

Anticipating (Im)possible Choices:

Averting, Mitigating and Responding Earlier to Forced Displacement

The Danish Refugee Council's Global Anticipatory Action Portfolio

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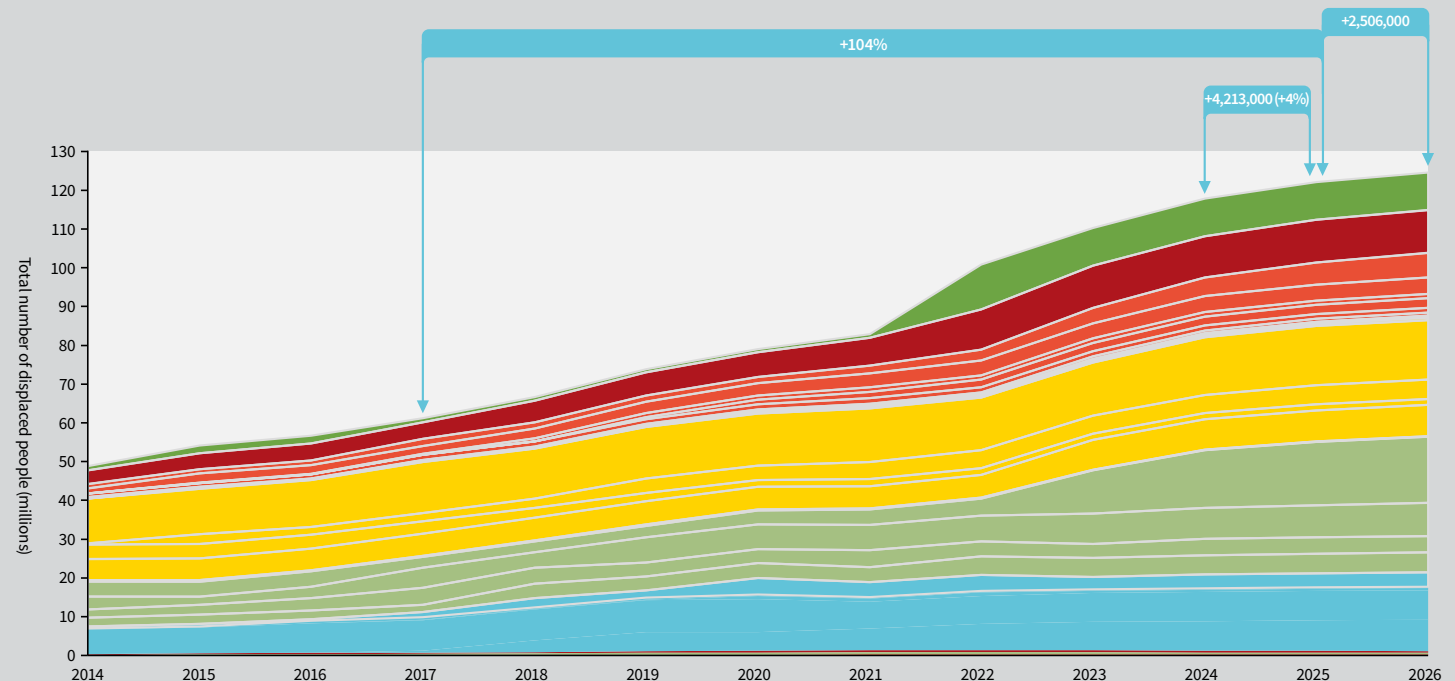
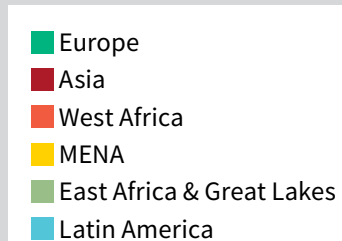


Current Landscape

Over the past decade, there has been a dramatic increase in humanitarian needs, with an estimated 305 million people requiring assistance in 2025 compared with 78 million in 2015. This surge is largely driven by the spread of armed conflict - and inability to end existing conflicts - coupled with rising frequency and intensity of climate shocks. This has resulted in the repeated and often protracted displacement of 123 million people worldwide, a figure which is estimated to rise by about 6.7 million by 2026, according to the Danish Refugee Council (DRC's) Foresight model.

