³⁹ Unlike other regions where refugees originate from a small handful of countries, seven sub-Saharan countries are in the top ten countries of origin for global refugees.⁴⁰ Further, nearly 60% of refugees and asylum seekers from Africa are under the age of 18.⁴¹ Across the continent, livelihoods and economies are highly sensitive to weather fluctuations, and climate extremes are a significant impediment to the resilience needed for self-reliance. Above-average climate variability and warming in West Africa, particularly in the Sahel countries of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, has resulted in agricultural losses, recurrent food crises, environmental degradation, and both water scarcity and extreme flooding.⁴² Pressures on land and water use also increase tensions between communities as herders and sedentary agricultural communities compete for diminishing resources.⁴³ In Southern Africa, recent cyclones led to severe flooding that damaged homes and critical infrastructure. These cyclones were linked to outbreaks of cholera as sanitation services quickly became overwhelmed.⁴⁴

Growth and progress are unequal.

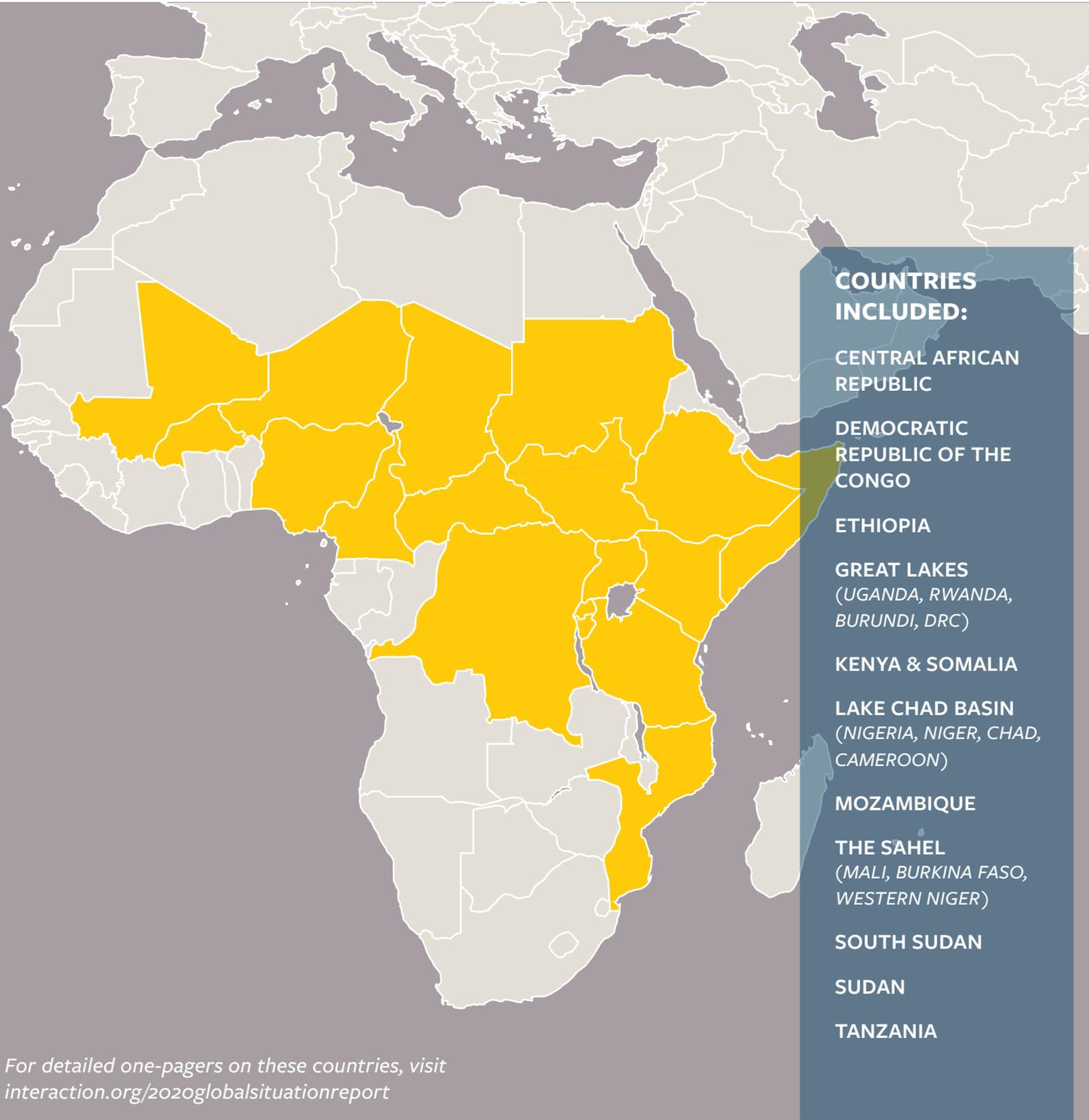
Despite significant global progress in combating poverty over the last two decades, sub-Saharan Africa still needs to make steep gains, given the depth of poverty.⁴⁵ Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest under-five child mortality rate in the world. Nearly a quarter of the population in sub-Saharan Africa is undernourished, 42% of people are without a basic water supply, 72% are without basic sanitation, and 58% of all youth between the ages of 15-17 in the region do not go to school.^{46 47 48} Sub-Saharan Africa struggles to achieve gender equality and ranks the lowest of the regions on the 2019 Sustainable Development Goals Gender Index driven by high rates of maternal mortality and unequal access to water and electricity.⁴⁹ Sub-Saharan Africa also has the highest

