

64 million fewer people received aid last year due to funding cuts by imperialist powers

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State of the Humanitarian System 2026, published by ALNAP (Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in humanitarian action), has revealed that 64 million fewer people received aid last year.

Aid agencies were focusing only on those whose lives were in immediate danger as they drastically scaled back their support for longer-term issues and ensuring an ability to recover from crises.

The humanitarian system has suffered one of its biggest contractions since its formation in the post-World War II era as a result of a 30 percent cut in humanitarian aid contributions between 2022 and 2025, from \$47.5 billion to \$33.3 billion, and the loss of thousands of aid workers' jobs.

ALNAP warned that the humanitarian aid system is crumbling amid funding cuts, increasing demands and escalating state violence. Its central finding is also its most empirically grounded: state violence is now the dominant engine of global displacement, far exceeding disasters, droughts and earthquakes or violence by non-state armed groups. The overwhelming majority of people forced from their homes today are fleeing government militaries, government policies, and government engineered crises.

Since 1991 the United States, backed by its allies, has been involved in perpetual wars that have displaced entire populations and destroyed entire societies. A conservative estimate of the number of people displaced by these wars, based on data from the Costs of War Project (Brown University), is around 40 million, with a plausible upper limit of 50 to 60 million.

Government are not merely failing to protect civilians, they are directly responsible for endangering them, including through displacement, obstructing relief and attacking aid workers.

State of the Humanitarian System 2026 documents the obstruction of humanitarian access through a raft of administrative, territorial, military, legal, political, and informational mechanisms. State violence is now the major source of harm to humanitarian personnel via airstrikes, shelling, arrests, criminalisation, intimidation, surveillance, propaganda and proxy violence used as deliberate tools of war and governance to restrict humanitarian aid and control civilian

populations.

In 2025, for example, more than 1,180 aid workers globally were victims of major attacks, driven largely by Israel's genocidal war in the occupied Palestinian territories, where 187 humanitarian workers were killed, 80 injured, 23 detained and two kidnapped. Governments are now major perpetrators of humanitarian norm violations—deliberately so—attacking civilians and aid workers, obstructing access, destroying infrastructure and weaponising deprivation.

The report concludes that the humanitarian system is collapsing because states have turned from guarantors of protection into producers of mass harm. The very governments—the US, Britain, France, Germany and Japan—that once claimed to uphold the global humanitarian system are now actively dismantling it.

ALNAP has only confirmed what the international human rights organisations and UN agencies have documented for years: state violence—not disasters, not non-state actors—is the dominant driver of displacement, civilian harm and attacks on aid workers.

The report is significant because ALNAP is a network of all the major national and international NGOs, United Nations agencies, Red Cross/Crescent Movement members, bilateral and multilateral donor organisations, academics and think tanks. Its mission is to assess the performance of the humanitarian system and it is headquartered in London at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

While ALNAP documents the political role governments play in creating displacement, it ignores the role played by the global political economy of destruction, austerity and inequality driven by major capitalist states, whose policies are dictated by the major corporations and financial institutions at the behest of the oligarchs that preside over them.

Like all the NGOs, UN agencies and humanitarian agencies, ALNAP claims that the collapse of the humanitarian system is resolvable through more funding, better coordination, improved access, and renewed respect for humanitarian norms. It appeals to the very states that have generated crises on a scale that no humanitarian apparatus could ever absorb, and which are now withdrawing the resources that once maintained the illusion of global care.

For decades, following the Second World war, imperialist states used humanitarianism to mask the violence of their foreign policy and to outsource responsibility for crises, thereby maintaining cut-price moral legitimacy and stabilising regions without accepting refugees. In the face of an escalating crisis of world capitalism, this policy is being junked in favour of state violence against the most oppressed.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in its analysis of the Trump administration's dismantling of USAID: USAID was founded in 1961 to "provide a democratic and humanitarian cover for the defense of imperialist interests around the world". Its abandonment signals that a bankrupt US imperialism that can no longer afford the humanitarian cover for its predatory actions and that henceforth it will rely on brutal violence to defend its interests.

In contrast defence spending for existing and future wars is increasing. The US has crossed the \$1 trillion threshold for the first time, accounting for around 34 percent of global military expenditure. China has increased its budget to roughly \$336 billion, an increase of more than 40 percent over five years. Russia is spending \$190 billion, a 65 percent rise over five years. European rearmament is unprecedented. The European imperialist powers combined nearly matched the US, with spending rising 14 percent to \$864 billion amid a vast rearmament drive. Germany's military spend has surged to \$114 billion, up 75 percent in five years, while Poland has increased spending by 120 percent.

Globally, military expenditure has hit a record \$2.9 trillion, rising for ten consecutive years and jumping 9.4 percent in 2024 alone—the steepest increase since the late Cold War.

From helping displaced people to containing them

There is a further point. The definitions and accounting rules provide convenient ways of determining what qualifies as aid. ALNAP's warning about collapsing funding refers specifically to humanitarian aid, not to the broader category of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). Cuts in humanitarian aid are occurring within a broader restructuring of development assistance, in which ODA is increasingly being used for domestic refugee costs, migration control and security objectives.

A growing share of the UK's ODA is now spent on "security"—overseas policing, border enforcement, counter-terrorism capacity control—rather than on poverty reduction or humanitarian relief. Although only 2 to 3 percent of UK ODA is formally recorded as security spending through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund in 2023-24, once ODA-funded migration?control programmes, overseas police and judicial training, counter?terrorism capacity building, and the new

Integrated Security Fund are included, at least 5 to 7 percent of UK ODA is now directed toward external "security".

Britain, like the other major powers, is now militarising its borders, externalising asylum processing, criminalising rescue at sea, rejecting refugees, and dismantling the right to asylum. Having created the crisis, they now criminalise the people fleeing it. While humanitarianism provides a system for managing displaced people in their own or neighbouring countries, border regimes prevent displaced people from arriving in the advanced countries. Both serve to contain the victims of state violence.

Similarly, a growing share of the ODA budget is being channelled towards the overall government expenditure on refugees and asylum seekers in Britain. This domestic expenditure, including hotel accommodation, and asylum processing, rose from 9 to 11 percent of ODA before 2021 to an unprecedented 29 percent in 2022. Announcing a new humanitarian funding package in December 2024, a Starmer government press release explicitly stated that humanitarian aid is being used to serve border?security and migration?control objectives, declaring "These programmes... will help to tackle migration flows upstream and bolster the UK's border security."

The question is not whether governments have enough money to provide humanitarian assistance. They retain the capacity to mobilise very large sums when they identify a strategic interest. Ukraine demonstrates what happens when a crisis is viewed as strategically important for a major donor: humanitarian assistance is accompanied by resources on an entirely different scale for military purposes. The UK had provided £357 million in humanitarian aid to Ukraine from the start of the war to mid?2026, but that sat alongside an enormous £13.7 billion military commitment in the same period.

The means to feed, house and care for every human being exist in abundance—the world produces enough food to feed everyone, yet nearly 3 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet. This is the direct result of production based upon private profit and the conflict between rival imperialist states to control and plunder the world's resources. The only force capable of resolving the crisis is the international working class, united across the borders that the refugee crisis exposes as barbaric, in a struggle to replace capitalism with socialism.



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