Anticipatory action is increasingly recognized as an effective tool for addressing crises before they escalate. By taking early, forecast-informed action, organizations can prevent or reduce the severity of emergencies driven by predictable hazards, rather than merely reacting to them once they occur. This shift from reactive to proactive enables more dignified approaches and efficient use of resources, saving lives and livelihoods.

Displacement Forecast 2025 & 2026





Despite the many benefits of anticipatory action, including its ability to reduce psychosocial stress, food insecurity and asset loss among at-risk communities, its full potential remains untapped in displacement settings. Only one anticipatory action framework addressing displacement [was active in 2023](#). Current models are not yet sufficiently adapted to be scaled up in [conflict-affected and fragile settings](#) and there is an absence of strong evidence to make them broadly credible in these contexts. This has kept anticipatory action from informing global policy processes and addressing displacement at scale. DRC is working to change that.

Drivers of Displacement

Displacement takes place in a multitude of contexts. Armed conflict is a significant driver with conflict and violence triggering [20.5 million new internal displacements](#) across 45 contexts in 2023, affecting populations in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the occupied Palestinian territory and elsewhere. Situations of generalized violence and human rights violations force individuals to seek refuge in neighboring countries and further afield. Natural hazards and extreme weather events such as floods, fires, earthquakes and cyclones force millions into displacement annually. Gradual environmental changes, including rising sea levels, desertification and depletion of natural resources, further erode livelihoods and compel communities to relocate. In fragile settings especially, these forces often interact with other factors which exacerbate vulnerability to displacement. This includes poverty and inequality, weak governance and urbanization. These create complex conditions where multiple causes contribute to displacement, making it challenging to tackle the root causes and enable durable solutions.



Anticipatory Action for Displacement

Anticipatory action in displacement contexts is complex because of the dynamic, multi-dimensional and human-driven nature of displacement and its underlying causes. Unlike more predictable extreme weather events or climate shocks, displacement can result from a combination of hazards – ranging from conflict and political instability to environmental stressors – or may be a consequence of a single, isolated trigger. This makes forecasting displacement even more challenging, as it requires understanding a fluid and rapidly changing landscape shaped by both human and environmental factors. Predicting displacement prompted by conflict or political instability makes risk forecasting even more challenging and context specific.

In displacement settings, anticipatory action must account for rapid or repeated population movements, legal considerations for displaced persons and the heightened vulnerabilities faced by such groups. These contexts require a strong focus on conflict-sensitive and protection-focused approaches, ensuring that responses do not inadvertently increase risks associated with displacement and its drivers. Access constraints due to conflict or political barriers further complicate anticipatory action, requiring innovative approaches to serving at-risk and hard-to-reach populations. Coordination can involve multiple stakeholders at different levels such as governments, humanitarian agencies, peace actors and local communities, often across borders or lines of control. Additionally, frameworks must consider both immediate humanitarian needs and longer-term impacts on the displaced as well as on host communities, including social cohesion and resource strain. In this way, displacement anticipation and its links to wider response modalities often evolve over time, necessitating flexible, adaptive planning across the displacement continuum rather than one-off interventions.

Why Anticipate?

Despite the complexities of anticipatory action for displacement, particularly in the face of dynamic, human-driven factors like conflict and political instability, investing in anticipatory action is more critical now than ever. In a world increasingly defined by [polycrises](#) – both climate-driven and conflict-induced – proactive measures can significantly reduce the human and financial costs of displacement. By forecasting and acting before crises escalate, anticipatory action allows for more timely, effective interventions that mitigate the impacts of displacement, protect vulnerable populations, and prevent the need for reactive and costly emergency responses. Investing in anticipatory systems not only helps to minimize the suffering of displaced communities but also reduces strain on host communities and national systems, ensuring that responses are coordinated and more efficient.