In 2018, sub-Saharan Africa hosted more than **26%** of the world's refugee population and **14.5 million** internally displaced people.

expected rates of population growth and a rapidly expanding urban population that is expected to increase fourfold to 1.3 billion by 2050.^{50 51} Though the region has made impressive gains in global health, particularly in combatting HIV/AIDS, these broader trends have the potential to strain already stretched food, health, education, and public infrastructure systems and overwhelm job markets that cannot meet the employment demand from a growing youth population.⁵²

The international order is shifting.

New actors and threats to democracy are shifting political and economic dynamics across the continent. China's Belt and Road Initiative has channeled money across the continent through transportation, power, water supply, and other infrastructure projects.⁵³ In September 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced \$60 billion in aid and loans for Africa, with more than 50 countries likely to have received loans so far.^{54 55} Democratic progress exists, such as in the case of Ethiopia's Abyssinian Spring, which brought reforms but also instability as ethnic, political, and religious tensions percolate.⁵⁶ Challenges to democracy, closing space for civil society, and policies that diminish freedoms in several countries threaten progress and infringe upon human rights.



For detailed one-pagers on these countries, visit [interaction.org/2020globalsituationreport](https://www.interaction.org/2020globalsituationreport)

New players and technology present opportunities and challenges.

Digital transformation across all sectors is driving much of the growth in the sub-Saharan African economy. Despite this potential, there are massive gaps in access to digital technologies for many. Mobile cellular subscriber penetration on the continent is only 76%, and only 22% of households have internet access.⁵⁷ To help improve digital access across Africa and harness digital technologies and innovation to generate new economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction, the African Union Commission (AUC) developed the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa with an ambitious goal of doubling broadband connectivity across the continent by 2021 and achieving universal access by 2030.⁵⁸ Private sector investment also plays crucial and ever-expanding roles in economic growth and transformation in Africa. However, U.S. efforts—like the African Growth and Opportunity Act and Electrify Africa Act—to advance private sector investment opportunities in Africa have not been able to overcome key structural and systematic challenges that have held many countries back from engaging in real opportunities.^{59 60 61}

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

REGIONAL TRENDS

High levels of population displacement, political and economic turmoil, and natural disasters increase insecurity and poverty levels in countries and communities across Latin America and the Caribbean. While the region has experienced notable economic growth over the last several decades, political instability and environmental shocks related to climate change have transcended sovereign borders, jeopardized developmental goals, and resulted in new and emerging humanitarian crises.⁶²

Challenges of climate and conflict transcend borders.

Unprecedented levels of displacement and migration across the hemisphere require increased development support for refugee- and migrant-hosting countries, coordinated local, regional, and international responses, and innovative solutions that not only meet the basic needs of displaced persons and host communities alike but also address the underlying causes of displacement. Venezuela is the source of one of the world's most significant displacement crises. The U.N. estimates that by December 2019, over 5 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants will have fled into neighboring countries due to deteriorating human rights conditions resulting from economic instability, food insecurity, health system collapse, and political violence.⁶³ Hosting countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and others have graciously welcomed refugees and migrants but are struggling to offer services and protection to those in need considering the dramatic influx of people overwhelming state-facilitated services. In Central America's Northern Triangle, migrants and refugees are fleeing violence, consecutive years of drought, and lack of employment and are seeking refuge and opportunity in the United States. U.S. policy decisions to restrict humanitarian and development assistance to Central America—as well as restrictions on asylum—further complicate the situation.^{64 65}

Growth and progress are unequal.

