Deepening Conflict, Fragility & Humanitarian Need

In light of the aforementioned challenges, worldwide humanitarian needs remain acute in 2021.

An estimated **235 million people** are currently in need of humanitarian assistance. This equates to 1 in 33 people worldwide, an increase from 1 in 45 at the end of 2019. Even more people—**270 million**—face acute hunger, with 34 million of those facing the risk of famine. **Nearly 80 million people** have been forcibly displaced as refugees, internally displaced persons, or those seeking asylum.

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Over the past decade, increased violent conflict (both state-based and non-state violence) has been the major driver of humanitarian need. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it had supplanted environmental shocks as the primary driver of humanitarian need and forced displacement. The dual crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change further exacerbated humanitarian needs in the past two years and have underscored the compounding impacts of global crises on the world's most vulnerable communities. Global crises are also acutely felt in **fragile states**, where there is insufficient capacity to absorb or mitigate exposure to environmental, social, political, economic, and security-related vulnerabilities.

These factors have compounded protracted crises in places like Syria, Yemen, Venezuela, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The impacts of climate change, COVID-19, and existing and emerging conflicts can be seen in places like Ethiopia, where conflict party dynamics, drought, and electoral violence have contributed to a complex **humanitarian emergency** and **severe famine** in Tigray. In the Sahel, climate shocks and conflict have dangerously reinforced one another to create massive food insecurity resulting in historically high levels of humanitarian need. The recent coup in Myanmar has also led to shrinking space for civil society and independent media, renewed ethnic violence across all conflict regions, and an overall marked decrease in humanitarian access to respond to growing needs.

As the U.S. continues to respond with humanitarian assistance to immediate crises, such assistance only offers a temporary reprieve to affected populations in reach. The U.S. must also, in tandem, continue to address the drivers of conflict, fragility, and humanitarian need, as well as the impediments faced by frontline responders through humanitarian diplomacy and other political means. The implementation of the recently passed Global Fragility Act remains uncertain but serves as a vital opportunity for the U.S. to change the way it approaches preventing violent conflict. Additionally, while the merger of various USAID offices into the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance was a welcome step, more needs to be done by the U.S. Government to leverage the new bureau to support holistic and efficient humanitarian response. For example, there are **well-identified legal, policy, and regulatory impediments** to effective humanitarian response which need to be addressed by Congress and the Administration.

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