In an era of unprecedented levels of crisis and displacement, which far outstrip the capacities of the international system, anticipatory action offers a cost-effective approach that shifts the focus from reactive to proactive solutions, safeguarding lives and livelihoods before displacement spirals. [DRC's investments in building anticipatory action systems](#) for displacement have demonstrated a promising cost-benefit ratio, saving up to 6.6 euros for every 1 euro spent in building foresight-informed systems. Doing so not only aligns with humanitarian objectives but also strengthens resilience to future shocks, making it indispensable tool in the global toolbox for fostering sustainable, long-term peace and stability.

Forecasting Displacement

Since 2017, DRC has been [pioneering](#) the use of displacement forecasting models which use machine learning and artificial intelligence to enhance the precision of predictions related to conflict- and climate-induced displacement. These innovations enable more accurate and granular forecasts, which inform earlier, more tailored responses. By continuing to further enhance its data-driven methodologies, DRC is leading the way in building enhanced foresight-informed displacement risk management.

DRC has developed [several predictive models](#) to forecast displacement patterns and strengthen humanitarian responses:

- 1. Foresight Model:** DRC's first displacement [forecasting tool](#), developed under a pro bono partnership with IBM. It aims to provide the organization and wider humanitarian sector with accurate forecasts and scenarios for strategic planning, operational response and programming in support of better prevention and protection to displacement affected populations. It is a machine learning model that predicts national-level forced displacement 1-3 years into the future, utilizing over 120 indicators related to violence, governance, economy, environment and socio-demographics.
- 2. Anticipatory Humanitarian Action for Displacement (AHEAD) Model:** This model forecasts displacement at the admin 2 level with 3-4 months of lead time including in the Liptako-Gourma area in the Sahel, South Sudan and Somalia. It uses historical data on conflict, health, environment, food insecurity and income to predict displacement trends based on machine learning. The [AHEAD Model](#) is being scaled to 19 countries by the end of 2026.



3. **Slow-Onset Drought-Related Displacement (SODRD) Model:** Developed in partnership with the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), [this model](#) explains the interdependencies between rainfall, livestock, land structure and socioeconomic conditions to forecast displacement due to drought among pastoralists [in Ethiopia and Somalia](#).
4. **Pastoralist Insecurity (SPIN) Model:** [This tool](#) forecasts risk levels in pastoralist communities, particularly in the Sahel region, by analyzing historical security incidents to predict future alerts and map safe corridors for pastoralists.





Integrating Data Science with Community Early Warning

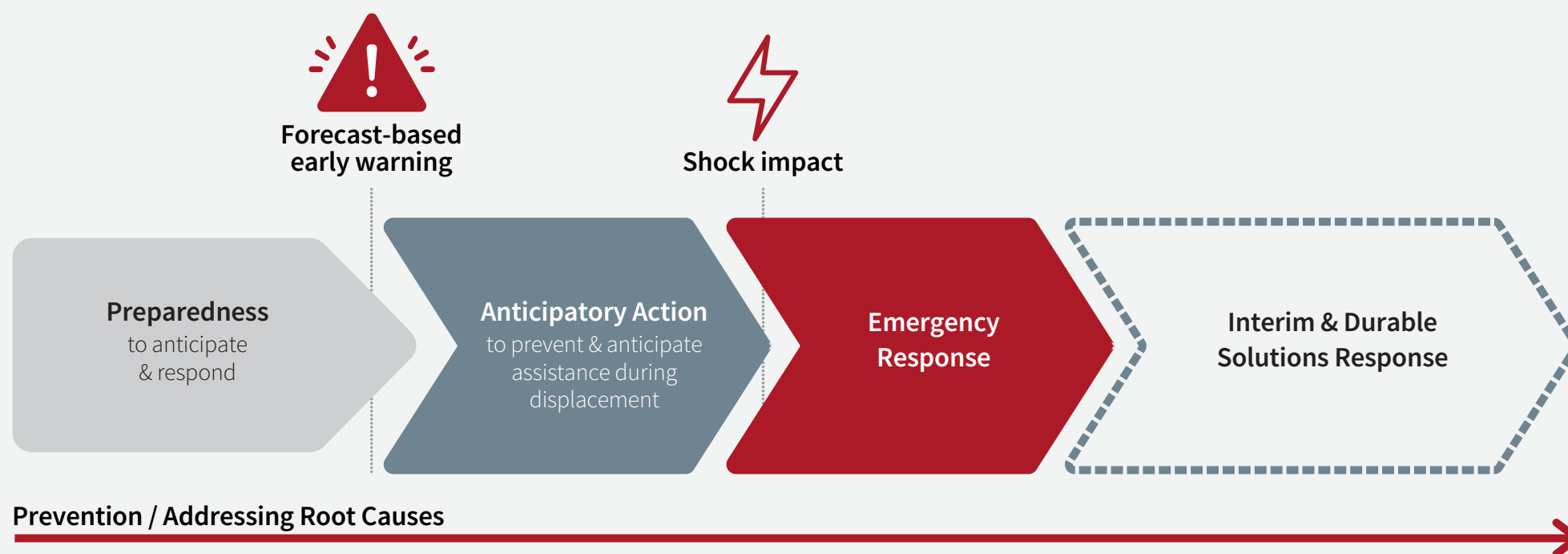
Building on learning from its [first anticipatory action pilots](#), DRC effectively integrates community protection and peace monitoring with predictive models, enhancing the accuracy of and community trust in early warning systems. By leveraging community-based protection monitoring, DRC detects early signs of changes in the drivers of displacement, especially in conflict settings. Implemented in collaboration with local peace committees, these mechanisms allow data collection on indicators such as reports of violent incidents, community members facing movement restrictions, and growing community-level tensions that could lead to displacement. While predictive models based on machine learning offer valuable forecasts of potential displacement, the community-driven inputs provide the critical context to interpret and act on these forecasts.