Overall, living conditions and economic outlooks for people living in Latin America and the Caribbean have improved in recent decades. The percentage of people living in poverty in Latin America fell from 45% in 2002 to 30% in 2017.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Latin America and the Caribbean's per capita GDP of \$12,000 still lags far behind developed economies' per capita GDP of \$46,600.⁶⁷ Experts anticipate 2019 GDP growth in Latin America to be the worst in the world, at only 0.2%.⁶⁸ Additionally, looming humanitarian and development challenges threaten progress in Latin America and the Caribbean, even in the most stable countries in the region.⁶⁹ In countries such as Haiti, weak governance, violence—including gender-based violence—and lack of economic opportunity continue to perpetuate cycles of poverty and instability. Populations in Chile and Ecuador have grown frustrated and disillusioned by alleged corruption and inequality.⁷⁰ Moreover, undernourishment and moderate and severe food insecurity have been on the rise in the last several years in Latin America, and the region has the highest homicide rates in the world.⁷¹ ⁷² Such challenges are magnified by environmental shocks that hinder resilience, including natural disasters like Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas and ecological destruction in Brazil.

Undernourishment and food insecurity are on the rise in Latin America, and the region has the **highest** homicide rates in the world.

The international order is shifting.

Just a couple of decades ago, Venezuela was a relatively stable democracy with one of the region's wealthiest economies.⁷³ However, in 2014, the country's economy and the political system started to collapse resulting in a crisis that has reverberated across South America and into the Caribbean. At the time of writing, governance crises are arising elsewhere in the region with mass-scale protests rapidly developing in Chile, Bolivia, and Colombia, challenging long-entrenched leaders and economic elites.^{74 75 76}



COUNTRIES INCLUDED:

- BRAZIL
- COLOMBIA
- HAITI
- NICARAGUA
- NORTHERN TRIANGLE
(HONDURAS, GUATEMALA,
EL SALVADOR)
- VENEZUELA

For detailed one-pagers on these countries, visit interaction.org/2020globalsituationreport

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

REGIONAL TRENDS

The 2011 Arab Spring protests and political movements across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) fell short of transforming the region. In many instances, the backlash led to or worsened protracted political instability and widespread state- and non-state-perpetrated repression and violence, resulting in significant human rights abuse, displacement, and migration, which continue to date. Corruption, widespread unrest, rampant inequality, gender-based violence and undue impediments to the operations of civil society organizations have stymied longer-term development challenges and opportunities.

The Middle East and North Africa region, already struggling with conflict, holds the **15** most water-scarce countries in the world.

Challenges of climate and conflict transcend borders.

Conflict and insecurity have continued to plague the MENA region. Syria and Yemen have a staggering need for humanitarian aid with ramifications from the conflicts affecting much of the region.⁷⁷ 13.1 million people in Syria require humanitarian assistance, and over half of the population was forced from their homes.⁷⁸ September 2019 was one of the deadliest months for civilians in Yemen, with reports of 388 killed or injured due to the conflict across the country.⁷⁹ These conflicts have seen regional and world powers engage directly and support armed groups and governments. Donor governments, seeking to contain violent extremism in a complex and porous environment, have put in place broad counterterrorism regulations and practices that put increased risk on

NGOs implementing humanitarian and development programs in high-risk environments. Water scarcity also plays a role in the lack of development and escalation of conflict—the region holds the 15 most water-scarce countries in the world.⁸⁰ Direct impediments to principled humanitarian action have, in some instances, escalated to direct attacks on humanitarian workers, their facilities, and the civilian population they seek to serve.

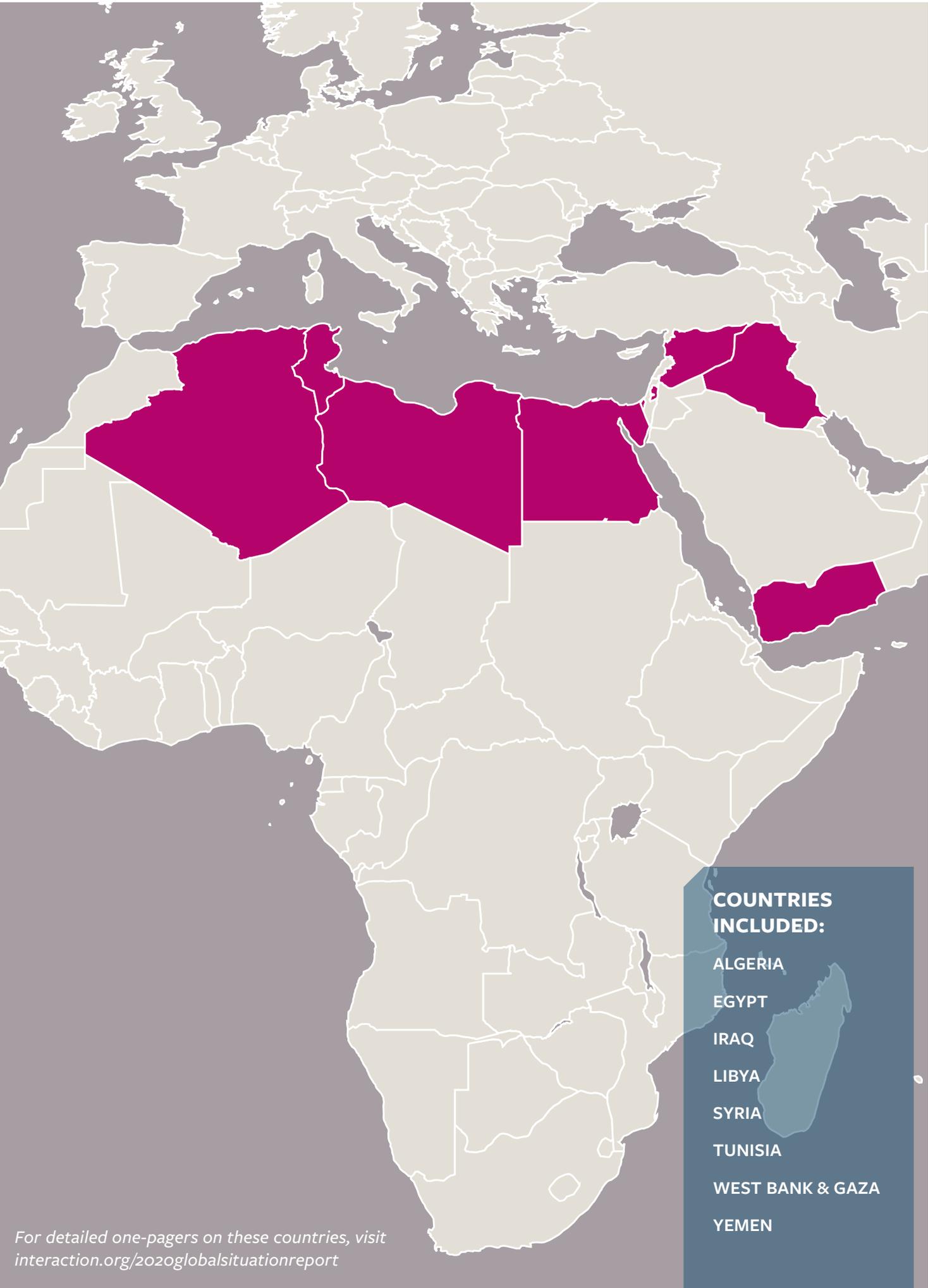
Growth and progress are unequal.

Economic inequality is more pronounced in the Middle East than in any other region in the world, with poverty concentrated in rural areas and a lack of progress on economic and political indicators for women and girls.⁸¹ Indeed, conflicts and authoritarian regimes have held back citizens' demands for gender equality during the upheavals of the past two decades. Displacement, conflict, and political upheaval across the region create new and additional challenges for inclusive growth, such as a lack of employment rights and opportunities for refugees displaced by the crisis in Syria. Youth unemployment rates have continued to increase, causing shifts in cultural expectations and increased inequality, especially for women whose significant gains in education have failed to translate into employment opportunities.⁸²

The international order is shifting.