In conflict environments, where violence and movement restrictions can shift rapidly, triangulating information from both community monitoring and predictive algorithms offers a more comprehensive understanding of risks. This combined approach ensures that DRC is not solely reliant on technology and national-level statistics but also incorporates real-time, ground-level intelligence that reflects the lived experiences of vulnerable communities. This allows DRC to make more precise decisions on when and how to trigger anticipatory actions, mitigating displacement before it reaches crisis levels. By weaving together predictive data with community-based insights, DRC's anticipatory action systems are both more responsive and contextually grounded, offering a more effective response to displacement risks.

DRC's Anticipatory Action Approach

DRC is committed to leveraging its expertise in displacement forecasting to inform earlier action and integrate anticipatory action across its programming and to scale displacement anticipation across the international aid system. This includes working

to address the unique needs and challenges faced by the forcibly displaced, triggering anticipatory action to prevent and minimize displacement and its impacts, and responding across the full displacement cycle in an integrated manner.





From addressing the root causes of displacement to enabling durable solutions to end displacement, DRC works in partnership with agencies across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus to ensure that interventions are coordinated and aligned to meet needs along the displacement journey, ensuring strong links with its own programmatic expertise. Recognizing the complexity and fluidity of the crises affecting displaced populations, DRC is building anticipatory action systems that address emerging challenges in close cooperation with national infrastructures, duty bearers and local responders.

DRC deploys anticipatory action as a versatile tool with impact potential at different points along the displacement cycle. By triggering actions ahead of peak impacts of a predictable shock based on forecasts, anticipatory action serves to mitigate the intensification of displacement drivers, reducing future displacement and contributing to longer-term prevention efforts. Further, it plays a vital role in protecting those already displaced, protecting them from secondary displacement and ultimately enabling solutions to end displacement in a dignified manner through return, resettlement, repatriation and (re)integration. This layered approach ensures that anticipatory action is not only about anticipating imminent crises, but also about enabling sustainable pathways towards lasting solutions for displaced populations.

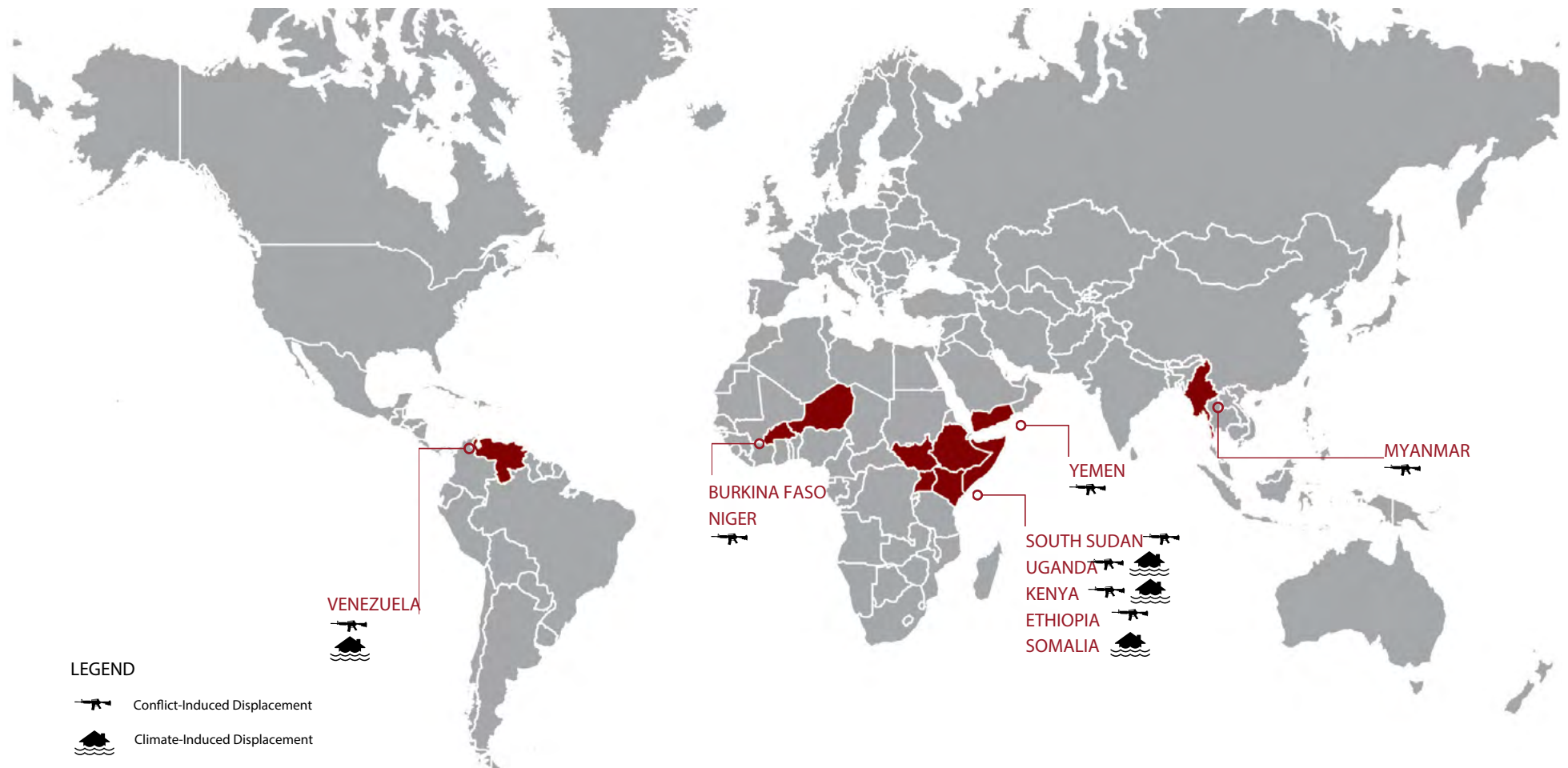
Guiding Principles

DRC's global Anticipatory Action Policy (2025-2030) sets out six guiding principles for anticipatory action:

- 1. Embracing a Multi-Hazard Approach for Holistic Assistance.** In complex displacement settings, risks such as climate shocks, conflict, and health hazards often overlap, intensifying vulnerabilities. DRC's multi-hazard approach ensures that its forecasting tools detect multi-dimensional drivers of displacement and anticipatory action systems address diverse threats, providing flexible, relevant, and robust responses.
- 2. Building Locally-Owned Anticipatory Action Systems.** DRC's deep community presence enables us to leverage local knowledge and leadership in anticipatory action. Through partnerships with local stakeholders and integrating community-driven approaches, DRC ensures interventions are culturally relevant, sustainable, and impactful. By collaborating with national systems and strengthening local early warning systems, DRC enhances system-level resilience, ensuring long-term sustainability and community ownership.
- 3. Fostering Collaborative Partnerships for Greater Impact.** Anticipatory action requires a collective effort. DRC works with a wide network of actors across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, from governments and duty bearers to UN bodies and civil society organizations, ensuring coordination and shared resources. By developing multi-agency, multi-cluster plans, DRC ensures that anticipatory actions are cohesive and scalable, effectively addressing the diverse needs of affected populations, including the hardest to reach.
- 4. Situating Anticipatory Action Across the Displacement Cycle.** Anticipatory action is essential across the full displacement cycle, from prevention to durable solutions. DRC integrates anticipatory action into ongoing programming to ensure timely, comprehensive, and sustainable responses, addressing critical needs in protection, shelter, economic recovery, and peacebuilding. By embedding anticipatory action in strategic planning, DRC strengthens its capacity to respond proactively, reinforcing long-term impact.
- 5. Mainstreaming Conflict Sensitivity.** Conflict Sensitivity ensures DRC's interventions minimize harm and maximize peace opportunities in conflict-affected areas. By using Conflict Analysis to inform early warning and anticipatory action, and by drawing on specialized peacebuilding expertise, DRC ensures that anticipatory actions are tailored to each context, fostering peace and stability while mitigating the negative impacts of displacement.
- 6. Driving Impact with Data-Informed and Evidence-Based Anticipatory Action.** DRC leverages advanced predictive models and community-level data to drive anticipatory action. By integrating real-time data and operational learning, DRC ensures that interventions are evidence-based and adaptive, continually improving to meet the evolving needs of displaced populations. This data-driven approach maximizes impact, making anticipatory action more cost-effective and sustainable.

Global Overview

DRC currently implements anticipatory action programs across 10 countries and is gearing up operations in eight additional contexts. It is gradually scaling up organizational anticipatory action capacities and expertise across its country operations based on learning and evidence from early pilot projects.





Anticipating Conflict and Displacement: A Pilot Project in South Sudan

DRC first introduced the conflict-induced displacement anticipatory action approach in Akobo County – a remote region of eastern South Sudan impacted by overlapping inter-communal conflicts – to mitigate potential displacement and its consequences. The project, supported by the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operation (ECHO), tested a predictive model that assessed conflict events and related displacement, drawing upon historical data and community-level protection indicators identified by local peace committees. By consulting with these committees and other local actors, DRC improved its machine-learning predictive model by incorporating more granular data collected by field teams. In May 2024, the system predicted that 1,500 people would be displaced within three months, prompting the activation of anticipatory actions. DRC facilitated inter-community dialogues between the Lou Nuer and Murle groups, which helped reduce tensions and strengthen conflict management capacities. Counterfactual analysis comparing the situation to neighbouring counties confirmed that such dialogue was pivotal to de-escalating violence. This also allowed for faster returns of displaced individuals, improved access to food and reduced needs. The pilot also proved to be cost-effective, saving up to 6.6 euro for every euro spent and resulting in up to 600,000 euros of averted costs associated with displacement. Beyond this immediate impact, it demonstrated the potential for anticipatory action to effectively mitigate conflict-driven displacement and reduce humanitarian needs, offering a scalable solution for conflict settings.

The AHEAD Program: Scaling Conflict-Induced Displacement Anticipation to Diverse Settings

The Anticipatory Humanitarian Action for Displacement (AHEAD) project, supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expands DRC's work in South Sudan in seven countries. This global initiative is dedicated to advancing anticipatory action for conflict-induced displacement. Across Burkina Faso, Niger, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Uganda, Yemen, and Myanmar, AHEAD focuses on developing national conflict-relevant anticipatory action frameworks, ensuring they are inclusive and shaped by multiple stakeholders, alongside in-country pilots. A strong monitoring, evaluation and learning approach supports the project by generating evidence from in-country pilots to inform advocacy efforts at the national, regional and global levels. It uses machine learning models developed by DRC to predict displacement 3-4 months in advance and helps inform more cost effective and smart humanitarian responses. The project's focus on advocacy brings with it an opportunity for DRC to share evidence and learning from this approach with humanitarian actors, governments and others to improve sector-wide responses to displacement. Ultimately, AHEAD seeks to elevate the role of anticipatory action connected to conflict-induced displacement, positioning it as a key strategy for humanitarian action.