Global and regional powers have long seen the Middle East and North Africa as a strategic region. While the United States military has had an active presence in the region for decades, Russia is also exercising a more forceful role, including as a party to conflict in Syria, recently occupying former U.S. military installations. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran all have competing interests, coming to a head in Yemen with each regional power supporting differing parties. The long-standing competition between the U.S. and Iran amplifies the potential for greater instability in Iraq and the region. Ongoing political unrest in the region has also challenged the established order in individual countries, with positive movement in Tunisia and Algeria. In Egypt, a series of repressive leaders have exchanged power in the last decade, including President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, who gained control in 2014 and cracked down on civil society organizations. And in Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon, young people in 2019 demanded greater government accountability and transparency, demonstrating that the political turbulence of the region is far from settled.

05 MIDDLE EAST+NORTH AFRICA



For detailed one-pagers on these countries, visit interaction.org/2020globalsituationreport

ASIA AND EURASIA

REGIONAL TRENDS

Asia continues to be the fastest-growing economic region in the world, presenting both economic opportunity and development challenges.⁸³ Income inequality across much of Asia is on the rise, the effects of climate change are acutely felt across the region, and it remains a hot spot for emerging pandemic threats. China has started to use military power and economic leverage to reorder the area, and democratic space is closing in multiple countries.⁸⁴ While Asia continues its development journey, countries that comprised the former Soviet Union seek greater integration with Europe and the European Union (E.U.).

Challenges of climate and conflict transcend borders.

Impacts of climate change—such as high water levels in Vietnam or severe floods in Balkan countries—threaten to undermine decades of development gains and put the population of both regions at risk. While glaciers are receding in Central Asia, the permafrost in the Russian Arctic is decreasing, putting infrastructure at risk of collapse and threatening critical water supply. Polluted air, which is particularly dangerous to children, has resulted in the deaths of 4 million people in the Asia-Pacific. Increasing climate shocks come with a high economic price, particularly in Southeast Asia, where climate change is estimated to cut the region's GDP by 11% by 2100, and threatens to set back recently achieved development objectives. Numerous conflicts are reverberating across borders, notably in Afghanistan and Myanmar, and are driving displacement crises.

Growth and progress are unequal.

Asia is expected to see a significant amount of the world's global population growth in the coming decade, adding to already overcrowded cities. Even as urban settings fuel economic growth, many urban citizens fail to benefit due to inequality and social exclusion, demanding new models for inclusive growth.

The international order is shifting.