Financing Anticipatory Action

The **Global Anticipatory Action Pooled Fund (AAPF)**, launched in 2024 to operate alongside DRC's [Global Emergency Response Fund \(GERF\)](#), allows for flexible disbursement of anticipatory finance based on forecast triggers and community-based monitoring mechanisms ahead of imminent displacement risks, capitalizing on DRC's displacement forecasting tools. Funding amounts and ex-ante activities to be financed are determined by context-specific anticipatory action plans, which are validated and approved ahead of trigger activations based on clearly defined organizational standards to ensure technical rigor and operational feasibility.

To sustainably scale-up its fuel funding for anticipatory action activations globally, DRC seeks to gradually increase the financing volume of the pooled fund, mirroring the gradual expansion of its anticipatory action systems-building activities, leading to higher operational readiness to consume anticipatory finance ahead of predicted forced displacement.

Under its global [Innovative Financing](#) portfolio, DRC is focusing on expanding anticipatory action funding by increasing disbursement from alternative financing mechanisms and [advocating for broader access](#) to disaster risk financing instruments, including sovereign insurance, government budgets and pooled funds such as OCHA's Regional Based [Pooled Funds](#) and Country Based Pooled Fund.



Smart Partnerships

DRC is committed to advancing the global anticipatory action agenda through its membership in key initiatives such as the [Grand Bargain Caucus](#) on Anticipatory Action, the [Anticipation Hub](#) and the [Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership](#). These partnerships enable DRC to advocate for displacement-focused and conflict-sensitive scale-up of anticipatory action, improve coordination and influence financing discussions. By engaging through these global platforms, DRC seeks to enhance the uptake of displacement forecasts, data-sharing and collaboration among humanitarian and development actors to build robust and effective anticipatory action systems tailored to the needs of those affected by displacement worldwide.

In addition to its global partnerships, DRC is committed to promoting the robust integration of anticipatory action within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus through its involvement with the Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies (VOICE) [Resilience Nexus Working Group](#) and beyond. Drawing upon its expertise and partnerships on [peacebuilding and conflict prevention](#), DRC engages the peacebuilding sector in its anticipatory action work, calling for the application of early warning information and foresight to peace efforts.

DRC also contributes to regional and national anticipatory action working groups, ensuring that coordination systems are harmonized and context specific.

Committed to Partnerships: Scaling Coordinated Anticipatory Action in the Greater Horn of Africa

The **Scaling Coordinated, Multi-hazard, and Conflict-Sensitive Anticipatory Action in the Greater Horn of Africa** project is designed to transform anticipatory action across the region by adopting a holistic, regional, and harmonized approach to address the intertwined risks driven by climate change, conflict, and displacement. By integrating a conflict-sensitive and multi-hazard framework, the project ensures that the most vulnerable populations are protected from the compounding impacts of these threats. It acts in direct contribution to the effective implementation to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Roadmap for Anticipatory Action.

Implemented by IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC), World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and DRC, [the project](#) focuses on strengthening regional and national coordination mechanisms, aligning anticipatory finance instruments, and embedding conflict and protection sensitivity, and displacement dimensions into anticipatory action frameworks. Enabling Somalia and Ethiopia as pilot countries, the project aims to generate robust evidence to scale anticipatory action effectively, in partnership.

Producing Harmonized Displacement Forecasts to Inform Humanitarian Planning

With support from the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operation (ECHO), DRC has partnered with IOM to develop a [Movement Projections Dashboard](#) in Somalia. The dashboard estimates the number of displacements and returns predicted to take place at district level on a quarterly basis in line with the humanitarian planning cycle. The analysis employs a multi-hazard approach, estimating the number of movements projected to occur based on the presence of conflict, drought and flood risk. The dashboard builds on a machine learning analysis model, historical climate, conflict and population data to predict the future scale of displacement leveraging current weather and conflict forecasts. Partnering on the joint generation of displacement forecasts, leveraging complementary in-house expertise, has demonstrated the potential for greater impact in influencing and informing humanitarian planning under joint forces. Building on the success of this pilot, IOM and DRC are now seeking to scale these efforts to further contexts.