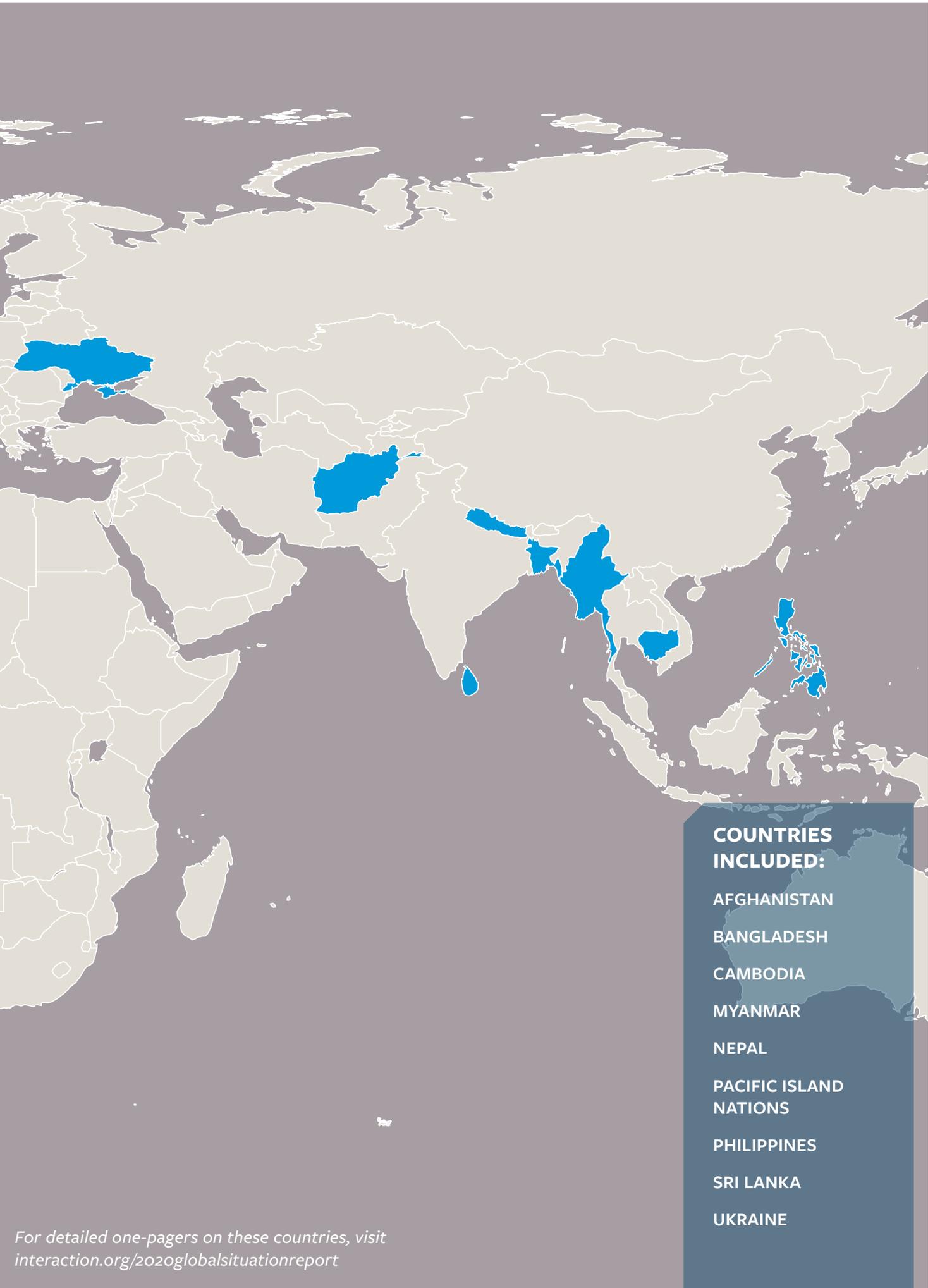
The emergence of China and the resurgence of Russia present challenges to the international order. China relies on foreign direct investment and construction contracts to spread its influence and assert power over other countries.⁸⁵ Many of these investments come with significant strings attached and closely resemble loans. Additionally, China and Russia have both taken an overtly hostile approach towards civil society organizations and have continued to push a malign anti-civil society narrative throughout the Asia and Eurasia region. China has met months-long protests for freedom and human rights in Hong Kong with aggression and police brutality, and in August 2019, the Russian police brutalized young Russians who took to the street in the name of democracy.

Climate change is expected to cut Southeast Asia's GDP by **11%** by the year 2100.

New players and technology present opportunities and challenges.

There has been a rapid turn toward the use of digital technology in the development sector. Technology allows for access to communications and information during crises. Mobile network operators in Nepal and Sri Lanka have developed early warning systems that provide citizens instructions via SMS before a natural disaster. In Serbia, the Centre for Research, Transparency, and Accountability developed the first fact-checking portal. The portal assesses the truth of public officials' statements on important social and economic issues. Yet, despite these advances, technology is also being used as a threat to freedom. Censorship and internet surveillance are increasingly common in countries like China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar. In 2019, governments in Asia cracked down on online dissent more than ever before; 14 of 15 countries in Asia arrested or imprisoned people for nonviolent expression online.⁸⁶

06 ASIA+EURASIA



For detailed one-pagers on these countries, visit [interaction.org/2020globalsituationreport](https://www.interaction.org/2020globalsituationreport)



WHO WE ARE

InterAction is the largest alliance of U.S. based international NGOs, with nearly 200 members and partners. InterAction is a convener, thought leader, and voice for NGOs working to eliminate extreme poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people.

Our members are premier international global development and humanitarian organizations that work in almost every country around the globe and collectively manage more than \$15 billion in programs worldwide.

How we work with the U.S. government

Alongside programs focused on strengthening adaptation of the international NGO sector in the face of global changes and convening across our network to learn about best practices that accelerate impact, InterAction serves as a platform to collectively influence governments and other major actors. Concerning the U.S. government, InterAction works with Congress and the Administration to ensure U.S. policies on development and humanitarian programs are impactful, targeted, and adequately funded. Through InterAction's Public Policy Committee system, we consistently convene and engage our members to collectively shape policy development, track program implementation, and inform U.S. government foreign assistance processes and systems.

InterAction facilitates a range of sector- and country-specific working groups, pulling together experts with diverse experiences. Working groups provide members with an opportunity to share information, discuss operational issues, and coordinate on advocacy efforts, as well as meet with stakeholders outside the NGO community who are engaged on the same issues.

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