IOM-DRC Global Working Group on Anticipatory Action for Displacement

DRC is committed to scaling Anticipatory Action in close partnership and coordination with other stakeholders. To drive global thought leadership on anticipatory action for displacement and to foster inter-agency collaboration, DRC is co-hosting the global Working Group on Anticipatory Action for Displacement with IOM, which seeks to foster knowledge exchange, and the development of tools, guidance, and resources to effectively anticipate displacement risks and enhance earlier assistance. Through coordinated efforts, this working group aims to endorse collaborative, harmonized approaches for anticipatory action for displacement, ranging from aligned displacement forecast triggers, multi-sectoral anticipatory actions and joint evidence generation and advocacy efforts.

Current and Future Priorities

- **Scaling Anticipatory Action for Displacement.** Looking ahead, DRC is dedicated to expanding its anticipatory action efforts across regions and broadening the geographic coverage of its programs. With a focus on innovative forecasting models for both conflict- and climate-induced displacement, DRC aims to reach more vulnerable communities worldwide. By scaling up our anticipatory action systems in cooperation with partners, we seek to reduce displacement risks, improve preparedness, and enhance resilience in the most high-risk areas.
- **Driving Evidence for Anticipatory Action in Displacement and Conflict Settings.** By investing in research, learning and real-time monitoring and impact evaluation, DRC is committed to growing the evidence base for anticipatory action in displacement and conflict settings, ensuring that DRC as well as peer organizations learn from programmatic experience and are thus more effective and targeted in addressing both the root causes and consequences of displacement.
- **Strengthening Collaborative Partnerships.** DRC recognizes that partnerships are critical to scaling anticipatory action. Through strategic collaborations with governments and duty bearers, UN bodies and civil society organizations, we are working to build robust, multi-stakeholder networks. These partnerships amplify the impact of anticipatory action in displacement settings, ensuring that interventions are coordinated, inclusive and far-reaching. By working together, we can expand the scope of anticipatory action and create sustainable, scalable solutions for displacement-affected populations.
- **Fostering an Enabling Policy Environment for Anticipatory Action.** DRC is committed to influencing the global policy landscape in support of anticipatory action, contributing actively to platforms such as the Grand Bargain, Anticipation Hub, and the Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership. Through its contributions, DRC advocates on behalf of the displaced, highlighting the need for a more proactive, coordinated approach to predictable crises. DRC encourages integrating anticipatory action as a core component of responding to global crises, ensuring the international community prioritizes early intervention and prevention.
- **Engaging Governments and Regional Bodies for Systemic Change.** DRC works closely with international donors, governments, regional bodies and other key stakeholders to encourage the adoption of anticipatory action with a focus on displacement and conflict settings. DRC's aims to support a global systemic shift, ensuring that anticipatory action becomes a mainstream approach in addressing crises. This includes influencing current policies to better account for displacement anticipation and driving new policy measures where required.

Founded in 1956, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is Denmark's largest international NGO, with a specific expertise in forced displacement. DRC is present in close to 40 countries and employs 9,000 staff globally.

DRC advocates for the rights of and solutions for displacement-affected communities, and provides assistance during all stages of displacement: In acute crisis, in exile, when settling and integrating in a new place, or upon return. DRC supports displaced persons in becoming self-reliant and included into hosting societies. DRC works with civil society and responsible authorities to promote protection of rights and inclusion.

Our 7,500 volunteers in Denmark make an invaluable difference in integration activities throughout the country.

DRC's code of conduct sits at the core of our organizational mission, and DRC aims at the highest ethical and professional standards. DRC has been certified as meeting the highest quality standards according to the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.

HRH Crown Princess Mary is DRC's patron.

To read more about what we do, see: www.drc.ngo

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